

From the Editor



I hope everyone had a safe and fun Jamboree weekend! In spite of the heat, it seemed like the turnout was good this year, the parade lasted 45 minutes and included Oregon candidate for Governor Betsy Johnson (along with a whole bunch of other candidates running for office!) making her usual appearance, the Kids Logging Show was again a big hit, and all the rest of the events and activities seemed to go well. Thanks to the Jamboree Committee for all their work to make this Vernonia event a success this year.

We have some exciting news here at the Voice. On August 11, we officially launched our brand new website. It was both stressful and exciting preparing for this, and we're still finding small bugs and corrections that need to be made. Please take a moment and go to www.VernoniasVoice.com and take a look. If you go to the site you'll notice that there is no paywall and only local advertising. We've intentionally developed the site to be focused on Vernonia and free for anyone to use, whether it's someone who has

moved away but still wants to keep track of what's happening here, or someone who is interested in visiting our community, or as a tool for our locals to help you stay better informed. And please feel free to let us know if you come across anything that doesn't function correctly or if you have ideas about how we can make our new website better. Thank you to the folks at TownNews for their help in getting this site launched, and an extra big thank you to Charise Ash for her local help and expertise in bringing this project to life for us!

On August 11 I attended the regular meeting of the Vernonia School Board. There are a bunch of changes happening at the District, now under the direction of new Superintendent Jim Helmen, and the meeting was very engaging and informative. Office spaces have been moved, and there are some slight changes to the weekly schedule. It was exciting to see the School Board members enthusiastic about their role in the District, and to see the Administrative team present and eager for the start of the new school year. Superintendent Helmen appears to really be listening to his

staff, his Board, and the parents in the District, and there was a real positive and hopeful feel across the room during the meeting. I encourage anyone in the community interested in public education to get engaged because it feels like good things are happening there.

And finally, on a more somber note, we were saddened to learn of the passing of Eleanor Thompson on August 10 at the age of 105. A long-time Vernonia resident who had recently moved to an assisted living facility in Forest Grove, Eleanor was a beloved member of our community. I had several opportunities to visit and chat with Eleanor over the last several years and always appreciated her sense of humor, her positive outlook, her appreciation for the little things that help enrich a life, and her generous spirit. We should all take a page out of Eleanor Thompson's book of life and remember to try and be thankful for the things we do have, each and every day.

Scott Laird
Editor and Publisher

A New Plan for the Grandstands? *continued from front page*

As a member of that committee he helped plan for the development of a paved walking path, lined with benches, that meanders through the park to a plaza space. The plaza would sit on the other side of the snack shack from the grandstands, with picnic tables and shade trees, where community members could grab a snack and relax, or watch ball games and enjoy the open space of the park.

Whiteman was particularly interested in providing an outdoor place for senior citizens to use. He believed they are an underserved population in our community and he saw the 15-acre Spencer Park as a place that could be welcoming to all of Vernonia's citizens.

"Vernonia has almost 80 acres of park space in our City's system," says Whiteman. "It's mostly supported by camping fees at Anderson Park and by day use fees at Vernonia Lake. But hardly any town our size supports a park system that size, so we have to give credit for that. If you look around at Spencer Park, this is a good park and we should be proud of it and take good care of it!"

The grant the City applied for to build the plaza was not awarded, but Whiteman was undeterred and went to work convincing the City to plant trees in Spencer Park. He developed a plan that included Memorial Trees that citizens could purchase in honor of friends, family, and other loved ones in order to reduce the cost to the City. He addressed the City Council with his proposal and since then the City has purchased and planted 39 Memorial Trees, five of them purchased by Steve and Sue Whiteman. Those trees are now growing and starting to provide shady spots all around Spencer Park.

Guess who has spent countless volunteer hours watering and tending to those trees? That's right, Steve and Sue have been hauling 600 feet of hose to all corners of Spencer Park for the last several years,

making sure those trees continue to thrive and beautify the park the Whitemans have adopted.

"Twenty years from now those trees will be providing shade that people will be racing to get to and use," says Whiteman.

Whiteman is full of ideas, most of them about how to make the Vernonia community a better place. With time on his hands while he's been watering those trees and wandering to all corners of the park, Whiteman has hatched a number of other plans he thinks would improve Spencer Park.

His newest plan is an alternative to the "Save the Grandstands" campaign, a grass roots community project to refurbish the deteriorating grandstands at Greenman Field, which were originally built in the 1950s by local volunteers to provide a covered place for fans to watch high school sporting events. The original proposal called for the area to be available for rent for events and activities once the grandstands were repaired, and the City entered into a lease agreement with the Intercultural Society of Vernonia, who acted as a nonprofit umbrella so the project could fundraise to make the repairs.

Unfortunately the project lost momentum during COVID and has not met the timelines for the repairs that were part of the lease agreement. The grandstands have become a nuisance, with constant vandalism and trespassing. In February of 2022 the Grandstands Committee told the City Council the project had \$9,000, along with some of the construction materials to go toward repairing the sagging roof structure, and asked the City to donate \$100,000 to complete the repairs. The Council voted 4-1 to reject the request for funding, and now the project appears stalled.

Into the project quagmire has stepped Whiteman with his alternative plan that he hopes the City of Vernonia and the rest of the community will embrace. Whiteman is proposing the grandstands be removed and

replaced with a covered pavilion in the 120 foot by 30 foot space it currently occupies. The new pavilion would serve the same purpose as the plaza he originally envisioned, (just in a different location) – a shaded spot where grandparents and other fans could view several ball fields, watch the action at the new Holce Family Skate Park, and enjoy the open park space. It could also be an open air gathering spot for other community activities – a farmer's market, exercise classes, plant sales and swaps, movie nights in the park... Whiteman thinks the possibilities are endless. An open and covered pavilion would mostly serve the same function as a covered grandstand, but could be more functional and adaptable to different community needs, he says.

"The old grandstands are an artifact and I think it's time to change that," says Whiteman.

Whiteman presented his proposal to the Vernonia City Council at their August 15 meeting.

One advantage of Whiteman's proposal is that the project would come back under the control of the City of Vernonia and could therefore be eligible for some different funding sources than were available to the grandstands repair project, possibly including American Recovery Program Act (ARPA) funds the City has been awarded.

Anyone who knows Steve Whiteman knows he has opinions about a lot of things, including the use and care of Spencer Park. He was very impressed with the grassroots efforts to build the new skate park, especially the efforts of Wendy Sears and Jeremy Simmons who initially championed the project, and the excellent quality of the end product. He loves seeing all the use the park gets each spring with all the community and youth sporting events, and commends the parents who have stepped up and put in the

work to prepare the fields each season. He'd like to see kids playing soccer on the fields in the fall. He likes that the Jamboree Committee is finding ways to use the park, although he doesn't agree with all their methods. He thinks there's a lot about Spencer Park that is worth celebrating.

He's also been critical of the conditions at the Park and the way it's managed and maintained. He's encouraged the City to charge fees to the Softball Tournament for camping in Spencer Park during Jamboree weekend, and has been outspokenly critical of the way the park is treated during Jamboree weekend. He thinks the park grass and soil is not being properly maintained, leading to it becoming "a hay field" each summer; he would like to see more irrigation and soil amendments to help maintain the health of the grass but also understands the prohibitive costs as well as flood zone restrictions the City faces in that area. He would like to see the Jamboree provide more activities for local kids in the park. He's concerned about ongoing vandalism at the park, and would like to see the City invest in a high quality security camera system to help protect it. He has spots picked out for at least 12 more trees he would like to see planted around the park and wants the City to place more picnic tables and benches near those shade trees so more people will want to use the park. And he would like to see the rest of the community invest in maintaining the park in the way he and Sue have become invested in it.

"I love living in this logging town and I've been treated very fairly here," says Whiteman. "If we're going to have a park right in the middle of our town, let's really make it the flagship of our park system and make it something special. It's a great park and there are so many ways this community could use it!"

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

One year subscription
(24 issues) \$35

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