

# The INDEPENDENT

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## Opinion

### Flood threat created interesting situation

The meetings recounted in the lead article on page one triggered some interesting conversations as people reviewed the situations faced in 1996 as a result of massive flooding.

One that kept bobbing to the surface with remarkably little assistance was whether the community should have saved the switch in the GTE telephone building and whether the effort would be made again. Everybody agreed that it was important to maintain that communication link, if possible, but...

At this point, several variations developed, but they all revolved around the foot dragging by GTE in replacing the outdated equipment. One person suggested that the number of volunteers needed for that single task was a waste of manpower, because they could have been helping a lot of people, not just the phone company.

Another said it was okay to use volunteers to help keep the switch dry, but only if they weren't needed elsewhere. A third person said it was a waste of effort because the long distance lines were out, anyway. Still another said the biggest mistake we made in 1996 was saving that blankety-blankety switch because GTE will never replace it.

On behalf of the people who had an opinion and the many more who just listened and nodded, here's a question:

GTE, when are you going to replace the outdated equipment in Vernonia with a switch that will allow local telephone customers to access caller ID and other such modern wonders? Before you answer, there is one condition: Don't use the Public Utilities Commission as an excuse for not modernizing; you can upgrade equipment when you want to.

In an entirely different vein, but related to the potential emergency situation, some local person, or persons, nearly created havoc last Wednesday by starting and spreading the reprehensible rumor that flooding was starting and the town had to evacuate in three hours.

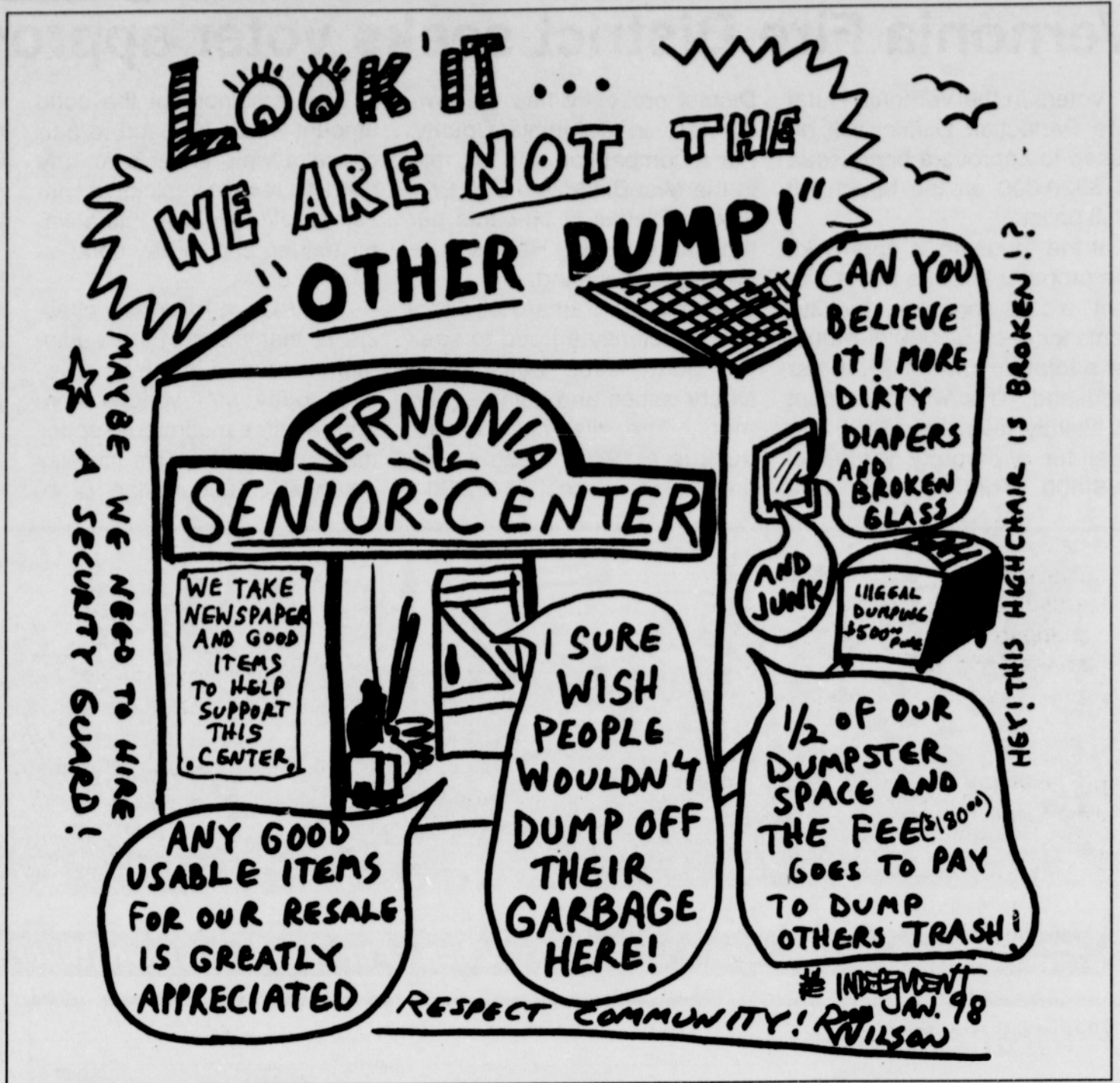
This not only panicked many people, it tied up at least one phone line at the fire station because so many people tried to find out whether the rumor was true. This isn't only irresponsible, it's dangerous. In any real emergency, emergency service phones must be available.

The people of Vernonia can be assured that they will be notified by properly identified emergency personnel if such a situation exists.

### Another consideration...

The hallway of every man's life is paced with pictures; pictures gay and pictures gloomy, all useful, for if we be wise, we can learn from them a richer and braver way to live.

Sean O'Casey  
Irish Playwright, 1880-1964



### Sometimes land use regulations can make a muddle out of a mud puddle

The INDEPENDENT supports good land use planning and applications. Nevertheless, there are times when good planning can be torpedoed by people who haven't done their homework. This one of those examples.

By David Hunnicutt

Bill Roberts owns four acres in Happy Valley, a small town on the edge of southeast Portland. In response to LCDC's goals, our friends at Happy Valley City Hall decided that there may be a few mud puddles that qualify as "wetlands" in Happy Valley. In order to make this determination official, the city hired a wetlands "expert" to locate all the mud puddles in Happy Valley. Once all of the puddles had been located, they would be mapped, and the city would adopt zoning laws to preserve them in their pristine state.

Being a dutiful worker, the city's "expert" drove up and down the streets of Happy Valley looking for mud puddles. Unfortunately for Mr. Roberts, the "expert" found a mud puddle on Mr. Roberts' property. Unbeknownst to Mr. Roberts, the "expert" summoned a couple of additional "experts" who trespassed onto Mr. Roberts' property and took two samples of dirt from the puddle. After serious scientific analysis, the "experts" decided that Mr. Roberts' puddle was a "wetland" and informed the folks at city hall of their results. The city placed Mr. Roberts' mud puddle on their wetlands map, and put Mr. Roberts' property in the Significant Natural Resource Lands zone.

Mr. Roberts had no knowledge of any of these actions, because the city never bothered to notify Mr. Roberts of the actions, either before or after they had occurred. So how did Mr. Roberts find out his land was a "wetland"? A potential

purchaser of his property told him. You see, Mr. Roberts decided to sell a portion of his land, as his health no longer allows him to maintain the property. When he put the property on the market, a person interested in buying the property told him he would give Mr. Roberts far less than his asking price, because the property was a "wetland" according to City Hall.

Needless to say, Mr. Roberts was quite upset for a number of reasons. First, the city had determined that his mud puddle was a wetland without ever bothering to personally notify him of their intent to do so. Second, the city's "experts" trespassed on Mr. Roberts' land. Third, the only reason Mr. Roberts' mud puddle forms (it only exists during the rainy season) is that the culvert under the public road next to Mr. Roberts' property fills with debris and isn't cleaned out by the city, county or state. In other words, Mr. Roberts wouldn't have a mud puddle to call a wetland if the government maintained its culvert.

Now for the worst part of this story. Having received the bad news from the potential purchaser of his property Mr. Roberts marched down to City hall to find out who was responsible for declaring his mud puddle a "wetland". When the city informed him about the "experts", Mr. Roberts contacted one of them and invited him back to the property. When the "expert" arrived, Mr. Roberts asked him whether his mud puddle was truly a "wetland". The "expert" replied that he really wasn't sure, but if Mr. Roberts would pay him \$2,500, he would do another study of the property! Well gee, if you're not sure, why did you put the mud puddle on the wetland inventory to begin with!?

No wonder people don't trust the land use process.

Reprinted from Oregonians In Action