

Sheriff's posse is now disbanded

by Rebecca McGaugh

One fixture at the annual Vernonia Friendship Jamboree, for many years, has been the presence of the Columbia County Sheriff's Posse. Both their equestrian and their foot members have been a welcome sight at Jamboree. That's in the past, though, as the Posse was disbanded in January of this year.

Sheriff Jeff Dickerson said the reason was that the professionalization of law enforcement has really changed the posse concept, plus there were liability concerns that required the members to have the full 16-week reserve training.

The posse was formed in the 1980s as a riding group and then took over Search and Rescue when the need was identified. They also did crime scene security, courtroom security, fair and festival security and were a visible uniformed presence.

Sheriff Dickerson told the posse in January, "We want you to join with us." The newly reorganized Sheriff's volunteer program has new uniforms that more clearly identify members as volunteers. One of Dickerson's concerns was that the posse's uniforms looked like deputy uniforms and the public could not tell the difference. That led to complaints about people who looked like

deputies but didn't respond like deputies. Posse members, some of whom were trained as reserves or in search and rescue, were trained to identify problems, back off and call for deputies or other law enforcement. Several posse members have joined the new volunteer efforts, though most have not.

The posse was told the equestrian part of the posse could remain, with a change of uniforms, but the rest of the posse would not be allowed to participate unless they signed onto the newly redesigned volunteer program. The posse had raised money for its activities by working the security jobs (always with the Sheriff's approval) and pooling the money. The only money the posse cost the Sheriff's Office was for general liability insurance and worker's compensation coverage. Those who rode horses provided their own liability insurance.

When the posse made the decision to disband, they gave \$1,000 from their funds to each of the five Columbia County Senior Centers and split the rest among county non-profits such as the Columbia County Food Bank.

The unfortunate result is the loss of a historic element of the Sheriff's Office, as the Posse will ride no more in area parades, fairs and festivals.

Get ready for Bear Creek 5K/10K

"If I can do a 5K, anyone can do a 5K!" – Maria Lemay.

Beginning and ending at Anderson Park, come and join in either a 5K Run/Walk encompassing a lap of Vernonia Lake or a 10K Run that heads south along the Banks/Vernonia Linear Trail. Both routes are flat and go through some tree-lined sections of the trail providing welcome shade and making them suitable for first time runners.

This event is a fundraiser for the Vernonia Cares Food Bank – an organization that has supported local families for the past 24 years.

How can you help? Volunteer at this event, become a sponsor, enter the race as an individual or group, bring a

friend, bring your dog, or come cheer on those who run or walk. Be there at the finish line!

Registration/packet pick up will begin at 7:00 a.m. on August 15 at Anderson Park, with the events starting at 8:00 a.m. and 8:05 a.m. Online registration is encouraged at <http://www.signmeup.com/61797>, or contact Maria Lemay, Race Director at 503-429-1069.

Power of the People

By W. Marc Farmer, General Manager, West Oregon Electric Cooperative



WOEC Updates

With several projects in various stages of progress, I thought it might be a good time to provide our members with an update.

The Timber/Elsie Transmission Line project is our biggest undertaking in over a decade. We are undergrounding the almost 17-mile line that suffered serious damage in the windstorm of 2006, then was the victim of Meth addicts who cut down over ten miles of poles to steal the wire, causing over \$1 million in damage. Since we are still paying for the last time the overhead transmission line was damaged by a major storm, it made little sense to put the line back up overhead, knowing it would be knocked down again by the next storm. Every year we have spent thousands of dollars repairing this line as the right-of-way is only 40 feet wide and the trees on both sides are over 100 feet tall. Simple geometry says that keeping the line overhead will continue to be a losing battle. To reduce the annual cost and labor to repair the line and increase the reliability of power, the decision was made to underground the line since over \$2 million in FEMA funds, and a Hazard Mitigation Grant for over \$500,000, were available for the project.

Michels Power was the successful bidder for the project and has removed the brush from the line and are doing a combination of trenching, direct boring, and plowing to install the line underground. It is anticipated the project will be com-

pleted by November 1.

The Board has directed Management and Staff to develop and implement a plan to underground at least ten miles of line per year in our system. The first meeting was held on June 25 and additional meetings will be held with Staff and our Engineering Contractor to review the most problematic lines in our system and prioritize them for undergrounding. This project will decrease maintenance expense, tree trimming and outages, resulting in increasing reliability and cost savings to the Co-op and its members. We will present the prioritized plan to the Board at the July Board meeting and hope to begin the undergrounding project later this year.

We continue operating tree trimming with two crews and between our progress, help from some logging in several areas, and what Mother Nature has taken down from the storms, we have been seeing some good progress in our system. Outages from tree-related issues aside from storm damage have been declining the last couple of years since we brought in the second tree crew.

We are just beginning the design work for the New Vernonia Substation that will be located on the same site as our pole yard. We will be using the \$475,000 earmark grant from the federal government to build the new substation out of the flood plain. It wouldn't make sense to put brand new transformers, to replace existing 40 year-old transformers, back into the flood plain. We anticipate completing this project between the end of 2010 and summer of 2011. We will remove the East Sub, (which also sits in the flood plain across from the New Hong Kong), once the new Vernonia Substation has been completed.

Help others by teaching English

Columbia County Citizens for Human Dignity is joining forces with Educate Ya (www.educateya.org) and is looking for volunteers to teach English one-on-one to the Spanish speaking community in Columbia County through the Intercambio ESL program.

An introductory meeting will be held at the office of the Rural Organizing Project, 33421 SW Maple St., Scappoose, on Tuesday, July 14, at 5:30 p.m.

For more information, call 503-410-0995.



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