

# Broadband: Service issues also pose public safety concerns



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian  
The heavily-taped CenturyLink junction box sits off of U.S. Highway 26 surrounded by trash, weeds and a destroyed traffic cone.

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Baker serves on the board of directors for West Oregon Electric Co-op, an electricity provider that serves rural areas in five counties. He said the co-op has the infrastructure in place with electricity and phone lines running to every home. He pointed to work Columbia County is doing to secure federal coronavirus relief money to run fiber along those lines.

He said he would like to see Clatsop County do the same and take a more active role in finding solutions.

"And I'd like to see somebody besides CenturyLink operate that (digital subscriber line) system, even if it's a (public utility district) type system," he said. "CenturyLink has failed with all their tax breaks they've gotten, all of the incentives they've gotten. All they've done is milk the system and

wandered off with all the value of it until it's in the state of disrepair it is now."

Kerry Zimmer, a spokeswoman for CenturyLink, said the company understands how important it is for customers to have reliable services.

"We are constantly assessing our options so that we can provide as much support to our communities as possible," Zimmer said in an email. "To best support customers in Astoria, we made the decision to evaluate alternate technologies for delivering services. Once a determination has been made, customers will be notified directly. At this time all services in the area are operating normally."

However, locals are skeptical that the investment will be made.

T.J. Hecox owns the Elderberry Inn with his wife, Emily.

He is doubtful a company will invest in laying more fiber lines in the area because of the lack of return on investment.

"It's really hindered the community as a whole," he said. "From Jewell School to Highway 26, the internet is mediocre at best if you do have CenturyLink. And if you get off of CenturyLink internet, they won't allow you to get back on it because they've oversold their broadband."

He said he has to pay for CenturyLink and satellite internet just to maintain the inn and restaurant's point of sale system.

"Basically, you just have to have two to have one work all the time," he said.

## Safety concerns

Internet service issues also pose public safety concerns.

Hans Mulder, the assistant chief of the Elsie-Vinemaple

Rural Fire Protection District, said the fire district's landline through CenturyLink became useless and they switched to using Verizon cellphones to handle district business.

"But not everybody can afford to do that," he said. "That also affects the 911 system, because if you pick up your home phone and you can't get out to dispatch, which is in Astoria, then if you have an emergency you can't even call 911."

The problem is Elsie is a rural community at the end of a fiber line, and no one wants to invest in branching fiber out, Mulder explained.

"There's only about 400 some homes around this area and they're spread out," he said. "It's not worth doing from (CenturyLink's) point of view. They keep saying someday, someday. But I'll probably be very old before I see any good service out here."

## Coast Guard: Goal is to preserve ship traffic on the Columbia River

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"The Coast Guard, we have partnerships with our local, state, federal and private stakeholders, and developed this plan for a coordinated response. And we practice this through exercising on a yearly basis, if not more."

Jim Merten, a port security specialist for the Coast Guard who is responsible for the Marine Transportation System Recovery Unit, used a Cascadia Subduction Zone disaster as an example.

If a ship needs to deliver relief supplies after an earthquake, he said, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would dredge the channel and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration would sound the channel to make sure it's deep enough and meets all the requirements.

"And then we're going to go ahead and put the aids and navigation back so that all the ships have the ability to drive there safely. And then each port will be working their own disaster recovery plans simultaneously so that they can have their port ready to receive these vessels as well," Merten said.

He said the plan will activate under three circumstances — when infrastructure like a bridge, lock or dam is damaged; when traffic is interrupted by issues such as a labor dispute or civil unrest; or when emergency response to an incident on one part of the river disrupts traffic

on the rest of the river.

"So we're going to have to potentially use captain of the port orders to move ships or authorize ships to go in different orders once the disruption is cleared," Merten said.

Last September, a navigation lock on the Columbia River at Bonneville Dam closed for 21 days after part of the lock system cracked. The Coast Guard worked with vessels to create a prioritized list of who would be the first to move once the channel reopened.

"What was really amazing to see was with the industry people, is that they knew each other's cargoes and they were able to prioritize within themselves who needed to go first, who needed to go second," Bailey said. "So they were actually very aware of what needed to get upriver and what needed to get downriver. And so they were able to coordinate that very well."

Merten said the recovery unit reports directly to the captain of the port, and the companies and agencies affected are also included in the process.

"And then while we're trying to prioritize the cargo streams and things like that, we're identifying alternate ideas, alternate methods, whether it's rail, whether it's barge, whether it's moving commodities out of different ports, different places, things like that — we take a regional kind of holistic approach to the river system in that event," he said.

## County reports three new virus cases

The Astorian

Clatsop County reported three new coronavirus cases on Monday.

A woman in her 50s and another woman in her 40s living in the northern part

of the county tested positive for the virus.

A man in his 40s living in the southern part of the county also tested positive.

All three were recovering at home, according to the county.

The county has recorded 67 cases since March 23. Fifty-five have reportedly recovered and the others are convalescing at home.

The Oregon Health Authority reported 14,847

cases and 262 deaths statewide from the virus as of Monday morning.

The health authority tracked 3,154 test results in Clatsop County, including 64 of the positive cases.

## Erickson: Co-hosted 'Caribbean Moon' on KMUN

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Last summer, he was in Australia, taking part in a reunion concert with his former band.

Erickson was part of a local reggae group, "Ma Barley," which, unfortunately, is no more.

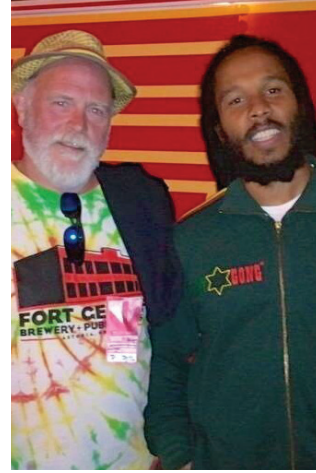
"Some key members of the band have moved away," Erickson said. "So Ma Barley is a legend now. We have a serious gap in dance band options in our county. So if anyone wants to start a reggae band, be my guest."

For a long time, Erickson co-hosted "Caribbean Moon," on local public radio station KMUN. The show still runs from 7 to 9 p.m. every Friday, but Erickson has not hosted since March 13. More coronavirus restrictions.

"The radio station has been trying really hard to catch up with things," he said, "so the shows are being broadcast remotely and on tape. There are five or six volunteers who are keeping the station alive and vibrant."

Just like Erickson's music.

"I don't have a band at the moment, but I will be babysitting (Caribbean Moon co-host) Jeremy Hirsh's piano. We've got some guitars and basses and three or four saxophones lying around. I play, but just



Debbie Twombly  
Mark Erickson with Ziggy Marley, son of Bob Marley, in 2012.

for my own pleasure and my wife's constant displeasure."

Meanwhile, the summer of 2020 had Erickson reflecting on 1968, when he was 16 and attending Mountlake Terrace High School, north of Seattle.

The spring, summer and fall of 1968 included assassinations, riots, protests and a presidential election, all while the war in Vietnam was at its peak.

"As far as the '60s are concerned, we had a tremendous amount of education at Mountlake Terrace about the Holocaust and also about civil rights," Erickson recalled. "I was a speaker in my class graduation, and the topic of the whole event was

race relations. Race relations has been a super important part of my whole adult life. I felt like being in a reggae band and also playing reggae music, it's sort of my social demonstration of positive change for our society."

After high school, he said, "My draft number was five in 1971. I kept my student deferment by keeping my grades up at Linfield, but I was also a conscientious objector. I was the third conscientious objector in my family. My grandfather was a conscientious objector in World War I, my dad in World War II, and I was a conscientious objector during Vietnam, on the basis that we believe in reconciliation. That's been a family tradition, and I'm proud to have been a member of that line. Nonviolence and reconciliation."

In the 1980s, Erickson said, "I drove a Green Tortoise bus, when I was taking a break from teaching."

The Green Tortoise line was one of several low-cost bus companies established in the 1970s, based in San Fran-

cisco and Seattle, providing long-distance service. It was also referred to as a "hippie bus" company during the 1970s, for their counterculture atmosphere.

"It covered the whole country, from San Francisco to Boston," Erickson said. "We toured Alaska and the Yukon to Baja. I've been to all 50 states, as a tour guide through about 45. I didn't put that on my résumé when I got my first teaching job in the Astoria School District, because it was kind of an alternative bus company with a seedy reputation. But I'm proud to say now that I was a Green Tortoise bus driver."

In the coming months, Erickson hopes to return to his volunteer job as public address announcer at Astoria football games.

"I really miss the camaraderie of watching local sports. I retired from teaching four years ago, and I miss the community of the school district. I hope that when football comes back, I get to participate in my volunteer area."

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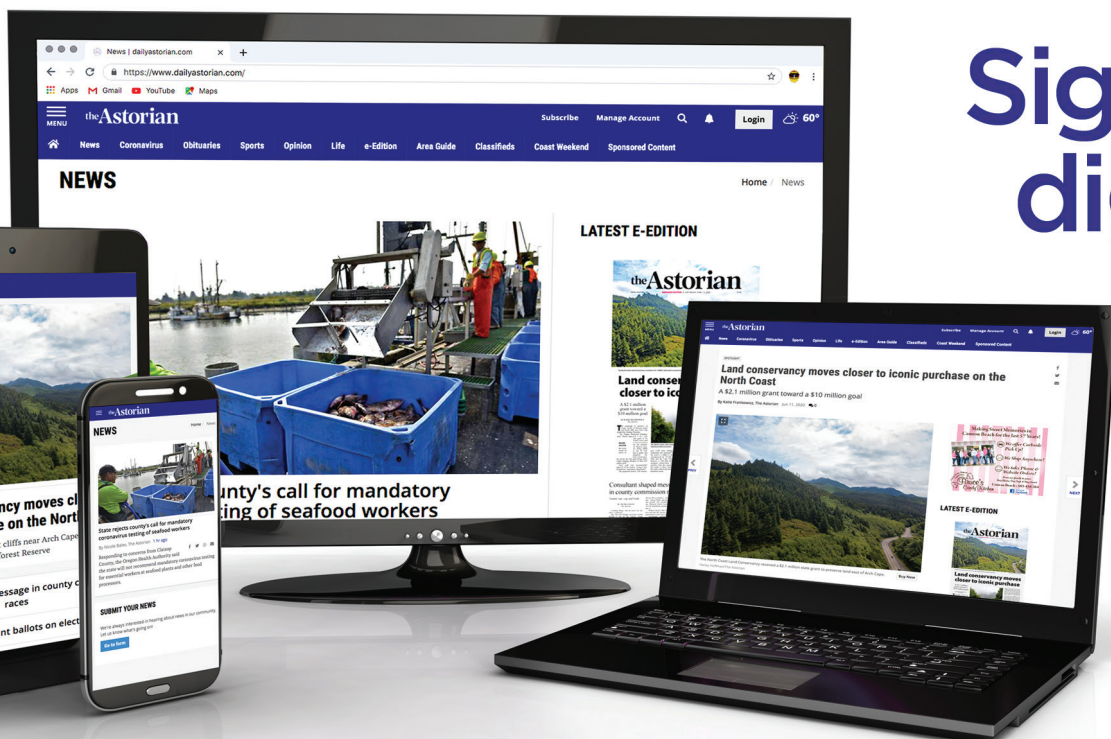
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