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THE INDEPENDENT

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

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The Farewell Edition



High water visited Vernonia again on November 19. This picture, taken at 4:30 p.m., shows the water level at the Miles Bridge (commonly referred to as the green steel bridge).

Goodbye statement from the publisher

by Clark McGaugh

It is with deep regret and great sadness, I must announce that this is the last edition of *The Independent*. Poor economic conditions, and the fact that there are not enough businesses able to advertise in the Vernonia area, simply won't allow *The Independent* to keep printing. Since *The Independent* ran out of money, with hope that conditions would get better and with self-deluded justifications, it has been running on credit.

Now the credit has run out and the delusions have evaporated, all we have left is debt.

Having two publications vying for limited available advertising has not helped. Some businesses wanted "to be fair" and advertise in both publications. A few businesses with limited budgets had to reduce

the size and/or frequency of their ads in *The Independent*. Other businesses, not wanting to be criticized for advertising in one publication and not the other, opted to just quit advertising. Some businesses have had to quit advertising to save money in order to keep their doors open.

Not that it hasn't been a great ride. I have been in constant awe and humbled by the devotion and dedication of our readers. Through our readers I have learned the great love others have for our community and that there are rarely just two sides to an issue; often there are as many sides as there are people with an opinion. I have valued every one of those people for sharing their views. It was a surprise that I didn't have to agree with those

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A look at *The Independent's* beginning and Vernonia, circa 1986

by Noni Andersen

It's been a great run. When Dirk and I started *The Independent* in 1986, we had two primary reasons:

One was that, until we moved to Vernonia in 1983, neither of us had ever lived in a town without a newspaper and we didn't like the vacuum caused by the lack of communication. The other reason was that many people here felt the same way and, knowing that we worked for another newspaper, repeatedly asked us to start one in Vernonia.

Many things have changed in the past quarter-century, and many have not changed. The following observations are all mine, no one else is responsible and, yes, I'm opinionated.

By the time we started the paper, I was fully aware that our city government operated for the benefit of only a few citizens, primarily because of incompetence, not because of deliberate intention. Most council members believed that the way government worked when they were kids was the way it should work four decades later (even though they didn't drive 40-year-old vehicles).

There were two variations of the council's motto: "We tried that once and it didn't work" or "Why should we try, it won't work".

The hardest part of getting our city council to operate (mostly) within the law was making them acknowledge that

the state Public Records and Meetings law applied to the City of Vernonia. When reminders were insufficient, I reported illegal, closed door "executive" sessions as though they were public meetings. Councilors didn't like that, so I reminded them that the state law applied to them *individually*, and that they were legally liable as *individuals*. The possibility of legal liability was more uncomfortable than learning to comply with the law.

Most council members eventually understood that there were valid reasons to learn how a municipal budget works, what constitutes the city's responsibility, why intelligent planning is needed, who can make decisions, and much

more. Nevertheless, they relied heavily on city staff for answers without considering whether the staff was adequately trained to answer their questions.

One area that has changed very little is that reliance on city staff, particularly the administrator and the police chief. A major problem occurs when council hires an administrator or police chief who is not qualified, or who has lied on their application, both of which have happened here. The council doesn't want to admit they made a mistake, so they refuse to consider any information to the contrary and vilify whoever provided the information.

In 1986, the council members lack of understanding was

the result of ignorance, not stupidity. Ignorance is a human condition frequently caused by thinking we know everything we need to know. Ignorance also results from limited exposure to people whose thought processes are different from what we grew up with. More recently, as we have seen, ignorance is often self-inflicted.

The Vernonia fire district board had a different approach to governing: They did whatever the volunteers said was needed, if they could afford it. Otherwise, they rarely made decisions, just let things happen...or not happen.

The latter was particularly annoying because the district was underfunded, but was eli-

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