

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

What is important in education of youth?

Just when those elements of education that help create a habit of lifelong learning are becoming increasingly important, the Vernonia School District is facing budgetary constraints that may reverse the trend.

More money is needed for textbooks. New books are of limited value when they are available only in the classroom, and can't be used at home. Good study habits require being able to obtain the necessary resources.

Music, which study after study confirms is one of the best exercises for increasing mathematical ability, is being slowly starved at the same time more students are attracted to it. It is also an element of learning that provides value long after people are out of high school.

Drama, easily the best way to instill confidence in students as they learn to get up in front of an audience and communicate, is already moribund. Again, this is an element of learning that provides value long after people are out of high school.

Cutbacks in science and technology will return our students to the end of the line in test scores, just as they are finally breaking out of that old mold.

Is there a bright picture here? Of course! The budget for extracurricular sports is increased!

Without sarcasm, it is obvious that a good sports program is also important. The question here is one of education.

If the district cannot afford materials for science and technology; if the district cannot afford enough textbooks; if musicians must provide their own expensive instruments; how can the district afford to spend so much money on extracurricular sports? Why aren't athletes required to buy their own uniforms? Or their own equipment?

A group that wants to sponsor an equestrian team for the high school is planning to do just that — pick up the costs for the competition — because the program would benefit students.

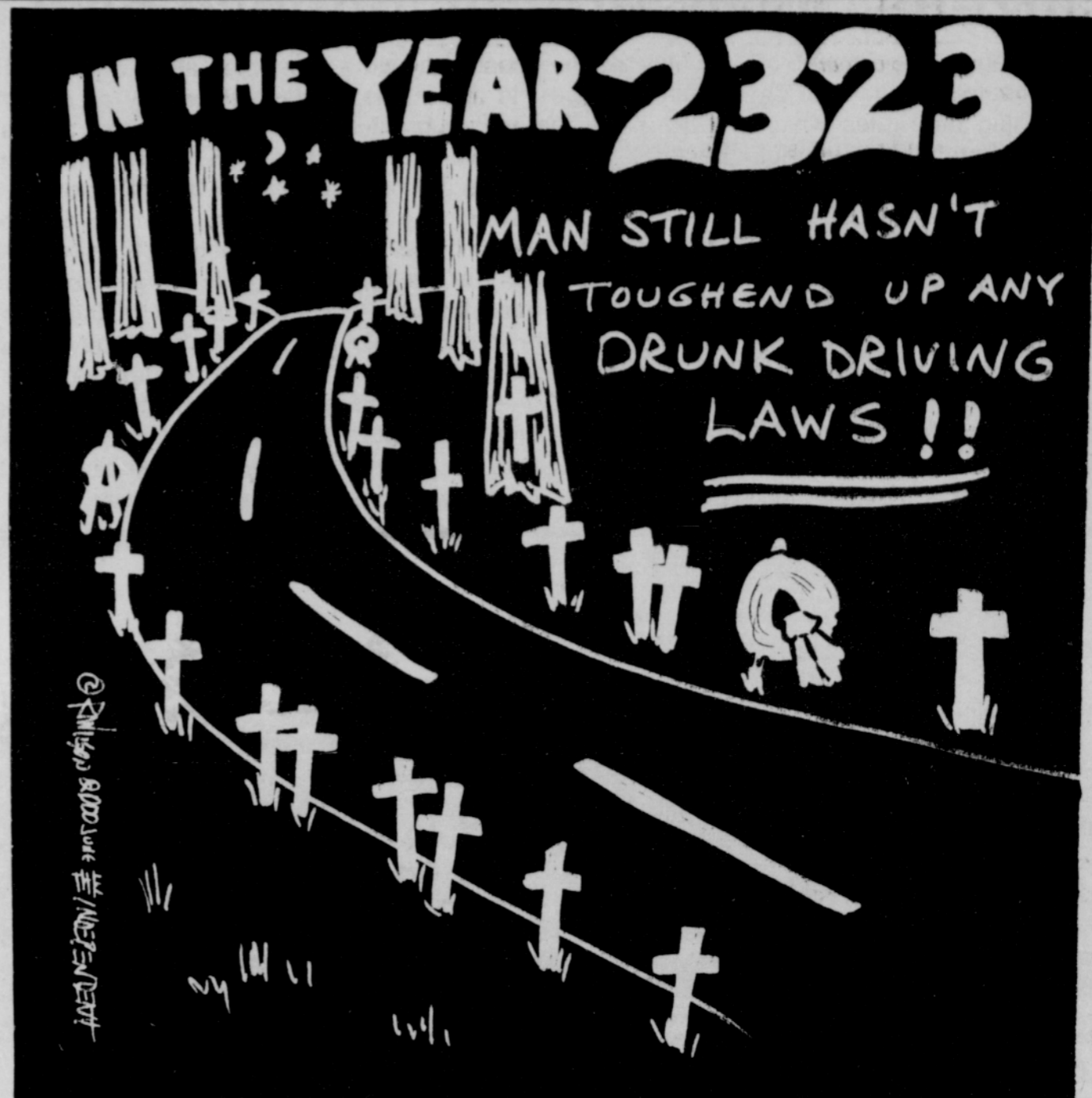
Others who feel that sports are important need to consider ways to raise the funds for that activity.

If the district cannot afford textbooks, science and technology materials, musical instruments or a drama program, then the district cannot afford football and basketball and volleyball and track and golf and baseball and softball teams.

Forestry exhibit at library

Although "sustainable" forestry is defined in many different ways, the worst thing we can do is close our minds to possibilities. The timber industry has changed so much over the last 80 years that we would be foolish to think we have all the answers now.

The Coast Range Association, which uses a very conservative forestry model, is presenting an exhibit at the Vernonia Public Library June 7th and 8th. This is not an "in your face" exhibit, but a serious approach to problems created by some forest practices. Take a look at it; it's interesting.



Ike Says . . .

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

Did you notice how nice and pretty the Nehalem River looked at the first of June? It seemed to shimmer with an almost fluorescent green color...or was that something floating on the surface?

The reality is that the pretty color and designs on the surface of the water were made by pond scum from Vernonia's sewage treatment facility. Duckweed was being sucked off the surface of the last effluent pond and into the discharge pipe that empties into a submerged diffuser pipe buried in the river bottom. It was an eerie sight watching a green plume of duckweed emerging from a softball-size spot in the river bottom and spreading rapidly across the surface of the Nehalem River. Within a hundred yards, the duckweed had spread across the entire surface of the river and was coating the banks and any surface that collected surface debris.

I first spotted something different about the river while crossing the green steel bridge at Riverview. After taking a closer look, I had a very good idea where it was coming from and, with a quick ride on my bike, found the source. I knew that what I was seeing was not normal, and that the authorities needed to be notified. The agency in charge for this kind of oversight is the state Department of Environmental Quality, and with a quick phone call, the ball was rolling. Some people seem offended by this action. I believe they would like to keep these kinds of problems "in house," but I found out a long time ago that playing that game usually results in repeat occurrences and denials of wrongdoing once the evidence is gone. Besides, I am not a cop, and who is responsible for following up on this problem once I report it?

Is this duckweed release a major problem? Probably not, if it can be stopped. The duckweed is part of the biological process in the sewage lagoons, as it consumes the nutrients in the water. Yet the duckweed needs to stay in the ponds so it does not release its nutrients into the river. The most serious threat from Duckweed plume is that when the plants start to die, the decomposition of the organic material will absorb oxygen from the river water and could lower the oxygen level enough to kill fish. Potentially, Vernonia could be one of the first cities prosecuted under the Endangered Species Act for a takings of coho salmon in the new coastal listed area.

The aspect of this whole affair that has me most worried is evidence of an obvious problem

with Vernonia's sewage system. Under the original discharge permit, effluent flows are supposed to stop every year on May 1st, but the flows have not been stopped due to a problem with the system. I was under the impression that our community had spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to solve this problem, yet it persists. The green duckweed was like dropping a dye pack in the sewage pond and then watching how much effect it has on the Nehalem River system. The observation I made answered this question with a dramatic "very much."

I could not fathom letting my children play in the river knowing that they were surrounded by Duckweed that just hours before was in a sewage pond. Yet many of us have probably done so with water that had, only hours before, been in the lagoon. The difference is, we can see the duckweed but we cannot tell sewage water from river water.

Most of the duckweed I observed was trapped by eddies and instream debris by the time it reached the East Fork of the Nehalem River. We can only hope this problem will be solved and that the negative effects on our natural resources and our quality of life will be short lived.

In a week or so it will be Father's day. A few weeks ago, my father and I took our annual trip to Oxbow Reservoir on the Snake River. We had a very good time fishing, eating, drinking and sleeping. Life on the Snake was very simplistic, the main goal being to catch a bucket of fish, then returning to camp to fillet the fish and recharge our batteries, then go catch another bucket of fish. Crappies, bluegill, and catfish were our main targets with a few bass making a surprise showing when they smashed our crappie jigs. At one point, while catfishing, the action was so hot that we had to race to bait a second hook that we were swapping back and forth on the main rigging before a fish would hit. Many times Dad was caught with crappie guts all over his fingers while his pole danced wildly in the pole holder.

Making a trip to the Snake takes considerable effort and it seems like my dad always gets burdened with the responsibility for gathering all of the gear. Then, when we get home, he ends up having to clean up most of the gear and the boat, with dried fish slime and guts on its hull. Being a working stiff, it is easy to justify my absence, yet I do feel guilty for not carrying my share of the load. Dad, do know that your efforts are deeply appreciated and we have shared many great ad

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