Vernonia Keeps Bobbing Up

By Mayor Sally Harrison

Sat down the other day with some ol' friends to start planning our 50th Class Reunion Celebration. After congratulating ourselves on surviving so long, we got down to business. Jan got out the "Memolog" annual (1959)-- the same year Oregon celebrated its 100th birthday... Two years after Oregon America Mill shut down permanently and a cloud of uncertainty hung over our town.

I found the "Dedication" page among all the young faces especially relevant. It goes like this: "The following is a quote from an article which appeared in the Nehalem Journal (Vernonia's first newspaper) of December 30, 1890. It stated: 'A reason for the rapid advancement of Vernonia is in the firm and unshaken confidence the people have in her future. It is confidence well-placed and hope well-founded... it is just as hard to keep a good town down as it is to suppress rebellion in Central America. It continues to bob up serenely attaining a more altitudinous position with each successive bob.'

It is our belief that Vernonia is continuing to 'bob up serenely' and will keep on bobbing. That is why we dedicate this annual to the Spirit of the Old and New Vernonia."

That same spirit lives today. I can't express in words how excited and happy I am about the opportunities coming our way! The good news I'm hearing didn't just fall into our laps. It is the culmination of over a year's hard work by so many dedicated citizens, some to the detriment of their own well-being.

Let's start at the top and work our way down. We can't thank Governor Kulongoski enough for his continuing support of our community, specifically our schools, with Oregon Solutions and now being on the top of the Governor's list for the stimulus money for the rebuilding of our schools in a "Green" manner. Rep. Witt's and Sen. Johnson's help was invaluable. Folks-- this is HUGE!!

In Washington, D.C., Senators Wyden and Merkley have our best interests at heart and are working hard to facilitate our flood recovery. They are presently waiting for the President's signature on two appropriations. One for \$450,000 for a WOEC sub-station and another for \$381,000 for new school equipment.

Closer to home, Commissioner Tony Hyde-- he has been working on so many levels, so many committees and so many meetings. If you can catch him, thank him for his dedication. He is our driving force in Salem and beyond.

Locally, the Columbia County Flood Relief is finally seeing the fruit of their considerable labors. Grant moneys are finally finding their way to buy-outs and elevations. Dan Brown and his staff have moved to new digs and pared down their staff, but they are still working hard on our behalf.

Dr. Cox, the School Board, and Staff have been doing double time and double the work this past year. We have come a long way and are finally closing in on our goal of safer, greener, new schools. I can hardly wait for the day we break ground!

Simultaneously, the City has had its first meeting with the Corps of Engineers to work on modeling for a permanent solution to flash flooding in the valley. Of course, budget is the concern.

The City is continuing its quest for a permanent sewer solution. Funds have been found to start the formulation of different options for consideration. It will be a grand day when we can say, "What sewer problem?" Along with the sewer, we will work on storm water control, safe drinking water supply and a fair fee schedule for utilities.

The one thing the rest of us must remember is we have a pivotal role in all this coming to fruition. It won't be easy. I repeat, it won't be easy. The short term sacrifices you will be asked to make will garner so many long term benefits: great schools, infrastructure we can live with, economic development, jobs, property value increases, and all still in our lovely valley.

The Vernonia spirit does still live on. We will continue to "keep bobbing up," better, more livable, more vibrant and more beautiful than ever before.

What's the Plan Stan? A Monthly Update on City Planning

By Seth Lenaerts

First things first, I have to come clean. This is only the second article and already I am not sticking to my word. I had intended on writing this article about GIS and the planning commission's goals for 2009, but that is going to have to wait. February has been amazing and let me tell you why. It took me awhile to find, but community planning is going on everywhere in Vernonia. For example, this past month I saw members of the Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robot team present flood mitigation plans to the city council. I met with Vernonia Hands On Art and was excited to hear about their plans for First Friday. Even the parks committee is planning on ways to get the community involved in our parks.

This community buzz had me thinking about an amazing road trip I went on in August. I started in Portland and crossed the Cascades to Madras, then drove through the long winding desert roads to Ontario. After that, I zoomed down to Lakeview, spent a short but very memorable amount of time at Crater Lake and then cruised back up the valley. I was taken aback by the beauty and astonished at the diversity this state has to offer. There are obvious reasons to like living in Oregon-- the beauty, summer, recreation opportunities, open spaces-- but how about the planning? Oregon has some progressive planning policies that help to keep it beautiful and accessible for all of us. One of my favorites, allowing public access to the entire beach! I am not trying to say that the Oregon planning system is perfect, but it does some pretty cool things. For example, the stress put on public input.

There are 19 statewide planning goals, including protecting agriculture and forest lands, affordable housing, multi-modal transportation and mitigating natural disasters. But above all, the number one state planning goal is citizen involvement.

A couple of weeks ago, I saw a great example of this. The Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robot team came to city council and presented a unique and innovative flood mitigation plan. They presented a system that equips houses with a type of air pocket that allows the house to rise with the flood water. It was great to see these young citizens present their ideas and research. The best part is that they were using their time and skills to improve our community. And, at the very same meeting a couple of VHS students informed council that they were interested in doing a project to get an amphitheater built in town.

The ideas are out there, but it takes a community to build them. Send me an email and we can pass along information about events/projects, no matter what stage they are in. Let's use this article as an opportunity to discuss, talk about and share possible community projects.

Until next time, you don't have to be coy, Roy, just listen to me.

You can reach Seth Lenaerts by email at Seth@vernonia-or.gov

A New Place to Call HOME: Grant Funds Awarded

By Jill Hult

Community Action Team (CAT) applied for and received HOME Grant funds through Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) to assist in the 2007 Flood Recovery efforts. The HOME Grant must be used on a development project, typically where the nonprofit developer buys homes or land, builds or rehabilitates homes and offers those homes for purchase. In this case, CAT has purchased a number of contiguous infill lots to build new homes for flood-affected homeowners. All families must meet the HOME program guidelines. CAT intends for this project to address the need for replacement housing for horegional community development corporation. Although CAT is coordinating with the City and County through the Unmet Needs Committee, it has sole responsibility for the project and is receiving no support from the Committee.

CAT has acquired 5 lots in Vernonia between 5th and 6th Avenues off of Bridge Street. One lot has an existing home that will be substantially improved and the other 4 lots will have new homes based on house plans CAT uses in its Self Help new housing program. CAT will be working with volunteer labor provided by Christian Aid Ministries (CAM) for part of the construction phase. They are expectJim Tierney, Deputy Director at Community Action Team. When asked for specifics, he said, "I cannot share project information that could be 'reverse engineered' to make available confidential client information." Tierney went on to say, "It is our goal to help flooded homeowners to continue being homeowners. At the same time, we hope to help the City and County to clear at-risk homes from the flood plain."

CAT is planning to have all the projects in this first group complete by this fall. They are assembling interested homeowners to form a second HOME flood relief

meowners who opt to have their flooded homes purchased by the City or County. This project is an example of CAT's Community Investment Department fulfilling its role as the

ing to begin site work the first week of March 2009.

"These projects fit our policy of providing replacement homes while not competing with the private market," said project in the area.

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