

NOVEMBER 2021

Minnesota/Iowa Issue  
207 E Cedar Street, Houston MN



*Inviting you inside to learn more*

# Giving Back to our Community

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## Closed for business

VETERANS DAY | Nov 11

THANKSGIVING | Nov 25, 26

CHRISTMAS | Dec 24

NEW YEAR'S | Dec 31



*Paul Whalen, of the New Albin Ambulance Service, receives AcenTek donation, presented by Jamie Meldahl, Business Services Consultant.*





## Supply Chain Issues Touch AcenTek

The National Telecommunications Cooperative Association (NTCA) reported widespread delays in getting communications equipment of all kinds, according to an article published by Cable Tech last summer. Everything from routers to customer premise equipment seems to be impacted by the delays that have only escalated since the pandemic began more than a year and a half ago.

AcenTek is one of many communications companies who are facing delays in getting in materials and experiencing shortages of needed supplies. Broadband providers all over the United States are facing the same challenges and trying to figure out a solution. The purchasing team reports bigger challenges than ever before with getting needed supplies in house, sharing that there are delays on nearly everything they purchase. When asked about what these difficulties mean for our customers, Kendra Eide, Purchasing Coordinator, replied, "We have been planning ahead as much as possible, using alternate sources when available and trying to stay up to speed with any plans the company has made. So far, our customers are not feeling this. We are trying our best to keep it that way. It just becomes more of a challenge with each new day."

Keith Vonderohe, Purchasing Coordinator at AcenTek reports, "What used to take us

days or weeks to get in, now is taking us months or even up to a year to receive. It's also interesting because we never know for sure what is coming on our order. Our suppliers are only able to confirm what they know. If they can't get confirmation from their manufacturer on when more product will be available, they can't tell us."

Projecting future needs and ordering in advance works for some of the needs for the company, however, it isn't feasible for others. "Materials are being ordered now for both the 2022 and 2023 fiber builds. That will help to secure what's needed so deadlines can be met for bringing fiber to the communities we had planned to. But when it comes to other supplies, like technology for our Video customers. Technology is always changing and AcenTek believes in providing the best. Having a large inventory of equipment that could quickly become outdated is a move that we are hesitant to make," Vonderohe explains.

On top of supply issues and delays in deliveries, there is also the compounding news of rising rates. A combination of many factors is likely to blame. First, the shutdown which

slowed or (temporarily) stopped manufacturing. Stopping, then slowing imports at the border also affected the availability of product. The labor shortage is another adverse factor. Manufacturers have had to limit their output due to insufficient resources and delivery services are now limiting the number of packages they handle daily, due to limited staff and equipment needed. All these factors are contributors in the supply challenges.

**Phone books also fell victim to supply issues. Printing was pushed back, citing "paper supply issues" as the reason. This caused our voice customers to receive their phone books about a month later than originally planned.**

Todd Roesler, CEO, gives credit to his team when asked about our customers being relatively unaffected thus far. "We continue to wrestle with the supply challenges, as so many other companies are. However, to this point, our customers' have been largely unaffected. I credit that to our purchasing team. They are working hard, getting creative, and planning ahead. Communication is crucial to help our purchasing team stay on top of things."



# Sign in

Username

user

Password

Sign in

## New Password Requirements

AcenTek will be implementing new password requirements for email customers, to increase security. For any new customers creating an email account with us, you will be asked to follow the following rules:

- ✓ Must be at least 12 characters
- ✓ Must contain at least 1 alpha character
- ✓ Must contain at least 1 upper-case alpha character
- ✓ Must contain at least 1 special character (\* \$ #)
- ✓ Must contain at least 1 numeric character
- ✓ Password cannot contain username

This change goes into effect on December 1st and will only be a requirement for **new** email accounts or any customers who wish to change their password. Existing accounts are grandfathered in with their current passwords, but we do encourage ALL customers to update passwords to follow the new recipe, for increased security of your account(s).

## Donations to Local EMS

Emergency medical services are an essential service, regardless of where you live. In the communities we serve, this service is volunteer based. We feel passionately about those who volunteer to provide such an important service to the communities they live in and want to support them. This year our Casual Day donations went to 10 area ambulance services in the area.

In October the emergency medical services in Brownsville, Caledonia, Houston, Ostrander and Rushford, Minnesota, all received \$600 donations. In Iowa, Clermont, Harpers Ferry, New Albin, Ossian and Waterville ambulance services also received a donation. The Casual Day fund is made up of staff donations. When enough funds are available to donate, the Board of Directors matches each donation, and we distribute them to local non-profits. AcenTek rotates through a list of fire departments, emergency medical services and libraries in every community we serve.

This year as donations were distributed, we heard the echoing cry for more volunteers. Several of these small departments are lacking volunteers and closure is possible if they do not get more people involved. While our donations were met with gratitude, donating time is what many of these small emergency medical departments need the most.

**If you are interested in serving your community in this way, please contact your local EMS for more information.**

*Pictured: (top to bottom)*

- ▶ **CALEDONIA:** Mike Loken, Technician, delivers check to Mike Tornstrom.
- ▶ **BROWNSVILLE:** Ben Novak and Brandon Frank with donation check.
- ▶ **HOUSTON:** David Runnigen and Tim Jergenson receive AcenTek's donation, presented by Mike Laufenberg, Technician.
- ▶ **WATERVILLE:** Dave Monserud accepts donation from Mark VanderKolk, Technician at AcenTek.
- ▶ **NEW ALBIN:** Paul Whalen receives donation from Jamie Meldahl, Business Services Consultant (as seen on cover)





## Update on Fiber Projects

Our goal is to provide our customers with unparalleled connections and experiences. That means we must provide the very best. The very best Internet is served by fiber. But getting fiber to every customer takes time. This year we have continued to make progress on our current projects in Waterville, IA and Houston, MN.

In early August, construction began on Phase 2 of the Waterville project, which includes the southern part of rural Waterville. We estimate construction to conclude in November, with splicing to follow before year end. Our customers in this area could have services converted to fiber as early as January of next year.

Construction on the final phase of the rural Houston fiber was completed in September. Splicing is scheduled to be complete by mid-December. We are optimistic that our customers in rural Houston will have their services converted to fiber late this year or early next year.

With the many challenges that the last year and a half have presented, we are thrilled that we have been able to make progress on the fiber projects and staying on schedule. We are very excited that our customers in Waterville and Houston will soon be enjoying the benefits that fiber service has to offer.



ABOVE: In early October, the Houston County Economic Development Authority (EDA) closed on a revolving loan with AcenTek. The loan will be used as matching funding for the broadband grant AcenTek was awarded to bring fiber to approximately 800 locations in rural Houston.

- ▶ Left side, back row: **Tony Schultz** (EDA Board Member), **Dewey Severson** (County Commissioner & EDA Board Member); front row: **Dominic Carr** and **Eric Brand** (Cooperative Network Services).
- ▶ Right side, back row: **Matt Schuldt** (EDA Board President), **Joe Thesing** (AcenTek Board President and EDA Board Member) and **Cris Gastner** (Senior Vice President, CEDA); front row: **Abby Wright** (Community Grants Specialist, author of grant from CEDA), **Allison Wagner** (Houston County EDA Director), and **Darren Moser** (Chief Financial Officer, AcenTek).

\*Also involved with the project, but not pictured: Eric Johnson, County Commissioner and EDA Board Member, Dayna Burtness, EDA Board Member, and Matt Vetsch, EDA Board Member.

## One (Simple) Way to Prevent Being Hacked

*Keeping your accounts safe is becoming harder and harder. It may be hard to know what to do to keep your information safe. Our best suggestion for keeping you safe, is multi-factor authentication.*

### What is multi-factor authentication?

Every time you log in or sign in, you are proving to that device that you are who you say you are. Normally that requires a username and password. These are both rather easy to access. Usernames are often email addresses and because we have a hard time remembering all our passwords, often our passwords are too simple. The simpler they are, the easier they are for someone to guess.

Multi-factor authentication is a way to keep your accounts safe. With this, when you sign into an account for the

first time from a device, you will need more than just your username and password. You will need another factor to prove who you are. An example of that additional factor

is a code that gets sent to your smartphone. You will then be asked to enter that on the site. If someone else tries to login to your account, they may know your username and password, but they will not have your phone with the necessary code on it. If that happens, the site then recognizes that the person trying to log in is not you and they are denied access.

If you are concerned about the extra time and effort it will take to login using multi-factor authentication, don't. You will not have to do the second step every time you sign in. The first time you do it from each unique device it will require you to take the second step, but after that, your device will be recognized, and it will not ask you for anything other than your username and password. And the benefits far outweigh the amount of time it takes to plug in your second factor that first time from a new device. Having multi-factor authentication will protect you if your password gets stolen. Passwords are often easy to guess and can get picked up by a hacker when you enter them while on public Wi-Fi. Multi-factor authentication ensures that even if your password is compromised, the hacker will not be able to gain access to your account.





# \$12.1 Million Dollar Grant for Fiber in Iowa

In September, we received the exciting news that AcenTek had been awarded the \$12.1 million dollar grant from the Empower Rural Iowa Broadband Grant Program. An estimated 2,350 locations in Harpers Ferry, Fort Atkinson, Ossian and Clermont will be receiving fiber optic services..

The estimated total cost of bringing fiber to these four communities in Iowa is approximately \$24 million dollars. This grant will help with nearly half of that expense. Nearly 2,000 households and 390 businesses will benefit from this project.

Todd Roesler, CEO, explained how getting this grant falls neatly in line with our vision. "Our goal is to provide unparalleled connections and experiences to every customer in every community we serve. This grant will help us to deliver the gold standard of internet to our Iowa customers. Our customers deserve this. And the sooner, the better."

Iowa governor, Kim Reynolds signed into law \$100 million dollars in funding earlier this year and in July the grant process opened. AcenTek, along with many other providers across the state, wasted no time applying for those dollars to help them better serve their customers. Nearly 200 applications were received. Thirty-nine applications were awarded a grant.



AcenTek has been awarded grants in both Minnesota and Michigan before, but this is our first in Iowa. And this one is huge! While we typically receive a grant to build fiber to one community (or part of a community), this grant allows us to build fiber to four different communities. While we have been awarded grants for millions of dollars before, this grant is greater than five times the amount of any previous grant we have received.

**“This grant will help us to deliver the gold standard of internet to our Iowa customers. Our customers deserve this. And the sooner, the better.”**

Next on the agenda is creating the detailed plan. We will decide what community to start with, and discuss the timeline and materials needed. It is estimated that the start date may be as soon as 2022 with the completion of the project happening no later than spring of 2025.

## In Our Community

This year AcenTek had the chance to resume participation in local community events and celebrations. After Covid canceled area festivities last year, we viewed these opportunities as welcome ways to get back out in our communities. Over the summer we participated in 6 area events. Employees walked in parades at Eitzen Family Fun Fest, Rushford Days, Houston Hoedown, Buffalo Bill Days, Ossian Fest and La Crescent Applefest, throwing out swag and thanking our customers for trusting AcenTek to serve them.

In addition to the parades, we also volunteered at the Houston County Fair in Caledonia. These events are what help make our communities so special and we are proud to support them.

► Pictured: Cable Locator, Cory Wiebke walks in the 4th of July parade in Eitzen as his daughter, Adamae, throws candy to the crowd from the truck.







**HONOR A PET  
WHO IS NO LONGER  
WITH YOU, WHO YOU  
MISS DEARLY.**



**700 seats  
in heaven.  
Your seat is the  
last 3 digits of  
your phone  
number. What  
seat do you get?**

**Date yourself  
by naming one  
concert you  
have attended.**

**Repost and a  
miracle will come your  
way today.**



360K

4.9M Comment

67.1K Shares



**I think you're in this video?**  
<https://urlwee.com/hbwbwr>

## Sharing ≠ Caring on Social Media

Scrolling through Facebook, you come across one of those posts that get your attention. It's a fun quiz that invites you to share something about yourself. "Honor a pet who is no longer with you by commenting their name below." Without giving it a second thought, you type in your pet's name.

Did you know that the most common passwords include your name, birth date, hometown, or a pet's name? Do you see the connection? It is easy to be fooled into giving out personal information and it is easier than ever for those with malicious intent to gain that information. Portals like Facebook are helping criminals to get this information more than ever before.

Social media platforms can cause us to let our guard down, thinking we are sharing information only with our friends who would never use it against us. Be aware that these quizzes or cleverly worded posts which cause you to engage by sharing personal details of your personal life are, often, meant to harm.

Social engineering is the act of manipulating people, so they give up confidential information. These social media quizzes or question posts make you a target. Each comes with inherent risk. These bits of information are often the answers to account validation questions. For example, if you have an online account, in addition to entering your password, you could be asked a question so the site to verify it is really you. Many times, these questions ask the name of a favorite pet, a high school mascot or street name. By sharing this information on social media, you are making it easier for someone to gain access to your online accounts.

So how do you protect yourself? It is best not to disclose personal information online. Keep phone numbers, addresses, pet's names, and birthdays to yourself. Be careful what you post and know who to trust. Just because you are on Facebook with many of your friends, not everything you see in your feed is trustworthy.

You should also be hesitant to engage with another type of post. These do not ask you to share personal information that may be used to guess passwords. Rather, they are targeting by gaining access to you via Messenger. Do you ever see posts encouraging you to participate by sharing the post? "Share this post and a miracle will happen to you today." You quickly share the post, thinking "What do I have to lose?" The person who originally posted that now has gained access to you via Messenger since you have connected through Facebook.

Messenger is a tool that hackers have used, sending out an enticing invite for you to click a link. The message appears to have come from a friend and so you think it is legit. Many times, the message implies you are part of a video or something similar. This might tempt you to click the link to see. But be careful what you click. These short messages that give very little context and include a link often are malicious.

Click bait quizzes are an easy way for scammers to gain user data, since most passwords include a pet's name or a street name, paired with a set of numbers like your birth date. These can be socially engineered attacks, targeted to get your personal information to use to hack into your accounts.



# Mission (Statement) Complete

Earlier this year AcenTek created a new vision and mission statement. The reason why companies like us create vision and mission statements is to improve productivity and efficiency. We also did it to help provide focus on our goal. Todd Roesler, CEO explains, "The year 2020 gave us a great opportunity to take a closer look at our business and rediscover our why, to redefine our purpose. Having a vision statement will greatly benefit not only the company, but the individual employees. They will have a clearer understanding of why we are here."

A vision statement is created to define what a company aspires to do. Our vision is to create unparalleled connections and experiences. What does that mean? Simply stated, it means we strive to provide a product and experience that is better than any other provider can give.



Our goal is not just simply providing fiber to our customers. And our goal is not merely to gain new customers. We want to provide our customers with services and experiences they cannot get elsewhere. From the first phone call to the tech installing services, to the care we give the community, every experience matters. This is how we plan to stand apart.

After our vision statement was developed, our mission statement came next. Roesler explains the difference between the two, "While our vision statement describes our long-term goal, the mission statement is like a road map of how we plan to achieve our vision."

By summarizing how we plan to provide the best experience, our mission statement (or road map) began to be clear. First, we considered who we are here for: our customers, our employees, and our communities. Then we asked, how do we plan to serve them? We want to enhance our customers' lives by offering the best service around, we want to empower our employees by providing a workplace that encourages growth and celebrates achievement, and we want to support our communities. We also thought about what makes us different or sets us apart. We provide world-class networks and service, even to those small, rural communities that the big providers overlook. We feel honored to be their first choice when considering a provider.

Those answers made our path clear. Our mission is to be the first-choice provider by enhancing our customers' lives with world-class networks and services, empowering our employees, and enriching our communities, large and small.

## OUR MISSION

To be the first-choice provider by

**ENHANCING**  
our customers' lives with  
world-class services

**EMPOWERING**  
our employees

**ENRICHING**  
our communities,  
large and small.

So what does this mean for you, our customer? And future customers? This statement will serve as our guide in day-to-day decisions made in every department at AcenTek. With the continual reminder of our goal, we will work harder to be even more motivated to improve your life through technology. The new mission statement is a reminder of our commitment to community. We want to support area efforts, show we care by bringing the best technology to small, rural communities and to encourage our employees to give back to these special places we call home. We want our customers to know (and feel) the commitment we have to them and their community.

## Lifeline

Lifeline, a program that helps low-income customers pay for internet or voice services bundled with internet is available through AcenTek.\* Residents in any state may qualify. The customer must participate in one of the following programs in order to qualify: Federal Public Housing Assistance, Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, Veterans Pension Survivors Benefit or their income must be below 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

To apply for Lifeline, visit [www.checklifeline.org](http://www.checklifeline.org). You can also learn more about the Lifeline program by visiting [www.AcenTek.net](http://www.AcenTek.net) and clicking on Internet or Voice. Both web pages have a link for Low Income Assistance. Click the link to read all the information about this program. If you have further questions about Lifeline, please feel free to give our team at AcenTek a call.

\*The Lifeline program may not be available in all areas served by AcenTek. Effective December 1, 2021, the Lifeline Voice credit is scheduled to be reduced from \$5.25 to \$0 as voice service will no longer be a Lifeline qualifying service.





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### Spread the Word!

High school seniors: AcenTek scholarship deadline is March 1<sup>st</sup>.

Visit [AcenTek.net/Scholarship](http://AcenTek.net/Scholarship) to learn more.

#### FOLLOW US

[/GoAcenTek](https://www.facebook.com/GoAcenTek)



#### VISIT US

[AcenTek.net](http://AcenTek.net)

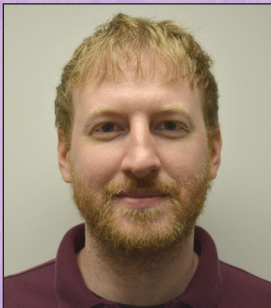


#### CALL US

888.404.4940



## WELCOME ABOARD!



### MARCUS SCHUMACHER

Marcus began working as a Network Operations Specialist in our Houston office in September. He graduated from Minnesota State Community Technical College and before joining our team, was employed by Bergan KDV in St. Cloud, MN. He and his wife, Katrina, along with their three children live in Winona.

Marcus enjoys mountain biking, football, volleyball and baseball. We are so glad to have him as part of our team.

## Congratulations on your retirement!



### MIKE BERG

After 33 years of serving our company, Mike Berg retired from AcenTek in October. He was hired in 1988 as a Combination Technician, but that is not where he stayed. Mike spread his knowledge around, serving in many roles during his time here. He worked as a Cable Splicer, Central Office Technician and for the past year and a half, Mike filled the role of Network Operations Specialist. His skill set proved he was an asset in every position he worked. His work ethic was commendable, and we are so grateful to have had him as part of our team for so long. He truly was an asset to AcenTek and he will be missed. We wish him all the best, as he enjoys retirement.



### SHARON VIX

In June, Sharon Vix retired after 49 years at AcenTek. Sharon started in '69 as a temporary General Clerk. She changed positions a number of times, and in '08 became Business Services Coordinator, where she remained for her last 13 years with us. Although her role changed several times, her commitment to her job never did. We sent Sharon off with our gratitude for the care she gave our customers for so many years. We wish Sharon every happiness in her retirement.