

Falls City gets a direct connection

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

FALLS CITY — Thursday morning Richard Faber uttered a phrase that people should get used to hearing from him: “Make sure you put your seat belt on.”

Faber, the driver for the new Falls City Direct Connect bus service, drove his first official routes on Thursday, driving from Falls City to Dallas and back again four times. The first day didn't see a lot of riders, but that didn't surprise the people who worked about a year on getting the free service up and running.

“The longer it runs, the more people we will get,” Faber said just before closing the bus doors and pulling away from Mountain Gospel Church, the pick-up and drop-off spot in Falls City.

It has stops at the Polk County Veterans Service Office, Flaming Medical Clinic, Walmart, the Oregon Department of Human Services office, and the Academy Building, where Polk County Public Health and Family & Community Outreach departments are located.

Trips to Dallas take off from Falls City four times a day on Tuesdays and Thursday, except for the second Tuesday of the month, when the route goes to Monmouth.

Monmouth stops are Monmouth Public Library, Waremart, Central Community Resource Center/Health Center, Polk County Behavioral Health and the Total Community Health Clinic.

Marie McCandless, Polk County Veterans Service Officer, said she's thrilled to have her office in Dallas be a stop on the route.

“I think it's huge. Getting vets to the office is one of the biggest hiccups we



Richard Faber drives the Falls City Direct Connect bus, a service that connects Falls City to multiple key locations in Dallas and Monmouth.

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have, letting them know we are here and getting them here,” she said. “We don't always have two people to go and do a home visit.”

Falls City Direct Connect's free service is paid with a grant from Willamette Valley Community Health, the local coordinated care organization for Polk and Marion counties.

A group of county and Falls City representatives began meeting about a year ago to talk about the lack of transportation options available to Falls City residents.

With only 950 residents, it was a stretch for most traditional public transportation systems to offer service in the community, said Brent DeMoe, the Family & Community Outreach director.

People on what became known at the Falls City

Transportation Committee had to think outside the box. The group consisted of Polk County department leaders, service organization leaders, Salem Health representatives, former Falls City Mayor Terry Ungricht, Lynn Bailey with the Falls City School District, and residents Donna Creekmore and Teresa Voden.

Polk County Commissioner Craig Pope, who serves on the WVCH board, also assisted the effort.

“I was told by a community leader that transportation was broken, and it could never be fixed in Polk County,” said Mona K-Hinds, the Polk County principal youth advisor with Community Services Consortium and one of the original committee members. “Those are like fighting words.”

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Falls City Direct Connect is a free service paid with a grant.

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