

# The INDEPENDENT

Published on the first and third Thursdays of each month by The Independent, LLC, 725 Bridge St., Vernonia, OR 97064. Phone/Fax: 503-429-9410. Publisher Clark McGaugh, clark@the-independent.net Editor Rebecca McGaugh, rebecca@the-independent.net Mentor Noni Andersen  
Printed on recycled paper with vegetable based dyes

## Opinion

### Help VHS help Jaden

It's really nice to see young people reaching out to help people in nearby communities. A talent show is scheduled for April 23, here in Vernonia, to help a boy in Banks who has cancer (see page 1 for more information). If you can help Vernonia High School help Jaden, please attend the show. And thanks to all who worked to put this fundraiser together.

### Whose trash is on Hwy. 47?

While looking through the April 30, 1987 issue, a letter to the editor from a 12-year old caught our attention. The letter, from Rebecca Jensen, said, "...tell me why so much garbage is dumped on Hwy. 47. Surely it is not all tourists and out-of-towners that put it there. It takes very little effort to keep your garbage in your car and dispose of it when you reach your destination. Now that some effort has been made to clean up Hwy. 47 and the city streets, let us keep it that way. How our town looks reflects the attitude of all of us. Take pride in Vernonia; you live here." We couldn't have said it better. And yet, 24 years later, there is still garbage all along Hwy. 47. Please don't litter.

### Oregon health report card

Oregon recently got a report card on health by county (for full results see [www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org)). Columbia County is shown to have 15% excessive drinking, compared to the Oregon average of 16% and the national average of 8% of the population. The Oregon Health Authority reported that there are, each year in Oregon, 1,400 alcohol-related deaths, 41,000 Driving Under the Influence arrests and 5,100 violent crimes attributed to alcohol. Just for comparison, in 2009 (last year of report), there were 213 Oregon deaths attributed to drug related causes.

April is Alcohol Awareness Month (see page 9 for more information). Have you ever wondered if you drink too much, or had someone suggest your drinking is a problem? If you are wondering, there is a survey at [www.alcoholscreening.org](http://www.alcoholscreening.org) that can help. If you'd like to quit drinking but don't know how to start, a free resource is Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). You can find an AA meeting on page 4 of this paper, or call 503-223-8569 for meetings in other locations.



### Out of My Mind . . .

by Noni Andersen



So much is going on, and so little of it is helpful to the community that I don't know whether to laugh, cry, or curl up in a fetal position and hibernate. I know there are many who would prefer that I hibernate.

So...

After the Vernonia City Council election, last November, I was thinking about the responsibilities facing the winning candidates. I felt that Josette Mitchell was capable of doing a credible job as mayor, and she has worked hard to conquer the steep learning curve that came with the win. She has even managed to instill some order at meetings despite inappropriate behavior by sometimes fractious councilors.

I also felt that the two new councilors, Willow Burch and Marilyn Nicks, who both own and operate local businesses, would be good for business, and was concerned only about their ability to represent the rest of the community. Boy, was I wrong!

They have both joined Councilor Kevin Hudson in his effort to replace the first competent city administrator in years, one who has the confidence of disparate elements of the community – city staff, volunteer committees, local businesses and organizations, and ordinary citizens – over what? Personal pique?

This pettiness harms the community, and is

especially harmful to businesses because of the following reasons:

The current administrator, Bill Haack, is working on many difficult projects facing Vernonia: wastewater treatment system, interfacing with the school district's huge project, how to handle what will be a park encompassing property from Rock Creek to Vernonia Lake, plus multiple other post-flood properties that will become the city's responsibility, a new senior center and food bank, the development of a biomass-powered commercial zone, and more. These are projects that require a *professional* administrator.

We have known for over a decade that the wastewater treatment system must be improved; Vernonia will not be allowed to continue discharging all of its treated effluent into the Nehalem. The city has gotten extension after extension, countless plans have been considered, many engineers have been consulted, and *millions* have been borrowed and spent.

Incapable and/or incompetent administrators, combined with similar councils that refused to deal with reality, have complicated and delayed solutions. The delays have resulted in higher costs for both the project and the loans.

Now we have three councilors who obviously don't like Haack, so they want a new administrator – creating more delays and driving costs higher, including possible penalties for failure to comply with clean water regulations. Vernonia is already a high tax and fee city. Driving costs higher – unnecessarily – isn't just bad for business; it's irresponsible.