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VERNONIA'S voice

free

Reflecting the spirit of our community

Vernonia Gets Our Skatepark!

The wait is over and Vernonia kids of ALL ages finally have their skatepark, thanks to the hard work of local volunteers, some great partnerships, and several generous donations.

The brand new, 9,000 square foot, $340,000, Holce Family Skatepark held a Grand Opening Celebration on Saturday, April 23. If there was any doubt about whether local kids were excited about this new recreational opportunity, those were quickly dispelled when hundreds of people surrounded the park, many showing up an hour early in excited anticipation.

The weather was uncharacteristically perfect as Vernonia City Administrator Josette Mitchell kicked off the ceremony by thanking a number of key individuals and groups, before allowing the eager kids to break through the tape and get rolling! Later a group of seasoned skateboarders and BMX bike riders showed off some of their advanced skills during a brief intermission before the local kids swarmed back onto the concrete park.

At the top of the list of locals who helped make this park a reality were Wendy Sears and Jeremy Simmons, two Vernonia community members who volunteered their time over several years to drive the project. They created the Vernonia SK8 group that held fundraisers, was awarded grants, developed a partnership with the City of Vernonia, and continually advocated for the project. One of the grants Sears and Simmons were able to secure was for $25,000 from the well known Tony Hawk Foundation.

Another partnership was with the Vernonia Boosters, who handled the finances and managed the construction with City staff. This partnership gave the project non-profit status, which allowed Randy Holce and the Holce Family to support the efforts with a $280,000 donation, providing the project the final funds they needed to create a design and complete construction.

Vernonia's skatepark was built by Evergreen Skateparks out of Portland, a well known family run company that had workers on site in Vernonia for almost two months clearing the area, shaping the track and bowl, pouring the concrete, and installing the features. Several local volunteers, along with City workers, helped with the initial clearing of the site and the installation of drainage. City workers, with help from West Oregon Electric Cooperative will be installing lighting to help make the park user friendly after dark.

Completion of the project, its much anticipated Grand Opening, and the creation of this new spot for community youth to recreate, are all something everyone involved, and the entire Vernonia community, can really be proud of.

See page 9 for more photos.

County Commissioner Candidates Respond to Our Questionnaire

Four candidates are running for the Columbia County Board of Commissioners Position 2, in the May 17, 2022 election. The seat is currently held by Henry Heimuller, who is not running for re-election. *Vernonia's Voice* sent all four candidates five questions to help voters get to know these candidates better. Their responses are below, unedited and in their entirety, and are listed in the order we received them.

1. Please introduce yourself, tell us about your qualifications or background, and why you are running for office? (250 word limit)

Brian Brust – My name is Brian Brust and I have been married for 23 years. My wife and I are lifelong residents of Columbia County. We've raised two children and are raising another. I am a veteran of the United States Marine Corps, I have owned my own business, and I've done construction for 30 years. I grew up in a logging family. I know what hard work is and long hours. I know what it is to get something done or accomplished in building buildings. We must communicate with many different people when we're planning on remodeling or building hospitals. Talking to building owners, building managers, department heads, engineers, architects, and different contractors is not easy, because not everyone speaks the same language. I am talking about understanding the specifics or nomenclature of items in builds. You find out communication skills are extremely important, as well as listening skills, for everyone to understand when there are issues that arise. I can not just send out a generic email to everyone on changes that have to happen on a build. I must be more specific to some people about what is happening and less to others that know just by what is said. Often, I must interpret what it is that a person wants or desires in the build to meet their needs. It comes down to communication and listening. I think these skills are necessary for a commissioner.

Kellie Jo Smith – My name is Kellie Jo Smith, my husband, Brandon and I have been married for almost 19 years. Together we have seven children, biologically, adopted and through foster care. We've been foster parents since 2015.

Our family has owned and operated Oregon Trail Lanes, the bowling center in St. Helens since 1981. Currently I handle the CFO duties, Compliance, HR, Marketing, and Planning duties.

As an active parent volunteer I found myself drawn to our schools and helping our children through advocacy, elected as a St. Helens School District Board Member in 2013, 2017 and 2021. I've served as Chair, Vice-Chair, Chair of the Budget Committee, and on many facilities and student and parent committees.

My volunteerism has also extended to many years of helping in local youth activities, as a Player Agent for St. Helens Little League, and several years of coaching for youth Basketball.

From 2014 to 2018, I enjoyed volunteering as a Columbia County Sheriff's Office Reserve Deputy, attending Marine Academy, and spending time on the Columbia River.

I'm running for office because I care about our communities and the people within them and I want to see us healthy and thriving.

Kelly Niles – My name is Kelly Niles. I have lived in Columbia County for 20 years. I am currently the Wildland Fire Supervisor for the Oregon Department of Forestry. I hold several volunteer positions on various committees in the county covering planning, budgeting, policy, and personnel management. I am a veteran, volunteer, and have been a public servant my entire life. I am running to bring a plan with new ideas for our future capitalizing on the many relationships I have made throughout my time in the county. To read more please visit electkellyniles.com.

Jonathon Barclay – I grew up in Hillsboro and lived there until 2020 when my fiancé and I were fortunate enough to buy a house in Deer Island. I've worked for Marriott in some capacity over the past 12 years. Prior to working at Marriott I worked in the construction industry for a decade. I'm running for county commissioner because, while living in the county for a short period of time, I realize that our elected officials don't represent the people. I realize our freedoms and rights are at risk even in small town America and I couldn't just stand by and do nothing.

2. What do you think are some positive things, or things that are going well in Columbia County? (250 word limit)

Brian Brust – Some of the positive things I've found being done in our county is the customer service in the courthouse. Whether it's dealing with elections, the county clerk, or land use, all the people I've had interactions with were pleasant experiences. I would say our county is excellent at getting grants from the state for each department, I've looked at the budget and nearly every department has a grant. Our county is phenomenal at doing the state's bidding regardless of the citizens' wishes. Another great idea our county embraces is being stuck in the idea that we can't do anything different from the way our county has operated for the last 20 to 30 years. Our county was phenomenal at following the wishes of her governor keeping us masked. The commissioners are quick to acquire more funds regardless of the effect on the citizens. I would say that our commissioners are good at signing contracts that keep our county beholden to the state. The county is phenomenal at spending money to do

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