

Trent Boaldin - EpicTouch

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

The touch of a button. In modern times, it is possible for the touch of a button on a computer keyboard or other electronic device to connect us to anywhere, if we have quality Internet access. Today we'll learn about an innovative broadband company which is making such high quality Internet access available through fiber optic service to one hundred percent of their community. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Last week we learned about Laura and Ronn Martin who recently moved to the Morton County town of Elkhart. Ronn has an information technology job so he was able to work from anywhere with good Internet access. He found such access in his former hometown of Elkhart. The company which is providing this service is EpicTouch.

Trent Boaldin is CEO of EpicTouch, which began as the Elkhart Telephone Company in 1956. Trent's grandfather, Curtis Whitecotton, started the Elkhart Telephone Company after 20 years with Southwestern Bell. At the time, the entire phone company had thirty listings. (I think I have more than that on my cell phone speed dial today.)

The company expanded over time and bought the local cable television business. Trent's father, Bob Boaldin, married Curtis's daughter and joined the company. They had Trent who grew up in the business. "I would come down after school and clean phones," Trent said.

He earned a degree in electronic engineering technology and later a law degree before returning to the company fulltime in 2015. Meanwhile, the company had gone through many changes. It was one of the first to offer Internet service in the region. In 1984, the company installed the longest unrepeat stretch of fiber optic cable in the country at that time.

The company also underwent a name change. It was renamed EpicTouch, which retained the initial E from Elkhart. The company slogan is Bringing Neighbors Together.

Today, EpicTouch is a leading provider of voice, video and data service. The company has grown and changed so much that it recently dropped the cable service and is providing such service through broadband.

"We are bringing state-of-the-art broadband connections to rural Kansas," Trent said. EpicTouch also took the innovative step of hiring an economic development specialist for the company.

Becki Richardson is economic development director for EpicTouch. She grew up at the nearby rural community of Rolla, population 442. Now, that's rural.

Becki works closely with Morton County economic director Vienna Lee. "We partner together all the time," Becki said. "Her role is vital and very helpful to me," Becki said.

Becki proudly notes that EpicTouch has provided one hundred percent fiber optics to homes and businesses in Elkhart since 2003. This means that

high quality fiber optic connections are available to every household and business in the community and beyond. Such connections were vital when Laura and Ronn Martin were considering moving back to Kansas from Texas.

As mentioned, Ronn was working in the IT field. He was connected with his work team virtually so he could work from anywhere, as long as he had top quality Internet service. EpicTouch in Elkhart provided such service.

The Rural Opportunity Zone program, which among other things provides a tax credit for those who relocate from out-of-state to rural Kansas, also entered into the consideration. "That was important because we were moving from Texas, a state which has no income tax," Ronn Martin said. With this incentive and the high quality Internet access offered by EpicTouch, the Martins moved from the Dallas-Fort Worth area to Elkhart in 2018.

In a time of rapidly occurring technological changes, the company remains committed to bringing neighbors together. "We're building broadband into other networks," Trent Boaldin said. "We're into providing exceptional customer service," he said.

For more information, see www.epictouch.com.

The touch of a button. With today's technology, a touch of a button on a keyboard or cell phone can connect us with people virtually anywhere. We commend Trent Boaldin, Becki Richardson, and all those involved with EpicTouch for making a difference by enhancing the tools of technology in rural Kansas. Their commitment to their community can't be touched, and I think it is epic.

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