



# THE INDEPENDENT

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Glorious weather couldn't outshine Vernonia High School's happy graduates on June 5th.

## As sitings increase, learn how to live with cougars

Since cougars have been seen recently in and around Vernonia, here is some information provided by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Oregon is home to more than 5,000 cougars, or mountain lions. While cougar sightings and encounters are rare, it is wise to educate yourself about the big cats.

Native to Oregon, cougars range throughout the state, with the highest densities occurring in the Blue Mountains in the northeastern part of the state, and in the southwestern Cas-

cade Mountains. Their primary food source is deer, but they will also consume elk, raccoons, bighorn sheep, and other mammals and birds. Cougars are territorial animals and maintain home ranges of up to 100 miles.

Most active at dawn and dusk, cougars are lone hunters. They are generally solitary animals, except for mothers who remain with kittens for about two years. While actual cougar sightings have increased, coyotes, bobcats and dogs are often mistaken for cougars. A cougar can be identified by its

large size, cat-like appearance, consistent tan or tawny body color, and long tail. An adult cougar's tail is nearly three feet long, and is a third to a half of its total length.

Cougar tracks can be differentiated from dog tracks by paying attention to detail.

How to identify cougar tracks versus dog tracks: Cougar tracks do not generally include claw marks because cougars have retractable claws and the heel pad has three distinct lobes at the base of the heel pad, forming an "M" shape. Dog tracks will usually include claw marks and tracks of dogs' rear pads are more rounded.

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## Administrator, police chief, councilor resign; Kay demoted

At the June 7 meeting of the Vernonia City Council, the first hint that something was amiss was the lack of City Administrator Bob Young's name plate and the fact that prior Interim City Administrator Jim Johnson was in attendance. The reason was made clear at the end of the very long council meeting, when council came out of an executive session and Johnson announced, "In executive session, council discussed the General Release and Severance Agreement that Bob Young signed at 5:00 p.m. today." The agreement stated that "The parties have agreed to accept Young's resignation effective 5:00 p.m. on June 7, 2010." In consideration for the settlement Young receives two months salary (\$12,499.96 less withholding) and his unused vacation worth \$7,031.70, minus \$500 for a trip to Washington, D.C., that was cancelled due to weather. The council had originally been scheduled to do Young's one year review at this meeting, instead they saw his resignation.

After discussing options for an interim city administrator, it came to light that Bill Haack, Vernonia's grant writer, who is employed by Columbia Pacific Development Corp. (ColPac), could and would act as interim

city administrator. ColPac will continue to pay his salary (up through December), though he requested a \$500 stipend to help with housing and utilities. Council appointed Haack as pro tem City Administrator through July while they decide how to proceed.

The budget committee had previously asked council to consider defunding the position of City Administrator, due to budgetary concerns, and council agreed to defund the position for six months. In addition they defunded the part-time Chief of Police position. Chief Frank Grace submitted a letter of resignation (announced at the budget committee meeting on June 2) stating he would not continue his contract with the city beyond August 2010, the end of his one-year contract.

Resignations continued as Councilor Brett Costley, whose position is up for election this November, distributed a letter of resignation effective July 1, 2010. Costley said, "I have come to the decision it would be better for the city and my family for me to resign July 1."

The day after the council meeting, it became public knowledge that Captain Mike Kay had used a one year clause in his contract to give up his position as captain and return to his position as sergeant. and become a member of the union again. According to Mayor Sally Harrison, Kay gave up his Captaincy so he could have union representation, though no specific reason was given for his wanting that representation.

When the dust of all these changes settled, Vernonia was left with a pro tem City Administrator through July, no Chief of Police as of September 1, one less council member as of July

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## State meeting on hospital in St. Helens

Oregon Public Health Certificate of Need program officials will hold a public meeting regarding the application for a certificate of need by Columbia Health District for a 12-bed hospital to be located at 35311 Millard Road, St. Helens.

Anyone may speak at the public meeting, and anyone who speaks may be questioned by the presiding officer or other Oregon Public Health staff. The time period for testimony may

be limited, depending on the number of people wanting to talk. The testimony will be limited to the proposal under review.

The meeting will be held Wednesday, June 23, from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. at St. Helens High School gym, 2375 Gable Road., St. Helens.

Jana Fussell, Oregon Public Health certificate of need coordinator will chair and conduct the meeting.