

Digital divide in rural America

Access to the Internet. The Internet is now considered a basic human right; it is how people find employment, handle their finances, receive an education, work, and receive medical care.

However, not everyone is able to use the Internet to its full potential, due primarily to slow speeds. Rural areas are at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing broadband.

GUEST COMMENT

Jordan Feyerherm

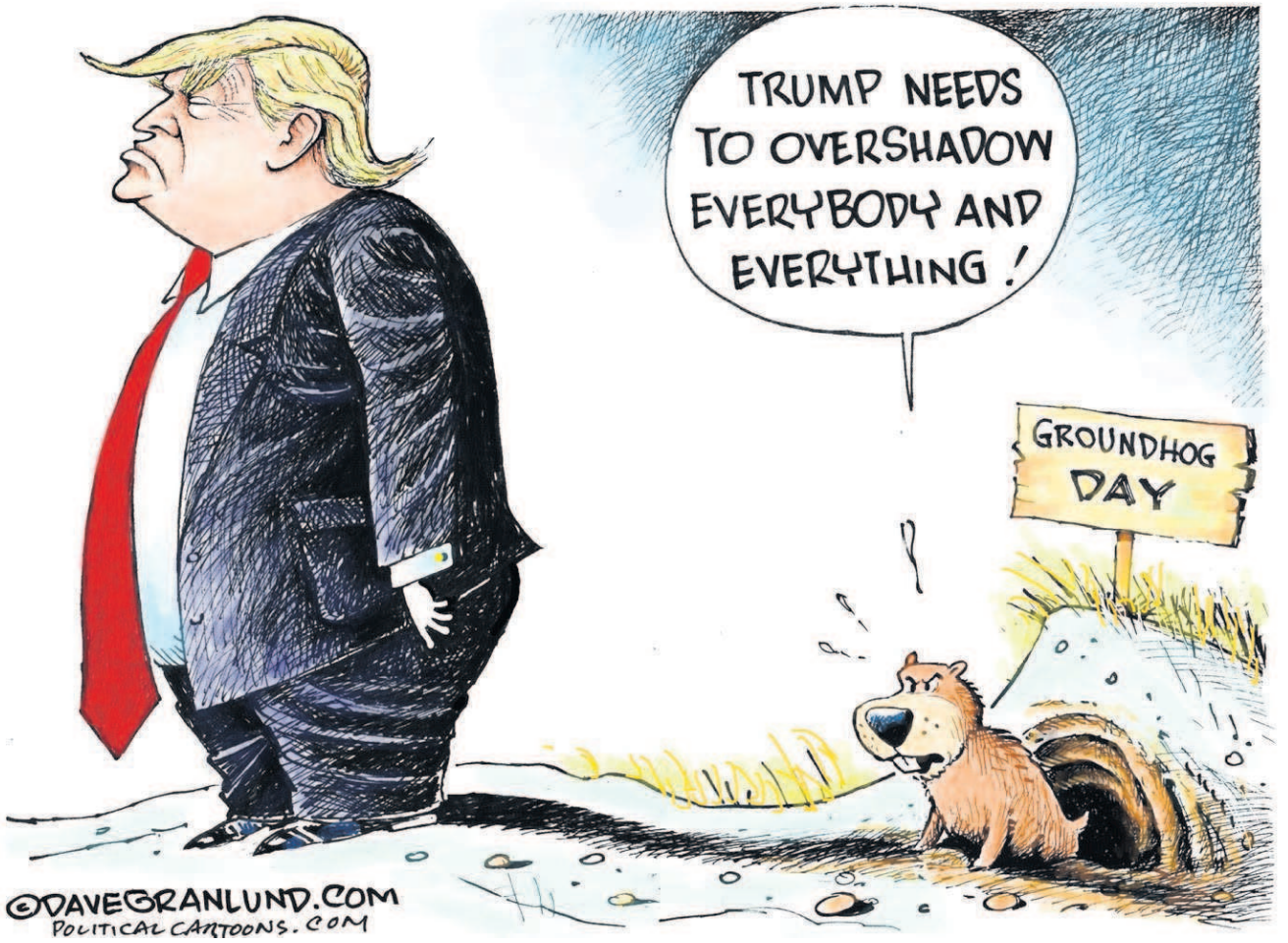
Expanding infrastructure into rural areas will improve health outcomes for residents by allowing access to specialists, increasing cost efficiency, and raising quality of care.

In rural schools, broadband access can offer students learning tools equal to those provided in urban settings. Students can have access to higher level curriculum, to a larger selection of foreign languages and connect with students around the world.

Increasing broadband access will be a boon to small town economies by keeping local businesses competitive and attracting new residents. In a recent study by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, it was found that areas with one to three broadband providers experience a 6.4 percent higher employment growth rate and a 2.4 percent increase to the population growth rate compared to areas without broadband, both vital factors in maintaining a healthy community.

We must do more to help rural communities gain access to broadband. We urge policymakers to consider new and innovative ways of developing infrastructure and promoting competition among providers. By expanding broadband access into rural areas, we are improving the health, education and economic well-being of small towns everywhere.

Jordan Feyerherm is a project organizer with the Farm and Community Program for the Center for Rural Affairs. Established in 1973, the Center for Rural Affairs is a private, non-profit organization working to strengthen small businesses, family farms and ranches, and rural communities through action oriented programs addressing social, economic, and environmental issues.



‘Rough’ winter depends on the person telling the tale

Snowed in means something different today than it did in the early 20th century



AND FURTHERMORE

Jon Rombach

“Old-timey winter” is the phrase currently leading the pack of descriptions I’ve been hearing to describe our recent weather.

The fourth most common description for this winter is “a real doozy.”

Second and third can not be printed here.

Years ago I did some work out on the Divide, a pretty short hop from Joseph in summer. Around that time, I read an account of early life on the Cat’s Back and took notice of how much the folks living out there had to stock up on flour and sugar, grit, determination and other staples, because once the snow fell they weren’t going to town for the next however many months. Really made me think.

Nowadays, I get oddly proud when the roads in and out of Wallowa County are closed. Makes me feel a little bit like those snowbound Cat’s Back settlers.

“Yep,” I tell people on the phone, “Minam is shut. Tollgate. Meacham. Can’t go south on 84 either, even if you could get to La Grande. Which you can’t.”

At one point this winter everything was closed except for the Rattlesnake and I kept refreshing the road report, hoping for complete isolation. Which makes no sense at all.

I end these phone calls with people living in metro areas by letting out a big sigh and saying things like, “Whelp, guess we’ll just have to hunker down.”

The general idea is to leave my friends and family with the idea that I’ll get off the phone and go back to tanning my new

set of buckskins, or sewing flour sacks together for a new parka.

Looking at old falling-down homesteads in remote parts of Wallowa County, the usual reaction is to comment, “Can you imagine spending a winter out here?” Right now I’m thinking and saying that same thing about friends living right here in town or up on Alder Slope, with no water or water but no functioning drains.

A buddy of mine got drifted in at his place for a week and ran out of coffee for three days. Three whole days! No coffee! What is this, the 1890s?

My best tools for coping this winter have been a hair dryer for thawing frozen pipes, a solar lantern when the power has winked out and remembering one of the toughest guys I’ve ever known, who endured brutal winter conditions back in the Depression. I find that thinking about how he got along keeps things in perspective when I can’t watch Netflix and feel like I’m really roughing it.

Jack Hollenbeak was from Prospect in southern Oregon, where my mom grew up. Jack was thin as a rail and tougher than a hardware store. He worked as a winter caretaker in Crater Lake National Park in the late 1930s, in charge of shoveling snow off buildings so they wouldn’t collapse. Jack referred to the Civilian Conservation Corps cabins as, “a Three C’s Camp.”

A newspaper story about his lonely winter job mentions 213 inches of snow in January alone. If my math is to be trusted, that’s almost 18 feet of snow. One of the problems with moving that much white

stuff was that, before long, he was shoveling uphill because the rooflines were below the snowbanks.

Jack didn’t have a thermometer with him, but nearby Chemult recorded 35 below that winter. Refrigerators hadn’t found their way into ranger’s cabins in 1937, but there was an ice box and Jack later told an historian interviewing him, “So I thought that’s where I’m going to store my potatoes ... in that old ice box – they’re well insulated! – and when the cold weather hit, those potatoes inside the ice-box, inside the house, froze just as hard as billiard balls.”

Meanwhile, Jack’s wife and 1-year-old daughter were living back at their ranch house, probably opening the window to let in some cool air because the stove made the place too hot.

You can find this interview with Jack online if you want to add his lonely, cold winter to your own toolbox for perspective. Look up Jack Hollenbeak, Crater Lake and that will lead you to a Forest Service oral history collection he shows up in.

Here’s a few extra tidbits I got from my mom and my own visits with Jack. He got around on the snow back then on skis he made himself from yew wood. He even made my mom a pair of those hand-planed yew wood skis and I wish those things were still around.

Jack had no radio, no record player and not much for reading material up in that CCC cabin. I remember him telling me that he did have a few Saturday Evening Post magazines and “by the end of the winter, those pages had gotten awfully thin, from me staring at them so much.”

I hear you, Jack. When it gets real cold I almost wear a hole in my TV screen from watching so much Netflix.

Jon Rombach is a local columnist for the Chieftain.

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Plan calls for wolf management

I am responding to the laughable commentary in the Jan. 18th Chieftain from the Oregon Wild guru about poaching. Although he tried to thinly veil his comments to include ALL animals with regulations concerning their status as a game animal, his main concern is obviously the wolf, NOT cormorants, sea lions and condors, animals we are not graced with in Wallowa County.

I would like to point out:

1. He insinuates that ranchers had something to do with some of the wolves who have been found deceased “under mysterious circumstances.” Really? What happened to innocent until proven guilty? Here’s some wolf facts: They only live for 6 to 8 years in the wild. They are vectors of at least 35 diseases, many of which would kill them. Pups in the wild have a survival rate of 60 percent. They don’t have ideal living situations! To you, every wolf that dies has met a tragic, unplanned, unnatural end. Nature says otherwise.

2. Oregon Wild was one of the groups invited to help write the Oregon Wolf Management Plan. What part of “management” do you not understand? You are flailing statements around about the tragedy of potential hunting of wolves, yet what other methods of controlling numbers do you suggest besides elimination? Let’s just go out and ask them to stop reproducing! We had a 30 percent increase of wolf numbers last year. Will you suggest that we have as many wolves as people in our county before you try to figure out how to keep them out of people’s backyards, eating their pets and terrorizing children walking to school (as they do in the south right now)? I would suggest you man up and support the Plan that you participated in.

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Flying in Wallowa County

What does a gal do as a pilot lifts his plane in the air and when he tips his wing, she unknowingly grabs her heart which then zips along with him as he does roll-overs and loops?

That is how I felt when Mark Peterson performed aeronautical acrobatics at last year’s Wallowa County Fly-in. This excitement burst in my heart again just watching a video of that event (filmed by Kyle Stangel) at the Wallowa County Pilots Association annual banquet last week. “Do you remember the whistling?” I whispered to a friend across the table as we anticipated the presentation.

He assured me, “You can hear it on the video.”

We watched so many fond memories on the screen: Cessnas of every color lined up on the grass, Miss Veedol’s sassy red self parked with the other vintage aircraft, and Peterson’s acrobatics in his P-51 Mustang. To see that fighter plane spin in the cerulean sky with Chief Joseph Mountain in the background took my breath away.

Flying intrigues me. Decades ago I took flying lessons — even soloed — but life interfered with my getting my pilot’s license. On a trip on the Wallowa Loop Road soon after I moved here, I stopped at the Hell’s Canyon Overlook and heard a roar shattering the silence.

“What IS that?” I silenced the skies.

A delta wing Stealth Bomber appeared from the north and slowly lumbered above the Snake River, almost at eye level with me. I imagined a brontosaurus dinosaur flying....

“How does it do that?”
Two summers ago I awoke to a strange



WALLOWA GAL

Katherine Stickroth

sound, like a high-pitched lawn mower, but it was overhead. So, I threw on some clothes and ran outside to see a powered hang-glider.

Another day an unusual sound raised my eyes upward. It was a jet being refueled in the air by another jet.

The best thing about where I live is watching the private planes take off and land at Joseph Airport.

“There’s Andy,” (the flight instructor). Or “There’s Bill,” or “There’s Barney...” There’s a large flying community in Wallowa County that maintains backcountry strips and just has fun with airplanes. With the growing success of the Fly-in, these members decided to form a non-profit foundation that would raise funds for aviation education.

Aviation education in Wallowa County?

Yep. Classes have already begun at Joseph Charter School with expansion to Enterprise and Wallowa schools in future plans. Tobey Koehn, director of this program, has garnered funds from S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) grants and high school students currently are studying aviation and building airplane parts.

At the banquet, more exciting than the thrill of watching the DVD of last year’s Fly-in, was the presentation by students

Ethan Pittman and his classmate, Aji, describing what they are learning. (A photo is displayed on today’s blog post.) Their enthusiasm and hopes for where this curriculum can take them was infectious. The slideshow of students riveting sheet metal and of girls working on a drone brought smiles to the roomful of pilots and the rest of us who love flying.

The demand for commercial pilots, aviation mechanics, and secondary suppliers is great. To think that Wallowa County could funnel well-trained students into higher education in aeronautics, leading to well-paying jobs and satisfying career tracks is something to consider. Who knows? They may bring one of those clean industries back home.

The possibilities of where this education endeavor can take these students is as open as the vast skies above us.

The Wallowa County Fly-in and Pancake Breakfast, which is now a fundraiser for the North East Oregon Aviation Foundation, is scheduled for Aug. 12. And just for fun, a fleet of 30 vintage airplanes is including a stop at Joseph Airport on July 10 on their summer schedule.

Mark your calendars and watch the Chieftain for upcoming announcements. There are ways for anyone in Wallowa County to come aboard, by volunteering or purchasing sponsorships.

And while the snow has us grounded for now, I look forward to spring when pilots will push the throttle, make that motor hum and slice the air in front of Chief Joseph.

Just love it!
Katherine Stickroth is a freelance writer and blogs at allowagal.com.