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The INDEPENDENT

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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

November 7, 2002

Tragic accident



A St. Helens man was killed in the accident above that closed Highway 47 for several hours. For a complete story, please see page 15.

City "Learning Center" nearing reality

With a \$150,000 grant to develop a Learning Center in Vernonia, and a tentatively approved block grant for an additional \$150,000, the City of Vernonia is now nearing a formal decision on where the center will be located and what programs will be incorporated.

The Learning Center Committee, which has been meeting for about a year, has looked at several buildings and discussed them with state officials. After completion of that process, it seems likely that the old city hall will be remodeled for the center. Three architectural firms have presented ideas and, though no contract has been signed, one firm has been initially approved.

At this time, the Upper Nehalem Watershed Council, uses part of the building; other

parts are used for activities from time to time.

The city and Columbia County have reached an agreement that will remove sections of Rose Ave. and Alder Street that are in the county's jurisdiction and make them part of the city. Before the ownership changes, the county will ditch, widen and pave the 850 feet of gravel road at the north end of Rose (This shows on official maps as Cleveland Ave.), and work with city employees to locate and clean all drainage facilities along Alder. It will be the city's responsibility to make any necessary water and sewer adjustments along Rose Avenue.

At the Vernonia City Council meeting on November 4, resident Jacqueline Ramsay asked if a handrail could be installed

along the path from Vernonia Lake to the primitive camping area. The path is sloped down to the camping area and can be quite slippery, Ramsay noted. The city will look at the problem and see what can be done.

There will also be a public hearing, December 2, on procedures and requirements for Vernonia's many parks.

Need for firefighters is topic of meeting

The Vernonia Fire District is in great need of more volunteer firefighters and has scheduled a recruitment meeting for Tuesday, November 12 at 7:00 p.m., in the fire hall.

Find out more about requirements and benefits, or how you can help, by attending the meeting.

Grant will fund 47J student programs

Vernonia School District has received a 21st Century Learning Grant of \$150,000 to begin a program for Recreational and Educational Activities with Community Help (REACH). Modeled after a very successful program operating for the last three years in St. Helens, REACH provides after school and summer activities for all school age children. The grant will be administered by the Northwest Region ESD which will also help develop the local program.

The district's board of directors also learned, at an October 24 workshop, that it has the opportunity to increase the leverage of the grant by working in cooperation with the City of Vernonia, which has received a \$150,000 grant to develop a community learning center. Tracy Dannen, of NWRES, said she is excited by the cooperation revealed in initial discussions with city administrator Michael Sykes and district superintendent Mike Funderburg.

The remainder of the workshop included discussion in several areas of interest.

- Board members Darryl Hamblet and Cari Levenseller told the board about their investigation of the process for forming a charitable foundation for the Vernonia School District. Hamblet told the board that they are ready to present their information to the public.

- Board member Tim Titus told the board that several parents, unhappy about the Senior Project, had approached him. The project is part of senior English and successful completion is required to receive a passing grade. VHS requires four years of English to graduate. Board chair Carla Strand noted that the "board" that approves senior projects is the senior project board, not the

school board. Funderburg told the board that resistance to, and confusion about senior project requirements is a common occurrence, even though the project has been in place for about 10 years. Funderburg will form a committee to gather information and make recommendations that will allow the board to formalize district policy. Any changes in requirements would not take effect until next school year. Parents and students with concerns about this year's project should contact the student's English teacher, Funderburg said.

- The process of mold mitigation at Washington Grade School has been completed, Funderburg told the board, except for one area behind a freezer. Another test of air quality has been scheduled.

- All of the fire alarms at WGS have been replaced; one at the high school needs work. The district may be able to recover 50 percent of the cost of renovating with strobe light smoke detectors, but no decisions have been made.

- The district received a quote of \$3500 minimum for asbestos mitigation at WGS. The district may also simply close the one storeroom where the asbestos was found, eliminating the cost entirely.

More school district news may be found on pages 10-11.

An engineer's report on the structural safety of Washington Grade School will be presented at the Vernonia School Board meeting on Thursday, November 21 at 7:00 p.m. Call 503-429-5891 for meeting site.