

The INDEPENDENT

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

Opinion

All's well that ends...

We are glad this unprecedented period of Vernonia political upheaval is over. Like many, we don't think those who were recently recalled from the Vernonia city council are bad people, just misguided and bamboozled from listening to only a small a portion of the community, and not hearing anything else.

Next week, the two remaining members of the city council, Mayor Josette Mitchell and Councilor Randy Parrow, will draw 15 citizens' names from the hat to form panels to interview those applying for the three open council positions. The only glitch will be if too few citizens apply to be on those panels, or if less than three people apply to be councilors. Those numbers won't be known until 4:00 p.m. on Monday, August 22, when the application period closes for both the panels and council. If you meant to sign up but haven't, there's still time.

Once new councilors are appointed, probably at a special meeting on August 29, the next step for the council will be interviewing the remaining candidates for city administrator, Bill Haack and Dennis Rhodes. Hopefully, those candidates will be available for quick interviews. With a full council, there won't be a tie vote, which held up the process the first time.

With a new council, a new city administrator and a process in place to fill out the ranks of the Vernonia Police Department, the city should be able to get back to working hard on all the projects now mostly on hold.

Then the Vernonia community should breath a sigh of relief, and begin mending any remaining hard feelings that all of this uproar has created.

It's back to school time

School starts in Vernonia on Thursday, September 1. That's right, before Labor Day. School in Banks starts on September 6, the traditional first day of school after Labor Day.

Please be careful driving once children are back on the streets, heading to and from school. Children don't always remember to look both ways or cross at designated crosswalks. It's up to adult drivers to keep an eagle eye out for the little ones, so everyone gets where they are going safely.



Out of My Mind...

by Noni Andersen



Should mail be delivered six days a week, five days, three? Should we close Post Offices in small towns? Should we even have a U.S. Postal Service? These are not rhetorical questions, they are being asked in Congress because USPS is asking for some changes.

A little background is helpful to understand the situation.

The postal service is self-supporting, its revenues come from selling its products and services at the best rates in the industrialized world. It is not supported by taxes, and hasn't been for over 25 years.

The postal service's financial problems have little to do with delivering the mail. Despite the worst recession in 80 years and increased internet usage, postal revenues have exceeded costs. So, why do they need money?

In 2006, Congress passed a bill requiring the USPS to pre-fund retirement benefits, including health care, for the next 75 years, and to do so within 10 years, something no other public agency or private firm must do. Even though USPS makes more than the system costs to run, it isn't enough to cover the \$21 billion (about \$5.5 billion annually since 2007) they've put in the retirement system.

To further complicate the situation, there have been payments into two retirement programs,

the old Civil Service Retirement System, and the 1980s replacement, Federal Employees Retirement System. Because of the overlap between the two systems, and an outdated calculation method, at least one Senator's office and two independent auditing firms estimate that USPS has overpaid the retirement systems by at least \$50 billion.

The fiscal problem could be fixed by recalculating the annual obligation based on an updated formula, and gradually return the overpayment by about \$5 billion a year.

Apparently that would be too easy. USPS management has another approach: It wants to break its union contracts, lay off at least 120,000 workers, and shift workers out of the federal employee health and retirement plans into cheaper alternatives. Oh yes, they have also proposed dropping Saturday service and closing more than 4,000 post offices.

In many ways, the Postal Service is hamstrung by Congressional mandates, for instance by limiting postal increases to about the cost of living. Nevertheless, since the decrease in mail volume with the recession, the agency has cut costs by almost \$10 billion and reduced the workforce through attrition and early retirements by 212,000, to 563,000.

Postal unions have made many concessions to lower costs, and new union contracts have provided more flexibility to adjust workers' schedules.

Rep Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), a billionaire who chairs the House committee that oversees

Please see page 21