

The INDEPENDENT

Serving the upper Nehalem River valley. Published twice monthly, on the first and third Wednesdays of each month, by Public Opinion Laboratory Ltd., 725 Bridge Street, Vernonia, OR 97064, as a free newspaper. Editors and Publishers, Dirk & Noni Andersen. Phone/Fax: 503-429-9410, e-mail: noni@vernonia.com

Opinion

Available: Viable not-for-profit 501(c) (3)

No, this isn't a hoax. When the Hands On Art Center was formed in 1996, its Mission Statement was written to encompass nearly any activity or project that would provide a creative learning environment for children and adults in Vernonia.

The mission statement includes activities that create bridges between people of all ages and that encourage the sharing of skills, resources, knowledge and wisdom. Also included are activities that expose the community to visual and performing arts through classes, workshops, exhibitions and performances, that encourage and assist students in collaborating with the larger community in educational and social venues, and much more.

The mission statement adequately covers the Hands-On-Art-Center and the Wheels Park Project, two projects that were/are creative learning projects that required mixed-age exposure and cooperation.

Now the two people who have kept these efforts alive have changed circumstances. MiChele Kunkel will be moving out of state to attend the Art Institute of Chicago and Michelle Blum is focusing on family needs and interests. They will not be able to continue shepherding HOAC and its spin-offs.

They are seeking four people who will continue these creative efforts and who want to partner in "building community" in Vernonia. A management structure is in place. For more information, call Blum at 503-429-0159, or Kunkel at 503-429-8034.

Earthquake exercise is a sensible learning effort

Everybody wants to avoid calamity, if at all possible. Unfortunately, it isn't always possible, and that is when preparation is invaluable.

Vernonia is one of the few Columbia County cities that has been working hard at developing a good emergency plan and, even before receiving an invitation to participate in MetroQuake '01, was planning to include an earthquake exercise.

Since most people here have never experienced an earthquake (except for the little jolt last month), it is even more important to learn everything possible. Obviously, all emergency and other public agencies need to know what to do, but so do ordinary citizens. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

Do you know how and where to shut off your gas or propane? Electricity? Water?

Do you know the safest place to stand in an earthquake?

Do you children know where to go if they can't get home and can't reach you?

Learn more by joining the earthquake exercise next week, and pick up the manual "Before Disaster Strikes—How Families and Individuals Can Prepare." It will be available at City Hall and Library, Fire Station, Post Office, School Libraries and *The INDEPENDENT*.

It's smart to be prepared.



Ike Says...

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

Spring has sprung and it is a wonderful time of year. One reason this spring has been so enjoyable is the lack of rain. In fact, the whole winter has been exceptionally dry. Many of you have been wondering what effect this may have on local fish populations. A lot of adult Coho salmon were hung up in the mainstem of the Nehalem River because there wasn't enough water flow from the tributaries to let them get upstream. Then it rained and the fish shot up the tributaries to their usual spawning grounds. They may have been held up long enough, though, that some spawned in the mainstem or very low in the tributaries. Whether this will become a problem depends on the weather this summer. If summer is hot and dry, as expected, the fry from last fall's spawning will meet some very hostile conditions. There is also concern that some redds (fish eggs in the gravel) may have dewatered due to low flows this winter. This would mean certain death to the eggs.

On the positive side, there has not been even one high turbidity event this winter, which has provided a very healthful environment for fish. They also should have expended far less energy than usual, since they did not have to battle high stream flows, and I think food may have been more abundant due to the milder weather.

There was a big increase in Coho salmon returning to the Nehalem this year. The preliminary number was over 17,000, about four times over the last ten-year average. This is great news and may indicate that the flood of 1996 improved conditions for Coho in the Nehalem. The fish that returned last fall were the offspring of the fish that returned in the fall of 1996. After being spawned, they emerged from the gravel in the spring of 1997, smolted in the spring of 1998, were in the ocean for the whole year of 1999, then returned and spawned in the fall of 2000.

Winter steelhead have seen similar impacts from the weather, although, since they return later in the year, they probably missed having the water level drop low enough to damage their redds. It's likely that the only problem for winter steelhead is increased vulnerability to local fishermen on their spawning beds.

Chinook salmon have had ideal conditions for their offspring, which should be out of the gravel by now and starting their slow migration toward the estuary. Chinook numbers were up this year and if there is not a high mortality rate on this run of fish, from now until they return, we should

have a bumper crop in four years.

Vernonia Lake is being stocked with catchable size trout and the fishing has been good. Local fishermen are having luck using rooster tails and copper bladed spoons. The new fishing piers are receiving a lot of use and handicapped people have been enjoying the new facilities.

The fishing piers were, in part, a project of the Izaak Walton League. My father, Don Webb, was the lead in pushing this idea and in helping secure the funding for the project. After failing in his first attempt for a grant from the Restoration and Enhancement board, he approached the City of Vernonia about applying for a grant, since a larger matching share was needed than the Izaak Walton League could handle alone. Vernonia Public Works Director Robyn Bassett submitted a new grant application and approximately \$38,000 was awarded. The money for this project came from fishing license fees. The Izaak Walton league provided manpower to establish bulk heads for the new piers and the city provided heavy equipment. Donald Dennis helped with the cement forms and provided additional manpower and finishing when the concrete was poured. Steve and Dennis Weller provided their self-loader log trucks to off-load the piers when they arrived. The contractor, Topper Industries, did a wonderful job, even in the difficult conditions of the second day, when it snowed. I would like to thank everybody involved in this project, which made Vernonia just a little bit nicer place to call home.

Recent beautiful weather had me itching to go kayaking, but my regular boating partner was unavailable. I happened to get a phone call from a person in Banks asking what the river conditions were and stating they were going canoeing the next day. I told him the conditions and, being slow in the head, didn't ask if I could join his party. The idea struck after I got off the phone and I started kicking myself for not thinking of it sooner. I didn't have the caller's name, so all I knew was that they planned to start their trip at Anderson Park. So, the next day, I made a couple of passes through Anderson Park and, finally, I lucked out and ran into the canoeists. The canoeing party consisted of Tom Cook, his two daughters and two sons. Tom quickly welcomed me to go along with them and his wife provided the shuttle to our ending point at Big Eddy County Park.

The weather was gorgeous, with the temperature just warm enough so I didn't have to wear my paddle jacket. I even had to apply sunscreen to the body parts exposed by my Farmer John

MARCH 2001 Ralissa # INDEPENDENT

Please see page 12