

# VERNONIA'S voice

reflecting the spirit of our community

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## Mist School: *The Little Schoolhouse That Could*

By Scott Laird



The Mist Grade School, part of Vernonia School District 47J, is as close to an old-fashioned, one-room schoolhouse as you're likely to see these days. With sixteen total students in grades kindergarten through five, the school has a family atmosphere that is unique in most of today's educational systems.

Teacher Joanie Jones lives across the street from the schoolhouse and her husband's great-grandmother and grandmother both attended the Mist Grade School. Half-time assistant Coni Hodgson also works as the custodian and groundskeeper and lives just a mile down the road. Volunteer parents come in and teach music and physical education and help with reading and other studies. Older students help younger students with lessons, at lunch-- even learning to tie their shoes. With two classrooms and a library that doubles as cafeteria and indoor recess room, it's not exactly a one-room schoolhouse. But it sure is close.

"This school is really about a group of people working together daily to learn," says Jones. "It's the kids, it's the parents, it's the community members all working together. And we're all here because we like it."

The Mist School has been in ex-

istence since before 1900. The current building was built around 1920, with an addition added in 1980. Vernonia's Washington Grade School Principal, Aaron Miller, oversees the Mist School. The schoolhouse is sixteen miles outside of Vernonia and is considered a "remote school," according to Miller, with the District receiving extra financial support for having a remote school which makes the whole operation feasible.

Head teacher Jones grew up in Hood River, went to college in eastern Oregon in LeGrande, and has been teaching in the Vernonia School District for fourteen years-- eleven of those at the Mist School. She never envisioned working in a small school setting like she is now, but that quickly changed when she came to District 47J. "When I moved here, I always thought I wanted to work in the Mist School," says Jones. "I just loved the atmosphere-- it was quiet and just a smaller school."

When Jones started at Mist, there

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## New Law Provides Insurance For All Oregon Children

*Registration Assistance Now Available in Vernonia*

The "Oregon Healthy Kids Program," legislation signed into law by Oregon governor Ted Kulongoski last year, is now in effect. The Healthy Kids Program offers free or low-cost health care coverage for Oregon children who don't have health insurance. Even kids with current health conditions can enroll.

Assistance is now available through the Columbia County Women's Resource Center (CCWRC) to get local families and children signed up for the plan.

"We're extremely excited about this program and this opportunity," said Debbie Snook, Executive Director of the Vernonia Medical Center, who is coordinating outreach in the Vernonia community.

Brandi Huntzinger of CCWRC will be in Vernonia on April 30th to help people with enrollment at the Vernonia Community Learning Center from 9:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. Please call Brandi at (503) 397-7110 or email at brandih@ccwrc.com to schedule an appointment. Huntzinger will also be available at other times, but is scheduled to be in Vernonia on the last Friday of each month to offer assistance.

Eligibility is mostly based on income and coverage lasts for one full year and can be renewed each year. The program covers health care needs including medical, den-

tal, and vision care; regular checkups and preventive care; prescriptions and medical equipment; and mental health and chemical dependency services.

Coverage will be through two regional providers: PacificSource and Kaiser. According to Snook, the local Vernonia Providence Clinic accepts PacificSource coverage.

To qualify, children must be age eighteen or younger, live in Oregon and be legal residents, and household income can't be above 300% of the federal poverty level, which is \$66,000 for a family of four. For households with an income of less than \$44,000, coverage is free. There is a Low-Cost option for households between \$44,000 and \$66,000-- they receive a subsidized premium of 85-90%.

"This is just a win-win situation for everyone in town, our schools and our councilors, our local Health Clinic, our local pharmacy, and especially our kids," said Snook.

*For more general information about the Oregon Healthy Kids Program, you can go to [www.oregon-healthykids.gov](http://www.oregon-healthykids.gov) or call (877) 314-5678. For specific questions about Columbia County, you can also contact Brandi Huntzinger at (503) 397-7110. For specific questions about Vernonia, call Debbie Snook at (503) 720-5542.*

**"Meet the Candidates"**  
for Columbia County Commissioner  
Thursday, April 15th, 7PM at the VCLC

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robinson  
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## Birkenfeld Store and Café: A Country Store That's Still Surviving

By Scott Laird

The Birkenfeld Store and Café, also known as "Birky's" has been around since 1910. That's a long time for a country store to be in operation, especially in this day and age of supermarkets and fast food restaurants. At the Birkenfeld Store, there's a sign in the window that tells a brief history of the building-- the store was at one time the local Post Office and housed a dance hall/movie house upstairs.

Birky's is still around as a country store, with the prerequisite liquor shelf and other necessities. But current owners Michael and Wendy Ingraham are finding new ways to drum up business and bring in visitors. Live music on weekends has returned to Birkenfeld, just like in the old days, and there is now an expanded 1,000 square foot deck where you can eat and drink in nicer weather and maybe even catch a glimpse of an elk herd grazing in the pasture.

"We're kind of strange in that we try to do a little bit of everything out here," laughs Mike. "There aren't too many stores around that also do live music." Mike



Mike Ingraham helps a customer at the Birkenfeld Store and Café.

and Wendy make everyone feel at home in the store and the cafe and dropping in for an evening of music feels almost like a house party.

The Ingrahams took over ownership of the Birkenfeld Store from Jack Haslett in 2004. "Wendy came home one day

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