

# INSIDE AcenTek NEWSLETTER

*Inviting you inside to learn more*

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## 10 YEARS IN FIBER: What we have done and why it matters

Back in 2014, AcenTek began building fiber optics to our customers. Up until this time, all our infrastructure had been copper. When we learned about the benefits of fiber optics, offering faster internet speeds and more reliable services, we knew fiber was our future. Providing the very best service available has been our goal since the birth of our company and transitioning to fiber aligned with that goal perfectly.

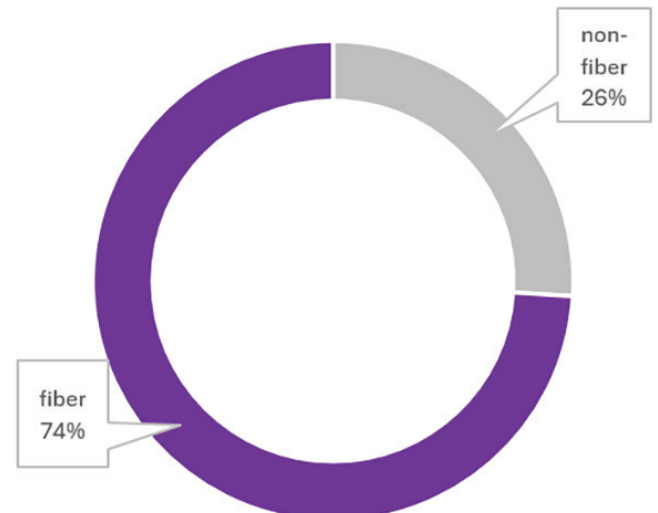
Our first fiber builds were located in La Crescent, Minnesota and Allendale, Michigan. Since then, we have brought fiber to 19,316 homes. A total of 3,600 miles of fiber optics have been placed to provide our customers with the technology their lives demand. To accomplish that, countless hours of planning, labor and construction have been done by our team.

Besides the time it takes to build fiber to our customers, substantial cost is also involved. We know our customers are worth it, however, the price of a build is a major factor in determining where we build fiber next. Over \$155 million dollars has been spent on fiber builds since we began. AcenTek applies for grants whenever available to reduce our costs and thus increase the rate at which we can build to our customers. While grants are helpful with the expense, the majority of the cost for each build is ours. While roughly 15% of the total price is swallowed by grants, the remaining 85% of that price tag is ours.

While the price of bringing fiber to our customers is quite expensive, we know they are worth every penny. Our goal is to build fiber to every single customer, regardless of their location. We will not stop until that goal is accomplished. Fiber optics is the answer to leveling the playing field for those living in remote areas. All our customers should have the same access to technology as those living in a larger town.



*Pictured: Splicing fiber during our fiber builds.*



*Active customers who have fiber versus customers who do not*

“Fiber optics helps keep rural communities thriving. Reliable internet makes working from home, online learning or successfully operating your business in a small town possible. Live where you want and we'll help you do the rest.”

—Mike Osborne  
Chief Executive Officer



## GRANT AWARDED: Rural Canton

AcenTek recently learned that we have been awarded the Border-to-Border Development Grant for rural Canton in Minnesota.

Back in May, we submitted our application for building fiber to southeastern Minnesota's Fillmore County rural areas around the community of Canton. The proposed fiber project will include 275 locations consisting of 212 households, 24 businesses, and 39 farms.

In October, the Minnesota Office of Broadband Development released the list of Round 10 grant recipients. This round of grants consisted of \$25 million from DEED's flagship for Border-to-Border Broadband Program and the remaining \$27 million from the Low Population Density Program. We

were excited to find that we had been awarded \$2,567,200 for rural Canton. This is 40% of the total cost of the project, which is estimated to be over \$6 million dollars. When AcenTek is awarded a grant, it not only helps us financially achieve our goal of bringing fiber to every customer, but also it helps with the timeline of doing so. Due to that financial help, we are able to bring fiber to areas faster than we may have been able to if we had to endure the total cost of the project on our own.

We are excited to have won this grant and look forward to building fiber to our customers in Canton. This fiber project will begin next year and will be completed on or before June 30, 2027.

## MyTV: Helping you stream

As more and more of what you want to watch is available only via streaming solutions, AcenTek has adapted our video product to keep up. This year we moved away from traditional Video with cable boxes and moved to a streaming service, which is, video delivered over the internet.

What led us to that decision? Some customers' equipment needed updating. As we considered update options, we also re-evaluated our product, our audience and the most popular trends of how to watch content at home. As a result, we began offering AcenTek MyTV to our Video customers. This solution offers the exact same content but now is delivered via streaming. Our customer service representatives contacted every customer with equipment needing updates, to explain this change and answer their questions. Our technicians visited approximately 1,900 homes in Minnesota, Iowa and Michigan, to help customers make the switch to streaming services. Customers were given a complimentary streaming device to help them get started. Instructions were shared with each customer along with the reminder that our support team was available for any ongoing questions they had after the technician's visit.

While streaming was common to many of our customers, for some this was brand new. Initially hesitant, we found some to be open to this change. They stated they knew this was the way things were going and they would eventually need to stream. For these customers it was the lack of knowledge on how to even get started with streaming that prevented them from cutting the cord. With the guidance of our team, many of these non-streaming customers were open to the MyTV solution.

For the customers who were familiar with streaming and perhaps already had one or many subscriptions, the change from traditional video to AcenTek MyTV services allowed them added conveniences. They could consolidate their content. They could now easily switch between AcenTek content and their other streaming subscriptions without needing to change the input on their TV each time or switch to a different device. Managing what content they want to watch, regardless of where it is coming from, was now much more convenient.



Many of our Video customers were worried about losing the local content with the transition to streaming. With AcenTek MyTV they could keep that content plus add on other streaming services in the future if they wanted. All their viewing options would be available from the convenience of one platform.

This year has been busy for our team helping our Video customers understand the change to MyTV. We understand and respect the varied preferences of our many customers. Our team has spent time with each of them trying to ensure they are satisfied with their video solution. It has been exciting for us to take this step forward with our video product in an effort to provide what is needed in the homes as more and more entertainment options become available.



## FIBER GOALS:

### How close are we to meeting them?

Our year began with an ambitious list of fiber projects to accomplish. With the close of the year upon us, here is an update on where we are at in accomplishing all the tasks on our list.

One of our goals for this year was to accomplish Phase 2 of our fiber build in Harpers Ferry. Another was to finish building fiber in our Ossian exchange.

While working towards these goals, we also felt the pressure of a ticking clock. In the fall of 2021, AcenTek learned that we would be awarded the Empower Rural Iowa Broadband Grant, totaling \$12 million dollars, to bring fiber to an estimated 2,350 locations in Iowa. This included homes in Harpers Ferry, Fort Atkinson, Ossian and Clermont. The rules of that grant state that we must finish all these builds by April 2025.

In April, we began Phase 2 of our **HARPERS FERRY** fiber project. With the help of our contractor, Central Cable, we completed construction by the end of the summer. This phase brought fiber to an additional 375 homes.

We have also been busy working in rural **OSSIAN**. In 2020, we completed our fiber build within the city limits and this year we have been back to address homes in rural Ossian. We completed construction on this project in September, connecting an additional 678 customers to fiber there.

With the progress made in both Harpers Ferry and Ossian, all indications point to AcenTek meeting our goal in regards to the grant. While the work is not completely finished yet, we



are in excellent shape to finish given our timeline. Central Cable, West Union Trenching and CNS (Cooperative Network Services) have all been valuable partners with AcenTek on our fiber builds. We had periods of rain, heat and humidity, but nothing got in the way of our team making progress. Our staff has also been incredible, stepping up to put in extra hours to get the job done. Employees have willingly swapped locations and regular duties to help when extra hands were needed on the Iowa fiber builds. The credit for executing these fiber projects goes to all these dedicated workers.



PICTURED: (above photo + feature picture) Fiber construction underway in rural Ossian.

PICTURED:  
Local TV station  
tapes AcenTek CEO,  
Mike Osborne, as  
he speaks at the  
groundbreaking  
ceremony in  
rural Dakota.



PICTURED:  
Posing with golden shovels at  
groundbreaking ceremony in  
rural Dakota, Dale Jansen  
(Central Cable), Ethan Webinger  
(COO, AcenTek) and Chad Zerr  
(CNS).  
Back row: Sott Peterson (CNS),  
Matt Minor and Jason Wieser  
(AcenTek).

While the projects in Iowa are important, we have also been working to bring fiber to more homes in Minnesota. In June we had a groundbreaking event at Southwind Orchards in **DAKOTA**. The short ceremony was attended by 5th District Commissioner, Marcia Ward and Minnesota Broadband Director, Bree Maki. Also in attendance were members from Central Cable (contractor for the project), CNS (engineering team for the project), AcenTek staff and board members, as well as local rescue and township workers. After the groundbreaking ceremony, guests were invited to a nearby worksite to witness the process of boring fiber. This build will bring fiber to 623 homes, businesses and farms in rural Dakota. We estimate the fiber build will be completed to the areas included in the grant we received by the beginning of November.





**BROWNSVILLE:** Cole O'Heron, Combination Technician at AcenTek, hands off donation to Tony Kath of Brownsville Fire and Rescue.



**CALEDONIA:** Mike Tornstrom (left) and Maria Drenckhahn (right) accept donation presented by AcenTek's Marketing Specialist, Sharlene Schobert.



**RUSHFORD:** Steve Quarve, Combination Technician, presents Curt Courrier (left) and Joey Busse (right) with AcenTek donation.



**HOUSTON:** Chris Cox (left) and Anna Frauenkron of Houston Ambulance accept AcenTek's donation presented by Mike Laufenberg, Combination Technician.

## DONATING: To local EMS

Our team made donations to 5 emergency service departments in our Minnesota serving area this fall. Brownsville Fire Rescue, Caledonia Ambulance, Rushford Ambulance, Houston Ambulance and Ostrander First Responders were each given a \$600 donation.

We had the pleasure of stopping by some of the EMS volunteers who had time to visit. While it wouldn't work for all departments, it was our pleasure to get to express our gratitude to those who volunteer in person. During our visits, we learned about how the donation may be used as departments mentioned things like the need for additional mannequins for training, ongoing equipment needs and helmet lighting.

Our Casual Day donations come from our staff who donate in exchange for dressing casually at work. Those funds are matched by our Board of Directors and used to support non-profit organizations in our serving area.

It is incredible how a small act of kindness can create a ripple effect of positivity, and we hope to inspire others to do the same.

## ONLINE SAFETY QUIZ

- ☐ YES ☐ NO 1. Are your passwords strong, unique and never re-used?
- ☐ YES ☐ NO 2. Do you have Two-Factor Authentication (2FA) enabled?
- ☐ YES ☐ NO 3. Do you use biometrics (fingerprint, facial recognition)?
- ☐ YES ☐ NO 4. Do you regularly update your software and devices?
- ☐ YES ☐ NO 5. Do you avoid using public Wi-Fi for sensitive activities?
- ☐ YES ☐ NO 6. Does your home Wi-Fi network have a strong password?
- ☐ YES ☐ NO 7. Do you monitor your banking and other online accounts regularly?
- ☐ YES ☐ NO 8. Do you avoid sharing personal information (address, phone number, travel plans) on social media?
- ☐ YES ☐ NO 9. Do you always log out of accounts when not using them?
- ☐ YES ☐ NO 10. Do you always turn off Bluetooth and location sharing when not needed?

## TAKE THE QUIZ: How safe are you?

If you took the quiz and answered NO to any of the questions, check out the tips below to help you become more safe online.

1. Use a combination of words, numbers, and symbols to create strong passwords. Never reuse your passwords.
2. Add an extra layer of security by using apps like Google Authenticator, Microsoft Authenticator, or Duo Mobile to add protection beyond your password.
3. Enable fingerprint, facial recognition, or other biometric options on your devices. These offer stronger protection.
4. Regularly update your operating system, apps, and firmware to patch known security vulnerabilities.
5. Public Wi-Fi is often unsecured, making it a target for hackers.
6. Set a strong Wi-Fi password and create a guest network for visitors.
7. Keep an eye on your bank and online accounts for any unauthorized transactions or unusual activity. Account alerts can be set up for added monitoring.
8. Sharing personal information (home address, phone number, travel plans) on public platforms can make you an easy target for cybercriminals.
9. Always log out of websites when you're finished, especially on shared devices, to avoid unauthorized access to your account.
10. To reduce potential attacks, disable Bluetooth and location services.



## TEAM BUILDING: Why it matters

Each year, AcenTek closes the office for a team building event. Many businesses find it important to hold team-building events because of the results.

Team building helps to build morale, improves employee engagement, strengthens communication and increases productivity. How can all of that be the result of just one simple event?

Team building events at AcenTek have a very specific recipe: start with food, end with fun. Back in September, 70 workers headed to The Creamery/Nordic Lanes in Rushford for the afternoon. After enjoying the pizza buffet at the Creamery, staff chose between volleyball, corn hole or bowling for their activity. Whether it was catching up on family events or talking strategy for the game, there was little quiet time among the group. A beautiful afternoon allowed for staff to enjoy each other while sitting outside, or enjoying the air while bowling inside.



PICTURED: Matt, Renae, Erik and Lori pose for a group picture while enjoying some fun while bowling.



PICTURED: Cole shows his perfect form, taking the game a bit more serious than some of his co-workers.



PICTURED: Mike and Cohl play bags with a crowd watching and visiting.

While disguised as fun, these events encourage socialization, allowing staff to get to know their coworkers on a more personal level. While this may not seem to be important for the product/service a company offers, it does make a big impact on the day-to-day operations. Being able to collaborate more easily with someone because now you know them a little bit better, is an advantage.

It leads to more efficient work, and more importantly, a positive work environment. This relationship building also helps to build bridges across departments. These events encourage positive morale. An afternoon not doing our regular daily tasks ends up benefiting not only AcenTek, but also our customers. Team building events at AcenTek are also an excellent way to reward our employees for the work they do for us. We appreciate our employees' dedication to a job well done and enjoy sharing an afternoon with them outside the office.



PICTURED: Karl and Mike compete during an intense game of bags.

### OFFICE CLOSED

**NOV. 11**

Veterans Day

**NOV. 28 & 29**

Thanksgiving

**DEC. 24 & 25**

Christmas

**DEC. 31**

(closing at noon)  
New Year's Eve

**JAN. 1**

New Year's Day

### WELCOME TO THE TEAM



**DEANNA LAPHAM**  
Accounting Assistant



**REBECCA LARSON**  
Human Resources Assistant



**JASON HIRSCHUBER**  
Cable Locator



**MELANIE HOLTER**  
Customer Service Representative



You can also upgrade to have greater control and improved security. There are two levels available, ExperienceIQ and ProtectIQ. ExperienceIQ is ideal for families who wish to have more control over the kids' online activities. Having ProtectIQ is like locking the doors to your network. Using Intrusion Protection Settings (IPS) to monitor, ProtectIQ alerts you and blocks any suspicious activity, keeping your devices safe from hackers.



- Block harmful websites.
- Set time limits per application, per day.
- See usage per device.
- Set your laptop as the priority if you work remotely. This ensures that other devices in use in your home do not use the bandwidth that work tasks require.
- FREE to customers who have Optimum or Maximum Velocity, or the Essentials internet package through AcenTek. For other customers, it is \$4.95/month.

If you are interested in upgrading from the free MyHOME app to ExperienceIQ or ProtectIQ simply give AcenTek a call.



- Monitors web traffic and blocks anything suspicious.
- Blocks attempts to (unknowingly) visit harmful websites.
- Alerts you to potential threats and viruses detected.
- Keeps all devices - not just computers and phones protected. This includes devices we often overlook like smart thermostats and video doorbells, which are also gateways for malicious activity.
- FREE to customers who have Optimum Velocity, Maximum Velocity or the Essentials internet package through AcenTek. For other customers, it is \$4.95/month.



## THANKING YOU PUBLICLY:

### For all our friends to see

Thanking our customers is something we love to do. Recently we have been using our social media pages as the tool to accomplish that. We have been shining a spotlight on some area businesses on our Facebook page. We want to thank them for letting us serve them by showcasing their own business and story for all our followers to see. We love sharing the positive impact they have made on the community because of what they do.

A company's Facebook page typically features announcements and news advertising their own products or services. That is typically how we use ours. But our Facebook page has also become the platform we use to help 'shout' our thanks to our customers.

For example, National Beef Day provided the perfect backdrop for thanking the many beef farmers we serve. In our post, we highlighted a beautiful farm in Northeast Iowa and while we were there, we got a photo of two of the best models in their herd. We saw just how much our followers loved this post because they knew (and appreciated!) the farmer, and the profession in general. These

“ This effort allowed us to celebrate the work our customers do. Whether their office is a tractor seat, a kitchen or a semi cab, they are a vital part of our community and we are so grateful to help them with their technology needs. ”

—John Tabbert  
Marketing & Sales Manager

positive posts, featuring local people and professions, draw attention to the assets many of us take for granted in our community. Seeing them on our phones serves as a great reminder of the importance of businesses like these.

Our goal of celebrating our customers on Facebook led us to some wonderful conversations with our customers. It also led us to some beautiful locations to grab a photo or two. World Bicycle Day was our excuse to feature a local bike store, Dairy Month led us to stop by a three-generation farm to hear about the endless work they do (and love!) and National Organic Month led us to an insightful conversation with the owner and president of a company that began over 80 years ago. National Donut Day was the perfect opportunity to call out our favorite local bakery and Truckers

Appreciation Day gave way to featuring those big blue semis we see daily on the roads of our community. While these 'holidays' are great reasons to celebrate our customers, AcenTek is grateful EVERY day for all the businesses who trust us as their provider.

If you don't already, follow along: [Facebook/GoAcenTek](#)





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# INSIDE AcenTek

## NEWSLETTER

*Inviting you inside to learn more*

MN/IA ISSUE  
NOVEMBER 2024

### CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR RETIREMENT!

#### **DALE BAKER** [BUILDING/GROUNDS PERSON]

After 18 years at AcenTek, Dale Baker, our Building/Maintenance Person, retired on September 1st. Known for his laid-back demeanor and consistent good mood, Dale always knew what was needed. He was our solutions guy, was very reliable and always willing to work. He was a tremendous value to our team and while he is missed, we wish him every happiness in his retirement.

*Thank you, Dale, for all you did for our company.*



#### **KEITH VONDEROHE** [PURCHASING COORDINATOR]

On September 27th, Keith Vonderohe had his last day of work at AcenTek. Keith was our Purchasing Coordinator for the past 20 years. He made sure our staff had all the needed supplies to accomplish their tasks. Keith was valued for his ability to keep projects on track, especially during unexpected supply challenges. However impressive his skills, Keith will be most remembered for his personality. With no shortage of laughs to share, Keith could talk to anyone, which is what made working with him so enjoyable. While the halls of AcenTek are very different without Keith, we are so happy for him and wish him all the best in his retirement. Thank you for your many years of service.

*Keith, you were a great value to AcenTek and we appreciate all you contributed.*