

EDITORIALS

County proves again that people here care

We've said it before and we'll say it again: the best thing about Tillamook County is the people who live here and help each other in times of emergency. Last week's floods produced more stories of heroism and compassion for local residents — and some outsiders — to tell for years to come.

Everyone you'd expect lent a hand — Coast Guard search and rescue teams, sheriff's deputies and local police, firefighters, Red Cross volunteers, and county Emergency Management people.

They all did themselves proud. But there were other heroes, too. School bus drivers, who turned out early and made sure the kids got home safely as the waters began to rise last Monday. The tow truck operators who pulled trailers out of perilous situations in RV parks and the truck driver who rescued more than 20 people stranded by floodwaters on U.S. Highway 101 at the Fred Meyer store last Monday night.

Volunteers who turned out to help flood-stricken businesses clean up the mess.

And last, but by no means least, the farmers and others who rushed to help move farm animals out of danger and those who went out into flooded pastures while the rain was still falling to pull stranded cows out of dangerously high water and get them to safety.

Tillamook County suffered a great deal of damage in last week's floods. But its reputation as a place where people care about each other came through with flying colors.

So, what on earth was the governor thinking?

If you were watching TV news out of Portland last Wednesday night, you probably heard the sound bite they played from the governor's press conference earlier in the day.

It was the second flood-related disaster of the week.

For reasons that I imagine are known only to the governor, he responded to a question about the flooding in Tillamook in an irritated tone of voice with a lecture to reporters about how it's been raining in Oregon for millennia and this is nothing new.

Hoooo, boy! The manure that wasn't bobbing up and down in local pastures hit the fan around here.

Channel 2 got bombarded with e-mails, some of them from outraged Tillamookers. The comments ranged from "Shame on him," to "This guy is a complete jerk ..." to "Maybe Mr. Governor should come over here and scrape some mud, or see a cow floating or stranded or talk to the people who lost their homes or business and then go on TV the day after he is re-elected and talk about his experience."

The reviews weren't any better on the streets of Tillamook.

"Irresponsible," is how one local businessman, who will be months recovering from last week's flood, summed up the gov's remarks over lunch Friday.

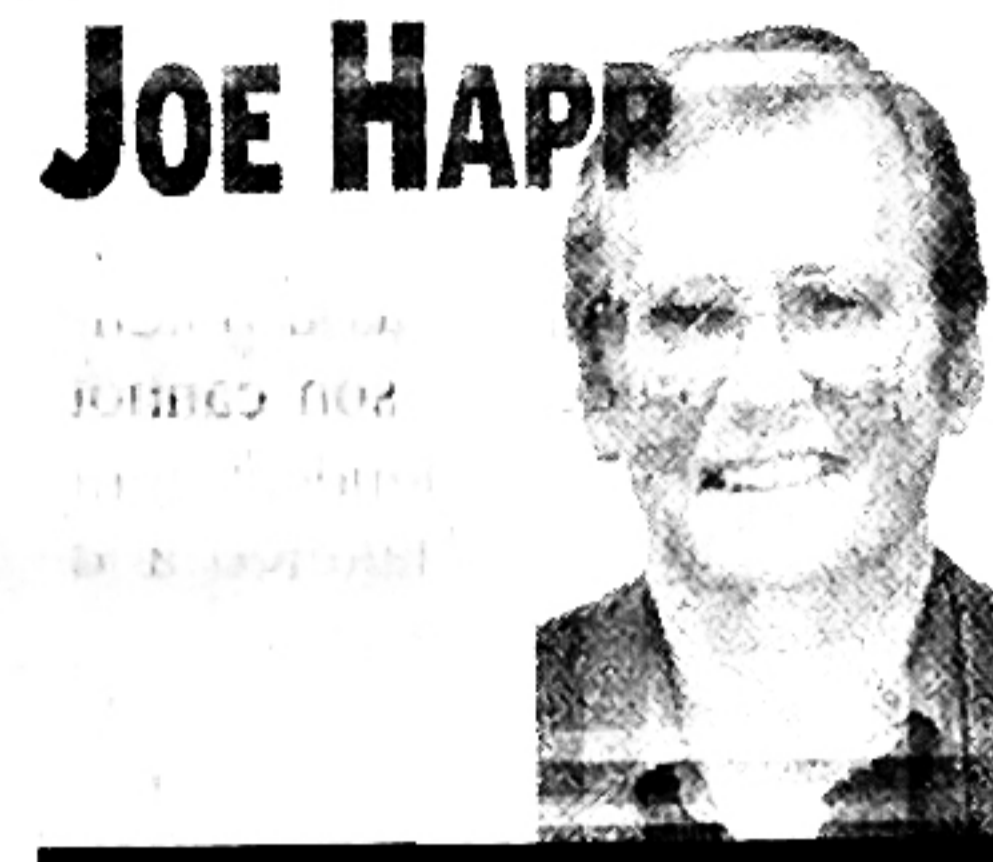
"If he'd said that on Monday, he never would have been re-elected on Tuesday," said another man.

I'm no apologist for the governor; he has people for that and they've been strangely quiet about this for several days now. But, I thought that, since only a portion of his comments made it onto the airwaves, it would only be fair for us to report the rest of what he said about flooding on the coast. So, we took down his comments from a longer version of the press conference that appeared on Channel 2's Web site. They appear on the opposite page.

Was he being insensitive to Tillamook's plight? Was he tired and cranky from partying too late on election night? Was he ticked off by the way the reporter phrased the question? You decide.

Disasters have a way of stressing out newspaper staffs. And newspaper staffs, in my experience, have a way of rising to the moment and performing above and beyond the normal call of duty.

That's the way it's been at the *Headlight-Herald* since the



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water started rising last week.

On Monday night, as the rain came down in torrents, reporters Meghan McGuire and Shasta Kearns Moore, both of whom are new to Tillamook County, worked late into the night covering the storm. McGuire, who covers North County, was unable to get home to Nehalem that night.

Managing Editor Ken O'Toole worked the desk quite late Monday night and was back at the crack of dawn Tuesday, producing news pages with his usual cool demeanor intact. Community Editor Linda Ediger, another flood refugee on Monday night, proofread news pages until deadline Tuesday despite worries about her pet pit bull-mix, Snoopy, who had to ride out the storm alone the night before.

Road closures kept human resources specialist Susan Dunn and production artist Carol Demeter from getting to work Tuesday from their homes in Rockaway Beach, so they took photos of flood scenes in the north end of the county that day.

Circulation Manager Judy Pullen and her crew braved bad road conditions Tuesday night to get copies of the newspaper distributed.

Publisher Kathleen Newton and I want to express our thanks for all their good work. We'd have been sunk without them.

"Shame on you!" e-mailed Susie Wenrick of Pacific City last week, taking us to task for not having a story on the Nestucca High School volleyball team, which was headed into the state volleyball playoffs.

Indeed, we blew it. But it wasn't sports correspondent Ross Abney's fault. Turns out he had filed a complete story on the Lady Bobcats' tournament appearance. But it got buried under a flood of other news. Hopefully, we won't make that mistake again.

Our apologies to the Lady Bobcats, their fans and all our readers in South County.

READERS' OPEN FORUM

We need a big ditch

I don't know what others think, but I say we need a big ditch from KTIL, near the Tillamook River, to the Coast Guard Ramp in Garibaldi.

The government won't let us dredge. Let's call it a ditch.

Let's make a place for some of this water to go. Does anyone agree with me?

Ivan Boge
Tillamook

Questions on the flood

I have lived in Tillamook since 1992. I care about what goes on here. This brings on so many questions about this flood.

Why did so many business owners wait so long to move their things or employees out of harm's way? What information were they being given?

I had been looking at the National Weather Service forecast and the National Weather Service advanced hydrologic predictions on the Internet since Sunday, Nov. 5. The predictions I saw told me this flood would be as bad, if not worse than the 1996 or 1998 floods.

By Monday morning, the Wilson was at 13.88 feet. By 1 p.m., it was well on its way to being a major flood.

People, employees of the businesses in that part of town, were put in jeopardy because they were not told to clear out in time. There were a lot of boat rescues. All those people should have been out before 11:30 a.m.

What information did the business owners get? Why did many of them wait so long to begin trying to save their business? Why did so many have to be boated out?

I got it second-hand that many people were being told the Wilson River wouldn't go more than 15 feet. That's 3 feet over flood stage. Bad, but not real bad. That river topped out at 23 feet, a new record. People lost so much because they were not given the correct information to be able to save property or animals.

Who do we look to on this one? This was a disaster with no preparedness. Why? I can't be the only one asking.

Kathleen Lamkin
Tillamook

Thanks to all who helped

Thank you for all your generous help after our record-breaking flood.

I owe the deepest thanks to my employees who show up day after day and make this business run. Without them none of this is possible. Now, in the worst of times, here they are with smiles on their faces and squeegees in their hands, washing away the

muck and mire from the flood. With your help, we are back in business and putting this flood behind us.

To all those who showed up at our door offering help, everyone here says thank you. It made all our jobs easier. We will never forget you. Thank you,

Loten Hooley
Rosenberg Builders Supply