

Program may mark the start of new partnership

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By **Jolene Guzman**

As of Wednesday, November 8, 2017

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DALLAS — Saturday's Dallas Make-a-thon was about more than building prototypes.

It's possible it was the beginning of a partnership between the city of Dallas and OnlineNW, a high-speed internet service provider based out of McMinnville.

Thompson Morrison, a representative of both Innovate Oregon and OnlineNW, said the company is looking for another community to offer its high-speed internet service.

The investment is steep for OnlineNW, so before moving in, it looks for signs that a community would support it and develop the businesses that would need the service.

OnlineNW has established such partnerships with the cities of Dayton and Willamina, and now is looking at Polk County as its next area of expansion.

"It's very, very expensive for us to build fiber in a community," Morrison said. "The purpose of building fiber isn't to allow people to stream Netflix. You don't need fiber to stream Netflix, but you do need fiber if you are building the businesses of tomorrow. We can't make that investment in a community unless we are confident that the businesses will be created that will need the fiber we are building."

He was encouraged by the turnout for Saturday's Make-a-thon — and for the enthusiasm among the participants.

"Gosh, there seems to be a lot of energy here," he said Saturday. "It's phenomenal. I've been so impressed with the community leadership that has been here, and from the businesses."

Morrison said OnlineNW has had initial conversations with city representatives, including AJ Foscoli, the city's economic development director, and LaCreole Principal Jamie Richardson through Innovate Oregon's education programs.

He said the company is in the process of a market evaluation and pre-engineering assessment to see what it would take to build a network in Dallas.

"We are hoping to make a decision in the not-too-distant future," Morrison said.

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