

# BUSINESS connections

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## Strong Women, Strong Progress

*Front row, left to right: Jackie Petersen, Angie Kreider, Kathy Ruoff Middle row, left to right: Deanna Lanter, Julie Bergman, Mikayla Parsons, Lori Kinnear, Tommi-Anne McAfee, Cheryl Moon, Jennifer Hermesch, Suzanne Schuster Back row, left to right: Madelyn Bruning, Jennifer Welch, Kinsey Boller, Carmen Bent, Collete Boeckman, Dawna Wilhelm*



In this special issue of *Business Connections*, we spotlight the women at Rainbow and the resources available for women in our industry

# BUSINESS connections

**Women went from answering phones to analyzing fiber.** Our industry has changed dramatically in the last 100+ years, not just in technology, but also in the role of women. It's been quite a journey — from phone operators called "Hello Girls" during WWI to today's women leading broadband providers and partnering with construction companies and cities on fiber projects. We created this special issue of *Business Connections* to coincide with the March events of Women's History Month and the Rainbow Annual Meeting.

On page 3, you'll discover why **NTCA's Women in Telecom is Empowering and Inspiring**. This program provides opportunities for women to connect, learn, and share to help each other move forward. NTCA CEO Shirley Bloomfield offers career advice and industry observations that you won't want to miss.

Pages 4-7 feature an **Employee Spotlight on the Women at Rainbow**. Of our 43 employees, 17 are women, as are three out of five members of our Executive Management Team. Since telecommunications is a traditionally male-dominated industry, these numbers are significant. We hope you take a few minutes to get to know these incredible women.

How has the role of women changed at your business over the years? What can you do to support the ambitions of young women in our community? Let's work together for progress.

Sincerely,  
The Rainbow Business Development and Customer Relations Team



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**Front row, left to right:**  
Mikayla Parsons; Madelyn Bruning; Angie Kreider, Director; Tommi-Anne McAfee; Suzanne Schuster; Deanna Lanter

**Back row, left to right:**  
Cheryl Moon; Johnny Kane; Jerad Enneking, Manager; Mike Regenstein; Jennifer Hermes

# NTCA's Women in Telecom is Empowering and Inspiring

**An interview with NTCA  
CEO Shirley Bloomfield**

The NTCA Women in Telecom (WIT) program provides opportunities for women in our industry to connect with others, share their obstacles and successes, and learn to take active and upward roles in the workplace. Participants have access to networking and training events, a mentoring program, and the FollowWIT video series and NTCA Women in Telecom Listserv.

To learn more, we talked to Shirley Bloomfield, CEO of NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, of which Rainbow is a proud member.

## **What advice do you have for young women starting out in the telecom industry?**

Doling out advice through a broad medium is kind of like spitting in the wind sometimes, which is one reason I mentor young women through the WIT mentoring program. This enables me to tailor advice to individuals. However, here's what I believe women need to do:

- **Speak up in meetings when you have something to share.** I used to make myself practice finding one thing I could add to any meeting I attended.
- **Find a mentor.** Regardless of gender, find a person you admire and ask them to share some wisdom with you and be willing to have you check in with them. Most people at later points in their career are delighted to give back to those coming up.
- **Look at feedback as a gift.** I know it can be tough to get critical feedback from a supervisor. Get past your initial defensive reaction and open yourself up to ways to grow.

- **Push yourself to network.** So many of my roles have come from people I knew who thought of me when opportunities arose. At the end of the day at a conference, it's tempting to go to your hotel room and kick off your shoes instead of attending that networking event. Push yourself to go and meet at least two people.

## **What positive changes regarding the role of women in telecom stand out for you as you reflect on your many years in the industry?**

I take great heart and encouragement at the progress of women entering the industry and rising into leadership roles. The number of women now CEOs or in the C-suite for NTCA member companies has grown steadily over the past decade, which plays to the adage, "If you see it, you can be it." The increased number of role models in this space has helped young women in rural communities see their community-based broadband providers as an attractive and vibrant career path.

**Find out more at [www.ntca.org/member-services/getin/women-in-telecom](http://www.ntca.org/member-services/getin/women-in-telecom).**

# Women at Rainbow

## Women's History Month is also a time to honor those making a difference today

Telecommunications is a traditionally male-dominated industry. Yet at Rainbow, three out of five members of our Executive Management Team are women and a total of 17 women work here. What better time than March — Women's History Month and the month of the Rainbow Annual Meeting — to shine a spotlight on the women at Rainbow?

Jason Smith, General Manager – CEO, said, "When hiring or promoting our women in leadership, I must admit that I didn't necessarily think of it as a need for diversity. Our middle management staff at Rainbow was already comprised mostly

of women. At the time, it was about promoting the best people to help lead us into the future, which includes expanding to other territories and building fiber networks. Those people are Kathy Ruoff, CFO; Angie Kreider, Director of Business Development; and Jackie Petersen, Director of Marketing. Now I see how filling those seats with women will inspire and inform the women who will follow in their footsteps."

Some of the women in the following pages may be familiar faces, and others may be new to you. We're pleased to share their stories and grateful for what they bring to the table at Rainbow.



### **Kathy Ruoff, Controller/Chief Financial Officer**

- 7 years at Rainbow + 19 years as Rainbow's auditor/consultant
- Lives in Kansas City with her husband
- Loves to spend time with family and friends, travel, and hike in Rocky Mountain National Park

"In 2020, I was especially proud of our Rainbow team because we faced major challenges yet were successful in helping our communities during COVID-19 by delivering much-needed broadband hot spots, transitioning cable TV customers to streaming, expanding a fiber network into Effingham and Lancaster, and beginning a fiber network build-out in Atchison. What teamwork! It's rewarding to know that Rainbow is helping rural America."



### **Angie Kreider, Director of Business Development**

- 17 years at Rainbow
- Lives near Muscotah with her husband, daughter
- Loves antique browsing, auctions and estate sales, being active at Muscotah United Church, and cooking

"I advise young women starting a career in the rural broadband industry to know your audience, study your service area so you know your communities and their needs, and keep your mind open to change and new ideas since knowledge is power. Personally, I'm proud of taking part in the development of employees who go on to advance at Rainbow and become community leaders."



### **Jackie Petersen, Director of Marketing**

- 18 years at Rainbow
- Lives in Everest with her husband
- Loves reading, traveling, and watching the Chiefs

"When I think of proud moments at Rainbow, four come to mind: 1) Merging two companies and doubling our size while expanding into the cable communities. 2) Being nationally recognized when Rainbow communities were awarded NTCA's Smart Rural Community designation. 3) Building out a fiber-optic network in 2010 to our cooperative area, way before Google made fiber cool. 4) Responding quickly to our schools during the pandemic by installing 21 community hotspots for students who needed Internet access."



**Carmen Bent, Operations Support Specialist**

- 15 years at Rainbow
- Lives in Hiawatha with her husband
- Loves to bake, spend time with her family, and work at Rainbow

“One accomplishment I’m particularly proud of occurred in 2016 when I created files, reports, and provisioning files for a smooth transition in transferring all of Rainbow’s ILEC territory from the C7 to GPON Fiber in the CMS. In 2022, I enjoyed being able to configure Elations diagrams and the SDP so it would provision all aspects for the new SMX.” (Don’t worry if you don’t know what all those acronyms mean. She does!)



**Cheryl Moon, Customer Relations Specialist**

- 1 year at Rainbow
- Lives in Effingham with her husband
- Loves to quilt and create original quilt designs as well as spend time with her husband and family

“The most rewarding part of my job is helping customers get fast and reliable Internet with excellent customer service. I also enjoy talking to customers over the phone to troubleshoot and resolve any issues. Plus, if other women at Rainbow need assistance, I’m just a voice or video call away!”



**Collete Boeckman, Billing Specialist in Accounting**

- 25 years at Rainbow
- Lives north of Holton with her husband
- Loves being outdoors, spending time with grandkids, and watching sports

“In the billing department, you must be detail-oriented, so our customers receive the correct information on their invoices. I find it rewarding to know our billing is performed correctly. In my 25 years at Rainbow, I’ve seen a lot of changes, and I’m always available to answer questions from our Customer Relations Team.”



**Dawna Wilhelm, Purchasing Coordinator**

- 17 years at Rainbow
- Lives outside of Everest
- Loves crafting, gardening, spending time with family and friends, and riding side-by-sides

“The broadband industry is constantly evolving. During my time at Rainbow, I’m most proud of building out fiber-to-the-home in our cooperative area in 2010. The most challenging period for me as Purchasing Coordinator is now, due to supply chain issues. As Rainbow expands our fiber network, it’s been hard to keep ahead of the materials needed.”



**Deanna Lanter, Lead Customer Relations Specialist**

- 12 years at Rainbow
- Lives in rural Huron with her husband
- Loves training and showing horses, spending time with family, working on the farm, and traveling

“I appreciate that everyone at Rainbow shares the same goal of wanting to supply our customers with quality Internet and customer service. When the Business Solutions position became available, a co-worker encouraged me to get out of my comfort zone and apply. I’m glad I did because I really enjoy my job!”



**Jennifer Hermesch, Customer Relations Specialist**

- 17 years at Rainbow
- Lives on a farm in rural Nemaha County with her husband
- Loves spending time with her husband and family, shopping, and traveling (including to casinos)

"When our school burned down, Rainbow stepped up to make sure services were in all the satellite classroom locations. Rainbow did all the wiring and installing for free, so the kids had what they needed. This was the moment that my pride in working for Rainbow was deeply embedded."



**Jennifer Welch, Accountant**

- 18 years at Rainbow
- Lives in Everest with her husband and daughter
- Loves camping, Ranger riding, hanging out at the lake, and game nights with friends

"This job requires me to be reliable, trustworthy, detail-oriented, organized, and prepared for change. My first manager at Rainbow, Beverly Ensminger, made the most impact on me. Not only did she give me the job, but she was always there to guide me through the many changes that came with working in this industry."



**Julie Bergman, Senior Business Development Specialist**

- 12 years at Rainbow
- Lives in Seneca with her husband and three children
- Loves to play golf, craft, and watch her children's activities

"I'm lucky to be surrounded by women that empower and encourage me daily. Angie Kreider and Jennifer Hermesch push me to be the best version of myself at work and at home. They encouraged me when I moved from customer service to business sales to community relations, and then into my newest role, Senior Business Development Specialist."



**Kinsey Boller, Marketing Specialist**

- 2 years at Rainbow
- Lives in Atchison with her boyfriend
- Loves to attend community events, go to the gym, plan events for family, and relax with Netflix

"I'm very passionate about the communities in Rainbow's service area and want to help them thrive. As a local Internet provider in a fast-moving industry, we're a resource to our customers. I try to be personable and do whatever I can to promote local businesses."



**Lori Kinnear, Human Resource Manager**

- 16 years at Rainbow
- Lives in Horton with her husband
- Love spending time with family and friends, watching Netflix, camping, and traveling

"When I began my career, Vicky Ptoymy and Dawna Wilhelm helped me so much. I was nervous but they assured me that I could learn the industry. I'll never forget what they would tell me, 'If you aren't making any mistakes, then you're probably not working.' That has always stuck with me."



**Madelyn Bruning, Customer Relations Specialist**

- 1 year at Rainbow
- Lives in Everest with her fiancé and his daughter
- Loves shopping, going to the nail salon, and taking trips with her family

"When I started at Rainbow, Lori Kinnear made a huge impact on me. I was scared to explore this opportunity since I knew nothing about the broadband industry. Lori assured me I was more than intelligent enough to learn the job and that I would excel at it. I want to thank her for believing in me."



**Mikayla Parsons, Customer Relations Specialist**

- 2 years at Rainbow
- Lives in Atchison with her husband and daughter
- Loves being a mom, spending time outdoors, fishing, and grilling

"It's an honor to be a part of the Atchison build and get to work with our new customers there. I've been able to share information on fiber Internet and provide them with a great service in a previously underserved area. These customers are so appreciative of having access to broadband."



**Suzanne Schuster, Customer Relations Support**

- 13 years at Rainbow
- Lives in Northeast Kansas with her husband

"I would give the same advice to both women and men interested in a rural broadband career — work hard and keep furthering your education. To be successful in this industry requires flexibility, dedication, and caring about the customer experience. It's rewarding to help customers get the fast Internet they need to run their business or home, such as when Rainbow expanded into Atchison."



**Tommi-Anne McAfee, Customer Relations Specialist**

- 1 year at Rainbow
- Lives in Horton
- Enjoys spending time with her dog and relaxing with friends and family

"I've learned a lot since coming to work at Rainbow, including what's involved in the rural broadband industry and what we can do to provide an excellent customer experience. My co-workers are always willing to help me and answer questions through phone calls or chats."

**Beverly Ensminger Retires After 27 Years at Rainbow**

Before retiring in November 2022, Beverly Ensminger spent nearly three decades as Rainbow's Human Resources Manager. She's witnessed many changes during her tenure.

"When I started at Rainbow in 1995, the technology was simple — dial tone phone service. Through the years, all employees had to embrace the fast pace of changes to technology and learn how that technology functions. Government regulation also keeps changing and is a complex part of our industry, so more Rainbow departments are now involved in it," Ensminger said.

What advice would she give young women pursuing a career in the rural broadband industry? Ensminger replied, "Learn as much as you can, even if the topic is outside your primary position. It's important to understand how the entire industry works, including its regulations."

Ensminger lives in Atchison with her partner Aldi, dog Greta Garbo, and cat Humphrey Bogart (Bogie). She has six children and 11 grandchildren. Retirement has given Ensminger more time to enjoy her passions — including camping, quilting, and photography.





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