

Letters to the Editor

Ed. note: The following letter was intended for *The INDEPENDENT* issue of November 21, but was derailed by circumstances beyond the control of the writer.

Safety of our schools is our responsibility

To the Editor:

Our children are not as safe as common sense standards would suggest.

The bottom line?...We have schools that are in need of major repairs or replacement and I feel they are unsafe enough to have removed my kids.

I do not write this letter to blame or find fault with anyone. I specifically write to paint a big picture. We have been given this information before. In School Board meetings and workshops, in reports available from the District Office, and from the columns of *The INDEPENDENT*. We have received information from groups who are obligated to inform, and small groups or individuals who found it of personal interest or concern. We have gotten it in small steady doses, and it is now time to sum it up, look at the big picture and take a deep breath. I gasped when I did.

Personally, my current focus is on WGS...I have children who are not attending classes in the main building, by my

choice. This decision was based on my concerns not regarding the "ifs" but more realistically, the "when." VHS is also a concern and documented in the reports.

After the flood [in 1996], we cleaned up as best we could but since then Staff, parents and children have complained of headaches, nosebleeds, sinus infections and the onset or worsening of asthma.

After the earthquake, and after reports were compiled, it is documented that structurally, mechanically and electrically we are, at best, in poor shape. When the buildings were built, they were built well. No one at that time had the information that we do today, for example, take horizontal load into consideration. My point is the moment the buildings were built (50 - 70+ years ago), some of the issues we face now were set in stone.

I have taken time to total the cost of recommended repairs from the 2001 reports alone, and they total \$5,948,000.00. Nearly 6 million dollars! That ONLY covers WGS and VHS. It is also important to note that the seismic report that has been referred to is "...ONLY from a cursory walk through... exposed-to-view... review of drawings made available..." and that "Studies, evaluations,

material testing, destructive probing, analysis and observation of all spaces were NOT performed."

This dollar amount does not cover past flood clean up or our current situation regarding mold and its clean up, or proper asbestos abatement. It also does not cover what they could not see! There is absolutely no question in my mind that this price tag is well under the real mark by a long shot. Anyone having endured a remodeling job will surely back me up on that. In other words, that price tag is attached to only what they COULD and DID see in 2001 at only two of our four schools.

I don't want money spent to clean up mold... if it is only to return. I don't want air quality tested after the initial clean up, without a base line test done before the clean up is done. This does not allow me to monitor the improvement. I don't want, literally, myself or any of my community members, to clear supplies out of a storage area, knowingly contaminated with asbestos, so we can then just shut the door. I don't want "avoidable illness" to befall anyone. I don't want my child to sit in a room so hot she can't think, nor do I want my children to have to escape "the bricks that will still fall" or "a shower of

glass." I don't want my child to sit in a classroom electrically over-loaded (two electrical outlets per room). I don't want my child to play in a basement with "cast iron sewer... [that] has corrosion" just under his feet. I don't want a fire alarm to not automatically report to ADT and I don't care if it is "not required." I don't want the teachers, custodians, or other school staff to be exposed to any of this, or myself, when I happen to walk into the building. I also don't want the District to make Band-Aid decisions or expenditures because they want to try and fix something... wanting to be responsive to a community that has been critical regarding their responsiveness in the past.

So, now you know why I am unwilling to bet my children's health and welfare. My head was in the sand. Opening up those walls at WGS, hearing of the mold and dry rot found and first hand reading of the reports filed, honed my senses and gave me facts.

It is my opinion any money spent to try and fix a small piece or portion of anything I know is wrong with our schools is wasted, unless we all decide to allow it and follow through completely. There is no easy answer or small cost. It will have to be fixed and borne by everyone in the community via a bond measure.

On November 21st, the most recent structural engineer will report to the School Board. He will say the building is not going to fall down of its own accord. I find that statement rather pathetic, if I keep the rest of my knowledge in mind. Shame on me if I don't.

Our children are not as safe as common sense standards would suggest. I utterly believe this responsibility again lies with my community and myself. Which includes clearly informing and supporting our school board to take the necessary actions and bear the necessary costs. It is OUR decision to make.

Sincerely,
Michelle Blum
Vernonia

Quotes were taken from:
"Existing Facilities Seismic Assessment" - May 3, 2001, by Walker / Diloreto / Younie, Inc.
"Facilities Study" - May 2001, by Interface Engineering
The INDEPENDENT - August 1, 2001, "Engineers explain schools' problems"

The INDEPENDENT - October 17, 2002, "WGS safe from dry rot, not earthquakes"

Thinks tax measure is "Blackmail"

To the Editor:

Prior to this November's elections and since, I have heard via radio and television, our State Elected Officials complain to Oregonians about the lack of funding available for our schools, health care, law enforcement, and more. In essence, blackmailing us to vote yes on Measure 28 in January 2003.

Several bond measures, (needed and important), were recently voted down, because many Oregonians feel like I do. Enough is enough! The last bond I voted YES on was five years ago. I have voted NO on everyone since, after I realized, that when I added it all up, 50% of my income already went to taxes (in one form or another) and to "required" insurances. Tack on what I pay out of pocket for what insurance doesn't pay for; I am left trying to support my family on much less than half of the income I make. Leaving the majority of my income to government and insurance agencies, who continually raise my rates and reduce my benefits.

At every election new bonds are presented for very valuable and needed resources for our communities. We are not voting for swimming pools and recreation centers, we are voting for the basic fundamental needs of any community, which we should already have.

Previously I voted no on these bonds because these were not "wants" these were "needs" that should have already been funded as the number one priority in our governments. But... instead, they are not properly funded, and our children, our elderly, our safety, and our lifestyles, suffer because our governments refuse to prioritize and budget accordingly.

I have not heard how government spending is being cut by reducing waste, removing unnecessary government programs, government downsizing, cutting road projects, or reformatting welfare programs to better serve those in real need. Instead, what I hear is how our

Please see page 16

Between the Bookends

By Ann Krutsinger, Library Assistant
Banks Public Library



I'm holding a copy of the book, *Take My Advice: Letters to the Next Generation from People Who Know a Thing or Two*, edited by James Harmon. Mr. Harmon lives (currently but not for much longer!) in the Banks area where he grew up. What is this book, really? I'd call it an inspired and inspiring idea — he wrote letters to an assortment of intellectuals, artists, movie stars, philosophers and authors and asked for guidance — words to live by.

What is truly amazing (I haven't seen James' letters but they must've rocked!) is how many people wrote back serious and thoughtful letters. Mr. Harmon says he got the idea from reading Rainier Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, when he was 21. After receiving replies to his missives, Mr. Harmon got sucked up by Life (with a capital "L") and the letters went into storage until he emerged a bit battered, but wiser, from his twenties. Who really can't stand to learn a thing or two? It was humbling to read words of advice from Katherine Hepburn: "Work as hard as you can, whatever you do, and try to spread

generosity of spirit." Others whose letters are included are Ken Kesey ("Don't say it. It's too hard to take it back."), Mary McCarthy, George Saunders, Tom Robbins and many others have written sincere (sometimes sinful) thought-provoking letters about the state of our world today as they see it. Take MY advice: This book is worth reading!

Thank you! To everyone who stopped by the Friends of the Banks Library Holiday Fest. This fund raiser helped pay for the Preschool Story Time as well as the 2003 Summer Reading Program.

Holiday Hours will be as follows:

December 24, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.

December 25, closed

December 3, 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.

January 1, closed

Preschool Story Time will be cancelled December 25 and January 1, and will resume January 8 at 10:15 a.m.

Banks Public Library: 111 Market Street.
Hours: Tues., Wed., Thurs., 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.;
Fri. and Sat. 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Preschool Story Time: Wednesdays, 10:15 a.m., when school is in session.
Phone: (503) 324-1382
Internet: www.WILnet.wccs.lib.or.us.
to browse library resources or to reserve materials electronically.