

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Look back before looking to new plans for this year

As a new year begins, it is always a good idea to see what was – and what wasn't – accomplished last year.

Several important City issues are incomplete and should be finalized before new projects are started. These include the Learning Center, Spencer Park improvements, acquisition of the old mill site property, pedestrian/bicycle lanes on Hwy. 47 (East Bridge Street), and the most urgent project – improvements to the wastewater treatment system. Most of these projects are pending because of the cost, always a problem for small towns. Nevertheless, while making plans and setting priorities is vital, so is completion. The new downtown crosswalks are a great touch, but lights at the lake are overly bright and plastic flowers in the lake planters are appalling.

In another area, a badly needed new Senior Center is still working its way through funding problems.

The school district has completed a needed new building, but has neglected maintenance of existing properties. The modular buildings require good maintenance, which they haven't been getting. In fact, a short walk around the school buildings reveals abysmal neglect of most of them. A new building is no excuse for failure to maintain existing properties.

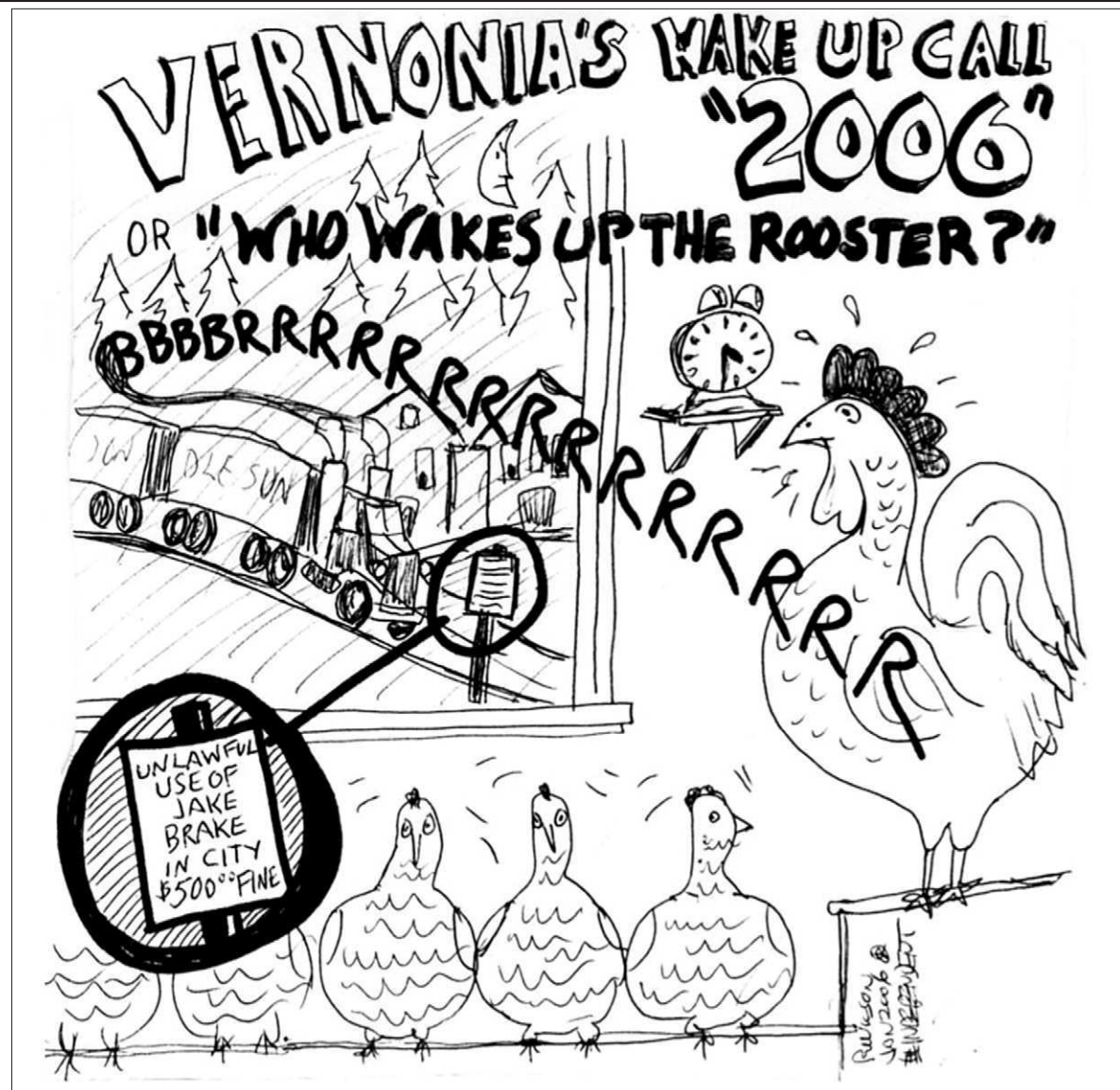
The county is working toward completion of a linear trail between Vernonia and Scappoose. A lot of time and effort has gone into this project, which will certainly benefit Vernonia. But it would be really helpful if they would guarantee a Sheriff's deputy in this area the next time they ask voters to pass an operating levy.

Losses diminish our community

Two much loved citizens have left us this month.

Mike Cook, a big man with a big laugh, and a generous heart, will be missed by all who knew him. He could tease with the best of them, but never in a negative way. Our memories of Mike will stay alive each year with his Christmas trees.

Bill Horn, a World War II veteran, was not well known by those under the age of about 60. But his many years of service in the community are remembered by the "old timers." We have not been able to obtain obituary information, but felt his many old friends would want to be notified.



By Dale Webb, member
Nehalem Valley Chapter, Izaak Walton League



Happy New Year, we made it through another year. 2005 wasn't too bad a year, hunting was pretty much normal across the state, with the exception of the continuing decline in Blacktailed deer. The Columbia River salmon fishery was also a disappointment. So what is in store for us in 2006?

Fishing across Oregon should be similar to last year, which includes low salmon runs in the Columbia River; forecasts are actually for lower numbers than in 2005. The debate will continue on the reason for the decline, with the culprits being the seals and sea lions, the dams, the Canadian fishery, the Washington Tribal fishery, ocean conditions and river conditions. There is definitely no lack of things to blame the decline on! Whether any of them deserve the blame is a whole other debate.

Trout fishing here on the Nehalem will remain great, unfortunately we will not have a consumptive fishery this year or probably next. A proposal that would have allowed the retention of two trout a day was nixed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife commissioners. Too bad, we are growing a lot of trout with most dying of old age or the elements. If you want to catch some trout to eat, catch some at Vernonia Lake; the lake has a few trout in it right now, and large

numbers will be planted in the spring.

Hunting this year should be similar to last year, too, unless this winter turns out bad. We are definitely having some bad weather lately, but at least most of the low elevation snow over east has melted off. Snow is very hard on game animals, especially when it gets crusted over. Locally, the elk are doing fine, the Blacktails will probably suffer additional losses due to Hair Loss Syndrome, especially in light of the cold, wet winter we are having so far.

One thing that elk hunters will notice next year is a drastic reduction in cow elk tags in all three of the units that border Vernonia. Tag numbers will be cut in the Saddle Mountain, Scappoose and Wilson units. The tags are being reduced for varying reasons – populations below Management Objectives and mounting cow harvest in the Disabled Hunter Program being the two biggest hitters. Another big change will be the state wide restriction of bull-only harvest for archery hunters, with the exception of units that can sustain cow harvest. This is kind of a vague new regulation, but should follow the same guidelines as the disabled hunter program, which allows antlerless harvest if there is a significant antlerless harvest opportunity allowed rifle hunters. I would anticipate archery antlerless harvest in our surrounding units.

Recently, I was invited to hunt on some private lands over in Eastern Oregon. The target was coyotes; it seems that ranchers are quite willing to allow predator hunting on their lands,

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