

Signed steel beam tops out Firstenburg patient tower



Ed Firstenburg signs last beam

Ed Firstenburg, retired chairman of the board of First Independent Bank Monday signed a steel beam hoisted atop the Southwest Washington Medical Center's patient and surgical suite tower under construction at the Mill Plain campus. The beam, decorated by the American flag and a fir tree, officially topped out the \$146 million project.

Firstenburg signed the beam, *Mary and Ed Firstenburg*—the same as the signature on a \$15 million check the Firstenburg's presented the medical center last year to help it finance its largest ever renovation and renewal project.

Medical center chief **Joe Kortum** told an assembled crowd watching the beam go into place that in 11 months they would see a completed tower at the site.

In addition to five floors of private patient

rooms, the tower will house a surgery floor with 13 surgical suites, two open heart surgery suites, and a heart and vascular center with five cardiac catheterization labs.

Feds pay for county voting system

Federal grants totaling \$2.1 million have paid for Clark County's new voter registration system and the new voting system as well, county auditor **Greg Kimsey** reported today.

The federal grants, created by the Help America Vote Act, covered the entire cost of the county's switching over from punch cards to the new optical system, according to Kimsey.

That's the good news. The bad news is that the new ballots, which will be read optically, are more costly than the old punch cards. The punch card cost was about 8 cents for each ballot, Kimsey said. The new ballots, printed by a system that can identify each ballot, will cost between 24 and 40 cents each.

Voters using the new ballots won't punch out chads but will be required to use a black or blue pen to mark boxes next to their voting choice.

Kimsey, who will present cities their reimbursements over the next couple of months, said part of the mission will be to reinforce the message that people aren't supposed to write all over the ballots.

In addition cities, in the county are to be reimbursed by the same grants for their voter registration costs. The total share of grants the cities get is \$24,509.

Bravo! Vancouver presenting swinging chamber music

Chamber music with a swing is on tap for Bravo! Vancouver concert goes at 3 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 22, in St. Joseph Catholic Church, 400 S. Andresen Road.

Compositions by Bela Bartok, Sergei Prokofiev and Aaron Copland will be presented by the Bravo! Chamber Orchestra. Two of the compositions were written in the 1930s for jazz titan Benny Goodman, according to Bravo! Artistic director **Michael Kissinger**.

Members of the chamber ensemble are **Maria Manzo**, piano; **Dale Tolliver**, cello; **Shawne Stone**, viola; **Brian Bennett** and **Tylor Neist**, both violin; and Kissinger, clarinet.

Reserved seating at \$15 per person is available from TicketsWest or at St. Joseph Church, **696-4407**. For further information, go to www.bravoconcerts.com.

State economy continued 2005 expansion in December

Washington's economy continued to expand in December, capping a year-long trend of steady job growth, reports state Employment Security commissioner **Karen Lee**. Over the year, Washington employers added

nearly 80,000 new jobs, Lee said.

The state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for December 2005 dropped to 5.3 percent, down from 5.6 percent the previous month. The decline, according to Lee, was due to the fact that fewer people were looking for work. By comparison, the unemployment rate in December 2004 was 5.9 percent.

Clark County's unemployment rate, which is not seasonally adjusted, declined from 6.5 percent in December 2004 to 6.1 percent last December. Last November, it was 6 percent.

According to county figures, employment increased here from 186,500 at the end of 2004 to 188,200 last December.

News brief

Deadline for submitting nominations for the General George C Marshall Youth Leadership Award is 5 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 19. The award is presented annually to a Clark County high school student who demonstrates leadership and motivates others to community involvement. The award includes a \$1,000 scholarship and an internship, worth \$500, in the Vancouver National Historic Reserve Trust office. The award is sponsored by the reserve trust.

Calendar

The NE Hazel Dell Association meets at 7 p.m. this evening in the Clark County Operations Center, 4700 NE 78th Street.

Tuesday headlines from at home and around the world

[Supreme Court upholds Oregon's assisted suicide law by 6-3 vote--Washington Post,](#)

[William Branigin](#)

[Camas's Jon Clemens appointed chairman of the board of Seattle-based Washington Technology Center--Columbian, Julia Anderson](#)

[Mervyns to close 25-year-old store in Westfield Vancouver Mall--Columbian, AP](#)

[U.S. wins support from China and Russia in calling upon Iran to suspend nuclear program--Washington Post, Mary Jordan and Dafna Linzer](#)

[Vancouver's WSP Sergeant Mike Kesler named Washington State Patrol's public information officer of the year--Columbian, John Branton](#)

[Vancouver housing posts torrid figures in sales during 2005--Oregonian, Alan Brettman](#)

Tuesday on the air

Casino Forum (1/12)—3:30 p.m. CVTV

Capital Perspectives (1/12)—5:30 p.m. CVTV

City Minutes (12/25)—6 p.m. CVTV

Vancouver Land Use Hearings (live)—7 p.m. CVTV

Town Tabloids and the weather

Anita Elliott prepares victuals fit for presidents. ✍ **Marilyn Casteel** voice of aplomb and equanimity. ✍

Jim Gregory signing up. ✍ **Dick Boyd** graciously accepts deal. **Tuesday**, rain hardly tapering off, 49.

Wednesday, precipitation palpable, 47. **Thursday**, continued rain, 44.