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VERNONIA'S voice

free

reflecting the spirit of our community

Armitage Sworn in as State Senator

Rachel Armitage has been selected by County Commissioners from Columbia, Clatsop, Mutlnomah, Tillamook, Washington, and Yamhill counties to fill the remainder of Betsy Johnson's term as State Senator for District 16.

Armitage, a Democrat from Warren in Columbia County, was sworn in on January 21. She previously worked as a legislative assistant in Salem in 2016 and 2017, focusing on constituent services, and education and foster youth rights issues.

Armitage plans to bring her perspective from her past legislative work to the Oregon Senate, advocating for better economic opportunities for Oregon's working families. Armitage will serve on the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on General Government, and has said publicly she does not plan to run for the seat in November. She is currently employed at Reed College, where she is also studying toward a Masters's Degree.

"I look forward to bringing my perspective as a rural Oregonian to Salem," said Armitage. "Our communities deserve action on the everyday issues that affect our way of life, such as access to rewarding jobs and stable, affordable housing."

ODOT to Begin "Green Bridge" Repairs

The Oregon Department of Transportation will begin repairs on the historic Nehalem River Bridge, located on Highway 47 on the north end of town. Known locally as the "Green Bridge," work will begin on February 7 and is scheduled to continue through June 30.

Built in 1939, the repairs on the bridge are needed or it will continue to deteriorate and require costly maintenance.

The project includes:

- Removing the rust that has built up between the steel plates.
- Straightening bent steel beams.
- Replacing rusted rivets and bolts.
- Repainting the bridge to protect the bridge against the elements and future rust.

During construction expect noise and lane closures, causing short delays.

Estimated cost of the project is $1.7 million.

Big Changes at Columbia Pacific Food Bank

The regional supplier of food to local food pantries is getting a new home and has a new Executive Director

By Scott Laird

Change is never easy, but sometimes it can be exciting.

That's the situation at the Columbia Pacific Food Bank, which supplies dry foods, meats, and fresh produce to food pantries across Columbia County, including Vernonia Cares.

Sometime around the beginning of March the Columbia Pacific Food Bank is expecting to move into their new, 12,500 square foot location on Columbia Boulevard in St. Helens from their old, 2,500 square foot location just around the corner. The newly renovated building will be easier for clients to access, and features a large walk-in fridge and freezer, lots of storage space in the warehouse, an inviting food pantry and indoor produce storage space for local users, a full kitchen and large office space, and more room for... well, maybe some new ideas.

That's because long-time Executive Director Casey Wheeler is taking this opportunity to retire at the end of March after nine years of service to the community, and will be handing over the Executive Director position to former Columbia County Commissioner Alex Tardif. During his tenure in charge, Wheeler was able to improve efficiency, while increasing food distribution by almost 500% to the communities that needed it, from about 4 tons of

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Alex Tardif is the new Executive Director of the Columbia Pacific Food Bank which will be moving into a new, 12,500 square foot facility in St. Helens in March.

Celebrating Black History Month

Black History Month is an annual celebration during the month of February across both the United States and Canada to recognize and honor the achievements by African Americans and their central role in history. Also known as African American History Month, according to history.com, the event grew out of "Negro History Week," created by prominent African Americans in 1926 to focus the attention of the public on important developments, contributions, and the legacy of African Americans across U.S. history and society – from activists and civil rights pioneers to leaders in industry, politics, science, culture, and more.

In honor of Black History Month, in this issue of the Voice we profile some civil rights freedom fighters who may not have the name recognition of other prominent leaders, but are people, some of them with local connections, whose accomplishments should make them household names.

Elizabeth Freeman

Elizabeth Freeman, also known as "Mumbet" or "Bet," was among the first slaves in Massachusetts to sue for and win her freedom. Born into slavery in 1742, she was given to the Ashley family of Sheffield, Massachusetts in her early teens. During her period of enslavement to them, she married and had a child, Betsy.

Soon after the Revolutionary War, Bet heard the Massachusetts Constitution read aloud in the Ashley's home, and heard these words from Article 1: "All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights; among which may be reckoned the right of enjoying and defending their lives and liberties..."

Bet recognized the potential legal and moral import of these words and sought out an attorney to sue for her freedom under the newly ratified state constitution. With the help of Theodore Sedgwick, a Stockbridge attorney and abolitionist, she pled her case in the Court of Common Pleas in August 1781 and became the first African-American woman to be set free under the Massachusetts Constitution. Her case, *Brom and Bett v. Ashley*, served as precedent in the State Supreme Court case that brought an end to the practice of slavery in Massachusetts.

As a free woman, Bet took the name Elizabeth Freeman. She worked as a governess in the Sedgwick household, and then she and Betsy bought

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