

School District Debt is Focus of Presentation to City Council

A team representing Vernonia School District 47J, including representative from the state, county, the Governor's office and the School District, made a presentation to the Vernonia City Council at the July 7, 2014 City Council Meeting.

The presentation focused on the current financial situation of the School District. According to members of the team, the District has over \$5 million in long term capital construction debt, with annual payments of over \$500,000. The presentation included a request that the City of Vernonia forgive over \$100,000 in debt the School District owes the City.

Aaron Miller introduced himself to the Council as the new Superintendent of the District as of July 1. Miller told the Council he would like to work together and move forward. "I think the relationship between the District and the City is a critical piece as we continue to move forward and revitalize our community after our natural disaster," said Miller, referring to the 2007 flood which damaged all three schools and large parts of the rest of the community. "I think we still have a lot of work left to do, but its good work and I think we are headed in the right direction."

The total long term debt includes two loans the District still owes on the old middle school building totaling \$887,577. The District is scheduled to make an annual payment of \$25,565 through 2022 and a second annual payment of \$78,950 through 2024 on those two loans. There are three outstanding loans on the new school construction: An initial QSCB

Construction Loan with a balance of over \$2.8 million that includes annual payments of \$206,538 through 2027; an Energy Construction Loan through the Cool Schools program with a balance of \$970,035 and annual payments of \$84,324 which also runs through 2027; and a second Cool Schools Loan with a balance of \$1.237 million with annual payments of \$106,152 through 2029. In addition the School District owes the City of Vernonia for System Development Charges (SDCs). That debt has a balance of \$106,290 with an agreement for the District to pay \$37,036 annually through 2016.

It was pointed out later that the Cool School Loans helped pay for installation of energy efficient technology in the new school, including the pellet stove heating system, solar panels and radiant heat flooring. Although these technologies initially added expense to the overall construction project, those costs will be recovered through energy savings over time. The district also received \$1.1 million in grants from the state which helped pay for the installation of some of those technologies. Because of the installation of those technologies the District has applied for both LEEDS Platinum and Green Globe certification. Both certifications allow the district to approach corporations and philanthropic foundations for grant funding; the Green Globe certification is especially important to timber companies.

John Donovan, a Senior Vice President at Metropolitan Group and the chief fundraiser for the capital campaign for the new school construc-

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'Let's Go!' State Park Programs Offer Chance to Try New Adventures

Are you or your family looking for an outdoor adventure or something new to try but are not sure you have the proper equipment or skills?

The Oregon State Park system may have just the answer, their 'Let's Go!' program.

Maybe you would like to try canoeing or kayaking or have never had the chance to pitch a tent and spend the night camping outdoors.

Maybe you've heard of disc golf and want to give it a try or want to take a hike to some breathtaking views of Oregon. Maybe you've been wondering who those redheaded birds are that are tapping away on that tree in your yard and are interested in learning more about birds?

Offered at various state parks, you and your family can learn beginning skills in paddling, camping, disc golfing, hiking, birding, fishing, cycling and more, and gain the knowledge and confidence to get out there on your own. All 'Let's Go!' activities are guided by Oregon State Park rangers who can teach you the basics as well as provide you with gear for the day.

Stub Stewart Ranger Allie Westfall explained more about the 'Let's Go!' program during a recent visit to the park. "In 'Let's Go!' programs provided by Oregon State Parks, we try our hardest to bring all the equipment to the visitors and just submerge them in the activity," said Westfall. "We teach them everything we know about it and give them an opportunity they might not otherwise have."

On July 12 Stub Stewart State Park hosted a 'Let's Go Birding!' program. Twenty participants, ranging in age from an adorable four year old to a retired couple who are RVing around the United



This Great Horned Owl was part of a presentation by the Portland Audubon Society at Stub Stewart State Park.

States, spent two hours with park ranger Jesse Serna walking the trails of the park and learning tips for identifying birds and their songs. Before heading out on the trail each participant was given a pair of binoculars to borrow and were taught how to focus them and use them correctly, as well as a Birds of Oregon guide. The group visited both ponds in the park. In addition to identifying the Red-breasted Sapsucker, the Swainson's Thrush, a Great Blue Heron, Wilson's Warbler and a Pacific Wren the group also saw chipmunks, beavers and muskrats.



Red-breasted Sapsucker

The 'Let's Go Birding!' program at Stub Stewart Park on July 12 was followed by a Portland Audubon Society interpretive program with birds on display. The audience had a chance to learn about and meet several photogenic species including a Kestrel Hawk, a Great Horned Owl, and a Peregrine Falcon. The program also introduced a Turkey Vulture to the group. All the birds come from

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Spencer Park Construction Renewed

The Vernonia School District has restarted construction on the Spencer Park replacement park sports fields at the site of the old school buildings which were deconstructed last year.

According to school superintendent Aaron Miller construction is currently on schedule to be completed and the fields seeded this fall and will be ready for use next summer.

The park plan calls for the construction of a baseball/softball field and two soccer fields. The sports fields being built will replace the fields the City of Vernonia lost when they traded properties with the School District as part of the new school campus construction project. The School District is responsible for the construction of the replacement park which will then be turned over to the City of Vernonia for public use.

The project was halted last fall when project quality issues delayed construction until it became too wet to continue site work.