



*DORA PROVES THE VALUE OF SMALL COMMUNITIES COMING TOGETHER TOWARDS A COMMON GOAL. COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES HAVE HELPED DORA BUILD A NEW FIRE HALL, HOST LOCAL EVENTS, AND IMPROVE THE LIVES OF ALL WHO LIVE THERE.*

## Community Center and Fire Hall

Dora is an unincorporated community on the East fork of the Coquille River in Coos County. Dora proves that small communities can do important things when the community comes together towards a common goal. The original case study in 2008 highlighted Dora's community-led initiative to revitalize a dilapidated school building into a multi-purpose community center and move the fire department to a new fire hall. Linda Kirk, a member of the fire department and retired school teacher, took the lead on grant writing. With her efforts and help from the Coos County commissioners and other community members, the project raised over \$1 million in grants and donations.<sup>1</sup> The new fire station

supplies more room for storage and training, while the community center, which houses the library, has become a key place for community gatherings.

## 2022 Updates

Since the grand opening in 2009, the community center has become a bustling center of the community. The building houses the library, a big meeting room, a dining room, and a kitchen. Prior to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, several events were held at the center including history talks that told the story of the small community of Dora. Linda Kirk mentioned that "amazing crowds turned out for these events."<sup>2</sup> COVID-19 slowed down a lot of the activities that took place in the center but the community hopes to

<sup>1</sup> Guzman, J. (2009). Raising the Fire Hall. The World. Retrieved February 5, 2022, from [https://theworldlink.com/news/local/raising-the-fire-hall/article\\_22eea6df-1419-5d6f-a3a0-0491836c6623.html](https://theworldlink.com/news/local/raising-the-fire-hall/article_22eea6df-1419-5d6f-a3a0-0491836c6623.html)

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Linda Kirk. February 3, 2022

resume the history talks when COVID-19 poses less of a risk. Some groups have already returned to the community center including a church that meets every Sunday and a crafting group that uses the space. Community members even gather at the center to play stringed instruments on the front porch.

Another group that is central in the community is the “Dora Friendly Club.” This community ladies club began over 80 years ago and has evolved with the times as Dora has grown and developed. In the beginning, the club was a place where the women in the community would get together and help each other with household chores. Over time, the club has taken on many projects that have helped bring Dora residents together. Some of these activities include providing an annual scholarship for a local student, putting on a community Christmas Program, providing scholarships for the local 4-H club, and making quilts for community members who have lost their homes in fires. To raise money for these projects, the club holds fundraisers such as an annual Fishermen’s breakfast and a Superbowl Sunday pizza sale.<sup>3</sup>

The Dora Public Library which is in the center of Dora is a vital part of the community. As part of a partnership between the Dora Library and the County library system, the library is connected to fiber internet so it can provide free high-speed internet to community members, including for working or attending classes online. People can park at the library any time of day and use the Wi-Fi for as long as they need. According to Mapril Combs, students often use this service to complete their homework.<sup>4</sup>

## New Sitkum Fire Garage



The community has continued to prioritize safe, efficient buildings for its emergency services with a new fire garage serving Sitkum, Dora’s neighboring community. The Dora-Sitkum Rural Fire Protection District responds to calls in Dora and in the neighboring community of Sitkum, but for decades the only fire hall was in Dora. This made it difficult to respond to fires in Sitkum, located about 7 miles away via a steep country road that passes through a river gorge. Falling rocks and boulders commonly block the road, and in the winter, it becomes icy and treacherous. The inability to get fire trucks through during certain times of the year illustrated the urgent need for a fire station in Sitkum. Since Dora is unincorporated, Coos County acted as the grant applicant, and the community was able to get a HUD Community Development Block Grant of \$755,950 towards building the new fire hall. This was enough to prepare the land and to build a 36 x 40-foot fire garage in Sitkum. The

3 <https://dorapubliclibrary.org/dora-friendly-club>

4 Interview with Mapril Combs. March 11, 2022

garage is large enough for two trucks, supporting gear, and is powered by solar panels on the roof. Linda Kirk said that using solar power has helped the town save money on powering the building and she hopes it will show neighboring communities that solar is a great option.<sup>5</sup>

## Broadband Challenges

Not all the projects in Dora have been as successful as the fire garage. One of the barriers for visitors and new residents is the lack of cell service in Dora. According to Linda Kirk, families considering moving to Dora often decide against it due to the lack of cell coverage and internet access. It can also be frustrating for visitors since they are unable to use GPS apps on their cell phones. The community has made requests to several cell companies to build a tower in the area, but so far, none have been successful.<sup>6</sup>

## High-Speed Internet Updates

Although the new fire garage is a major milestone for Dora and Sitkum, there are still obstacles to developing the capacity of the community of Dora. Having access to high-speed, quality internet is becoming essential for students and workers. Internet service providers are unlikely to build fiber internet infrastructure in areas of with low population density, so Dora has had to be creative in attaining broadband. While many households connect to the internet through Starlink (a provider that uses a series of low-orbit

satellites to supply internet access) satellite is generally less reliable than a wired connection and has higher up front and monthly costs.<sup>7</sup>

However, Dora may soon have reliable fiber internet infrastructure. A local rural electricity cooperative called Coos-Curry Electric Cooperative Inc. (CCEC) is working to bring high speed internet to rural communities on the southern Oregon coast, including Dora. The project is called Beacon Broadband, and its goal is to supply high-speed fiber internet to all the communities that CCEC serves. In 2018, CCEC gauged interest among its members and conducted a feasibility study, revealing that 20% of members had inadequate internet service. In 2020, CCEC created Beacon Broadband which was awarded \$14,129,000 over 10 years in Rural Digital Opportunity Funding. In 2021, Beacon Broadband hired staff, created designs for the first portions of the network, and selected vendors and partners to complete the project.<sup>8</sup> The organization hopes reliable internet will improve telemedicine, distance learning, and remote work opportunities; create new ways for community members to connect with each other; encourage regional economic development; and close the digital divide between urban areas and southern Oregon. Beacon Broadband is using a rolling design-construction process and plans to have the entire network built over the next three years.<sup>9</sup>

5 Interview with Linda Kirk. February 3, 2022

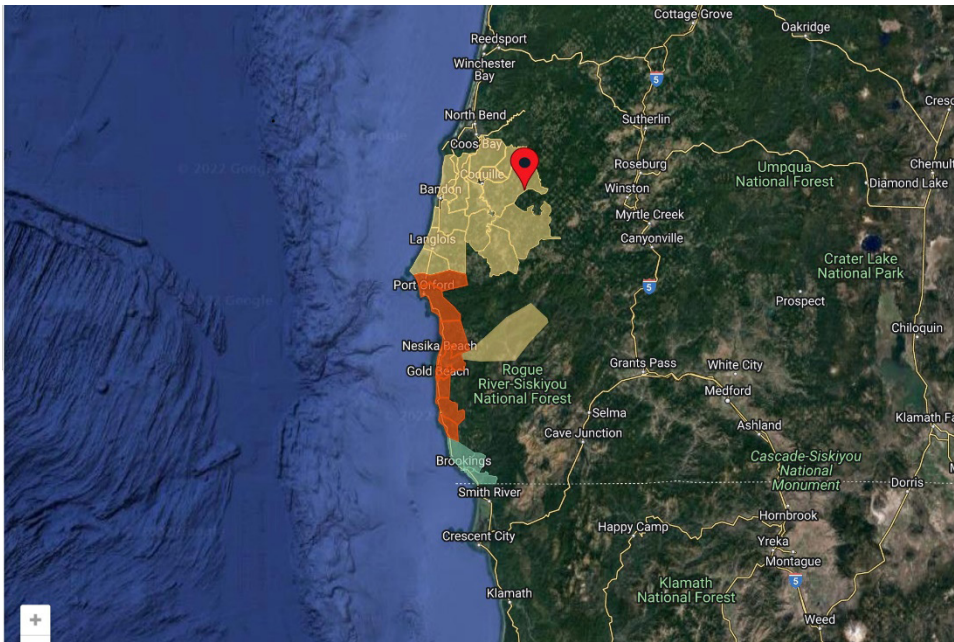
6 Interview with Linda Kirk. February 3, 2022

7 What is Satellite Internet - Pros & Cons. (n.d.). Plug Things In. Retrieved February 6, 2022, from <http://www.plugthingsin.com/internet/satellite/>

8 Beacon Broadband Powered by CCEC Breaks Ground on New Fiber Network | Coos-Curry Electric Cooperative. (2021). Coos-Curry Electric Cooperative Inc. Retrieved March 12, 2022, from <https://ccec.coop/beacon-broadband-powered-ccec-breaks-ground-new-fiber-network>

9 Our Project | Beacon Broadband. (2022). Beacon Broadband. Retrieved March 12, 2022, from <https://www.beaconbroadband.com/our-project>





Beacon Broadband's projected service map: orange highlighted areas indicate where internet service is projected to be available by summer 2022. Yellow highlighted areas indicate future service areas. Dora is indicated by the red marker.

## Takeaways

**Community support can go a long way.** Each of the successful projects described above started with a local group that wanted to solve a problem. These efforts show that with a little work developing solutions, forming partnerships with the county, and applying for grants, small communities can make substantial changes to improve the lives of their citizens.

**Be realistic with what is possible.** While Dora has celebrated many successes, not all its projects have panned out. Linda Kirk says that when looking for help, it is important to show the need. With the community center and the new fire halls, the community clearly communicated the dire need for improvements.<sup>10</sup> By focusing on the most pressing needs of the community and developing realistic projects, this small community has been able to solve some of its most pressing problems.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

**Linda Kirk**

Volunteer  
Dora-Sitkum Rural Fire Protection  
District Dora, Oregon  
541-572-2182  
morplys@gte.net

**Mapril J. Combs**

Locals History Expert  
Dora, Oregon  
541-572-5532



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