



# THE INDEPENDENT

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Despite recent heavy rains, groundwork on the new school construction is on schedule. Construction on the building is scheduled to begin March 1.

## Vernonia Schools to Receive \$11.2 Million in FEMA Grants

Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden and Congressman David Wu announced, on January 13, that the Vernonia School District will receive \$11.2 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The new grant comes in addition to the \$150,000 in funding that the school district received through Congressional appropriations in fiscal year 2010.

According to FEMA, the agency will acquire the existing Vernonia K-12 school buildings through its Flood Mitigation Assistance program. The \$11.2 million in proceeds from the acquisition will go toward the construction of a new school campus outside the floodplain. Groundbreaking for the project took place last month.

"This grant will do more than just construct a school, it'll help rebuild a community and create jobs," Merkley said. "I'm thrilled these unspent disaster funds have found the right home. Congratulations to the community. Not even a 500-year flood can wash away Vernonia's bright future."

"This announcement means that the federal government and FEMA are doing the right thing for the families of Vernonia

who have worked tirelessly to put their lives and their community back together," Wyden said. "The schools in Vernonia have always been the heart and soul of the community and this money means that it will stay that way into the future."

"Money can't build the spirit of community that the citizens of Vernonia have shown since the flooding," said Wu, "but \$11.2 million can certainly build a top-notch school, create some jobs, and foster new hope for a better future. This is a proud day for a much-deserving community."

In 2007, devastating flooding washed through Vernonia, completely destroying sections of the Vernonia School District. The district received \$150,000 in Congressional appropriations funding in fiscal year 2010 after Senators Merkley and Wyden requested funds to replace equipment damaged by the flood.

According to school superintendent Dr. Ken Cox the \$11.2 million includes \$10.4 million for buy-out of the existing buildings and approximately \$800,000 for demolition of the existing buildings. The district's new school budget already included the \$10.4 million.

## Update on Hwy. 26 tunnel closure

Repairs on the Dennis L. Edwards Tunnel, on Hwy 26, originally scheduled to start on Monday, January 17, were postponed until Hwy. 6 could be stabilized and cleared of approximately 1,000 cubic yards of landslide debris. The state Department of Transportation anticipated that the Hwy. 26 work would start on the night of Wednesday, January 19.

During the work, the tunnel will be open every weekend and weekday but will close nightly Sunday through Thursday until late May.

On weekends, the tunnel will close at 10:00 p.m. on Sundays. On weekdays, Monday through Thursday, the tunnel will close at 8:00 p.m. and re-open the next morning at 6:00 a.m. The tunnel will remain open during Spring Break, March 18-27.

The tunnel will be relined, have drainage improved, lighting replaced and a bicycle warning system will be installed. The final repairs are expected to be completed in July, though the nighttime closures should be over at the end of May.

View [www.tripcheck.com](http://www.tripcheck.com) or dial 5-1-1 for information about road closures. For information about the Dennis Edwards Tunnel project, visit [www.dennisedwardstunnel.org](http://www.dennisedwardstunnel.org).

## Concert to benefit scholarship fund

There will be a concert by *Hill Road Band* (with special songs by Brian Maynard and Mark Brown) to benefit the Zack Rumbolz Memorial Scholarship Fund on Saturday, January 29, starting at 7:00 p.m. at the Vernonia Community

## Wyden Town Hall

U.S. Senator Ron Wyden will host town hall meetings in Columbia and Clatsop counties on Saturday, January 22, 2011. Senator Wyden has been holding town halls in each county every year since 1996.

The Columbia County Town Hall will be held in St. Helens, starting at 3:30 p.m. at the St. Helens Armory, 474 S 7th St.

The Clatsop County Town Hall will start at 10:30 a.m. at the Columbia River Maritime Museum, 1792 Marine Drive, Astoria.

Church, 957 State Avenue.

Admission is free but cash donations for the scholarship and canned food donations for Vernonia Cares Food Bank will be accepted.

For more information, call Mark Brown at 503-961-5281.

## Fire protection award to Fishhawk

The small community of Fishhawk Lake is being recognized for their efforts to reduce their risk from destructive wildfires. On January 8, the residents of Fishhawk were awarded a plaque and signs to post around the community recognizing them as the newest member of Firewise Communities USA. Firewise Communities are special communities all over the nation that have invested time, energy and resources toward protecting their

communities from the threat of wildfires. The Firewise organization is dedicated to spreading the message of what individual homeowners and communities can do to take charge of protecting themselves.

Fishhawk has long been  
**See Rural on page 5**

## — CORRECTION —

Willow Burch's name was misspelled in a photo caption in the January 6 issue. *The Independent* apologizes for the error.