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# The INDEPENDENT

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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

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## Tis the Season...



A Christmas tree erected last week on the lawn in front of Vernonia City Hall is now aglow with light as the community prepares for the holidays. Assisting with the job were, from left, Don Tiffney, Don Webb, Scott Rethwill, Duke Gortler and Bob Scroggins. Marvin Meyer donated the tree from his Christmas tree farm south of Vernonia.

## New engineer, same old results on WGS

Gerald Gotchall, of Nishkian Dean Consulting & Structural Engineers, told the Vernonia School Board and an audience of about twenty people that he "wished that he could report that the previous report [by Walker/Diloretto/Younie, Inc., May 3, 2001] was wrong," but after reviewing that report and examining building plans and visible portions of the structure of Washington Grade School (WGS) he had reached the same conclusions. Gotchall gave his presentation following the board's business meeting November 21 in the WGS gymnasium.

Older buildings, said Gotchall, "are typically found to be

deficient, particularly in meeting code provisions for lateral forces from earthquakes and wind" when compared to current building code requirements. The current code is more demanding, based on more sophisticated and varied building materials and construction techniques, use of larger open spaces within buildings, and more knowledge of earthquake mechanics. According to Gotchall, earthquakes of increased frequency and duration can be expected, based on historical and archeological records.

Seismic (earthquake) up-grading of public buildings, particularly schools, has been the

subject of public attention. Gotchall says, in his report that several groups (in the state) advocate mandatory upgrading and that, in his opinion, "these groups will become successful and mandatory upgrade will become law." Gotchall went on to describe in some detail the renovations needed to WGS. The existing building would essentially have to be gutted, with both exterior and interior walls reinforced with concrete and steel. The result would be a "brand new 70 year-old building that doesn't fit program needs," Gotchall said.

In response to an audience question, Gotchall said that

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## Big shake-up in city police department

Within the past two weeks, three members of the five-officer Vernonia Police Department have retired, resigned or changed positions.

James Walters, a 20-year veteran of the Vernonia Police Department, has resigned as chief of the department, but will stay on the job as a sergeant. Walters has held the position of chief for the past ten years.

The city was also informed by PERS that Police Sergeant Gene Baska, who took a bad fall in the department's garage, will not be able to return to work because of a back injury. Baska was also a veteran of the department.

Additionally, the newest member of the five-officer department, Chris Snyder, has resigned. There are now just two officers, Jim Gaskins and Andy Roy, and Sgt. Walters.

"This has not been an easy decision," Walters wrote in his letter of resignation, "but it is appropriate at this time."

He also expressed his desire to remain with the department as sergeant. The city concurred with his desire.

The search for a new chief is underway and city administrator Mike Sykes has told the council that he hopes to fill the position before the end of January.

Another change at City Hall is a new recorder. Kate Conley has been hired to replace



Kate Conley

Janelle Serafin, who has married and moved away.

Conley, the daughter of Art and Dorothy Laubach of Mist, graduated in 1985 from Vernonia High School. She and her husband, Rod, lived in Portland, but now live in Mist with their daughter, Kelsey.

## Citizens say "Charge us for parks"

There are, undoubtedly, Vernonia residents who don't care about the city's many parks, but none of them attended a hearing before the city council last Monday on a fee schedule proposed to maintain the parks.

At least ten residents spoke in favor of the proposal, with most of them also urging the city to add a charge of \$1.00 per month for parks to the bill for water and sewer use.

Several speakers noted the grant-funded improvements in

parks over the last few years and expressed concern about the city's ability to adequately maintain them without a consistent, and sufficient, revenue source.

Speakers also emphasized that, if the council approves that funding mechanism, the need remains to enforce a fee schedule for nonresidents.

City staff will research the procedure further and bring their findings back to the council.