

Online NW to host Dallas Makeathon

By Jolene Guzman

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DALLAS—Transformative. That's the word AJ Foscoli used to describe his experience at one of Innovate Oregon's all-day make-a-thon sessions.

Foscoli, the city of Dallas' economic development director, attended one of the events held in Yamhill County when he worked for Strategic Economic Development Corporation, a regional organization serving throughout the Mid-Willamette Valley.

Innovate Oregon teams with McMinnville-based internet service provider OnlineNW, Colorado-based technology "electronics literacy" company SparkFun, and a local community to design a day of computer coding and problem-solving.

Instructors teach participants how to code in the morning.

Then, in the afternoon, instructors ask them to form groups of all ages, from children to retirees, to use their new technical skill to build something that solves a real-

world problem.

No weeks of courses — just a matter of hours — to go from learning to solving.

Foscoli was on one of those teams in previous Innovate event working with students.

"It's hard to describe unless you live it," he said. "You think from the outside, you think that there's no way that can happen, and yet it did. I've seen it multiple times. It wasn't just the one time. It wasn't a lightning strike. It was replicable."

This Saturday, Dallas is getting in on the educational fun with the Dallas Make-a-thon, at LaCreole Middle School.

LaCreole Principal Jamie Richardson said he knew of the work Innovate Oregon has done in other communities.

"We knew we wanted it, but didn't know how to ask for it," he said.

Innovate Oregon's co-founder Thompson Morrison, also a representative of OnlineNW, said the organization began five years ago, an initiative of Technology Association of Oregon.

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Innovate: OnlineNW teams up for Makeathon

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He said the group formed in response to the need to train a workforce for the emerging technology and innovation-based economy.

The group also learned that there was no one-size-fits all approach to changing education.

"To do that, we needed to help create local strategies for infrastructure, talent, community and business development for each community," Morrison said.

Morrison said Richardson participated in Innovate Oregon's training last spring and said Richardson said he wanted to put the new concepts on display for the Dallas community to see.

"Given that experience, he asked us to bring a make-a-thon to Dallas for others to begin to understand the potential of this new mindset to transform education," Thompson said.

Richardson said the benefit of having Innovate Oregon and its partners lead the make-a-thon is that teachers and staff members can participate as "students" instead of instructors.

"I think our staff get to play a little bit on that day,"

Richardson said.

Business owners, city leaders and average citizens are invited to join in the learning, too. Dallas' event is drawing executives from IBM and Nike, Foscoli said.

Richardson said about 50 participants have signed up as of Monday, but it could take as many as 60.

Foscoli said the experience changed his perspective on education and the younger generation.

"We just underestimate kids a lot. The make-a-thon made me realize that they have a lot to offer, we just have to give them the opportunity to do so," he said.

Saturday could be the start in a long-term relationship between OnlineNW and Dallas, as well.

The company participated in Innovate events in Dayton and Willamina and found enough support to bring their high-speed internet service — 10-gig — to those communities.

In turn, OnlineNW donates a portion of its proceeds in those cities to an "innovation" fund in each community.

OnlineNW is well-established in Yamhill County and



MARCOS ROMERO/for the Itemizer-Observer

Innovate Oregon make-a-thons are open to students of all ages and adults who want to participate.

is looking at expanding to Polk County, Foscoli said.

He said the make-a-thon helps the company gauge the community's interest in

what it has to offer — and the educational and economic benefits that come with having high-speed internet service.

"They see Polk County as a natural extension," Foscoli said. "They want to know that the community is interested in this."

For more information on Dallas Make-a-thon, or to sign up, go to <https://spark.adobe.com/page/BXURNTY7sX3zY/>.