

A support system can make all the difference

By **ERICA BRADLEY**

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Having a support system can make all the difference for career-driven women. Rural Telephone Chief Operating Officer Rhonda Goddard has worked her way up the corporate ladder at the telephone cooperative with support from her family over the last 17 years.

Goddard worked for Mapes and Miller as an accountant for four years before taking a job at Rural Telephone as a senior accountant in 1993.

She said there were 38 employees, including herself, when she started. Rural Telephone now employs 400 people.

"At that time, Rural Telephone had 26 exchanges and 62,000 lines. It was the start of a growth period for Rural," she said.

Goddard applied for the controller position a year after starting as a senior accountant. In 2001 she was promoted to the chief operating officer position.

Goddard said her family has always played an important role in her success. She is married and has two sons; her mother frequently looks after her children.

"That support system makes all the difference. Being successful in your career requires a commitment of time and some sacrifices. I have such a supportive family," she said.

Goddard's responsibilities include: being involved in business strategic planning, helping departments set budgets, monitor the operation throughout the year, looking into new products and services and attending conferences.

"My days are always filled and challenging,"

she said.

She said Rural Telephone has seen a lot of changes in the last several years with broadband and wireless technologies coming into the area.

Goddard said Rural Telephone has always tried to anticipate what their customers would want.

They have embraced innovation in wireless, broadband and even home security systems.

"This board and group of management has been extremely visionary. We've embraced wireless in many areas," she said.

In 2005, Rural Telephone reached a strategic roaming alliance agreement with Sprint, allowing wireless customers to be able to get service from Sprint cell towers throughout the country.

"It gives us nation-wide coverage, which is very important," she said.

Nex-Tech is the wholly-owned subsidiary of Rural Telephone and provides wireless and cable services. She said a lot of challenges, as well as rewards, have come with the new technology.

"I think there are always challenges. We've had to restructure and reorganize," she said.

Rural Telephone and Nex-Tech were recently awarded Recovery Act Broadband Infrastructure funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The project will total \$49,588,807 in grant funds and \$51,612,842 in loan funds.

"It was a very labor intensive and very complicated. It was a tremendous team effort," she said.

The project will bring the development of



Rhonda Goddard, the chief operating officer at Rural Telephone, started working at Rural Telephone in 1993 as a senior accountant. She worked her way to chief operating officer.

—Telegram photo by Erica Bradley

broadband services to 21 towns and 26 rural areas spanning over 4,600 square miles in Decatur, Ellis, Gove, Graham, Norton, Osborne, Phillips, Rooks, Sheridan, Smith and Trego Counties.

Goddard said when she isn't working, she

spends her free time with her family on their farm west of Lenora. She enjoys attending her sons' sporting events and going camping.

"If I get stressed, I go horseback riding," she said.

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