

Betta Fish Project Teaches Students About Life Cycle

By Scott Laird

Vernonia High School students have been learning about science and the natural world through a unique, hands-on project initiated by teacher Jean Riley.

Students in Riley's classes have been raising, mating and observing betta fish for the past few years and have learned quite a bit about genetics, the life cycle, and basic fish care. Riley teaches Biology, Physical Science, and Natural Resources.

The project began two years ago, when Riley rescued a dying fish from a pet store. He lacked color and had lost his fins. Riley brought him into her classroom and set up an aquarium, telling her students she didn't expect the fish to survive, but at least its passing could be more peaceful. She says she used the rescued fish to help teach the students about their own connection to animals. "Many young people don't know very much about animals—that they might have feelings, or anything like that," explains Riley. "Any time you can get them to connect, it is good."

Betta fish are a large genus of small, often colorful, freshwater ray-finned fish from Thailand. The males are very showy and beautifully colored. Mature females can also be very pretty.



Surprisingly, instead of dying, the fish made a comeback and regained his color and health. He became the class mascot. The students named him "Fishé" and Riley started teaching them about the life cycle of the betta fish, comparing it to the salmon they had al-

ternatively learned about. Riley says her students asked her if they could get Fishé a girlfriend and try to breed them. Initially, Riley refused, stating that money and time were both lacking. When a small Class Grant became available, however, Riley applied; the funds would be used to try a small breeding experiment in her classroom. "It was a chance to teach the students about different kinds of fish, and for the students to form a positive bond with the fish, which is good for any young person," says Riley.

Riley says she was surprised when she was awarded the grant, and purchased several addi-

tional aquariums, to hold the multitude of babies that could result from a successful project.

Riley got a small batch of females and Fishé really took to one of them, which the students named Peach. But, unfortunately, the fertilized eggs didn't hatch.

After several attempts at breeding Fishé and Peach, Riley and her students decided to continue the project, but locate a new breeding male and female, retiring Fishé and Peach from the program. Blue-green Amari was the chosen female. The students discussed genetics and colors and decided on the type of male they wanted to use to continue their project.

After voting between a number of males temporarily donated by students for the project, they chose Romeo, a red and clear fish with baby-blue markings. Romeo and Amari were successfully mated, and several hundred live babies hatched last May.

Riley and her students now have seven aquarium tanks of fish. Several teachers in the school have adopted males to use in their classrooms, and many of the fish were adopted locally. Several batches have been sold to pet stores in the greater Portland area, which has helped offset some of the food costs. The mature males

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School District Cuts Four Days

Vernonia Schools Superintendent Ken Cox announced the need to cut four days from the current school year because of a budget shortage.

The announcement came at the April 11, 2013 Vernonia School Board Meeting. Cox requested that the Board take immediate action and cut May 10, May 17, June 6 and June 7 from the current calendar. The move would affect all school district employees and reduce their salaries by four days. The Board approved the move unanimously.

Cox cited less-than-expected revenues and increased costs for the budget shortfall. He noted that the lower revenues were due to a lower than anticipated student count this year, donations that were lower than expected, and credit from the ESD that was used for additional services, as well as several other unexpected reductions. Cox explained that, among the increased costs, were the addition of staff for special education and shop classes and higher negotiated salaries, expected savings in utilities that did not materialize, higher insurance premiums at the new building, and additional moving

expenses. Cox explained that during the preparation of the budget for this year the district faced a number of unknowns. "In order to save jobs we budgeted too close to the wire," said Cox.

Cox reported that the current projected ending fund balance shows a \$35,265 deficit. By cutting four days this year Cox expects savings of \$89,840, leaving an ending fund balance of \$54,575 to start the next school year.

Cox was not optimistic when he talked about the upcoming budget for the 2013-14 school year. Cox said he expects a large increase in PERS contributions the district needs to make as well as less funding from the state due to cuts. "There will be significant impacts on the budget next year," said Cox. "With our student count continuing to drop, we will have a challenge and we will not be able to maintain the current staffing levels that we have at this point." Cox suggested that the first cut would be for the Superintendent to be reduced to a half-time position next year.

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VRFPD Board of Directors Candidate Interviews

On May 21, 2013 Oregonians will vote for several local positions in a general election. Most positions up for election in Vernonia have candidates that are running unopposed. The Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District has two open positions. Luke Ellis and Mike Demeter are running against each other for Position 5 ; Ben Davis is running unopposed for Position 1 .

Vernonia's Voice sat down with each of these three candidates for interviews to help give our readers some insight into their views and perspective on the position they are running for.

Tell us a little about your background and personal life. What is your fire experience and what are your qualifications for this position?

Ben Davis: I joined the VRFPD in 1999 right out of high school; our

family had just moved to Vernonia and I thought it was a good way to become a part of the community and meet new people. I went on to PCC and got my Associates Degree in Fire Science and followed that up by getting my National Registry Paramedic. During that four or five year period I continued volunteering with Vernonia and progressed from Firefighter to Lieutenant to Deputy Chief and eventually served for two years as Training Officer. I worked full time during that time frame as a Paramedic in Washington County for Metro West Ambulance and in 2005 was hired full time as a Paramedic/Firefighter at Columbia River Fire and Rescue. With them I am now an acting Lieutenant, filling in as company officer when someone is away, and have been continuing to progress with my leadership, experience, and education. I have also continued my education and am pursuing, part-



time, my Bachelor's Degree in Fire Administration through Eastern Oregon University. I am currently a Firefighter with VRFPD, having stepped down from the Deputy Chief and Training Officer positions because of the large time commitment needed to fill those roles appropriately.

Throughout the time I've been involved with VRFPD and with Columbia River I have served at different levels, including with the Vernonia Volunteer Association. I have some experience with Public Meeting Law. My degree in Fire Science and my continuing education give me a solid background in operations.

I married Christie Brown Davis in 2007; we met through VRFPD.

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