



Stress disappears in the calm waters of Vernonia Lake as a lone angler enjoys a pleasant day.

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THE INDEPENDENT

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Can you dig it...



It was a long time coming, but official groundbreaking ceremonies July 9th finally signaled the beginning of construction for a new Columbia County jail. Sheriff Phil Derby leads law enforcement officials and attorneys as they all dig in. Chronicle photo

New jail and justice center gets underway

After almost a year of study, volunteers who formed an advisory committee and worked arduously, both on their own and with a consultant, to determine what Columbia County needed to replace its old, cramped and inadequate jail, agreed that the county Board of Commissioners should ask voters to approve a bond issue for a new justice center.

In an era when most fiscal ballot measures have resembled comets heading beyond the horizon, Columbia County's voters agreed that a new jail was necessary and approved a \$13.9 million bond measure.

Everything looked good until numerous snags interfered with siting the jail where county officials had determined was the best site. The site, on Port Road and Old Portland Road in St. Helens, was too large for the jail and the bank that had foreclosed on the property many years ago wanted to sell the entire 49-acre parcel, not just a part of it. So the county found a partner interested in locating on the site, but that fell through.

The next arrangement didn't work, either; nor the third offer.

Finally, nearly 18 months after the advisory committee was formed, the county was able to buy 11 of the 49 acres for \$500,000.

At the groundbreaking on July 9, about 100 people braved the 90+ degree heat to talk about the effort involved in putting the project together.

Sheriff Phil Derby recounted those efforts and introduced many others involved, including a happy jail manager, Lt. Jim Gibson.

Construction is now underway, with a December 1 target date for completing site prepara-

tion and pouring the concrete footings, floor and walls. The weather will be a factor in this initial phase, but once it is done, the roof can go on and construction can continue throughout the winter on the 46,000 square feet facility that is designed to hold up to 195 inmates.

The current county jail has a capacity of 33 male and six female inmates. It is usually overcrowded, requiring the county to rent beds in other facilities and/or release prisoners before they complete their sentences.

Because of the delay, what was initially a \$13.9 million project is now a \$14.7 million project, so the county will have to find ways to finance the additional sum.

The county asked the City of St. Helens for a variance to delay sidewalk construction at the new facility so the estimated \$257,000 for sidewalks could be used on jail construction. The variance was not granted because others must construct sidewalks.

WOEC/PGE sale goes to PUC

The proposed sale of PGE's service territory in Columbia County to West Oregon Electric Cooperative has taken the next step.

PGE has filed an application with the Oregon Public Utilities Commission, asking to transfer its service territory to WOEC. Such an application would normally require about six months for determination, but this request may take longer because of potential initiatives on the ballot in September or November.

Petitions being passed in the four Columbia County cities that would be affected by the proposal—Scappoose, St. Helens, Columbia City and Rainier—are seeking to be annexed into a Public Utility District. Four of the petitions ask for annexation to the Columbia River PUD and a fifth petition being circulated in Rainier seeks annexation to the Clatskanie PUD.

A public hearing on the annexation petitions must be held by the Columbia County Board of Commissioners. The hearing is scheduled for September 8 at 7:00 p.m. in room 308 of the county courthouse.

The purpose of the hearing is to set boundaries for the pro-

posed annexations. The boundaries used in the agreement between PGE and WOEC are the city limits of each of the four cities as of 1940. It is unclear whether the commissioners could change those boundaries, but it is highly unlikely that they would want to do so.

Strand, Blum will lead 47J board

Carla Strand will head the board of directors for Vernonia School District 47J during the 1999-2000 term, with Jeff Blum as vice-chairman. The two were unanimously elected by their fellow board members at the board's annual organizational meeting in July.

The board accepted the resignations of junior high school science teacher Kathy Kuskie and Vernonia Youth Corps teacher Kristi Hickox. Hickox has accepted a position with the Northwest Regional ESD. In other personnel action,

Judi Gwin was approved for the position of secondary special education teacher, a position she filled in the spring semester on a temporary contract.

The board also approved the bargaining agreement for classified employees, with previously agreed upon modifications.

Regular school board meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month at 8:00 p.m. in the district office. The public is welcome to attend.

Bill Greene, former county planner, dies

Bill Greene, long-time head of Columbia County Land Development Services, collapsed at his home Sunday evening, July 18. He was taken by Scappoose Fire District ambulance to Legacy Emanuel Hospital but did not recover.

Greene, a retired Scappoose resident, had recently accepted a part-time position as planner for the City of Vernonia.

Few details were available at press time. A full obituary will be in the next issue of *The INDEPENDENT*.