

WebWorks: Anywhere! Forum Summary
Stevenson, Skamania Lodge
October 27, 2015

MCEDD, Skamania County Chamber of Commerce, and the Skamania EDC gathered three presenters together to explore how businesses and organizations in rural Washington are utilizing broadband to connect with customers, suppliers, and staff. Each entity utilized internet for different aspects of their businesses, but all saw it as vital to their ability to work effectively in the 21st century.

The following presenters highlighted broadband utilization and needs in education, business, tourism, and health care.

- **Scott Anderson:** Scott Anderson, Radcomp Technologies and Stevenson City Council, welcomed the group and shared some background on broadband. He noted the significant growth from the 1990s with dial up connections to now where a business needs at least 25mgbs connections. Broadband has become integral to businesses every step of the way from communications via voice over IP to the ability to accept payment to accessing sales on a global scale. Scott noted that Radcomp is able to have employees throughout the Pacific Northwest because of the strong connections they have. The City of Stevenson had one of the first municipal wifi systems in the country, and its webcams for weather conditions are very popular. Scott noted that the City is continually updating its web presence. He is also exploring opportunities to support development of a broadband strategic plan for the City.
- **Kinetics, Inc: Anita Gahimer-Crow.** Anita and her husband have a company that focuses on infrared software that is located in Mill A at their home. Anita worked at PNNL in Richland and remembers the beginnings of utilizing email and sharing documents from her time there. After she met her husband, they were looking for the place they wanted to live and looked to bring jobs with them. Their business progressed along with the internet. They focus on government contracts in research and development, and need to use the web to access their clients. They have worked with a local ISP to gain access to fiber to their home in order to get the services they need to successfully run their business. Anita encouraged businesses to think about investment in their connectivity as they are planning for capital expenses, as it is a necessity today rather than a luxury. Anita also noted the importance of high speed internet connections for public safety, education, and health care.
- **Silver Star Industries: Bill Skiffington.** Bill shared that Silver Star builds store interiors all over America. This includes cabinets, walls, panels, and fixtures. 30 years ago, to work with a client they would mail a catalogue, have a phone call, and mail plans back and forth. Today, they are able to create 3D renderings of the designs to present for customers to walk through remotely and make real time changes based on feedback provided. To make this work, there are over 30 computer workstations at the office that need a high speed broadband connection. Bill noted that in addition to these customer service and design tools, having a well-designed website is part of the vetting process their clients go through before choosing a company to work with. Competing with larger companies, this web presence is key to telling the story of the company to their potential customers. When Blue Star's connection goes down it is incredibly challenging

for them to continue as speed of response, customer service, and their online presence are key to their ability to serve customers. This means redundant connections is key to their business. In part as a result of these and other improvements in technology, they have seen over 12% growth per year for the last 10 years and now employ over 100.

After the presentations, conversation focused on the challenges remaining to broadband access for businesses. The group discussed the significant barriers home based businesses have to robust broadband access, especially when they are out of town. However, the group noted that the access to true broadband even in downtown Stevenson can change building by building. Scott also noted that many people would like to move to the Gorge for the lifestyle, and that broadband is key for them to be able to do so if they can bring their job with them or start a business of their own. Without connectivity, existing businesses cannot grow and new ones cannot locate. For these reasons, the group expressed interest in supporting additional connectivity in the community.