

# Vernonia SK8 Update

The Vernonia SK8 Committee is currently waiting for the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) to review the grant application for the Vernonia Skate Park. The OPRD grant budget is based on lottery dollars which is typically obtained in the August time frame with awards given in September. According to OPRD, they have not received the grant budget dollars yet due to COVID-19 so they are on hold as well.

As a reminder, Vernonia SK8 is asking for a 6,000 square foot skate park which will cost approximately \$200,000 for the basics. Thanks to the Vernonia community, they have nearly \$50,000 in cash along with \$25,000 from the Tony Hawk Foundation! They have a \$7,000 in-kind pledge from Javoss for site prep, along

with skate park concept drawings from skate park builders Spohn Ranch and Evergreen Skate Park, both worth \$6,000 each. The City of Vernonia will hold \$20,000 towards the skate park once the OPRD grant is received and will also donate \$10,000 towards permitting and drainage. This brings a local total contribution of \$124,000 towards the skate park.

The SK8 Park Committee is still raising funds because every penny will go towards special elements of the skate park. They would love to provide tables/chairs for picnics so parents can watch; shade sails for the skaters so they don't get sunburned; helmets and pads for those that need it; and more! Please visit <http://vernoniask8.webflow.io> for ways to donate and to stay up to date!

# November 3, 2020 Election Information

There are many important races in this year's elections, including several local elections, for two Vernonia City Council seats and Mayor, two seats on the Columbia County Board of Commissioners, and for State Representative for District 31.

Starting on page 7 in this issue you will find our Candidate Questionnaire and Responses for these four local races. Also, please take a look at our Readers Lend Their Voices section, starting on page 4. Many people have taken time to submit Letters to the Editor with their views on specific candidates and races. Hopefully you will find these two resources helpful when you sit down to fill out your ballot this year.

## What should you do if you see someone interfering with a ballot box or your right to vote?

- document what you see
- call Election Protection at 866-OUR-VOTE (866-687-8683)

## The following is relevant information for Columbia County voters and the November 3 election:

**Ballot Drop Box update** – Outside 24 hour accessible ballot boxes have been installed at

Rainier City Hall, Vernonia Public Library, and Clatskanie Library and are in the process of having decals applied. These boxes will be marked, unlocked and accessible on October 15.

**Ballot mailing** – Ballots will mail to the county at large Wednesday, October 14. Expect to see your ballot anywhere from the Thursday the 15 to Monday the 19.

**Voter registration** – New Voter registration deadline was October 13.

**Voter's Pamphlet and Voter's Pamphlet corrections** – The Voter's Pamphlet has been delivered to households the week of 10/5-10/9. If you have not received one, you can find one at your local post office and digital copies can be found online.

There are several corrections to the Columbia County portion of the Voter's Pamphlet:

- Page 5, column 1: Alex Tardiff should be spelled Alex Tardif
- Page 11, column 2: Jake Carter is a candidate for Columbia River PUD sub 4, not Clatskanie PUD
- Page 16: There is a reference to "applying postage" to your return envelope. This is no longer the case and return postage is prepaid.

# The Timber Industry of Today Part 5: A Visit to a Family Owned Tree Farm

By Scott Laird

*Over the last several months I've written about the timber industry in Oregon from a number of different perspectives. I've had the opportunity to learn about and talk with many people who work in and care deeply about Oregon's forests. In this, our final installment in this series, we visit a small, local family owned tree farm.*

Dick Courter grew up on a family farm in Illinois that had a small woodlot as part of the property. The woodlot contained some very nice white

oak trees, along with some good walnut trees. Courter's father loved walnut wood – he absolutely adored it, Courter says as he tells this story. His father planned to use some of the white oak to build a corn crib, so he hired a logger to come in and cut some of it. Courter says he was just six or seven years old at the time, and remembered his father explicitly telling the logger not to take out any of the walnut. "I was out in the barn yard one day and saw a load of walnut driving off the property, headed for the mill," he remembers, "so I ran and found my father and told him what I saw. I've never seen my dad so mad in his life as that day."

At the mill they had already started to cut the walnut into lumber, "and it was already cut off the stump and he couldn't do anything about it," adds Courter, so his father made a deal with the mill to cut the walnut and they would share the lumber 50/50 – that's how mills operate, the owner of the wood got half and the mill got half. "Well, if you know anything about walnut, it has a lot of white wood on the outside, it's not all that dark wood like we think walnut should be," explains Courter. "So which 50% of the wood did my dad get? They gave him all the white wood. And that's why, when I got interested in forestry as a career, I wanted to work with small forest landowners and with families to keep that kind of thing from happening to them."

## A small, family tree farm

I meet Dick Courter just inside the gate of the Nehalem Tree Farm, the family owned property he manages



Recently harvested timber on the Nehalem Tree Farm

near Vernonia, just a few miles down Timber Road from the Highway 47 split. I had visited the property last summer at Courter's invitation; he was hosting a tour for the Oregon Small Woodlands Association, which he is deeply involved in, and had invited me to take part. On that tour there were about 100 people, but this time it was just Courter and myself. It was a beautiful early October morning, still crisp and cool when I arrived, but sunny and quickly warming. A few days before my visit Courter had told me Mike Pihl Logging was on the property doing some work and we might get to see some trees being cut, but when I arrived he said a piece of machinery had broken down and the operator had gone looking for parts.

Courter says he initially enrolled at the University of Illinois to study ar-

chitecture, "because I had a lot of interest in wood and building," but became disillusioned with the program after the first semester, and switched to the School of Forestry. After earning a BA in Forest Management he went to work for Crown Zellerbach, assigned to field research.

In 1978 he started his own forestry consulting business, GeneTech, where he mostly works with small, family owned forest property owners. When he and his wife Gayanne, who was from Portland, were looking for a place to live, she said she needed to live near the city, and farm boy Dick said he needed some land. Gayanne found them the perfect property, 13 acres on Skyline Boulevard at Cornell Road in Portland, where they still live and operate their 10 acre Skyline U-Cut Christmas Tree Farm.

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*inside*

7 candidate questionnaire

20 voices in my head

21 good ol' days





# The Timber Industry of Today

## Part 5: A Visit to a Family Owned Tree Farm *continued from front page*

Courter's father-in-law had gotten into the timber business in Columbia County, purchasing a full section (640 acres) in the early 1940s for \$4,000, which he logged for many years. When his father-in-law began to have health issues, the family decided to sell the property. "The story he told me was that he had so much logging equipment up on that section and he didn't know what to do with it, so he bought this piece of property," what is now the almost 60 acre Nehalem Tree Farm, "and moved all the equipment onto it." That was around 1963, says Courter. "I tell people my wife's family has owned property in Columbia County for 75 years, but this piece hasn't been owned by the family for that long."

Courter says a dispute in his family over succession of the farm in Illinois made an big impression on him. When Gayanne's mother wanted to sell the Nehalem Tree Farm property in 2003, Courter jumped at the chance to purchase it from the estate and take over management.

The property has about eight acres that is fronted by the Nehalem River, and at the time Courter took over it had limited access; a flood in 1977 had washed out the road and another land-owner controlled a small parcel which Courter had to purchased to gain access. "It's only been the last six or seven years that we've been intensively managing it," he explains.

Courter says when his father-in-law was still alive, Courter tried to convince him to manage the for-



*Dick Courter, owner and manager of Nehalem Tree Farm*

est more – do more thinning and cutting, including in a large stand of cedar. "I tried to get him to clear cut that stand of cedar and plant new trees there," explains Courter. "Thank God he didn't listen to me. He didn't do it because he was an old-growth logger and there wasn't anything on this property big enough for him to

log yet. I really applaud him now, because those trees have a lot of value now."

When Courter first started out as a forester for Crown Zellerbach he worked out of the Tillamook office, in the old-growth forests in the Coast Range. After a few years he was transferred to Vernonia, where he went to work on lands that had already been cut and replanted in young, new growth forest. "That really gave me a lot of insight and knowledge about how to approach managing young forests," he says.

His involvement in smaller family run tree farms extends beyond his own property and his consulting clients. He has served on numerous boards, and in leadership positions for a number of organizations, including: National Woodland Owners Association, Oregon Small Woodlands Association, Association of Consulting Foresters of America, Oregon Association of Consulting Foresters, and the American Forest Foundation. He was also named the Oregon Forester of the Year by the Society of American Foresters.

When asked about his forest management philosophy, Courter say he advises his consulting clients to manage their properties the way he would have managed the Nehalem Tree Farm if he had started there earlier, and the way he is trying to now. He points out a stand of trees across the property line at the top of his farm, which borders a stand of trees owned by Weyerhaeuser. The Weyerhaeuser trees

*continued on page 17*

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CORPORATE MEMBER



# Schools Update: Return to Learn

By Superintendent Aaron Miller

COVID-19 infection rates in Columbia County have continued to rise following Labor Day making Comprehensive Distance Learning (CDL) a continuing reality for students in the Vernonia School District (VSD).

In order for students in grades Kindergarten through 12 to return to on-site instruction, county numbers must be below 10 cases/100,000 people for at least three consecutive weeks. In order for students in just grades K-3 to return to school those numbers must be below 30 cases/100,000 people. For the week

of September 26, those numbers were over 37 cases/100,000 people.

Despite not being able to instruct students on campus, the VSD continues to provide a full range of services as it implements CDL.

The District has purchased and received donations of enough Chromebooks for each and every student to have their own computing device for schoolwork. In addition to the Chromebooks, the District has also been able to provide internet connectivity for approximately 40 families who would not otherwise be able to provide this necessary service to meet their children's school needs. This

connectivity is made possible through a grant sponsored by the Oregon Department of Education in conjunction with Verizon Wireless.

Meals (a breakfast and lunch each day) continue to be distributed on-site at the school between 11 am - Noon every Monday - Thursday, and those meals are now being delivered by school bus for those families unable to make it into the school each day. The District is now serving over 300 meals per day to children in Vernonia.

Any student or family needs for technology, meal service, Mental Health support, or instructional support, are also

available through the school. Any families in need of extra supports in these areas should contact the school at (503) 429-1333.

While county metrics are not currently allowing the VSD to open its doors to students, the District continues to watch these statistics in hopes that we can bring our kids back into the building, safely. The first opportunity for this to happen remains after the end of the first quarter, on November 16. Wash your hands, wear your masks, and cross your fingers that we can get to this point soon, for the health, safety, and well-being of our kids.

## School Board Report

At the October 8, 2020 School Board Meeting:

**Principal Reports** – Elementary Principal Michelle Eagleson provided a written report and said the school is hosting K-5 Community Chats on the second Tuesday of each month from 6:00-7:00 pm.

Eagleson reported that despite a few minor issues, students and staff were excited to start the year and online learning has gone pretty well.

Middle/high school Principal Nate Underwood also provided a written report and told the Board online learning has gone well and that his staff is working through some issues with connectivity for all families, tracking attendance, and use of new technology.

**Superintendent Report** – Superintendent Aaron Miller told the Board COVID positive test numbers will not allow a return to in-person learning for K-3, which the

District was hoping to implement in the near future. Miller did say that Limited In-Person Instruction will begin soon for high school students, allowing one-on-one assessment and other assistance. Miller informed the Board that sports practices will begin on October 19.

Miller told the Board meal delivery service to student homes began on October 5.

Miller reported District enrollment is currently at 527.

### Board Approves Bus Service Contract Adjustment

– The Board approved an adjustment between the District and Curl Bus Service. The District will be utilizing Curl's services to deliver meals to students, but will not be using bus service this school year until in-person school begins again. The adjusted contract allows the District to realize savings from services not utilized

Vernonia School Board Meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, November 12, 6:00 pm. Please check the District's website for updates/changes [www.vernonia.k12.or.us](http://www.vernonia.k12.or.us)

while allowing Curl Bus Service to remain solvent.

**Board Approves VEA Contract Adjustment** – The Board approved changes to the contract between the District and the Vernonia Education Association, which represents teachers in the District. The request was made to open up bargaining to address COVID impacts.

## The Timber Industry of Today Part 5: A Visit to a Family Owned Tree Farm *continued from page 12*

are planted close together and are small and spindly with numerous dead limbs. "Stands of that age, or actually younger, I advocate should be thinned and spaced out. That does two things – it reduces the possibility of fire getting started there. The other thing that happens is those trees that remain will grow much larger." Courter goes on to explain that one of the things a forester learns early in their studies is that 50% of the wood in a tree is in the outer 1/3 of the diameter of the tree. The outer part of the tree doesn't make good lumber – it will twist and warp more easily. "So, I want that tree stem to be as large as possible in diameter, at as young an age as possible, to provide the most, best wood."

Much of the timber on the Nehalem property Courter is managing today is around 75 to 80 years old. Courter explains to me the growth rate of trees, using a hand drawn graph, which shows a typical S curve – young trees grow slowly at first, then very quickly until they reach about 65 years, and then slow down again; eventually they stop putting on new growth. "What we try to do in forestry is catch the tress at the point before the growth starts to slow and effectively maximizing return on investment."

Courter says he tries to manage a property in 10 year cycles. As an example, he divides his 60 acre property into six sections of 10 acres each, or six cycles. "What we would want to do is have the full 60 acres with a section of trees that are ready to harvest every 10 years or so," he explains. "That way the owner can clearcut 10 acres and start over. Every 10 years they have timber

to harvest and manage, and it is generating some regular income."

The Nehalem Tree Farm has mostly Douglas fir growing on it, which was planted, along with some large cedar trees, which have the most value. There is also some grand fir, hemlock, maple, and alder which have grown naturally, which Courter says he considers "worthless." Courter has been trying to establish more cedar in a low lying area along the Nehalem frontage, but has struggled to get them free-to-grow for the last seven years. He says they're difficult trees to grow in a nursery and are a favorite food of deer and elk.

When Courter harvests logs from his property and on properties he has managed for clients over the last 20 years, he works almost exclusively with Mike Pihl Logging. Courter provides his contract loggers with a price sheet that sorts logs by species, length, and diameter, and lists the current prices being paid by local mills, to maximize profits out of each log. Some logs are exported, and some go to domestic markets.

Courter says he thinks the current taxing structure on timberland properties and harvests are fair. "It's a 'real property' taxation process and property with standing trees is not real property by definition," says Courter. "So when you stop and think about it, there should be no tax on trees if you are going to tax the property like it were a city lot with a home on it. I don't think people understand how the tax system on timberlands is set up."

After over 50 years in the timber industry, I asked Courter what changes he has observed over the years. He says

there are a lot less mills these days, especially in eastern Oregon. "Over there the landowners effectively have almost no markets anymore, or at least none that are close to them," he says. He says when older mills retooled and replaced worn out equipment they were set up to handle the smaller timber that is being harvested in recent years. "There's a lot of mills these days that can't handle the bigger logs."

He also has seen a huge conversion from small, privately owned timberlands to industrial managed lands. "I used to joke with Longview Fibre, who owned a lot of timberland that they were barely managing, and told them, 'Why don't you sell some of this property to private landowners and let them manage it, because you know, someday you'll get it back anyway.'"

Courter notes that the vast majority of industrial timberland is now controlled by one owner – Weyerhaeuser. "I'm a strong believer that families ought to have more opportunity to own property than they do right now," he says. "There are a lot of reasons why they don't. It's kind of a sad scenario. A lot of families acquired timberlands during the same era my father-in-law bought his properties, but they never really understood what the property was worth in terms of having trees growing and the way the property's value would increase, because they bought it so cheap." He also notes that a lack of estate planning for family succession lead to inheritance taxes that forced families to sell timberlands. Courter says he now counsels his consulting clients to prioritize having a succession plan. He also

recommends involving younger family members in the management of the property, so when it comes time for them to take over, they are knowledgeable about the land and trees and know what needs to be done.

I asked Courter his thoughts on replanting after logging with just a single species, usually Doug fir, and how that impacts a forest ecology overall. "A natural Douglas fir forest is effectively a monoculture, and it always has been," he says. "If you plant 100% Douglas fir you are going to get other species coming in, they just do. It might vary somewhat depending on what is there for seed sources before you cut the stand. You just can't keep maple, alder, and ferns from growing around here. My philosophy is that you're going to get the diverse forest without even working at it, but I like to have value in the forest as you grow it, and the value in a forest is going to be in the Douglas fir and the cedar."

Courter says logging philosophy has changed dramatically in the last 20-30 years, particularly around the heavy logging machinery which causes soil compaction; he says equipment manufacturers took note and now make designs that are lighter and have less impact on the land.

I asked Courter his opinion on Oregon's current Forest Practices Act and how those rules and regulations impact a small landowner. "I'm not against a Forest Practices Act, but it is getting so it's difficult for family landowners to make any money from managing their property." He says on the 60 acre Ne-

## Bridge Street Bits



**By Karen Miller**

THE SENIOR CENTER BOARD enjoyed our monthly meeting in our freshly painted board room with lots of cheery window light streaming in at our new building. Lots of talk went on kicking around exciting events being planned for our age 60 and over seniors. As soon as we are allowed, our inside dining will be available. Any questions you may have, please call Marny, our newly hired and capable Office Manager, at her office 503-429-3327. Her office hours are Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm.

A GRAND TIME WAS HAD BY ALL at our Grand Opening on September 12. We do want to give a BIG shout out to our Vernonia City Administrator for all her many hours of planning, attending meetings, and negotiating, that made this building a reality, THANK YOU JOSETTE MITCHELL. You are the BEST!

WE WANT TO GRATEFULLY THANK our next door neighbor, the Vernonia Health Clinic,

along with ALL the other organizations and individuals for their donations to help us keep our seniors' needs met in this community.

ALSO, THANK YOU TO RICK HOBART who donated an inside American Flag for our multi function side room. We begin each Board Meeting in saluting the Red, White, and Blue with the Pledge of Allegiance.

GUEST WI-FI will be up and running soon.

FOOT CARE can be scheduled by calling Joyce 503-753-7745. Plans are to offer blood pressure and other screenings as COVID rules allow.

JOIN US FOR CARD PLAYING on Fridays at 1:00 – We now have room for all! Bring along your card playing ideas.

I GOT TO SAMPLE OUR COOK'S delicious clam chowder today and can't wait until we can dine in for meals. For now Chris puts out great Home Delivered Meals. This last month of September there were 264 meals delivered.

FOR ONLY \$15 you can become a Senior Center member, and receive our exclusive member newsletter to be the first to know

what's in the works. Send your dues to: Senior Center, 547 Weed Ave, Vernonia, OR 97064 Age 60 and over. Hope to have you join us!

FROM THERESA OUR THRIFT STORE MANAGER: Theresa wishes to say thank you for all the donations that have been coming in, plus all the patrons of our store. Both those are what keep us being able to continue Home Delivered Meals, and helps finance other needed services. Call her for Cabin in Vernonia rental 503-429-5250.

SOME OF YOU REMEMBER Michelle Moore who came to the center to serve our seniors with up-to-date information on Medicare Plans. Michelle has retired, and in her place is the very capable Mike Leipzig. As I have, you will find him very helpful and knowledgeable; Michelle hand-picked him as her successor in this field.

WITH THAT I WILL SIGN OFF, 'til next time: Don't argue about WHO is right. Determine WHAT is right.

See ya' around town...

**Vernonia Senior Center • 547 Weed Avenue • (503) 429-3912**

## The Timber Industry of Today Part 5: A Visit to a Family Owned Tree Farm *continued from page 17*

halem Tree Farm, he can't manage or harvest on about eight acres that is along the river because of riparian restrictions. He said rules in Washington and California make it very difficult to work through all the regulation in those states; he says it can take three years or longer to get the state forestry department to approve a logging permit in California. "I don't want that happen in Oregon."

Courter says he's not sure we have the information needed to answer whether climate change is real and if it will impact logging in Oregon. He says he believes the changes we are seeing are normal, just long-term changes in weather. He also expressed concerns about talk in Salem about the need for more funding to fight wildfires in the state. "Why are we worrying about fighting fire, let's worry about not letting fires get started in the first place. And the way to do that is to do more intensive forest management, not just on private and industrial lands, but on public land, including U.S. Forest Service lands and Oregon state lands. We need to reduce and keep the fuels to a minimum which will keep fires from igniting. Then we can use those firefighting dollars for other social issues."

He also points to the way the State Board of Forestry and the Oregon Department of Forestry is managing state lands as a concern. "They don't manage those to the intensity they could and harvest as much as they should. There's enough there for them to get the income they need to manage themselves well, but there's too much pressure from the outside against that." He says he would like to see a family forestland owner appointed to the Board of Forestry by the Governor. "We need to get back to a Board of Forestry that understands how to manage forests," he says.

Courter says he is very supportive of Timber Unity. "There's a lot of farmers in that group, and I'm a farmer," he says with a laugh. He supports their issues and their fight against the impacts he thinks the cap and trade bill would have had on rural businesses and communities. "There were a lot of issues that caused Timber Unity to organize themselves. I believe they've done some good and I think a lot of people are starting to listen to the issues they've raised." He also praised their efforts to help families and communities during the recent wildfires.

Courter's past experience with numerous forestry organizations and the concerns that Timber Unity has raised, have led him to throw his hat into the political ring this year. He is currently running as the Republican nominee for State Representative for District 33 in Portland. He says he's concerned about continually increasing and new taxes, especially the recently mandated Corporate Activity Tax and how it has been impacting both businesses and consumers, along with the proposed Cap and Trade bills that have circulated through Salem during the last two sessions. He also expressed concern about the constant use of the Emergency Clause by legislators trying to pass bills.

### Reflections, impressions, and final thoughts

During this series of articles I've appreciated the many people who have made themselves available to share their interpretations and opinions: the logger, the state forester, the watershed, the small business owner, the tax payer, the state forest, and the small woodland owner. I've examined different forest management models, talked about logging jobs, considered forest ecology,

taken several walks in the woods with knowledgeable hosts, and asked about how the industry has changed over time.

This series has provided me with an opportunity to explore various points of view, many of them conflicting, and some of them overlapping. It's also been a learning opportunity for me, and hopefully for you, too.

What I've found is that we all have opinions about the timber industry – how it's regulated, how they operate, and how it impacts our communities, our county, and our state. I believe that what each of us has been told, what we've experienced, and what we believe about the timber industry has been ingrained and we often don't question it or consider a different viewpoint.

I understand that Vernonia has considered itself a logging town that has supported families and put food on the table for generations. Others have chosen to move to this community and make it their home for other reasons – it was affordable, it's a quick commute to nearby high tech jobs, they enjoy the surrounding nature, they like small town life, or being an active part of a community where they can make a difference.

While providing good paying jobs and products we all use, the timber industry also controls most of the land in Columbia County – 85% of it is forestland, and 95% of that is privately owned. That means those private timberland owners control the land where our drinking water comes from. They control the land where local wildlife live. They control the streams that our salmon return to. They control the land where we would like to hike, ride ORVs, hunt, fish, and collect mushrooms or firewood.

They also control the land that would provide tax revenue to fix our roads, maintain our parks, and fund our

schools.

In Part 4 of this series we discussed our state forests, and noted the Oregon Board of Forestry is considering a new model for managing state forests by implementing a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). On October 6 the Board of Forestry voted unanimously to finalize this proposal. The plan would establish environmental protections on 730,000 acres of public forests set aside as conservation areas where intensive logging could not take place for a 70 year period, while protecting the state if logging in the other areas killed or harmed the habitat of protected species. The proposal still has several steps before it becomes law.

In addition, most Salem insiders say they are expecting timberland tax reform to be a hot topic of discussion during the upcoming session.

It seems inevitable that in a state with so much timberland, with an industry that has been at the center of its formation and success, that timber issues will always be an ongoing discussion.

*The original publication of this article on October 15, 2020 incorrectly spelled Dick Courter's last name. Vernonia's Voice deeply regrets this error.*

**Vernonia's Voice is published twice each month on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday. Look for our next issue on November 5.**