

CONNECTIONS

PUBLISHED BY POLAR COMMUNICATIONS AND ITS SUBSIDIARIES

Winter 2020

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BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

THROUGH THE USDA RECONNECT PROGRAM, POLAR WILL DEPLOY BROADBAND TO 1,500 RURAL LOCATIONS—INCLUDING SCOTT’S SPORTING GOODS

Scott’s Sporting Goods in rural Grafton, North Dakota is an unassuming white building at the dead-end of a gravel road. If you don’t know what you’re looking for, you just might miss it; but the moment you step inside, you’ll know you’re in the right place.

Inside, you will find a veritable treasure trove of firearms and accessories. Hundreds of guns—many of them rare and difficult to find—line every inch of the tiny building’s walls, while more hang from the ceiling.

Scott and Lori Monson operate Scott’s Sporting Goods from their 1,600-acre farm. And while their business has amassed a loyal following over the past 15 years, one thing has held Scott’s Sporting Goods back: slow, unreliable Internet.

“We’re running two businesses simultaneously, both the farm and the sporting goods store, and we rely on the Internet heavily,” Scott said. “Right now we’re just using our cell phones for hotspots, which are very slow and oftentimes inadequate.”

Due to their rural location, the Monson’s have been left behind by the fiber revolution—until now.

Bridging the Digital Divide

Scott’s Sporting Goods is just one of 1,500 locations that will receive fiber from Polar through the USDA ReConnect program. The program, which offers federal financing and funding options in the form of loans, grants, and loan/grant combinations, will facilitate broadband deployment to as many rural premises as possible, including homes, healthcare facilities, farms, and businesses.

This year, Polar was awarded a 21.5 million dollar grant/loan combination to serve rural Walsh and Grand Forks counties in eastern



North Dakota. The program will allow Polar to expand on its Fiber to the Home project, which delivered fiber to residences within the company's independent local exchange carrier (ILEC) area and was completed in 2016.

"Being that we were done in our ILEC area, we looked at opportunities to expand and build out to these underserved areas," said Polar CEO Karl Blake. "We have employees who live in these areas. We drive through them every day. We had people on one side of the road that were customers of Polar and were getting high-speed fiber, and people on the opposite side of the gravel road that did not have any service. So we wanted to be able to come and serve those areas."

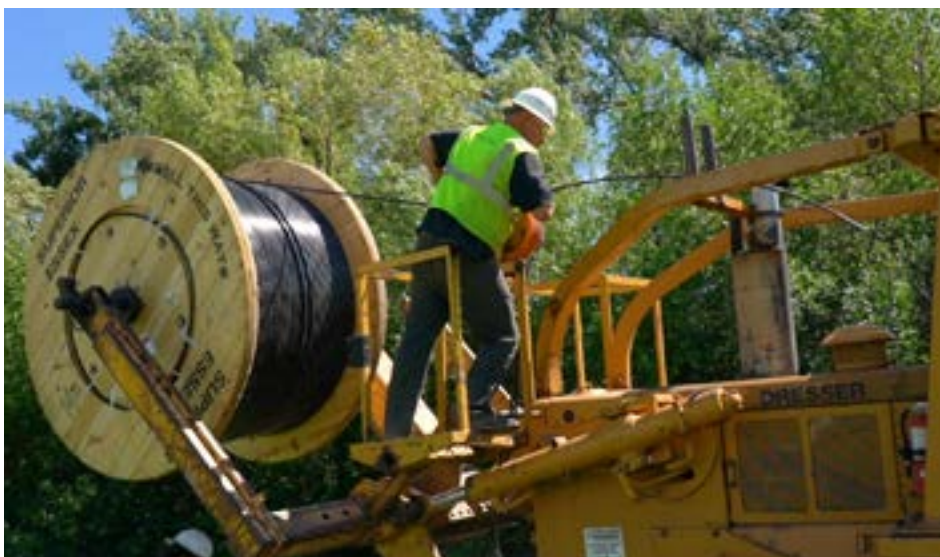
When Polar was awarded this grant/loan combination through the ReConnect program, Karl immediately identified Scott's Sporting Goods as a potential recipient. While doing business personally with Scott, Karl learned of the dismal Internet quality he was working with—but because the Monson farm was outside of Polar's service area, there was nothing he could do at the time.

"Scott and Lori are trying to run a small business on a mobile hotspot, and it's just not feasible in this day and age," Karl said. "Now we can provide broadband to Scott and all the other locations in these areas that desperately need broadband service to run their businesses."

The ReConnect program allows recipients five years to deploy broadband to previously underserved areas, but Polar plans to

have their build out completed in just two. Construction began in May, making Polar the first ReConnect grant winner in America to begin construction.

To Karl, this project and the speed at which they plan to complete it reflects Polar's commitment to bridging the digital divide in North Dakota.



"If you look at rural North Dakota as a whole, 98 percent of it is covered by the independent local exchange carriers. It's that other 2 percent that we're trying to reach," Karl said. "My goal is that North Dakota would be the first state in the nation to have 100 percent fiber connectivity for residents, and we're well on our way to doing that."

Broadband is Just the Beginning

From running background checks to processing credit card transactions, high-speed Internet is essential for a business like Scott's Sporting Goods. Without it, Scott feels as though he is unable to provide his customers the service that they deserve.

"Due to our current Internet, our credit cards and our background checks take a lot longer and it's not the fast, tidy service that we need to provide for our customers," Scott said. "We're falling behind."

While it will be a few months before Scott's Sporting Goods can see the benefits of broadband first-hand, Scott is already looking toward the future. And it's not just the sporting goods store that will benefit from broadband; as a farmer, Scott will be able to access real-time weather updates and monitor the conditions in his grain bins—technology that is unthinkable with his current Internet.

"This broadband from Polar is going to greatly change both of our businesses," Scott said. "They're a great company to work with. They've always answered my questions clearly and quickly. We're excited to work with Polar and I think broadband is just the beginning."

Polar is proud to support businesses like Scott's Sporting Goods through the USDA ReConnect program. Contact us today to find out how Polar can empower your business!

EMPLOYEES RECOGNIZED FOR YEARS OF SERVICE

Three employees and one director are being recognized for their milestone years of service this year. We would like to congratulate all of them and thank them for their loyal and dedicated service to Polar Communications and the telecommunications industry.



Roger Hahn
40 years



Jon Russell
15 years



Carol LaHaise
15 years



Chris Nelson
5 years

FIBER PROJECT UPDATE

Polar's fiber project construction season is winding down due to frost and cold conditions. Over 500 miles of fiber has been buried, which leaves approximately 90 miles to finish when conditions allow in the spring. We have been completing customer installations in the city of Northwood and will begin installations in Walsh County in early December. Installation crews will continue to work through the winter to transition customers to our services.

Stay up to date with our fiber projects on our website at www.polarcomm.com/fiberprojects. If you have questions regarding your services within our fiber projects, please contact us at 701-284-7221 or customerservice@polartel.com. We look forward to serving you!



POLAR WELCOMES KELLI SCHATZ



Kelli Schatz joined Polar's Managed Services / Extreme IT department on November 2, 2020. Her duties include internal troubleshooting and support and assisting and supporting Polar's business Extreme IT Managed Services customers.

Kelli is a Park River, ND native and graduated from Mayville State University in 2003 with a Bachelor of Science, obtaining majors in both Business Administration and Computer Information Systems. She brings 13 years of information technology experience from her most recent role on the Product and Enhancement Teams at CoreLink Administrative Solutions.

Outside of work, Kelli is an active volunteer in the community, at her church, with the local hockey boosters, snowmobile club, and 4H. She is an expert baker, which has been enjoyed by many.

Welcome Kelli!

POLAR EMPLOYEES DONATE \$2300 TO CAVALIER FIRE DEPARTMENT



Since 2008 Polar employees have donated over \$27,000 to local groups, organizations and charities through their Casual Clothes for Charity Program. Every Friday participating employees pay \$1 to wear jeans to work for the day. At the end of the year, participating employees submit a charity of their choice for the funds to be given to. One charity is randomly drawn and this year's recipient is the Cavalier Fire Department, nominated by Joan Swartz. They will receive \$2,300, the total funds collected this year. Pictured above is Cavalier Fire Department Chief Shane Werner and Polar employee Joan Swartz.

Other charities submitted for the drawing included: Pregnancy Help Center, Park River Fire Department, Fordville Fire Department, Walsh County Backpack Program, Lakota Fire Department, Polar Toy Drive, Angel of Hope Memorial Park, Walsh County Food Pantry (3), Edinburg Fire Department and Lil' Spuds Daycare.

Polar employees are happy to have this opportunity to give back to the communities in which they live and work!



SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES



In support of continuing education for rural youth, Polar Communications and its subsidiaries are pleased to offer high school and college students the opportunity to apply for the following scholarships:

Polar's John G. Walters Scholarship:

Ten \$1,000 scholarships will be issued to graduating high school seniors from our service area who plan to continue their education at an accredited 2-year or 4-year college/university or vocational-technical school. Parents or guardians must be Polar customers of voice or broadband Internet service.

Polar's Leadership Scholarship:

Polar Communications offers the Polar Leadership Scholarship. This \$2,500 scholarship will be awarded to a student who is involved in their school, serves their community, achieves leadership roles in activities, functions or organizations, and strives to reach their highest potential. Other considerations include any work/internship experience outside of school. Two scholarships will be awarded. Applicants must be a senior in high school or freshman or sophomore in college and their parents or guardians must be Polar customers of voice or broadband Internet service.

Foundation for Rural Services (FRS)

Scholarship: FRS, along with NTCA - The Rural Broadband Association, promote, educate and advocate to the public rural telecommunications issues. Polar is proud to be a member of NTCA and supports FRS in this worthy endeavor. If a graduating high school senior from our service area is selected for one of the FRS national scholarships (\$2,000 each), Polar will contribute an additional \$500, bringing the FRS award to \$2,500. Parents or guardians must be Polar customers of voice or broadband Internet service.

Application deadline for all scholarships is March 5, 2021.

Youth Tour: The Foundation for Rural Service (FRS) annual Youth Tour is one of the most visible examples of the foundation's involvement with, and commitment to, rural youth. This year's Youth Tour will be held June 5-9, 2021. Each year, in collaboration with NTCA member companies, FRS brings rural students from across the United States to Washington, D.C., for a four-day tour of some of the most historical sites in the nation. While there, students also learn about the telecommunications industry, as well as the regulatory and legislative processes. Educational sessions on these topics are greatly enhanced by site visits to the U.S. Capitol and the FCC to meet with industry leaders and members of Congress. The students are also given ample time to explore the nation's capital and its many attractions.

To qualify, the student's parents must be voice or broadband subscribers of Polar, and the student must be age 16 or 17 years old at the time of the Youth Tour. Along with submitting an application, students are required to write an essay on modern technology. Applications can be obtained from your high school guidance counselor or online at polarcomm.com/about-us/#scholarships

Deadline for Youth Tour entries is March 5, 2021

**APPLICATIONS CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT
[POLARCOMM.COM/ABOUT-
US/#SCHOLARSHIPS](https://polarcomm.com/about-us/#scholarships)**

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KEEPING STUDENTS CONNECTED

WORKING WITH LOCAL SCHOOLS, POLAR DELIVERED BROADBAND TO STUDENTS IN NEED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

On August 26, 2007, an EF4 tornado tore through Northwood, North Dakota. The twister's 150 mile-per-hour winds leveled the town, leaving one dead, eighteen injured, and an entire community in shock.

The next day, August 27th, Northwood's class of 2020 was scheduled to begin kindergarten.

"The class of 2020 has been through quite a lot," said Northwood Public School Superintendent Shane Azure. *"The day*

before school started, they had to be relocated to various buildings around, from Hatton to Mayville State College. So it has always been different for this class."

As it often does, tragedy brought the community together. Northwood rose from the rubble, with a brand-new \$13 million dollar school as a symbol of the town's resilience. But then, thirteen years later, another tragedy struck: the COVID-19 pandemic.

Just weeks before their high school graduation, the class of 2020 was once again forced to relocate and finish the school year from their own homes.

"As we were hearing things during COVID-19, we realized that the last 45 days of school were going to look a little bit different. We had high hopes that we would maybe be back in the last week or two of school, but that didn't happen," Shane said. *"As of March 16th, we had 316 students, K-12, learning from home on a distance learning plan."*

Keeping Students Connected

This spring, districts across North Dakota rushed to come up with a plan. They needed to equip students with the resources and support necessary to access their education from home. One of the most important resources was high-speed, dependable broadband.

"Our principals sent out a survey to parents to gather feedback and information about what they needed at home, whether it's curriculum, textbooks, whatever it was," Shane said. "In that survey, we found that we had eight to ten families that didn't have broadband."

Shane knew that, without Internet access, students would not be able to connect to their teachers, assignments, or fellow students. Refusing to allow a single student to fall behind, Shane called Polar Communications—and he wasn't the only one.

"Superintendents started calling and saying, 'Okay, we're going to an online-based learning system, and we have students that don't have Internet access. What can we do to connect them?' said Polar CEO Karl Blake. "As a local provider in our area, it was just something we needed to do."

The first step was to determine how many students required a broadband connection. Working with local superintendents, Polar identified 120 students across their service territory who did not have access to the connectivity they needed to attend school from home.

But identifying these students was the easy part; the question of actually getting broadband to them would prove to be much more complicated.

Broadband on a Board

During a typical home broadband installation, a Polar technician will bring fiber into the home, connect all necessary equipment, and answer any questions the customer may have. It is an entirely hands-off process for the customer; but when the coronavirus outbreak began, technicians were suddenly unable to enter customers' houses.

In order to safely connect students to broadband during the COVID-19 pandemic, Polar's technicians had to get creative—and the solution, according to Field Operations Supervisor Jim Praska, was broadband on a board.

"We would pre-mount everything on a whiteboard—the ONT, the router, all the power cables—and we would drop it off at the customer's house," Jim explained.

"The customer would grab it, plug it into a nearby outlet, and then we would go from outside with a fiber jumper. The customer would plug it in, and then they'd have service."

Once the board had been taken inside by the customer, a technician would stand outside and communicate either over the phone or through a window to answer any questions and walk them through the installation process. The process required patience from both technicians and customers; but despite its challenges, Jim and his team worked tirelessly to provide every student the connectivity they needed to continue receiving a high-quality education from home.

In just a few short weeks, all 120 students were connected.

"We knew how important it was to have broadband service for all students to be able to learn online, and we had the means and the

talent to do it," Jim said. "I don't think there was any question about it, whether we're going to do it or not. We just did it."

A Sense of Normalcy

On June 19th, dressed in their caps and gowns, the class of 2020 crossed the stage of Northwood Public Schools' auditorium.

It was not a typical graduation ceremony—half of the 220 invited guests watched from overflow seating outside the auditorium, many of them wearing masks—but yet, little has been typical for this graduating class. From a devastating tornado to an unprecedented pandemic, their education has been bookended by hardship.

It may not have looked anything like they had expected, but with support from their peers, their teachers, and Polar broadband, the class of 2020 was able to finish their senior year strong.

"This time during COVID-19 has been scary," Shane said. "It was extremely important for us that all students had the same access to technology that they needed to continue their distance learning plan from home. It's uncharted waters, and Polar stepped in and gave our students and parents a sense of peace of mind."



Polar is proud to invest in education, even in the midst of a pandemic. Contact us today to discover how Polar can empower your students!

CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAYS WITH

12 DAYS of SAVINGS

DECEMBER 1

Add a WiFi mesh extender for 3 months free

Sign up for a bundle and receive a gift card of your choice

DECEMBER 2



DECEMBER 3

Managed WiFi self install and over the phone tech assistance fees waived



DECEMBER 4

3 months free + free activation of VIPRE anti-virus & spyware protection

DECEMBER 7

BOGO premium channels Sign up for one and get another for one month at no charge



DECEMBER 8

Sign up for paperless billing and receive a \$20 bill credit

DECEMBER 9

Sign up for a bundle and receive a gift card of your choice

One month free of the Sports Pack

DECEMBER 10

DECEMBER 11

Sign up for a bundle and receive a \$20 credit per service (phone, TV or broadband Internet)

DECEMBER 14

Add any calling feature for 3 months free



DECEMBER 15

Increase your broadband Internet speed and continue paying your current rate for 3 months



DECEMBER 16

First camera installed free when you lease a surveillance system



Offers are valid for one day only, December 1-16. Specials are listed on this insert and will also be announced daily on our Facebook page.

POWER BACK-UP

Because your home phone service is provided with our state-of-the-art fiber optic network, it requires electric power to operate. To avoid a disruption of home voice service during a power outage – and to maintain the ability to connect to 911 emergency services – we at Polar Communications provide you with backup battery power.

WHERE TO OBTAIN YOUR BACKUP BATTERY

Polar Communications would like to ensure that our customers are provided reliable backup batteries that allow you to continue to use your home voice services during a power outage. That is why we provide an 8-hour backup battery with the Polar Communications demarcation equipment. A 24-hour standby backup battery is available for purchase from Polar Communications. This backup battery includes a 3-year warranty.

WHAT YOUR BACKUP BATTERY CAN – AND CAN'T – DO FOR YOU

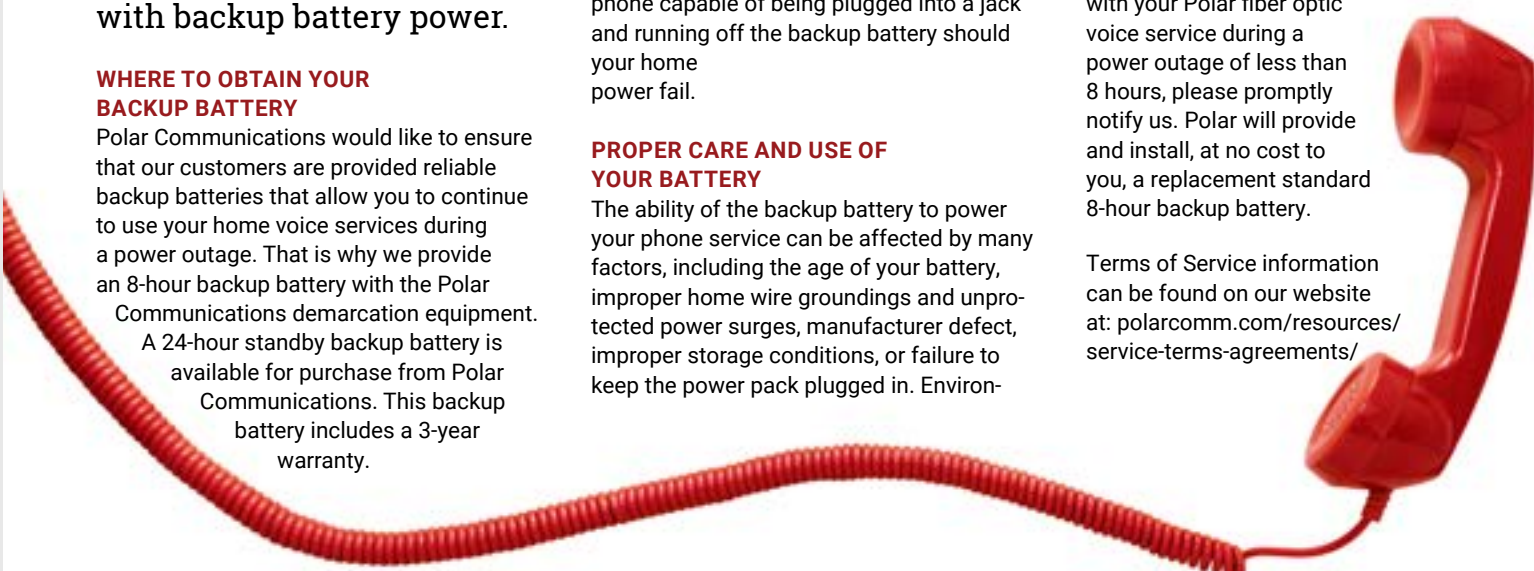
The backup battery provided by Polar Communications is expected to last at least 8 hours on standby power. That means the backup battery should give you approximately 6 hours of talk time. The backup battery does not provide power to any services other than voice. Home security systems, medical monitoring devices, routers and other equipment will not run on a home phone backup battery. The backup battery does not power your phone handsets that may separately require power. You must have a phone capable of being plugged into a jack and running off the backup battery should your home power fail.

PROPER CARE AND USE OF YOUR BATTERY

The ability of the backup battery to power your phone service can be affected by many factors, including the age of your battery, improper home wire groundings and unprotected power surges, manufacturer defect, improper storage conditions, or failure to keep the power pack plugged in. Environ-

mental factors such as temperature can shorten your battery's useful life. We recommend that you store your battery above 41°F and below 104°F. These batteries are rechargeable. This backup battery performs a self-test and produces an audible alarm on fault detection. If this happens, after checking that the unit is plugged into a functioning power plug, contact our business office and we will correct any fault condition. Polar Communications monitors the battery voltage and we will be alerted when it is low. You will not need to access the battery; however, if you experience any problems with your Polar fiber optic voice service during a power outage of less than 8 hours, please promptly notify us. Polar will provide and install, at no cost to you, a replacement standard 8-hour backup battery.

Terms of Service information can be found on our website at: polarcomm.com/resources/service-terms-agreements/



**It Pays to be a
Coop Member**

Capital credits will be disbursed as a credit on the December 2020 billing statements. Members receiving \$401 or more and businesses with multiple accounts were mailed a check. Capital credits paid out this year are margins from the years 2001-2003. Polar Communications returned \$2 million to its co-op members this year.



Clip this page and keep it with your Polar directory

DIRECTORY UPDATES

Border Auto Import Inc 652 Highway 59 Pembina701-825-6285
 Bridell Jeff & Rebecca 372 W Renville St Pembina.....701-825-6540
 Carriere Misty res Neche701-886-7229
 Carter Rodolpha Jr 407 W Divide Ave Drayton701-454-6159
 Dodge Patricia res Edmore.....701-644-2330
 Goodoien Ryan & Shelbie 9413 139 Ave NE Cavalier701-265-4678
 Holman Michelle res Pembina701-825-6211
 Johannesson Nancy res Drayton701-454-3388

Koppang Insurance 418 Briggs Ave S Park River701-284-6066
 Mandt Richard res Northwood701-587-1124
 McDonald James res Cavalier.....701-265-3150
 Morrison Planning & Consulting 14518 County 1 Bathgate....701-265-8425
 Rendezvous Region Trading Post 100 Main St W Cavalier ...701-265-3127
 Stabo Tim 124 Harris Ave S Park River.....701-284-6303
 Varwig-Graham Susan L 508 W Wallace Ave Drayton701-454-6143



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CONNECTIONS

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Karl Blake



This institution is an equal opportunity provider
and employer.

Holiday Hours:

Thursday, December 24

Closing at 2:00 p.m.

Friday, December 25

CLOSED - Christmas Day

Thursday, December 31

Closing at 4:30 p.m.

Friday, January 1

CLOSED - New Years Day