

State grappling with frequent phone problems

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — In the wake of Tuesday’s outage phone at state offices in the mid-Willamette Valley, two legislators say they’re eager to see state phone functionality improve. Between early 2016 and late May, state government phone systems have experienced 22 outages of some kind, according to the Office of the State Chief Information Officer. Tuesday’s outage, which affected state offices in Salem, Keizer, Woodburn and Dallas, was attributed to a problem with CenturyLink.

“My office lives and dies

by the phone,” said Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, on Wednesday. “I mean, we pride ourselves on being available to our constituents.”

Eight of the 22 outages were associated with IBM, the vendor on a troubled effort to overhaul the state phone system, Project MUSIC. Six were associated with CenturyLink; and eight were associated with power failures and leased network circuits.

An outage doesn’t always translate to a complete failure of the phone system, DAS says.

An outage could mean problems with call features such as voicemail and voice-mail notification, or lower

call quality, a DAS spokeswoman wrote in an email to the EO/Pamplin Capital Bureau on Wednesday.

Tuesday’s outage occurred because there was a problem with a piece of hardware from CenturyLink, which provides network services to a slew of state field offices.

After learning of the issues, the Oregon Department of Administrative Services contacted CenturyLink to send a technician to fix the problem. Service was restored Tuesday evening, and DAS has asked CenturyLink to conduct a review of the incident.

Meanwhile, the state is working to remedy issues with Project MUSIC. Prob-

lems with the system became evident in January, when the system’s “failover,” or backup plan, failed after an outage, Liz Craig, a spokeswoman for DAs, wrote in an email Wednesday.

“If IBM’s failover had been successful, it would have quickly resolved the outage and restored all voice services and voice-related applications,” Craig wrote. “And, this happened after IBM had conducted a failover test in April 2017 and reported to the Office of the State CIO that the test was successful.”

That’s what prompted the state to issue a notice of default to IBM that month.

The state told IBM to come up with a plan to fix the issues. By early May, 82 percent of the remediation measures IBM said it would undertake had been completed, according to a May 22 presentation by the CIO’s office to lawmakers.

Gartner, a third-party contractor, has done a “risk assessment” of the Project MUSIC system, and DAS has already mitigated some of those risks, Nikki Fisher, community outreach and events strategist for Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, wrote in an email Wednesday.

The total budget for Project MUSIC was \$45.8 million. Financing costs are

expected to set the state back \$7 million every two years through mid-2023.

State Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, the chair of the legislative budget subcommittee on general government issues, said he was concerned as well, but thinks the governor recognizes the importance of remedying the technical problems.

“In all fairness to the State of Oregon, we don’t always control internet connectivity or cloud activity, and so unfortunately the Governor’s Office has been taking beatings sometimes when acts outside of her control occur,” Smith said. “To me, this isn’t a very partisan issue.”

ROAD: ‘Parrot pirate’ will spend offseason in Honduran bird program

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Davis Amusement is one of several carnival ride companies across the U.S. that travels around on the county fair and festival circuit.

Dowis has been working at carnivals since 1990, and with Davis Amusement since 1998. During his career, he has operated, set up, or fixed every ride at the carnival.

They start the season in Las Vegas in February and move north as the weather heats up. They are at fairs in Oregon, Washington, California and Idaho until Labor Day, and then head back to Nevada.

Once the weather turns cold, many of the carnival workers will spend the time working on the rides — from painting to technical maintenance.

“Safety is always the first priority,” Dowis said. “We’re not here to hurt people. We’re here to make money, but safety is our number one priority.”

The time between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day is a time for some carnival workers to find other jobs, or just go home.

“A few of us will stay here and work,” he said. “Some will go work at Walmart, some will sell Christmas trees. And sometimes they just go home and visit with family.”

For some, a temporary job has turned into a lifestyle.

Zoe Jones, who runs the balloon game for the carnival, said she was a college student at Boise State University when she became friends with the daughter of the Davis Amusement owners.

“She introduced me to this life,” she said. “I get to travel, meet an entire town, and the goal for the entire week is just to have as much fun as possible with the town.”

Jones said there are many curiosities about carnival life that people don’t consider.

“Did you know we all live in these tiny bunkhouses?” she said. “I never thought about carnivals before this.”

Dowis said while some aspects of carnival life have endured, the business is changing.

“We do safety meetings, comply with the state,” said Dowis. “We’re pretty close to being just like McDonald’s.”

He said that includes random drug tests and suspensions for violations.

“The days of long-haired, not tucking your shirt in are going by the wayside for everybody,” he said. “It’s not like it was 20 years ago.”

On the stage

Working with birds is a year-round affair for Chris Biro, who performs the “Pirate’s Parrot Show.”

A staple at county fairs since 1991, Biro developed what was initially an interest and a hobby with his pet macaw into a career.

At one of his four daily



Chris Biro of McNeal, Arizona, holds a pair of his sun conure parrots between shows at the Umatilla County Fair. When not performing at events Biro travels to Honduras to do conservation work with sun conure parrots in the wild.

shows at this year’s fair, he spends some time educating his audience about the birds before they impress the crowd with tricks.

“Parrots are one of the few species of birds that use their feet to pick things up,” he said. “And, they can move both the upper and lower parts of their jaws.”

He devotes about 16 full weeks each year to traveling to different county fairs, but the rest of the year he does bird trainings, both at home and abroad, as well as teaching animal training classes online.

“This year, the macaws are flying better,” he said.

He also does conservation work with birds, and is

currently preparing to travel to Honduras after fair season ends to work on a macaw breeding and release project.

“There’s the conservation side, the fair side, and the free flight side of it,” Biro said. “I stay very busy.”

“We’re all small business

owners,” said Louie Foxx, a magician performing at this year’s fair. “We all have emails to return, receipts to log.”

Foxx performs all year, with fairs and festivals packing his busy season, May to October.

“In the offseason I per-

form at all sorts of venues,” he said. “Corporate events, arts schools, comedy clubs. I’m fortunate to be fairly busy year-round.”

Foxx said the nomadic lifestyle is hard on some.

“Some people will pop in for a year, and say, that’s not for me,” he said. “It takes a very versatile sort of performer.”

But Foxx enjoys most aspects of the job.

“At the end of the day, I’m hanging out in the sun and there’s a bunch of us that all know each other,” Foxx said. “But we don’t have the same routes. So next week I’ll go to the next fair, and see a whole new crew of people I know.”

In chatting with audience members between shows, Foxx said he’s been introduced to lots of things he’d never see otherwise.

“People will send me to crazy restaurants, or say, right outside of town is the world’s largest ball of twine,” he said. “I like to come to different communities and experience your community.”

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RV: No one was hurt in parking lot fire

Continued from 1A

started the RV to leave and smelled smoke, said Moen. He flipped up the engine cover in the interior of the vehicle and flames started shooting out, she said.

Moen’s first thought was of her new decorations.

“I wanted to grab pillows and throw them out the door, but it went so fast,” she said.

No one was hurt in the blaze. Moen grabbed her walker, her dog Roscoe and his leash, and Saunders grabbed Moen’s purse and his backpack before the flames consumed the rest of the RV.

Pendleton Fire Depart-

ment interim assistant chief Greg Lacquement said the fire burnt through to the rear of the RV, but by his estimates took them less than 10 minutes to extinguish. He said from their perspective the vehicle was a total loss, but that is ultimately for the insurance company to decide.

The fire shut down Court Avenue near the Highway 11 intersection for about an hour.

It was an older RV, from 1985, but it only had 38,000 miles on it when they bought it, said Moen. She said it didn’t drive well at first because it hadn’t been used for some time, but that’s

why they were refurbishing it. They had the air conditioning, heating and electrical checked out in Portland last week and everything appeared to be fine, she said.

They were planning to pack up Moen’s house when they got home to Portland, so they could rent it out and embark on a yearlong trip visiting national parks and museums.

“We were telling all the neighbors we were having an RV open house with champagne and cookies,” she said.

Moen said she has friends who live in Pendleton and Hermiston, but doesn’t know what they will do next.

POM: Will start sometime in October

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cial issues. We try to find ways to accomplish our goals.”

Commissioner Rick Stokoe said the commission has given Neal a conditional offer of employment, which is contingent on his passing a background check and going through contract negotiations. His salary will be between \$175,000 and \$225,000 annually.

“We decided Ryan was the best fit,” Stokoe said. “He’s well-informed with what’s going on at the port.”

He said Neal is also involved with the community, which was one of the commission’s top priorities.

“All our applicants were highly qualified,” he said. “But some were from big

shipping ports, that only do container shipping. We do a wealth of things — economic development, shipping, helping businesses. We need someone who understands our port.”

He said the commission has not yet given Neal a start date, but estimated it will be sometime in October.

Neal was one of four finalists the commission interviewed. All four appeared at a public meeting at the port on Monday, for which Stokoe said more than 100 people showed up. They shared a little about themselves and their vision for the port.

The other candidates were Dean Gardner, a longtime financial officer and businessman of Selah, Washington; Stephanie Seamans, a CPA from Kennewick; and

Peter Wilhelm, a businessman who has worked for paper mills in Wallula, Washington and Zechem.

The candidates went through four sets of interviews on Tuesday. They sat before three panels — one consisting of people familiar with the technical aspects of ports and industry, one of community members, and one of people in the business and finance world. The panelists were selected from throughout the region, said George Dunkel, the Special Districts Association of Oregon employee who conducted the candidate search.

“I feel honored that the commission selected someone that I know well,” said Gary Neal. “It’s a pretty exciting opportunity for him.”

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