

## Local I\$ the Way

By Jill Hult

In the face of today's staggering unemployment rates, it is only appropriate that communities, like ours, look for ways to strengthen our own ability to provide goods and services to our fellow residents, because it is the first line of defense in maintaining our viability as a place to live.

Community Action Team, Inc., is one example of this philosophy taking the lead to make progress out of disaster and keeping much-needed dollars in the local area by using local businesses and contractors on the Corey Hill housing project.

Casey Mitchell is heading up the development of these four new homes and one rehabilitated house. Mitchell stated there have been fifteen local businesses and Contractors working on the project along with four other Columbia County businesses and one Washington County area business. "As a long-time resident of Vernonia and a real estate developer, I know how bad the local contractors are hurting. It has been my pleasure to work with Vernonia and Columbia County businesses, and have found them to be professional, reasonable, and responsive. I hope to do business with more of these businesses in the coming months" added Mitchell.

Community Action Team, Inc., has also taken on the management of Columbia County Flood Recovery (CCFR), which has employed ten local employees for over a year and a half. CCFR recently sent letters to local contractors soliciting them to provide required information needed to work on any given mitigation or rebuilding project as well as business cards and marketing materials that would allow CAT to provide them to clients. CCFR encourages all local contractors to come in and provide their information if you haven't already done so.

Vernonia, as a community, is proving, in the aftermath of a disaster and in these adverse economic times, our ability to adapt and survive. We are moving in the right direction proudly and *locally*.

## An Opinion: If Not Tasers, What?

By Scott Laird

I have been struggling all month with whether to weigh in on the issue of Use of Force by the Vernonia Police Department during an arrest on March 20th. And although I had hoped to only write a fact-based account of the situation, I find myself compelled to make a few comments.

I am very aware that police can, and at times do, abuse their power and office. I was once witness to a good friend falsely arrested in Portland a few years ago, and have seen police misuse their position. I truly wish we didn't have to have armed guards in our communities. But, unfortunately, we live in a society that requires someone to keep the peace. And so, as a society, we will occasionally have to deal with situations like the current one under investigation in Vernonia.

On March 20th, Vernonia Police responded to a complaint of a party with underage drinking on Bridge Street. When police responded, they became involved in a physical altercation with an eighteen-year-old male, and ended up using a Taser to help control the suspect. This incident has led to claims by the eighteen-year-old's family of police brutality and excessive use of force, to an outside investigation initiated by the City of Vernonia, and some discussion within the community at large.

There are a couple of points I feel need to be addressed. The first thing I think people need to consider is this, and for me this is the bottom line: When the police show up at your door, and you have broken the law, and they try to arrest you, and you resist... you should not be surprised when they use force. The police are not going to look the other way and say, "OK, never mind," and go back to their cars. Their job is to apprehend law-breakers. If you resist, you could end up getting hurt--end of story.

My second point: There are claims being made that officers should have been able to subdue an eighteen-year-old without having to resort to the Taser. To me, that argument doesn't hold up. I have personally wrestled with my forty-pound dog that does not want flea treatment applied to her, and have witnessed parents trying to put an uncooperative child into a highchair or car seat without hurting them. If someone doesn't want to go along with you and physically resists, they can make it very difficult to contain them, no matter what their size. In my opinion, this is a silly argument-- it's one of the reasons tools like Tasers, and pepper spray had to be invented and are carried by police. I would also like to challenge anyone to go down to the middle school, pick out a thirteen-year-old, and tell them to kick you in the knee or the groin, or punch you in the chest as hard as they can. That's the kind of resistance police are often faced with, and another reason tools are created to assist them in their job.

I don't know what happened on March 20th; I wasn't there. The Police report is being withheld by the District Attorney's office until the conclusion of any criminal proceedings. The family of the young man arrested on March 20th did not return phone calls from Vernonia's Voice about the case.

Did Vernonia Police act appropriately on March 20th? Yes, according to Howard Webb, an expert on Police Use of Force, who has testified in over 200 state and federal courts about use of force issues, and reported on this incident to the Vernonia City Council on May 18. In Webb's investigation, he states Vernonia police acted according to department policy.

Some people don't like the choice of Webb as an investigator of this case, because he is a colleague of Chief Kay. Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson was aware of a working relationship between Kay

and Webb before Webb began his investigation and didn't see it as a problem. Webb says he investigates and testifies against officers he is acquainted with regularly-- he travels a wide circle and knows or has trained a large number of officers and instructors currently working in Oregon. He also concedes that Police officers, like everyone else, make mistakes, and need to be held accountable.

Tasers are being used by thousands of police departments nationwide. Are they completely safe? I don't know the answer to that. But they appear to be the option of choice right now by the experts who have tried to develop safe ways to control criminal suspects in all kinds of situations without resorting to lethal violence. A better question to ask might be, "If not Tasers, than what should police use?" More violent and aggressive physical tactics? Nightsticks, fists, flashlights? Guns?

The studies are mixed on Tasers and you need to review a lot of information to understand the ramifications of their use. There is a 130-page study by Amnesty International that states 334 people have died after having a Taser used on them. But the link between death and use of the Taser is somewhat sketchy at best. That same study also cites a study by Wake Forest University in which nearly 1,000 cases were reviewed, 99.7 percent of which were found to have resulted in either no injuries or mild injuries associated with scrapes, puncture marks and bruises. Only three subjects sustained injuries serious enough to warrant hospitalization. Two subjects died, but autopsy reports found no link between the Taser and the deaths.

I'm not saying Tasers are safe or not, I have not reviewed all the information, just perused parts of a few studies. In many studies, data and information can often be manipulated to make just about any point you are trying to make. I think it's good to have as much information as possible on the table when making accusations during this kind of discussion.

Do Tasers have the potential to be dangerous? Absolutely. The state of Oregon has had five deaths since 2001 after the use of a Taser. According to TASER International's own website, Tasers are banned in seven states and the District of Columbia. Do Tasers have the potential to be abused? Again, absolutely-- just like any other method to control a struggling suspect.

In a conversation with Vernonia Interim Police Chief Mike Kay, he noted that from his review of Vernonia Police records, he only came up with a handful of occasions when Vernonia police were forced to use a Taser. Are there other indicators that Vernonia Police act especially harshly when apprehending criminal suspects? Do we have a rash of complaints about excessive use of force by our local department? It doesn't appear that way.

One other point I want to make: Vernonia police officers are especially isolated here with few options for quick back-up assistance. They may find themselves outnumbered in situations where they need to make quick decisions and act fast. The Taser gives them a tool to protect themselves and other citizens.

If not Tasers, than what do we suggest our police officers use when faced with violence or situations in which someone is continuing to resist arrest? Maybe in a few years, police departments will have a new, failsafe method to control and force compliance from criminal suspects. Until that time, there doesn't appear to be another, safer choice in Vernonia.

## Readers lend their voices...

To the Editor:

We would like to thank all of you who came to the Fire and EMS BBQ and for joining us at our 2nd Annual Pancake Feed. We enjoy these events and having the chance to meet with our community. A BIG THANK YOU to the Vernonia Lyons Club for supplying the BBQ and volunteers to run it for us! Also to Gretchen Lindauer and the Vernonia Middle School for letting us use their kitchen once again, also thank you to Randy Parrow and Sentry Market. Thank you to the community for your donations which will go towards new rescue equipment. We really appreciate all your support, it means a lot to us! We look forward to seeing you all again at our next event!

With gratitude,  
Your Vernonia Volunteer Fire Fighters

To the Editor:

I understand that Memorial Day is a busy time for the cemetery with lots of grieving families and traffic. What I don't understand is the lack of attention to parking detail. I have pictures and witnesses to prove that during ceremonies vehicles were parked on top of grave sites, one of which my family member. As I write this full of tears, I am disgusted and sick to my stomach that anyone could be so ignorant and insensitive as to park on top of a mother's son, my best friend, a little boy's father! The headstone is double the size of any in the cemetery and in full color. How could you miss that? When you hopped out of your car on your way to visit your loved one's grave did you even care where you were parked or so relieved to find a spot you didn't care to move? Well, I care and Cory's friends that witnessed this cared! I was crushed to see the tire tracks on the headstone and burn out marks along side of Cory. Really people? How would you feel if this was your loved one someone was parked on top of? I hope next year the parking situation will be better thought out, but it's not only the cemetery keepers responsibility...it's yours! Open your eyes and pay attention!

Amy Barton  
In Memory of Cory Robert Kepple  
10/28/79-2/7/04

To the Editor:

The turn out for Vernonia's Pride's "Make Vernonia Shine" day was very disappointing with only 38 people signing up and half of them were not involved with cleaning.

In the past we have had as many as 200. We had provided lunch for 150. It takes a lot of time on the part of Vernonia Pride to organize this event.

I know there is a lot of unemployment in town and if you did not

make it out on clean up day we could still use your help. We did not get to all of our senior citizens; they need gutters cleaned and lawn work done. City parks can also use your help. We are getting a new playground structure at Hawkins Park and can use some extra hands to assemble it.

Downtown is looking so much better than it did, some businesses are looking good, but some of you could still do better.

A very BIG thank you to all of you who did turn out and lend a hand in some capacity.

DeLoris Webb  
Vernonia Pride

To the Editor:

Our state Representative, Brad Witt, has been busy telling us all the wonderful things he's doing for us in Salem through newspaper columns and newsletters. Unfortunately, he's neglected to mention two bills he's sponsored that will have a profound negative effect on our property rights and lifestyles.

One is HB3058, sponsored by Witt and one other representative. This bill would allow corporations to get wetland fill permits on private property they don't own, and get permits for work on private property even when the landowner opposes the permit. The landowner doesn't even have to be notified that the permit has been applied for.

Coupled with a corporation's legal right to use eminent domain to force the sale of private property, it means any of us could end up with, for instance, an LNG (Liquid Natural Gas) pipeline going through what was formerly our land. Witt is a big supporter of the proposed LNG terminal on the Columbia and the 600 miles of pipeline needed by it and other proposed LNG terminals.

The state Attorney General has weighed in on this bill, saying it will have a "profound impact on property rights" -- and seizure -- in Oregon. Political groups on both ends of the spectrum oppose this bill. Witt managed to get it through the first step of the legislative process; you might want to let him know what you think of his action.

Witt's second bill is HB2470, "Relating to Dogs". It's an attempt to fix the fact that dog kennels in Oregon are essentially unregulated at the state level. You might think this is a good idea...but wait till you see the details.

This bill allows breeders to have 50 sexually intact dogs that are two years of age or older. They can have an unlimited number of younger dogs, but they have to keep some records about them. They also can have an unlimited number of dogs that are not sexually intact. Even these limits don't apply to boarding kennels -- they can have an unlimited number, as long as the average stay at the facility is less than 30 days. The bill does require that a facility that has 75 dogs have one person on site for 8 hours each day!

I love dogs -- we currently have two rescue Great Danes. But the thought of 75 dogs living next door, with only one person there for 8

hours a day, terrifies me. This bill is worse than useless. It will specifically legalize these kennels, making it harder for neighbors to prevent new ones or fight abuses caused by existing ones. In Columbia Co., as anyone who's followed the five year saga of the local kennel ordinance knows, there is essentially no kennel regulation.

Witt can be reached at 1-503-986-1431; rep.bradwitt@state.or.us  
Pat Zimmerman  
Scappoose, OR

To the Editor:

Our family would like to express our sincere thanks to the Vernonia EMS crews and the Fire Department, and the Life Flight Crews who responded when our family member Tommy was injured in a recent accident. The quick response and quick thinking by the emergency crews probably saved Tommy's life. Words cannot express our gratitude to everyone for their help and support through this very difficult time. Tommy is on his way to recovery, and we just wanted to say thank you: to the hospital staff, our friends and neighbors, to the Vernonia community, and of course the emergency responders.

Tom, Dawn, Tiffany, Stephanie, and Brianna Carr  
Vernonia

To the Editor:

Teacher Appreciation Week is a week in the academic calendar which is dedicated to all of our teachers around the world. It is a time to say thank you to our teachers for all of their help and show our gratitude for all the time and effort that they have put into educating our children. With the help and support of WAUNA Federal Credit Union, U.S. Bank, Cedar Ridge, Vernonia Boosters and many volunteers, the staff and students of the Vernonia School District enjoyed a week of festivities. The staff at Washington Elementary would like to thank those involved for their generosity, and most importantly, your commitment to our community.

Ronda Lennen  
Secretary, Washington Grade School  
Vernonia

### 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.**