

Program may mark the start of new partnership

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — Saturday's Dallas Make-a-thon was about more than building prototypes.

It's possible it was the beginning of a partnership between the city of Dallas and OnlineNW, a high-speed internet service provider based out of McMinnville.

Thompson Morrison, a representative of both Innovate Oregon and OnlineNW, said the company is looking for another community to offer its high-speed internet service.

The investment is steep for OnlineNW, so before moving in, it looks for signs that a community would support it and develop the businesses that would need

the service.

OnlineNW has established such partnerships with the cities of Dayton and Willamina, and now is looking at Polk County as its next area of expansion.

"It's very, very expensive for us to build fiber in a community," Morrison said. "The purpose of building fiber isn't to allow people to stream Netflix. You don't

need fiber to stream Netflix, but you do need fiber if you are building the businesses of tomorrow. We can't make that investment in a community unless we are confident that the businesses will be created that will need the fiber we are building."

He was encouraged by the turnout for Saturday's Make-a-thon — and for the enthusi-

asm among the participants. "Gosh, there seems to be a lot of energy here," he said Saturday. "It's phenomenal. I've been so impressed with the community leadership that has been here, and from the businesses."

Morrison said OnlineNW has had initial conversations with city representatives, including AJ Foscoli, the city's economic development di-

rector, and LaCreole Principal Jamie Richardson through Innovate Oregon's education programs.

He said the company is in the process of a market evaluation and pre-engineering assessment to see what it would take to build a network in Dallas.

"We are hoping to make a decision in the not-too-distant future," Morrison said.

Maker: Program attracted 50 participants

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"At the core of this, it's not about the technology," Morrison said. "At the core is the creativeness that is used to solve a problem, the deeper learning that comes out of that. The type of dynamic that comes out of it, the learning happens in a very collaborative, fast-paced way. It's accelerated.

"That's why these kids and these adults by the end of the day, they're thinking, 'how did we do that?'"

Innovate Oregon, an initiative of the Technology Association of Oregon, was created to find the best ways to train workers to be creative problem solvers who can work in teams to come up with solutions quickly, Morrison said.

That starts with education and looks a lot like what was happening in LaCreole's Innovations Lab on Saturday, Morrison said.

"The traditional model is I don't move until I have everything planned out because I'm afraid of failure," he said.

"Design-thinking" — like what was encouraged at the make-a-thon — allows for failure. It's expected even.

"It's from failures that we learn. That allows us to try again being smarter," Morrison said. "Failure is an essential part of the process."

Innovate Oregon, with partner OnlineNW, have begun working in



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

JD Shinn, at the computer, makes last-minute adjustments to his group's greenhouse and chicken coop on Saturday afternoon.

Dayton and Willamina to both transform education and business in those communities. OnlineNW

brings the technology — high speed internet service — to the community, and Innovate Oregon works with schools to redesign how students are prepared for careers.

LaCreole's Principal Jamie Richardson has already begun some of that work. He's attended administrative training in adapting education to a "design-thinking" model. Saturday, with teachers, school administrators, business and community leaders in the room, that model was put on display.

The next step is training teachers to adapt it to classrooms.

"It's really important for the teachers in the room see that, they begin to realize that the kids can learn faster than they can teach," Morrison said. "The purpose of this is for people to see the potential. Then the training gives you a pathway to actually introduce it into the building."

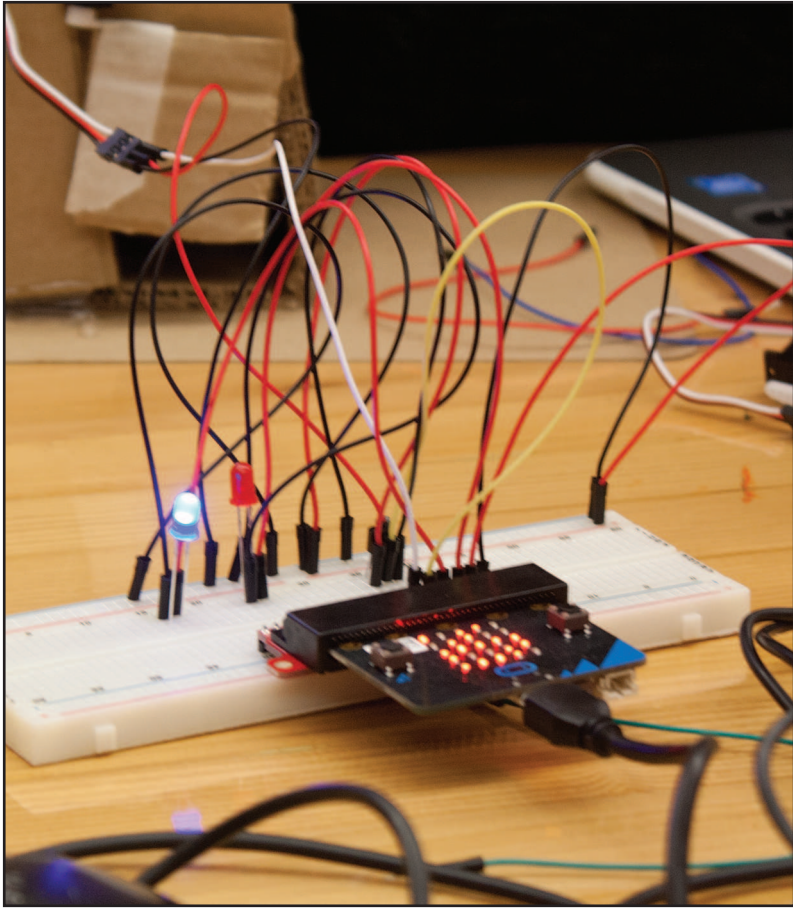
Educators in the room seemed ready to take the plunge.

"I really liked the engagement that was occurring across the board," said Tim Ray, Dallas High School's career-technical education coordinator. "I wonder why we had to show up here on a Saturday and learn 17 times more than we would learn in a normal school year. It blows my mind, and I'm an

educator."

Teachers weren't the only people excited about using the method. "I liked that some of us failed a couple of times and, because we

failed, it was easier to fix our mistakes and go back and do it again," said Morgan Helfrich, a seventh-grader. "That's one less mistake we would make."



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer

The blue light turns on on a temperature sensor, showing when the greenhouse door should close as the air temperature decreases.



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Ethan Carter connects wires during the prototype designing portion of the make-a-thon on Saturday at LaCreole Middle School.

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