

Small firm has big ambitions

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Rockland-based company thriving

By Emily Jones Features Editor

ROCKLAND — On a small residential street in Rockland, two horses idly munch on grass, a scene common in many small Southeast Idaho towns.

In the small building across the street, however, it's anything but slow, small town living.

Inside, a complicated mass of wires and computers keeps residents of rural southern Idaho connected with the latest technology.

Direct Connections, a small communications company based in the city of 316 residents, also provides telephone service to more than 7,000 customers in Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Utah. As the company has expanded, it has also delved into the realm of cable television, high-speed Internet and 24-hour customer service based in Rockland.

It might seem like a big task for a small community, but company president Leonard May says small communities are his specialty.

His family got into the communication business in 1954, with only 300 subscribers and a telephone switchboard in a corner of their home.

Today, Direct Communications is still family-owned, and it remains right in Rockland, where May grew up.



Journal photo by Bill Schaefer Rodney Pugh, of American Falls, works in the call center Thursday morning at Direct Communications in Rockland.

Over the years, the company has expanded with new technology and business opportunities, but their work remains geared toward the rural areas. Direct Connections serves areas that have been neglected because they aren't cost-effective for the larger companies to pursue, May says.

They also provide services that only a small, local company could provide, like a recent project where May's cable company worked with Aberdeen High School students to broadcast the school's district football game on a local cable television station.

And, they've taken on the goal of connecting rural southern Idaho to the world. It takes heavy equipment and plenty of manpower, sometimes climbing mountains, but May and his employees say they've created a service that can provide a way for even the most remote families to become connected to the Web.

"No matter how remote you are, we have a connection to fit your needs," says Jeremy Smith, who manages Internet services.

With their Internet options, including satellite, cable modem, wireless and DSL, Direct Connections is helping communities meet the demand of a new, technologically-enhanced world, marketing director Brigham Griffin says.

With high-speed Internet, people can work from home, and communicate with the world in just a few fingerstrokes.

"The old model of having to go into the office to do work is gone," Griffin says.

And, with towns such as Preston seeing an influx of new residents commuting to jobs in larger cities, it's a technology that could be handy in the future.

And, as Direct Communications expands, it's continuing to be a strong part of Rockland's economy. Forty five employees work in the Rockland office, and there are more in the company's other locations.

It's bringing new faces to town as well. Griffin moved to Rockland in the fall to become the company's marketing director. Originally from South Africa, Griffin earned his MBA at University of Utah before beginning his job at Direct Communications.

He says he was surprised to see a sophisticated telecommunications system in a community of 300, but he's glad to be a part of it. He plans to stay.

"You get the best of both worlds," he says. "You get an interesting job, and you get to live here in the mountains."