

from the editor....

Well, January sure was a busy month around here in Vernonia. Right from the start we had to stare down not one, but two flood warnings and probably were saved by unexpected changes in the weather. One thing that was obviously noticeable was the way this community was prepared, unlike in December 2007, when we were caught unaware. This time the Police, City, Fire District, County and community volunteers all came together early. It was a proud moment to see this community pull together, share ideas and resources, and be well prepared for this potential emergency.

What was even more interesting was some creative thinking and problem solving that went into our planning. Some unusual steps were taken by some groups to protect their assets, and the city located resources that hadn't been activated before. The school district made use of available labor (including students) to secure themselves. And our old friends, the Oregon Department of Corrections Inmates, showed up and did some heavy lifting and were available to help.

We have obviously learned some lessons-- lessons that I hope are not soon forgotten. The idea of having an action plan in place is something that should be considered by more entities in the community. Some other ideas: Drills to practice action plans, reminders from the city in the fall to make sure citizens are prepared, a "Free the Floor" campaign in November-- get all that stuff you left sitting in the garage over the summer up off the floor, and get volunteer sign-up lists of those willing to assist those in danger zones. These are all ways this community could be even better prepared in the future.

One interesting outcome of this drill was the realization by city and community leaders that we really are an island out here in Vernonia, Mist, Birkenfeld and Fishhawk Lake. And in the event of natural disasters and weather related emergencies, we will probably find ourselves fending for ourselves. It appears that the Vernonia City Council and city staff are taking this seriously, and are working to secure more equipment and resources and put plans into place to make sure we can be as safe and self-sufficient as possible.

Continuing to dwell on the potential for flooding in this community has been pointed out as being negative. It's bad for growth and business. No one will want to move here. But, in fact, I think it's a reality of living here we all need to deal with. And actually, the way this community pulled together, looked out for each other, and is attempting to deal with its problems should be a selling point. It's the hand we've been dealt, and we need to play it and not try to bluff our way through. Community meetings, neighbors helping neighbors, volunteers showing up at all hours-- you don't see that in most places anymore these days. We have a lot to be proud of here, and I think those two scares in early January will force us to be stronger and pull together even more.

Maybe the weather of the last two years was just an anomaly. Maybe these were just unusual circumstances, and quirks in patterns. But maybe not. Maybe unusual weather and the potential for flooding are becoming parts of our yearly schedule. We can try to move people out of the flood zone-- but that takes time and money. We can try to create ways to control the water upstream, or move it down stream faster-- again time and money. We can examine the ways we might be influencing what happens to rainfall in our watershed-- too much logging in the headwaters? But mostly, we can be better prepared, help ourselves and our neighbors, plan ahead and be ready to activate, keep thinking outside the box for possible solutions, and most of all-- keep talking about it. It was really amazing what happened around here in early January, and I think we can all be really proud of the progress we've made in a year.

-- Scott Laird
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corrections...

In the January 2009 issue, Vernonia's Voice stated in the article entitled "Winter Storms Put a Damper on the Holidays," that the city of Vernonia procured generators and that one of those generators was used at the Sentry Market. Sentry owner Randy Parrow asked us to clarify that Sentry Market paid for the use of that generator, not the city of Vernonia. Also, in the letter to the Editor from Tim and Tammy Sook, Tim Barrow's Company, TRW Firearms was mistakenly referred to as TNR Firearms. We apologize for any confusion."

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