

## GUEST OPINION

By Mary Sykes

For almost 4 years I promptly paid water, gas and electric at the home my son owned. He used it only occasionally, and I lived there full time. He sold it to me in 2003. I called NW Natural and City Water to change those accounts into my name with no problem. No fees. No hassle.

Not so WOE (West Oregon Electric). They said I must have my son's permission. I let it slide. Too much hassle. More than a year later I called again and this time was told they would need 4 months of cancelled checks before they would change to my name. I pay my bills electronically and darned if I was going to give them 4 months of my entire checking transactions. That's none of their business.

Although they cashed checks from me via online bill payments for years, I was told I must furnish proof as they couldn't possibly track down who paid a bill. They had too many customers. Actually, any accountant worth his/her salt can track source documents. So I got really mad. At this time the clerk did not mention that I must pay \$26 to join the cooperative, nor did she mention I needed to fill out an application. That is all the info I needed and, had I known that, I would have dropped it. I thought I was getting a simple name change and all she needed was my credit status.

THEY DON'T LISTEN; or DID SANTA CLAUS PAY THE BILL? Still steaming, I wrote to the interim manager and the board and said I didn't think this policy was fair. The manager, after numerous calls to my son, sent him an application and asked him to co-sign for me. My son would have, but I take pride in my good credit and found their distrust insulting. The board didn't respond to me.

The manager called me, so pleased that he solved the problem. I asked him, didn't my son confirm that I paid the electric bills. He said yes. So I asked him, if my son isn't paying the bills and they have been paid promptly all these years, WHO do you think paid them, Santa Claus? He laughed. I didn't think it was funny.

I am nearing 70, not as swift as I used to be, but I finally figured out how to use "filters" for my online banking bill-paying account to be able to isolate and print a record of almost 4 years of WOE payments. So I sent that record with an application and a check for \$1.00 with a letter saying that I assumed that because I had paid so long, I would not have to pay a connection fee. I was ALREADY connected. I received a terse notice back that said "Required".

They sent my application back for signature, cashed the \$1.00 check, and sent the next bill in my name—a bill for July 22 to August 1 or 2? plus the \$25.00 "connection" fee. I paid the electric charge online, but not the connection fee since I was NEVER disconnected. Although I never returned the signed agreement, they cashed the \$1.00 check. So I was now a member. Since I didn't want to be a member if it cost to connect, I requested they change the name back to my son's and was told that would cost another \$25.00 connection fee. Incredible! So I said I would appeal, to ask the board to waive the connection fee and inquired about the date of the next board meeting. I thought I just had to attend and speak my piece.

CAN YOU BELIEVE THIS? I thought my request to appeal this matter to the Board would be honored. Imagine my shock when on August 17, only 3 weeks after the account was in my name, I received a shutoff notice for the entire amount, the connection fee plus the electricity bill I had already paid. The cutoff date was 2 days after I received notice and less than a month after I became a "member". Is this legal? Oregon law requires PUC-covered utilities to send a 15 day notice before disconnect.

I admit I was curt with the front line folks. Although I did not cuss, I let them know I was angry. No doubt they are nice people, but on the job they are too quick to defend company policies, very bureaucratic, don't inform about process, and do not communicate clearly to the public. Had someone told me on my first two inquiries that I had to fill out an application, and pay fees, I wouldn't have pursued a name change. And that is all they should do, really. Tell folks they need an application, they need good credit,

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## Letters

### Tree removal helps prevent forest fires

To the Editor:

I would like to comment on the letters sent to you about the home site clearing/logging activity along Louisiana Avenue. Seems to me Mr. Pihl may have done this community a big favor. If we watch the local TV news there are forest/wild fires throughout Oregon and Washington. Seems like there is a new fire everyday.

Let us consider this scenario: It's noon – 90 degrees – strong east wind – two young boys build a campfire – after awhile they decide to go swimming. Soon the campfire has jumped onto some dry grass then begins to burn along the hillside. Finally, smoke is seen – someone calls the Fire Department, but it's too late, the hillside has become a raging inferno. Hot sparks and embers are picked up by the east wind and deposited on homes and properties situated along A, B, and C Streets and might carry to the middle of town. The Fire Department cannot respond to the many calls. Homeowners must help themselves or leave the area.

Now given the fact that most of the wood fuel has been removed and several fire breaks have been created the foregoing situation will not happen as any fire would be small and easily controlled.

Perhaps Mike Pihl deserves a thank you from the folks that might have been affected if this work had not been done.

Sincerely,  
**Steve Roberts**  
Vernonia

### Kids' Fishing Derby was great fun, again

To the Editor:

The Fish Derby went off well during the Vernonia Friendship Jamboree this year. We cut the fishing time from two hours to one hour, which made a lot of moms and dads happy. We had 78 kids fishing, and many fish caught. Many prizes were given, and we all had a great time. We also had a donation pot that people put money in, we split the pot and had two drawings among the kids that signed up. I am not sure who had the most

fun, the kids or the people putting the derby on. A special thanks to The INDEPENDENT paper, which has been a sponsor for years.

A big thanks to Bob Scroggins, Dennis Nelson, Dee Dee Webb, Dale Webb, Donna Webb and Marvin Long for help signing up the kids, counting and measuring the fish and giving out the prizes. We also had a short auction.

**Don Webb**  
**Fish Derby Chair**  
**Nehalem Valley Chapter**  
**Izaak Walton League**

### New playground is result of lots of help

To the Editor:

With the new playground now completed, we would like to take a moment to express our gratitude for all of the support. First, we would like to thank Curl's Transportation for transporting the playground from Grants Pass to Hillsboro; for completing the journey to Vernonia, we would like to thank Ed Buckner.

Thanks to Boise Cascade for donating woodchips and Gwin Logging for transporting them to our school. We would also like to thank Randy Holce and Longview Fibre for providing the logs to enclose the play structure. Many thanks go to J&S Concrete for their donation of all the concrete materials to install the play structure. Lastly, with the awesome support from the community and the aid of people from the Hillsboro School District Maintenance Department, this goal became a reality.

We would like to thank the following people for help with the installation: Lisa Brewer and Tom Ramsey, Ed Buckner, James Brookins, Jerry and Josh Butcher, Colin and Barb Croas, Loren and Robin Dennis, Brandon Eyrrick, Tami Goodman, Penny Johnson, Ken Kahler, Lee MacDiarmid, Jennifer Martin, Scott and Jeanne Mohr, Don and Sue Rainbolt, Keith and Daniel Shaw, Dave Small, Craig Tolonen, Nate Underwood, and Jessica Westlake.

And, we would like to give a "Big Thank You" to the VCPTA Playground Committee for all of the hard work and determination which made the whole

thing possible. Because of all of these dedicated souls our children will have a new place to explore and enjoy.

Sincerely,

**Mary Roumanos-MacDiarmid**  
**Vernonia Community PTA**

### Thanks for support of V. Cares Fun Run

To the Editor:

Vernonia Cares Food Bank would like to extend their sincerest appreciation to our sponsors for their support of our recent successful 5K Fun Run: Tuality Healthcare, Holce Logging, Marquis Care, Vintage Suites, Dennis Electric, City of Vernonia, US Bank, West Oregon Electric Cooperative, The INDEPENDENT, Vernonia Sentry, Wilcox & Flegel, Fuiten, Rose & Hoyt, Carol Ostrander, Maple Street Clinic, Sport People Northwest (Cedar Ridge), Black Bear Coffee Company, Vernonia Inn, Vernonia Realty & Insurance Center, Soderback & Daughters Trucking, Leonetti's Pizza & Grill, Bretthauer Oil Co., Creatures Pet Shop, Friends of the Vernonia Public Library, Vernonia True Value, Columbia County Parks, and Jazzercise.

You are all a great example of how our community and surrounding communities rally in participation of Cares events. We Vernonians are so blessed with our great paths and park-like setting that makes runners love to come here.

We at Cares recognize our food bank would not be able to provide for those in need without your support. Thank you for taking the "Dare to Care Challenge."

**Terry Grosnick**  
**Vernonia Cares**  
**5K Fun Run Director**

### "Paddle" Boats are a lot of fun at V. Lake

To the Editor:

We feel we have to share the great fun we had at the Vernonia Mill Pond Lake this past week. My grandson and I decided that we would spend some time on the "Paddle Boats" (which you actually "pedal" rather than "paddle") they now have for rent there. First we had a great lunch at

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