



Karen Hinton, owner of The Shiny Thimble, visits outside her shop with quilting friends Maudean Brown, Mary Lou Drury (behind Brown) and Frances Arneson. Hinton's 11-year-old son Mathew Delano is at right.

## Mt. Vernon city leaders have projects in the works

Town receives gift of building for new city hall location

By Angel Carpenter  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Mt. Vernon city officials are moving on three major projects, including wastewater system upgrades, city park improvements and a new location for city hall, which will create space for a new museum.

### Wastewater treatment upgrades

Upgrading the wastewater treatment facilities has been on the city agenda for years, before Mayor Kenny Delano or City Recorder Tami Kowing came on board.

Delano is in his second term as mayor, and Kowing is in her seventh year as city recorder.

The city received a \$2 million Community Development Block Grant, plus an additional \$255,000 CDBG grant and a \$225,000 loan from the Oregon Infrastructure Finance Authority to upgrade the wastewater treatment facilities.

Now the long wait is over, and Kowing said HECO Engineering of Idaho will do the leg work on the outdated system, and the project is expected to break ground this fall.

"It's just the first phase," she said, adding it's an expensive process. "They'll get everything repaired and do some testing and see how much further we need to go."

Sewer lines will also be extended to Rim Rock Lane on the north side of town, which is off Highway 395, and if residents in that area would like to hook up to the line, they can.

Delano said the town became quiet after the school closed in 2011 due to budget cuts.

"There's been no booming industry," he said. "When we lost our school, that really changed the genetics of the town — the school was a huge draw."

Although the town is small, it's still necessary to maintain an adequate water system, he said.

"We want to be able to have fire suppression, keep lawns green and wash cars," he said. "We're in excellent shape. However, those things are prone to wear out."

He added, "It's a real struggle to build up any capital money for any large infrastructure problem."

Delano said they can only make small, incremental increases to their water rates to take preventative measures. They can't charge the rates found in Bend or Portland, he said.

"We're doing OK with our sewer getting work done with this grant — that's helpful," he said.

### City park improvements

Delano said he hopes to see children playing at the city park, currently under construction, before the students head back to



The current location of Mt. Vernon City Hall, soon to be moved across Highway 26 to a new location.

school this fall.

He said the timing depends on how many setbacks they experience, but he added the work has to be complete by October.

"Hopefully, the kids can enjoy it for part of the summer," he said.

Kowing said the park is the first thing people see when they enter the city from the east.

"We're doing all sorts of upgrades to draw more people," she said.

New playground equipment was delivered earlier this spring, but flooding and more rain prevented them from completing the first part of the park project, which is adding underground sprinklers to the grassy area.

All the old metal slides, jungle gym and teeter-totters were removed, and the new set includes slides, bridges, a rock-climbing wall, swings and a type of zipline. Smaller children can also enjoy playing on a horse spring rider.

Cement will be poured to anchor poles and other areas. Then a padded floor topped with AstroTurf will be laid on the playground.

Lighting will be upgraded at the park, and three new flagpoles will be installed.

Delano said a park committee, formed just before he became mayor three years ago, made the park plans.

Kowing said surveys were sent out to residents to add their input.

"It seems like everyone is in support," she said. "The residents love it."

There are additional plans to construct a walking path around the park, so adults can exercise while the children play, but it will be included in a future grant cycle.

### Mt. Vernon City Hall set for new location

Once a plumbing permit from the state is acquired, the location of the city hall at 199 W. Main will move kitty-corner across the street to 250 W. Main.

The newer building, which was owned by John La Liberté, once housed Oregon Telephone Corporation. La Liberté's late wife, Sue Newstetter, used it as her office. Newstetter is credited with writing the CDBG grant application for funding the renovation of the Mt. Vernon Community Hall.

Kowing said the Mt. Vernon School Alumni Committee was

looking for a spot to house a plethora of trophies and other historical school memorabilia, with some items dating back to the 1920s.

The committee members knew La Liberté's property was for sale, but the building is too large for their needs. Then the idea formed to move city hall to the bigger building and start a museum in the current city hall location.

Plans were made at a city council meeting in January.

Mt. Vernon resident Mary Ellen Brooks bought the building to hold until grant funding could be secured, but a delay on the grant occurred because state offices were experiencing a government shutdown. Two months later, she donated the building to the city.

Brooks did not wish to be named, but city leaders and others involved were overwhelmed at her kindness.

"It's a very tight-knit community, and they support each other, and it's just amazing," Kowing said.

Delano added, "I'm excited, not just because of the new city hall building, but the way that we got it — a bunch of local people came together wanting to display Mt. Vernon's history."

Brooks is not on the alumni committee but is well-known for her love of Mt. Vernon history. She and Lyle Williams wrote a 320-page book of the city's history titled "Mt. Vernon: The Town, the People, the Horse" available for sale at city hall and local stores. It can also be found at the Grant County Library in John Day.

The newer city hall will include the council chambers, offices for Kowing and Public Works Director Bill Cearns and more room for storage.

Currently, the city is painting, replacing flooring and upgrading the bathroom for ADA access.

Delano said the soon-to-be-former city hall will be leased for a modest amount, and the city will pay for water and take care of any future repairs needed for the building.

### Mt. Vernon happenings

The city hasn't seen any new business starts in the past year, but the Silver Spur Cafe now has new owners, Mt. Vernon resident Jackie Osborne and her husband, Todd



Eagle photos/Angel Carpenter  
Suds Pub in downtown Mt. Vernon.

Donohue, who bought it in December of last year.

Osborne is not new to the business.

Her sister Brenda Coley — the current owner of John Day's Snaffle Bit Dinner House — bought the Silver Spur 30 years ago, and Osborne worked there as a cook and waitress at that time.

"Coffee was 40 cents," Osborne said of the earlier days.

Now she has plans to give the cafe a facelift with fresh paint and hanging flower baskets, and she'll open up the patio.

Hours are 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays.

"We bought it because we didn't want our local restaurant to close," Osborne said.

One other restaurant in town is Suds Pub, which offers beer on tap and barbecue meals. It was started by Jesse and Joe Madden three years ago, and is holding steady along with a few other businesses in town.

Oregon Telephone Corporation, with its main office in Mt. Vernon, has been making big plans to bring broadband service to smaller Grant County communities through a public-private partnership with the Grant County Digital Network Coalition. Both entities have submitted grant applications to fund the projects.

Ortelco General Manager DeeDee Kluser told the Eagle that Ortelco has sufficient fiber backbone and employees to absorb the needs of new customers.

Other Mt. Vernon businesses include Ferguson Surveying & Engineering, gas stations Blue Mountain Mini-mart and Chevron Triangle Mini-mart, Shiny Thimble quilt shop, Blue Mountain Lodge, Mt. Vernon RV Park and Hamilton Winery.

Mt. Vernon Grange is a meeting and greeting spot, located across Highway 26 from Clyde Holliday State Park, known for an annual pancake breakfast served by Grange members and the Christmas bazaar in November. They also rent the building out weekly to the Seventh-day Adventist Church for services on Saturdays and a Mennonite church on Sundays.

During election season, political forums are also held at the Grange. Harold Preston is the current master of the Grange, Frances

Preston is secretary and Brooks is treasurer.

Grange members focus on community service, including their involvement in "Words for Thirds," giving away dictionaries to third-graders at Monument, Dayville and Long Creek schools and homeschool students. They also join with members of the American Legion Auxiliary Ellis Tracy Unit 77 to give the books to students at Humbolt Elementary in Canyon City and Seneca School.

The Mt. Vernon Grange has been around for 92 years. It burned to the ground in the late 1940s when it was located at the now-empty Crossroads Service Station — when it burned, it was the first fire responded to by the new Mt. Vernon fire truck. It was rebuilt in 1953 in its current location.

Brooks said Leslie Holland and his family donated the property for the current Grange location, and it was built by the organization's members.

Mt. Vernon Community Hall on Ingle Street sees plenty of activity for meetings, fundraisers, bazaars, weddings, funerals and more.

Kowing, who handles rentals for the hall, said sometimes a party that is rained out at Clyde Holliday park will call to move their gathering indoors.

Newstetter, who died in 2015, was credited for securing grant funding for the hall's big overhaul, which was completed in 2008.

Delano, who is a staff surveyor at Ferguson Surveying, is a long-time Mt. Vernon resident.

He said that he and the other city leaders, including councilors Lori Kerr, Bryan Montague, Mitch Wilson and Mike Cearns Sr., "work exceptionally well together."

City council meetings are on the second Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. at city hall.

"Everyone listens to everyone's opinions, and we're all local people and have been here a long time," Delano said. "We want to take care of our citizens as a governing body, but we don't want to be an overbearing governing body."

He said they're looking ahead to a water system master plan, and a chance to receive ODOT's small city allotment program funding to work on streets.

"I'm hoping we'll get that grant this year," he said, adding they were passed over last year because they had received it the previous year. "We're formulating the things we have to work on the most in town."

Delano said a Memorial Day flash flood last year and spring floods this year brought out the best in their volunteer firefighter and public works staff.

"We have an exceptional volunteer fire department, our city youths and our rural guys," he said. "They were up at the crack of dawn."

He added, "We didn't lose any infrastructure, thanks to the volunteers that came out — we were able to keep everybody pretty safe."