

First Friday Says Goodbye

For five years, First Friday has been a hallmark of Vernonia's summer season. The events, held the first Friday of every month from May through October, were designed to be a celebration of arts and community. Visitors were able to enjoy educational demonstrations; the talent of local artists, crafters and musicians; Scouting and children's' activities; and connecting with friends and neighbors. It was a gathering of community that was enjoyed by all – visitors, vendors and volunteers alike.

Declining attendance at First Friday events has peaked interest in finding a new way to serve the original mission of bringing art and community together in Vernonia. As a result, First Friday is disbanding and its committed volunteers are joining forces with the umbrella organization—Vernonia Hands-On Art Center, a 501 (c) (3) non-

profit—to host three events in the upcoming year. The updated vision includes a focus on local art and artists, collaboration with other community organizations, creative activities for children, as well as opportunities for adults to visit. Plans for 2012 include an expanded celebration as part of the Jr. Salmon Auction in May, a New Year's Eve gala, and another yet to be determined event. Stay tuned for details.

For those who will miss the beautiful products of local crafters, be sure to stop by the new Made in Vernonia store where you can view and purchase a variety of unique items from a selection that continues to grow and change.

We are looking forward to an exciting new year. If you're interested in volunteering or would like more info, please contact Erika Paleck (503)704-5970, or epaleck@gmail.com.

CASA Hires New Volunteer Coordinator *Seeks more volunteer advocates to help children in Columbia County*

Debi Sakamoto of Portland has joined the staff of CASA for Kids as its new part-time volunteer coordinator.



Sakamoto has volunteered as an advocate for two years with the CASA program serving Multnomah and Washington counties. She previously was a regional vice president for public affairs with Key Bank. "We are so excited to have someone with Debi's diverse experience as a CASA, a volunteer coordinator and in the corporate world," said executive director Kathryn Bourn.

Hiring a part-time volunteer coordinator was made possible by a grant from the Oregon Community Foundation.

Sakamoto will enable the program to support more Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), Bourn said.

CASAs are trained volunteers assigned to advocate for one foster child or siblings. In order to comply with National CASA Association standards, local programs have to provide the equivalent of one full-time coordinator for every 30 CASAs, Bourn explained. The program currently has 21 CASAs serving 57 children.

"While we have doubled our number of CASAs in the past year, we are still struggling to keep up with the need to provide advocates to foster children," Bourn said. The number of Columbia County children entering foster care skyrocketed in the last half of 2011, Bourn said. "We have so many children coming into foster care that the Department of Human Services is having to place them in foster homes outside the county. That's unusual. Columbia County used to have enough non-relative foster homes to take care of all of its children coming into foster care and even take foster children from surrounding counties." The increased number of foster children also resulted in Columbia County Circuit Court adding additional hearing days for its juvenile dependency cases, she noted.

Columbia County DHS currently has more than 150

open cases affecting 250 abused and neglected children.

"Foster children who have a CASA have the best chance for a successful life," Bourn said. She cited studies showing that children with a CASA are more likely to experience stability if they return home to their parents and more likely to be adopted if they aren't able to safely return home.

CASA for Kids is currently recruiting new advocates for its upcoming training. The 30-hour training begins Tuesday, Feb. 28, in St. Helens and Wednesday, Feb. 29, in Rainier. The free training continues on Monday and Wednesday evenings and on Saturdays through March 12 at the Riverside Community Church in Rainier.

Bourn emphasized that CASAs come from all walks of life and no special education or career experience is required to become an advocate. "We currently have CASAs who have been mechanics, EMTs, educators, nurses, realtors, homemakers, and business persons," she said.

For more information or to apply to become a CASA, visit the program's website at www.casaforkidsinc.org, email info@casaforkidsinc.org or call (503) 366-4133.

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Rightline Expansion Approved For Enterprise Zone Incentive

Rightline Equipment, Inc., has been approved for a three-year property tax abatement on new capital investments at their plant in Rainier, Oregon. The company, a manufacturer of world-class lift truck attachments, will undertake a significant expansion of its plant and workforce during 2012. This manufacturing outfit qualified for a property tax incentive due to its location within the Lower Columbia Maritime Enterprise Zone and the firm's pledge to expand its workforce by at least 10 percent.

The Lower Columbia Maritime Enterprise Zone was created to stimulate private investment and job creation by offering 3-5 years of property tax abatements on new investment in manufacturing,

processing, fabrication, and distribution projects. This enterprise zone encompasses an array of prime, developable industrial land in and around Rainier and Clatskanie, Oregon.

Columbia County, the cities of Rainier and Clatskanie, and the Port of St. Helens are the public sponsors of the enterprise zone. The Columbia County Economic Team serves as the zone manager and liaison to companies interested in expanding or locating within the area.

The mission of the Columbia County Economic Team is to deliver business-driven economic development services to retain, grow, and attract businesses to Columbia County.

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