

47J Board discusses possible budget shortfall and solutions

The Vernonia School Board spent the first part of their December 4 meeting discussing what appears to be a budget shortfall that could amount to \$130,000 by the end of the school year. The budget figure is based on lower than anticipated tax revenues, lower enrollment, and a reduction in the School Improvement Fund. The district instituted a spending freeze two months ago and tightened it further last month, without seeing much savings.

Superintendent Ken Cox suggested to the board a number of approaches, including "wait and see if it comes out that way," make staff cuts, use flood insurance money to shore up the budget, use proceeds from the previous sale of Lincoln School, or cut school days. Snow days might be used as unpaid staff days and only five would be needed to make up the potential shortfall.

After lengthy discussion, the board was leaning toward an approach that would combine some insurance funds, some sale proceeds, and some unpaid snow days. The board and Cox agreed to wait until the January board meeting for a final decision, they will then have budget numbers through December on which to base their decision.

The Oregon Solutions team

should have site information by the January meeting, Cox told the board. The next step is the selection of an architect for the schools. This process will be started now so work can begin as soon as the final site selection is completed.

Cox told the board that a five-foot high engineered flood wall around the middle school might be possible with FEMA covering three quarters (or about \$300,000) of the cost. Board member Ernie Smith said he would like a determination of whether such a wall would displace more water in any future flood events. "We need to make sure a wall doesn't negatively affect our neighbors," said Smith. Cox said that the wall would be kept very close to the building to reduce negative impact, but allow the building to continue to be used for some purpose. The board approved an engineering study and request for FEMA approval of such a wall.

The board accepted, with much regret, the resignation of Cathy Ward. Though the resignation is effective December 1, 2008, Ward will stay through the school year to complete her contract.

The next board meeting will be held January 8, starting at 6:00 p.m. at the District office.

Buy roses and help VHS students

Because a number of Vernonia students are planning significant trips – either with a class to Washington, D.C, or with the high school band to Disneyland – Creatures & Vernonia Florist are planning a fund raiser to help them.

Creatures & Vernonia Florist are taking orders for 12 long-stemmed red roses displayed in a gift box, for \$20. If you would like to place an order, students will be taking orders for the next couple of months. The plan is to have orders processed and available for pick-up at Creatures & Vernonia Florist, starting Saturday, December 20, then every two weeks, until funds are raised to send the kids on these memorable trips.

Orders may be placed at Creatures & Vernonia Florist,

736 Bridge St., Vernonia.

Lego Team competes in robotics, plus



Left to right; Rock'em, Sock'em Robots team members Jacob Eyrrick, Bridger Steward, Bill Organ, Brad Ely, Megan Ely, Kaitlyn Eyrrick, Anthony Pelster, and Coach Susan Ely, after demonstrating their project and presentation at the Senior Center on December 9.

Remember Lego Bricks, named that in 1953? If you have kids or grandkids, you know that Legos aren't just brick-shaped plastic building pieces anymore. Nowadays, Lego is so much more.

For instance, First Lego League (FLL) is a program aimed at getting children aged 9 to 14 excited about science and technology. FLL sets up yearly theme-based challenges that incorporate research, problem solving and engineering, utilizing Lego robotics units.

Each team of up to 10 kids, with at least one adult coach, has about 10 weeks to:

- build an autonomous robot that will, in two minutes and 30 seconds, complete pre-designed missions,
- analyze, research, and invent a solution for a given assignment, and
- create a clever presentation about their solution to perform in front of a panel of judges.

Winning teams earn awards and trophies.

Vernonian Susan Ely took on the role of FLL coach for a Vernonia team with a goal of competing on December 14 in Hillsboro at one of the FLL events. Rock'em, Sock'em Robots was the team name and

Jacob Eyrrick, Bridger Steward, Bill Organ, Brad Ely, Megan Ely, Kaitlyn Eyrrick, and Anthony Pelster, along with Ely, made up the team.

This year's project was called Climate Connections. The team had to research how climate affects their community, and identify a problem caused by climate. Not surprisingly, Rock'em, Sock'em Robots chose flooding. Then they had to find another community somewhere in the world affected by the same issue. Next was to create innovative solutions, program Lego robots, and share their research and

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