

# INSIDE AcenTek NEWSLETTER

*Inviting you inside to learn more*

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## GROWING OUR FIBER FOOTPRINT: AN UPDATE ON PROJECTS

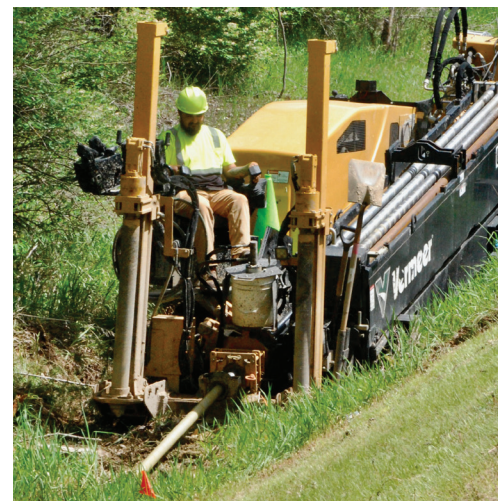
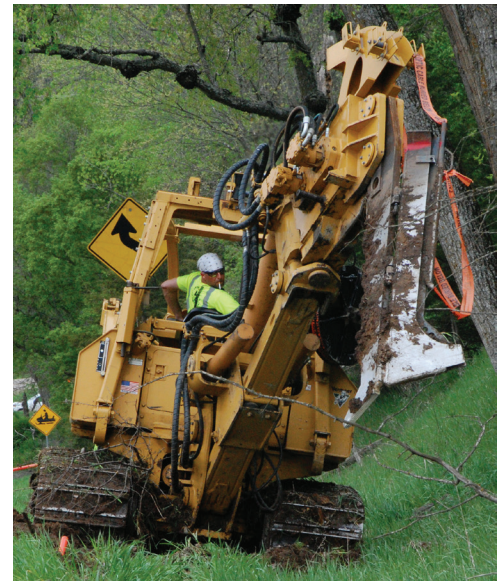
Last fall we completed the fiber build in **FORT ATKINSON, IOWA**, with the help of West Union Trenching and Cooperative Network Solutions (CNS). Our team worked to convert customers over to fiber-fed services. We are excited that this project, that brought fiber to 824 locations in the Fort Atkinson area, is now complete.

Our fiber build in **EITZEN, MINNESOTA**, has also been completed. This build also included locations in Dorchester, Iowa. The construction finished last year and earlier this year we converted our customers to fiber-fed services. This project brought fiber to 389 locations.

In **HARPERS FERRY, IOWA**, we have just begun Phase 2 of our fiber project. With the help of Central Cable, construction began in late April. Our estimated timeline to have the construction completed in the grant area of Harpers Ferry is by the end of summer.

In 2020, we completed our fiber build within the city limits of **OSSIAN, IOWA**. This year we are back in that area, bringing fiber to our friends in the rural parts of Ossian. At the beginning of this year, we began doing home assessments. This summer, residents here will notice large spools of orange tubing (conduit) moving into the areas we are working in. We will lay the conduit and insert the fiber inside. We are planning for construction to be completed by the end of October. This is an aggressive plan, but we are optimistic that customers will begin being hooked up to fiber as early as mid-July.

Later this summer, we will be working with Central Cable for the construction phase of our fiber build in Dakota, Minnesota. Construction in the grant areas of Dakota will begin in August, with an estimated date of completion of November 1.



*PICTURED: As part of our build in Harpers Ferry, construction started along the Lansing Harpers Road in early May.*



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.

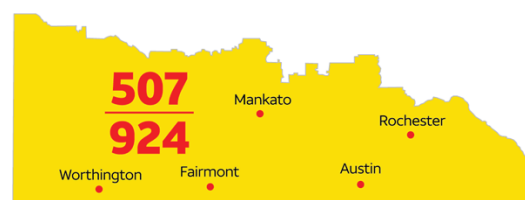
## AREA CODE ADDED: 10-Digit Begins

One year ago, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission approved adding a new area code in southern Minnesota served by the area code of 507. This change means callers will need to dial the area code plus the phone number when dialing. This change goes into effect July 30th.

Forecasts suggest that there will be no more phone numbers available to assign in the 507 area code by early 2025. To make sure there are new telephone numbers available, the 924 area code is being added. Dialing the area code plus the phone number will be required for all callers, not just those who are AcenTek customers.

While the change doesn't go into effect until the end of July, we encourage you to prepare for it now. You may place local calls using the area code now, and we encourage you to get in the habit of dialing all ten digits before the change becomes mandatory. Also to prepare, check any equipment you have at your home or business. Automatic dialing equipment, such as fax machines, burglar alarms, speed dials, and call forwarding, will all need to be reprogrammed to function properly after July 30th.

For more information on the new area code, scan the QR code or visit the Minnesota Public Utilities website at <https://mn.gov/puc/consumers/new-area-code/>





*In January, AcenTek introduced a new option for our video customers, called MyTV. Due to the number of customers we have and the size of our serving area in Minnesota and Iowa, we will roll this out, one community at a time, starting with customers who have the oldest video equipment. Since January, over 500 customers in Rushford, Houston, Caledonia and Dakota have made the switch to MyTV, accessing the exact same content that was available to them with our traditional video service.*

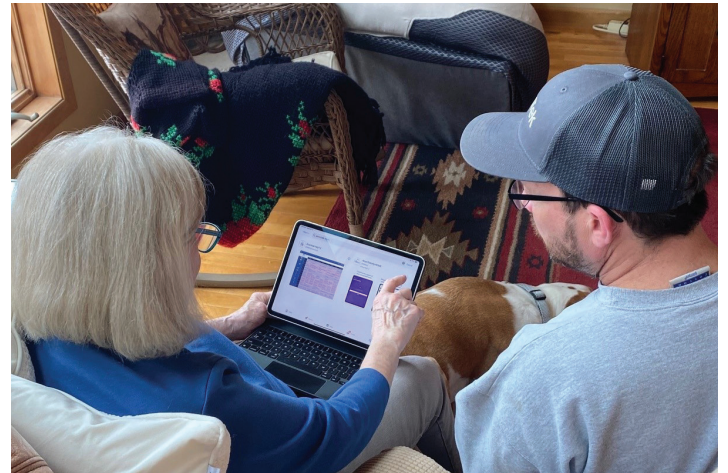


## CHANGES WITH VIDEO: MyTV Coming to All Serving Areas

**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. Since the set-top-boxes that had previously provided video service are no longer needed for MyTV, the customer ends up saving on monthly rental fees. The MyTV app is available on many streaming devices, such as Amazon Fire Stick, Apple TV and Roku.

**What's the timeline?** AcenTek serves a large area in both Minnesota and Iowa. Because of our internal resources, we have planned a gradual roll out, one community at a time, starting with customers with the oldest video equipment. Our team will contact you when we are ready to bring MyTV to your home.



**How are customers reacting?** Our customers, thus far, have been receptive to this. Technician, Mike Laufenberg, shared, "I find that most customers are very grateful for the techs to come into their home and help them with the transition."

Customer Service Supervisor, Cindy Wold, explains her team's role in helping customers feel comfortable in the midst of change, "Our job is to really lay the foundation of all the customer needs to know: What is changing with their video service, why it is changing and how this impacts them. We explain the details and answer their questions."

*Our team at AcenTek is excited to offer MyTV service to our customers.  
We look forward to continuing our work of offering a more convenient solution to our video customers.  
Our team will contact customers as MyTV is available in each area we serve.*

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



## 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 to go 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 that is sure to deter 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](http://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



## 74TH ANNUAL MEETING RESULTS: Vote Changes Bylaws, Welcomes New Board Member

On April 23rd, AcenTek held the 74th Annual Meeting of the Members via Zoom. Congratulations to Cindy Wright, our new board member who will represent Houston County. Congratulations also to incumbents, Bobbie Hillery (Fillmore County) and Barry Fruechte (Iowa, as served by the Association) on their re-election. Special thanks to Bluff Country Financial for securely handling the ballots and tallying the results for us, again this year.

In addition to the election of the board, our members also voted to make a change to our bylaws. There were three proposed changes to Article III that members voted on, and all three changes were accepted. This bylaw change goes into effect immediately.

| ✓ PASSED                            | ✗ FAILED                 |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ✓ Amend Section 1, Article III      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ✓ Eliminate Section 3B, Article III | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ✓ Amend Section 3D, Article III     | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Our annual meeting has always been the ideal time to show our gratitude to our members. Every member who attended our meeting received a \$10 credit on their June bill.

Thank you to every member who took time to vote in this year's election. We had nearly 1,400 ballots submitted. Ten winners were chosen from those who mailed in their ballot and were awarded gift cards to the merchant of their choice.

We were excited that over 500 people attended our online meeting. Thank you for taking time to attend online, proving you care about your cooperative. From those who attended, ten winners were randomly chosen and awarded a gift card to the merchant of their choice. Congratulations to all 20 winners!

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## Congratulations Winners!

Each of the winners were contacted and chose where they would like their gift card to. Options included: Best Buy, Target, Walmart, Kwik Trip, Casey's General Store, Bauer's Market, Cox True Value Hardware, Caledonia True Value Hardware, Rushford Hardware, Quillin's, Root River Market or Rushford Foods. Below is the list of winners with their corresponding exchange area.

### \$50 Gift Card Winners:

- ♦ Tom Berns (La Crescent)
- ♦ Randy & Valery Breyer (Dakota)
- ♦ Pat & Judy Christian (Rushford)
- ♦ Randy & Kathy Dahl (Rushford)
- ♦ Terry Dahlby (La Crescent)
- ♦ Cathleen Grinde (La Crescent)
- ♦ Rudolph Hesla (Waterville)
- ♦ Knights of Columbus Hall (La Crescent)
- ♦ Kirby Rahn (Houston)
- ♦ Linus & Paula Tekippe (Fort Atkinson)

### \$100 Gift Card Winners:

- ♦ Alison Culhane (Houston)
- ♦ Charles Poppe (Rushford)
- ♦ Thomas Tiedemann (Houston)
- ♦ Ronald Wenthold (Ossian)
- ♦ Thomas Wiese (La Crescent)

### \$250 Gift Card Winners:

- ♦ Cynthia Christensen (Rushford)
- ♦ Kirk Knutson (Dakota)
- ♦ Randall Stiegmann (Waterville)

### \$500 Gift Card Winners:

- ♦ Darlyne Dwyer (La Crescent)
- ♦ Donna Lutzens (North New Albin)

## GIVING BACK: Fire Departments

This spring, donations were made to 11 fire departments in our serving area in Minnesota. We had the pleasure of visiting some local firemen and presenting them with our donation in person. It was our pleasure to stop by and express our gratitude to those who volunteer their own time to help their community in their time of need.

Fire departments in Dakota, Ridgeway, Lanesboro, Rushford, Houston, Hokah, Nodine, Canton, La Crescent, Caledonia, and Eitzen were each presented with \$600 donation. While visiting with a few of our friends at these departments, we heard about some possible plans for using the donation. Suggestions ranged from needed air tanks to medical equipment to thermal imaging cameras.

These donations are made possible as a result of staff making a donation in exchange for the option of dressing casually to work. Those funds are then matched by our Board of Directors. The Casual Day fund is used to support non-profit organizations in our serving areas, such as fire departments, EMS departments and libraries.



**EITZEN:** Mike Loken, AcenTek Technician, presents donation to Fire Chief, Doug Meyer (middle), joined by Ryan Gossman (left) and Mitch Lange (right).



**HOUSTON:** Mike Laufenberg, AcenTek Technician, presents donation to Fire Chief, Steve Skifton (right), joined by Tim Jergenson (left).

**RUSHFORD:** Steve Quarve, AcenTek Combination Technician (right), presents donation to Nick Smith.



**CALEDONIA:** (L-R) Adam Hoscheit, Storm Davis, Kurt Zehnder, together with AcenTek Combination Technician, Corey Gantenbein who is presenting donation to Jeff Winjum, along with Michael Nelson, Chris Schansberg, and Randall Ashbacher.



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.

### 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)

### 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)



## ROBOTICS: Spotlight on Community

Robotics programs have become very popular, and the schools in Caledonia, La Crescent and Houston are no exception. The 2024 season was an impressive one for area students.

In Caledonia, the Robotic Warriors, team 5914, were awarded the Engineering Inspiration Award. This was for their work in the community and inspiring others to better understand Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. Receiving this award earned them the right to compete at the World Championships of FIRST Robotics in Houston, Texas, in April.

The robotics program in La Crescent also had an impressive year. Their first competition, held in Duluth, Minnesota, resulted in a 3rd place finish and being invited to compete at the Minnesota State High School League State Tournament the first weekend of May. One of their mentors, Mark Moulton, was also awarded the Seven Rivers Robotics Competition Volunteer of the Year Award for his work in furthering the message of FIRST and for his impressive work with local robotic teams.

In Houston, the mission is to build young people through building robots. One way they encourage students to get involved is with their Lego Robotics program. Students from grades 4 - 8 are welcome to participate. Lego Robotics is a great way to introduce the youth to robotics and get them hooked on the program.

Robotics programs are available to students in Caledonia, La Crescent and Houston schools, grades 7th – 12th. The competitions that students get involved in are incredible, but what they learn about STEM and about themselves is the much more impressive part of the story. While building and competing with robots, students learn to persevere through challenges. They learn how to be a team and work together to fix a problem and make a machine operate to its full potential. They learn peer support and encouragement. And they also get to explore career paths that may fit their passion. This program is not about students building robots, it is about robots building the next generation of young business leaders, engineers, programmers, and technicians.

Without donations, our schools would not be able to have programs like this. Donation dollars are used for registration fees, purchasing parts for the robot and for the purchase of tools and equipment to ensure the most up-to-date technology is available. In order to be on the cutting edge of what this program has to offer, the teams use cameras that track the location



Student fixes robot's intake after a particularly brutal match.

***This program is not about students building robots. It is about robots building the next generation of young business leaders, engineers, programmers, and technicians.***



Houston's Team 5339 works on their robot.



La Crescent's Team 2977 gearing up for the match.

of the robot and a vision system to “see” the goal the team is trying to achieve. These teams are currently purchasing new equipment that allows students to make parts that are increasingly complex using CNC's machines and carbon fiber 3D printers. Donations help to push the boundaries of what is happening in the classrooms at these schools.

***AcenTek is proud to support the robotics teams in Caledonia, La Crescent and Houston.***



207 E Cedar Street  
PO Box 360  
Houston, MN 55943

# AcenTek NEWSLETTER

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## CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR RETIREMENT

After 25 years of working for us, Tom VanGundy retired in April. Tom started as a temporary seasonal laborer and officially began his career with us in March of '98 as Combination Technician. In 2007, he became Facilities Engineer in our Houston office, the role he held until his final day.

Perhaps the most noteworthy attribute Tom had was his positive attitude and unwavering dedication. His strong work ethic, humble nature, and his ability to get along with everyone will truly be missed. Congratulations, Tom, on your retirement! Thank you for all your many years of hard work and dedication to this company.

**THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING. BEST WISHES, TOM!**



**TOM VANGUNDY**

**FACILITIES ENGINEER**

## WELCOME TO THE TEAM!



**ALEX  
KJOME**

**IT SYSTEMS  
ADMINISTRATOR**