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# THE INDEPENDENT

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September 5, 2012



The first day of school for Vernonia students, on September 4, started out with an assembly in the commons area of the new school. See related article on this page.



Speeches started off the August 21 Grand Opening ceremonies for the new Vernonia school. U. S. Senator Jeff Merkley is shown speaking while looking on, left to right, are State Senator Betsy Johnson, Representative Alyssa Kenny-Guyer, Oregon Senate President Peter Courtney, Representative Suzanne Bonamici, Norm Smith from the Ford Family Foundation, Representative Debbie Boone, Oregon Secretary of State Kate Brown, Superintendent Dr. Ken Cox, Columbia County Commissioner Tony Hyde, Oregon Solutions Co-convenor Tom Kelly, and Oregon Chief Education Officer Rudy Crew. Unseen behind the podium are U.S. Senator Ron Wyden and former Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski. See article this page.

## New services available for veterans

Community Action Team is pleased to announce an important new program for veterans and their families. CAT is one

of two recipients in Oregon of a 2012 Supportive Services for Veteran's Families grant from the Department of Veteran's Af-

airs. The award will provide housing assistance and supportive services to 80 veterans

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## New school in Vernonia opens with much fanfare

The much anticipated opening of the new Vernonia school took place on August 21, with many Vernonians and their children in attendance.

The celebration started with tours for visiting "notable guests". Everyone then assembled outside in front of a podium. Student Samantha Wallace led the crowd in the Pledge of Allegiance before the speeches began.

Speakers started with Superintendent Dr. Ken Cox, who said, "It's my pleasure to serve as the Master of Ceremonies today. There's a lot of people who thought this would never happen. One person said, 'This is just a dream'. Behold the dream." After the applause, Cox went on to thank current and former school board members, and the dedicated teachers and staff "who stuck with us."

There were speeches by U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, U.S. Representative Suzanne Bonamici, Oregon Chief Education Officer Rudy Crew, former Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski, Columbia County Commissioner and Vernonia resident Tony Hyde, Tom Kelly of Neil Kelly Company (and Oregon Solutions Team co-convenor along with Hyde), State Senator Betsy Johnson, and Norm Smith, President and CEO of the Ford Family Foundation.

Others offering brief comments were Oregon Senate President Peter Courtney, Secretary of State Kate Smith, State Representative Deborah Boone, State Representative Alyssa Kenny-Guyer and, after lunch, State Representative Brad Witt.

When it was State Senator Betsy Johnson's turn to speak, after former speakers noted the key role she played, her first tearful words were, "So much for not crying." She received a standing ovation at that point,

acknowledging the fact that, as with so many others, she put tremendous energy into helping get the school built. Johnson went on to say, "Vernonia, you never gave up. Thank you."

Former Governor Ted Kulongoski added, "I cannot tell you how proud I am to be an Oregonian because of the community. You are what Oregon is all about."

Cox had the final words, saying, "As Superintendent of Vernonia School District, I dedicate this building to future education, I dedicate it to the community of Vernonia. I dedicate it as a place of safety, and it represents the future of all of us."

At that point, the speakers moved behind the ribbon and each cut the ribbon. Then students and faculty, many in green t-shirts, led the way into the newly dedicated school building for tours, both guided and self-guided.

At noon, lunch was provided and speeches were given from the new stage in the commons area (also the lunchroom), including comments by State Representative Brad Witt.

The day continued with self-guided tours before a community open house at 5:30 p.m. for those who couldn't attend the earlier festivities.

The new school, with 135,000 square feet, can house 1,000 students from kindergarten through grade 12, with room for future expansion. It sits high on O-A Hill at the end of Missouri Avenue. It has been built with sustainable construction methods and energy-saving design to such an extent that the district is applying for LEED platinum certification.

Vernonia School District residents voted for a \$13 million bond to start the construction and the district hired Metropolitan Group to raise the other \$27 million needed for the \$40

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