

Jenny Russell – JenRus Freelance

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

World Wide Web. Of course, that's the term which we see on the Internet. It reminds us that Internet technology operates far beyond our borders. Today we'll meet an Internet marketing company which is using the tools of technology to transcend the traditional limitations of distance in rural America. Special thanks to Nex-Tech and writer Steve Herrs whose article in Connections provided content for this story. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Jenny Russell is the owner and founder of JenRus Freelance, a marketing company which does both traditional and Internet marketing. Last week we learned about her associate Luke Mahin, who also serves as economic development director for Republic County. Jenny and Luke are officed in the rural community of Courtland.

Jenny grew up nearby in the rural community of Glen Elder, population 428 people. Now, that's rural. She went to Bethany College and earned a degree in Business – Communications and Marketing.

"My dad farmed and my mom teaches school," Jenny said. "My mom always asked, 'Wouldn't you love to move back?' I said, 'Sure, but what would I do if I moved back?'"

Then she had an opportunity to work for Brush Art Corporation, an advertising agency based in Downs, so she did have a reason to move back to the region.

Jenny met and married Jay Russell. Then Jenny and Jay moved to his hometown of Courtland when he took a job there. Jenny did marketing work for Brush Art for nearly five years.

In 2008, Jenny gave birth to their first child so she was seeking more flexible hours. She created a freelance business, JenRus Freelance, through which she continued to do Internet marketing for Brush Art. She started working from her home, but as the business grew, she opened an office in Courtland where Luke Mahin joined her.

By the way, JenRus is pronounced like gen'rous but comes from the first syllable of her first and last name: Jen-Rus.

JenRus Freelance provides a host of marketing and web consulting services for clients in Kansas, the United States, and internationally. The JenRus staff have specialties in construction equipment marketing, recreational vehicle marketing, small town and rural life marketing, economic development, non-profit agency marketing, and more.

A key to the success of her business has been having access to high-speed Internet. Courtland is served by Nex-Tech, a subsidiary of Rural Telephone in northwest Kansas. Nex-Tech offers high capacity fiber optic cable to homes and businesses in Courtland, under a program called Fiber to the Premise. This large bandwidth enables JenRus Freelance to serve its customers effectively.

Her clients are just a touch of a button away anyway. They don't care whether she is in Courtland or in Kalamazoo, as long as they get the high quality products and service which they are seeking. "Having high-speed Internet out here in a rural area, you can do that kind of stuff, and that's important to how the business runs," Jenny said.

One of the challenges facing rural Kansas has been the “distance penalty,” where rural places have a disadvantage of being far away from certain amenities. High speed telecommunications can help overcome that disadvantage.

Jenny Russell sees increasing amounts of telecommuting, which is important so that people can live in rural areas but continue to connect with customers and companies online. "I'm seeing a big trend toward that, and that's going to be really important to our rural areas because we have that high-speed Internet technology out here," Jenny said. "If you can telecommute, you can work from anywhere," she said. "Why not work from here?" she asked.

Jenny Russell is convinced that sophisticated telecommunications and high-speed Internet provide a strategic advantage for rural communities seeking to attract younger workers and families. Her family is certainly an example.

For more information on her business, go to www.JenRusfreelance.com.

World Wide Web. Yes, that refers to the Internet, but it also reminds us that Internet communications can go far beyond our borders. We commend Jenny Russell and Luke Mahin of JenRus Freelance for making a difference with technological entrepreneurship. Thanks to high-tech communications, the message of rural Kansas can reach world-wide.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.