



THE INDEPENDENT

Vol. 25, No. 20

The Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley for Over 25 years

October 21, 2010



Left to right; Interim Vernonia City Administrator Bill Haack, Representative Brad Witt, General Manager Marc Farmer, Senator Betsy Johnson, County Commissioner Tony Hyde and Representative Debbie Boone were all smiles at the October 8 groundbreaking for the new West Oregon Electric Cooperative headquarters on Rose Ave. Photo by Sarah Rossi.

New flood maps change risk in some areas

Columbia County is urging residents affected by the recently-approved Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood maps to get insurance before November 25th, the day before the new maps take effect.

Columbia County recently completed reviewing and renewing flood maps, which help identify hazard zones and high-risk properties that are eligible for flood insurance under the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Some properties not previously in the flood plain are now listed in that area, which means those residents may need to purchase a NFIP flood insurance policy.

According to Glen Higgins, flood plain administrator for the county, if your dwelling has historically been mapped as out of the Flood Hazard area and is now in that area on the new maps, if you purchase flood insurance prior to the November 25, 2010, deadline, you will qualify for a Preferred Risk Policy. The Preferred Risk rate can

be continued on that policy for two years, as long as the insurance policy is kept current. After two renewals, your policy will transition to a standard rate schedule but, because you bought a policy when your dwelling was out of the flood hazard area, you can grandfather to the "out of the flood zone" rate, or use the new zone rate, whichever is less expensive for you.

Those with mortgages may be required by their lenders to purchase the flood insurance because standard home insurance does not cover floods, according to Derek White, the county's emergency management director. "All folks in the flood plain are highly encouraged to get flood insurance even if they don't have a mortgage company requiring them to do so," White said.

White added that NFIP policies will pay claims even when federal disaster help is not eligible. "We had flooding in Clatskanie in January 2009 that did not meet the requirements

for a federal disaster declaration. Those who had flood insurance were still able to get assistance with claims they filed and others were unable to get any kind of recovery assistance."

For more information on the NFIP, go to <http://www.floodsmart.gov> or call 1-888-379-9531.

State public records, meeting laws get "F"

Attorney General John Kroger recently released a Government Transparency Report emphasizing that Oregon's nearly 40-year-old public records and public meetings laws need major reforms.

"Oregon received an 'F' in a 2007 study of government transparency in the fifty states," said Deputy Attorney General Mary Williams. "Oregonians across the state agree with that assessment."

After taking office last year, Attorney General Kroger determined it was time to reform

See Public on page 5

City found in violation in five areas of flood grant compliance

The City of Vernonia received a letter, dated September 23, notifying them of issues needing to be addressed regarding their administration of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds used for flood recovery projects.

The letter, though it said that, "In general, the grant project is in compliance with...requirements." also said that the project is not proceeding on schedule and that there was one "Finding". A "Finding" was defined as a situation where the city is in violation of federal law or a Special Condition of the grant contract. The City had 30 days to provide a satisfactory response to the "Finding", before "appropriate sanctions

may be exercised."

The grant in question is for \$500,000 to help with flood elevations and rehabilitation projects administered by Community Action Team (CAT) in their capacity as the overseer of the County's flood relief efforts.

The "Finding" actually outlined five areas needing to be addressed, including documenting permit inspections before paying for work done, the homeowner needing to find three bids for work (versus CAT giving them bids), handling of homeowner conflicts with contractors, work not being done to specifications, and problems with paperwork in one file. One of the findings was about work that had to be done a second time because 6" foundation blocks were used where the requirements called for 8" foundation blocks.

Jim Tierney, CAT Deputy Director, told council, "I don't think this kind of feedback is ever harmful" and that it gives an opportunity to review the process. The eight-page response letter approved by council outlined corrective action that would address the concerns, such as additional training for personnel. Council approval allowed the letter prepared by Community Action Team to be sent within the 30 day time limit.

Ballot drop sites

Ballot drop sites for the November 2 General Election are as follows:

- Vernonia Library during library hours through Nov. 1; noon to 8:00 p.m. on Nov. 2.
- Mist-Birkenfeld RFPD during office hours through Nov. 1; 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Nov. 2
- County Courthouse, 230 Strand St., is open 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on November 2. There is also a drive-by drop box in the lower parking lot.



Halloween Activities Sunday, Oct. 31

Carved Pumpkin Contest — 3-6:00 p.m. at Black Bear Coffee Co. Bring your carved pumpkins to be judged. \$2 for 12 and under, \$5 over 12. Cash prize determined by number of entries. Free music by Basinbillies and free face painting for kids, plus 50/50 drawing, \$1 per ticket or \$5 for six. Sponsored by Black Bear and the Free-wheelers.

Halloween Costume Parade — 4:30 p.m. starting at City Hall. Sponsored by Vernonia Community PTA and Clever Cricket.

Fall Carnival — 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Vernonia Christian Church, with games, prizes, goodies and more. Join us at 410 North Street for a safe Halloween alternative of free family fun for everyone. For more information call the church office at 503-429-6522