



Rural Development • Rural Utilities Service • Telecommunications Program

Everyday Superheroes

Need: In rural North Dakota, high speed Internet isn't a luxury; it's a necessity. Just ask Tracey Koester. Tracey used to commute to Bismarck, ND for work. It was a 56-mile journey one-way, and she did it 5 days-a-week, for 17 years. Tracy and others have used high speed connections to start businesses, take classes, and interact with the world. The economic and personal benefits of these services is immense.

How Rural Development Helped: BEK Communications Cooperative, founded in 1952, is a multi-faceted telecommunications company headquartered in Steele, North Dakota. They provide voice (BEKTEL), data (BEKNET) and video (BEKTV) services to more than 6,000 customers throughout six counties in south-central North Dakota.

One of the reasons BEK has been able to provide such high quality services to its customers at such reasonable rates is their partnership with USDA's Rural Utilities Service (RUS). Since the mid-1990s, when the Rural Utilities Service was created, BEK Communications Cooperative has received over \$70,000,000 in low interest loans and grants from RUS to build and upgrade its state-of-the-art communications network. It's a partnership that thrives to this day, with the Cooperative's most recent award being a \$2 million plus grant via the agency's 2014 Community Connect Grant Program

Results: Needless to say, the process of commuting every day was taking a toll on Tracey Koester's family life. That is, until BEK Communications, built a state-of-the-art, fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) network right outside Tracey's front door. With a brand new broadband connection at her disposal, Tracey was able to quit her job in Bismarck and start her own advertising business, Cow Camp Promotions, which allowed her to work full-time right from the comfort of her very own home. Without high speed Internet, there's no way Tracey could do what she does. There's no way she could be home with her family everyday.

Or take Burdell Johnson. Burdell is a farmer and rancher from Tuttle, ND. The very same BEK Communications fiber-to-the-home network that helped Tracey start her own in-home business, allowed Burdell Johnson to pursue a Masters Degree online, which ultimately helped him establish an insurance agency, Food and Fiber Risk Managers (FFRM), in Tuttle. Without the high speed Internet connection, Mr. Johnson would not have a Masters Degree, and without the degree, his insurance business would likely not be in existence. The technology he used to obtain his degree is the first thing he turns on in the morning and the last thing he turns off at night. Without it, he estimates that the community would be set back 30 years.

If you'd like to learn more about the Everyday Superheroes at BEK, please visit their Youtube page at: <https://www.youtube.com/user/bekcommunications>

Obligation Amount: \$2,136,045 Community Connect Grant

Date of Obligation: 2014

Congressional District: Representative Kevin Cramer, ND 1; Senators John Hoeven and Heidi Heitkamp

Partners: Sweet Briar School and Morton County Water Resource District

Demographics: Oliver County has been identified as experiencing persistent and/or borderline poverty levels for children under the age of 18.

Impact: Economic Opportunity and the ability to work from home, Educational Opportunity such as online learning and continuing education, & Improvements in Healthcare & Public Safety.