

The INDEPENDENT

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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

February 2, 2006

It wasn't close...



Above: The horse arena at Anderson Park on February 8, 1996.

Below: The same area on January 30, 2006, after nearly 4.5 inches of rain fell in four days.



System, service improvements mean lower fire insurance rates

Results of a survey by Insurance Services Office (ISO), of the Vernonia Fire District and the City of Vernonia, found that improvements to services in Vernonia will reduce the cost of fire insurance in the area. A letter to the Fire District and the City indicated that changes to area insurance rates will take effect in January, 2006.

Vernonia Rural Fire District Chief Paul Epler recommends that residents contact their insurance agents to see what the

new classification cost benefits will be. "I have been told by one Vernonia resident that the savings on their home was around \$80.00 per year," said Chief Epler. "The major improvements are due to the Fire District's newer fire fighting equipment and the City of Vernonia's water system upgrades."

Another improvement is the new radio system for Columbia County 9-1-1. While none of these improvements were free,

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Heavy rains remind area residents of disastrous flood of Feb. 8, 1996

By Noni Andersen

Because I could not get to Mist for six days after the flood, this article is about the Flood of '96 in Vernonia, with few references to elsewhere. Please see the related article for a recap from Mist and Birkenfeld.

Ten years ago, on February 8, 1996, there was massive flooding in Oregon and Washington. The upper Nehalem Valley was devastated; 60 percent of the homes in Vernonia and more than 80 percent of the homes in Mist and Birkenfeld were flooded, some with as much as four to six feet of water.

Everyone was affected, whether their homes were flooded or not, because these communities were cut off from the rest of the world. State Highway 47 was wiped out in several places – south of Vernonia, between Vernonia and Mist, between Mist and Clatskanie. Slides and/or culvert failures destroyed part of state Highway 202 between Birkenfeld and Jewell, parts of the Scappoose-Vernonia Highway, and Apiary Road. Telephones were useless in rural areas and for all calls outside of Vernonia. The only reliable means of communication was radio.

There was flooding throughout the northwest but, locally, a series of weather conditions combined to allow massive flooding: It had been cold enough, long enough to freeze the earth fairly deep and several feet of snow sat on the frozen ground, effectively insulating the ground, instead of melting and being absorbed into the earth. This was followed by the Pineapple Express – warm rains carried by a

jet stream from the South Pacific. The amount of rainfall wouldn't have caused flooding without the frozen ground and the snow pack. Since heavy precipitation is normal in this area, few people thought a disaster was imminent.

Vernonia Fire department volunteers put markers in the river and monitored them regularly. Wednesday afternoon, February 7, the water stopped rising and even went down some. Most people thought the worst had passed. They were wrong.

The fire department decided to have a skeleton crew moni-

tor the river overnight and sent the other firefighters and medics home for some sleep, knowing that long hours of duty would be required if the water started rising again. Well, it did rise again, very rapidly, and volunteers started responding to their pagers about 3:00 a.m.

Low-lying areas were flooded and evacuations were underway. By 3:30 a.m., police officers were driving through areas of town warning people to evacuate. Many long-time residents thought it was unnecessary because they had seen flooding over the years and

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Interim superintendent is experienced administrator

At a special meeting on January 26, the Vernonia School District board of directors approved the contract and selection of Dr. Albert Davidian as the interim superintendent. Dr. Davidian was one of four candidates interviewed for the interim position, which will run from February 1 through June 30, 2006.

Davidian, a doctoral graduate of the University of Illinois, most recently served as interim superintendent at the Camas School District for the 2004-2005 school year. Prior to that, Davidian was the superintendent at North Marion School District from 1996 to July, 2003. North Marion District has 1,800 children but is similar to Vernonia with all three schools, K-5, 6-8, 9-12, on one campus. Davidian comes to Vernonia with a wealth of experience in budgeting, bond levies, contract negotiating, and in facilitating educational improve-



Dr. Albert Davidian

ments.

"My goal is to work hard over the next five months to meet the needs of this education system and carry out the needs of the board; to develop the budget, help with labor negotiations, finish the middle school building, and handle all the normal activities of the school year. I want to have a clean desk, everything running well

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