

Health Center Grand Opening

that the Health Center Board's goal is "...building partnerships with new providers in order to widen the scope of services so it is not just primary care."

Guest speakers at the ceremony included State Senator Betsy Johnson and Columbia County Commissioner Tony Hyde.

"This is another great day for Vernonia!" said Senator Johnson. "Vernonia is a great place to live and work and this is one more step in putting everything back, not just the way it was but ten times better!"

"We had a crisis, and instead of just falling flat and becoming victims, we recognized opportunity," added Commissioner Hyde, referencing the new school, the new West Oregon Electric headquarters, and the new Health Center as improvements to Vernonia since the flood.

Also in attendance at the ceremony were State Representative Brad Witt, Vernonia Mayor Josette Mitchell and former Vernonia School District Superintendent Ken Cox, who traveled from his new home in Idaho to be at the event.

Patient care at the Health Center is provided by The Public Health Foundation of Columbia County and Pacific University. Sherrie Ford, the new administrator for The Public Health Foundation, was a guest speaker, as

was Physician Assistant Jim Ferguson representing Pacific University.

The new Health Center building is named in honor of Carolyn Keasey, long time member and chairperson of the Vernonia Health Board. Carolyn Keasey passed away in October of 2013. Numerous members of the Keasey family were on hand for the celebration. Paleck unveiled a portrait of Carolyn Keasey which she said will have a prominent place in the new building. "We are very proud to have Carolyn's name connected with the Vernonia Health Clinic from this day forward," said Paleck. "Her upbeat spirit was the driving force that kept the project alive to its completion."

The new facility was fully funded through fundraising efforts and grant awards from The Meyer Memorial Trust, The Ford Family Foundation, The Collins Foundation, The Oregon Community Foundation, The Samuel S. Johnson Foundation and the Carolyn Keasey Memorial Fund. Funding was also provided through the FEMA buyout of the old clinic building. Funding also came from The Providence-St. Vincent Foundation, which collected funds donated to rebuild the clinic immediately following the flood in December 2007, and from individual donors.

Marc Seigel from U.S. Senator Jeff Merkely's office read a message

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from the Senator. "Congratulations on this exciting grand opening of the new Vernonia Health Center. Access to affordable and quality health care is critical to our communities and this new health center will provide necessary primary care to Vernonia residents. Due to an innovative model with Pacific University and The Public Health Foundation of Columbia County, the Vernonia Health Center will fill an important health care need for the community," read Segal.

The Carolyn Keasey Memorial Building is the first completed phase of the Rose Avenue Project, a collaboration between local non profits and the City of Vernonia which has been developed as a home for local essential services. The project will hopefully add the new Senior Center and Vernonia Cares food bank in the near future.

The new facility has five rooms dedicated to patient care, treatment rooms and office space, as well as a large conference room. There is space for additional services to be added.

The building was designed by Scott Edwards Architecture and constructed by Five Star Building.

Following the grand opening ceremony the building was open for tours and refreshments were served.

VRFPD Replaces Apparatus

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well as for training firefighters.

E451, which is being replaced, was a 1974 Ford F900. According to Smith, state standards call for a second out engine to be no older than twenty years old.

Smith noted several other issues with E451. Because it has a manual transmission, only two members of the District were able to drive it. It also only seats two firefighters.

The new engine from Banks seats up to five, has an automatic transmission and is obviously twenty years newer, meaning the safety features and other equipment on the rig are more up to date.

Smith says the purchase of the newer engine helps alleviate some of his concerns about the fleet, but really just emphasizes some of the other needs the District has.

"This is our first course of action to update our fleet," said Smith.

WT452 is a water pumper/tender and has multiple issues. A 1982 Ford, which can carry 2000 gallons of water, WT452 has an engine issue which Smith says has already been "bandaided." It also has a problem with a pump as well as a tank leak and has been out of service several times with transmission filter leaks. Smith noted that when members of the District were called at 3:00 AM to help fight a wildfire conflagration this past summer, he had to go in to the station immediately, fix the transmission filter and get the rig back in service, before they could leave.

Another issue the department continues to face is dwindling volunteer personnel. Smith continues to raise a red flag warning that he doesn't have enough

volunteers. Current volunteers lives are getting busier and training requirements are getting longer, says Smith, and the community can be vulnerable at times. Smith gave as an example that while

be responsible for training. Smith says that adding a training officer could allow VRFPD to develop a resident training program and house students, who would give the District more able bodies to respond to calls.

Smith says the District is looking to reconfigure their apparatus to try to find different ways to use the rigs and equipment they presently have to be more efficient and safely protect and respond to the needs of the community. Unfortunately there currently just aren't enough resources.

Smith says the district probably needs to consider an operating levy.

"WT452 [the water pumper/tender] is in dire need of being replaced and we're going to have to find a way to fund



VRFPD has replaced E451 (left) with a newer 1994 engine (right).

he was away fighting that wild land fire this summer, VRFPD was called out for a motor vehicle accident that ended up needing an extrication. Only two firefighters who are trained in extrication rescue techniques, a volunteer Duty Officer and a volunteer who was on light duty, were available to respond. "We just had one of those weekends when none of our volunteers were available to respond," explained Smith. Although the injuries to the patient were not life threatening, the extrication took an hour and a half and created a very high level of anxiety for Smith, who was following the call by radio in Central Oregon, and for the Duty Officer and volunteer who were responsible for assisting the victim.

Smith has suggested one solution to the personnel issue would be for VRFPD to hire an additional paid full-time staff member. According to Smith, that additional officer could respond to calls and

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that," said Smith.

Funding an additional staff member as part of an operations levy would go a long way to reducing Smith's personnel concerns. That person could help rebuild the volunteer base, develop a training program and respond to emergencies.

Smith says he believes the District has been very frugal with their spending and resourceful in finding ways to make do with what they have.

"My job and passion for this District is to help and be of service to the community," says Smith. "And it's the same for our volunteers. We just need more resources to be able to do our jobs safely, timely, and efficiently."

Columbia Humane Society Featured Pet



"Peaches"

Meet Peaches. She is a very friendly and fun loving 5 year old female DSH that is ready to go to her new forever home. She came to the shelter as an owner surrender. She is very sweet and loves attention from anyone that is willing to give it to her. She has a bright disposition and will be sure to bring a smile to anyone who meets her. Her adoption fee is \$90.00.

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