

The INDEPENDENT

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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

October 16, 2003

Sight Seeing...



Hayrides were a popular choice to get to both salmon viewing sites and the various activities and events during Vernonia's first Fall Salmon Festival. See pages 14-15.

Council starts work on Town Hall ideas

Vernonia City Council, at their Oct. 6 meeting, reviewed the recommendations on law enforcement that were developed by citizens during the September 22 Town Hall meeting.

Police Chief Mike Cahill said the recommendations were not in conflict with existing goals for the department, falling primarily into areas of communications and funding.

Council discussed potential ways to increase communications from the department to citizens, and from citizens to the department. Ideas included developing a way for citizens to ask questions or make comments – with or without identifying themselves – followed by responses to their questions or comments. When that process is agreed upon, *The INDEPENDENT* will publish the information.

Council agreed to a four-year lease-purchase contract with for a new police car. The first year's payment will be paid by the insurance replacement for the car wrecked in July. The remainder of the contract would require that a little less than \$6,000 per year be included in the budget. Chief Cahill said he would rather have good cars than a car for each officer.

The Vernonia Grange is ask-

ing for a temporary hardship reduction in their water rates while they reorganize and try to revitalize the organization. The city attorney was instructed to draft an agreement for review at the next council meeting.

Council adopted a modification to the water curtailment ordinance that will allow moving from level to level as the water flow changes in Rock Creek. This will allow staff to initiate or end curtailment as needed without Council approval at each change.

Public Works Director Robyn Bassett reported a complaint about the city selling water to area residents whose wells have gone dry, when water curtailment is in effect. The rate to non-residents is \$2.50 per 1,000 gallons; City residents pay \$1.25/1,000 plus property taxes. Council expressed concern about health issues if people need water, but requested Bassett to review the outside rate.

In other business, council

- Accepted the Smart Growth Ordinance, but will revisit it at the Oct. 20 meeting.

- Approved, with one abstention, the Lyon's Den application to OLCC for a full liquor license;

- Accepted a small piece of property for a sidewalk and road on Lakeview Drive, but will not be responsible until the road is completed to City standards.

- Set a Town Hall meeting on Economic Development, Nov. 17 at 6:30 p.m. in the Council Chamber at city hall.

Amount of school funding still uncertain

Vernonia school board started the new school year with the same overriding consideration that ended the old year – uncertainty about state financial support.

Superintendent Mike Funderburg reminded the board, during their September meeting, that this year's budget was based on a state school fund appropriation of \$4.8 billion, resulting in serious reductions in every area of the budget. Because school funding is unstable, the local budget committee developed priorities for "add-backs," if the appropriation increased. According to Funderburg, the legislature agreed upon a minimum of \$5.05 billion, then, with a three-year income tax surcharge, raised the total to \$5.2 billion. That additional amount is now in jeopardy because of an initiative

going to voters in January that would repeal the surcharge.

Funderburg explained that the legislation guarantees there will be no reductions to the state school fund this year, regardless of the outcome of the initiative. Any adjustments needed will be made in the 2004-2005 school year. If the initiative passes, Vernonia will lose up to \$400,000, resulting in even deeper cuts than were experienced last school year.

Legislative adjustments to PERS also affect the local budget, but the result is uncertain because of legal challenges. In order to protect the district from incurring a large debt, the disputed amount has been added to contingency, Funderburg explained. Any additional funds received, should the state school fund exceed \$5.05 billion, will be held in the

Unappropriated Ending Fund, which cannot be used during this budget year. Funderburg stressed the necessity of protecting the district from the kind of painful mid-year adjustments that had to be made last year.

Funderburg presented a list of add-backs that closely paralleled the priorities developed by the Budget Assistance Team (BAT) in the spring and were recently reviewed by members of BAT. Two teaching positions, in special education and in middle school, have already been addressed by internal adjustments in the budget and staff, putting textbook adoption at the top of the list. Funderburg told the board that this was increased to \$10,000, twice the projected add-back, due to unexpected needs for books at Mist. Following the priorities es-

Please see page 9

Resignation creates School Board need

The resignation of Vernonia School District Director Leslie O'Leary has created a vacancy on the school board which the board would like to fill as soon as possible. Those interested in serving in this volunteer position may pick up applications at the district office.

O'Leary, an accountant, resigned for personal reasons.

Ichneumon?? Xenophile??

Vernonia women
take honors in AARP
National Spelling Bee.
See story on page 17.