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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

May 16, 2002

Hard work, big smiles...



A hard-working crew of students with the Oregon Youth Conservation Corps paused to smile at the photographer while working on the banks of Bear Creek, between Vernonia City Hall and the Vernonia Public Library. The students have spent several days removing nuisance plants and helping create a healthy riparian area. This OYCC crew, under the supervision of Anna Vacca, is from St. Helens.

Artifacts missing; museum locked up

By Noni Andersen

During a public meeting last month with the Columbia County Board of Commissioners, long-time volunteers at the Vernonia museum of the Columbia County Historical Society expressed dismay at being treated as though they weren't trustworthy, and felt that Historical Society President Bob Brown was trying to replace them with volunteers from other areas. A particular frustration was that Brown had locked them out of parts of the museum and had asked them to give him their keys, which they refused to do. They were also dissatisfied with greatly reduced public access, because the museum

was being kept open only a half day per week.

Brown and society director Charles Grant said little in response.

Commission chair Tony Hyde said he would have the county counsel's office research all agreements between the county and the Historical Society in order to clarify the relationships. The county allocates funds each year for the historical society's museum operations in both St. Helens and Vernonia. The City of Vernonia owns the local museum building, which is leased to the county. Following that meeting, the volunteers felt that, with the aid of the Commissioners, ar-

reas of disagreement could be rectified.

Until last week, that is, when volunteer Faye Sword reported to the Commissioners and to the City of Vernonia that some Indian artifacts were missing from the local collection. It was impossible to tell whether they had been stolen or had been removed by someone with a key. No accusations were made, but the commissioners responded by locking up the local museum and locking every one out.

Another meeting was held last Tuesday. Again, representatives from Vernonia talked with the commissioners. Again,

Please see page 14

"Half full" approach for 47J's fiscal year

Vernonia School District Superintendent Larry McClellan offered reflections on the state of education funding, from his perspective of thirty years in education, at the first meeting of the district's Budget Committee on May 9. The full committee, in an unprecedented show of attendance that included all 14 members, listened as McClellan stressed that he and the administrative team were trying to remain positive by looking at the budget as a "glass that is one-half full," rather than one-half empty.

While preparing for the budget overview, McClellan considered the level of support and services available — and the corresponding level of programs available to students — in the 1970s. In today's Vernonia district, that would include two additional teachers at both the high school and grade school levels, full time librarians in each school, a school nurse, and a much greater level of education resources. To supply that level of service, he calculated, the district would need approximately \$1.7 million more than is currently available, or almost 30-percent more than the current 2001-2002 budget.

Quoting from the 2000-2001 budget message, McClellan explained that voter-approved property tax measures in the early 1990s changed school

funding dramatically. Prior to that time, schools were funded primarily through local property taxes. School funding is now controlled by the state legislature, which sets the revenue available for each district. The funds allocated are now based on a formula that ties local property taxes to the amount of funds available from the state. Timber revenue is also included in the formula. The result is that an increase or decrease in any one revenue source has no effect on the total that the school receives.

Because of the changes, McClellan explained, the state general fund, which is derived mostly from income taxes, is now a significant source of revenue for schools. In good economic times, income tax revenues are strong. In a weak economy, income tax revenues fall, directly impacting the amount of money available for school districts.

However, the budget committee process remains critical, McClellan said. "The challenge (to budget committee members) is to communicate the budget to the public. School funding is a major issue that we can no longer ignore. We have to be active if we want something different."

The legislature based the level of funding for the 2001-2003 biennium on the Quality

Please see page 10

It's too late to mail your ballot

Voters who have not already mailed their ballots would be wise to leave them at one of the ballot drop sites.

Ballots may be left at the Vernonia Public Library, 701 Weed Avenue, on May 16-17, from Noon-5:00 p.m.; May 18, 10 a.m.-2:00 p.m.; May 20, noon-5:00 p.m. and May 21

from noon-8:00 p.m.

Any county courthouse will have a place to leave ballots and elections offices will be open until 8:00 p.m. on May 21. Voters may use any official drop site and their ballots will be forwarded to the county where they are registered.