

## The INDEPENDENT

Serving the upper Nehalem River valley. Published twice monthly, on the first and third Thursdays of each month, by Public Opinion Laboratory Ltd., 725 Bridge Street, Vernonia, OR 97064, as a free newspaper. Publishers, Dirk & Noni Andersen. Editor, Noni Andersen. Phone/Fax: 503-429-9410, e-mail: noni@vernonia.com Display Advertising, Clark McGaugh, 503-429-9410, e-mail: clark@vernonia.com

## Opinion

### Town will miss Art Parrow

When Art Parrow died last week, no one was very surprised — not only was he 81 years old, but he had been battling cancer and heart trouble.

Nevertheless, he will be missed.

His introduction to Vernonia in 1968 was as high school principal, a job that requires both a strong spine and a strong sense of humor. Fortunately, he had both.

There is an obituary on page 20, so we're only hitting the high spots here, but those characteristics served him well in other endeavors, too, most notably as Vernonia's mayor, a position that includes brickbats and praise, deserved and undeserved.

Art's dahlias are all over town and some of his wood-working projects still decorate our sidewalks at Christmas time. He didn't run from controversy, but he didn't miss a chance for a laugh or two, either. Art Parrow was a principled man with a twinkle in his eye; he will be missed.

### VRFPD board has chance to make improvements

Vernonia Fire District's Board of Directors has, for far too long, neglected to completely fulfill its responsibilities, which was made abundantly clear to them when Chief Paul Epler resigned. They haven't been dishonest in any way; they just kept avoiding any controversy, which meant they not only failed to eliminate the problems, but they also failed to sustain their own policies or support their chief when it was most necessary.

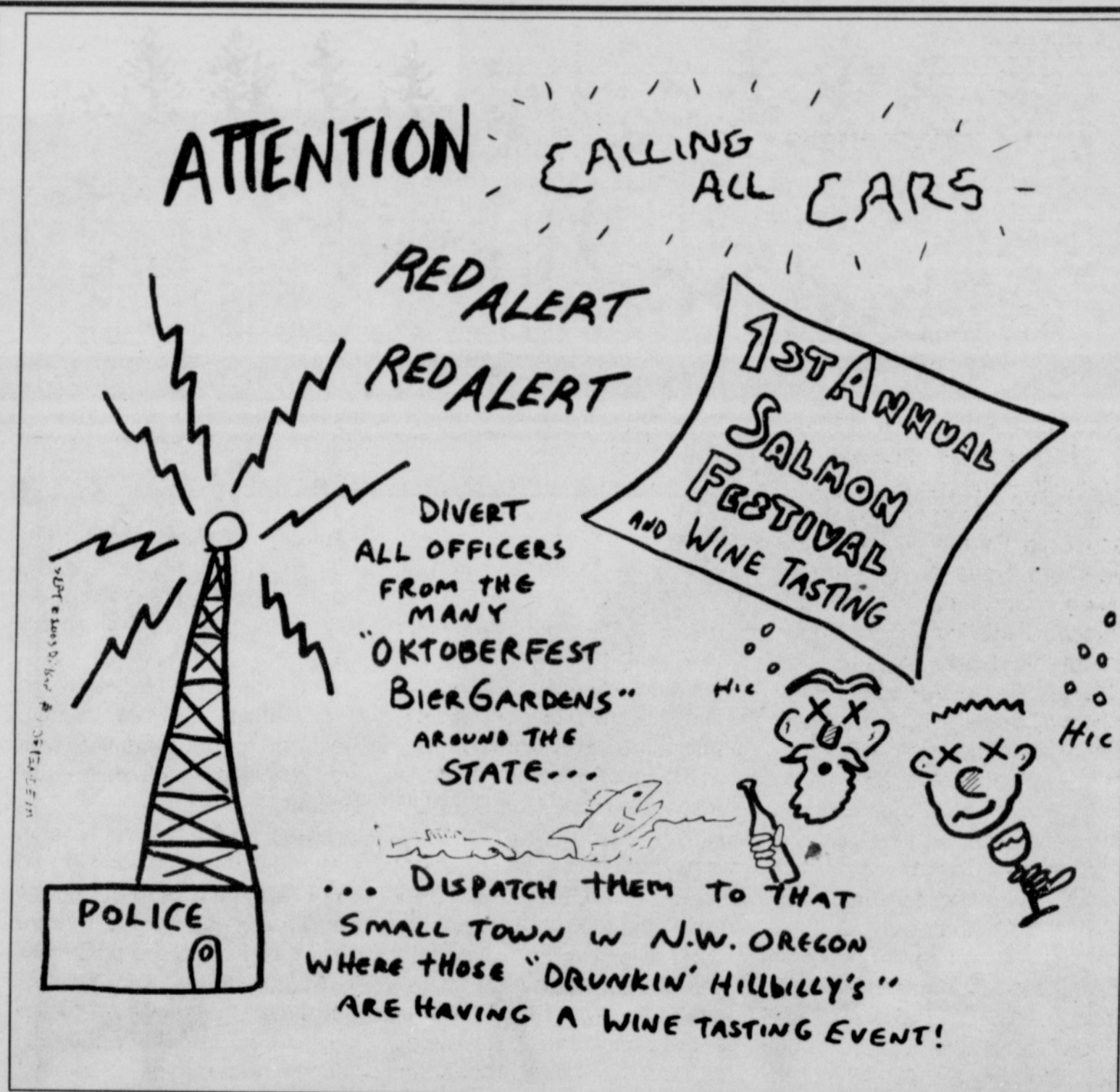
It appears that the board plans to get everything in order, now. So, instead of looking back and saying "well, we used to..." keep looking — and moving forward.

### Another park dedication is good news for Vernonia

On Friday, September 26, there will be a dedication ceremony at Airport Park to celebrate the improvements.

Among the invited guests, there will be representatives of several state agencies that were the key to both funding and completing the project.

But the City hopes that local residents who haven't been out to see the work, will also attend the celebration. It's a beautiful park so why not join the party?



## Legislative Update

By State Rep. Betsy Johnson (District 31)

While most Oregonians will remember the 72nd Oregon Legislature as being the longest in state history — 227 days — it was also one of the most productive sessions in recent years. The Legislature successfully addressed most of the critical issues facing the state, including the staggering budget shortfall, the public pension crisis and the crumbling transportation system.

The Senate adjourned on Aug. 26 and the House followed the next evening after Gov. Ted Kulongoski signed a tax increase bill earlier in the day. Republican House leaders had insisted on staying in session until the governor signed the bill into law.

I wish I could report to you that lawmakers have come up with a long-term solution to shore up the structural weaknesses in the public finance system that has made Oregon's budget crisis one of the nation's worst. However, there was no time left in the hectic final days of this session to craft a tax reform bill.

The Legislature did vote to establish a committee to develop a tax-reform plan and submit its findings to a special session of the Legislature next June. It's the only way to get past the talking stage and come up with a practical long-term solution.

The crux of the problem is that Oregon's general fund relies solely on the personal, and to a much lesser degree, the corporate income tax. In healthy economic times the revenue generated by these income taxes is also robust. When the economy sours the receipts go down proportionately. When receipts are not sufficient to meet the agreed upon level of expenditures, the

Legislature is faced with reducing expenditures, borrowing money, or raising additional revenue through an increase in personal and corporate income taxes.

#### Key accomplishments of the 2003 Legislature

**2003-05 Budget** — With nearly a \$2 billion drop in revenue since 2001, the Legislature managed to agree on a two-year, \$11.6 billion budget that leaders say contains adequate support for schools and social services.

**PERS reform** — To control the ballooning costs of the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS), lawmakers passed laws that scale back benefits of many of the 215,000 people in the system by slowing the growth of retirement accounts and freezing cost-of-living adjustments for some retirees. Public employee unions have already filed lawsuits in state and federal courts seeking to overturn the changes.

**Human services** — The budget crisis threatened to remove 65,000 single adults and childless low-income couples from the state's innovative health coverage plan. However, lawmakers approved the necessary funds to avoid reducing eligibility for the plan. A \$2.4 billion human services budget also restores mental health, chemical dependency and emergency dental services for these people; restores in-home and other services for about 1,200 impaired people who lost state assistance earlier this year; restores monthly welfare payments that were cut by \$5 the past 18 months; and rolls back monthly co-payment for job-related day care assistance from \$43 to \$25 effective Oct. 1.

**State school support** — The two-year budget provides \$5.2 billion in state school support

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