

# Vernonia Fire District seeks voter approval for bond

Voters in the Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District will be asked to approve a bond issue of \$320,000 on the March 10 mail ballot.

If the measure is approved, the property tax rate in the district would increase by 33-cents for each \$1,000 of value, for a total tax rate of \$1.16 per thousand. This would amount to slightly less than \$100 per year for a property valued at \$85,000. The Vernonia Fire

District presently has the lowest rate in Columbia County. For a comparison, the tax rate in the Mist-Birkenfeld Fire Protection District is 98-cents per thousand; in St. Helens it is \$3.16 per thousand.

The VRFPD board of directors reluctantly agreed to seek the bond issue because of safety issues and aging equipment. The district's newest truck is a 1980 model. A new fire engine will cost \$240,000.

The remainder of the bond amount would be used to purchase a new chassis for the district's rescue vehicle, to convert an older vehicle into a water tender, and to pay bond issuance costs.

The reason for a new chassis is that much more equipment is carried in a rescue vehicle today, so it weighs more and requires much more space than previously. This creates potential transportation prob-

lems in getting equipment to the scene of an emergency and, when response time is urgent, it may slow down putting the equipment into operation.

An additional concern stated by the board is the need to get firefighters off the old, traditional tailboard. Because of safety problems, it is now illegal to purchase a fire engine that requires firefighters to ride outside. New engines are built with crew cabs.

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Vol. 13, No. 2

"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

January 21, 1998

## Winter arrives...



Snowfall on Jan. 10, 11 and 12 resulted in one day off from school with time for sledding, snowball fights and building snowmen.

# County hazard plan underway

Columbia County is holding meetings throughout the County to allow citizen participation in its Hazard Mitigation Planning project. County citizens are encouraged to attend one of this series of public meetings to share their ideas regarding projects that may eliminate or reduce the impacts of future disasters on their communities.

It is the County's hope that local citizens, knowledgeable of their community and its past disasters, will provide the needed information. Local gov-

ernments and emergency response officials have been invited to these meetings to share their knowledge and ideas.

While the focus of the county's plan will be on those areas outside the cities, all information received will be used. Specific information regarding hazards within cities will be passed on to the cities for their hazard mitigation planning efforts.

Meetings have already been held in Mist and Rainier. Following for additional meetings.

## County surveyor fined by state

Columbia County Surveyor Phil Dewey will pay \$3,000 in a negotiated settlement with the Oregon Government Standards and Practices Commission (GSPC) over his failure to submit fees to the county, as required by ordinance, then submit a bill for the fees to the county treasurer.

Dewey has maintained that

he did no harm in bypassing the procedural requirement and the county has said that his accounting for the unsubmitted funds was adequate.

The GSPC found Dewey in violation on nine counts of using an official position for financial gain. Payment of the fine will settle the case.

St. Helens: Thursday, Jan. 22, 7:30 p.m., St. Helens High School Commons.

Scappoose: Tuesday, Jan. 27, 7:30 p.m., Scappoose High School Cafeteria.

Vernonia: Thursday, Jan. 29, 7:30 p.m., Vernonia Fire District Fire Station.

Clatskanie: Thursday, Feb. 5, 7:30 p.m., Clatskanie City Council Chambers.

## City meeting for flood damages

Owners of houses in Vernonia that were "substantially damaged" in the flood plain or floodway during the 1996 floods need to attend a meeting tonight at the Vernonia Fire Station to get applications for reimbursement of costs associated with elevating their homes.

Those property owners who are seeking to relocate also need to attend the meeting. The meeting starts at 7:00 p.m.

# Emergency planning worked during storm

By Noni Andersen

Last week's winter storm brought enough snow to delight the children and close school for a day. It also created potentially hazardous travel conditions.

Locally, most people weren't concerned about the weather until several days of heavy rain were forecast. Because of the snow and ice in the hills, that forecast created anxiety in many people who were flooded out of their homes in February or April of 1996, when conditions were somewhat similar.

This time, however, Vernonia wasn't going to be caught by surprise. The snow started on Saturday evening, Jan. 10, and continued through Sunday and most of Monday and, while it was still snowing, weather forecasters were predicting heavy rains. Everyone involved in Vernonia's emergency plan was called to a meeting at the Fire Station because of possible flooding.

At 6:00 p.m. Monday, Jan. 12, sixteen people arrived, ready to review the plan developed during and after the 1996 emergency...and ready to initiate any part of it deemed necessary. Firefighters had already placed river gauges in the Nehalem and Rock Creek and were monitoring the water's rise. Among the considerations were evacuation routes and evacuation centers, communications, supplies, and potential problems such as locked gates on logging roads. Before the meeting ended, everybody understood their areas of responsibility and everybody at the meeting left with tasks to follow up on.

A second meeting was held Wednesday evening, Jan. 14, with many more people. By this time all of the people who

needed to be involved in case of an actual emergency had been contacted. The initial contacts had been made for evacuation centers, the Red Cross was ready, emergency services (police, fire, medical) were ready, sand bags and sand were available, evacuation routes had been checked and a ham radio station had been set up.

At this time, it appeared there would be little, if any, flooding. Nevertheless, the group continued working on perceived weaknesses in the plan and made a few additions or changes.

A third meeting was held, on Friday, for a final review. People in Vernonia and the surrounding area should be assured that a workable emergency plan is in place and will be updated as needed.

## Red Cross offers disaster training

Beginning and advanced training courses for Red Cross disaster responders in Columbia County will be held Saturday, March 7, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (beginning) and Saturday, March 14 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (advanced) at the Vernonia Fire Department.

Participants in the course will learn the procedures involved in assisting displaced residents, regardless of the cause.

People interested in attending the courses can call (503) 284-0011, ext. 273.

Claudia Johnson and Gayle Shriver of Vernonia, Janis Fletcher, Carolyn Grice, Terry Grice and Ginnie Donner of Rainier, and Bonnie Harris of Columbia City have all completed training, making them able to assist their neighbors in times of disaster.