

from the editor...

Well, the ongoing saga of police use of force continues in Vernonia. Last month, I stated my opinion and don't really have a lot more to say on the issue. Mr. Ed Johnson has stated his differing opinions in another newspaper, opinions he is certainly entitled to.

Actually, I'm glad Ed Johnson has raised the issue of police use of force in our community. Most of us would not have heard about this incident and would have been unaware that police had used a taser on one of our citizens if Mr. Johnson hadn't brought it to our attention. Mr. Johnson raises a good point-- it is important for citizens to monitor what their police are doing, how they are handling themselves, and how they treat citizens they come in contact with. The job of police officer is ripe with opportunities for abuse, and I think it's good for officers to know citizens are paying attention. I applaud Mr. Johnson for asking questions about this incident, even if I don't agree with how he's done it.

I also applaud our city government for taking Mr. Johnson's claims about what happened to his family member seriously, and initiating not one, but two separate investigations. If eighteen-year-old Elliot Graf truly believes he was mistreated by the Vernonia Police and truly believes Vernonia Police used excessive force, then an investigation was called for. Police should be held accountable for their actions.

This incident has stirred up a lot of emotions and raised a couple of issues for this community to consider, hopefully providing an opportunity for some discussion and dialogue-- dialogue that could lead us to find some common ground and possible solutions. I think, at the end of the day, we all really want the same thing-- a safe, affordable and interesting place to live, work and play.

It makes me sad that we find ourselves arguing with each other about this issue. I think it's sad that we have to arm our police officers with

weapons and things like tasers, pepper spray or batons. I think it's sad that we have eighteen-year-olds who can't find constructive things to do, and that as a community we aren't providing healthy and safe activities for our youth and young adults. I think it's sad that our school budget is being cut and that so much of the city general budget goes to law enforcement, with nothing left to fund community development programs. I think it's sad that we currently only have one police officer who chooses to lives in our community and call this city home.

Wouldn't it be great if we could eliminate all those issues from our communities? (And I'm sure we're not the only rural community that struggles with these same issues.) Those might sound like lofty ambitions, but I believe they are things that might be at least partially attainable by working together, listening to each other, respecting each other, and trying to find solutions. This current incident has shown that we could all do better at working together, listening, respecting and trying to find solutions, myself included.

A couple of final notes. At the last City Council meeting in June, there was a discussion about what might be done to encourage more of our police officers to live here in town. With a new City Administrator starting in late June and the hiring process started for a permanent police chief, this seems like a good time for this community to seriously start that discussion. And, while we're at it, maybe we could discuss whether we really want our police officers to carry and use tasers, and what do we want our future police force in Vernonia to be. That seems like a good place to start.

*Scott Laird*  
*Editor and Publisher*

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reflecting the spirit of our community

**Publisher and Managing Editor**  
**Scott Laird**  
**503-367-0098**  
**scott@vernoniasvoice.com**

**News Editor**

Scott Laird

**Copy Editor**

Dennis Nicks

**Photography**

Scott Laird

Barb Carr

**VHS 2009 Grad Pages**

**Art Director/  
Graphic Design**

Rebecca Wright/  
FlighWright Design

**Contributors**

Nancy Burch

Mackenzie Carr

Janelle Thomas

Cedergreen

Brandy Fosdick

Ben Fousek

Sally Harrison

Gordon Jarman

Seth Lenaerts

Heather Lewis

PJ O'Leary

Erika Paleck

Sonia Spackman

Burt Tschache

Miles Wickstrom

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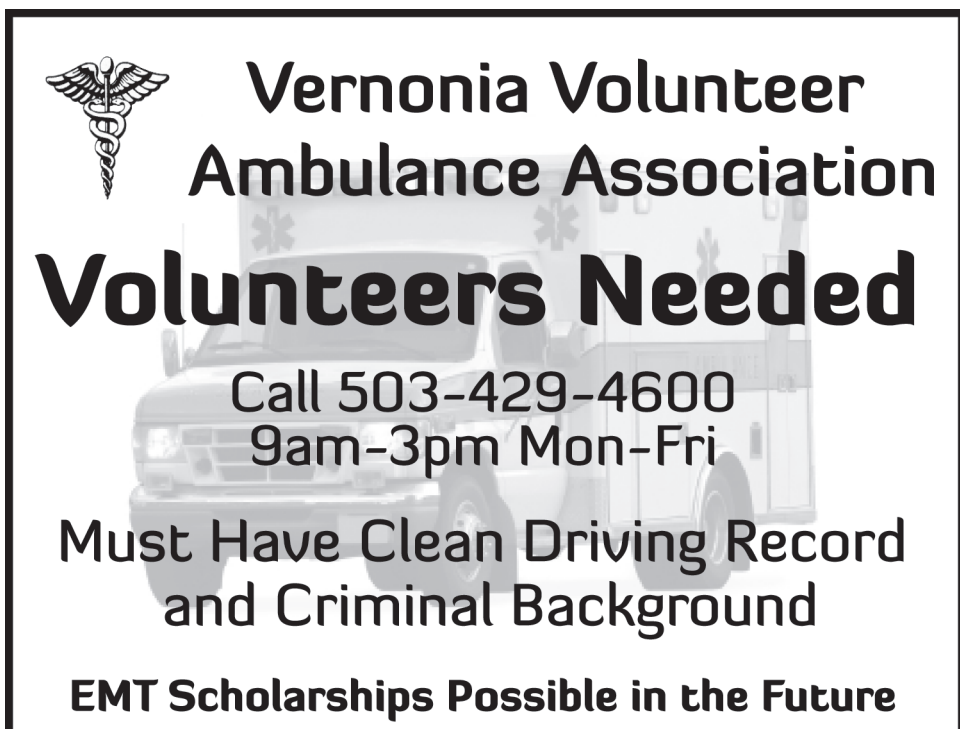
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