



## What Would New Schools Look Like in Vernonia?

By Scott Laird

More than a year after the December, 2007, Flood, Vernonia school students, teachers, administrators and parents are still trying to work around the devastation it left behind. Students and teachers are attending classes in modular classrooms, the community watches sporting events in a temporarily repaired gymnasium, students have to travel outdoors in the rain between classrooms, and everyone is uncertain what the future holds for Vernonia schools.

How many classes will graduate having spent their high school years in mods? Are run down and temporary classrooms and schools what Vernonians want for the children of our community? How many teachers will continue to stay and work in these current conditions? How many families will give up and move away if we don't build new schools? And how will the district recruit new talent for its faculty?

These were just some of the questions facing the Oregon Solutions team that is working on the plan to build new schools in Vernonia. Building new schools is a complicated process that involves Transportation and Growth Management (TGM) studies, the possible expansion of the Urban



A classroom at Bonnie Slope Elementary in Beaverton is bright and colorful

Growth Boundary of the city, and the raising of millions of dollars (current estimates are around \$30-40 million), that will undoubtedly include passing a bond issue that citizens will have to back. All difficult and time-consuming chores.

Although a final site for the schools has yet to be determined, the Facilities Committee, which is working as part of the Oregon Solutions process, has put together an initial plan that provided estimates of square footage that would be needed, which is now being used to help determine the final site, and which then allowed architects to create preliminary cost estimates. According to Vernonia Superintendent Ken Cox, a final TGM report is expected to be presented to the Oregon Solutions Team on February 20, paving the way for the School Board to choose a final site. Then would come some public input as to what the community wants to see included in a new campus, before a final design is created. Cox also expects to begin the process for choosing an architect in the near future. "The process is taking longer than any of us would like," said Cox. "But with all this work completed on the front end, we will be able to move ahead much quicker once we have a site chosen."

And the process also includes some fun work for the Facilities Committee, who get to help figure out what should be included in a new campus, and do some dreaming about what a new campus would look like. The Facilities Committee has authorized a group of teachers and interested community members to do visitations to recently constructed school campuses in Oregon. The group has been charged with investigating what kinds of design features are being used, to see what new buildings look and feel like, and to ask questions of staff and administrators about how the buildings are functioning.

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## A Day With the Linemen

A WOEC member gets educated in how our electric coop operates, and a glimpse at what linemen do to keep the power on.

By Scott Laird

The service area is very big. And it's very, very rural. That was the first, and most important thing I learned when I was given the opportunity to spend a day with some of the Linemen crews from the West Oregon Electric Cooperative (WOEC) in mid-January. WOEC are the providers of electric service to Vernonia and a bunch of other rural customers in Northwest Oregon. Another important thing I learned was that those crews, and the rest of the people who run WOEC, are dedicated, and work incredibly hard to provide us with electrical service, under what can be some pretty extreme and difficult circumstances.

One other thing I want to point out, before starting this story, and it really turns out to be the moral, so I want to make it clear early. As members of this Coop, we are all in this together-- we are all owners and operators of this service system. As much as we don't like high rates and unreliable winter service, it's our Coop, and our situation is not likely to change significantly anytime soon.

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This past December, a series of snowstorms dumped two to three feet of snow on the WOEC service area. Some customers were without power for days, some for weeks, and some were just being reconnected in mid-January. Many of the Coop members were very understanding-- others complained about the lack of service-- some pretty loudly. There seemed to be a lot of questions on people's minds about what it takes to operate a rural power provider, me included. It seemed like a good time to take WOEC Operations Manager Steve Scott, and General Manager Marc Farmer up on their offer to do a ride-along with some of their crews and see what a day is like for the linemen and other folks at WOEC,



Randy Heath and Jim King reconnect power to a WOEC customer.

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The cafeteria at West Salem High School

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new officer

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happy 150th oregon

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winter formal

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## Vernonia Flood Stories: Part III- Community Services

In early January, 2009, the city of Vernonia stared down two potential storms that had the potential to cause flooding. In the wake of the devastating floods that hit the area in December, 2007, National Weather Service predictions led city and community leaders to gather and make preparations-- initiating contingency plans, activating emergency shelters, moving important equipment-- even sandbagging, and trying a new technology that was called "shrink wrapping" to preserve the interiors of some buildings in the flood plain. Fortunately, the nasty weather spared Vernonia, and gave us an excellent opportunity to work through a live drill, showing how much was learned from last year's disaster. The community was organized, alert, vigilant, informed and prepared-- and emergency Incident Commanders did an excellent job of running the show.

In this series of articles, Vernonia's Voice has been looking at the Flood of 2007, its effects on the community, what has happened since last December, and where we are now. This month, we look at vital community services and organizations, and get a chance to see how they prepared for the possible flooding that was predicted in early January, 2009.

By Scott Laird

### Vernonia Cares -- Initiating an Action Plan

One of the truly amazing stories from the Flood of 2007 was the Vernonia Cares Food Bank, which lost everything at their headquarters when the flood hit-- leaving the devastated community without the food assistance so many residents desperately needed. On top of that, Director Sandy Welch's home was also flooded, leaving the recovery effort in the hands of volunteers and board members. And what a response they got. Flooded on Monday with almost three feet of water, through the herculean efforts of volunteers, Vernonia Cares reopened on Saturday December 8, and began receiving food donations and handing out assistance immediately.

Taking over the entire American Legion Hall, when they had previously worked out of two small storage rooms, Vernonia Cares bounced back with a vengeance. continued on page 14



WOEC staff moved office equipment to an upstairs crawl space in January during the flood warning