

New grant aims to expand internet access to underserved families

Utilizing \$27,000 in grant funds from the Oregon Community Foundation (OCF) and private donations from Silicon Shire companies, a new public-private collaboration has formed to bring internet access to more than a hundred underserved families in Springfield, Cottage Grove and Eugene.

The funds will be used to underwrite the cost of equipment needed to connect homes to the internet.

“There is a need to support local families, to get them connected to the internet so they can access online learn-

ing and other community resources,” said Heidi Larwick, director of Connected Lane County. “Everything is online now, including education, and that will continue to be the case for the foreseeable future.

“These underserved families and students need to have access to the same opportunities as their more well-connected peers.”

Douglas Fast Net (DFN) and XS Media are two of the Internet Service Providers collaborating in the initiative.

“One of DFN’s responses to the COVID crisis was to launch our

‘DFNCares’ program. With the uncertainty of what schooling will look like in the fall, the timing of this grant couldn’t be better and will allow us to continue to offer the DFNCares program,” said Todd Way, CEO at DFN.

“In the first days school districts transitioned to distance education we listened to the community and opened a discussion with all of our employees. The feelings were unanimous.

“The need is significant and we felt an obligation to help. The program so far has benefited many families and we look for-

ward to being able to do even more with the support of this grant,” said Stephen Parac, COO at XS Media.

This spring, Connected Lane County began working in earnest with Onward Eugene, school districts, local internet service providers including Emerald Broadband, DFN, PEAK, WIN, and XS Media, as well as with companies in the Silicon Shire to connect families who were without internet access.

Creative solutions have been deployed by parking “hot spot” enabled buses in neighborhoods and leveraging convert-

ed cell phones as internet access points.

This grant marks a timely new investment in bridging the digital divide.

“Onward’s vision is a thriving regional economy that leads to inclusive prosperity. We’ll never really achieve that, unless everyone has access to the internet,” said Matt Sayre, Managing Director of Onward.

In Lane County there were 3,900 students (out of 47,000) that were initially without access in March; more than half of those students lack access because of financial barriers, while others

lived in rural areas where the internet was not accessible via any means.

With social distancing measures in place, services and resources like education, telemedicine, unemployment claims and more are increasingly only available online.

Families without internet access are at a clear disadvantage to succeed in these times.

Internet installation work is ongoing, with the goal of readying families when distance-based learning is implemented again this coming fall.

Oregon Health Authority presents business, public face covering guidelines

The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) released a statewide update to its face covering guidance in conjunction with Gov. Kate Brown’s July 1 statewide mandate for the wearing of face coverings while in public spaces.

The guidance applies to all businesses and the general public.

Businesses

- Require employees, contractors and volunteers to wear a mask, face shield, or face covering, unless an accommodation or exemption is required by law or the following exemption applies:

- Employees, contractors and volunteers: Masks, face shields or face coverings are not required when eating/

drinking or when at or in a location where the employee, contractor or volunteer is not interacting with the public and six or more feet of distance can be maintained from other people.

- Provide masks, face shields or face coverings for employees.
- Provide accommodations and exemptions from the mask, face shield or face covering requirement for employees, contractors and volunteers if such accommodations or exemptions are required by:
- If customers or visitors will be required to wear a mask, face shield or face covering:
- Post clear signs about any such requirements.
- Provide accommoda-

tions and exceptions for:

- People with disabilities and medical conditions
- Children under 12 years of age (except public transit, see below)

Additionally, a business should, but is not required to:

- Provide, at no cost, at least disposable face coverings for customers or visitors who do not have one.
- Post signs about any mask, face shield or face coverings requirement in languages that are commonly spoken by customers and visitors.

The Public

When riding public transit, an individual must wear a mask, face shield or face

covering unless the individual:

- Is under two years of age.
- Has a medical condition that makes it hard to breathe when wearing a mask, face shield or face covering.
- Has a disability that prevents the individual from wearing a mask, face shield, or face covering.

It is strongly recommended that individuals, including children between ages 2 and 12, wear a mask, face shield or face covering at all times in all indoor public places, particularly in places where it is likely that physical distancing of at least six feet from other

individuals outside their household unit cannot be maintained at all times and vulnerable people must go.

Because children between the ages of two and 12 years of age can have challenges wearing a mask, face shield or face covering properly (e.g., excessively touching the face covering, not changing the face covering if visibly soiled, risk of strangulation or suffocation, etc.) it is urged that if masks, face shields or face coverings are worn by this age group, that they be worn with the assistance and close supervision of an adult.

Masks, face shields or face coverings should never

be worn by children when sleeping.

The use of mask, face shield, or face covering may be optional if six feet or more of distance is maintained from others. Otherwise, it is recommended to wear mask, face shield or face covering in public settings where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

There may be mask, face shield and face covering requirements and recommendations that apply to other businesses not listed in this guidance.

Free guidelines can be obtained by contacting Mavel Morales at 844-882-7889.

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