

EOT expands, merges with Gorge Networks

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Hermiston-based Eastern Oregon Telecom has expanded its reach through a merger with Gorge Networks of Hood River.

Joe Franell, CEO of Eastern Oregon Telecom, is now president of the newly formed Blue Mountain Networks. He said eventually everything might use the Blue Mountain Networks name, but for now customers of both companies will continue seeing the name they are familiar with on communications from their internet provider.

He said EOT has been talking with small internet providers throughout Eastern Oregon for years about combining forces to create more economies of scale, and Gorge Networks was a “perfect” fit. ZRF Partners, a private investment firm, assisted with the financing.

“It’s all positive, all exciting news,” Franell said. “We’re still local. We’re not selling to some big corporation.”



Eastern Oregon Telecom of Hermiston has merged with Gorge Networks of Hood River.

HH file photo

Eastern Oregon Telecom covers Umatilla and Morrow counties in Oregon and Benton County, Washington, while Gorge Networks covers communities in Hood River, Wasco and Sherman counties in Oregon and Klickitat and Skamania counties in Washington.

EOT recently extended fiber internet to Athena, Weston and Adams and is working on Fossil, Spray and Mitchell.

Bringing a reliable internet connection to tiny rural towns is a passion for Franell, who chairs Oregon’s Broadband Advisory Committee, and he said he hopes to solve “digital inequities” in the Blue Mountain Networks coverage area within five years. That includes not only serving small towns for the first time, but also expanding fiber to more neighborhoods in cities, such as Hermiston and The Dalles.

He said in the past the Broadband Advisory Committee has struggled with some “passive” attitudes from the Oregon Legislature about the importance of equity in internet access across the state, but COVID-19 has demonstrated exactly why it is something that should be a funding priority. “I think that argument is over with,” he said.

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Franell said members of the committee are reporting growth in industries, such as telemedicine, online education and telecommuting, for work that had been expected to take decades. The demand has kept internet providers busy.

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Vietnamese cuisine coming to Hermiston this summer

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It will come a little later than expected, but Hermiston will get a new Vietnamese restaurant this summer.

Pho Quan, located in the old Walker’s Farm Kitchen building at 920 SE Fourth St., plans to open in mid-June. Co-owner Micheal Dang said the original plan was to open for Easter Sunday, but complications from the pandemic delayed everything. It was harder to get the needed permits, supplies and services from contractors with so many offices shut down.

“We met a few obstacles along the way and had to handle everything head-on,” he said. “Everything is a learning experience and you just get better going through it.”

The restaurant will be a “little sister” to Pho Mignon of Kirkland, Washington, and Ox Pho & Grill in Federal Way, Washington, that were started by Dang’s parents. They emigrated from Vietnam in 1981, Dang said, with the dream of opening a restaurant, but it took them a couple of decades to feel comfortable enough with the English language and their business skills to go into business for themselves.

Dang said when Pho Quan does open next month, everything will be done in accordance to proper social distancing guidelines to keep employees and customers safe.



A sign outside the future Pho Quan Vietnamese restaurant advertises its expected June opening.

Staff photo by Jade McDowell

“WE MET A FEW OBSTACLES ALONG THE WAY AND HAD TO HANDLE EVERYTHING HEAD-ON”

— Micheal Dang, co-owner of Pho Quan

“We will most likely have a limited menu upon opening due to the aftermath of COVID-19, but everyone can expect us to carry our traditional bread and butter items, such as Pho and Banh Mi,” he said.

Pho is a Vietnamese noodle soup, while Banh Mi is a sandwich made on a baguette. Dang said Vietnamese food has “a lot of French influence in it, which makes it really unique and healthy to try.”

“Especially in an area like this with an untapped market, we’re really interested to see how everyone will respond to it,” he said.

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