

Readers lend their voices... An Opinion: The Vernonia Blog... I'm Disappointed In You

By Scott Laird

To the Editor

Well, we have had a busy past few weeks. I just want to say a great big thank you to the professionals and volunteers that have put in countless hours to keep our community safe. Thank You!!!

One thing that was heard over and over again at town meetings after the flood last year was that folks felt that we were caught short and were unprepared. These last two weeks we have seen what our town leaders have been busy putting into place.

The first evidence of these new programs was when I received a phone call checking on my mother. The CERT team had been doing welfare checks on seniors during the power outage and when she did not answer her door they contacted me to see if she was well and if we had adequate source of heat. Fabulous!!! (If you want to be on this list call the senior center)

The next example of change was the automated reverse call back service from the 911 dispatch. Since then, I have found out that not only will they call landlines but cell phones as well. To register your cell phone number call 1-800-696-7795 (the non-emergency number for 911).

Also, the novelty of "shrink wrapping" the medical clinic and WOEC.

Thank goodness we did not have a major event again, and my heart goes out to other communities that did not fair as well, but I feel that our community is much more prepared after experiencing the new services being implemented and I know that they will continue to make adjustments from what they learned during this "dry run".

The last few weeks have also given me an opportunity to fine tune my own preparedness and for our neighborhood to work together to solve issues facing us jointly.

So thank you; Chief Kay and Officers, Deputy Chiefs Smith and Davis and VRFD, James Baribar, City public works, CERT volunteers, Dr. Phyllis Gilmore, Dr. Ken Cox and school staff, And everyone else who through selfless acts of volunteering makes this a great place to live.

Proud to call Vernonia my home,
Heather Lewis

To the Editor

Joining millions of optimistic, emotional and patriotic people- from Oregon and every state of the union and from around the world, I today had the overwhelming pleasure of witnessing the Inauguration of our 44th President, Barack Obama, along with the beginning of a new political era that his Presidency signifies.

In his Inaugural Address, our new president reminded America that, despite the many and severe challenges facing our country, we have, whenever tested, never faltered.

President Obama assured the nation that the centuries-old values that make up the fabric of our society- honesty, hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism- have driven America's rise to greatness and enabled our nation to survive all challenges, including economic crises, war, national disasters and terrorism.

The President also reminded us that the selflessness and kindness of Americans makes us friends of all people and nations who seek peace and dignity for humankind. He said that nations will be judged by what they build, not what they destroy and that by building strong international relationships and leading by example, America will continue its role as a world leader.

President Obama stated pointedly that each of us has a responsibility to ourselves, to the nation and to the world and advised us to "pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin remaking America."

Part of this remaking will take place across our country, throughout our State Legislatures, and in the Oregon House, where I am committed to working for the kind of change that will make a positive difference in the everyday lives of my constituents and all Oregonians.

State Representative Brad Witt
House District 31

It's January 29, and we're still waiting.

It's a great idea, a beautiful website, and a wonderful opportunity. And I was excited to see someone put the effort into creating a public place to discuss issues about Vernonia. Until I read what they had to say. Or didn't.

What am I talking about? Well, www.VernoniaBlog.org, of course. Haven't heard about it yet? Well, I'm not too surprised, because after an initial series of posts from each of the three writers on the site, and some buzz around town-- we haven't heard a word from them. No replies to emails, no new posts on their website, no letters to the editor-- nothing.

If you haven't seen VernoniaBlog yet, I'll give you a little background. With much fanfare (cards sent in the mail, anonymous letters dropped at City Hall), the writers of the site announced their intentions. "VernoniaBlog.Org is intended to be a blog about the community. It's not a forum, but any contributions from the community will be published." And then this: "We are going to provide...opinions, criticisms, praise; whatever we find that is noteworthy or just makes us mad enough to write it down..."

The website was started on January 7, and promised updates by the anonymous writers at least every two weeks. They promised to step on some toes, take notes and name names, and that they are writing in self-defense, as people around here who express their opinions are cut off, shut down, or told that what they say doesn't matter.

Here's some people they praised: A State Trooper who picked up an elderly gentleman walking on the side of the road in two feet of snow. He's a hero! Joann Glass works hard at City Hall. Mike Kay did a great job preparing the city for possible flooding. Here's some people that pissed them off: three old ladies and a city councilor. And Vernonia's Voice-- which is fine.

But at least base your comments on facts-- not rumors, innuendoes and inaccuracies. You can read their comments yourself, if you're so inclined, and see what you think.

Just a side note-- I am all for praising those in our community who do good work. City employees did work hard and went beyond the call of duty during recent emergencies. And they should be praised. But let's also look beyond the obvious every once in a while.

Here's what I think: There are all kinds of issues, concerns, complaints and problems that need to be addressed in this town. And a live, cyber-based outlet could be a perfect tool. These folks obviously have some skills and talent-- their website is attractive and well put together, and they seem to really care about this community.

But if you want to be a writer-- than write. And get your facts straight. And don't perpetuate rumors.

A couple other points: Don't be so condescending to your readers. Don't call us dumb, tell us how clever, literate and funny you are, and give us reading lists so we can get your jokes. I'll choose my own reading material-- and it won't be the collected works of William Shakespeare, Stephen King and Lemony Snicket.

Another thing. This isn't really a blog-- it's a website that is about your opinions-- just wanted to get that out in the clear. Bloggers don't remain anonymous. Blogging is about transparency, an open airing of opinions. In fact, according to Wikipedia in John Doe v. Patrick Cahill, the Delaware Supreme Court found that standards had to be met to unmask anonymous bloggers, and the Cahills settled in a lawsuit

with a rival who was posting comments about them. In the United Kingdom, a college lecturer contributed to a blog in which she called a politician uncomplimentary names, including referring to him as a "Nazi." The politician found out the real name of the lecturer (she wrote under a pseudonym) via the ISP and successfully sued her for damages and costs.

So stop hiding behind pseudonyms and calling yourself a blog. If you are going to attack people in the community, at least have the courage to put your name on your comments.

Now, I especially don't like complainers who don't offer ideas, suggestions or possible solutions. I like constructive criticism. So here are some ideas for some possible topics on your site: Do we really need to build new schools, or is it OK for our students to attend class in modular buildings? What's happening with the money Columbia County Flood Relief raised and why are people still living in FEMA housing? What's happening at the Vernonia Community Learning Center now that Flood Relief has moved out? What's up with that big wall Bill Sword built around his place across from Anderson Park? Should the County allow expansion and industrial development at the Vernonia Airport? The city is considering an Urban Renewal District in downtown-- what is this, and what will it mean? Where were Columbia County Road crews during the December snowstorms? That's just for starters.

Looking for some unsung heroes (who aren't police officers)? How about the volunteers who cleared out the Vernonia Cares Food Bank during the flood warning on January 1? How about Deputy Fire Chiefs Ben Davis and Dean Smith-- volunteers who worked as hard as any paid city employee during the snow storm and flood scares? How about Rural Fire Board President Steve Weller who monitored the situations and gave up part of his vacation because the city was in an emergency? How about all our youth sports coaches? School volunteers? 4-H parents? CERT Volunteers? Don't like the way things are run around here? Yes--start discussions. Attend a city meeting. Join a city committee. Volunteer with a local organization. Run for city office. Write a letter to the editor-- Vernonia's Voice welcomes your opinions. Offer an alternative solution.

There are lots of local non-profits who could use your expertise to help design and maintain their own website. There are lots of topics that need open discussion. There are lots of volunteer groups who need passionate and committed people to join them. Put your energy to good use.

Another source of news, information and opinions in our community? I welcome you with open arms. Another bunch of complainers and Monday morning quarterback-- you can keep it. Complaining just to hear yourself talk will quickly leave you... well, talking to yourself. Why not be part of the solution, instead of adding to the problem?



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