

from the editor....

The weekend of March 20-21 was a very exciting couple of days for me, personally. First of all, on Friday, March 20th, Major League Soccer announced they were awarding a new franchise to Portland. As an ardent supporter of the Portland Timbers, this was extremely gratifying and highly anticipated news. Then, on Saturday, March 21, at the Regards to Rural Conference in Salem, I was awarded the Rural Oregon Award of Excellence for Community Leadership for my work with Vernonia's Voice. Two very different events, two very different circumstances-- yet, two situations that show the power and positive impact of community and of leadership.

Regards To Rural is the region's premier gathering of rural leaders, volunteers, and all those who care about vibrant rural communities, and is hosted by Rural Development Initiatives (RDI). RDI are familiar to Vernonians, having led numerous leadership trainings here since beginning its relationship immediately after the flood of 1996. They also provide the training for the Ford Institute Leadership Program, which is completing its third training class here this spring.

The Community Leadership Award is given to graduates of RDI facilitated leadership development programs who have used their leadership tools and skills to add value and increase capacity in their community. I was nominated and chosen for my work publishing Vernonia's Voice and for the positive influence it has had on Vernonia.

Vernonia's Voice has in many ways been a labor of love-- hard work that is extremely satisfying-- because I see every day that the end result is absolutely making a difference for the people of this community. We have more engagement and participation in activities, a positive outlook on our future, and the feeling that no matter what is thrown our way, we will find a way to persevere and succeed. The recognition of the impact Vernonia's Voice is having is extremely rewarding-- to know that the positive influence is not just noticed here in Vernonia, but on a state-wide level is immensely gratifying.

My thanks go out first of all to all the volunteers and contributors, and especially to those who were part of this from the very beginning. You have all helped make Vernonia's Voice truly the voice of Vernonia. I could not do this without you, and this award belongs to each and every one of you as well. And to all of our readers, advertisers, subscribers and supporters for your continuing encouragement and inspiration. You have really made this all worthwhile. This is an award that we can all be proud of.

Major League Soccer (MLS) coming to Portland is something I will not claim responsibility for. I was originally involved in helping start the supporter's section that sits behind the north end goal and that now calls itself the Timbers Army. My involvement has shrunk in recent years, but what is so amazing about the announcement that Portland will be home to a first division team, is the way the Timbers Army grew. Initially, there were thirty or forty of us sitting together, cheering, singing and chanting. But, through a grassroots effort that received almost no official support from the team management, a movement was born and an organization was created that now includes thousands of supporters and attendees at each home game. With passion, commitment, hard work, and a lot of behind-the-scenes organizing, fans of the Timbers have built a community that is as effective as anything I have ever seen. They create their own merchandise and literature, organize and raise money to help fellow members who are in need, help with Habitat for Humanity. And they have led the campaign to bring MLS to Portland, and were mentioned as being responsible in part for MLS's decision to choose Portland for an expansion franchise.

Some people may think that is a waste of energy-- spending so much time on being a fan of a sports team. But the Timbers Army is a real community, and real relationships have grown out of people's involvement. Real action has taken place because these people know how to work together.

There are many leaders in the Timbers Army, just as there are many leaders in Vernonia. In fact, the Timbers Army reminds me of Vernonia in a lot of ways-- passionate, committed, dedicated. Working together for a positive end result. They were hoping to bring a MLS team to their city-- we are trying to recover and become more vibrant. Both are results I am proud to be part of.



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