



Preschool Teacher Still Loves What She's Doing, Even After Twenty Years!

Kala Cota has been teaching some of Vernonia's preschoolers and providing childcare in a wonderful learning environment for the youngest members of Vernonia families. And after twenty years, her enthusiasm and love for teaching and helping children learn has not diminished one bit.

On a recent visit to Cota's home-based school, her excitement about teaching came shining through as she talked about her approach to learning. "It's important to understand the value of play," says Cota about her preschool philosophy. "When children are young, they learn through their play. So to me it's important to set up an environment that encourages social interaction and promotes their development."

Cota takes a well-rounded approach to learning at her school. "I like to change the environment to add new materials and things they can explore," she explains. "I think it's important to introduce all the concepts, such as colors, letters, numbers, shapes-- but in a fun way. To me, the most important thing is for them to learn that school is fun."

Cota and her husband, Chris, have converted the double garage at their home into a fun-filled classroom with play and learning centers, activity areas, and even a quiet reading loft. And they've turned their backyard into a kids' outdoor play land. Their property includes a couple of wooded lots in which Cota has developed trails that her students can explore during nice weather and learn about nature. Indoors, she includes many sensory activities, books, toys, homemade play-dough, and art projects.

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Exploring the woods in the Cota's backyard play area

Take Care of Oregon Days: Celebrating Oregon's 150th Birthday with Make Vernonia Shine Day

By this time, most of us have heard that Oregon is celebrating its 150th birthday this year -- the Sesquicentennial if you want to get technical, use really big words, and impress your friends. Well, this month it's time for all of us to join in the celebration with Take Care of Oregon Days. Vernonians will join others all around the state to help improve the quality of life in our great state with projects planned in communities everywhere. In Vernonia, it happens on May 16th as Vernonia Pride organizes Make Vernonia Shine, our annual clean-up day here in town. Students from Vernonia schools will be planting trees in the watershed on May 15th as part of the celebration.

Take Care of Oregon Days, a month-long celebration, is being organized in part by SOLV, a non-profit organization that brings together government, business and volunteers in programs and projects to enhance the livability of Oregon. "We've had an amazing turnout of volunteer leaders signing up for Take Care of Oregon Days projects," said Sara Ryan, a Program Manager with SOLV.

"Most of the projects are the usual community clean-ups and river restoration projects, like our Down By the River clean-ups that SOLV sponsors," said Ryan. But there are also some unusual projects. Ryan mentioned a student in Baker City who has organized a "Pedal Pick-up" to get friends to ride bikes and

clean up along roadsides and a project to clean and repair cassette tape players for a talking book service. "We have so many cool things happening and a variety of people getting involved in a number of different ways," said Ryan.

Over 500 projects will take place in Oregon, the majority of them on May 16th. In Columbia County, clean-ups are planned in Clatskanie, at Pixie and Datis parks in Columbia City, at Dibblee Point Beach in Ranier, and at Scappoose Bay in St. Helens. A month-long "Feed our Families and Furry Friends" a community pet and food drive is also being held in Columbia City.

For more information about Take Care of Oregon Days or to find a project planned in a community near you, go to www.solv.org



A spring shower brought this rainbow to Vernonia Lake

Oregon Way Kickoff Features Vernonia

Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski addressed the first meeting of the Oregon Way Advisory Committee in early April, offering three projects for consideration, including rebuilding the city of Vernonia into a greener, and more energy-independent community.

The meeting marked the beginning of Oregon's effort to compete for and win competitive grants from the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The purpose of the group is to advise the Governor on projects across the state that will showcase Oregon's green expertise.

"We have an unprecedented opportunity before us with the competitive grants in the federal economic recovery package," the Governor said. "With this unique public-private partnership, we have the opportunity to secure federal dollars to showcase to the world that Oregon is the leader in doing business smarter and greener while creating jobs and sustainable economic opportunities for the future."

To set the group's work in motion, the Governor offered three projects for consideration and asked the Oregon Way group to assess the projects, and if they support moving forward, to identify competitive federal grants to apply for. The group will report back to the Governor with that determination and whether or not the projects meet the criteria and the goal of The Oregon Way economic recovery effort. If the Governor agrees with the assessment from the advisory group, he will then advance recommended projects to the appropriate federal agency(s) for consideration.

In addition to the Vernonia Project, the Governor asked the advisory group to consider and review expanding the presence of solar highways in Oregon and retrofitting Portland Community College Sylvania campus to achieve "net zero" energy usage. Columbia County Commissioner Tony Hyde addressed the group as project sponsor for Vernonia, outlining the project details, and explaining how it fits the Oregon Way criteria. The Vernonia Project includes: creation of a new school campus outside the flood zone; development of a fully self-sustaining electricity system by using biomass; construction of a more efficient, safer wastewater treatment facility outside the floodplain; beginning a downtown renewal and Main Street Program, complete street improvements; and building a Community Service Center that would be home to a senior center, food bank, and medical clinic.

What Does The Future Hold For Vernonia? An Interview with Tony Hyde

Columbia County Commissioner and Vernonia resident, Tony Hyde, has played an integral role in the recovery of Vernonia and other county communities after the flood of 2007. He has played an even bigger role in the effort to rebuild the community, acting as Co-convenor for the Oregon Solutions process that helped the school board choose a site for a new school campus and, using his connections in Salem, to keep Vernonia in the forefront for the Governor and other state agency heads. At the first meeting of The Oregon Way, the team put together by Governor Kulongoski to review projects that could be submitted for Federal economic stimulus funds, Hyde presented the Project Concept for Rebuild Vernonia to the Governor and the team, hoping to attract funds for construction projects in our community. Vernonia's Voice recently sat down with Tony Hyde to talk about Vernonia schools, economics in Vernonia and in Oregon, and what the future might have in store for us.

Vernonia's Voice: Where are we with the Oregon Solutions process?

Tony Hyde: In danger. The entire Oregon Solutions program is slated for a sixty percent cut. The state is not just targeting Oregon Solutions. They're saying that anything that is not core services in the university system is gone. From my perspective, that's just not acceptable. I know too much about the value of Oregon Solutions, and it's not just helping Vernonia. But it's Vernonia right now. Every Oregon Solutions project is individually funded to the tune of \$50,000.

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