

Wi-Fi Hotspots available for Morrow County students



School buses are being used for Wi-Fi hotspots around the county.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures across Oregon have required school districts to come up with solutions to various problems. One of those issues is how to help students connect to state-mandated “distance learning for all.”

In the Morrow County School District, one of the challenges was how to provide learning to students without a reliable internet connection. According to Marie Shimer, Director of Educational Services, the district conducted a family survey in each of its communities – Boardman, Heppner and Irrigon – to determine how many students did not have a reliable internet connection. The results showed that 40 percent of their students lacked reliable internet connectivity.

Morrow County School District and the InterMountain ESD Information Technology (IT) Department obtained Wi-Fi hotspots and installed them on school buses or in some cases, on houses, where the largest needs were. “We put the larger hotspots in locations with larger concentrations of students,” Shimer said. “The neighborhoods and Mid-Columbia Bus Company have been very collaborative with us in this

process.”

According to Patrick Kerrigan, IMESD Server Specialist, the hotspots grab a cell signal and turn it into a Wi-Fi signal that provides an internet connection to the Chromebooks that the district issued to students when remote learning began in March. Kerrigan said the devices broadcast a signal of about a 100-yard circle and “they don’t push a signal into buildings very well so sitting outside on a doorstep is usually best.” The Wi-Fi hotspots are not accessible to the public, they only connect to the district’s Chromebooks, which helps with security, Kerrigan said. Kerrigan said the hotspots installed on houses run constantly, but the ones on buses run for about eight hours off a battery pack.

Shimer said over the last week, about 16 GB of data has been used across the larger hotspots. The district also has 60 smaller hotspots on individual homes that provide a smaller area of connectivity. “We have definitely increased internet connections for many students who can continue their learning, be in touch with their teachers and simply know that the district is still here for them,” Shimer said.

Pilot in jet flyover has local connection

‘We hope we were able to boost spirits during these times,’ says pilot who flew F15 fighter over Heppner



Morrow County District Attorney Justin Nelson got out of his office for a few minutes Friday to observe the two F15 fighter jets and the flyover of Pioneer Memorial Hospital in Heppner. -Photos by David Sykes.



By David Sykes

Friday’s flyover of Heppner and the hospital by two F15 fighter jets was meant as a spirit booster for our local health care professionals, and it certainly was for all those on the ground. But there was also a local connection between the thundering jets in the sky and our small town that most people don’t know about. One of the National Guard pilots is married to the niece of local man Chris Rauch, and Friday afternoon when he got home took some time to speak with the Gazette-Times about the flyover, and his life-long passion for flying.

“We really enjoy doing these flyovers and we hope it boosts the spirits of the people on the ground during these tough times,” says 35-year-old Oregon Air National Guard Pilot Pfeifer of the experience. Pfeifer’s wife, Allison, is the niece of Lexington farmer Chris

Rauch.

Pfeifer and his flying partner took off in their F15 Eagles from Portland Friday morning and then between 8:48 a.m. and 10:07 a.m., took a little spin around the northern part of the state doing flyovers at 10 hospitals all the way from Vancouver to Heppner, Hermiston, Pendleton, Baker, Madras and more. The pair were flying to “salute Oregonians on the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic, lift morale during a time of severe health and economic impacts, and remember those brave service members who have paid the ultimate price for our freedom,” the National Guard said in its news release about the flyovers.

“We hope we can just make people feel a little better,” Pfeifer said succinctly.

We asked Pfeifer a few things that people on the ground, who don’t get to fly these super-fast fighter jets, might wonder. Can

the pilots see people on the ground? “Yes, we can see people on the ground,” Pfeifer says. He explains that in a two-plane formation the pilot in the front has more of a chance to look around, but even though he was flying slightly behind the lead jet, he was also able to see people on the ground at all the hospitals they flew over. How fast were they going? He says on a trip like this the planes are “only” going about 400 miles per hour when they pass over the hospitals, but they are capable of much more. A google search says the plane can go up to 1,875 mph, so Pfeifer has a lot of power in his hands. Is it fun to fly? “When you take off and it throws you back in your seat, it is definitely a rush,” he says. “It’s like riding a roller coaster that doesn’t end.” How much fuel does one of these fast jets use on a trip like this? He said when they left Port-

land, he had 21,000 pounds of fuel, and when he got home, he still had 8,000 lbs. “I had plenty of fuel for the trip,” he says.

Pfeifer, who presently is on full-time military duty but normally flies for Alaska Airlines as his regular job, says he has done about “a half dozen” flyovers during his career, mostly for special occasions and holidays. “They are really enjoyable to me,” he says, adding that it usually takes 10 to 12 hours of planning to prepare for a two-hour flight like Friday’s.

“I grew up in a small town; just a blue-collar kind of guy who is living his dream,” he says about flying jets. “It just goes to show that if someone really wants something, with work and some God-given talent, they can achieve it. I hit the lottery and there is nothing else I would ever want to do,” he says about his love of flying.

DEADLINE: MONDAYS AT 5PM

Print & Mailing Services

- * Design
- * Print
- * Mail

Sykes Publishing
541-676-9228

Community fitness center being built

The old Lott’s Electric building is currently being remodeled as a community fitness center. The Heppner Community Foundation purchased the building, located at 369 N Main St, in March and has begun demolition and cleanup.

Alstott Construction,

project manager, will install new siding, roofing, windows and doors as well as a complete remodel of the interior which will include a handicap accessible restroom and assorted exercise equipment. The funding for the facility will be through monthly membership fees, which have not been determined at this time.

The project was made possible through grant funding from the Howard and Beth Bryant Foundation, Morrow County Unified Recreation District, The Wild Horse Foundation, Good Shepherd Community Foundation, Northwest Farm Credit Services, Willow Creek Valley



The store front sign that was discovered during demolition (featured in last week’s issue of the G-T) will be preserved and remain intact as part of the building.

Economic Development Group and Wal-Mart. The Lott family also contributed

to the project with a reduced price for the purchase of the property.

FREE DUMPING

Until further notice to aid in the protection of our residents the north and south transfer stations will only be open on Saturday's 9am - 4pm.

SATURDAY ONLY 9AM - 4PM

CLOSED ON SUNDAY

It is recommended that everyone follow precautionary guidelines to help prevent the spread of illnesses.

- If you feel sick, stay home.
- Practice social distancing by maintaining 6 feet or more between you and someone else.
- Wash your hands with soap or hand sanitizer.

MORROW COUNTY TRANSFER STATIONS

NORTH TRANSFER 69900 Frontage Ln. Boardman, Oregon 97818	SOUTH TRANSFER 57185 Highway 74 Lexington, Oregon 97839
-----------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------

Questions or comments contact:
Morrow County Public Works, 365 West Highway 74, Lexington, Oregon 97839
Phone: 541-989-9500 Monday - Thursday 8am - 5pm

NextEra Energy Resources is proud to support the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon.

To donate to CAPECO and support those impacted by COVID-19 please visit:
<https://www.capeco-works.org/donate>

OR UNTIL FULL!

Investing in Oregon.

Local Investment. Jobs. Clean Energy.

[NextEraEnergyResources.com](https://www.NextEraEnergyResources.com)