

# The INDEPENDENT

Vol. 23, No. 20

"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

October 16, 2008

## Popular Ride



Bill Sword and his trusty John Deere tractor again delighted folks at the Vernonia Salmon Festival, on October 4, with free wagon rides to salmon spawning sites.

## Steep hikes in utility fees coming soon in Vernonia

The October 6 Vernonia City Council meeting began with a public hearing on rate increases for water, sewer, park fees and out-of-city library fees. At the end of the hearing, Mayor Sally Harrison announced that the council's consensus was to prepare the resolution with blanks in the spaces for the rates and make a final determination of the rate changes at the October 20 council meeting. Approximately 12 citizens attended to hear the staff report on the proposed rates from Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson.

Most of the property taxes received by the city, Johnson explained, go into the General Fund, which is used primarily for police (\$490,000 or about 90%). None of the property tax money goes to water or sewer operations, which are fee driv-

en. About 20% of the fees collected go to pay off existing debts. Johnson said that, of about \$1.39 million in revenue received by the city, 41 percent goes to debt service. The recommendations for fee increases came from the Parks Committee and the Public Works Committee, which are official citizen advisory groups, Johnson concluded.

One citizen told council that she is still being billed (and paying for) water and sewer although her house has been torn down, she has used only about 300 gallons to hose off the area and doesn't have a sewer hookup at all. She asked how we (the city) got so far in debt and asked council to consider basing fees on usage and giving a break for those who don't use as much.

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## Property tax bills coming, too

Columbia County Assessor Sue Poling, has certified the 2008-09 Columbia County Assessment and Tax Rolls, and over 28,000 property tax bills will be mailed this week to Columbia County property owners.

Under the property tax system implemented by Measure 50, passed by Oregon voters in

1997, taxing districts have permanent tax rates for operating purposes. At the same time, maximum assessed values of individual properties are limited to a three-percent increase each year, unless the property is improved, subdivided, rezoned or disqualified from special assessment or exemption. These are "exceptions" to the three-percent increase in maximum assessed value. The tax assessed value of an individual property is the lower of the maximum assessed value or the real market value of the property.

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**Confusing Ballot Measures?  
See page 4.**

## Firewood cutting permits available

Oregon Dept. of Forestry has wood available to cut and is offering wood permits for the public. Permits are \$10.00 for two cords of wood, and each household can get a maximum of five permits per year. Call the Astoria office at 503-325-7215 for more information on areas and about obtaining a permit.

A team of volunteers will cut wood for Vernonia citizens who are unable to cut their own. The volunteers need loads of logs or a supply of wood to cut into firewood. Anyone with logs or a wood supply, please contact Robert Alverts at 503-639-0405, or 503-577-0202, or email balverts@teleport.com

## Fireworks Scheduled

There will be fireworks Oct. 17 during Homecoming. If you have pets that are upset by loud noises, it may be wise to keep them indoors.

## Fire season ends; burn permits still needed

Fire Season was officially terminated on October 6. With the ending of fire season, forest operators are no longer required to have fire suppression equipment and fire watch services as part of their forest operations. Public fire restrictions have also been lifted with the end of fire season. The Columbia County Fire Defense Board has lifted the ban on open burning. Burning will be regulated on a day-to-day basis by local fire districts and the Oregon Department of Forestry

(ODF).

Permits are required for any open burning within Columbia County. The burning of domestic waste and yard debris requires a valid permit from your local fire district. If outside a rural fire district, the Department of Forestry issues this permit.

The burning of logging slash related to forest management activities, whether in large or small quantities, is permitted only through the Oregon Department of Forestry. When obtaining a permit, clearly describe the type of burning you'll be conducting to ensure obtaining the correct information and proper permit. Those conducting burning of land clearing debris or logging slash require special permits, this is not covered under the typical household "backyard debris burning"

permit.

For more information on burning regulations, contact the appropriate district office:

Vernonia, 503-429-8252

Mist-Birkenfeld,

503-755-2710

Banks, 503-324-6262

ODF Forest Grove,

503-357-2191

ODF Columbia City,

503-397-2636

## Town Hall Meeting

7:00 p.m. Oct. 22

Vernonia City Hall

Topics will include schools and funds available for flood recovery projects.