

Water and mud return to Vernonia area as unwelcome guests

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the high school, traffic had to detour. Power was restored to most areas Tuesday morning, and most phone service was back by Wednesday.

By Tuesday night, Red Cross had arrived with enough volunteers to close the other shelters and use only Cedar Ridge for emergency food, shelter and supplies.

Town Hall meetings were held in the Washington Grade School gymnasium on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Tuesday the gym was packed, though attendance was down for Thursday's meeting and a pretty good crowd was in attendance on Saturday. Information on electricity, phones, water, and other services and assistance were provided, then there was a question and answer period. At the Thursday meeting, Vernonia City Planner Aldie Howard was named as Emergency Interim City Administrator, as City Administrator M.R. "Dick" Kline was not available.

Reports from some places put the water level lower than 1996, but most areas saw deeper water. Some businesses and homes that had only minor damage in 1996 had extensive damage in the Flood of 2007. Since the roads weren't damaged, the National Guard was able to bring in boats and help with the final rescues, some from second story windows on Heather Lane and other streets in that area. Thankfully, there was no loss of life in the Vernonia area.

Water for drinking, food preparation and sanitation became an issue on Tuesday. The flood mud was proving to be too much for the water plant, where Jeff Burch of Public Works had been working since the waters started rising, even though his own home flooded. Water restrictions went into effect Tuesday. Water was to be used for food preparation and sanitation only, no hosing down muddy areas and no clothes washing allowed. At its low point, the water level in the water plant was at two feet instead of the normal 27 feet. A \$30,000 a day water purification system was brought in to help restore the system. On Saturday, December 8, water restrictions were lifted.

As in 1996, volunteers quickly opened Mount Trashmore south of City Hall and also started the Victim's Assistance service at City Hall, making a data base of what people needed and what other people had to give.

Supplies and volunteers started coming in and, by Wednesday, the piles of sodden carpet, insulation, ruined furniture and appliances seemed to be in front of every home and many businesses. Heavy equipment rumbled through town, aided by National Guardsmen directing traffic.

Police Chief Mat Workman lined up enough additional police help to be able to watch and protect the properties vacated because of mud and water.

Governor Ted Kulongoski flew in Tuesday and spent about three hours reviewing the damage. The Vernonia City Council had sent an emergency declaration to Columbia County on Monday, the Columbia County Board of Commissioners sent a declaration to the Governor, and information started going to the Federal Government that same day. By Saturday, December 8, President Bush had approved the emergency declaration that provided payment for the extra manpower and equipment used in Columbia County. The declaration of emergency for individual property owners came on Sunday, December 9. FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) set up a toll-free number and people were able to start registering for federal assistance (additional information on FEMA in this issue).

The Governor returned to Vernonia on Sunday and toured the school buildings, the downtown area, and City Hall. When asked what he would like to say to Vernonians, Governor Kulongoski replied, "What I would like to tell them is that they are actually showing citizens of the state what a community is, and how you come together. To the citizens of Oregon, you're actually telling the people what Christmas is all about. It's about caring, it's about reaching out, not just with your money and your time, but also your heart. That's what this is all about, it's about Oregon and it's about the people

here in Vernonia."

Volunteers can still register at City Hall. Medical care is being provided in an evacuation tent at the Providence Medical Clinic parking lot, and Columbia Community Mental Health is seeing people at the same location. Supplies are available across from Vernonia City Hall

and from the Red Cross at Cedar Ridge. Cedar Ridge is also still the location for those in need of food and shelter.

Money donations for the community can be made at Wauna Federal Credit Union and food donations are now being taken at Columbia Pacific Food Bank at 474 Milton Road

in St. Helens, instead of at Vernonia Cares.

The cleanup work continues and Mount Trashmore grows and then shrinks as loads come in and go out. One thing everyone has learned from the Flood of 2007 is that 100 year floods don't always wait 100 years before happening again.

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The application deadline is January 25, 2008. Board Elections will be held on March 1, 2008 at the Annual Meeting.