Web site takes community pulse
The Vital Signs site includes data on areas beyond Walla Walla County, including Milton-Freewater and Columbia County. It also includes interpretation of the data.

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WALLA WALLA -- Get the pulse of the community with a touch of the keyboard.

The Community Council will launch a new quality-of-life data Web site in a public celebration Tuesday at the Walla Walla Regional Airport.

Known as Walla Walla Regional Vital Signs, the site will showcase about 40 indicators meant to reflect trends in the overall health of the regional community. The information is not only intended as a resource for local residents but also for the council as the independent, nonpartisan group moves forward on its mission of community problem solving through a participatory democracy.

"Our intention is to not really promote any particular thing but rather to take the temperature of community health," said Community Council Executive Director Julie Reese.

"This is a tool we hope will spark conversation that will help people think about the state of the community."

She said the site will showcase local data in five categories related to the economy, education, health, public safety and household information.

Some of the data sets are similar to those compiled for the Port of Walla Walla's indicator site, Walla Walla Trends. In fact the same team from Eastern Washington University's Institute for Public Policy and Economic Analysis, led by Executive Director Patrick Jones, is working on both sites.

However, the Vital Signs site also includes data on areas beyond Walla Walla County, including Milton-Freewater and Columbia County. In addition to the data, the site includes interpretation of the data, something the Trends site specifically does not do.

"We had people within the region come in and talk about what these indicators mean and evaluated how we stand," Reese explained. "Is this a good trend? Are we doing well or are we doing poorly? As an indicator, what needs watching?"

Each indicator includes a description. Many also have an assigned grade to reflect how well or not so well the community is faring, Reese.

Walla Walla Regional Vital Signs is the result of more than a year’s work by a committee of regional leaders.

The Web project began as part of Northwest Area Foundation's Creating a Value-Added Community initiative, aimed at finding ways to strength and improve quality of life. The foundation awarded Community Council a grant to get the site going. Early discussions to determine which indicators should
be included were facilitated by Whitman College sociology professor Michelle Janning.

Reese said the Community Council has a contract with Eastern Washington University's Institute for Public Policy and Economic Analysis to maintain the site for the rest of this year and into 2010.

*The Community Council invites the public to the launch of its Web site, Walla Walla Regional Vital Signs. A brief program will begin at 4:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Walla Walla Regional Airport. The presentation will be followed by a hands-on opportunity to try the site. After the event, the site can be accessed at: www.wallawallavitalsigns.org.*