



# Inside Our Films: Our Town is a Film Destination

By Jim Bryson

You may not realize this from looking around but Vernonia is kind of a big deal for filmmakers. I've never lived anywhere before that has been the home of so many film projects. The movies that immediately come to mind are *Ring of Fire* (1961) and *The Vernonia Incident* (1989). But these two are far from the only cinematic visits that we have had. Most recently, in 2016, Green Day filmed the music video for their song Still Breathing in Vernonia and most scenes from the video are very recognizable as our town. A more trained eye might even recognize Vernonia in *Thumbsucker* (2005), *Tillamook Treasure* (2005), *Bucksville* (2011), and of course, the first *Twilight* (2008) movie filmed several scenes here. I'm pretty sure this isn't even a complete list.

To tell you the truth I'm not too surprised that we are a destination for such a myriad of film projects. We are located quite close to Portland, a large city with a large airport. It is also the location of Lyca Studios so film people make their way up here. I'm very excited that we have had so many interesting films shot here in Vernonia and I'd love to see many more.

*Ring of Fire* (1961) was quickly apparent to me as "the film" of Vernonia on my first visit to town that involved a stop by the Black Iron Grill. The colorful old film posters on the walls immediately piqued my curiosity and when I first moved to town I made a point of getting this film from the library.

This movie stars David Janssen, Joyce Taylor, and Frank Gorshin and was written and directed by Andrew L. Stone. The story follows the local town sheriff (David Janssen) who attempts to apprehend a young group of criminals (Frank Gorshin, Joyce Taylor) passing through his town. The criminals turn the tables and take the sheriff hostage. But their attempted escape is dramatically prevented by a raging forest fire.



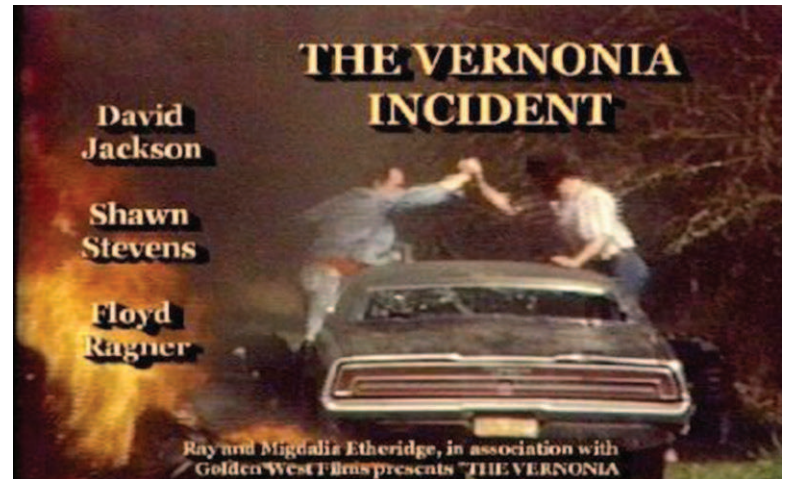
It is a pretty simple story and on its own it doesn't bear much remembering. However, its setting in 1961 Vernonia with quite a few street scenes of the town early in the film is a very exciting glimpse into our city's history. At the conclusion of *Ring of Fire* the forest fire burns the local mill to the ground as the townsfolk flee. The filmmakers were allowed to burn the old Oregon-American Lumber Company mill for these scenes and that seems to have marked a major change in the history of the town.

It wasn't until 1989 that another feature length film was made in Vernonia. Whereas *Ring of Fire* had a full Hollywood budget *The Vernonia Incident* (1989) is a perfect example of an independent film. It was shot on a very short three week schedule at a cost of only \$67,000! As such it doesn't have the slick feel of a large production but its story is just as strong and its setting is also very recognizable for a Vernonian.

*The Vernonia Incident* stars David Jackson, Shawn Stevens, and Ed Justice and was written and

directed by Ray Etheridge. This film follows a similar story arc of big city criminals happening upon a small town and not being prepared for rural living, for rural people, or for rural justice. Although *Ring of Fire* could be seen as a romantic adventure film *The Vernonia Incident* is squarely a rollicking action film. In this story two out-of-town criminals attempt to rob the local grocery store and murder the local policeman in the process. They attempt to flee but are stopped by a vigilante group of gun-toting locals. This accounts for the alternate title of the film, *Lynch Mob Vigilantes*. It also pretty much sums up the whole story.

With both of these movies the real reason to watch them is if you live in or are familiar with



Vernonia. Seeing the town in all its former glory on the big screen helps remind one of the beauty of our setting and our town's relevance to modern cinema. I dream of seeing another film production come to Vernonia. Both films, as well as *Thumbsucker* (2005) and *Twilight* (2008), can be found at your local Vernonia library.

Vernonia's Voice is published twice each month on the 1st and 3rd Thursday. Look for our next issue out December 7.

## Where Do You Read the Voice?



**Cutter, Chuck, and Denetta Barklow, and Jake Handegard took a time out and read the Voice at Century Link Field during the Seattle Seahawks 17-14 loss to the Washington Redskins on November 5.**



**CLEAN COLUMBIA COUNTY**

Do you believe that people and communities have a basic right to healthy environments and economies? Then come check out Clean Columbia County! We hold meetings the second Thursday of every month.

Columbia Soil and Water Conservation District  
(Old Warren Grange)  
35285 Millard Road St. Helens, OR 97051  
(503)-799-6968  
info@cleancolumbiacounty.info  
and check us out on Facebook!

## Mariolino's Pizza & Grill

**Serving breakfast, lunch & dinner  
Ice cream - cones, shakes & sundaes  
Daily Specials**

Family owned and operated for over 40 years.

**721 Madison Avenue, Vernonia (503) 429-5018**

we bakes

**FRESH BREAD  
FRIDAYS  
5PM - 8PM**



805 Bridge Street  
Vernonia Oregon

www.webakes.com

**503-429-2222**