

Chalk Talk

Chalk Talk is a monthly column of information about Vernonia schools. It is written by various staff members. This month's column was written by teacher Kim Morrison.

Students visit State Penitentiary

Tuesday, March 6, wasn't a typical evening for a small group of students and teachers from Vernonia High School. We boarded a bus at the end of the day and headed down I-5 to visit the Oregon State Penitentiary. Upon arrival we were asked to submit photo ID, herded through a metal detector and sent through a series of locked doors. One metal detector and six locked doors later, we arrived in the visiting room. The process to get in and out of the prison takes nearly an hour. There are very strict rules about attire and a background check is necessary in advance.

Students were greeted by a large group of men, most serving 25 years to life for varying crimes. They have created a program for youth called Freedom Road. One might assume the program was created as a scare tactic but, in reality, it's an informative discussion about personal choices the inmates made and how they fell. The term fell refers to the ultimate moment when the prisoner committed a crime and got caught by police. It seems the inmates have a language all of their own.

Students were asked questions about the choices they make in their daily lives. Prisoners asked students to not take the same road. Slouching, snickering, or any form of disrespect was absolutely forbidden. The inmates made the students sit up and pay the utmost attention. Personal accounts of gang activity, drugs, and violence were recalled with enormous regret. Two inmates who spoke to the students had been in state custody since the age of 15. One was nearing release at the age of 30. He spoke of all he has missed out on in life; no driver's li-

cense, no eighteenth or twenty-first birthday parties, no college, no marriage, no children.

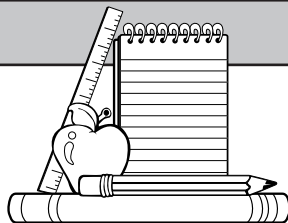
Inmates spoke of the harsh reality of small cells, which they referred to as their houses. One told us, "Imagine your bathroom, now throw in a mattress where the shower is and that is my living space. Oh, and I share it with another man."

Health care is minimal. I asked if an inmate would receive medication for high cholesterol and I got a definite head shake that meant, "NO." Teeth are tended to only when an inmate has a problem. Preventive care is nonexistent. Due to funding cuts, programs for inmates are extremely limited. Most programs and classes are organized and run by inmates. Students became acutely aware that life is not one of ease in the Oregon State Penitentiary.

I had to ask if job or computer training was available so that they could obtain a job upon release. The inmate laughed and told me that he had been in the system for 24+ years and has never been on a computer or seen the Internet. If behavior is good enough, some are considered for the work program that includes building furniture. Pay for this full time job maxes out at \$150 a month. A correspondence class to better yourself costs \$1000 each.

The stories of the mistakes made were all about choices; wrong choices, deadly choices, and choices that changed the outcomes of their entire lives. Hopefully, the students learned by the inmates mistakes so that they will never know the same fate.

Special thanks to teacher Rachel Wilcoxon for introducing our students to such a valuable program.



VCLC spring session is underway

Area residents will have a wide choice of classes to enjoy during the Vernonia Community Learning Center's spring session, including eleven Spring Art Workshops being offered through a joint effort with Vernonia Hands on Art.

Popular teacher and artist Kimberlee Weisker will be returning with classes on watercolor, beading and mixed media. Local resident, college instructor and artist Diane Coughlin will teach printmaking and basic drawing classes. An especially noteworthy class this term is Portland Community College's Writing 121, an English composition class required for every college freshman.

Art classes being offered this spring include Watercolor and Ink, Beading, Mixed Media

– Round Robin Style, How and Why to Juggle, Group Guitar, Bellydancing, Printmaking, Basic Drawing, Felting, Modern Collage, and Haiku.

PCC is offering Basic Design, Art 116; Reading 90/College Reading 115; English Composition, WR121; and Spanish Conversation.

Other classes being offered this spring include Computer Basic Applications, Computers Made Simple, ebay, Parent and Me, Computer Security, Human Origami, Hunter Safety, and Nutrition – Live Healthier!

Some of the class dates and times have changed and differ from the green flyer sent out on St. Patrick's Day. For more information, or to register, call 503-429-1030 or visit the Vernonia Community Learning Center at 939 Bridge St.

**Happy Easter -
The Easter Egg Hunt is at
10am Sharp in Hawkins Park,
Saturday, April 7**

**Come One, Come All,
Let's Raise
Money For
Vernonia Youth Baseball**



**2nd Annual Vernonia Youth
Summer Baseball Association
Golf Tournament Fundraiser**

Saturday, May 5th, 9:30 AM • Vernonia Golf Club

**4 Person Scramble
1st and 2nd Place Trophies
• Longest Drive • Closest to Pin • Longest Putt
Great Door Prizes**

**\$60 per person cash or check - no credit cards
Price Includes Green Fee and Lunch.**

**Club and Cart Rentals Available
To reserve Call 503-429-6811**

**For info call:
Melissa 503-429-0969 or Brent 503-429-9352**

**Play Rain or Shine – No Refunds.
Entry Fee is Tax Deductible OR Tax ID 93-0814021**

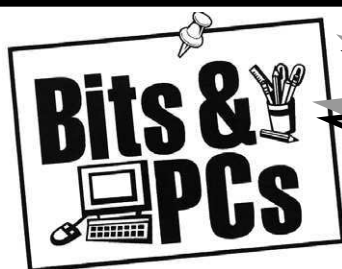
Take survey to improve child services

If you are a parent who has used or is using child care or a child care provider who is providing care for your children and/or other children, the Oregon Child Care Resource and Referral Network would like a moment of your time. The non-profit organization is seeking to improve statewide services to parents and child care providers. They have developed a long-range strategic plan with specific goals, and formed an independent task force to help them focus on improving their programs.

A brief survey has been developed for parents, whether you have or have not used child care resource and referral services and for child care providers whether you are a provider in a child care center or an independent family child care provider. Your answers will help the task force in making recommendations to the Ore-

gon Child Care Resource & Referral Network. The survey is on their website at www.oregonchildcare.org.

The survey needs to be taken by April 13.



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