

INSIDE AcenTek NEWSLETTER

Inviting you inside to learn more

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GROWING OUR FIBER FOOTPRINT: AN UPDATE ON PROJECTS

Last year we continued building out fiber to locations in the **MESICK** and **BUCKLEY** areas. We finished construction by the end of the year, giving an additional 326 locations in Buckley the option of fiber and adding the fiber option to 111 homes in the Mesick serving area. Our technicians worked diligently over the winter to get those homes hooked up to fiber-fed services.

Building fiber in the town of **COPEMISH** is also complete. We are just finishing up converting our last customers in that area to fiber. Earlier this year, we started mainline construction to our customers in rural Copemish. Work will continue through the summer, with the tentative completion date for construction being July 1st.

In the city limits of **THOMPSONVILLE**, we finished construction last October. After that, our team began switching our customers over to fiber-fed services.

Construction began in two small areas in **HOXEYVILLE** late last year. Both builds were completed by May 1st. Our customer service team will be reaching out to the customers impacted to make them aware that fiber is now available at their home.



PICTURED: The work began on area fiber projects in April.



Pictured (L-R): Aaron Whilfart, Brent Trickle, Les Siem, Jason Wieser of AcenTek, Carl Allen, Chris Swenson, Dan Berg.

HONOR EARNED: Safety Award

Each year the Minnesota Telecom Alliance (MTA) honors a business with the Company Safety Award. On March 19th, AcenTek was honored to receive this award for 2023. Jason Wieser, Installation/Repair Supervisor and Safety Committee Member, accepted on behalf of AcenTek.

The honor is awarded annually to a company that meets or exceeds the safety criteria defined by MTA. They track safety training attendance, perform facility inspections and field observations. With the use of various tools and processes, they verify that a company is compliant with OSHA regulations throughout the year. We were so excited to be chosen for this honor.



Below are the specifics on the metrics tracked to determine award recipient:

- **Active Employee Participation.** Personnel participate in scheduled training and engage in the safety program. The percentage of participating employees needs to be 90% or better. Calculations are based on the number of incomplete classes for the year.
- **Safety Training.** Ensures that employees who do not attend in-person training complete their safety training in LMS within 90 days.
- **Work site/facility hazard identification results 90% or better.** Life safety issues fixed immediately.
- **OSHA's total recordable injury rate must be below OSHA average of 3.4.** (OSHA formula is recordable incidents X 200,000 divided by the number of standard employee labor hours).
- **Maintains Safety Program records, which include Safety Data Sheets, Facility Inspections, and other safety documents.**
- **Employees wear PPE** (Personal Protective Equipment) when required.

WELCOME TO THE TEAM IN ALLENDALE!



**MCKENZIE
LAMB**

MARKETING
SPECIALIST



**TOBIAS
O'BRYAN**

INVENTORY
COORDINATOR



**DONALD
SHANTZ**

OUTSIDE PLANT
EQUIPMENT
OPERATOR



**LISA
RACE**

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
REPRESENTATIVE

In January, AcenTek introduced a new option for our video customers, called MyTV. Since then, over 350 customers have made the switch to MyTV, accessing the exact same content available to them with our traditional video service.



Combination Technicians in our Allendale office: (L-R) Rob Miller, Phil Brown, Ron Borst and Ron Aten.

CHANGES WITH VIDEO: MyTV Coming to All Serving Areas

Why the change? Over 95%* of homes in America have at least one streaming subscription. With streaming content becoming more and more popular, AcenTek looked for a way to deliver our video service that would make it easy for the customer who still wants AcenTek content but also may enjoy streaming services. AcenTek MyTV delivers our content via the internet, just as other streaming services do. This means our customers can easily switch between watching our video content and their favorite streaming subscriptions, all from one platform. No need to switch between devices or go to another room to watch.

MyTV makes it possible to watch programming on your laptop, TV or phone, no longer limiting where you watch. As long as you are connected to AcenTek Internet, you will be able to watch. The MyTV app is available on many streaming devices, such as Amazon Fire Stick, Apple TV and Roku.

*According to Entertainment on Demand Data from Kantar, the world's leading marketing and analytics company, January 2024.



How did customers react? The team at AcenTek is excited to be able to offer this option to our customers. And customers have been receptive to this change as well. One of our Customer Service Representatives, Alex Stein (Mesick office), shared, "I had some who said they were expecting this to happen anyway, and that since they didn't want to switch providers, they were willing to learn MyTV." Regarding the installation, our technician, Ron Aten (Allendale office) said, "...by the time we leave the home and have explained how simple the operation of the Fire Stick is, they seem satisfied and happy to use the added benefits of a streaming device."



Twitter/GoAcenTek



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Facebook/AcenTekAllendale

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TECH TIP: Passwords Made Easy

Passwords are a necessary part of life. With so many of our daily activities demanding the internet, having (and remembering!) strong passwords is essential for keeping us safe online.

There are so many rules for creating a strong password that sometimes they can seem overwhelming, and perhaps even unrealistic. There is a way. Password managers take the headache out of passwords and help to keep you safe. Password managers keep all your passwords in a secure convenient location whether it be an app on your phone or a browser extension. This allows you to use the auto-fill option, adding to the ease of use. With a password manager you only need to remember ONE password, a master password. This allows you inside a 'vault' of all your passwords. Once inside you can simply click to copy and paste the password into the account you are trying to access. No need to remember the password, or even type it. Simple!

What's even better, is that this solution is also safer than you having to create and remember all your passwords. They use advanced encryption sure to detour even the most skilled hacker. For some, it would require more than a lifetime to crack the code and access your vault.

Along with using a password manager, we also recommend using Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA). One example of this is when a code is sent to another device for you to enter to ensure your identity and prevent the wrong person from accessing your information or accounts.

*You've forgotten your password.
Or you need to change your password.
Your mind quickly goes into overdrive, trying to
recall all the best practices in creating the strongest
password. After all, the last thing you need is to have
someone hack into your online accounts.*

*How can you stay safe when it comes to passwords for
all the online activities your life demands?*

*Let us introduce you to your new best friend
when it comes to passwords.*



Password managers offer the following:

- ✓ **Master Password:** The only password you need to remember is the master password.
- ✓ **Advanced Encryption:** Password managers use advanced encryption to protect your credentials. Without this encryption, your passwords are accessible to anyone.
- ✓ **Zero-Knowledge Architecture:** The best password managers use a zero-knowledge architecture, which means that passwords are encrypted before leaving your device. Even the provider cannot decipher them.

LOW-INCOME ASSISTANCE: Lifeline

Lifeline is a federal program that lowers the monthly cost of phone or internet service. To qualify, the customer must participate in one of the following programs: Federal Public Housing Assistance, Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Veteran's Pension Survivors Benefit or have an income below 135% of the poverty guidelines. To learn more about this program, scan the QR code or visit our website at www.acentek.net/voice/low-income-assistance.



OFFICE CLOSED

MAY 27 | Memorial Day
JULY 4 | Independence Day
SEPT. 2 | Labor Day
NOV. 11 | Veterans Day

ALLENDALE ROBOTICS: Spotlight On Community

There are many opportunities for students in the Allendale area to participate in activities. Robotics is another one of those options. The Allendale Robotics organization offers STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) programs for Allendale area students, kindergarten grades through 12th. The purpose of the robotics program is to provide students with an opportunity to work with robots and to learn about STEM in the process.

For younger students (K-3), the program offers opportunities with smaller robots. They use building materials to understand the fundamentals of programming, engineering, and building using the VEX 1-2-3 and VEX Go platforms. Once students enter our elementary school program, referred to as VEX IQ, they work with larger plastic construction robots. These robots perform game-based tasks and are operated both as student-driven and autonomously. These students start competing with area teams.

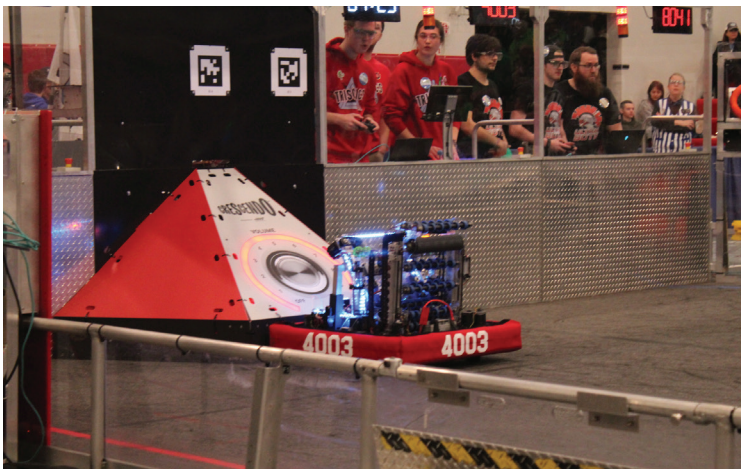
The students in middle school evolve to the VEX Robotics Competition (VRC) program. This is where students work with larger metal construction robots and advanced programming techniques. These students compete with area teams in tournaments and leagues.



The VEX VRC Team 61187E, the Deep Fried Pickles, getting their robot set up on the field for a skills match.



The TriSonics, FRC Team 4003, at the Lake City event. Photo taken after winning the Quality Award.

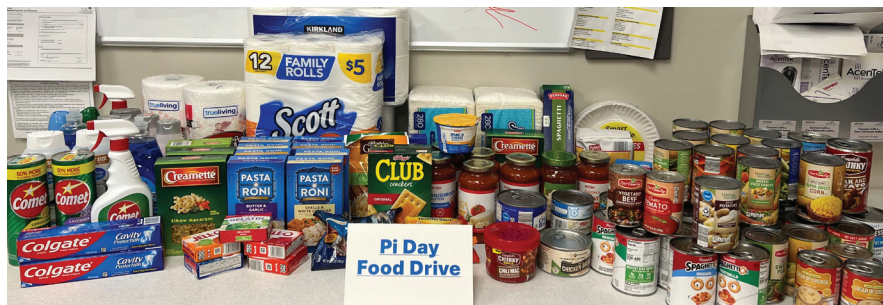


Crescendo, the TriSonics robot for the 2024 season, lining up to make a shot.

The high school program is a FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotic Competition team. The team, the TriSonics, have been in Allendale for 13 years. These students learn to design, fabricate parts, build, wire and program the robot, and then compete in intense competitions. Unrealized by many, the team also has a business and marketing team for students who want to get involved in a non-technical way. This program has something for everyone.

There was a lot to celebrate recently with the robotics program in Allendale. Their Elementary VEX IQ teams advanced 3 teams to the State Championship event. In addition, three middle school VRC teams advanced to the State Championship. Of those three, two teams advanced to the World Championship in Dallas, Texas, in April. The TriSonics (high school team) has competed in 2 district events this season and won the Quality Award.

The Allendale Robotics programs are 100% volunteer-led. The volunteers lead the meetings and work with the students on curriculum-based learning. Some volunteers also help mentor students about design, fabrication, programming, business and marketing. Two VEX events are held each year and these are all run by volunteers. Without them, this program would not be possible. Sponsors also help ensure the future of the robotics program. The donated funds are used for team registrations, robot parts, travel expenses, equipment and supplies. AcenTek is a proud supporter of the Allendale Robotics Program.



DONATIONS: Helping Those in Need

Recently, our team in the Allendale office found a way to give back while having a little fun. While celebrating Pi Day, staff organized an in-office food drive, after learning about some area need. Our team thought this would be the perfect time to gather food for those in need. The gathered food was donated to the Allendale Food Pantry.

In addition, \$600 donations were made to the food pantries at Allendale Love INC and Coopersville Cares. The Outdoor Discovery Center, located in Holland, Michigan, also received a donation from AcenTek. These donations are possible due to staff participating in casual day, a program that allows staff to dress casually in exchange for a donation. The Board of Directors at AcenTek then matches those funds and staff decides which area non-profit organizations to donate to.

In addition to those mentioned, AcenTek also donated to Lori's Voice, an organization that provides financial assistance for children with disabilities to help them afford adaptive equipment, travel and therapy not fully covered by insurance. The donation will be used for an upcoming event called Walk for the Challenged held in June in Coopersville.

AcenTek is proud to support these organizations and commends all the volunteers who work so hard to keep these resources available in our community.



Christine Byma with Love INC accepts donation from AcenTek employees, Amy Hehl and Shari Brookhouse.

AcenTek employees, Shari Brookhouse (left) and Lisa Phillips (right) present director of Coopersville Cares, LeeAnn Rosel (center), with Casual Day donation.



At AcenTek, we feel passionate about the education of our youth and that is why we take great pride in supporting these students by offering them a scholarship opportunity. Over the past 23 years, AcenTek has given out \$442,000 to graduates who live in our serving area.

It is with great excitement that we announce this year's scholarship recipients, each receiving \$1,000 to go towards their continued education. These deserving seniors have been accepted into a tech school, college, or university to fulfill their future aspirations. Congratulations to this year's winners! We wish you all the best as you follow your dreams.

MICHIGAN:

- Gage Bustos (*Mesick High School*)
- Alyssa Franck (*Hamilton High School*)
- Avery Matthews (*Buckley High School*)
- Kaelyn Reyna (*Allendale High School*)
- William Reynolds (*Allendale High School*)
- Emma Shermak (*Mesick High School*)

MINNESOTA:

- Kate Crosby (*La Crescent High School*)
- Kamryn Jorgenson (*La Crescent High School*)
- Kaelyn Kath (*Cyber Village Academy*)
- Wyatt Krzoska (*La Crescent High School*)
- Ashlyn Miller (*Rushford-Peterson High School*)
- Preston Peterson (*Houston High School*)
- Ryan Prinsen (*Rushford-Peterson High School*)
- Luke Ruen (*Lanesboro High School*)
- Alicia Schroeder (*Caledonia High School*)

IOWA:

- Mitchell Bohr (*North Fayette Valley High School*)
- Isaac Ericson (*Waukon High School*)
- Katrina Hageman (*South Winneshiek High School*)
- Rachel Meyer (*South Winneshiek High School*)

MESICK ROBOTICS: Spotlight On Community

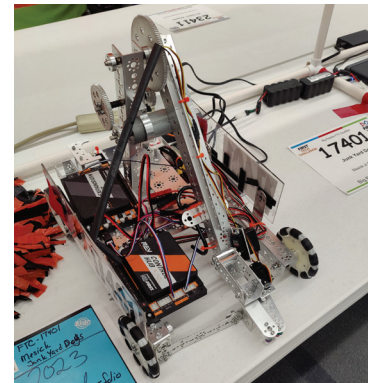
Robotics has become very popular in schools across the nation. Mesick is no exception. The purpose of the robotics programs is to provide students with an opportunity to work with robots to learn about STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). This program provides students with a chance to explore fields that they may wish to pursue beyond graduation.

The Mesick area offers students in middle school and high school an opportunity to participate in robotics. The middle school team, Junk Yard Dogs, participates in the FIRST Tech Challenge. The high school team, Chronic Robophobia, takes part in FIRST Robotics Competitions.

Both the middle school and high school teams are very active, participating in at least two competitions per season. Each year there is a new theme and game chosen for the competitions. When the game is released, teams come up with designs, plan and prepare for the challenges they will face. The team is divided into different groups to work on the drive train or coding the electrical sensors or appendages for picking up and moving different objects. The middle school team works with reusable materials. In other words, they use parts from the previous year's robot and build a new one from scratch. The high school team gets new parts each year as part of their registration. The high school team starts with a kit and then makes modifications to meet whatever goal they plan to focus on for game play. For the next month approximately, the teams test and modify their robot according to different challenges. This prepares them for competition. The robotics teams often partner up with local technology and engineering experts in the community who help mentor the students. The competitions can be multiple days, and involve setting up the pit area and having the robots inspected. Practice is normally part of the pre-competition routine, as everyone is trying to prepare to give their best performance. Based on how well the teams do and what awards are earned, teams can advance to the state championships. There is also an opportunity to advance to the world championship if they are successful at the state level. Yet to advance, the Mesick teams are getting closer and closer each season. Will next season be their year? We think so.



The Junk Yard Dogs robot at competition.



The Chronic Robophobia's robot, ready to compete.

AcenTek is proud to shine a spotlight on such a valuable program for area youth. Good luck on your next season, Junk Yard Dogs and Chronic Robophobia!

BUSINESS HIGHLIGHT: Affogato's Ice Cream & Coffee Shop

Affogato's Ice Cream and Coffee Shop opened in 2021 and is locally owned and operated in Allendale. Formerly *Get the Scoop*, the shop used to only be open seasonally with a menu that only included ice cream. But things have changed. Now open year-round, Affogato's menu includes lattes and espresso coffee drinks to partner with the hard and soft serve ice cream they offer. Vegan options are another menu addition. With the improvements this business has made since opening, it is no surprise that they have more exciting news on the horizon. Owners hinted about a new menu category, coming soon.

AcenTek is proud to serve Affogato's Ice Cream and Coffee Shop in Allendale and wishes them continued success as they explore new offerings.



“The reliability and consistency of Acentek's internet provides us with a point-of-sale system we can always count on. For a short time, we switched. After only 6 months of repeated headaches with unresolved service issues, we came back to AcenTek. It's great because we deal with someone local, right here in Allendale. Our point-of-sale system has been consistently working ever since we came back. Lesson learned.”



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Houston, MN 55943



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MESICK OFFICE:
5351 M-37, Mesick, MI

NEWSLETTER

Inviting you inside to learn more

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR RETIREMENT

SHARI BROOKHOUSE [CUSTOMER SUPPORT REPRESENTATIVE]

In April, Shari Brookhouse, Inventory Coordinator in our Allendale office, retired. Shari started at Allendale Telephone for 22 years and then, in 2009, was hired as a Customer Support Representative for us. Later she transitioned into the role of Inventory Coordinator, the position she held until her last day. Shari's versatile skills and knowledge have proved to be such an asset to us over the years. Her dedication and friendly smile will certainly be missed by the entire AcenTek team. After 36 years of working in the industry, we wish her nothing but the best in her next chapter.



KRISTI KNOPER [CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE]

In May, Kristi Knoper retired from our Allendale office. Kristi worked for Allendale Telephone Company for 18 years and then, in 2009, was hired as a Customer Service Representative in our Allendale office. Kristi's knowledge made her our go-to person in the Allendale office when help was needed. We thank Kristi for her years of dedication to both us and to our customers. We are grateful to have had her as part of our team and wish her every happiness in what lies ahead.