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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

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Family fun...



Summer is here and the dam is up on the Rock Creek swimming pool. It's a great way to cool off on a hot summer day - and it's free!

MetroWest chosen as new bus provider

By Noni Andersen

The Columbia County Board of Commissioners has been expressing dissatisfaction with Colco Transportation and its operator, the Columbia County Council of Seniors, for more than a year and, in fact, refused to allocate any transportation funds to the senior council from this year's budget.

As Commissioner Tony Hyde explained, \$50,000 of transportation funds were put aside while a county-wide transportation plan was being developed "so seniors wouldn't have to carry the burden of providing transportation" for everyone who rode Colco. Hyde said he wanted to see \$10,000 go to each of the five senior centers in the county, for them to use for their own transportations needs.

When the senior council was de-certified by the state in May, the county was ready to make a change. Right?

Well, not exactly.

Commissioner Rita Bernhard said in April that alternative plans were being developed - a statement supported by Sen. Joan Dukes at a meeting in Vernonia. Yet, as of June 3, the county had not made any specific effort to provide alternate transportation. They were "talking to providers" and "working with a transportation planner," but hadn't issued any requests for proposals (RFPs) or requests for quotes (RFQs), basic steps to be taken before local governments award contracts.

The county didn't think they had to use RFQs, Hyde explained, because it was an emergency.

On June 30, all Colco vehicles (except four that are owned outright by the council of seniors) were turned over to the county.

As of July 2, interim con-

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Rally cars will be here July 12 47J budget finalized, priorities listed

Most people don't think of using a navigator while racing, or of running against the clock, instead of getting in front of a pack of other drivers, but that is the "hook" in rally car racing.

Oregon Rally Group is bringing their premier event to Vernonia on Saturday, July 12, with upwards of 80 rally teams from all over North America.

The race will start at 10 a.m. from Hillsboro Stadium, with teams heading west to roads in the Tillamook State Forest, then work their way to Vernonia for their first service stop.

The service area will be at Washington Grade School and, with 80 cars arriving at two minute intervals, there will be activity all afternoon.

This will be a great opportunity to check out these remark-

able cars and the crews that take care of them.

Don't miss it!

Fewer lifeguard hours this year

Because of fiscal restraints, the City of Vernonia has not been able to hire lifeguards for as many hours as in prior years. As a result, there will be no lifeguards on Sundays, except during Jam-boree.

"We have excellent, certified lifeguards who would like to work more hours," said Robyn Bassett, the city's director of public works, "but the city's financial condition just doesn't allow it."

Bassett was especially concerned that parents be aware of the situation.

Vernonia School District Budget Committee completed its work, June 9, by approving the latest budget revisions and prioritizing a list of programs and positions to be returned to the budget if additional revenue becomes available. The approved budget is based on a state school fund allocation of \$4.8 billion. According to Superintendent Mike Funderburg, it appeared likely, at that time, that the legislature would increase the allocation to state school fund (SSF) to at least \$5.0 billion and, possibly, to as much as \$5.2 billion.

Funderburg and Deputy Clerk Dawn Plews presented a personnel summary for the 2003-2004 school year, as compared to the personnel levels adopted in the 2002-2003

budget. Overall, staff will be reduced by slightly more than nine full-time employees. This level of staffing represents the loss of five or six more full-time positions than were absorbed by budget cuts this year. All areas will be working with a smaller staff next year, from food service to administration.

Based on concerns discussed in previous budget committee meetings, Funderburg and the administrative team developed a list of items to add back to the budget if more money becomes available. If the legislature increases the SSF to \$5.0 billion, it would add \$147,175 to district revenues. If it were increased to \$5.1, local revenue would increase by an additional \$73,538.

Following discussion, which included reference to goals adopted at the beginning of the budget process, the committee decided that the first priority should be the addition of special education personnel, followed by \$5,000 needed to complete next year's textbook adoption, and the return of business and alternative education. Funderburg explained that retaining the business/alternative education program will enable the district to apply for a \$150,000 charter school implementation grant to expand the existing program.

The committee recommended the following "add backs," if additional revenue becomes available (listed in order of priority):

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