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THE INDEPENDENT

Vol. 27, No. 14

The Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley for Over 27 years

July 18, 2012



Among the volunteers helping Vernonia School District on moving day were a work crew from South Fork Forest Camp. The Lions Club made lunch for all the volunteers and State Senator Betsy Johnson, flanked by inmates in this picture, served the meal. The work crew is shown above, after lunch, enjoying a visit with dogs Thor and Molly. Grade School Principal Aaron Miller and Superintendent Ken Cox are standing in the rear at the right corner. For more information on the event, see Chalk Talk on page 12.

Right; John Dass and Bo Clark, Vernonia High School student volunteers, were setting temperature data loggers in Rock Creek as part of a DEQ project on July 5. Photo by Aaron Miller.



Columbia County Citizens for Human Dignity hold Coal Forum

by Jack and Nancy Phillips

A proposed coal export terminal at the Port of St. Helens was the topic of conversation, July 11, at one of a series of popular Kitchen Table Conversations held by Columbia County Citizens for Human Dignity (CCCHD), a community service organization. The lively event, held at St. Wenceslas Catholic Church in Scappoose was moderated by CCCHD member David Schaarf.

Introductions and welcoming statements were made for participants from both government and private groups, but there were no representatives from the Governor's office, the Corps of Engineers, Kinder-Morgan (Coal) Company, Portland & Pacific Railroad, or the Oregon Department of Transportation. Columbia County Commissioners Tony Hyde and Henry Heimuller were in attendance, but did not seek or take

questions from the community

A panel of four speakers included Brian Gard of Gard Communications, a Portland PR firm representing Amber Energy Company of Australia; Brett VandenHeuvel, an attorney and Executive Director for Columbia Riverkeepers; Patrick Trapp, Executive Director for the Port of St. Helens; and Bethany Cotton, an attorney and spokeswoman for Greenpeace.

According to Gard, a large coal terminal would bring benefits to Columbia County, including 25 permanent jobs.

VandenHeuvel spoke of an overwhelming increase in barge (Amber Energy Company) and rail (Kinder-Morgan, Inc.) traffic along the Columbia River which, he said, would cause coal dust pollution of air and water, as yet unheard of in Oregon. He also cited opposition from a panel of 180 physicians because of potential

harm to public, and especially children's, health.

Trapp explained how the Port of St. Helens finds and processes prospective lease tenants for port facilities.

Cotton emphasized the toxicity of Powder River Coal, and that it is a soft, powdery mineral, not hard rock, in its mined state. According to Cotton, it is highly friable and easily ignited, at rest or in transit, posing dangers for Columbia County residents, firefighters and the county's already strained infrastructure and emergency assets. She cited insufficient assets in Columbia County to handle a derailment, explosion or large, coal-fed fire, and asked who would pay for such a catastrophe? Coal can be shipped to Asia and the Far East for profits, but its pollutants come back to the West Coast in stratospheric wind streams that contain lead and 30% of our mercury poisoning.

After panel members initial statements were completed, the forum broke up into over a dozen round table discussions. This resulted in a series of prioritized questions being asked of the panelists and, following their answers, follow-up questions and measured discussion from the community members.

The response from community members was vigorous. Most people were demonstrably upset with the dangers to clean air, clean water, public health, public safety, and emergency response capabilities, plus mile-long, 124 car coal trains along Hwy 30, Scappoose and St Helens (12 a day); and a 100% increase in barge traffic. In addition to these issues, community members were concerned that lease options had been negotiated by the Port of St. Helens without public notice, and that port commissioners met individually with coal companies, avoiding

a quorum and notice requirements.

The main idea put forward from The final discussions emphasized that community members not wanting toxic coal in Columbia County, should contact the agencies issuing permits, and oppose the issuance of such permits for the reasons discussed. If no permits are issued, the coal corporations and the terminals would be stopped.

At one table, a man commented loudly, "What I want to know is, who the heck thought this (coal) was a good idea, anyway?"

**Look for the
Jamboree
Pull-out Section
in the August 1
issue**