



*Rod Kusser*

## Congratulations and *Enjoy Your Retirement!*

In his 27 years with Venture Communications Cooperative, Rod Kusser never let the customer stray far from his mind. "He is there for the customers every step," says Fay Jandreau, assistant general manager at Venture in Highmore. "He's highly committed to delivering services and making sure every customer feels appreciated and valued by Venture."

Kusser began his career with Venture on Feb. 6, 1995, when he became a member services representative. Two years later, he was promoted to his current position of member services manager. On Nov. 30, he will retire, leaving behind a strong legacy of the importance of customer service. "There was never a change to service or process where Rod was not thinking about the impact to the customer-owners," says Jandreau. "He is just so passionate about what he does here." Kris Rittel has worked as a member services representative under Kusser for the past 15 years. She got a front row seat to her boss's commitment to Venture customers. "The customer was always first," she says. "He took that very seriously."

During his time with Venture, Kusser's focus on the customer also meant a focus on future customers. In 2019, he helped lead the effort alongside the state of South Dakota to provide broadband services to underserved communities, including Hughes, Hand and Beadle counties. His desire to ensure that all had access to broadband services speaks volumes to his commitment to the work, his colleagues say. "Every day he shows up and he's going to root out any issue and any problem, he finds them and fixes them," says Jandreau.

Known for keeping a cow bell in his office and carrying a yard stick around the office, Kusser had energy to burn when it came to his work. "He would tap his pen during meetings, and I would look at him until he stopped," Rittel says with a chuckle. "He was also known for talking with his hands," says Mary Knox, Venture digital marketing specialist. "I'm not sure he can explain anything without using his hands to get his ideas across."

His retirement is a loss for Venture, but Jandreau says Kusser's legacy of customer care will continue. He set the bar high. "I think Rod was on a constant quest for the perfect balance of serving Venture and serving our customers' needs," Jandreau says. "That commitment from Venture will stay the same thanks to Rod's example." We hope Rod is blessed with many wonderful experiences and wish him a long and happy retirement!



*Janice Volek*

On March 14, 1983, Janice Volek joined Venture Communications Cooperative (then known as Sully Buttes Telephone) as a secretary. In the years since, her job and duties have grown and changed, and she's become indispensable to the business. On Nov. 30, after 39 years with the company, she retired. "Janice came to work at Sully Buttes Telephone a year after I first got onto the board," says Harry Thomas, former member of the Venture Communications Cooperative Board of Directors. "She came to work to be the CEO's executive secretary, but she's never let that job description hold her back, and over the years they kept expanding her job."

In August 1997, her title was changed to administrative assistant. "She's a very detailed person. Things don't get by her very often," Thomas says. "Everybody likes to have Janice organize things for them because she does it right." Thomas fondly remembers Volek's help to him over the years, especially when he served as the president of the NTCA, the National Rural Broadband Association. "Janice did so many things to help me get re-elected to the national board," he said "I so appreciated it. I gave a lot of nice speeches along the way that Janice wrote." Fay Jandreau, assistant general manager at Venture, shared side-by-side offices with Volek and always knew she would be at her desk early each day. Her attention to detail and her commitment to Venture impressed him, and he will miss her early morning greetings. "It was always a nice way to start the day," he says.

In addition to her attention to detail and commitment to Venture, Volek also gained a reputation for her compassion for her colleagues. "When I started 26 plus years ago, Janice made me feel very welcome and helped me feel a part of the team," says Janelle Jessen, controller for Venture. "She was always a great resource and gave advice on how to handle different situations." That same compassion extended to the members of the Venture board. "Janice has a heart for people and it shows in everything she does," says John Langer, president of the Venture board. "When my father died unexpectedly a few years ago, Janice and Randy Houdek (general manager) came to Gettysburg right after hearing of my father's passing. "When Janice heard my wife was struggling with her health, she called to check up on her several times to see how she was doing and sent prayers our way," he says. Langer says he deeply appreciated her compassion over the years and will miss her contribution to making Venture a great company. "Janice is a people-person, and we will all miss her."

Everyone at Venture will miss Janice's commitment to her work, her kindness and her attention to detail in everything she did. Her colleagues wish her all the best as she enjoys her retirement.

**NOTE that our office will be closed on:**  
Monday, December 26th, and Monday, January 2nd

# HAPPY *New* YEAR!

KEEPING YOU...



# In Touch

December 2022 ■ Volume 46 ■ Number 509

### Farewell from General Manager:



*Randy Houdek*

I have had the tremendous privilege of being a Sully Buttes Telephone/Venture Communications employee for over 36 years, serving as GM/CEO for the last 25 years. Venture Communications has witnessed tremendous change while I was here, from so many acquisitions and expansions into unserved areas while ensuring that service to our members never suffered.

One of the transitions that has been very rewarding is the completion of the fiber to the home project. This project, like many others was a team effort. From the management team planning and overseeing the build, our technical teams figuring out how this would work and not disrupts existing services, to the folks in the office that managed scheduling, billing, records, and explaining the new process to many customers. This fiber network will allow Venture to offer new and enhanced services for decades to come.

My official retirement date was November 30th. The board has selected Fay Jandreau to serve as the next General Manager. Fay is currently our Assistant GM and has a long and distinguished career in rural telecommunications. I've known Fay for many years and he is well liked and respected in our industry. The board made a great decision in picking Fay and I'm sure he will do a great job for the members of Venture. Please accept my thanks as I step away from this role and into another phase of my life. I've met so many of the members in your place of work or at annual meetings. I want to thank you for all of the words of support and encouragement, and at times, concerns. They were all taken to heart and appreciated.

I have really enjoyed my years at Venture. I have had the pleasure of working for and with the best board of directors imaginable. They have been supportive, attentive, intelligent, and trusting. And always making decisions based on what is best for the members and the cooperative. And the employees, what can I say? Venture has, and has had, some of the brightest minds in our industry. They work hard, are innovative thinkers, and keep the members interests first. It has been an honor to work with such a great group of people and it's a gift to call them my friends. I suppose when you work in any industry this long you are bound to make friends around the state and throughout the country. I've made some lifelong close friends and I hope to stay in touch with them. And while other dear friends have passed, we still have some terrific memories and stories to tell.

What are my plans? I'm not really sure. If there is a way to stay connected in the industry, in a different capacity, I would enjoy that. Most importantly, I hope to spend more time with my wife, Deb, and our kids and grandkids. Other than that, I enjoy hunting and golfing. I plan to learn how to fish (With the help of my kids and friends). Deb and I will also do some traveling. Thanks again for all of the well wishes, as I've said many times, "I'm the luckiest guy I know."

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communications

Venture Communications is an  
equal opportunity provider and employer.

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PROVIDER

### Coloring Contest Winners!

2nd-3rd grade



*Anisah*

K-1st grade



*Cooper*

Preschool 3-4



*Julia*

Toddler 1-2



*Kinslee*

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### Wortman Retires!

Venture Communications was fortunate to hire Derick Wortman on August 26, 1996, as it began a 26-year working relationship that benefited not only our company, but the community as well.

Derick began in the construction department, burying cable mainly in the northeast exchanges of Britton, Langford, Pierpont, Roslyn, Rosholt, and Sisseton. Craig Fausett, Derick's first boss, said, "Derick was always willing to do more and eager to try something new." Derick was promoted to IR (Installer Repairman) Tech in 2011. As the industry's technology changed, Derick took part in a variety of projects, transitioning from Seiscor to AFC Fiber to the Node and from AFC to Fiber to the Home, as well as completing Paradyne DSL cutovers, Next Level to IPTV video upgrades, BEC modem change-outs, pedestal removals, and ONT grounding.

Service Manager Clint Buchholz, noted, "He was one of the great public relations guys we've had for Venture and made a lasting impression on many. Even today, customers from those areas remember Derick and call him by name." Customers and coworkers alike enjoyed Derick's huge personality, ability to easily strike up a conversation, and famous one-liners like, "I'm busier than a one-eyed cat watching two mouse holes."

During the 2022 construction season, Derick became Plant Inspector, keeping the crews moving correctly on the Spink/Beadle Fiber to the Home project. Clint said, "The crews couldn't say enough nice things about having Derick there with his knowledge and drive to get it done. That's a great testament to Derick's ability and years of experience." Assistant General Manager Fay Jandreau also admired Derick's rapport with customers. He said, "Derick was a great ambassador for Venture. I suspect he ate more warm cookies, and carried more groceries for customers than any of us."

In addition to having a strong work ethic, Derick is a good guy with a kind spirit. Fay recalled, "I remember a night rodeo in Ft. Pierre where my 4-year-old daughter went to play with friends and got lost. With great panic, we sent out a search party of friends, and Derick quickly volunteered. After about 20 minutes Derick came driving up in a golf cart with my daughter sheepishly tucked under his arm. Her tears were as big as his smile. Derick had found our baby girl! Our great relief then shifted to the stern question, 'Where have you been?' She replied, 'I don't want to talk about it. Derick, let's go.' And like a favorite uncle, he sped off to get her a treat and give us a chance to gather our composure. As Derick often does, he gave us all what we needed right when we needed it."

Clint wrapped things up with this, "Thank you, Derick, for all your years of service to Venture Communications. It's truly been a pleasure to know you. Good luck in retirement and happy trails."

## Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



Fay



Marilyn



Shauna



Kassie



Suzanne



Ryan



Joe



Katy



Lyle



Tyler



Karla



Jennifer



Kris



Ryan



Amy



Brad



Clint



Dustin



Chad



Curt



Diane



Dixie



Don



Mary



Trevor



Nikki



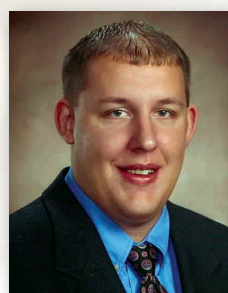
Glen



Janelle



Scott



Josh



Ed



Karla



Brian



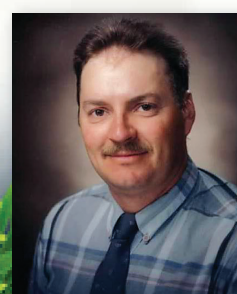
Tyler



Miranda



Jennifer



Mike



Christen

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