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THE INDEPENDENT

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Left to right, Anika Suppes, Ashton East, and Aubrey Leach are shown cleaning up the trail near Anderson Park on April 1. They are part of the Free Wheelers group who clean trails and Hwy. 47 South through town three or four times each year.

Water rates increased, are sewer loan fees next?

A potential increase in sewer fees was discussed at the April 2 Vernonia City Council meeting. The reason given is the need to raise city sewer loan fees enough to start repaying the principal on an \$8.2 million loan, not just the interest.

The current \$12 monthly fee is paying only the interest, and is not reducing the principle on \$4.3 million already spent from a 2005 \$8.2 million engineering loan from the state Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). An increase of \$19.00 would raise the current \$12.00 loan fee to \$31.00 per month and would allow the city to get a head start on repayment of that loan. The loan was intended, and partially used, to plan a sewer upgrade for the city. That all came to a halt after the 2007 flood, when it became apparent that the planned changes

would not protect the system against future floods.

Council did not take action on the idea of raising sewer loan repayment fees, rather they asked Administrator Bill Haack to review it further with the Public Works Committee, then talk with DEQ about other repayment plans, including the possibility of a two-to-three-year step plan to gradually raise the rates. Council asked Haack to bring the matter back to them for further consideration at the May 7 council meeting.

The city recently announced an increase in water rates, from a \$35 base rate and \$1.25 for each additional 1,000 gallons over the first 2,000 included in the base rate. The new water rates of \$36.00 base rate and \$4.25 for each additional 1,000 gallons will take effect in June.

I-5 charging stations will help cars “kick gas habit”

March 16, the Oregon Department of Transportation, along with charging station partner AeroVironment (NASDAQ: AVAV) and the Oregon Department of Energy, opened the first phase of the “West Coast Electric Highway.” Eight charging station hubs with two outlets at each location are now available for public use. Two more will be installed soon north of Cottage Grove as part of this first phase. Together, these stations will provide EV owners access to a network of electric “refueling” spots along Interstate 5 in Oregon, paid for by American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds through the Department of Energy.

“As the first state in the nation to establish an EV charging infrastructure along a major interstate, Oregon is leading the EV pathway and supporting adoption of the next phase in

the evolution of transportation,” said Pat Egan, chair of the Oregon Transportation Commission and vice president of customer and community affairs for Pacific Power. “Once Oregon’s segment of the West Coast Electric Highway is completed, EV drivers will be able to travel from Ashland to Portland at a fraction of the cost of filling a gas tank and with no direct emissions.”

The West Coast Electric Highway will eventually allow EV drivers to travel from San Diego to Vancouver, B.C. without relying on carbon-based fuel. “Fast” charging stations, included at each of the newly operational locations, can provide a full charge for an EV in less than 30 minutes; soon, these stations will dot interchanges up and down I-5.

“Plug-in vehicles are increasing in popularity, with **See Charging, page 4**

Vernonia Easter Egg Hunt

The annual Vernonia Easter Egg Hunt will start at 10:00 a.m. sharp, this Saturday, April 7. The hunt is for children aged 0-10, and is held at Hawkins Park. It is sponsored by Vernonia Community PTA.

Vernonia Theater group performances April 13-14

The Vernonia Community Theater will present two showings of “Vaudeville’s My Home,” a play written by Ken Bradbury.

Performances will be on Friday, April 13, and Saturday, April 14, starting at 7:00 p.m. in the Washington Grade School gymnasium. Admission is \$5 for adults and \$3 for students.

childcare is available, provided by the Vernonia High School Leadership class, in the school library (donations appreciated).

Vernonia Community Theater is operating under the auspices of Vernonia Hands-on-Art, whose non-profit mission includes the performing arts.

Fundraiser sales for Roberts

All the money from items sold at Lincoln Grade School through May 1 will be donated to the Ryan Roberts Kidney Transplant fund.

Sale hours are 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. each weekend.

Donations of items are wanted to increase what can be sold. Bring donations to the sale.

Health Center Town Hall

A Town Hall will be held tonight, April 4, at 7:00 p.m. in the school cafeteria (green building) by the Vernonia Health Center Board (VHCB).

VHCB invites the public to join them in thanking Providence Health Service for their 10 years of service to the community and to wel-

come Dr. Bryan Miller of Verdura Wellness Clinic, the new medical provider in Vernonia.

There will also be a discussion on options for moving the clinic out of the flood zone.

Refreshments will be served.