VRFPD bond paid, lowering local tax rate

From page 1

Although most property owners can expect a predictable three percent increase in their property tax bill each year, there is another source of change. Whether a property owner's tax bill varies more than three-percent is largely the result of changes in local option and bonded debt levy rates, which are not limited by Measure 50. This is why the percentage change is not the same throughout the county.

The Vernonia RFPD bond approved by voters in March 1998 was paid off last year, decreasing this year's consolidated tax rates in that district. Other areas affected by bonded levies include Scappoose and Rainier.

Total property taxes of $50,071,055.45 are being billed for the county, cities, schools and special districts. That amount is 1.11 percent less than last year. An additional $1,112,599.67 will be billed for such things as drainage districts assessments and the Oregon Department of Forestry fire patrol special assessments. That amount is 27 percent higher than last year due to an increase in fire patrol assessments. According to the Department of Forestry, the rates reflect rising firefighting costs, a restructured wildfire funding system approved by the 2007 Legislature – including a surcharge on improved lots, and payback of a one-time loan to cover deficits incurred in fighting 14 large fires over the past three years. Forest landowners and owners of one or more improved lots in forest protection districts will see these rates reflected on property tax statements this year. For more information on the increase in fire patrol assessments, go to www. oregon.gov/odf or call the Department of Forestry at 503-397-2636.

County-wide, the market value of all taxable property increased by five-percent, from $6.90 billion to $7.25 billion. The largest residential increase in market value, based on sales prior to January 1, 2008 was in Prescott, where vacant land values increased by 25 percent Most of the remaining residential market values in the county increased by an average of six-percent. However, property taxes are based on assessed values. The total assessed value this year is $38,658,310.45 or 0.83 percent lower than last year.

Please see page 12

State web site for financial information

Oregon's Department of Consumer and Business Services has launched a Web site to address the concerns of Oregonians worried about the security of their finances.

"Recent events in the financial markets have caused many Oregonians to wonder whether their money is safe and what, if any, action they should take to protect their investments," Governor Ted Kulongoski said. "There are many safety nets in place to protect your money, such as federal deposit insurance and guaranty funds, so for most Oregonians, there is no need to make sudden changes. I urge Oregonians to consult with a trusted adviser before making any major financial decision."

The Web page – available at http://egov.oregon.gov/DCBS/safe_money.shtml – addresses common questions about bank and credit union deposits, insurance policies, brokerage accounts, mortgages, and other investment areas. It also includes links to state and federal financial regulators and other resources.

In addition to developing the Web page, the Department of Consumer and Business Services is taking steps to better protect consumers during these uncertain economic times.

The department has increased its staff in mortgage lending and is hiring more financial examiners to conduct more frequent and in-depth examinations of state-chartered banks and trusts. The department also is continuing to provide homeowners facing foreclosure with information and counseling resources to help them stay in their home.

For more information, visit the department's Division of Finance and Corporate Securities Web site at: www.dfcs.oregon.gov.

League of Women Voters set meeting

The League of Women Voters' of Columbia County will hold a public meeting October 20 at the OSU Extension office in St. Helens. The board will meet at 6:30 p.m. followed by the general meeting at 7:00 p.m.

For more information, contact Georgia at 503-366-0739.

Test of vote counting equipment

The public certification test of Columbia County's vote counting equipment will be on Tuesday, October 28, for the November 4 general election.

Testing will begin at 1:00 p.m. in the County Elections Department in the courthouse in St. Helens. The public is welcome to attend.

Ballot drop sites for area voters who do not mail their ballots will be as follows:

- Vernonia Library during regular hours, plus extended hours November 4 from noon to 8:00 p.m.
- Mist-Birkenfeld Rural Fire Dist. Main Station during regular office hours. Hours for November 4 with be 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.