

Here They Are... Vernonia's Biggest Losers

By Scott Laird

Janet Wedgworth and Tiffany Ruby are the winners of this last quarter's "Biggest Loser" competition. Wedgworth and Ruby, part of a group of Vernonians who meet weekly to weigh-in and encourage each other in their weight loss goals, finished first and second in the twelve-week section which ended at the end of July.

Trish Maldonado who has been helping organize the group for over a year said the group continues to be an inspiration to all the participants. "This is just such a positive thing. We have on-going people who continue, just to help them maintain their weight loss."

It costs \$25 to join for the first time, \$20 for returning "losers". The group meets on Monday evenings for weigh-ins and to share successes, difficulties and to encourage each other. "We have private weigh-ins so people don't have to stand up in front of everyone," said Maldonado.

Wedgworth lost 17.67 % of her starting weight and Ruby lost 16.93%. The two biggest losers split over \$700 in cash prizes; the winner gets 60% of the pool of money, second place gets 40%. There were also a number of prizes for the winner donated by local businesses to encourage the participants. Prizes included: personal training sessions with Teresa Williams; Jazzercise classes from local instructor Penny Costley; \$400 in dog obedience classes from Elite Dog Training; teeth whitening from Vernonia Dental; brunch for five at The Old Mill House Bed and Breakfast; printing at Agalis Internet and Computers; and a personal photo shoot with local photographer Matt Davis.

Wedgworth said the key to her loss was "...walking 2.5 miles every morning, and running in the afternoons. I also was on 'The Australian Diet' which I followed almost religiously." Ruby said she made healthy choices about food, counted calories, and exercised and ran.

Maldonado, Wedgworth, and Ruby all said that being part of a group was vitally important to the success of participants. "I lost twenty-five pounds before and it took me six months," said Ruby. As part of the Biggest Loser group, "I lost almost thirty pounds in three months, and I know it was because of the accountability and competition involved."

The new group began meeting on August 4. You can reach Trish Maldonado at 503 866-7362 to find out how you can become one of Vernonia's Biggest Losers.



Tiffany Ruby and Janet Wedgworth congratulate each other on being Vernonia's Biggest Losers.

The Ax Man & His Mistress

By Bruce Heikkinen

For some reason the History Channel's hit show "Ax Men" fascinates me. I guess I'm not the only one! Two million worldwide viewers (mostly men between eighteen and fifty) watch the show weekly. Maybe it fascinates me because I grew up in logging country in northern Wisconsin, and logging is still such a big part of the life there and a part of who I am.

Logging's roots in America stretch back to the early 1600's. From the arrival of settlers in Jamestown in 1607, lumber was essential to shipbuilding and the North American economy. Throughout the 19th century, Americans headed west in search of new land and natural resources. By the start of the 20th century, the Pacific Northwest was well on its way to becoming the place for quality timber.

"Ax Men", if you haven't seen the show, is about four logging companies and their daily struggle making a living in Northwestern Oregon. Of the four logging crews that are on the show, Melvin Lardy's Stump Branch Gang fascinates me the most. There's something about Melvin, a young businessman, now thirty-three, who started "Stump Branch" at the age of twenty-two, with nothing but himself, a John Deere skidder, a chain saw, and an old truck. This is what America is about! A country boy, or should I say character, who now has over a million dollars in equipment and almost as many challenges every day.

I had to meet him!

Melvin made time for me and my friend Bob one night at the Dairy Creek Tavern in Buxton, Oregon, where we enjoyed a couple of brews, and he told us about doing one of the toughest and deadliest jobs in the world... logging. It's no easy task! From machinery breakdowns, high turnover in his industry, long hours, foul weather, and unpredictable terrain, he risks his life retrieving the timber with which we build our country. "Some of the younger generation unfortunately think milk comes from Safeway, meat from McDonalds, lumber from Home Depot, and the logging industry is destructive," he said.

The truth is by law every tree cut is replaced. No one is more of an environmentalist than Melvin Lardy! It's his passion to preserve and restore the forests he lives in - not only for logging but recreation and every living thing.


Global warming? You might have a problem convincing Melvin; he took 2 1/2 weeks off last winter and returned to over eight feet of snow! The old timers said that winter was the coldest with the most snow they remember in the Northwest.

Life is a challenge everyday. Lumber prices are down, fuel prices are up and the profit margin is shrinking, but Melvin wouldn't give it up for the world. It's the only world he knows. He's grown his business and enjoys learning everyday the tricks of his trade. His objective now is to have all that equipment paid off within two years -- that's a long way from that 1975 John Deere skidder!

Has "Ax Men" and being seen by millions of people on TV changed him? Not money wise. The loggers weren't paid much, but the show will soon be in its second season when he'll reap the financial benefits. Has he changed personally? He hopes not. "I'll be a logger from Buxton, Oregon, till the day I die." And oh yes ...that mistress... she's not a woman at all. Her name is Logging and the forests he grew up in and loves!

Bruce Heikkinen, formerly of Brantwood, Wisconsin, currently resides in Edgewood, Washington. Bruce is a freelance writer who enjoys writing about unusual characters in the Pacific Northwest.

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