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Beaverton startup wants to make reading accessible to all with Open LORE software

Open LORE

Glen Wagner, left, and Steve Bauer founded Open LORE, a Beaverton-based assistive reading technology company. (Laura Frazier/the Oregonian)

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For Steve Bauer and Glen Wagner, one failed project became the inspiration for another.
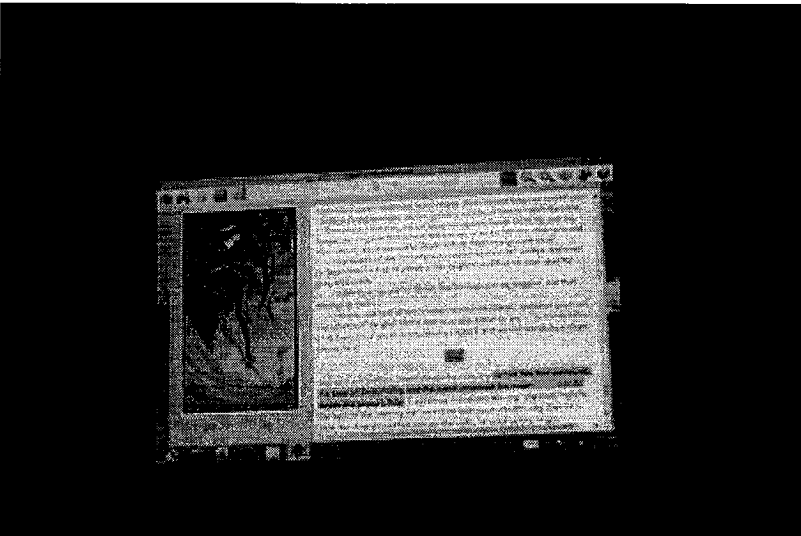
Bauer and Wagner launched **Open LORE**, a Beaverton-based assistive reading technology company. Founded with support from a statewide program, Bauer and Wagner hope to offer an inexpensive, locally sourced product to help those with reading disabilities. Open LORE released its first software product in June.

Open LORE Read software takes an e-library of downloaded books and converts text to speech. The program reads aloud and visually tracks each word as the sentence moves along. Users can also type a passage or input text from another document to be read aloud.

The name of the business centers on the idea of making knowledge available to everyone, Wagner said, especially people with reading disabilities.

"When you look at our software, just about every aspect is designed with that in mind," Wagner said. "We really are about removing those barriers."

Wagner and Bauer have experience in technology and entrepreneurship, they say. Bauer spent 20 years with Hewlett-Packard, and Wagner worked at Intel.

It was ultimately technology that led them to education.

Bauer and Wagner say an assistive technology project for Intel and GE's Care Innovations inspired Open LORE. When their project was dropped, Wagner and Bauer applied to **Oregon's Self Employment Assistance Program** for financial support to start Open LORE.

Through the program, entrepreneurs can

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Open LORE Read software reads text aloud and tracks sentences. Users can personalize the font and background page color. (Laura Frazier/The Oregonian)

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collect unemployment benefits while they devote time to starting a business, instead of looking for work. The program has **helped other Portland-area startups, such as Urban Airship.**

They said it wasn't hard to get family support for their startup. Wagner's wife is a substitute teacher in the **Beaverton School District,** he said. Bauer, who lives in Camas, said his wife has worked as an occupational therapist for the **Evergreen Public Schools** since 1990.

They decided early on that Open LORE would be a self-funded project, Wagner said, which poses its own challenges. Without many resources, Bauer and Wagner tested Open LORE Read on their kids, family and friends. They're also navigating new territory, like complicated copyright law, Bauer said.

Yet they hope they can offer a product that won't break the bank for those who need it.

Although other companies offer reading assistive technology, they are generally nationally based and could cost hundreds of dollars, Bauer said. A license for Open LORE Read is $35 or $45 with 10 books.

Open LORE can help younger students struggling with reading fluency and ability or older students that might work around their disability but are adjusting to increased workloads, Wagner said.

For specific disabilities, such as dyslexia or **Irlen Syndrome,** which affects brain processes and can make it challenging to read black print on white paper, the software has particular design traits. For example, to help those with Irlen Syndrome, Open LORE Read allows the user to choose specific font and background page colors, Wagner said.

Users can build e-libraries with material from sites such as **Bookshare, Pottermore** or **Project Gutenberg,** complete with images. Open Lore Read is compatible on all Windows devices.

To get the word out about Open LORE, the team has **started a Facebook page** and attended a convention for homeschooled families this summer. They'd love to see Open LORE integrated into classrooms and connected with groups that focus on helping students with disabilities.

The pair is **currently developing their next product-** Learning Center would provide vocabulary games, study guides and a mobile camera that can import documents to be read aloud.

Open LORE is still in its fledgling stages. Without a need for a physical office, Bauer and Wagner work from home. They talk on the phone frequently and meet once a week at the **University of Portland,** Bauer said.

But the time and effort to make Open LORE successful is about more than just selling a product.

For both Bauer and Wagner, it's about leaving a legacy.

--Laura Frazier | **Facebook** and **Twitter**