

Vernonia ambulance service assigned to Metro West

If residents in the Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District need a paramedic or an ambulance, they will find that, officially, there is no longer a Vernonia Volunteer Ambulance service. But they shouldn't be surprised when Vernonia volunteer EMTs or paramedics arrive.

Although Metro West Ambulance of Hillsboro has received approval from the Columbia County Board of Commissioners to provide ambulance service to Vernonia, local volun-

teers will be providing the same skilled help they did previously.

Since most of the volunteers work full time at other jobs, it became nearly impossible for them to provide 24-hour service in the district. That situation, combined with internal conflicts in the ambulance association, helped the fire dis-

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trict board of directors decide that help must be obtained.

Initially, the district contracted with Metro West for daytime coverage, with volunteers taking night calls. Now, with county approval, the company will operate out of Vernonia using a Vernonia ambulance that Metro West has agreed to purchase.

Volunteer EMTs will continue to provide local service. The only difference is that Metro West now has responsibility for the volunteers' training and di-

rection.

The recently approved contract is for only six months, at which time the ambulance franchise will open for bids.

VRFPD is still without a fire chief, since Steve Weller resigned in April, but the board is in the process of interviewing candidates and hopes to make a selection soon.

In the meantime, Don Webb, who has more than 40 years as a volunteer firefighter in the district, has been directing operations.

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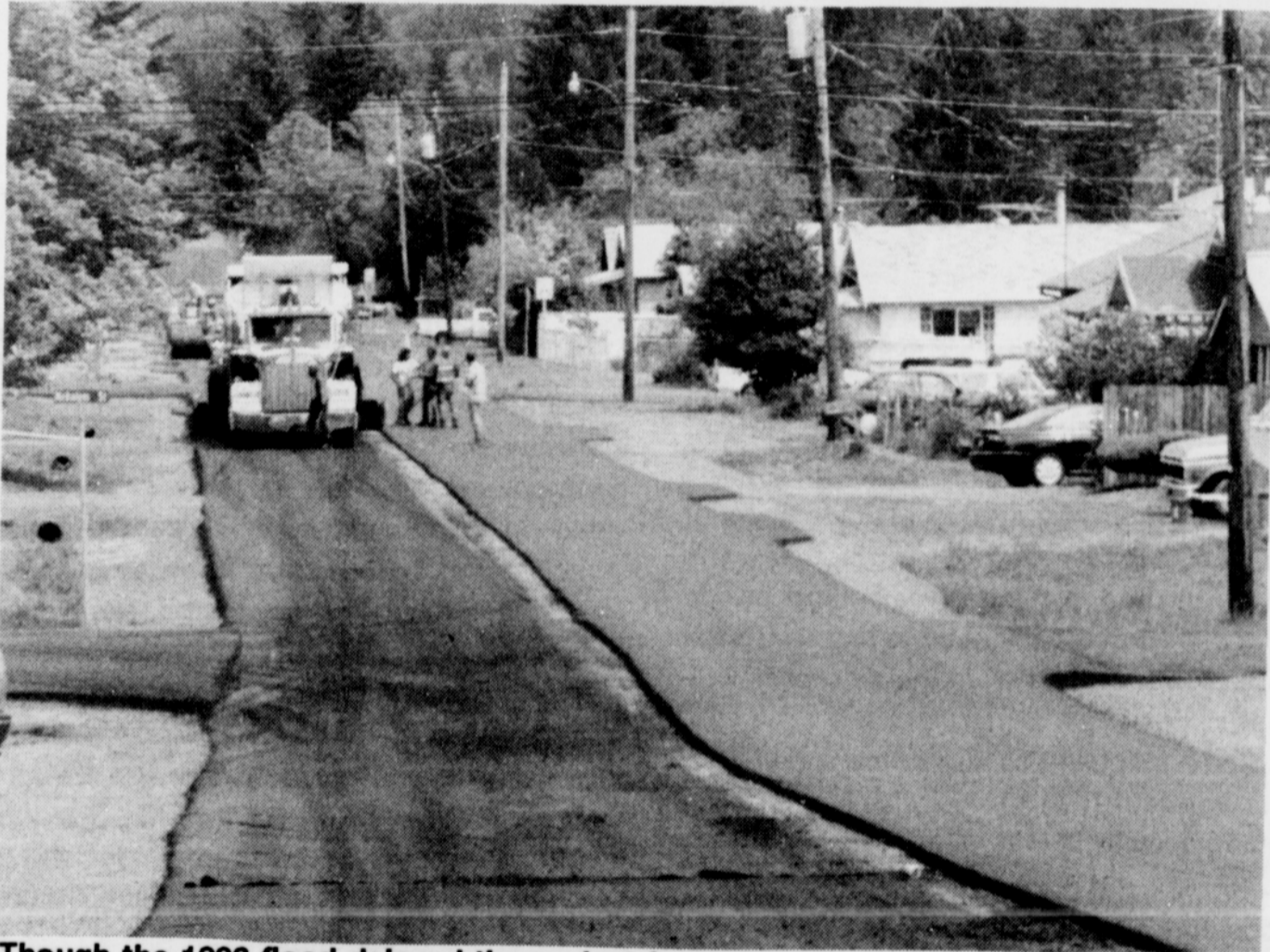
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Smoooth...



Though the 1996 flood delayed the project for a year, when Rose Avenue was finally paved, the combined sighs of relief from people who use the well-traveled street were probably sufficient to cool the hot asphalt. Anderson Park also benefited from a new paving job.

WOEC board hears engineering report

By Jim Buxton

Rex Brown, consulting engineer to West Oregon Electric Cooperative, and Del McGinnis, the COOP's Operations Manager, presented an "Engineering and Operations Update" to the board of directors at the May meeting, Tuesday evening. Among the items presented to the board were:

1. The elimination of a hard-to-maintain power line in a canyon near the tunnel on the Sunset Highway by replacing it with a new-style buried cable along the edge of the highway.

2. The rerouting of a power line near Fishhawk which crosses the Nehalem River, a field and some forest. The line was inaccessible during the recent flooding.

3. Studying the feasibility of helicopter right-of-way line clearing in certain parts of the WOEC service territory. It has been reported to be cost-effective for certain other utilities in the Pacific Northwest.

4. Building a new higher-capacity substation in Vernonia using new and used equipment at bargain-basement prices to back-up and perhaps eventually replace the aging substation, which has been running at nearly full capacity.

5. Continuing to replace old wire that is too small to efficiently carry the load, thereby cutting "line loss". Brown recommended that, as old distribution transformers are replaced, the COOP consider using "low-loss" transformers, even though they are more expensive.

6. Continuing to replace fuses in the line with "re-closers", which are like automatic circuit breakers.

7. Making sure that all distri-

bution tap lines are fused.

8. BPA, which supplies power to WOEC, has made several gross billing errors, prompting WOEC to consider installing its own meters at the BPA connection points. Brown reported that BPA has agreed to update their system to "RMS" metering which, he said "is very accurate". The WOEC office would be able to get daily readings using a telephone line. For that reason, Brown recommended that WOEC not install its own meters.

9. McGinnis told the board that he thinks "System Automation" might be necessary in the future. Manager Russell Green said that there was no staff recommendation at this time, he just wanted it to be part of the engineering discussion.

10. McGinnis listed several other projects which will be taking place this summer.

In other business, the board discussed the use of credit cards for payment of electric bills and decided that it is worth trying.

They voted to implement two policies: No. 212, establishing a "Ready to Work" drug-free workplace at the COOP, and No. 108, a rewrite of the Director's Fees and Expenses policy. More policies will be reviewed at future meetings.

At one point, a member in the audience asked if a further rate cut could be made if the COOP stayed in a relatively profitable position. Manager Green answered that the COOP's present financial goals were to pay off the short-term line of credit with CFC, and then build up a cash reserve. The board might want to retire some capital credits. Another rate reduction would have low priority at this time,

City will sell trees, some land

A crumbling city hall that has more liabilities than it has space has forced the Vernonia City Council to make an uncomfortable decision: They have authorized cutting 60 acres of timber, plus another 20 acres within the city limits, which will then be offered for sale.

The plans displayed in the city library have been reduced in size in order to reduce the \$1.5 million estimated cost of a 10,000 sq. ft. municipal building down to a mere \$1 million.

Only some of the city's timber is old enough to bring top prices, so it is estimated that the sale will bring in about \$750,000. Grants and loans will provide the remainder needed.

Remodeling the present

building isn't feasible. The clay tile that forms the outside walls soak up water every time there is rain (71+ inches in 1996). Then the water slowly leaks out of the tiles and across the floors.

Other problems include insufficient space for all of the departments that must be housed there, a single, ancient bathroom that will never meet ADA standards, and a back wall that was condemned many years ago.

City administrator takes Redmond job

Vernonia City Administrator Vergie Ries will not renew her contract with the city because of an offer she couldn't refuse. The Bend resident, whose four-month contract started three days before the Febru-

ary 1996 flood, will become city manager in Redmond.

She has already taken the position and is returning to Vernonia as needed to help with the budget process and other ongoing situations.

The council is presently interviewing for an interim administrator. They will then start the process of finding a permanent replacement.

Charter review set

Mayor Art Parrow recently appointed seven people to serve on a Charter Review Committee. The appointees are Ken Bateman, Shirlee Daughtry, Elroy Miner, Mario Leonetti, Sharon Parrow, Susann Ragsdale and Noni Andersen.

The initial meeting of the committee has not yet been set.