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Through its apprenticeship program and outreach to local high schools, Surf Internet inspires students to get involved in tech and make it their career.

Surf Internet

TRANSFORMING CONNECTIVITY

"We've always been a family-focused business. We really believe that a rising tide raises all ships and that includes the customer and the team member. We try really hard to call our employees 'team members' – not employees. We think about them as partners in the business and even try to instill a mindset of ownership."

– Gene Cruise, CEO

The local cardboard boat race attracts 5,000 to 8,000 people. Surf Internet volunteers and "has a company picnic at the event with everyone else who's there to raise money for a good cause," Cruise reports.

Surf's stats:

- Delivers high-speed, reliable internet to homes and businesses in underserved, rural communities
- Headquartered in Elkhart and formally incorporated in 1999
- Serves the Great Lakes region (11 offices across Indiana, Illinois and Michigan)
- Approximately 300 team members, with an anticipated 350 by the end of 2025

Fostering education:

- Formal 18-month training program for managers
- Employer participant in Horizon Education Alliance Student Pathways Career Quest program, creating hands-on, work-based learning apprenticeships for high school students working out of its Elkhart office

Values added:

Vice president of human resources Kord Kozma: "We took all of 2024 identifying the right values that resonated with us and helped keep that cool stuff. ... We talked in one form or another to about 50% of our employee population."

The resulting values: integrity, trust, transparency, continuous improvement, collaboration and accountability.

Building connections:

- Annual Christmas party
- Cardboard boat race that benefits the United Way and Elkhart
- Local food drives

"Our team genuinely believes they're part of something bigger than themselves," Cruise emphasizes. "Everybody wants to know they have a purpose. If you asked our team members, they'd say, 'We're making a difference in the world by getting people connected.'"

Appreciation:

- Personalized welcome cards for new employees, donuts/conversations with Gene and birthday cards for all
- Access to over 700,000 discounts and benefits across various national retailers, service providers and entertainment options
- Daily live chat celebrates positive input from external customers praising a team member

