

Business Notes

WOEC diversifies with NoaNet rural telecommunications project

In keeping with West Oregon Electric Cooperative's strategic vision to enhance the rural lifestyle and diversify the co-op's business opportunities, the board of directors approved participation in the Northwest Open Access Network (NoaNet). The NoaNet project will provide improved telecommunication services in rural areas through fiber optic cable leased from the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA).

"We are excited about the opportunity to partner with other electric cooperatives across Oregon to enhance telecommunications service and add a valuable asset to rural communities and their economic development efforts," said Robert VanNatta, West Oregon Electric board president.

The members of NoaNet Oregon are nonprofit, community-owned electric cooperatives. Co-ops can use the NoaNet fiber optic system for utility purposes such as real-time metering and energy management. In addition, NoaNet

will make excess capacity available to others on a cost-based, nondiscriminatory basis. For example, communities might use the NoaNet system to interconnect schools, hospitals, judicial systems, libraries and emergency services.

Utility members and customers of NoaNet will develop and operate communication systems within their own service areas that will connect with the NoaNet backbone system. Since NoaNet's licensed fibers run mainly through rural areas, this new system is well suited to meet the future telecommunication needs of rural communities. These communities are often not economically attractive markets for most telecommunication companies. By providing access to advanced broadband telecommunication facilities on an open, cost-based principle, NoaNet promises to help their utilities, customers and Oregon's rural communities.

Last year, as the board of directors considered the NoaNet

project, the co-op's members approved a bylaw change that would allow the board to explore other beneficial business opportunities, including the NoaNet project. Those revisions passed by nearly a 3-1 margin.

"For West Oregon Electric, the NoaNet project provides an opportunity to diversify its business plan," said Russell Green, West Oregon Electric general manager. "Our business plan shows that our NoaNet customers will benefit from competitive pricing and quality service, while our electric ratepayers will see long-term benefits as we achieve greater economies of scale."

As a NoaNet member, West Oregon Electric became an eq-

uity partner, providing cash as part of its participation. The co-op is also responsible to guarantee a portion of the construction loan for the project. Finally, West Oregon Electric must build its own "middle mile" fiber network in order to serve customers. Revenues from the sale of telecommunication services will cover costs associat-

ed with the project. The cooperative is able to take advantage of this unique opportunity because of funds provided by a recent financial settlement with Portland General Electric related to the proposed purchase of their electric facilities in Columbia County. No electric ratepayer revenues are being used for this project.

Bretthauer opens Oregon's first alternative fuel station

Bretthauer Oil Company, which owns Vernonia 76 Service and began delivering petroleum products over 75 years ago, has now opened the first commercial compressed natural gas (CNG) fueling station in Oregon. The station, located just east of Cornelius Pass Road at 21180 NW Amberwood Drive in Hillsboro, is considered a major step in promoting alternative fuel use in the state.

"Bretthauer's alternative fuel station is an investment in Oregon's air quality and independence from foreign oil prices," said Mark Kendall, senior energy analyst with the Oregon Office of Energy. "Compressed natural gas or CNG is the cleanest burning alternative fuel available."

On-road vehicles using traditional fuels produce more than 60 percent of all carbon monoxide pollution. Studies have shown that dedicated CNG vehicles reduce exhaust emissions of carbon monoxide by approximately 70 percent and of carbon dioxide (the principle greenhouse gas) by up to 30 percent, compared with gaso-

line-powered vehicles. Compressed natural gas can be used in an internal combustion engine with few modifications.

The City of Hillsboro and the Port of Portland are purchasing alternative fuel vehicles to use CNG. Northwest Natural, which provided technical assistance for the project and will provide the fuel, will also refuel its vehicles at the station.

Seminar on legal traps for employers

A free seminar for employers - Six Snafus "Legal Traps Employers Should Avoid" - will be presented by Chet Nakada, of the Bureau of Labor and Industries, Wednesday, March 6, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Columbia Tech Center, 375 S. 18th in St. Helens. Registration begins at 9:00 a.m.

The seminar is sponsored by the Oregon Employment Department, Management & Training Corporation and the St. Helens/Scappoose Chamber of Commerce, with a grant from the Regional Workforce board.

Make reservations by February 25, by contacting either Diana Riggs Nish at 503-397-6495 or Jeanette Sharinghausen at 503-397-4995 x-26.

Small Woodlands Association expands annual seedling tree sale

The Columbia County Small Woodlands Association will hold its fourth annual tree sale from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Saturday, March 9, in the Hi-School Pharmacy parking lot in St. Helens.

Species of trees at the sale will include improved Douglas fir, giant sequoia, coast redwood, incense cedar, noble fir, Norway maple, red maple, ponderosa pine, western red cedar, quaking aspen, maidenhair tree, little-leaf linden, Colorado spruce, Danish noble, "flame" maple, red oak, Chinese dogwood and pin oak.

The number of improved Douglas fir seedlings has been increased significantly from former years, since the supply had been exhausted early during prior sales. Others should be in adequate supply, however, purchasers are advised to arrive in the morning to assure availability. Tree planting directions

will be distributed and qualified foresters will be on hand to answer questions about selection, suitability, planting and care. Most of the seedlings are bare root, although a limited number of several species are prepped.

The nonprofit Small Woodlands Association promotes family forestland owners' understanding of responsible land stewardship on parcels of 5 to 5,000 acres. Nearly 150 families in Columbia County are active in the organization, which sponsors tours, speakers and other educational activities for members and friends. Over the past several years, members have planted over a quarter of a million improved Douglas fir seedlings, which are grown under contract for the Association.

For more information, call President Rod Nastrom at 503-397-5997 or Paul Nys at 503-556-8800.

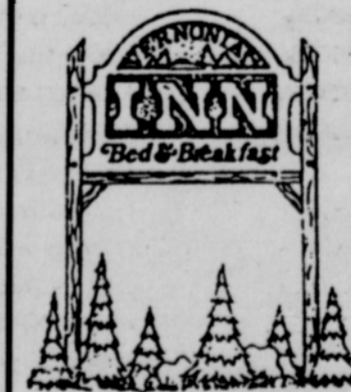
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