

august2009

free VERNONIA'S voice

reflecting the spirit of our community

volume3 issue3



Meet Bob Young

Vernonia's new Administrator is excited to be here and ready to get to work!

Vernonia's new City Administrator, Robert "Bob" Young, arrived from Bonney Lake, Washington, in late June. Young helped oversee Bonney Lake as its Mayor and City Administrator when it was the second fastest growing city in Washington. Bob recently went back to school and received a Masters Degree in Public Administration from the University of Washington. After a few weeks on the job, Vernonia's Voice sat down with Mr. Young to talk about his first impressions of his new job and town.

Vernonia's Voice: *How did you end up choosing Vernonia?*

Bob Young: When I was applying, I asked, "Where's Vernonia?" (Laughs) No, I had looked at the map to see where it was, but I had never been here before. So the day I came in for my interview was my first time here. My brother knew of Vernonia because he was a State Patrol officer who patrolled here back in the early 70's and was a game warden. And I have been delighted here. I have found a neat little city with lots of stuff going on. I was also looking at a position in Eastern Washington, but it was a sleepy little town. Vernonia is not a sleepy little town. I saw an opportunity to help a city rebuild itself from the devastation of the



Bob Young is Vernonia's new City Administrator.

flooding. I saw a city where I could maybe make a difference, help pull things together. I saw some good employees that looked like they would be good to work with. And I've found some good people in the community already. So you've got a real jewel out here, and I'm delighted to be here.

Vernonia's Voice: *How did you get into City Administration as a career?*

Bob Young: In 1995 or '96, I got interested in what was going on in the city where we lived-- Bonney Lake-- interested in the workings of our city. And I would go to city council meetings to try to find out what was happening. And being a warm body who was interested, I soon found myself on the Planning Commission, where I spent two years. Within six months, I was Chair, because they found I could run meetings. Then I was asked to run for Council, but before I could do anything, the head of the council came and asked me if I would run for Mayor. And I ran and won handily over an incumbent, as a virtual unknown in the city. When I took over as Mayor, we didn't have a city administrator,

continued on page 18

Gary Meyers Preserves a Little Bit of History

By Scott Laird

Some people have described it as a museum. And in a sense that's what it is: a place that collects and safeguards artifacts for society. In this case, it's a small but interesting assortment of items that specifically pay tribute to a building, and the businesses that have occupied it-- and to the heritage of a small rural community and a way of life.

"I used to sit across the street in the old drugstore parking lot with my buddies when I was sixteen or seventeen," says Gary Meyers. "And I used to say to them, 'one of these days I'm going to get into that building and do business. I know I could do it.' And they'd just laugh at me. But here we are now. It just goes to show that dreams can come true, if you're willing to follow them."

Gary Meyers is the owner of Meyers Auto Body on Bridge Street in Vernonia, but this isn't a story about the auto body business. It's a story about respect for the past and a curiosity about what came before. It's about an interest in preserving the history of a place, down to the smallest details, and about being able to share what has been preserved.

Meyers has run his auto body shop for over twenty years in what was once the Vernonia Auto Company-- a Chevy dealership started in 1935. It was once one of four car dealerships in town, a reminder of how mighty and thriving this little town once was. The building was built in 1924; the Chevy dealership closed in 1976. From 1976 through 1987, various auto-related businesses occupied the space. It was even used by Vernonia High School during the 1981-82 school year for shop classes. Meyers moved in in 1988.



Meyers began collecting automobile memorabilia after the flood in 1996. While cleaning up, Meyers found the old Chevy Dealership sign that used to hang outside the building tucked away in a corner of a back room. He cleaned up and restored it and it currently resides hanging in the

continued on page 14

County Budget Is Not Business as Usual

By April Bamburg

It is not business as usual in Columbia County-- or, at least, it will not be in the current fiscal year. From law enforcement to the county's planning and building services and county offices, changes are ahead.

In June, after several months of cost cutting, scrutiny and negotiation, Columbia County approved a budget of approximately \$20 million for operations in the current fiscal year.

According to County Commissioner Tony Hyde, County offices will close for eight furlough days throughout the fiscal year, from July 2009 - June 2010, in an agreement with county employee unions. Those dates are as follows: September 4, November 25 and December 24, 2009; January 4, March 26, April 23, May 28, and June 18, 2010.

The Columbia County Sheriff, Roads and Parks Departments will be open on those days, according to a release from the Board of County Commissioners.

These furlough days, an early retirement program and a pay freeze for managers and elected officials, may have saved up to 16 jobs in various county departments.

"We had a choice," said Hyde, the county's budget officer, "We could reduce the budget through furloughs, a pay freeze and early retirement, or we could lay people off."

"The Board chose to retain jobs and provide the

least impact on services to the public," he said.

The Land Development Services (LDS) Department, which oversees planning, building and code enforcement, among other activities, in the unincorporated areas of Columbia County, took a cut of approximately 35 percent, according to Hyde. "But, their business is down by 40 percent," Hyde said. "It is very difficult to find quality planners. Ramping back up when we have a need will be difficult, to maintain that level of quality."

LDS Director Todd Dugdale said that the cut to his department "is more like 40 percent." Because of budget cuts, Dugdale was forced to cut four full-time employees and two part-time employees. Both of the part-time employees and two of the full-time employees were cut from the building program, and two full-time positions were cut from the planning program-- one planner and secretary.

"The largest challenge will be maintaining service at the front counter and with the public," Dugdale said. "Historically, we've had four in the front office; now we have three with no planning secretary."

Dugdale said that there is the possibility for an increase in activity on the planning and building sides of his department, related to Measure 37 claims filed in Columbia County and processed by the state under the rules of Measure 49, which replaces a waiver of land-use regulations or the payment of compensation with an approval

continued on page 22

inside



2
4th of July



11
county fair



16
youth baseball