

The Connection

Kennebec Telephone Co., Inc.

Photo Courtesy of Tara Eckstain

GOODBYE 2020

Managers Moment

with Veronica Gerard Marketing Manager

Kennebec Telephone Company along with our business divisions want to wish all of our customers a very Happy New Year!!! 2020 has been a year for the books for most all of us. I'm not sure about all of you but I'm ready for 2021. We continue to expand fiber to our customers as we will be 99.9% fiber to the home with all of our customers to start the new year.



We have some exciting news out of our Chamberlain NAPA division! Tim Miller from Kennebec, is working directly with Chamberlain NAPA to delivery parts on a regular routine. Tim is starting his day in Chamberlain and going east and west delivering parts to new and exciting repair shops, farmers and ranchers. So, if you see Tim pulling into your driveway or shop, he's got some great sales fliers, and some on-hand material for any shop needs you may have. He is also set up remotely to look up any parts or material and check in store quantities and availability while out on the road.



If you need anything delivered don't hesitate to call John at Chamberlain NAPA 605-234-6009 or Tim on his cell at 605-877-0996.

HELLO 2021

Bears of Service Recognition

In a "normal" year, part of our holiday company party is the recognition of employees' years of service. Of course as we all know, this has not been a "normal" year by any stretch of the imagination!

Hayden and Carter hit their 5 year mark with Powercom

Jason Urban marks 15 years as the "Computer Guy"!

And Tim Boysen and Rosemary Collins are celebrated for 5 years part time service.

Congratulations to all!



Jason Urban, TCS
receiving his award from Manager Trusty Mertens



Powercom Manager Chaz Bowar presented Five year awards to
Hayden Schelske and Carter Collins



Assistant Manager, Matt Collins presented Five year awards to
Rosemary Collins and Tim Boysen





211 HELPLINE AVAILABLE STATEWIDE, LAUNCHES NEW APP

Struggling to pay rent this month? Want to donate household goods? Not sure where to get tested for Covid-19?

Want to know if you qualify for food assistance programs or where you can volunteer for the holidays? The 211 Helpline Center can help answer all these questions — and more for people by simply dialing 2-1-1. The program that's often considered the "front door" of the social services system is now available to all South Dakotans thanks to the 2020 Legislative Session.

The 211 service is one of three main components of the Helpline Center in Sioux Falls. It also offers suicide prevention and crisis support as well as volunteer connections. The center manages a robust database of more than 5,000 programs and serves as a local and national point-of-contact for disaster response and recovery efforts. In the past, it's assisted with local flooding disasters and the September 2019 tornadic event in Sioux Falls, to name a few, and will work hand-in-hand with law enforcement as needed. Helpline staff are professionally trained to answer questions 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Their job is to listen and connect people to services, eliminating confusion and providing efficiency with detailed information about programs, resources and processes.

A staff member may take a call from someone wondering where to get food assistance followed by someone who has thoughts of suicide.

A 2019 Legislative Task Force saw value in making that kind of service available to the rest of the state. One of its goals was to better use existing systems to provide access to mental health resources. At that time, 34 of the state's 66 counties had access to 211. In March 2020, lawmakers approved and the governor signed Senate Bill 2, which fully-funded the service statewide.

A PANDEMIC STRIKES

Just weeks earlier, state health officials had reported the state's first probable cases of COVID-19 and since that time, Helpline Center Executive Director Janet Kittams says call volume has increased by 94 percent.

Kittams said the first increase in calls was about COVID-19. About six weeks later, they saw the impact of the illness as callers sought help with rent, food or utility assistance. These were people who were new to needing help, she said.

"People are hurting from the pandemic. Many have never been in a position where they've had to ask for help before," Kittams said. "This is an opportunity to make a difference in their lives."

For example, there were 3,880 needs calls for food in all of 2019. Compare that to 13,609 calls for food from January-July 2020.

Between March 10, when state health officials announced the first probable case, through October 31, 211 received 72,596 calls/texts/emails with 78,796 "needs" identified - some had more than one need.

The pandemic provided new challenges but the staff was prepared. Initially, it was "all-hands-on-deck," Kittams said. Some of the center's other programs were temporarily halted and everyone answered calls. Additional full- and part-time staff members were hired, including former employees who became furloughed and returned to the Helpline Center.

They also made slight, yet impactful changes to their conversations and ask callers whether they've experienced additional stress or anxiety due to the pandemic. If they say, "yes," a team member will follow-up with more support.

"We're here for people regardless of their situation. When they call, they'll get a caring person on the other end of the line to talk to," Kittams said.

A recently released 211 Helpline app is also available on the App Store or Google Play. Users can explore categories such as food, employment assistance, healthcare, volunteer/donate as well as contact information for those resources.

From SDN Blog, Amy Bennett Smolik
<https://sdncommunications.com/blog/211-helpline-available-statewide-launches-new-app>

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| Security systems | Key systems |
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