

# Join CASA and help children in court

CASA for Kids, Inc. has formed to carry on the work of Court Appointed Special Advocates in Columbia County. CASAs (or Court Appointed Special Advocates) are trained volunteers appointed by a judge to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children in juvenile court.

The main job of CASA volunteers is to advocate for foster children to have a safe and loving permanent home. "CASAs ensure that these children do not fall through the cracks," noted CASA for Kids Executive Director Kathryn Bourn. "And given the budget cuts to social services, those cracks are becoming chasms." Meanwhile, child abuse is on the rise. In Columbia County, the rate of "founded" abuse and neglect reports increased 68 percent between 2007 and 2009.

In Oregon, every child with a pending juvenile-dependency case is entitled to have a CASA volunteer. "Unfortunately, in Columbia County, we don't have nearly enough volunteers to serve all the children," Bourn said. CASA for Kids currently serves about 15 percent of children in the foster-care system.

In order to serve all the children, CASA for Kids needs to train an additional 50 to 75 volunteers. Most CASA volunteers advocate for just one child or one sibling group. CASA for Kids will offer a new CASA training, starting February 24. Training topics include child abuse, substance abuse, domestic violence, cultural com-

petency issues, speaking in court, role of DHS, poverty, and CASA guidelines. Volunteers receive 30 hours of new CASA training, write a sample court report, and observe experienced CASAs in court before getting assigned a case of their own.

CASA volunteers come from all walks of life, ethnic groups and educational backgrounds. "What they have in common is tenacity and compassion for children," Bourn said.

Currently, 12 CASA volunteers advocate for 37 children. With more than 260 new juvenile dependency cases having been filed in Columbia County Circuit Court this year, that leaves 223 children without a CASA. Not all of those children wind up in foster care; some remain in their family home while their parents or other family members work with the Department of Human Services. Either way, however, having a CASA volunteer to advocate for the child is extremely important.

Studies have shown that

children with a CASA spend less time "in the system." They either return to their parents or are adopted more quickly than children who do not have CASAs. Children with CASAs also receive more services to assist them with their educational, medical and psychological needs. When a CASA advocates for the child, the child tends to have more contact with extended family members too.

CASA advocacy is a unique volunteer role. While juvenile case information is highly confidential, as parties to the case, CASAs receive child protection reports and medical, counseling and school records. CASAs meet regularly with the children, their biological and foster parents, caseworkers, the child's attorney, other family members, and community service providers. Once appointed, CASAs go to court and participate in hearings and settlement negotiations at all phases of the case. They make their own report to the court

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## VPD offers fraud information

The Vernonia Police Department has provided contacts for people who have been the victim of fraud, or who want more information on how to avoid becoming a victim. Fraud is wrongful or criminal deception intended to result in financial or personal gain.

For internet fraud, go to

<http://www.ic3.gov>. For phone scams, call 888-195-8501 or Federal Trade 877-982-4357 or see <http://www.phonebusters.com>. For fake check frauds, information is available at <http://www.fakechecks.org>.

Other helpful websites are <http://www.stopfraud.gov> and <http://www.ripoffreport.com>.

## Senior Center News

Vernonia Senior Center officers and board members for 2011 were elected at the membership meeting in December. Carl Holsey will serve another term as president; Sykes Mitchell and Bill James are vice-presidents, treasurer Pat Ray and secretary Sandy Welch were re-elected. Board members for the new year are Pauline Coffman, Dick Rosen, Susan Goodhope, Jack Harvey, George Gans, Larry Bernardi and Francine Lentz.

It's also time to renew your annual membership or to join for the first time. Vernonia area residents, age 50 and over, are eligible, and the \$15.00 membership fee provides many important services for our community.

Free blood pressure checks are back on schedule, courtesy of Columbia County Public Health, on the 4th Wednesday of each month from 11 a.m. to noon.

Now that the holidays are over, foot care is also back on the regular schedule of the second and fourth Fridays of each month. Call Marilyn Albro, R.N., at 503-429-0406 for an appointment. Foot care is \$15.00.

Lunch is served Monday through Friday at noon. A \$4.00 donation is suggested for those 60 and older, and \$5.00 for those under 60. If you prefer lunch to go, for only \$5.00 you can call ahead and place your order.

If you enjoy bingo, you can also have fun at lunch time with free Bingo each Monday starting at 11:45 a.m.

Breakfast for all ages is again available on Fridays at the Senior Center, from 7:30 to 9:00 a.m., at \$3.50 per person. Maple bars are also made fresh daily for \$1.00 each! If you want maple bars for a gathering of any kind, call 503-429-3912 a day or two ahead and place your order.

**Vernonia Senior Citizens Center:** 446 Bridge Street  
**Senior Information Assistance Rep:** Rosie McCoy  
**Hours:** Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.  
**Thrift Shop Hours:** 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.  
**Phone:** 503-429-3912

## Master Gardener™ classes

After twenty-one years of holding the Oregon State University Master Gardener™ classes in St. Helens, and last year in Vernonia, this year's classes will be held in Clatskanie. The class starts on Tuesday, March 8, and will meet every Tuesday through May 31, from 9:30 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. with a thirty minute break for lunch.

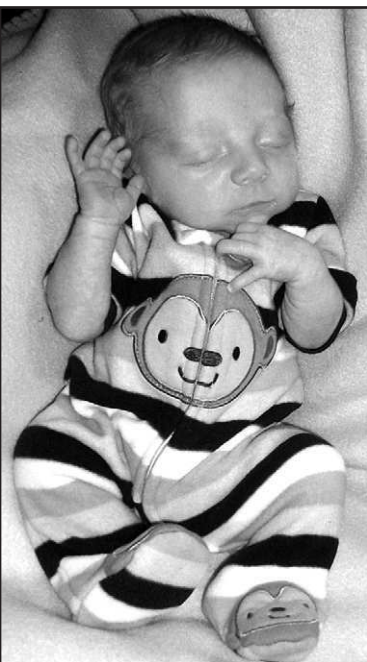
Topics to be covered will include vegetable gardening, insect identification, botany for gardeners, plant problem diagnosis, growing fruits and berries, lawn management, weed identification and management, pesticides safety, and plant propagation.

Weekly instructors include

Oregon State University teaching and Extension faculty, experienced Master Gardeners and other professionals. Cost of the series will be \$75.00. Students completing the class will be expected to pay back about 50 hours on community horticultural projects.

Applications will be accepted through February 15. For more information or to get the application packet, contact the OSU Extension Office by calling 503 397-3462, emailing either Chip Bubl ([chip.bubl@oregonstate.edu](mailto:chip.bubl@oregonstate.edu)) or Vicki Krenz ([vicki.krenz@oregonstate.edu](mailto:vicki.krenz@oregonstate.edu)), or by stopping by the office at 505 N. Columbia River Hwy. in St. Helens.

## Welcome Additions



### Joshua Exzavior Ellis

Joshua Exzavior Ellis was born October 25, 2010, to Luke and Torie Ellis of Vernonia. He weighed 5 pounds and was 17-7/8 inches long.

He joined his brother, Joseph, and sister, Jordynn, at

the family home.

Grandparents are Karen and Stephen Ellis, and Judy Clement, all of Vernonia.

Great-grandparents are Marion and Jeanette Grant of Vernonia and Loren Ellis of Scappoose.

### Mariolino's

Prime Rib  
\$13.<sup>99</sup>

FRIDAYS & SATURDAYS

721 Madison Ave., Vernonia • 503-429-5018

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736 Bridge St. Vernonia [www.vernoniaflorist.com](http://www.vernoniaflorist.com)