

An Opinion: Looking Back on a Tough Year

By Brian Allbritton, Executive Director, Oregon Energy Fund

Oregonians faced steep challenges over the past year

Snowstorms last winter closed schools and businesses for days, forcing many working parents to take time off whether or not they could afford it. During the summer, wildfires displaced many people from their homes, while others were told to stay inside as a dangerous haze blanketed much of the state.

While the storms and fires were difficult for all of us, for folks working paycheck to paycheck, this resulted in financial crisis. Families faced devastating income shortages as wage earners were unable to work. Faced with a missing or reduced paycheck, many had to make tough choices. Do we pay the rent or the electricity bill? Buy food or pay for the gas bill?

I believe that no one should have to make these decisions.

Some Things You May Not Know...

By Trish Smith

Vernonia EMT Volunteer Coordinator

Hello. Most of you know me as the "Ambulance Lady," or previously as the "Bus Lady" or the "Sasquatch Bread Lady."

I am fortunate enough to have been able to serve this community for the past 10 years as both a volunteer and paid EMT. If not for an old friend inviting me to a volunteer ambulance business meeting, I would have missed out on being a part of this great family as well as a rewarding career. This is my invitation to you.

I'd like to share some facts about local emergency medical services that you probably don't know.

1. Although we work side by side, the Vernonia Volunteer Ambulance Association (VVAA) is separate from the Vernonia Fire Volunteers. Though most of the members are on both associations, they are separate departments, separate apparatus, separate benefits, separate officers.

2. The VVAA pays for school! My mentors walked me through every step, from finding an EMT class, to helping me register. When it came time to pay, they provided me with a check to cover books, classes and tests. When it came time to study, they invited me to the station to practice skills over a plate of BBQ.

3. Metro West Ambulance has partnered with Vernonia and provides two fully

How we responded

I work for the only statewide non-profit in Oregon providing energy assistance to families in crisis. At Oregon Energy Fund, we responded quickly to heightened demand in the wake of fires in the Gorge and Eagle Creek and snowstorms across the state. Together, we raised over \$1 million to provide utility assistance, with nearly \$10,000 distributed here in Vernonia through our partnership with St. Vincent De Paul. 83 individuals in the area received help with their utility bills last year.

Oregon Energy Fund's emergency assistance helped thousands of people. However, that still left a tremendous number in need, considering that 1 in 8 Oregonians struggle to pay their utility bills and still have money left for necessities like food and medicine – even without the complication of a wildfire or snowstorm thrown in.

stocked 9-1-1 Advanced Life Support ambulances, all the needed equipment and supplies, training, living quarters, uniforms, and of course, a Paramedic 24/7. They also fund a position at 50 hours a week, Monday to Friday. That's where I come in! During the day my Paramedic partner and I, or Bailey Wegner (the other paid EMT), are paid staff and we respond with lights and sirens in uniform to 9-1-1 calls in the community. Outside of those hours, I volunteer my time.

4. Volunteer hours are unpaid hours. Next time you see an EMT after 4:00 pm or on a weekend in their EMS garb wearing pagers, thank them! They are doing it because they love what they do and what they represent. A transport during volunteer hours can earn you some cash. Though most of the volunteers in Vernonia have other jobs, it can easily turn into full time with benefits.

5. EMT's are in great demand and make a competitive wage! I started by filling in at special events in Washington County to earn some extra money as a stay at home mom. Shortly after, I started working full time on an ambulance at Metro West in Washington County as well as filling in at the coast at Medix Ambulance. Now here I sit, helping to manage, train, and mentor new EMTs. I guess you could call it "work." I love what I do so much, I miss it when I'm not working.

6. What do you mean you don't have

You can help, too

I'm happy to report that we now have a way that you can help, too. Your own West Oregon Electric Cooperative Inc., a long-time supporter of our work, is the first co-op in the state to offer our PowerUp Program, a way of donating through your utility bill.

You can "PowerUp" your community by rounding up your monthly bill to the nearest dollar for regular support, choose to contribute a little extra every month, or make a one-time gift at any time and for any amount.

Keeping it local

100% of all donations to this program will stay within the WOEC service area, so your charity dollars stay local. If you'd like to help your neighbor in need, please either check your next WOEC utility bill or give online at www.OregonEnergyFund.org/WOEC. Through the power of giving, you can ensure that your neighbors stay healthy, safe, and housed.

to spend thousands on school? Really? I have zero student debt and one of the most rewarding careers ever.

Do you want to truly make a difference in people's lives? If you want to serve our community and to be there when it counts the most, please call me at (503) 429-4600. Let's talk about what we do and schedule a ride-along so you can see firsthand what being in Emergency Medical Services is truly about.

I'd also like to invite you to attend one of our business meetings for the Vernonia Volunteer Ambulance Association at 555 E Bridge Street, Vernonia OR 97064. I look forward to meeting you!



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One year subscriptions
(24 issues) \$35

Vernonia's Voice is published
on the 1st and 3rd Thursday
of each month.

Vernonia's Voice, LLC
PO Box 55
Vernonia, OR 97064
503-367-0098

www.VernoniasVoice.com

FIRST DAY HIKE

Join L.L. Stub Stewart State Park staff on the Banks-Vernonia Trail on January 1st, 2018. Cross the Buxton trestle, experience expansive views of the Oregon Coast Range and hike past northwest native plants in Douglas Fir stands originally managed for logging. The hike will start and end at the Buxton Trailhead.

**Be prepared for uneven, potentially slippery surfaces. Wear sturdy footwear and dress for cold, often wet weather. Dogs allowed on leash only. Trail is not adequate for strollers. Best for hikers age 12 or older or younger if abilities warrant. Bring water and snacks.

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