

Meet the Candidates: Vernonia Mayor, City Council, and Columbia County Sheriff

By Scott Laird

Vernonia's Voice hosted two political forums on October 10 and 11 at the Cabin in Vernonia. The first evening featured three candidates running for Columbia County Sheriff, Dave Brown, Jim Gibson, and Brian Pixley. Former Sheriff Jeff Dickerson abruptly announced he was retiring early in April of 2018 ahead of this upcoming election, paving the way for county citizens to elect a new Sheriff for the first time in a decade. The candidates answered questions from myself, who acted as moderator for the event, and from the audience.

On the second evening candidates for Vernonia Mayor and City Council all responded to a series of questions from both the moderator and the audience. Candidates for Mayor included Rick Hobart and Jill Hult; candidate David Sterner declined to participate in the event. Candidates present for two City Council positions included J.R. Allen, Mike Seager, and Dale Webb; candidate Richard Traver declined to participate.

Candidates for Vernonia Mayor and City Council were previously given an opportunity to respond to a written questionnaire – their responses were published as submitted with no edits in the October 4, 2018 issue of *Vernonia's Voice*. Both Sterner and Traver declined to respond to that questionnaire.

Both evenings were well attended and informative. Both events were recorded on video and will be available on the *Vernonia's Voice* Facebook page, as well as both Vernonia Community Bulletin Board pages.

The following is a recap of the questions and candidate responses at our Meet the Candidates events.

Vernonia Mayor and City Council

Rick Hobart is a retired log truck driver who currently drives school bus for the Vernonia School District. He served as the Park Host at Anderson Park for the City of Vernonia for one year. He owns a small horse and carriage business and is a volunteer with the Vernonia Lions Club where he helped in a collaborative project to reline Dewey Pool at Hawkins Park. He said he would like to give back to the community that has given so much to him during his life.

Jill Hult is a current member of the Vernonia City Council, elected four years ago. She has a degree in communications with an emphasis in training and development, and says she understands how to work with people, and how to collaborate and communicate. She is a member of the newly formed Columbia County Tourism Steering Committee, where she will be a voice for Vernonia. She grew up in Vernonia and says she understands and wants to honor Vernonia heritage while still moving the community forward. She said she would like to see Vernonia with a healthy budget, a rich culture and community, and be a place that, when people visit, they want to return.

J.R. Allen graduated from Vernonia High School. He is married, owns a home in Vernonia, and raised his children here. He has a background in commercial construction and is a union member. He said his experience working with architects, engineers, and many different supervisors in construction will help him in the role of Councilor. He said he will work hard and encourage volunteerism. He said his battle with cancer in 2011 has given him a new perspective and that he wants to give back to the community he loves. He said it was up to the voters to decide if they want to keep basically the same Council or, "...you want to shuffle the deck a little bit and get a couple fresh ideas." He said he was confident he could work with anyone at City Hall and fellow Councilors.

Mike Seager is a current City Councilor. He served in the U.S. Air Force and worked at Boeing. He moved to Vernonia in 1980 and owned the cable television company here. He has been the Airport Manager for the Vernonia Airport for over 20 years, and has served on the Vernonia Planning Commission. He said he thinks the City is currently operating the best it ever has in the time he's lived here and would like to stay on the Council because he thinks there is still work to be done. He says the Council has worked well together and accomplished a lot of things.

Dale Webb was born and raised in Vernonia, graduated from Vernonia

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Manufacturing Industry Leaders Join Forces with OMIC

Hands-on activities and live demonstrations showcase modern manufacturing technology and professional opportunities for students

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tor, offering high-demand, high-wage, and high-skill employment. The event showcased the vision, and training and education programs taking shape at OMIC while exposing youth to modern manufacturing career pathways. In the afternoon the event was opened up to the public.



Students from the Columbia County region got a peak at their potential futures when they visited the new Oregon Manufacturing Innovation Center (OMIC) on October 5 in Scappoose for an engaging and educational event hosted by OMIC and regional industry, education, and workforce development partners. The event offered fun, creative, hands-on activities for attendees to help them learn about the manufacturing industry, a vibrant field offering professional growth and opportunity.

The event supported "National Manufacturing Day," which takes place annually in early October and promotes the advanced and expanding manufacturing sector across the country, particularly in Oregon, which is touted as a leader in durable goods manufacturing.

"Manufacturing in Oregon has a bright future and OMIC will boost Columbia County's economy by bringing world-class advanced manufacturing to the area, educating young people, and training workers to enter high-demand jobs that provide living wages," said U.S. Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici, who stopped by to take part in the event. "I am proud to be a champion for OMIC and the opportunities it will bring to our community. I look forward to seeing what OMIC achieves in the coming years through the world-class research, development, and training it offers our workforce."

About 300 student attendees had a chance to experiment with 3D printers, laser cutters, robots, and virtual welding as a way to better understand the world of making things. Students had a chance to talk with industry and manufacturing representatives about their fields and their companies. On-site workshops provided an opportunity to learn how these activities relate to the region's robust manufacturing sec-

Manufacturing participation for the event came from companies like Boeing, Oregon Aero, Blount, Daimler, Madden Industrial Craftsmen, Northwest Oregon Works, Rightline, Silver Eagle, and Sport Copter. In addition, area high school robotics teams participated in the event, including several students and an instructor from Vernonia High School.

One of the most popular exhibits was the INSITSU drone demonstration where students had an opportunity to sit in the control room and learn how to launch, operate, and recover a drone. Students learned about potential uses for drones that include maritime operations, disaster response, defense deployment, data gathering, and commercial applications.

"I got to fly a drone and I got to practice welding," said Oregon State Senator Betsy Johnson, who also visited the event. "The companies that were here gave our kids a hands-on chance to see what engineering and manufacturing, and doing things with their hands is all about."

The OMIC Research and Development (OMIC R&D) facility where the event was held is a world-class collaborative environment bringing together industry, higher education, and government in partnership to develop new tools, techniques, and technologies to address manufacturing challenges through applied research and advanced technical training. OMIC R&D is modeled after the University of Sheffield Advanced Manufacturing Research Center (AMRC) in partnership with Boeing in Sheffield, England. The OMIC R&D collaborative partnership is located in Scappoose in a facility owned and administered by the Oregon Institute of Technology (Oregon Tech).

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