

Community... A Continued Series on Celebrations

By Jill Hult

You may recall a couple of articles several months ago that were a part of a series focusing on the “big six” events that happen in Vernonia throughout the year. The events are: The 4th of July Great American Bash, Vernonia Friendship Jamboree and Logging Show, Community Garage Sale, St. Mary’s Quilt Fair, Salmon Festival, and the Spirit of Christmas. Each of these events gives us the opportunity to come together in appreciation and celebration of our community but they also draw visitors to experience our community as well. The first two articles covered Vernonia Friendship Jamboree and the Spirit of Christmas including the Christmas Bazaar. This article appropriately focuses on the 4th of July Great American Bash.

There is no doubt that all of these events require the hard work and dedication of volunteers to bring them to life and make them a success for all to share. The 4th of July is no exception and we are fortunate in our small town to have a fireworks show as many communities, even larger than ours, have discontinued theirs. We are also fortunate to have more than just fireworks. Since 2009 the current Great American Bash has been bringing us a parade and a music concert thanks to volunteers and cooperation.

The festivities begin with a parade that is open for anyone to participate in and is free to enter. The concert is brought to us by Vernonia Prevention Coalition (VPC) grant funds overseen by VPC Director Deanna Pearl. The concert costs approximately \$6,500. The grant is possible because this event is part of the VPC mission to bring family-oriented events to the community that is alcohol, tobacco, and other drug free. Deanna Pearl said, “The very essence of the VPC mission is to develop safe and healthy neighborhoods through collaborative planning, community action, policy advocacy, and enforcement. This day is about supporting family-friendly

events in safe and healthy neighborhoods.” There are two volunteers who organize the concert and prepare the grounds but Pearl needs about five more volunteers to help “man” the ticket gate and tear down after the show.

I asked Pearl what the biggest challenge the event has faced or still faces. She said, “The first year, the biggest challenge was the organization of the event itself, mainly finding performers. This year, due to popular demand, Jesse Cain will come again from Nashville with his band to perform. He is always gracious and gives a great show. Last year, his band was pleasantly surprised by the whole day and were looking forward to coming back this year.”

Pearl would also love to increase the variety of activities for kids to do during the event, however; that would take separate funding or sponsorship. It may also require additional volunteers to help out.

The day is also an opportunity for other organizations to use as a fundraising opportunity. The VPC utilizes the gate fee to support youth and family friendly programs. The Booster Snack Shack will be open to feed the masses and others will be there such as the Vernonia Volunteer Ambulance Association, to provide snacks, games, and fun! The Spirit of Christmas Volunteer group will be selling cotton candy in order to buy new lights to decorate downtown during the holidays. For the past three years, the VPC has hired youth groups to take care of the garbage and recycling as a fundraiser. This year, the VHS junior class will have the honor of this money-making opportunity.

So what about the awesome fireworks? Do you know that it costs approximately \$5000 to put on Vernonia’s fantastic display of sky-bursting color? Not to mention the dedication of the licensed pyrotechnic Loren Loomis and the other Volunteer Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District crew. There are a lot of things to consider other than what impressive fireworks to buy to make the

show safe and spectacular. The Fire Department is required to fill out paperwork from the ATF for each firefighter they have at the launch site plus a licensed pyrotechnic. They also have to have a 400 foot security barrier and perimeter that deters people from getting too close to the launching site.

As many of you may know, it is the community of Vernonia that raises most of the funds for the fireworks. The fundraising starts early as donations are accepted at the event itself in anticipation for the next year. Then, by March of every year you will find donation cans set out on nearly every business counter in town asking for donations. This year, the Ambulance Association and the VRFPD pledged to match up to \$1,000 of donations. The donation cans have raised approximately \$800 at last count and the Vernonia Boosters also donated \$500. This means the community has raised \$1300 since March! Not to worry though, at last year’s event a whopping \$2000 was collected for a grand total of \$5300 so far. The Vernonia community can be proud to know that every year we help make this show possible with your donations.

The organizers are planning on between 850 -1200 people attending the event. Most come through the gates to be a part of the concert, while others wait until dark to see the magnificent firework display.

I asked Pearl if there was anything else she would like to add. She said, “For the last four years, I have received numerous thank you’s, well wishes, and comments on how safe the event is and how nice it is to be able to let their kids run around without the worry of second-hand smoke, burning cigarettes, drunken fights, or open containers.”

This event is volunteer driven and could not happen without the support of the community. What a great day to spend with your family in an environment where youth can make safe and healthy choices to reach their full potential.

If you are interested in volunteering for the 4th of July festivities, please contact the event organizers at vernoina4thofjuly@googlegroups.com. Planning for this event officially starts in January, but it is never too late to get involved!

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