

# The INDEPENDENT

Serving the upper Nehalem River valley. Published twice monthly on the first and third Wednesdays of each month, by Public Opinion Laboratory Ltd., 725 Bridge Street, Vernonia, OR 97064, as a free newspaper. Editors and Publishers, Dirk & Noni Andersen, (503) 429-9410.

## Opinion

### Thanksgiving will be meaningful this year

Thanksgiving is a wonderful time to count our blessings and, in spite of the catastrophic situations so many people in the upper Nehalem Valley have faced this year, we have many blessings to count.

There was, of course, the flood that has become a defining moment in the valley: Before the Flood and After the Flood define both horrible and wonderful events.

There were times when it looked like the schools would never get put back together, but look at what has happened. Not only are they mostly usable now, in some ways they are better than ever. Vernonia High School really needed to be rewired in order to accommodate today's technology. Because the flood created a different, more urgent need, it has been rewired and, with the combined efforts of government, businesses and individuals, the results are better than the district could have hoped for, working by itself.

Vernonia Cares was also devastated by the flood, losing all of the emergency food in the valley and all of their refrigerators and freezers. Now, aside from the fact that the need for emergency food has been heavy this year because of circumstances, the all-volunteer program is back on its feet. One way to count our blessings is by generously donating what we can to this vital program. They are conducting a food drive at this time and we urge everyone who can, to please help restock the pantry.

The Oregon Flood Support Project is filling a vital role by helping the children, so many of whom were impacted by the flood in ways adults aren't always able to see. The arts and crafts programs they have conducted since July have given many children the opportunity to work out their anxieties. Incidentally, it's not just for children; they also have programs for adults because anxiety isn't limited to any one age group.

The word "volunteers" always comes up when talking about important happenings in the valley, as it should. If our communities hadn't had the committed people who willingly fill in whenever and wherever they're needed, most of us would still be out of our homes, the schools wouldn't be usable and flood debris would still be strewn all over the valley.

We all know people who volunteer long, long hours for the community and who never seek recognition. It was wonderful, this year, to see our fire and emergency medical volunteers receive recognition at a statewide affair; they deserve it.

But don't forget all the other volunteers, those who serve on boards for their fire districts, schools, city and senior center; those who have worked so hard on flood recovery; those who help out at schools or with Vernonia Pride or the Mist Helping Circle; those who work with the Lions or at the library; those who perform "random acts of kindness."

We are fortunate to live in such a wonderful community. We are rich with the heart of humanity. We wish you a wonderful Thanksgiving Day.

# GOT MILK?

## Ike Says

By Dale Webb, member  
Izaak Walton League, Nehalem Valley Chapter

About a month ago I started noticing something fishy going on down at the Vernonia Water Plant. My stuffy nose could smell the situation even before I got out of my pickup! No, there wasn't a scandal going on with our public works employees, it was the smell of dead salmon in the creek.

The Izaak Walton League conducted summer chinook salmon surveys for Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife again this year and we witnessed one of the most spectacular events of nature. This year's run of salmon was tremendous compared to the two previous years. To give you an example, I surveyed about a quarter-mile of Rock Creek behind the Vernonia Water Plant. In 1994 we observed a maximum of two fish per survey week; in 1995 we saw 31 fish. This year we had a high of 53 fish in one survey and what was more impressive was the following week, with a count of 42 live fish and 48 dead fish.

If you combine these two figures as being fish that spawned in this survey area you would come up with 90 fish in a quarter mile of stream. This is 360 fish per mile! Now, I'm not claiming that's how many fish there were per mile of stream on average, but I would venture to say that it had to run close to about 100 fish per mile. Considering that this run spawns in the Nehalem River from the Jewell area to at least Hwy. 47 at Timber Jct. and up Rock Creek to at least the Keasey Dam site, we are talking about one heck of a lot of fish. I would not be surprised if at least 2,000 fish entered the Rock Creek system alone.

This year, the Ikes were asked by ODF & W to conduct some field collections of these magnificent fish, a request initiated by the National Marine Fisheries Service. The purpose of the project is to secure tissue samples so a "genetic fingerprint" can be developed for this particular run of fish. The genetic fingerprint will help agencies manage this run because they now will be able to identify them in the catch of ocean fisheries. This could be really important in the treaty with Canada. The fingerprint could also be used in law enforcement cases.

Walt Weber, our district fish biologist, approached me with the project and asked if I

thought we could catch at least 30 fish. He must have known that I will try anything at least once. I said that I thought we could.

Walt started laying out the protocols and secured the necessary permits. He also supplied us with styrofoam coolers and a large dip net. We took care of the dry ice and shipping arrangements. I would like to thank the Vernonia Sentry Market and United Parcel Service for their cooperation and diligent service.

The protocol for the project was that we were to secure only spawned-out salmon and the genetic samples must be immediately frozen on dry ice and remain frozen until they reached the lab in Port Orchard, Washington. Our first attempt included about seven volunteers and a seine and a couple guys with dip nets. We found out that salmon don't always go the way you want them to and that we were about a week early; it was questionable whether some of the fish we captured had spawned, so we released them. We caught only 10 fish for about six hours of work.

The next week, my dad and I tried a different tack, capturing the fish one-on-one, without a big group of people and, to our surprise, it worked extremely well. We were able to be more selective in the fish we caught and less disruptive to the other fish in the area. After a fish was caught, it was killed; then we removed an eye, cheek muscle, heart and liver, and placed them in an individual ziplock bag, along with an identification number and location details. The samples were then placed under dry ice in a styrofoam cooler. The temperature of dry ice is around 80 degrees below zero so it just about instantly freeze the tissues. We also removed scale samples for age determination, and kept track of fish length to see a comparison of age to size.

Dad had quite a knack for catching these fish and most of the time he kept me busy taking samples and keeping the documentation straight. I asked him if he had fished at Celilo Falls on the Columbia River as an Indian. Most likely it was a skill developed while pitch-forking coho in the Nehalem in the 50s.

Many times while surveying, I stood in awe as I watched these powerful fish dig massive redds into the river bottom substrate. The most spectacular shows, though, were the males fighting over the females. These fish are

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