

The INDEPENDENT

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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

April 17, 2008

Toxic cows



These cows appear very interested in this container. They are probably looking at the photographer, DEQ Senior Project Engineer Loren Garner. See related story on page 9.

Culvert work to close Jackson School Road

Washington County plans to close Jackson School Road on April 21 to replace a culvert. The road will be closed between Evergreen and Meek Road from 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Signs advising of the upcoming closure will be posted. Travelers are encouraged to use Glencoe Road as an alter-

nate route.

This schedule may change due to weather, work schedules, or availability of materials. For a current schedule, check www.wc-roads.com

For more information, call 503-846-7623, or e-mail: wc-roads@co.washington.or.us

Volunteers available for flood relief help

Columbia County Flood Relief (CCFR) center in Vernonia is still providing volunteers for your flood relief help – whatever it might be.

If you need help in cleanup or rebuilding, call the volunteer center at 503-429-4948.

City refuses payment then cuts water service in billing dispute

Ever wonder what would happen if you tried to fight city hall?

Leonard Simmons is a 71 year-old retired citizen of Vernonia living on a fixed income in a small, neatly maintained home (despite the damage received in the December flood) with his two 14 year-old Scotty dogs. He has been fighting Vernonia city hall since last August over the \$11.50 water rate increase put in place to rebuild loan reserves spent for some other, as yet unidentified, use. On April 2, the city's response to Simmons fight was to turn his water off.

Before the \$11.50 water loan charge, Simmons went round and round with city hall over the \$1.00 park maintenance fee on the water bill, saying he doesn't use the parks and shouldn't have to support them. That's "taxation without representation" according to Simmons. He thought he'd won that one when he was told by Joann Glass, over a year ago, that the city attorneys had looked at that and had 'exempted' him from having to pay that fee. When Glass' job

description changed, the \$1.00 started showing up again.

Simmons maintains that the citizens of Vernonia paid \$8.00 a month in the '80s to build up that water loan reserve in the first place and if the city 'lost' the money, that doesn't make the citizens responsible for building it back up again by paying \$11.50 a month. When the \$11.50 showed up on his bill, in August of 2007, Simmons started crossing off that charge plus the \$1.00 park maintenance fee, and paying the rest of the bill. Each time he paid this way, he says, Glass, and more recently Bree Eckertson, would say, "You're not paying it all, I don't know what to do." Simmons said he told them, "I'm not paying, I don't have the money," then they'd give him a receipt for the amount he paid.

On March 31, 2008, Simmons says he went in to pay and Eckertson said, "I'm going to take this to Aldie." Interim City Administrator Aldie Howard came to the window and that's when the trouble started, says

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City extends Waste Management franchise, rate change undecided

The Vernonia City Council held a study session with representatives from Waste Management, before the regularly scheduled April 7 council meeting. Interim City Administrator told council that the city had received back 140 of the 915 surveys sent out with the water bills. Of the 140 responses, 126 were from current curbside garbage customers and 119 want curbside recycling service. The majority of responders favored curbside recycling pickup twice a month.

Waste Management District Manager Dan Wilson, Pricing

Manager Mike Jefferies, and Operations Manager John Roth fielded questions after a Powerpoint presentation explaining that Waste Management will seek to raise fees from \$17.42 to \$18.55 for weekly residential 32 gallon garbage pickup. If curbside recycling is added twice a month, the rate will be \$23.70, rather than \$18.55. The only service that would be dropped in the new structure is the 32 gallon can will-call pickup, which will no longer be offered. Additionally, the proposal includes increases for drop

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