

Hello again! This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Wednesday, August 14, 2024 beamed in from the *Jefferson County Beacon* for KPTZ 91.9FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

In the wake of the internet outage on August 2, Jefferson County Public Utility District Broadband and Communications Director Will O'Donnell wrote in an op-ed for the *Beacon* about the fast, and more importantly reliable, publicly managed internet coming to Jefferson County, thanks to our PUD's dedicated efforts. For the past few years, the PUD has been hard at work building a publicly-owned fiber-optic network to serve our rural residents. This ambitious project has secured over \$55 million in funding and kicked off construction earlier this spring. So far, more than 100 miles of fiber have been laid, stretching from the northern base of Mt. Walker to Gardiner and Chimacum. Nearly 500 homes now have fiber edging up to their properties, and starting next week, the PUD will be bringing that fiber inside homes, with plans to connect 30 to 50 residences each week. This effort is set to continue over the next four years, during which the PUD aims to connect over 4,000 homes and businesses and install more than 500 miles of fiber. It's the largest utility expansion Jefferson County has seen in decades.

But this project is more than just laying fiber – it's about creating a robust, reliable infrastructure that will stand the test of time. The August 2 incident highlighted just how critical this is. A contractor working for a private company accidentally damaged a vital PUD fiber line along Ness Corner Road, resulting in a major internet outage across much of the county. The damage caused by the contractor led to a 12-hour outage, affecting not just the PUD's internet traffic but also that of other providers, including Astound, and even some cell phone towers. This event revealed the vulnerabilities in our current system and underscored the need for a more resilient network. The fiber development addresses these challenges head-on. As they continue to build out the network, they're incorporating redundancies to ensure that future outages are minimized. While the August 2 incident was a stark reminder of the work still needed, it also served as a catalyst for strengthening our county's digital infrastructure.

Now, let's dive into the exciting part – the incredible service this new network will offer. The PUD's fiber network isn't just fast – it's delivering a level of service that most of us haven't even imagined. The network is capable of delivering speeds of up to 10 gigabits per second. To put that in perspective, most current devices, including your newest smartphone or computer, aren't even capable of utilizing such high speeds. And even if you're paying for high-speed internet from another provider, chances are, unless you're connected directly to a fiber network, you're not seeing those speeds in reality.

Of course, speed isn't the only advantage. The reliability of fiber is unmatched. Unlike satellite or cable internet, which can be affected by weather conditions, tree cover, or radio frequency interference, fiber delivers a stable connection regardless of external factors. And because fiber provides the same speed for uploads as downloads, you won't experience the frustrating imbalance where you can stream a movie but struggle to video chat without freezing.

Beyond speed and reliability, there's another crucial aspect to this project – affordability. The PUD has made it a priority to ensure that this new service is accessible to everyone in our community including through the use of a discount available for low-income customers. And unlike many private providers, the PUD's pricing is straightforward – no hidden fees, no surprise hikes, no data caps. These rates are set by publicly elected officials in open meetings, ensuring transparency and fairness.

As Jefferson County looks forward to a future of unparalleled connectivity, there's another sweet story unfolding in our community. While the PUD is laying fiber, Amanda Thieroff is serving up scoops of vegan ice cream at Fiddlehead Creamery, a local treasure gaining popularity for its delicious and inventive flavors. Hailed as the queen of vegan ice cream, she started Fiddlehead Creamery back in 2016. Amanda's journey wasn't easy – she spent nearly a year perfecting her recipes, experimenting with different types of coconut milk until she found the right balance of flavor and texture. From strawberry rhubarb to lavender, her creations are a hit at the Jefferson County Farmers Market and the Finnriver Cider Garden, where you can find her scooping every weekend through October. What started as a small operation with hobbyist equipment has now expanded to a thriving business with a six-quart ice cream maker and a growing wholesale market. You can now find pints of Fiddlehead ice cream in several local stores, including the Nordland General Store and Aldrich's Market.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturdays, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from jeffcobeacon.com. You can submit ideas to the Beacon through info@jeffcobeacon.com. This is Derek Firenze. Thanks for listening.