

# The INDEPENDENT

Vol. 19, No. 11

"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

June 3, 2004

## Remembering...



**Veterans from American Legion Post 119 raised the nation's flag to honor those who had fallen in the service of our country, as Vernonia Memorial Cemetery filled with grateful memories on the annual day of observance, May 31.**

## 47J budget committee okays budget without time to read it

A majority of the Vernonia School Board Budget Committee approved the 2004-05 budget as presented at their May 20 meeting—although few of them had read the document.

During a prior meeting, the committee reviewed the district's guiding principles and budget goals, plus recommendations made by the Budget Assistance Team (BATEam), but the budget wasn't complete, so the full committee saw it for the first time on May 20 and sent it to the board without members of the committee, except those on the BATEam, having an opportunity to read or review the document.

Superintendent Mike Funderburg explained changes and revisions in the BATEam recommendations and (savings):

- Close Lincoln Grade School, money for maintenance of the building is included in other budget areas, (\$30,000).
- Reduce junior high speech (\$5,000).
- Eliminate jr. high track (\$3,000).
- Reduce high school Voc. Tech. by half (\$25,300).

- Eliminate high school track (\$6,000).
- Eliminate JV wrestling, softball and baseball stipends (\$6,000).
- Reduce VHS certified library position (\$29,000).
- Reduce drama (\$5,000) (This effectively eliminates it).
- Eliminate journalism stipend (\$1,260).

Major reductions resulted from the difference in salary of retiring teachers as compared to that of newer teachers, by eliminating one administrative position, a reduction in contingency and the transfer of accounts payable support to grant funding.

After reviewing the recommendations of the BATEam, Funderburg told the committee that administrative personnel in the district had been reduced over the past eighteen months from seven positions to 3.5. Tobie Finzel, a committee member, questioned the unprecedented level of staff reduction. Funderburg replied that having nearly all students in only two buildings would help. Additionally, because of legislative changes equalizing ESD funding, additional money will be available to support the posi-

tion of Special Education Director. Nate Underwood, WGS principal and district curriculum coordinator, said that curriculum is probably not being addressed as it was when the district had a curriculum director. Funderburg said, "We cannot continue to function long-term at this level."

The audience expressed great concern about weakening art instruction because sixth grade art will no longer be taught by a certified art teacher, but by a middle school teacher. Veteran art teacher Doug Tesdal, special education teacher Kathy Pennington, guidance counselor Anne Mason and parent Orissa Burghard all protested the change, in person or in writing.

Funderburg responded that art and music are maintained; he did not address quality.

Parent Amy Cieloha inquired about the lack of an aide for large kindergarten classes. Funderburg said that the only way to add aides would be to find more money.

Ray Brixey moved to approve the budget as presented; Jim Krahn seconded the motion. Noni Andersen asked to meet again because committee members hadn't yet read the budget; school board member Phil Doyle concurred.

It was approved by Cari Levenseller, Randy Hansen, Tim Titus, Ed Buckner, Gienah Cheney and Krahn (all school board members), and committee members Rick Gwin, Greg Kintz, Finzel and Brixey.

Two committee members, Jeff Blum and Cindy Naillon, did not attend.

The board will meet June 17, then hold a budget hearing on June 24. These are public meetings.

## City budget gets approval on first review, public hearing set

The City of Vernonia Budget Committee met June 1, to review the proposed budget for the fiscal year July 1, 2004, through June 30, 2005, which is specifically designed to allow the City to continue offering the present level of service in every department. No additional employees or new programs are included in the budget. Though final negotiations with employee unions are not yet complete, no problems are anticipated

that would impact the proposed budget.

Grant funds pay a major role for the new Learning Center and a new Senior Center. Other grants will support planning for expansion of the sewer treatment facility, as well as major improvements to Spencer Park, which is scheduled for a paved parking lot and restrooms.

In the area of marketing, grants provide for a new tourist

brochure, a new web site, advertising for the Salmon Fest, and a visitor information guide. A downtown improvement fund is being developed to help businesses make improvements.

The City will be looking into the possibility of buying a large portion of the old mill site for multiple uses: To serve as a trailhead for the new Scappoose-Vernonia Linear Trail, to increase sewage treatment capacity to accommodate future

growth and meet DEQ requirements, and, possibly, for a light industrial business park.

Assisting the budget committee in reviewing details of the budget were City Administrator Mike Sykes and Finance Clerk Cindy Naillon. No members of the public were in attendance. After review, clarification, and a few corrections, the budget was approved. The public Budget Hearing will take place on June 22.