

Vernonia Flood Stories: Part III- Community Services (continued from page 1)

Volunteers built wooden shelves, which were restocked, new computers were donated by Intel and set up by Bill Langmaid, refrigerators and freezers arrived from Standard TV and Appliances, Safeway sent fresh meat and produce, and with the help of many more people, Vernonia Cares was back in business.

But maybe even more important was the Emergency Evacuation Plan that was established in the aftermath of 2007, and was put into practice on January 1, 2009. Bob Stacklie, a former Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue Captain, who was head of Tactical Rescue there for five years, volunteered to establish teams of volunteers, giving each an assigned area of responsibility in case of the need to evacuate the building in the future. "In any emergency situation, the emergency has to be recognized-- that's the first step," said Stacklie. "We are now able to monitor the Clear Creek gauge and watch the rate of increase of river flow, and then activate a response when necessary." On New Years Day, with weather forecasts predicting rains on top of accumulated snows, and with a flood watch in effect, Stacklie activated the Cares volunteers and emptied the building almost completely in around three hours.



Oregon Department of Corrections inmates help restock shelves at Vernonia Cares in December '07

Stacklie assigned three teams, each with a specific task-- Mike Pihl Logging was responsible for moving the forty-foot trailer where food is stored. Casey and Josette Mitchell were responsible for moving computers, records and other office equipment. Stacklie and Bill Langmaid took care of the five freezers and three refrigerators inside the Cares building. "It's all about division of labor when you have a manpower intensive job," said Stacklie. Each group had a team of volunteers they could contact to assist with their area of the evacuation, and those group leaders had experience with those areas from last year, so they knew what needed to be done to make the facility secure. "We decided to pull the trigger early and started at around 7:00 PM," said Stacklie. "We were done by 10:00, so we didn't have to work through the middle of the night. We found some rough spots which we will correct, so we know it will go even smoother next time."

For Vernonia Cares, having an Action Plan in place and a great group of volunteers, could have made all the difference. It's a model that could-- and should-- be re-created throughout the community.

Providence Medical Clinic-- The Art of Saran Wrapping

OK, I can see those wrinkled brows and questioning looks. The Art of Saran Wrapping? What does Saran Wrap have to do with a medical clinic?

Well, when flood warnings were issued and with a building that is still sitting in the flood plain that suffered approximately \$250,000 in damage in 2007-- a building that contains valuable, necessary, and heavy equipment, and provides a vital service-- trying to make the building watertight from the outside seemed like it might be an answer.

"Last year, it took us three weeks until we were able to re-open," said Scot Gudger, Senior Director of Operations for Providence Health Services. "From our point of view, this was worth a try."

Last year, the clinic struggled to provide care for local residents-- relocating to the Vernonia Fire Station for emergency services immediately after the flood, working from a medical trailer provided by Northwest Medical Teams for a short period of time, before Providence Health Systems finally made the unusual move to erect a MASH style tent complex in the parking lot of the current clinic.

This year, Providence decided to try to stay on location and preserve their facility. "We just got an idea and ran with it," was how Jim Powell described the project. Powell, a Real Estate Property Operations Manager with Providence, worked up the idea with input from In-Line Commercial Construction in Aloha. "They did the renovation work last year on this building for us," said Powell about In Line Construction. "And they were great to work with."

Powell and In-Line Construction came up with the idea of wrapping the building with a six foot high swimming pool liner, which was bolted into the ground with metal strips over a strip of foam padding-- the intention being to make it as water tight as possible. A sump pump was installed at the lowest spot inside the building, and a generator installed on the roof to keep it running, in case of any leakage.

"Usually a construction company doesn't think like a response unit," said Gudger. But In-Line Construction did, arriving in Vernonia with a crew of eight, with only twelve hours lead time to install the "wrapper" around the clinic, leaving only the front door unblocked. That front door was later sealed, completely enclosing the building. Fortunately, the high water never reached flood level, and Powell's idea was not tested in reality.

"We have made a real effort to protect ourselves," said Dr. Phyllis Gilmore, of the Vernonia Providence Clinic. "If nothing else, we showed FEMA that we tried to mitigate against damage."

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Providence Clinic tried a new idea and "wrapped" their building in an attempt to keep flood waters out.



WOEC tries blocking doorways to keep water out

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