

from the editor

This month *Vernonia's Voice* is celebrating our 5th anniversary.

In the spring of 2007 I met Evan Doyle for the first time. Together we created a vision for a newspaper that would talk about the good things that were happening in Vernonia. A newspaper that would celebrate the events and activities in this community that were vibrant and fun. A newspaper that would include stories about the people and businesses in our town. We envisioned a colorful publication, with lots of photographs. A publication that would embody the spirit of our town—and make outsiders want to come visit.

I will always remember the first trip I made to visit local businesses, to find out whether there was really any financial supporting and advertising dollars for a new publication in town. With the help of local graphic designer Rebecca Wright, Evan and I had created a mock version of what the front page might look like. I headed to the south end of town and walked into the Wauna Federal Credit Union office. As luck would have it the Advertising Manager for Wauna just happened to be visiting the Vernonia branch that day. She listened to my brief introduction of our idea, took a look at the design of the front page and said, "Sure, we would like to advertise in this—let me email you the ad we want to run." And that was it—we were on our way!

So many local businesses

stepped up to the plate and offered their support in the beginning. I would be remiss if I didn't mention Gordon Smith and Randy and Sharon Parrow at the Sentry Market—their backing at the beginning of our venture was instrumental to our successful launch.

So with the support of local advertising dollars, and no previous experience publishing a newspaper, in June of 2007 Evan and I started *Vernonia's Voice*. I would also be remiss if I didn't mention the initial help we received with design, advertising creation and layout from Rebecca Wright. Her expertise, experience and wonderful sense of style were crucial to bringing our vision of a colorful and vibrant newspaper to life. We could not have done it without the professional services of flightwright design.

Over the last five years much has changed. Evan decided to leave after one year. In January of 2009 we went from publishing once a month, to twice each month. We began covering more local politics and made a conscious decision to make space and time to report on school activities. Advertisers have come and gone—but there is a large group, whose ads you see in this issue, who have been with us since day one. And as I looked back recently over all of our back issues—hopefully my writing and reporting has improved!

I also have to mention two other groups of important people. One

is our contributors. Over the years we have featured written columns, published occasional submissions, received editorial and proof reading assistance and printed photographs by many different local business owners, writers and citizens. Their support and willingness to share their talents have been instrumental, I believe, in making our publication a success. And truly making this *Vernonia's* voice.

And finally it's time to acknowledge you—our loyal readers. Without you there certainly wouldn't be a reason to print this publication. Your encouragement and feedback—both positive and negative—are often what keep us going each month, and have helped us reach this mini milestone of five years.

We have been proud to attempt to reflect the spirit of this great town and the people who live here. It is an honor to serve you and a responsibility we do not take lightly.

They say it takes a village to raise a child, and at five years old, *Vernonia's Voice* is still very much a child. We have been nurtured, inspired and motivated by all parts of this community, and by our families and friends, over the last five years.

Thank you for your continued support.

Scott Laird
Editor and Publisher

An Opinion: Rate Increases Were Necessary

By Scott Laird

Any day now Vernonians who get their water and sewer service from the City will receive their next bill. That bill will reflect recent changes in both the water and sewer rates that we pay. I won't deny that when that bill arrives it is going to hurt. But, as painful as it is to see even higher rates for our utilities here in Vernonia, these changes that the Vernonia City Council recently approved were necessary and needed.

The "can" that is the financing for the upgrades to our wastewater facility has been kicked down the road too far and for too long. And the longer we try to avoid dealing with the issue of paying for the needed improvements, the more expensive completing the project becomes.

The latest increase, is to make full payments on the sewer loan for work previously completed in Phase I of

the wastewater treatment upgrade. This will appear on your water bill as \$31—it was \$12.

The argument that "...there must be some other option..." is really no longer valid. The city has looked at almost all other possible solutions and none of them are viable. Or less expensive.

At some point a municipal government has to commit to a plan and begin the process of moving forward when it comes to large infrastructure projects. In fact, the Vernonia City Administration has worked extremely hard over the last few years to figure out the least expensive way to solve our wastewater treatment dilemma. Which in the end will not be inexpensive.

By the way, this isn't the last sewer increase we will see before this project is complete.

Hoping that DEQ will let us slide isn't a real solution either—this

community has been hoping DEQ would just go away for about twenty years now—and they haven't.

The Vernonia City Council did not pass these increases without a lot of debate, discussion, and agonizing. They knew exactly what they were doing when they increased our, and their own, sewer bills by \$19 earlier this month.

The Public Works Committee and City Council took the time this spring to create a water rate study to analyze usage and recommend a tiered rate system that will more fairly distribute costs among water customers. They put a lot of energy into debating and discussing that change in rates as well. And a lot of agonizing.

What this council did with these rate increases was to maybe make it impossible for some families and residents to continue to live here. Which is extremely sad. This was not a decision they made lightly.

VERNONIA'S
voice
reflecting the spirit of our community

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But what they also did was take a brave stand and decide to not kick that can any further down the road. They decided to create a water rate system and collect sewer fees that actually reflect the cost of operating those utilities. And they decided they weren't going to pass this problem on to someone else down the road—when it would cost even more money to solve.

They decided to do what was necessary and deal with the issue that was in front of them.

It is going to hurt when that next bill with those increases arrives. But increasing the rates was the right thing to do.



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