

The INDEPENDENT

Vol. 21, No. 2

"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

January 19, 2006

Nature's Bonus



Recent heavy rains have also brought some spectacular rainbows during lulls between storms. This photo was taken January 11 at the Green Bridge.

Work on sunset Hwy will cause some traffic delays

Work will begin this month on a Sunset Highway (U.S. 26) safety project in Manning.

The \$3.1 million project between Hayward Road and Chrysler Drive will include the

following:

- Adding a continuous left
- Please see page 4

Local girls recover from meningococcal disease

Alert parents and medical providers made it possible for two Vernonia girls to recover from potentially fatal meningococcal disease with little or no damage.

Mikila Solberg, 8, and 10 year-old Sarah Dahl, both students at Washington Grade School (WGS), were each hospitalized and given aggressive treatment with antibiotics in the early stages of the disease.

Mikila was hospitalized January 7 and responded well to treatment, allowing her to be released after four days. She responded so well, said her mother, Erica Solberg-Mandes, that on the second day, Mikila complained about her soft diet and insisted on a ham sandwich.

There was no confirmation that Sarah had the same disease, but because of the symptoms she displayed and her contact with Mikila's older sister, doctors felt it was better to err on the side of safety. Sarah was hospitalized Jan 10 and released after two days.

Both girls had to continue a course of antibiotics, but they are both in good shape and are busy living normal lives.

School Response

When the first case was reported, Vernonia School District officials took aggressive action to notify parents and minimize the likelihood of exposure for other students.

A letter sent home to parents on January 9 told them that a student had been hospitalized with the disease. The letter also described how it can be transmitted from one person to another, described the symptoms and emphasized the urgency of immediate treatment.

Going beyond the procedures recommended to minimize exposure, the district sanitized desks, rooms, bathrooms and fountains at WGS, plus the cafeteria, library and other shared spaces, even though meningococcal disease is not highly contagious without close contact.

Water fountains at WGS have been shut off and students are now using water bottles with their names on them.

Columbia County Public Health Nurse Karen Ladd told *The INDEPENDENT* that the school district's response was

Please see page 21

Whiteman appointed to Vernonia Council vacancy

After interviewing three candidates on January 9 for a vacant position on the Vernonia City Council, Mayor Sally Harrison began the January 17 city council meeting by reading a letter from Janie Wasmann, who withdrew as a potential councilor. Council then voted for the two remaining applicants with Randy Parrow and Shirlee Daughtry opting for Steve Whiteman; Brett Costley voted for Liz White and Harri-

son abstained.

Robert "Steve" Whiteman was then sworn in as the newest city councilor. Later, when Harrison was asked the reason for her abstention, she said that with only four votes and two candidates, she didn't want the potential of causing a tie vote, so she abstained. She went on to say that both candidates were qualified.

During the January 9 ques-

Please see page 20