

Vernonia Boosters Get Creative With Fundraising

Vernonia Band instructor Rob Izzet knew a good thing when he saw it.

Izzet, a Portland TrailBlazers season ticket holder, noticed a group of people working a concession stand at the Rose Quarter stadium during a game, and stopped to ask some questions. What he found out has led to a financial windfall for some of Vernonia's Boosters groups.

What Izzet discovered was the "Food for Funds" program that the Rose Quarter and Memorial Coliseum offers as a way for area non-profits to earn money for their organizations. Groups can sign up to work at a concession stand at events, and earn a minimum of \$32 per person who works, or 12% of the stand's sales-- whichever is more. Groups have to go through initial training and receive food-handlers and OLCC certification, and can then sign up to work as many events as possible.

"We started this as a way for us to raise money for our band trip," said Izzet. With the Boosters established as a non-profit, other groups related to sports and youth have jumped on the bandwagon.

Betsy Miller is coordinating the staffing of the booth for local groups. "We have had over thirty volunteers go through training, and we've already worked a number of events," said Miller. "The workers carpool together to the events, and have been having fun in the process," said Miller. "Groups have been raising money for the Senior Trip, the Band Trip, and for the Wrestling team."

The beauty of this fundraiser is it takes the burden of support off of local residents and businesses.

"Groups have to commit to four events a month for a whole year, or a minimum of forty-eight events," said Adrianna Garcia, with Ovations Food Services, who runs the program. "Last year, we paid out \$574,584 to non-profit groups, and the program has paid \$7.6 million since it was started by Paul Allen in 1995." Garcia went on to explain that about fifteen groups participate each year, and that some groups have been part of the program every year since it started. "It's a big commitment, especially for a small group like the Vernonia Band Boosters," said Garcia.

"This is a great way for parents to raise funds for their student's trips," said Izzet. "They get to put the money they earn towards the project they pick, so they can directly pay for their kid's band or senior trip. It's a great opportunity, and we're taking full advantage of it."

Deciding To Cancel School: What goes into making the decision?

Vernonia School Superintendent Dr. Ken Cox has a tough job even under normal circumstances. Underfunded budgets, personnel decisions, staff issues and concerns, difficult students, questions from parents, are just some of the daily issues that a school superintendent must deal with. Throw in trying to build a new, safe school campus and most of you will agree this guy has his hands full. Dealing with Vernonia's unpredictable weather is just one more item on Ken Cox's list of things that need to be handled.

Vernonia's Voice sat down with Dr. Cox on a snowy winter afternoon to find out what he takes into account when trying to decide whether or not to close school for the day-- or week, as was the case in Vernonia during the week of December 15. Cox chose to start the winter holiday break a week early, because of poor conditions and predictions of more bad weather on the way-- closing school on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, and then telling families that school would not reopen until January 5th. Dr. Cox was right this time, as Vernonia received about twelve inches of snow over the next few days.

We met Dr. Cox at the School District office on Wednesday, December 17, with snow piling up on Vernonia Streets all day. Cox had just finished shoveling the walkway from the parking area to the building. "I listen to the weather reports, watch the news, and depend on Rob Curl who provides our bus service," said Cox, when asked about what goes into his decision-making to cancel school for the day. "Rob has drivers out all over the area and he gets a lot of input and information from them about conditions in the area. I count on Curl's to give me local information."

Cox noted there are certain problem areas that need to be considered-- Timber Road, Stony Point Road and Pebble Creek Road are especially hilly and difficult to reach. "The hilly areas are tough," said Cox. "We can get up them, it's the stopping and then restarting that is the problem. Curl's has automated chains on some of the buses, but for those to work, the bus has to be moving. If they stop on a hill, it can be difficult for them to get going again."

Dr. Cox also noted that extremely cold weather can impact his decision. "We had twelve degree temperatures this week in the mornings. I didn't want to have kids standing out in those temperatures. Some families here may not have clothing for those kinds of extremes."

Dr. Cox said that he usually talks with Rob Curl around 5:00 AM to get a feel for a situation. "Sometimes we'll talk with Shelley Cota, one of the Curl's lead drivers to get her input," said Cox. "I trust Curl's network of information, and usually base my decision on what they are telling us. I also try to consult with the school board if possible, and let them know what I'm thinking."

Having kids arrive at schools and then having to send them home early is not really a good option, so Cox tends to err on the side of caution. "Parents go off to work, and we can't send kids home to an empty house," said Cox, "especially our youngest students."

Asked about using a two-hour late start, Cox replied that he doesn't like to use that either. "When we cancel school, it's often because of icy conditions. Icy roads just get slicker as the temperature warms up in the mornings, so it usually isn't going to get any better a few hours later." Cox said he often drives the roads himself the night before to check on conditions in the outlying areas.

Dr. Cox said he was able to trust the weather forecasts when deciding to close schools for the entire week before Christmas break. "They had been very accurate so far, and it just made sense to trust them."

Closing school seems to be a decision Dr. Cox takes very seriously, and one he puts a lot of thought into. The safety of his students and staff appears to be his first priority over inconvenience in scheduling or to parents, which is exactly as it should be.

Building Green Schools--What It Really Means

By Scott Laird

As the Vernonia community begins to envision a new school campus that is safe from high water events, there is talk of designing those schools to be models of "Green Design." But what exactly do we mean when we say Green Design? It might bring to mind large solar panel arrays on the roof and large wind-powered turbines; or maybe recycled rainwater systems to irrigate playing fields. A closer look at current trends in green design tells a different story, and points toward more subtle design features that are creating cost-effective and better schools.

The Oregon Solutions Team, with the help of the Oregon Department of Transportation, is putting the finishing touches on a Transportation and Growth Management Plan for Vernonia, which is looking at two potential new sites for school campus development, as well as at rebuilding on the current site. This plan takes into account the feasibility and impact on each potential location, and includes the installation of utilities and other infrastructure needed, as well as land development issues like Urban Growth Boundary expansion. The Oregon Solutions Team will soon be making a recommendation to the Vernonia School Board on what they deem to be the best location for campus development. Then the fun begins.

Once a location is chosen, an architect will be selected, and then the design process can begin. Vernonia School Superintendent Ken Cox has stated from the beginning his intention to include "green design features" in the new schools. But what will those features be?

A trip to the Oregon Department of Energy website sheds some light on what is currently happening in newer school construction projects in Oregon, with a number of case studies listed, including schools in Sisters, the Salem area, The Dalles, Clackamas, and, of course, Portland. These schools are being called "High Performance Schools," which refers to a facility that is energy- and resource-efficient, and cost-effective. It does not refer to the curriculum, teachers, or administration-- but one added bonus is that high performance schools have been shown to increase student performance.

These high performance schools provide a myriad of benefits that include: healthier air quality through use of natural or non-toxic carpets, paints, and furniture, as well as better natural air ventilation; a more comfortable learning environment that includes thermal, visual, and acoustic controls; energy efficiency, making the facility less expensive to operate; resource-efficient, using less water, and minimal impact resources in construction; is easy to maintain; and can be a community resource that is adaptable and can grow.

One case study featured is the Ash Creek Middle School in Monmouth-Independence, which serves about 400 students. Ash Creek makes use of natural daylight through windows and light "shelves" that reflect light up and off white ceilings, but also shade the lower windows and reduce heat gains from the sun, and have diffusers that spread the light throughout the classroom. Classrooms are equipped with efficient light fixtures, with sensors that turn them off when there is enough natural light available or when rooms are unoccupied. Other high windows and skylights help light hallways, the gymnasium, and the media center.

Lighting-efficient designs have proven to be one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to create a high performance building, and can be expected to decrease energy bills by as much as twenty-five to fifty percent. Even more impressive, and hopefully of more interest to teachers, parents and students-- studies have concluded that natural day-lighting can increase math scores by as much as fifteen percent and reading scores by up to twelve percent.

The North Clackamas High School, which opened in 2002, made use of natural and recycled materials in its construction, like natural linoleum, ceramic and quarry tile, brick, recycled rubber flooring, and recycled acoustic tiles. Other Oregon high performance schools have made use of water-efficient plumbing fixtures, natural materials in construction, flexible space, and natural ventilation to create cost-effective and easy to maintain buildings that have become sources of pride in their communities.

So the big question becomes-- what will all this fancy design initially cost? Actually, not very much, as estimates range from zero to four percent additional costs up front, or about one dollar additionally per square foot. Vernonia estimates it will need roughly 150,000 square feet of space. These initial additional costs could be reduced through participation in the Oregon Department of Energy's High Performance School Program, which offers up to \$50,000 to schools that commit to designing a high performance school. Initial expenses would definitely be recouped in the first few years of operation with reduced energy bills and savings that could be expected in the range of \$50,000 per year based on other high performance schools savings.

One last piece of good news-- green technologies are evolving and changing, becoming more cost-effective, more efficient, and user-friendly every day, changing practically as you read this. Most likely, there will be new design ideas and technologies available when it comes time to begin construction of Vernonia's new schools.

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