

Leaving Office: A Conversation with Tony Hyde

Tony Hyde has represented Columbia County on the Board of Commissioners for almost 20 years, helping keep often forgotten Vernonia on the radar. During his time in office he has seen a lot, from two major floods, to the development of a bike trail, to the start of a major economic development project in Scappoose.

The following is a look back on Hyde's time as a County Commissioner, in his own words.

Vernonia's Voice: What are some of your accomplishments you are most proud of during your 20 years serving the citizens of Columbia County?

Tony Hyde: I guess it depends on perspective, but individually I've done absolutely nothing. I think we've built a lot of really good teams in Columbia County and I've been part of that; I've been a cheerleader for that I'll take credit for that.

The team that we built to rebuild Vernonia after both the 1996 flood and especially the 2007 flood, and I fear to name names because I'm sure I'll leave somebody out, but obviously Jim Tierney, Dan Brown, Susan Wagner, there were a lot of really good people that stepped up. I'm not sure how much the community is aware of how involved Columbia County was in rebuilding this town, but it was way deeper than most people realize. The County spent literally hundreds of thousands of dollars out of the General Fund to help rebuild Vernonia. I'm reticent to talk about it because then the other towns in the County ask why we don't spend money rebuilding them. Well, you can only help somebody that wants to be helped. I became most proud of what we did here in 2007 after the flooding last December when we had almost no damage. By comparison, and you look at the water we had—we fixed it. We fixed this town. And it's not just about raising buildings, but fixing the infrastructure—the schools, the health center, the electric co-op, and soon the senior center. I'm proud we took that on, and in fact it was almost my single focus for several years. This town could have dried up and blew away. What really struck me was when we had FEMA folks from all around the country coming here. What we saw as residents was devastation, what they saw was a beautiful little community. When I kept hearing that over and over, I changed my focus. If they see that, then we should too. This community has great bones, and once you realize that, then you want to start working to put it back together.

The second thing I'm most proud of is the development of the Crown-Zellerbach Trail. This is a huge deal for the County and we're just starting to experience the benefits. When we started on this and saw the opportunity to use the old Crown-Zellerbach Main Line and connect to the Banks-Vernonia Trail, it took a lot of work and constant vigilance—always looking for new funding sources, always looking for the next piece. It was like a giant jigsaw puzzle. Who owns what? What is the right-of-way? Has it been surveyed? And then dealing with the State of Oregon, State Forests, State Parks, ODOT, federal agencies... it went

on and on. That task was monumental and that would be one thing that I could say that I, Tony Hyde, did. That would not have happened if I had not kept pushing it and I'm very proud of that accomplishment. It's not finished—we still have work to do—and I'm not going



to be a County Commissioner but I'm not going to stop working on it. I'm the keynote speaker in McMinnville because they are pushing their piece that will join the trail system. I'm on the committee for the Salmonberry Trail to become part of the trail system. I want to see all that happen and I'll be there because it's important to me and it's important to our communities. We've seen the economic development that has happened from having the Banks-Vernonia Trail and then you add this other piece coming from the other side of the county and then add it to this whole system of trails... it's going to be huge. It's good for everybody. It's good for our health, it's good for our economy, it's good for our mental health.

I'm also extremely proud of what is happening in Scappoose right now with the Oregon Manufacturing Innovation Center (OMIC). That is not an anomaly, it's not luck, it's not just something that came along. You don't just have a carrot growing in your garden, it happens on purpose. And the first thing you have to do is prepare the soil. With the help of some other key people, including Senator Betsy Johnson, we've been focused on that 500 acre piece of property for a very long time—it's been a 20 year slog. The very first hearing I had as a County Commissioner was what I call the "Rock Wars" which was about a mining permit for the property adjacent to the Scappoose Airport which had aggregate on it that the company that owned it wanted to mine. Typically, if you look anywhere the best places to build industrial sites are near airports. But State Senate Bill 100 protects farms, forest and aggregate, so they had standing. And this issue was going nowhere. That first packet of information I received was so large it had to be delivered with a hand truck. With some help from Governor Kitzhaber I was able to convene the

stakeholders with mediators. What was amazing was how quickly we found the commonality in what both sides wanted, and once you find the common ground, that's where you go. We all wanted the economy to be better and grow. We wanted that property at the airport for industrial development and they wanted rock—but it didn't have to be THAT rock. And we found another 500 acre piece of property with rock and worked out the deal. The whole thing has taken a long time and we've had to be patient. In fact, the Board of Commissioners will be making a final decision on their mining permit for that new 500 acres at our December 21 meeting. So it really has taken 20 years. In the mean time the property next to the airport was sold and the owners had the vision to hold on to it, develop some infrastructure, and today it's going to be the site of PCC's first physical campus in Columbia County along with three four-year institutions, and some major companies like Boeing and Daimler. It all came together. The whole business of industrial recruitment is long and expensive, but if you stay focused you can do it.

It's about preparing the soil, and doing that took a team. It's always teamwork. I can look at each city in our county and point to something positive. We have Boise Cascade coming in with the second phase of their operation with

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