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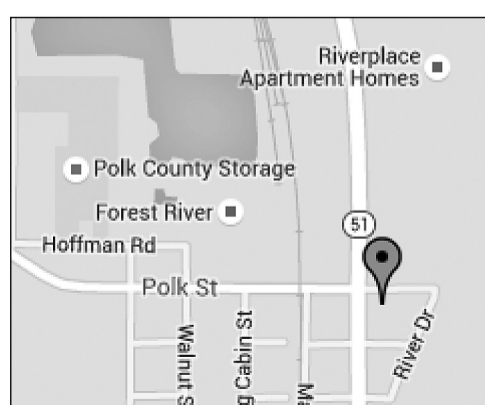
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EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer

Juan Navarro is the new community liaison for the city of Independence.

## Navarro unafraid to lead

New liaison open about his undocumented status

By Emily Mentzer  
The Itemizer-Observer

INDEPENDENCE — Juan Navarro, 22, has already had a great impact on others, inspiring high school students and politicians in Washington, D.C. Navarro, the new community liaison for Independence, testified in front of the Oregon State Legislature in favor of Undocumented State Tuition, which allows undocumented residents of a state to receive in-state tuition rates.

Navarro, who is vocal about his undocumented status, was born in Mexico, but said he grew up in Stayton.

"I learned English in Stayton, went to school in Stayton, my first girlfriend was in Stayton," he said. "Life was in Stayton."

Navarro was born with a birth defect. The Mexican government said he would have to spend his life in a wheelchair. Unable to accept his son's fate, Navarro's father heard about the Shriners Hospital in Portland.

"He decided to take matters into his own hands," Navarro said of his father. "So he emigrated over here to make me better."

After six surgeries in his youth, Navarro found himself on the high school track team, playing basketball and soccer.

President Barack Obama's

executive order, DACA — Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals — made it possible for Navarro to go to college and find work other than in the fields and factories, but it hasn't been easy.

His openness about his undocumented status has helped inspire other Latinos to pursue an education.

Navarro has spoken at conferences for the Oregon Students of Color Coalition, and now serves as a member of that board. He tells high school students about his journey, and shows them it is possible to achieve a higher education without papers. "Your grades matter," Navarro said, particularly as an undocumented resident. "You can't get financial aid. You can't get any federal loans or anything, so you have to make a difference through your grades, through your efforts, through your volunteer work."

A student at Western Oregon University, Navarro is majoring in exercise science, and considering a double major in community health. He is active in Mecha of WOU and student government.

Along the way, Navarro has had people who believed in him and his abilities more than he did himself, and now he plans to use his enthusiasm for life to help the Latino community

in Independence.

"Many things need to get done," he said of the work to bridge the communities in the city. "I'm a very strong grassroots organizer."

First of all, Navarro wants to tackle police-Latino relations. He said in Stayton, there was one particular officer who seemed to harass Latinos, particularly those who were undocumented.

"Because there's a language barrier, they don't know what they have to say," Navarro said. "Whenever a Latino gets stopped by the cops, they wonder, 'What's going on?' The fear of deportation is there."

The officers in Independence aren't like that, Navarro said, but not everyone may know that. He plans to start by including the Latino police officers in conversations in the community.

Navarro said he has made an impact at Western, and now he has to go from organizing events for a campus to an entire city.

First up? Bringing a Dia de los Muertos, also known as "Day of the Dead" event to the city.

"Having some kind of Dia de los Muertos event would be such a wonderful thing," Navarro said. "I have contact with a couple people here. We will get the gears rolling to see what we can do."

## MINET board to shift focus

But first, it discusses employee benefits, board policies

By Emily Mentzer  
The Itemizer-Observer

MONMOUTH/INDEPENDENCE — Monmouth Independence Networks board of directors believes it needs to stop "playing small ball" and refocus on the big picture of telecommunications and running the business.

But before that, the board addressed whether MINET employees should receive free cable, telephone and Internet as a perk of working there.

MINET General Manager Don Patten said board members need to focus on "appropriate agenda items" that will move the company forward.

"Too much negative attention is being attached in public and press to the board, and, by association, to MINET," he said. "This board has been focused on the small issues to such a degree that it misses the big ones."

Patten said members of the board have focused on employee manuals, job descriptions and "chasing legal citations."

"While these are genuine issues, over-focus on details presents a poor public perception," he said.

Board member Mike Lodge agreed, saying, "This board has been wound pretty tight, to the point of micro-managing."

Lodge said the term "manage" should not be part of the board, as a board's role is broader, focusing instead on policies.

Board vice-chairman Scott McClure said the board has been playing "small ball for a year."



He said that the managers at MINET have a handle on the day-to-day operations, and that he would like the board to shift focus.

Board member David Ritchey agreed.

After the board came out of an executive session to discuss records exempt from public records laws, Lodge said Chad Stokes, MINET's attorney, was not on retainer and cost \$200 an hour each time he is called.

"Anytime anybody picks up the phone and calls the attorney on behalf of MINET, he drops a bill on MINET," Lodge said. "In view of that fact, I would suggest that the board agree that none of us call him unless we agree."

Board chairman David Clyne said they couldn't agree to call the attorney as a group before Stokes was called because it would be considered an illegal public meeting. Instead, McClure will look into creating a board policy about calling the attorney. The board approved a code of conduct at its August meeting, but has yet to establish any board policies or bylaws.

Since May, MINET has

paid \$3,700 in attorney's fees for various investigations, including the tort claim filed in June by Laura Rodriguez for discrimination.

McClure, who had been working on possible bylaws for the board with board member Jerry Hoffman, said they decided the MINET board did not need more documents, but would let the intergovernmental agreement (IGA) stand alone.

He said revisions should be suggested to the two councils — Monmouth and Independence — to clean up the IGA document, such as redefining the role of the secretary/treasurer.

After a discussion about employees receiving free telecommunication services, Clyne was the sole negative vote.

Clyne said giving employees services for free could mean up to \$3,000 per year value if they received the top package MINET has to offer. He wanted to reduce that to the basic service package, if not remove the benefit completely.

"MINET should be able to offer benefits to their employees," Ritchey said.