



Winter Storms Put a Damper on the Holiday

Vernonians wishing for a White Christmas got more than they bargained for...

The weather outside was frightful, and for Vernonians without power, a fire was delightful. And it snowed, and it snowed, and it snowed.

The City of Vernonia was forced to declare a State of Emergency during the Christmas holiday when snow-falls of two feet shut down roads, and power was knocked out to area residents.

City officials met on December 22, and declared the emergency at the request of Interim City Police Chief Mike Kay, who was named Incident Commander and acting City Administrator when Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson was unable to reach the city. Johnson was consulted by phone, and was aware of the city's inability to respond to the needs of its citizens during what is being called the worst snowstorm in forty years.

Snow began falling in the Upper Nehalem Valley on Sunday, December 13, leaving a few inches of accumulation. Freezing temperatures in the teens caused slick conditions that forced School Superintendent Ken Cox to close school on Monday and Tuesday. On Wednesday, December 17, snow fell continuously throughout the day, bringing the city to a virtual standstill. Cox closed school for the rest of the week, giving students an early start to their holiday vacation, and hopes for a white Christmas in Vernonia. "The weather reports had been pretty accurate so far, and they were calling for more snow," said Cox in justification of the week-long closure.

And then the snow just kept coming and periodic power

outages began. When power went out for about twelve hours on December 19-20, local CERT (Citizen Emergency Response Team) volunteers were activated, with fourteen responding and going door to door to provide welfare checks on fifty-three vulnerable senior citizens. More snow on Sunday, December 21, brought

total accumulation to about 24 inches around town-- more in some higher elevations. Treacherous road-conditions, and lack of proper equipment left Vernonia isolated from outside help, with Highway 47 and the Scappoose-Vernonia Highway both impassable at times, and local residents unable to travel safely around the area. "We tried to use the one plow-blade the city owns, but it broke," said Johnson. It was also determined that it was unsafe to operate Public Works vehicles on city streets due to conditions.

On Monday, December 22, a quorum of the Vernonia City Council met and declared a State of Emergency, and authorized Chief Kay to make decisions for the city. Kay established a Joint Incident Command with the Rural Fire

Department, and, in the absence of Chief Paul Epler, who resigned in early December, consulted with Deputy Chiefs Ben Davis and Dean Smith on most major decisions.

With limited resources, city police, fire and emergency medical crews struggled to keep up with the needs of local citizens, and feared not being able to provide adequate public safety. "It was absolutely the right decision to declare an emergency," said Johnson, when asked about the Council's decision. "The city had exhausted its resources. I do not believe we overreacted, and that we took precautionary measures that were appropriate."

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Vernonia was ready for Christmas, even before the snow started to fall.

Vernonia Cares Hands Out Christmas Cheer

The folks at the Vernonia Cares Food Bank helped make Christmas a little brighter this year for almost 200 families, as they handed out food boxes that contained the makings for a full Turkey Dinner on the weekend before the holiday.

Nasty weather on Friday, December 19, didn't stop Vernonia Cares from accomplishing its goal of providing a holiday meal for Vernonia citizens, although local power outages on Christmas day probably put a damper on some holiday celebrations. But that doesn't negate what Vernonia Cares was able to accomplish. "This is the best day of the year for Vernonia Cares," said Director Sandy Welch, as she watched clients pick up their dinner boxes. "It's the day I enjoy the most!"

Vernonia Cares had prepared 200 boxes, and had 178 families signed up. "We always have a few walk-ins at the last minute," said Welch. "And we're ready for them."

This year the boxes provided a full Turkey dinner, including yams; corn and green beans; stuffing; cranberry jelly; gravy mix; pumpkin and evaporated milk for pies, (continued on page 10)



Sharon Pierce picks up her Turkey Christmas Dinner at Vernonia Cares



It was definitely a white Christmas in Vernonia

inside



christmas
bazaar



schaumburg
house



winter
wonderland

Vernonia Flood Stories - One Year After the Flood Part II: The City

By Scott Laird

Last month, we passed the one-year anniversary of the Flood of 2007, and received a major snowstorm as a reminder that we are still vulnerable. This month, Vernonia's Voice continues its look back at what happened in December, 2007, looks at what has been done during the past year, and looks ahead to the future. As always, it is the personalities and people who make up the bulk of the story. This month, we focus on The City-- the folks who we elect to make decisions for us, those they hire to work for us, and the volunteers who help keep things running by giving of their own time.

City Government-- Steering a Straighter Course

When the Flood of December 3, 2007, washed through Vernonia, a vacuum of power was left behind. Three of the five members of the City Council, Mayor Sally Harrison and Councilors Randy Parrow and Steve Whiteman, were directly affected by flooding, with severe damage to their private homes. In addition, Parrow's business--the Vernonia Sentry Grocery Store--was flooded, and Whiteman, who is a teacher and coach in the Vernonia School district had other major responsibilities to attend to. During the initial days and weeks of recovery, all three were at times distracted by personal and business matters. City Administrator M.R. "Dick" Kline was preparing for a family trip to witness his son graduate from Army bootcamp, and chose not to try to return to the city to help with recovery. There was a lack of leadership the first few days as the city struggled to establish relief operations.

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Vernonia's parks saw their share of damage