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Internet: Collaborations help students get online

Continued from Page 1

a long time, but COVID-19 highlighted the problem, says the Ford Family Foundation, a nonprofit group that provides administrative and financial assistance to rural parts of the state.

Thirty-seven percent of rural Americans have no broadband internet service at home, according to a 2019 Pew Research Center report. Access also varies by demographic, with minority households at a disadvantage.

Warrenton-Hammond School District bought tablets for many students this year and made arrangements for them to find wifi hotspots, such as Warrenton Community Library and Camp Kiwanalong.

The Ford foundation began providing support to several Douglas County school districts so they could provide hotspots and the technology for families in remote areas to access distance learning. The foundation helped Malheur County with a grant for its schools in remote areas.

In Crook County, the school district used a pair of school buses as mobile hotspots and parked them around Prineville and in the tiny towns of Juniper Canyon and Powell Butte. Students bring chairs and their computers or do their homework in family



In Crook County, the school district uses buses as mobile internet hotspots.

Crook County School District

cars parked near the buses.

In Hornbrook, a town of 250 in Northern California, expensive cellular data is currently the only way to access the internet, creating a barrier for students engaged in online learning. A grant from the Shasta Regional Community Foundation is funding a project to install router equipment that will give most neighborhoods hot spots that will provide free internet access.

In Willamina, southwest of McMinnville, a recent collaboration between the town and local provider OnlineNW meant that, when COVID-19 hit, more than 90 percent of the town had access to super-fast fiberoptic internet service in their homes or places of work.

"A year and a half ago, not even half the town had the ability to get hooked up," says Lincoln Monroe of OnlineNW. Willamina was the second rural project for On-

line NW, which also offers high-speed service in Dayton.

Some communities have used municipal infrastructure to create affordable new networks. In 2007, for example, Independence partnered with the neighboring city of Monmouth to form their own company, MINET, to build multicity broadband infrastructure.

The federal CARES Act includes funds to help rural communities connect to high-speed internet. Oregon has \$10 million available for broadband projects, with priority given to projects that provide broadband access to K-12 students. In addition, the Oregon Legislature recently passed a cell phone tax to fund expanded broadband service in remote parts of the state.

911 staff graduates from academy

Two members of the Astoria Police Department graduate today, Nov. 6, from the basic telecommunications class for 911 operators at the police academy in Salem.

Dispatchers Bobbie Andring and Jesse Kirkendall were members of the 121st graduating class, a three-week course that includes emergency call handling, stress management, civil liability, ethics, criminal law, and fire-rescue and law enforcement operations.

The 9-1-1 training program began in 1993.



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