

Zipty Fiber expands Cove coverage

The company has purchased Cove portion of internet firm OTC Connections

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

COVE — Zipty Fiber, an internet service provider, is expanding its presence in Cove. Zipty has purchased the portion of OTC Connections that is currently serving the community. This puts Zipty in a position to be the major provider of fiber-optic internet services in Cove, according to Dan Miller, a public relations representative for Zipty Fiber.

Miller said OTC Connections, which provides internet service throughout Oregon, Idaho and Washington, has an abundance of equipment in Cove that Zipty will incorporate into its network there.

“They have excellent hardware that will strengthen our network,” he said.

OTC Connections, which also provides fiber-optic service, has 50 Cove customers that will now be served by Zipty. These customers will have a chance to continue receiving service packages similar to the ones they have from OTC Connections. They, and many others in Cove, will also have the opportunity to begin receiving some of the other high-speed fiber-optic services offered by Zipty.

Serving customers in Cove since 2020, Zipty Fiber during that time has been laying the foundation needed to begin providing fiber-optic service.

Zipty started taking customer orders from Cove residents for new fiber-optic services Friday, July 15. Zipty will start scheduling installation of its fiber optic service in the next several weeks.

Harold Zeitz, chief executive officer of Zipty Fiber, said he is delighted his firm has the opportunity to increase its presence in Cove.

“The community of Cove deserves the best, fastest, most reliable internet in the Northwest. I’m proud of the work our team has done to put the infrastructure in place to be able to manage all the internet traffic we expect from this great place,” he said in a press release. “I’m thrilled that individuals and families will be able to get even faster speeds at their homes, faster than any other provider in the Northwest.”

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The Observer, File

A Zipty Fiber technician works on a cable in this undated photo. The company in July 2022 announced it is expanding its presence in Cove.



Shannon Golden/The Observer

Allyson Smith, 28, holds Vader, a blue-tongued skink, on Wednesday, July 13, 2022, at the newly opened Savage Serpents in downtown La Grande. This lizard is one of almost 100 animals Smith looks after at her reptile specialty store, which opened in June.

Passion project

New ‘Savage Serpents’ reptile specialty store a long time coming for owner

By **SHANNON GOLDEN**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Allyson Smith got her first exotic pet — a tarantula — at 10 years old. She was hooked and spent years learning about and raising all manner of reptiles, amphibians and fish.

More than 18 years later, Smith now owns Savage Serpents, a reptile specialty store that opened its doors in downtown La Grande this June.

“I’ve always had a fondness for things that are a little bit out of the ordinary,” Smith said. “I definitely love to advocate for things that are kind of seen as scary or intimidating.”

Smith, who grew up in Boise, moved to La Grande more than seven



Shannon Golden/The Observer

Allyson Smith, owner of the new Savage Serpents in downtown La Grande, holds Vader, a blue-tongued skink, at the shop on Wednesday, July 13, 2022. Vader is a fan favorite at Smith’s education events, she said. This species of lizard is native to parts of Indonesia and Australia.

years ago. She joined the team at Pet-sense after it opened in 2018 and soon became store manager. Smith hoped to create a space where people could come not only for supplies but to see animals and also interact with and learn about them. She also found herself eager to expand the store’s resources for other reptile owners in

the Union County area.

“I just felt like the selection of supplies and live animal accessibility in general in La Grande was very lacking,” Smith said. “I kind of just wanted to do it myself.”

She began hosting “Reptile Rallies”

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Fuel up at new pumps in La Grande next year

Jacksons Food Stores demolishing and rebuilding gas station and truck stop

By **ISABELLA CROWLEY**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — By this time next year, the corner of Island Avenue and Mulholland Drive will be the home of a new gas station and truck stop.

Jacksons Food Stores, based in Meridian, Idaho, owns both the Chevron and the former Shell gas station located at 2706 and 2614 Island Ave., respectively, according to Mike Boquist, community development director for the city of La Grande.

“La Grande has been a great opportunity for Jacksons Food Stores. We have been working over a year to develop the best store design to serve the residents of La Grande and travelers,” Jessica Aguilar, the engineering project manager for the La Grande Jacksons project,

said.

The two-phase project will completely transform the existing Chevron gas station and Jacksons convenience store, according to Aguilar. Jacksons Food Stores declined to comment on how much of a financial investment the company has made in the project.

Boise-based BRS Architects drafted and filed the plans for the store with the city. Jacksons Food Stores is working with two contractors on the project: Leonard Petroleum Equipment, of Boise, and Pacific North Contractors, based in Nampa, Idaho.

The first phase is currently underway at the site of the former Shell location. The gas station was demolished in preparation for the construction of a high-flow truck-diesel canopy, Aguilar said. Each fuel dispenser will



Jacksons Food Stores/Contributed Graphic

A rendering shows what the new convenience store and Chevron gas station will look like at the corner of Island Avenue and Mulholland Drive in La Grande. This will be the second phase of the construction project by Jacksons Food Stores and is slated to begin during the spring of 2023.

have a diesel exhaust fluid pump — an integral component that ensures trucks meet the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency emission requirements by converting nitrogen oxide into nitrogen

and water vapor, according to the American Petroleum Institute. Most commercial fuel cards will be accepted, Aguilar said.

Boquist said once the first phase is complete, the

existing convenience store and Chevron gas station will be demolished, so the next phase can begin.

The second phase will complete the new look. According to Aguilar, the

plan includes constructing a new 7,100-square-foot convenience store, which will feature fresh food offerings and Krispy Krunchy Chicken, along with well-stocked shelves of snacks and drinks. With the larger convenience store and fuel options, Aguilar said that Jacksons Food Stores anticipates expanding the current staff.

The second phase also will add a new, larger gasoline canopy with six fuel dispensers. These also will include nonethanol gasoline and auto diesel.

Construction for phase two is slated to begin during spring 2023 and is expected to take around six months. According to Aguilar, the teams have been proactive in minimizing potential delays, but given the current market issues, there is always a risk.

“We hope to open later summer 2023 or early fall 2023,” she said.