

## from the editor

The dust is finally starting to clear from the last eight months of turmoil at Vernonia City Hall, and we are finally ready to get back to business.

With three new City Councilors in place and Bill Haack back as City Administrator, I would like to take this opportunity to send out some kudos to the citizens of Vernonia as a whole. Over the last eight months the people of this town have rallied together and under very difficult circumstances, took a stand and fixed what they saw as a bad a situation. With three City Councilors acting in ways that did not reflect the will of the electorate, the citizens stepped forward, attended Council meetings, stayed informed about current happenings, spoke out publicly about their opinions and created the change they wanted to see. When Mayor Josette Mitchell and Councilor Randy Parrow asked for citizens to volunteer to sit on an interview panel to offer recommendations to fill three vacant council seats, twenty-nine citizens volunteered their time to be part of the process. And after three Councilors were recalled and the whispering around town was, "Who would want to be a City Councilor now? No one will volunteer for that position after what has happened!", eight citizens stepped forward and offered to serve their community in an extremely important role, at a critical and controversial time.

The last few months have been painful for Vernonia as a community and for our citizens. But if there are a few bright spots that have come out of this, one of them has to be that once again Vernonians have shown resiliency and courage, and have refused to give up. The last few months have produced a new found sense of civic engagement, and I have been proud to witness this community pull together during a difficult time. Everyone who stepped forward in the many various roles and capacities deserves to be commended.

That being said, there a few particular people who I feel deserve special recognition:

**Mayor Josette Mitchell and City Councilor Randy Parrow**—From day one when Mitchell took office this past January, along with two new City Councilors, it looked like this new Council was going to have trouble working together. Over the last nine months the Vernonia City Council has had to deal with an investigation into, and the firing of a police officer, the

resignation and then reappointment of the Interim Police Chief, a job search for a permanent City Administrator, the firing of the Interim City Administrator, two separate recall elections involving the recall of three City Councilors, the appointment of three new City Councilors, and finally last week, the hiring of a permanent City Administrator.

Through all this, long time Councilor Parrow stepped forward and assumed the role of elder statesman, taking some difficult and controversial stands, offering guidance to new Mayor Mitchell and calmly disagreeing with a majority of the Council when he believed they were making mistakes. Parrow was thoughtful and concise with his public statements and actually contributed an air of dignity to the Chambers at City Hall, at a time when it was clearly needed.

Mayor Mitchell, who walked into a maelstrom in her first role in public office, has been nothing short of amazing. She has dealt with all the above mentioned turmoil with aplomb, grace, a sense of humor, and above all, professionalism—even though she is a volunteer. She has worked tirelessly, stepping into the role of part-time Interim City Administrator and has shown extensive leadership qualities. She has grown quickly into her role, has spent inordinate amounts of time educating herself and has not backed away from making hard decisions. She has come out the other end of a very ugly eight months looking like a real hero. She is a Mayor this community can be proud to have represent us and someone we can all rally behind. I expect her to do some great work for this community in the years ahead, now that she is getting back to the business at hand.

**Jim Johnson**—Johnson has twice now come to the aid of our community in a time of need, filling the role of Interim City Administrator on two different occasions. He has brought a sense of professionalism, experience, and calm during some very difficult transitional periods and has helped this community work through some confusing issues and traumatic changes. His demeanor, insight, guidance and dedication to our community have been above and beyond what we could have expected from an Interim. We all own Jim Johnson a debt of gratitude for his continued willingness to adopt and assist us.

**Sharon Bernal**—It is never easy for a business owner to take a political

stand. It is also not easy for anyone in a small community to take the lead on a controversial issue. Sharon Bernal has done both, on two separate occasions. In 2009 she took the lead and ran the campaign, helping pass the School Bond that provided the initial funding to start construction on our new school campus. Running a campaign to tax a community is never popular, yet Bernal did it, passing the Bond Measure by an unheard of 22% margin. This past spring, when it became obvious that something needed to be done about the majority of City Councilors who were not representing the majority of the voters in this community, Bernal again came forward and ran and organized two separate recall campaigns, winning both handily. Bernal has stuck her neck out professionally twice now—because she is a citizen of the community who cares about our future and because it was what was best for Vernonia. And the citizens have shown they have agreed with her with their response at the ballot box.

**Bill Haack**—Haack was appointed as Interim City Administrator in June of 2011, after having worked in various capacities within the community and Columbia County in regards to flood recovery after December 2007. He had built strong relationships with many community entities and citizens, as well as important statewide relationships during his work on flood recovery, and with city staff during his work as Interim City Administrator. He believed he still had work that he wanted to complete in Vernonia and had applied for the permanent City Administrator position, offering to fill the position at a salary way below current industry standards.

No one would have blamed him if he had just waved goodbye to Vernonia and all our troubles when a majority of City Council voted to terminate his contract in May of 2011. He could have given up on us again when Council couldn't agree on appointing a fifth member and remained split after interviews for City Administrator, leaving Haack and the other candidate dangling in the wind. Haack is a talented and respected individual who would have no problem finding work somewhere else—at significantly higher pay. He chose not to turn his back on Vernonia, to wait for the situation to work itself out, and is now back to continue the work he started.

He has shown humility, integrity and especially loyalty, and will hopefully

VERNONIA'S  
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reflecting the spirit of our community

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