

# Kennebec Telephone Company

Rod Bowar and his family have owned and operated Kennebec Telephone Company for more than 22 years. Located in Kennebec, South Dakota – population 250 – Bowar has never encountered an obstacle he couldn't overcome with what he calls a healthy dose of creativity. Almost two decades ago, the town's electrician closed shop after the weight of running a business became too much to handle. Bowar's business was left without a company for their electric repairs, so he convinced the electrician to move back to town and Bowar absorbed the business operations himself. He did the same thing for the local auto repair shop. Bowar is active in recruiting local high schoolers to work for him and often pays for their technical school if they commit to work for him after graduation. He serves on the town board and leads the town's volunteer fire department.



When the coronavirus shook the nation in March 2020, Bowar worked to find creative solutions that would keep his employees safe while allowing them to continue providing high-speed internet to the community.

To accomplish these directives, Bowar applied for and received a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan. The company utilized their PPP dollars to retain all 54 employees, which allowed for flexibility in utilizing their other funds to continue providing high-speed internet access across Kennebec, Presho and the surrounding rural areas. To provide for some employees who were more immunocompromised, Bowar purchased used campers, renovated them, and rented spaces at the local campground. Bowar says providing these individual working camper spaces enabled him to keep his staff healthy and able to work safely.

With his entire staff able to continue working, Kennebec Telephone Company installed internet capabilities in homes of school kids who didn't already have connection. They worked with people who were new to teleworking to increase bandwidth or internet speed, and worked with customers who were struggling to pay their internet bill because of COVID-related financial struggles.

Bowar says the key to overcoming obstacles while running a business is to maintain a positive attitude and focus on the ways you can serve others. "You can complain about circumstances, or you can get to work and figure out how to make the most of it," said Bowar. "The PPP was a success because it helped us keep our people and keep providing our essential services. I'm grateful for that."