

Have You Heard About...

By Sharon Parrow

Hey, have you heard about the new blog in town? Yes... the Vernonia Chamber of Commerce (otherwise known as the Chamber) has a blog. All you have to do is go to the Chamber site and click on "blog."

The idea behind this is so all of Vernonia, and anyone else, can go there and communicate in one place about our community. Actually, it is set up so you can give ideas, get information, and ask any questions you might have about what is going on in and around Vernonia. If you have heard of something that might be going on, you can put that question on the board, and hopefully someone in the community will have an answer.

Advertise a garage sale. Post a concern, or get an interactive discussion going by commenting on other posts. Ask for help on a project. Find someone right here in Vernonia with skills you need. Communicate directly with others in our community about what is good, bad, ugly, great or stupid! Don't like a decision that was made by City Council-- tell everyone. Heard a good rumor? (Not in Vernonia?!) Have it clarified or dispelled. Discuss the conditions of the public restrooms, local sidewalks, pocket parks, or crosswalks.

The blog can also be used for businesses. Give a review of a local restaurant or complain about customer service you received from a store clerk. Let everyone know someone went above and beyond the call of duty for you. Is a business carrying a new item that you found useful? Know of a business owner that is looking for a good employee with a certain skill set? Is there something you can't get in Vernonia that you think businesses should be carrying? Talk about it on this new site.

The site allows you to ask any question or to give any opinions that you might have, whether the opinions are kudos or complaints. The only thing that they will block is profanity or abusive language.

I think this is a great opportunity to get to know a little bit more about Vernonia and what is happening here. Did you know that there is an Economic Development Committee that is working on improving downtown? Did you know there are people working to save the July 4th fireworks? Heard any new information about new schools in Vernonia? Need to know how to make a reservation for your family to stay at Anderson Park when they come to visit in July? Go to the site and check it out! And get to know Vernonia better!

An Opinion: In Vernonia, Is The Glass Half Full Or Half Empty?

By Scott Laird

Age old questions: Which came first, the chicken or the egg? If a tree falls in the woods and there's no one there to hear it, does it make any noise? Tastes great or less filling? (OK, that one's not age old, just age appropriate.) Is your glass half full or half empty? Questions... Lots of questions these days.

Here in Vernonia, we are wrestling with some very serious and tough questions-- Questions about whether or not to build a new school campus and how to pay for it. Questions about how to meet a major shortfall in the school budget. Questions about how to fund necessary upgrades to our wastewater treatment facility. Questions that may highly impact the future of our community and determine it's survival.

How people view the future and answer the tough questions is often part of their chemistry. We are often told to "Look on the bright side," or "Have a positive attitude." But some people aren't wired that way. Many people look at the world, and see what is wrong. See things that need fixing. See problems, concerns, and things that need improvement. These same people often roll up their sleeves and get to work looking for solutions, ways to fix the problems, and try to find answers to what isn't working.

Other people approach things differently. These people try to see the positive in most situations. They see a problem as an opportunity. They try to find what is already working and build on it. They look for solutions, offer options, and try to find answers. They look for what is positive and want to talk about how everything is going to work out and be OK.

I (in case you haven't noticed) like to look for the positive, although I think there is room and a place for both. Sometimes us sunny-siders need to be reminded that everything isn't so rosy.

Like here in Vernonia. Right now, there are a lot of positive things happening. Even after a devastating flood eighteen months ago and a very poor economic outlook, we have a lot to look forward to in this community. At least from my viewpoint.

Right now, the transformation of Vernonia is on the short list of projects that Governor Kulongoski is touting to receive Federal Economic Stimulus Funding. Rebuilding the Vernonia school campus in a safe location, rebuilding our wastewater treatment facility-- a project that has been dragging on for years--, finding ways to produce inexpensive electricity, building a Community Center complex to house our food bank, senior center and medical clinic-- all are on the table as projects that may get funded and become reality. That is positive news.

Even through the bleak recent economic downturn, local businesses are surviving and our downtown still appears vital and full of life. A new restaurant opened, First Friday celebrations are starting again and the Open Air Market is getting ready to kick off another season. A new courtyard is being constructed at the Vernonia Community Learning Center, our city government appears to have weathered the storm of 2007 and the last few years,

and seems to be on the right track. Participation in community activities is high and people seem engaged in what is going on. To me, the glass appears to be half full.

On the other hand, our schools are facing that severe budget shortfall this year. We are being told cuts are coming to all aspects of education and the programs that are offered-- big, painful cuts. Our city government is still struggling with a tight budget, and a lack of resources. The timber industry continues to struggle. The economy, though starting to show signs of recovery, is still very weak, and many Vernonians have been laid off and are out of work. For many people, times are tough and money is tight. Half empty.

In order to receive those economic stimulus funds that are on the table, Vernonians are going to be asked to pay a portion of the cost to rebuild our schools. That means a bond measure, estimated to be around \$13 million dollars. That means increases to our property taxes of around \$2.00 per thousand-- probably a little less. Financially, this community is facing some very tough times, and it's only going to get harder.

Which brings us back to those tough questions. The question isn't, "Is Vernonia going to survive?" We all know this is a town made up of a bunch of survivors who always find a way. But is just surviving good enough? To me, the question is really, "Is Vernonia going to thrive?" --which raises a whole slew of follow-up questions. What happens to this community if we don't build a new school campus? What happens if we don't pass that bond?

I recently asked those questions to four candidates running for the Vernonia School Board, and not one of them had a good answer. There doesn't appear to be a back-up plan if we don't build new schools. Right now, the school district is paying around \$14,000 a month to rent the modular trailers. That expense is taking away funding that could be used for educational purposes-- to fill some of those holes in the budget. Is it possible that the Vernonia school district could cease to exist if changes don't happen soon? Yes, quite possible, even likely. They can't afford to continue the way they are now. If we don't have any schools in Vernonia, who is going to want to stay and live here? Not most families. But what will they do, sell their homes and move? Who will they sell them to? What happens to our property values if we don't have schools in this community? I expect the value will decrease much more than the anticipated hundreds of dollars in yearly property tax increases that are being proposed.

Adding more burden to already struggling families in a poor economy is not a choice most administrators, board members, or community members take lightly, nor relish. But the choices appear very limited. Can the members of this community afford to pass a bond and build new schools? Or is the question, can we afford not to?

Readers lend their voices...

To the Editor:

Help Vernonia build a new school. The timing for building couldn't be better. It seems strange to say something like that with the current economy, but it's true. The availability of Federal funding due to the relief program will allow us to build the long overdue new school, out of the flood plain.

Our schools, just like most small towns across America, are the hub and lifeblood of our community. It is a sense of pride to students and a place where lifelong friendships for young adults and parents are born and nurtured. If the schools don't thrive, neither does the town. Is it wise to wait to see if we flood a third time? Then what will we do?

It will require good leadership and experienced professionals to guide us through the bureaucracy that accompanies such funding. I would urge everyone to elect Jim Krahn to the school board. His professional experience, and both nationally and internationally recognized leadership skill, is critical during this process. To have someone of Jim's ability, at our community's disposal is priceless.

Pat Stacklie
Vernonia

To the Editor:

I am always so glad when new faces step up with conviction to serve our community. It is often unseen and unappreciated. So when we had two wonderful young mothers throw their hat in the ring to serve on the school board, I thought bravo! Unfortunately, I do not think that this is the time to change "horses". Jim Krahn has the connections at the state level that we need to see this project through. His dedication is such that even after having major surgery last year he did not miss any meetings but attended them via phone when needed. That is the type of dedication we need to see our new schools built. I do sincerely hope that both young ladies continue to participate and be invested in the process but my vote is for Jim Krahn for school board.

With best regards to rebuilding our schools and community,

Heather Lewis
Vernonia

Dear Supporters,

The Board and Staff of Vernonia Cares Food Bank (VCFB) would like to clarify how your donations are handled. Checks and cash received are issued a pre-printed, numbered receipt. This document indicates VCFB's nonprofit EIN number along with the donor information. This EIN number proves that we are a nonprofit, and you may deduct your donation on your taxes. We would recommend that cash be brought to our location during our regular business hours (Tuesday and Thursday between 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM). This way your cash donation can be processed properly and given a receipt right away. The

food bank is located within the Legion Building (627 Adams Avenue, Vernonia).

Checks may be delivered in the same way, or they can be mailed to Vernonia Cares, PO Box 126, Vernonia, OR 97064-0126. No VCFB staff or representatives directly solicit funds. (Over the holidays, we did ask Vernonia businesses for turkey donations, and some gave cash towards that project.) If you are in doubt regarding any person seeking a donation on Cares' behalf, please contact VCFB executive director Sandy Welch at the food bank (503-429-1414) or Barb Ervin (503-429-1625).

We work hard to be a service agency in which you can place your trust. We want you to be confident your donations are handled responsibly. Thank you for your generous support. We are currently providing emergency groceries to over 400 people per month. Thank you for allowing us to be your hands extended to the hungry in and around Vernonia.

Sincerely,
Rosie McCoy, Vice President
VCFB Board of Directors
Sandy Welch, Executive Director

Letter to the Editor:

Jim Krahn, 19 year Vernonia resident, is currently running for position #1 on the school board. The experience Jim brings to our district is immeasurable. Jim has served over five years on the Vernonia school board and eight years on a Wisconsin school board. Mr. Krahn has extensive experience and knowledge of the legislative process. With his experience, Mr. Krahn has the ability to provide the district with funding and grant avenues to assist the district in building a new facility. His contacts with elected officials are numerous and invaluable, including Senator Betsy Johnson. Mr. Krahn's philosophy is that we all had adults that sacrificed and gave their best to ensure the finest education possible for us. Now the time has come for all of us to collectively give back to today's children. A bond, combined with federal funding and grants, will provide the financial support necessary to secure our children's education and safety. It's a small investment that will benefit and protect our property value, business owners, economic status, and most importantly, today's youth. As a community member and educator, I ask that you vote on experience and optimism, vote for Jim Krahn.

Kim Oblack-Morrison
Teacher/Jewell School Dist

47J Citizens,

This year the school board election is occurring at an extremely critical point. Jim Krahn has been an invaluable 47J board member. Please acknowledge his contributions and commitment by voting for Jim.

After the flood of 2007 there was a vacancy on the board. Jim had previously served on the Vernonia School Board, he knew what was involved. Undaunted by the amount of work that the term would

present, Jim knew he could help the district get through this devastating period. He put his name in and was appointed to a position ready for the huge task of getting our schools back on track after the flood.

Experienced in managing publicly funded entities, Jim knows the importance of keeping himself connected with what is happening in state government. This helps our small town stay on the minds of legislators.

Jim does not pretend to know it all. He will listen. He also will admit that not every decision is perfect, but he learns from what has happened in the past and moves forward with better knowledge.

Shortly after being appointed in 2008, Jim experienced a very serious personal issue. Many would have resigned at that point, however Jim made sure that he attended every meeting possible either by phone or in person. He is committed to seeing the schools through this period.

Jim's children are grown and his motive is not in one particular area of the school district, it is purely for the greater good of the whole community. Right now the school board is at an extremely critical point in a process that will take a couple of years to complete. Please don't throw away his valuable investment. Let him finish the job he came on board to tackle. Vote for Jim Krahn for Vernonia School Board and confirm that his dedication and hard work are recognized and appreciated.

Sincerely,
Dr. Phyllis Gilmore
Vernonia

To the Editor:

Not very often do I laugh out loud. It's more like a quiet chuckle, but P.J. O'Leary's column has made me laugh out loud since the very first column. I just don't even know what to say about his humor but I love it and can hardly wait for the next edition. It's like dessert at the end of a meal. We try to read every article and appreciate the positive attitude and well written articles. And we don't even live in Vernonia! Tell everyone on the staff thank you for a great paper.

Barbara Compton

HOW TO SEND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Vernonia's Voice welcomes and requests your thoughts, opinions, and ideas. Please include your name, address, and phone number; limit your letters to 300 words or less. Vernonia's Voice reserves the right to edit, omit, respond, or ask for a response to letters submitted. We will print letters, space permitting. Deadline is the 20th of the month. **Email to: news@vernonias-voice.com or mail to: Letters, PO Box 55, Vernonia 97064.**