

Vernonia: A small town with a healthy attitude,

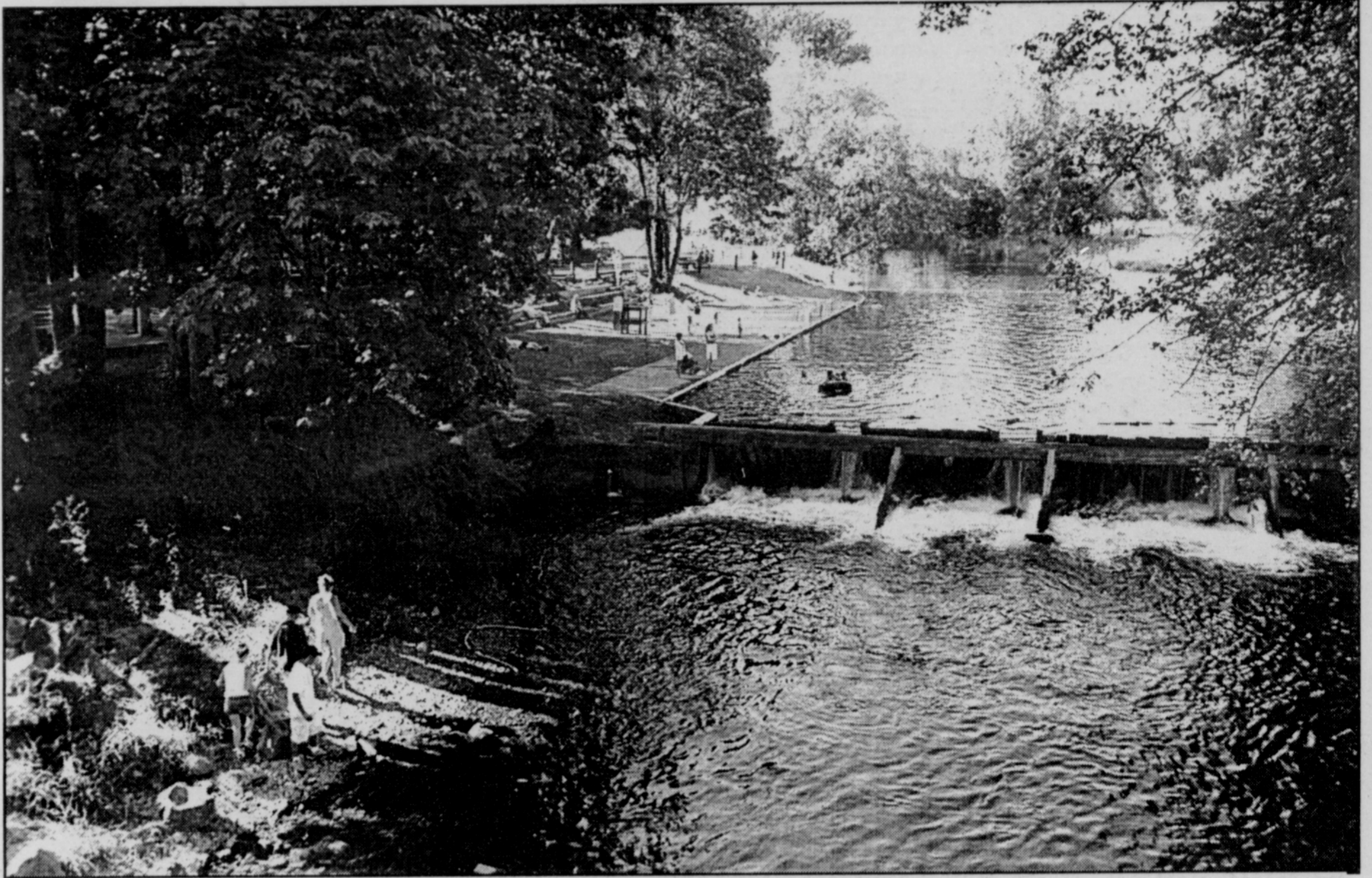
Vernonia appears to have adopted the theme "Full Steam Ahead Into the New Millennium" a few years ago. The City, its businesses and its residents are involved in a remarkable round of improvements.

Outdoor recreation is still the primary focus for non-intrusive, merchant-friendly economic development, with the Banks-Vernonia Linear Park as the anchor. But the B-V trail is just the tip of the recreational iceberg.

Well-thought-out projects bring in major grant funds

This year, the City has received grants for about \$450,000 for park improvements and expansion. These funds will extend and pave the B-V trail from Anderson Park to Lake Vernonia and construct two handicapped-accessible fishing piers at the lake. Anderson Park will see major renovations, replacing worn infrastructure for RV spaces, plus new restrooms, showers and cooking facility, and a sheltered picnic area.

Also being worked on are a primitive (tent) camping area and acquisition of land for increased parking at the lake. In the meantime, the pool area at Hawkins Park has been landscaped, a



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Vernonia has one of the last free-flowing municipal swimming pools in the state. Rock Creek is dammed each year from mid-June until school starts. In the foreground, people are exploring the streamside below the temporary timber dam erected by the City. A life guard is on duty most days.

drainage system and other improvements are underway for Spencer Park's ball fields, and plans are in place for major improvements to Ora Bolmeier Park, Shay Park and Airport Park.

Organization and enthusiasm are effective tools

Despite a population under 2,500, Vernonia has the organization and enthusiasm needed to maximize the efforts of volunteers, City staff and contractors who are involved in these ongoing efforts. It's "Full Steam Ahead..."

Merchants undaunted with torn up streets and missing sidewalks

In 1999, the City's 60 and 70-year-old water distribution system was replaced, with major disruption to downtown businesses because the water mains ran under the sidewalks. Though it was difficult, instead of reacting with anger and frustration over the lack of sidewalks for most of the summer, local business owners crossed their fingers and waited through the turmoil and loss of income. When the job was completed, they felt they had earned the new sidewalks, street lights and landscaping. Now, as more flowers and new trash receptacles are being added, the business section is even more attractive.

Merchants are also improving the appearance of many buildings, with some projects completed, some underway and more in various stages of planning.

City Hall and Library capped 1999 efforts

In 1999, Vernonia saw the completion of a new city hall and library. A million-dollar project, the city hall and most of the library were paid for with earnings from city-owned timber. Library construction was aided by an \$80,000 grant from the state library, plus a couple of private grants for furnishings. They were built on donated, surplus state-owned property.

Residential, industrial properties upgrading

Residential properties are also following the trend. The streets are in, utilities have been placed underground and the lots are ready for construction at Nickerson Ridge, a new residential development off of Knott Street. Plans have been approved for the first phase of townhouse residences at Cedar Mill, a new development within walking distance of downtown. The City of Vernonia has 20 undeveloped acres, as well, that are zoned for residential development.

Light industrial property is also available and industries that could provide local jobs would be welcomed with open arms. Utilities haven't yet been extended into these properties but are adjacent to them.



JUDY HILL/THE INDEPENDENT

A busy commercial street, Bridge Street is also the north-south through route for Oregon Highway 47, known as the Nehalem River Highway.

A big "Thank you" to the agencies who have helped

The State of Oregon, Federal agencies, the Northwest Oregon Economic Alliance, and Columbia County have been vital in this small town's efforts. The City financed the desperately needed new City Hall and Library, but could not complete other big projects without the help of the loans and grants provided by these agencies.