

Vernonia Schools Announce Interim Superintendent

The Vernonia School Board has unanimously approved the appointment of Aaron Miller as the part-time interim superintendent for the Vernonia School District. Mr. Miller will begin his one year appointment on July 1. The board made the approval during their March 13 meeting to help the schools transition smoothly from the leadership of departing superintendent Dr. Kenneth Cox.

"We're excited to build upon what Dr. Cox and the community have created. Our school board sought an interim superintendent who could lead our efforts to address the achievement

of all students and to analyze our gap issues," said School Board Chair Bill Langmaid. "Mr. Miller showed professionalism and leadership in various educational experiences that we believe will serve Vernonia very well during the coming year. He impressed us during a conversation on the importance of sound leadership during this interim phase when he said, 'The students are our most important concern. Every action we take must benefit them.'"

Mr. Miller received a bachelor's degree in psychology from Pacific University in Forest Grove, OR, and earned a master's degree in teaching, specializing in elementary education, from Oregon State University in Corvallis. His coursework for the initial and continuing Administrator license was performed at Portland State University.

"I have spent the last 24 years dedicated to children in several different communities, and I'm honored to be chosen by the board," Mr. Miller said. "I feel it is essential for an interim



superintendent to engage in a collaborative fashion with the school board, community, administrators and the staff to ensure a productive and successful school year. I am very grateful for the opportunity to extend my role in the leadership team this year."

Mr. Miller currently serves as the full time principal at Vernonia Elementary School. He began his teaching career at Lebanon Elementary, moving to Scio after two years. There, he taught second and third grades for 13 years. His move to Vernonia came in 2005, when he stepped into the role of principal. His appointment

as part-time superintendent will not eliminate his position as building principal, and the district expects to see some shifts in administrative duties to accommodate his new position.

Mr. Miller will replace Dr. Kenneth Cox, who joined the District in 2006. Dr. Cox was tasked with serving as both project manager and superintendent during his tenure, as a major flood in 2007 necessitated relocating the entire campus out of the flood plain. After opening the new school in 2012, Dr. Cox has stayed on for two years to ensure a smooth transition into the new environment. Dr. Cox will be leaving the district at the end of his current contract on June 30.

City and Health Board Sign Lease Agreement

The City of Vernonia and the Vernonia Health Board have reached an agreement and signed a fifty year lease for property controlled by the City at the Rose Avenue Project. The agreement allows the Health Board to move forward with construction of the new Health Center.

A ground breaking ceremony has been scheduled for March 28, 2014 at 12:30 PM at the West Oregon Electric Cooperative Bays.

"This has been a long process. It has involved a lot of planning and many different entities working together to craft this lease agreement," said Heather Lewis, representing the Health Board. "We are all glad to move forward. This is a big project for the City of Vernonia, the Health Board and the community. In my opinion, both sides showed their commitment to this project by the level of diligence they invested in making sure this was done right. The effort that everyone put into this is greatly appreciated. The long term benefits to the community are worth the time spent on building a project of this importance."

Mayor Josette Mitchell was equally upbeat when discussing the final lease agreement. "It is signed, sealed and delivered!" said Mitchell.

The City Council and Health Board have met numerous times over several months in an attempt to finalize a lease agreement that both sides were comfortable signing. The Health Center is the first entity to move forward with construction at the Rose Avenue Project site. It is anticipated that the Vernonia Senior Center and Vernonia Cares Food Bank will relocate to the site sometime in the future.

Town Hall Held to Discuss Impending Jail Closure

A Town Hall, hosted by *Vernonia's Voice*, was held on Wednesday, March 12, to address concerns surrounding the closing of the Columbia County jail. About fifteen people were in attendance.

All three Columbia County Commissioners, Tony Hyde, Earl Fisher, and Henry Heimuller, were part of the panel, along with Under-sheriff Andy Moyer, representing the Sheriff's Department.

Commissioner Hyde made it very clear at the outset of the meeting that the County intends to close the jail, and is already planning for that eventuality, as they begin their budget process for the upcoming 2014-15 fiscal year.

"This is not a threat," said Hyde. "It's not 'We may...' We just went through some very difficult preliminary budget numbers today. We are closing the jail. Without a levy we are closing the jail; there are no options left."

A citizens group "Keep Prisoners in Jail," was formed early this calendar year to collect signatures, and petitioned the County Commissioners to place another bond levy on the May 20, 2014 ballot in a final attempt to halt the closure of the county jail. The levy would tax Columbia

County property owners \$0.58 per thousand and provide the minimum revenue needed to continue jail operations for the next four years.

All three Commissioners agreed that this operation levy was a temporary, stopgap measure. Hyde explained that there are current economic development projects happening in Columbia County. "Within four to five years I think we are going to be in really good shape as a county," said Hyde. "I really, honestly believe that. We just have so much happening. We have a lot of companies that are now starting to come into Columbia County. But right now we have this gap we are up against."

The jail was originally designed to house a total of 250 inmates. Because of recent budget reductions it currently only houses a maximum capacity of twenty-five local inmates.

If additional funding is not secured the current plan calls for Columbia County to rent ten beds from Polk County for local prisoners, and book and release most other local arrestees. If a prisoner is considered especially dangerous or violent, the County would have to decide which prisoner already incarcerated to release and make space, something

they already do whenever they reach the maximum of twenty-five. With additional funding from a successful levy the jail could house up to one hundred local prisoners.

A previous levy last November failed at the polls, 58.3% to 41.7%. Following that failure the County Commissioners began looking at options for shutting the jail. The jail requires twenty-five employees and a \$4.8 million budget. The County General Fund currently only provides \$2.9 million, including revenue (approximately \$1.5 million) they receive from the rental of eighty-five to 100 beds to the United States Marshall Service. Because of this short-fall, the jail is currently operating with only sixteen employees.

Commissioner Hyde opened the discussion at the Town Hall by giving some background about the jail. Hyde explained that the Jail is funded through discretionary funds in the General Fund. Hyde stated that the Sheriff's Department uses about 26% of the General Fund; he says that a normal amount in other counties around the country is 21-25%.

Commissioner Heimuller told the audience that when County

continued on page 4

inside

10 loggerbots

11 vhs winter sports

14 vhs athletic hall of fame

19 stars of vernonia

19 st. patrick's day parade

