

Readers lend their voices...

To The Editor,

A few days ago I enjoyed reading about your day with the loggers. My career, actually my life, has been in the Logging industry, with the exception of a few years in the Army and college.

My father was a well known timber faller in our area (Tillamook Co.) from 1930's till about 1975. Our neighbors and friends, classmates even teachers appreciated the work of loggers, and the quality of families. In my teenage years I spent a lot of days on the job site, spotting for dad, driving wedges into those giant trees. I entered Forestry then switched to Surveying once I discovered the merits. Because of the switch I got drafted in between, in 1967. I came to Vernonia in 1973, with degree in hand and worked in the Forest Engineering Department of Crown Z. The tree farm here was about 100,000 acres. That is when my real forestry education started. Mine is an observation but I have a lot of respect for the science of managing the forest. These multi million dollar operations are dependent on several things and the industry has evolved to include important protection of the environment - in my day the loggers both new and old have always been very sensitive about fish & wildlife. The resource and activity are managed with public opinion in mind, though much of the time the public are pretty hard on logging, and getting worse. The CZ company, now a new owner, knows how much timber each acre grows per year, the land is divided by tree age and growth potential (part of the Foresters day to day work). Add this up and you know what you can remove - forever - and not run out of timber supply, sustained yield. Company requirement (or land owner) for dollars can play a part but the cut level is a major issue always. The science is intense and I hope you get a response from someone who has more than my limited depth of knowledge to present this info to you, aside from an emotional "logging is bad".

Maybe my biggest point in writing is to note that as you spend time in a clearcut area, you gain a new appreciation for what is happening around you. New life is teeming, song birds love the outburst of insects, small and large animals need the openings in the forest and plants (annuals), of all kinds sprout, bloom and shade the new seedlings. Sit quietly and you can hear them all, and on a lucky day you will catch sight of an owl picking up a squirrel, Elk or Deer bedded or grazing, or something better. But don't wait to take that look, by about the fifth year the new growth will close off this open view for about 40 years.

Jerry Keenon
Vernonia

To the Editor:

Over the past few months I have enjoyed watching the open-air market grow -both in the number of vendors and customers. If it was Friday in Vernonia, you knew you could go to the market and see friends and enjoy home-grown produce and bakery goods. It became a wonderful meeting place. Previously, the vendors had fun socializing, selling a few things and over-all enjoying themselves! What profits were made from table and space rentals went to offsetting the city's debt on the Learning Center.

I have no idea why someone would want to destroy that feeling, but obviously someone did. They called the health department and shut down all vendors with home-made food!

As I was sitting at Black Bear this evening watching people come up to the market, their response was surprise and dismay... where is everything? What a disappointment!

At a time when the citizens of Vernonia should be excelling in cooperation and finding new ways to connect and communicate with one another, a small mind wanted to destroy a successful part of our community re-building effort instead of helping to find a way to make it work better.

No more, thanks to someone's selfishness! I hope you're happy with yourself!

Carol Davis
Vernonia

To The Editor,

The local Health Inspector, in search of violations after a phoned-in tip, recently inspected the Open Air Market. Perhaps there were some, perhaps not. I don't know; I wasn't there. Baked goods, frequently sold at the venue and labeled as being from non-certified kitchens, were one possible concern. No illnesses had apparently been reported.

We live in a world where millions of people are homeless due to war and natural disasters. Countless people starve to death each day. Our nation is at war in two countries on the other side of the world. Our country's economy is sliding deeper into recession. In our own county, over sixty percent of the population are living in the lower economic levels, just making it day-to-day. We've lost whole families due to the after-effects of the flood among other problems.

Where is the sense of proportion here? Next time we, as citizens of this community, see a problem, why not come together with possible solutions instead of complaining, destroying, or demanding that our already over-taxed, over-burdened, over-worked bureaucracies just fix it as if we, ourselves, were uninvolved by-standers in our own lives?

A local enterprise had brought much needed income to lo-

cal inhabitants, and it helped to defray the City's debt in some small measure brought on by the Learning Center. Downtown businesses certainly benefited, especially the Buckhorn and the Black Bear.

The questions we should all be asking ourselves are: Do my actions benefit the community? Am I contributing to the greater good? If we cannot answer YES to these questions before we act, perhaps we should hold our peace until we can.

Sincerely,
Erika Paleck
Vernonia

To The Editor,

This letter is in response to the Opinion piece on the Vernonia Bicycle Skills Park in the August 7th issue of The Independent. The proposed park will be owned by the City, so I was interested to read the update. After reading the Opinion piece, I think it might be beneficial to share a few more facts with readers.

Being new to Vernonia, I interviewed City Recorder Joann Glass, Mayor Sally Harrison, and Scott Laird, chair of the City's Parks Committee, for help with this article.

As I understand it, the Bicycle Skills Park project was started three years ago. The idea is to create a local attraction and help make Vernonia a bicycling destination. A consulting firm called Ric Balfour and Associates was hired to create a Master Plan—a vision of what the park would be like when complete. The Balfour firm also helped prepare the application for the city's land use process (a Conditional Use Permit). At the public hearing, 13 local citizens spoke in favor of the project and one against. The consultant also helped make a presentation to Vernonia Middle School and High Schools students, after which about forty students signed up to be involved in the project.

Last summer, local volunteers began building trails on the site. Two local residents volunteered use of their tractors and mowed designated areas for trails. Two other citizens offered use of their ATV's which were used to drag tractor wheels to remove surface vegetation along the trails. A group of local youth spent a day on dirt bikes to help break-in the trails. Another citizen volunteered his time and a bulldozer to clear the areas for the Skateboard Park and Dirt Jump Park. Roughly 27 volunteers logged about 200 hours of time on trailbuilding alone during 2007; over 300 volunteer hours have been spent on planning the project so far. Finally, Columbia River Youth Corp, an alternative school program in St. Helens was hired as professional trail builders for eight work days, and did the finish work of cutting in the trails, a decision that had the full support of the Vernonia Parks Committee and the City Council.

This year, the project has not moved forward as quickly as was hoped. Spring and fall are traditionally trailbuilding seasons, with little construction done during summer months. The flood last December has left community members with other important priorities. Many of city's volunteers have been working on flood-related issues. But, more work is planned for the park. This fall the City intends to bring in Westside Trail Federation, a group of volunteer trailbuilders with experience working in the Tillamook State forest, who are excited to help move this project forward.

Alta Planning and Design was hired to create a detailed plan for the Dirt Jump Park area of the project, a plan that was accepted by the Parks Committee on July 16th and by the City Council on August 4th. The Dirt Jump Park is expected to be built by Westside Trail Federation volunteers and interested locals. As was explained to the Parks Committee, the \$931 quoted in The Independent is actually being used to oversee construction of stunt features, so they are built to safe standards. By the way, the features will be secured with stakes and chains to prevent them from moving again in the case of more flooding. As I understand it, the Lion's Club still intends to pour a concrete slab in the area for the long awaited Skateboard Park.

Even though this project is sponsored by the City, the project must still go through a regular permit process—the same permit process required of a private development.

In my experience, projects being spearheaded by volunteer efforts can take years to plan, and often just as long to implement. This project has been funded almost exclusively with grant funds that have been secured through the hard work of local volunteers. About \$36,000 has been received to date, with an additional \$247,000 pledged from Oregon State Parks. The Master Plan process completed at the beginning of the project help secure the grants.

The Mayor mentioned to me that the community is in need of economic stimulus and that youth and adults in this community need healthy outdoor activities and places to recreate. This past spring the Vernonia community identified "places and activities for youth" as a main priority during the "Vision 2020" process.

The Bicycle Skills Park is under way and has the potential to draw visitors and meet the needs of this community. The City's hope is that the community will continue to see the value of this project and support it. While the Skills Park will not, by itself, solve all of our economic problems, it will very likely attract more people to Vernonia who will spend money in area businesses.

Jim Johnson
Interim City Administrator

An Opinion: Rebuilding the School Gym - A Step in the Right Direction

By Scott Laird

As we start into another school year, Vernonia School District officials are telling us that we have lost about sixty enrolled students from last year. For every student the school district loses, they also lose \$5,600 in state funding. This will have an impact on the district and its ability to deliver services. It appears that instead of sending their kids back to Vernonia's flood damaged schools, some families are looking for alternatives.

It is understandable that many families are choosing to leave town or send their students to other schools. Many have experienced their second major flooding event in eleven years. Many are still not back in their homes ten months after the flood. Some families are still waiting to find out, since they didn't receive FEMA assistance or have flood insurance, whether there will be any local help to repair their homes. Families are not looking forward to sending their kids to school in damaged buildings and modular classrooms, a temporary solution that may last for the next few years.

So what is the district doing to encourage families to stay? Recently it was announced there were plans to rebuild the high school gymnasium, putting it back together temporarily so it can be used for student athletic activities for the next three to four years. After that it will need to be torn down because it will not be up to current codes. Some people are questioning the wisdom of spending about \$600,000 for a temporary fix.

Let's look at it another way. If by repairing the gym and keeping the athletic programs functioning they are able to keep twenty students in the district, then over the next three years the district will hold on to about \$112,000 in funding each year or \$336,000 over three years. That makes the initial \$600,000 investment a little easier to take. And if they don't fix the gym, how many more families will choose to leave?

When I look around Vernonia, I don't see all doom and gloom. I see positive momentum and people working hard to make things right. It may not be happening as fast as we would like, but it is happening. At the recent Town Hall meeting concerning flood mitigation, we were all reminded that after the flood of 1996 it was almost two years before homes were being raised. This time we have already started the process after ten months.

I think we have a lot to look forward to in this community, and a lot of positive reasons to stay here and try to rebuild. The potential of a brand new school campus being built giving us state of the art facilities that will last us for the next sixty years is just one. The Oregon Solutions team is hard at work trying to make new schools a reality for Vernonia. And with members like Betsy Johnson, Tony Hyde and Dan Brown- people who really care about this town - and all the state resources being thrown our way, I feel pretty sure we're going to get it done. Although they still have a long way to go, Oregon Solutions is successful with 90% of the projects they accept, so I would say the odds are in our favor.

Many of us have chosen Vernonia as our home for many different reasons. This is a vital, vibrant community, with great activities and events taking place all year round, active organizations, healthy outdoor activities for our youth, great parks, groups that promote music and the arts, friends and neighbors who care, and a bright future ahead of us.

Fixing the schools needs to be our number one priority. Things are hard right now, and they may not get much easier anytime soon. But from what I have seen in the short time I have lived here, this is not a town of quitters. I believe there is opportunity and hope. I think we will find a way to get back on track. Rebuilding the school gym, even as a temporary fix, shows progress and gives families a reason to choose to stay.

HOW TO SEND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Vernonia's Voice welcomes and requests your thoughts, opinions, and ideas. Please include your name, address, and phone number; limit your letters to 300 words or less. Vernonia's Voice reserves the right to edit, omit, respond, or ask for a response to letters submitted. We will print letters, space permitting. Deadline is the 20th of the month. **Email to: news@vernoniasvoice.com or mail to: Letters, PO Box 55, Vernonia 97064.**