

## Owen Public Library Innovation and Collaboration Grant Project Report

By Lorelee Petersen

In June of 2017, the current police chief requested that the library turn off the library's WiFi at night. He felt it was being used inappropriately, and users tended to park behind the library building, out of sight. While the library board does not want to dictate who may or may not use the wifi or for what purposes, they were concerned about the safety of patrons who were parking in a dark area, out of sight from the street. They considered many possible solutions to the problem and finally decided on one.

Working together with the City of Owen, we applied for and was awarded the WVLS Innovation and Collaboration Grant, and began to plan our area's first WiFi park. Our idea was to increase the WiFi signal so that it was stronger on the street and in the small, unused Fremont Park, which is across the street from the library.



It turned out that our project had perfect timing. The city had received a grant in order to do landscaping in the city's public spaces. I worked with Owen Community Development Director Tim Swiggum, the Head of City Works, Erik Stinson, and leader of Growin' Owen's Alison Milbert. Growin' Owen is a group of gardeners who came together to assist with the landscaping grant.

After receiving grant funds, we had a pavilion built in the park. It includes plenty of electric outlets where people can plug in devices, from phones to crockpots. The outlets are located higher up in the structure so small children cannot reach them. The sides of the pavilion are open for safety measures. A light in the pavilion comes on at dark and stays on all night. Street lights are nearby as well.

With the pavillion came a WiFi booster, which made a robust signal available around the library and across the street in the park. Besides the library front lawn, there are plenty of parking spaces in front of the library and in the park, where people can sit in their vehicles and use the WiFi.

Around the same time that this was happening, Growin' Owen was planting flowers in the park and later, adding new trees. As an added bonus, the family of a past library board member donated a concrete bench in her memory. The bench was placed on the lawn in front of the library.

On September 20, a Grand Re-Opening Ceremony was held at Fremont Park. There was a ribbon cutting ceremony, music, cake and ice cream to celebrate the pavillion.



**You are invited to the  
Fremont WiFi Park  
Grand Opening**



**Thursday, September 20  
4:00 Chalk Drawing**

It wasn't long before we began to see people sitting in our shelter. Sometimes they are using the WiFi, sometimes they are reading books, watching the trains, or talking with friends. A person who lives nearby likes to put her parrot's cage in a wagon and walk down to visit the park. One Saturday a man plugged in his electric guitar and gave an impromptu concert in the park. We are constantly surprised and pleased to see ways in which the park is being used, and we plan to keep seeking new opportunities for Fremont Park.

Thank you to WVLS for awarding us the Innovation and Collaboration Grant, so that all of this was made possible.



The ribbon-cutting at the Grand Re-Opening of Fremont Park. From left to right, Mike Ojanpera, Owen Library board member; Tom Bobrofsky, Clark County Library board president; Nancy Garrett, Owen library board member; Lorealee Petersen, Owen Library Director and Jesus Iberra, Owen Chief of Police.