

This Place We Call Home

By Scott Laird

Over the years many people have tried to describe "home."

"Home is where the heart is."

"Home is whatever place you long to be."

Or, as the Talking Heads stated it in their lovely song, *This Must Be the Place*, "Home - is where I want to be, but I guess I'm already there."

What we consider our home has many definitions and descriptions. It can be the physical structure we reside in, the town where we live, the place we originally come from, where our family lives, or even the region of the country where we find ourselves.

We often think of home as a place, designated by man-made boundaries—a street address or a town, state or country on a map. Bio regionalists like to consider a place, not by those man-made divisions, but by the ecological borders that make a place unique—using rivers, mountains and basins to designate the confines of a place.

In Vernonia, we find ourselves surrounded by those forests, rivers and streams, and hills and valleys—certainly a very beautiful place to call home.

Home can also be an idea. One of my favorite definitions of home is, "a place where something flourishes."

Another way to think about home is to consider the people and community that make up a place and make it special.

As we celebrate the holiday season and the end of the year, let's take a moment to look back at our community and the people that make this place our home:

- This is place where people can put aside political and religious differences and find ways to work together.
- This is a place where, when the community was devastated by a flood in 2007 the people came together to focus on the recovery effort, which is just now reaching its final stages, seven years later.
- This is a place that chose to tax themselves in the middle of an economic downturn to raise \$13 million to build a new school campus for the children of the community.
- This is a place where those children often can't wait to leave to go out and explore the rest of the world, (as they should) but often choose to come back when it's time to raise their own families.

- This is a place where the committee that plans an almost sixty-year tradition, the annual Jamboree and Logging Show, experienced a resurgence and a new burst of energy and enthusiasm this past year from a somewhat unlikely source—a group of twenty-something young mothers, who are choosing to raise their families here.

- This is a place where another of the main planners of several recent events, including Jamboree, doesn't even live here, but still considers this her "home."

- This is a place where, when a local family, somewhat new to the community, lost everything to a fire, the community rallied to donate household items for them. The community then held a sale with the left over donated items the family couldn't use, raising funds to help the family get back on their feet, even though they decided they needed to move away from Vernonia to restart their lives.

- This is a place where workers at the electric cooperative work non-stop, though rain and flooding, through big winter snow storms, and, as we saw last week, through the windiest of weather, to restore power to all of us.

- This is a place where community mentors donate their time to help local high school seniors explore career options through their Senior Projects.

- This is a place where a group, known for tooling around in beefed up four-wheel drive pick-up trucks and SUVs, are becoming even better known as a service organization with a generous community spirit and an extremely giving nature.

- This is a place where the local school district, battling a tight budget, depends on and receives hours of classroom and other help from community volunteers.

- This is a place where local volunteers stage an old-fashioned, small town Christmas celebration, complete with storytelling, cookie baking, gingerbread house decorating, home and storefront decorating and chili cook-off

competitions, and ends with a lighted parade—led by those community minded four-wheel enthusiasts.

- This is a place where over 200 families will receive a Christmas meal from the local food bank, complete with turkey and all the trimmings. Much of the funds and food for those meals are donated by local citizens, businesses and community groups.

- This is a place where local firefighters will deliver donated toys for Christmas to over 200 local children.

- This is a place where an elderly gentleman and his family choose to spend their Christmas day hosting an annual dinner on December 25 for anyone who needs a place to spend the holiday, and won't accept any donations or gratuities for their effort.

- This is a place where, when a local and much beloved man passes away too early, the funeral is held in the largest space available, the local school, and there still isn't room for everyone.

Our wish for you this holiday season is that you take a moment to slow down and truly appreciate this place we all call home.



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