Horizons Makes Push For Improving Telecommunications Access

Washington State University (WSU) Extension launched a Horizons program in late 2006 in the communities of Klickitat and Skamania counties.

Horizons is a Northwest Area Foundation-funded program, based on the concept of "community leadership to reduce poverty."

It was designed to promote community discussion, strategic thinking and leadership training.

The program includes creation and implementation of action plans for rural communities experiencing economic decline, to help them move toward prosperity.

Six communities applied and have been accepted into the Horizons program: Goldendale, Glenwood, Klickitat, Trout Lake, Stevenson/Skamania and White Salmon/Bingen.

Hundreds of community members across the two counties participated in the first stages of the process, concluding last fall.

Each participating community identified action items on which to focus. Interests ranged from programs for improving local youth activities and senior services, to affordable housing.

Another need recognized by several communities was to improve telecommunications services, since many of the more remote residents do not have access to high-speed Internet or cell phone service.

WSU Extension and Horizons Community Coaches Ava Van Velsor and Linda Williams coordinated formation of a committee to address telecommunications issues.

Klickitat County Economic Development and Washington's Office of Community Trade and Economic Development are involved, in addition to Klickitat PUD, Embarq, WSU Center to Bridge the Digital Divide, SawNet and community representatives. They recognize the importance of access to high-speed Internet for rural businesses and individuals.

The community of Glenwood has led the way in assessing high-speed Internet demand, tapping into the initiative and the interest of Glenwood High School senior Jimmie Smith, who incorporated the need for this service in his senior project.

Within weeks, more than one-third of the nearly 200 surveys he mailed had been returned. Most are overwhelmingly in support of improving high-speed Internet access in Glenwood.

This response attracted the attention of one area high-speed Internet service provider, who is working on a plan to improve Glenwood's service.

Encouraged by Glenwood's efforts, the Horizons telecommunications committee is adapting Glenwood's survey for use throughout the county. Questions are being added to help determine reasons people do not want or can't get broadband service, to better understand what residents know about technology training available in the area, and to help identify locations where access is unavailable.

We need your input. Watch for the "Telecommunications Survey" in your April Klickitat PUD billing statement. The survey will be collected at Klickitat PUD offices.

Results will be tabulated by Goldendale High School students and used to determine demand, identify community education interests and work on targeted infrastructure needs. ■

When Power Is Out, Take These Simple Steps

Nobody likes power outages, but unfortunately they can happen. Being prepared and knowing what to do when an outage occurs will make the time you are out of power more tolerable.

Before calling Klickitat PUD to report an outage, make sure your circuit breaker is not tripped or the fuses are not blown.

Check to see if other people in your area have lost power.

Report the outage and be prepared to give your name, address and phone number.

Turn on an outside light so repair crews can see when your power has been restored. When your power is restored, it's best not to turn everything back on all at once.

Be patient. Our crews will work diligently to restore your power.

Being prepared does not involve a lot of money or time. If you are medically dependant on electricity, call Klickitat PUD today, so your name can be added to our customer life support program. ■

To report an outage call:

Goldendale
773-5891 or (800) 548-8357

White Salmon
493-2255 or (800) 548-8358