



Jim Boldt and his family are the PUD's first broadband connection.

THE CONNECTOR FALL 2023

MANAGER'S ARTICLE

CONNECTING OUR *Community*

This summer, we saw our first customer get connected to broadband! This milestone was amazing and the culmination of a couple years' worth of work and coordination on the PUD's part as well as over a decade of local digital equity activism by the residents living on the west end of Hood Canal.

I first met Jim Boldt, one our electric customers in the Beacon Point area, at a PUD association meeting in 2012. His background is heavy on PUDs, having run the Washington PUD Association for years, as well as consulting with PUDs in communications and government relations. It was at this first meeting that he started pushing me to help find a solution to broadband for him and his neighbors, as I worked for his local utility. He and others in the area started the West Canal Community Broadband Group and have worked tirelessly to lobby public and private sector utility providers to develop a plan to serve the west end of the canal from Hama Hama to Brinnon.

Luckily, the pandemic spotlighted the importance of digital equity and broadband availability to maintain our new way of life in rural communities and ensuring that those of us in rural areas also have access to streaming, remote learning, telework, telehealth, social networking, and all the other facets of digital connectivity that are now important to daily

life. The funding started coming down from the federal government and we were fortunate to be able to step in to help provide this solution for our electric customers- not without the help of a tremendous group of supporters and collaborators in both the public and private sectors.

Fittingly, Jim Boldt was the broadband guinea pig. He was the first customer connected as a test run to try out the new network before Hood Canal Communications started connecting others. I am very proud of Jim, Robert Gash, Phil Thenstead, and the rest of the West Canal Community Broadband group for their grassroots efforts to make broadband a reality for their communities. I'm also thankful that I get to add this really cool accomplishment as one the highlights of my career so far at Mason PUD 1.

I know the grant money from HCC couldn't reach all of our customers this first round. I also know there are a lot of communities that are still waiting for access and even more customers that have questions about where HCC is serving and when. I would encourage you all to visit their website at www.hcc.net and call their office to find out more information on their buildout plans and please remember that even if they don't get to you this first pass by, the fiber is now going to be at the highway and that was the first



HCC's technician consults with Jim Boldt on his fiber service.

herculean step. They will continue to work on grant applications and buildout plans to serve the rest of the areas in the coming years.

Thank you to all our awesome customers for your support during these grant applications and buildout projects. It's an honor to serve all of you and I look forward to tackling more important projects ahead on your behalf.



Kristin Masteller
General Manager

GENERATOR SAFETY



It should be fairly obvious since gas-powered generators are loud and smelly, that the odor they are omitting also is in the form of a poisonous gas. Despite these harsh effects of an operating gas generator, people still use them in enclosed spaces including garages, campers and sheds close to humans and pets. Carbon monoxide poisoning from generators causes thousands of illnesses and deaths every year, despite pleas from the news media and health officials urging people to use them safely and properly. Even if you can't smell the fumes, carbon monoxide can

still be permeating your home.

Another inherent danger from generator use that gets far less attention, but is equally as deadly, is electricity back feed from generators that puts electrical line workers at risk of injury and death. Many homeowners plug generators in without even considering that they are pushing generated power back onto the electrical grid. When line workers come to your home or neighborhood to work on the power lines, they undergo a series of checks to ensure that the lines are deenergized from

the utility's side of the power source, but they have no idea if the lines are suddenly energized from a homeowner firing up a generator without proper safeguards. In September of 2021, two line workers were killed in Alabama due to electrical back feed. They were part of a mutual aid crew that responded to the devastation of Hurricane Ida. This was an avoidable tragedy.

All of these injuries and deaths are completely avoidable if people use generators safely and responsibly.

Safe generator use for homeowners should include things like:



A well-ventilated space for the generator to operate that is at least 100' away from the house



If there's no transfer switch, shutting the main breaker to the whole house off at the panel and plugging freezers or electrical equipment directly into the generator



Install CO2 alarms in your home and if you start to feel sick, dizzy, or weak while using a generator, get to fresh air RIGHT AWAY - DO NOT DELAY



Keeping the generator dry under an elevated tarp or pop-up tent



DO NOT plug a generator into a wall outlet



Have your generator inspected regularly to ensure it's working properly



Installing a transfer switch at the panel to help prevent back feed of electricity through the home and onto the power grid



Don't overload the generator-rotate the appliances you need to use on a schedule such as freezers and refrigerators overnight, tv time and lights during awake hours

Our line workers and water techs already go out in the worst weather conditions. They put their lives at risk to ensure that our community has essential utility services 24/7. It is paramount that homeowners do what they can to help protect the men and women out there working for them. Please put these tips into practice and share them with family and neighbors. The more education we do around generator safety, the more we can help save lives.



PROJECT WRAP UP:

Working Against the Clock

First, as we're approaching our stormy season, I'd like to take a moment to thank all of the staff at the PUD. We have some very dedicated employees who are all on call 24/7. As soon as the lights go out, the utility tries to get people back on as quickly as possible. The same for the water department. They all go out when the weather is usually the worst, and they work steadily until people are back in service. We've had a lot of afterhours calls this summer due to our wildfire prevention settings and the crews spent a lot of their home and family time at work instead, because of that. I just want to acknowledge their extra efforts and say thank you to the PUD 1 employees for their dedication.

These months are full of projects going on in both electric and water departments, as well as trying to help facilitate broadband deployment to unserved customers. PUDs have played a major role in broadband deployment in Washington State over the last two decades. While Mason PUD 1 isn't a broadband provider outside of our small middle-mile project between Eldon and Forest Drive, our neighboring PUDs in Mason and Jefferson Counties are. I would like to say a big thank you to Mason PUD 3 for their efforts in broadband in Mason County. They have done a lot to lead the way.

The electric department has many system upgrades that they are working on. The Union area will have a new substation by the end of 2024. Our crew has been working on underground conversions, pole line replacements, tree trimming and much more. This is all in addition to the three contractor projects happening independent of our daily construction and system work. The water department has been busy replacing old mainline

to fix leaks, upgrading systems' well infrastructure, and trying to keep the safe, quality water flowing on 75 systems across Mason County. This is in addition to the eight grant funded projects that are occurring in the water department independent of their daily work. It's a lot for a small utility of our size. Regardless, both departments have maintained that quick response time to keep all of you in safe, reliable utility services.

We, as a utility, take environmental stewardship very seriously and understand that we have a responsibility to be good stewards as we conduct these projects on behalf of the public. This is sometimes challenging for a small utility that must jump through a lot of hoops on compliance with state and federal regulations that increase project and operational costs for us. We have tried to keep our rates as low as reasonably afford and still do our work, but our costs to do business keep rising. We understand that a lot of people are still having hard times with household finances too. If you find yourself having a hard time paying your utility bill, please come in or give us a call. Customer Service will do everything they can to help you out and connect you with bill assistance programs. They also do a great job taking care of customers and supporting the crews during the storm events.

Again, I would like to thank all the hardworking staff at Mason PUD 1 for keeping the lights on and the water flowing.



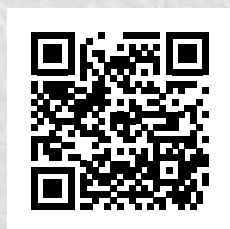
Ron Gold
Commissioner, District 2



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CLEAN AUDITS for the PUD

We've been busy in the Finance department at the PUD these last couple of months. Our 2022 audit was completed in September, with the District receiving unmodified opinions for both the financial audit, as well as the District's first ever grant compliance audit. That means that the District's financial statements were presented fairly with no deficiencies or material weaknesses in the design or operation of internal controls over financial reporting. The District was also in compliance with requirements applicable to its major federal programs. With all of the grant funding the District has brought in over the past few years, we'll continue to have grant compliance audits.

The next audit for 2023 will occur in the summer of 2024, and will cover financial statements, accountability, and grant compliance. We appreciate our team at the State Auditor's office and look forward to working with them again next year.

Now that the audit is complete, we'll be moving into budget season for 2024. The budget workshop will be held on November 14th and staff will plan to present the final



budget for adoption at the December 12th board meeting. The information for these meetings will be on the PUD website at: www.mason-pud1.org and include a virtual Zoom option for those that can't attend in person. Materials presented to the commission and public will also be available on the website and I invite questions from the public both at the meeting and offline if anyone would like to call the office.



Katie Arnold,
Director of Business Services
and District Treasurer



Heading into the cold months, PUD 1 has begun our annual campaign to raise donations for the Canal Comfort Fund. This fund is sustained entirely by generous customers who want to assist neighbors and families in need.

Despite the continued efforts and donations, the need is always greater than the supply. We hope that you will consider rounding up your next payment and asking us to set aside the change to the Fund. We also are able to take one-time donations or even set up regular monthly donations on your statement.

If you are a family or individual in need, please reach out to PUD 1 customer service and the Community Action Council.

They will help you with the application process to see if you qualify for assistance. In addition to the PUD's Canal Comfort Fund, the CAC and OlyCAP also have programs that can provide energy and water assistance and even energy efficiency for your home. The CAC of Mason & Thurston Counties has an office on Railroad Ave. in Shelton and can be reached at (360) 426-9726. OlyCap, serving Jefferson County, can be reached at (360) 385-2571.

Thank you again for your continued support of this program!

Thank You

for your years of service with PUD 1!

Mary
Bechtolt
5
years

Cole
Corirossi
5
years

Mike
York
25
years

Lew
Parson
Too long
to count!



THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS regularly meet the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month at 1:00 p.m. Meetings are now held both in person and remotely. The call-in instructions for the public are posted on the PUD website along with the meeting packets. For more information on meetings, please visit mason-pud1.org or call the PUD office.

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www.mason-pud1.org

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