

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Mutual tragedy has created friendships

It's easy to forget how special our families, friends, neighbors and acquaintances are. It's also easy to remember small slights and disagreements.

These last two weeks, with their tragedy, stress, worry and fatigue, have reminded so many of us just how important and how valuable those others are in our lives. How many of us would choose to watch the rising water alone or say "no" to the thoughtful offers of help? A few, yes, but only a few.

The communities in the upper Nehalem Valley had little choice about whether to handle the emergencies alone. There was on one available to help and the few that wanted to help couldn't get here.

Nevertheless, we have much to be grateful for, especially the locally developed emergency command center and the myriad volunteers who helped anyone who needed help.

A few special people should be mentioned:

John and Mary Ann Shaw and their family not only rescued most of a neighborhood, including one woman who had just had open heart surgery, but took more than 50 of the evacuees into their own home, fed them and kept them safe overnight.

Randy Aultman suddenly had to run an emergency shelter and he did so, accepting responsibility for some 200 people while having to leave his family to be watched over by others.

The women at St. Mary's who fed our bodies with hot food and our souls with warm concern.

Kim and Jim Tierney, Sue Cavinee, Genny Fisher and all the others who started the relief effort before FEMA and the Red Cross could find Vernonia on the map—or even find the map.

Debbie Sturdefant for opening up her banquet room at the Sidetrack as a child care center, feeding the children and charging nothing.

Linda Hartman for keeping another 50-60 older children busy and safe; also for helping others by doing their flood-contaminated laundry, free.

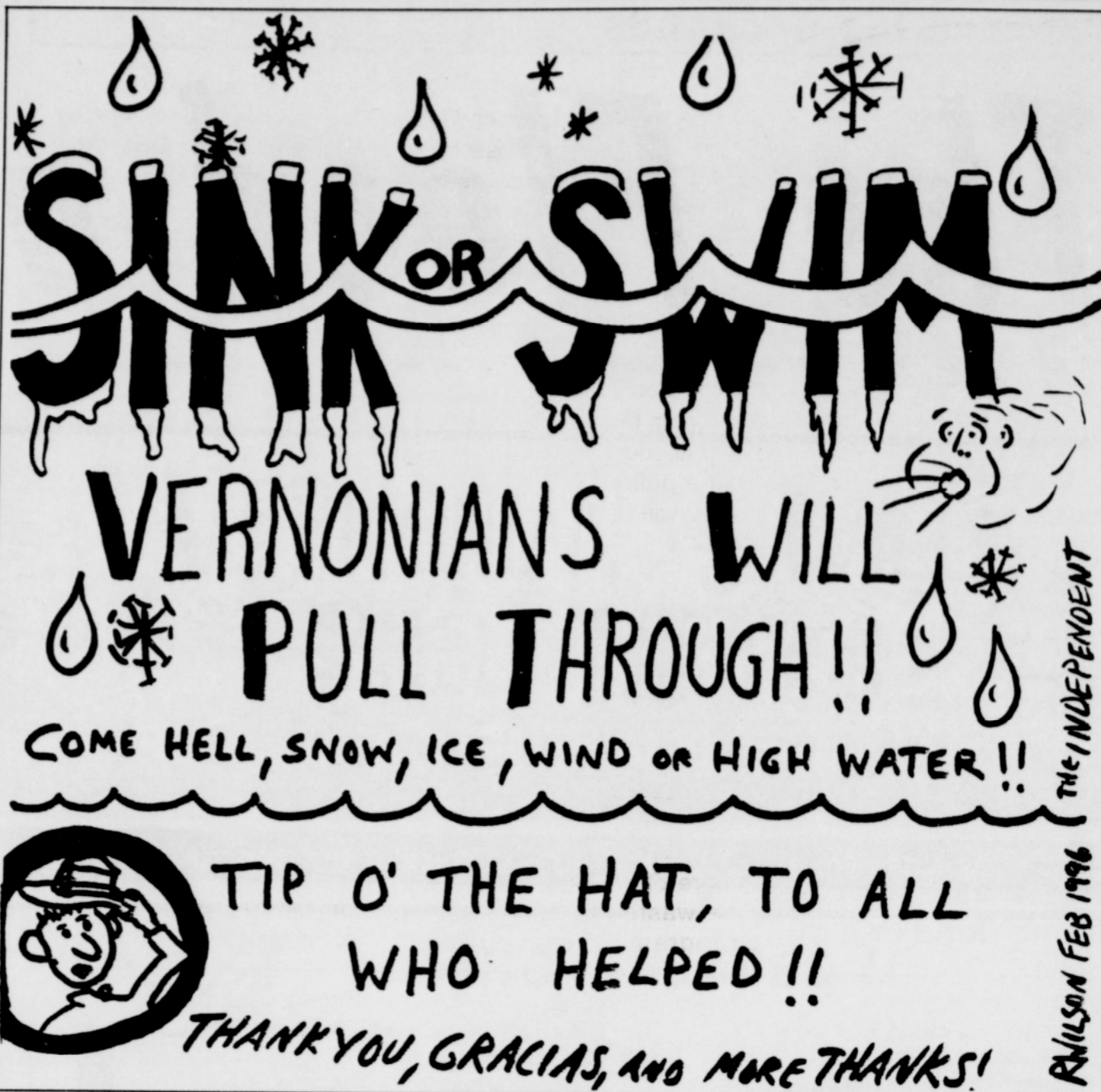
No, we're not ignoring other very important figures; we've just started. In the next issue of *The INDEPENDENT*, we will do considerably more detailed coverage of the flood and its aftermath.

We hope that some valid estimates of recovery costs will be available by that time and that plans will have been started to accomplish the recovery.

Thanks Mayor Hyde and President Clinton

Mayor Tony Hyde was one of a handful of mayors who spoke with President Bill Clinton and, instead of breathing platitudes, he spoke emotionally and from the heart about the lack of help from federal, state and county governments. The President listened carefully and, the next day, FEMA, the National Guard and Red Cross arrived in Vernonia.

It was not a coincident. President Clinton said he would get on the problem right away—and he did what he said he would do.



Boat needed to help people evacuate

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has done so many times in the dark of night. I rolled over and dozed off. Soon, I could hear the scanner crackling with communications and I couldn't stay in bed any longer. Mom was up, and told me the river was rising again. In fact, she thought she heard the pager report a rise of about a foot an hour. I decided it was time to head to the station to give a hand. I arrived at the Incident Command Center, which had been established the day before as the heart of communications for local agencies. It wasn't long before the volunteer firefighters, men and women, were being dispatched to check out roads and residences.

I was teamed up with Jim Hayes, you know, that big barrel-chested guy with the hickory shirt opened all the way to the bottom and that red chest hair hanging out. We were sent to Riverside Drive to check on water conditions in the mobile home park. As we got to the cul-de-sac we noticed the rising water was only a foot away from the pavement. A local police officer was also checking out the situation and we concurred with his decision to evacuate the area. The officer conferred with Police Chief Walters, then began sounding his siren as he drove through the street of mobile homes.

Jim and I returned to the station just as daylight broke and were inside when the call went out for a boat. Since Jim had hijacked his brother's boat the day before, we were ready to go. Our assignment was to evacuate the Barela family from their residence alongside Rock Creek. We launched our boat at the Wa-

ters' (what an appropriate name) residence. The river was right up to the pavement and launching the boat was easy.

We eased our way into the river and took a careful look at what we were getting into. The current was mainly in the channel, but just before the Barela's, some current kicked up next to their garage. Jim forced the boat through the current, just missing the garage and the top of a fence post that barely showed above the swirling currents. We made our way to the upstream side of the house and hung out in an eddy caused by three vehicles that were barely above the turbid water.

Mrs. Barela was quite excited to see us and waved from her upstairs window. After sizing up the exits to the house, we eased into the door of the residence, with the stern of the boat actually inside the house. We dispatched life jackets to the three occupants, then loaded Mrs. Barela and some of their belongings into the boat for our first trip to shore. Rock Creek raged a mere forty yards away, and we knew we mustn't get caught up in its currents with the bridge so close below us.

We eased our way below the house using its eddy as shelter from the currents, then powered across the current toward safety. My heart skipped a beat when we temporarily hung up on a submerged fence, for getting caught up against something in a boat can spell disaster. Freed from the underwater obstacle, we delivered Mrs. Barela to somewhat dry ground and started back for the remaining two occupants.

Back at the house, we dis-

covered Mr. Barela and his son in a canoe that had been tied up outside the home. We watched in disbelief as they headed toward the main current and a fir tree. They barely missed getting tangled up in the tree before they paddled back toward us. Jim and I breathed a big sigh of relief as they made their way past us and into calmer waters. We quickly loaded our boat and started back for the station.

The river was pouring across the street by the Medical Center, but was not on Bridge Street in front of Washington Grade School. We were back at the station just long enough to grab a sandwich, when we were sent to evacuate a woman and two children on Hwy 47 North. Jim said the address sounded familiar, then realized it was where he had once lived. We didn't need our boat this time, the house was still out of the water, but the highway in the Riverview area was under water. We delivered our refugees to the grade school, where the water was now in the street but the sidewalk was still dry.

We returned to the station, grabbed a bite to eat and, once more, we were ordered to the Riverview area. Jim and I crossed the bridge and stopped to check out the water that now poured over the highway. Easing our way through the water, we could see it wasn't above the tire hubs. Before reaching our destination, we were forced to park on the only dry spot we could see, and launch our boat because of high water ahead of us. The current was a lot swifter there and, as we floated down Hwy 47, the wa-

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