



# NEWS

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## **SBA Names Minnesota Small Business Persons of the Year**

BIRD ISLAND – Brian Sheehan, Kevin Sheehan, Susan Peterson, and Brian Fagerstrom, owners of Rural Computer Consultants, Inc. based in Bird Island, Minn., have been named the Minnesota Small Business Persons of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

The Small Business Person of the year is selected annually based on growth in sales or unit volume, increase in the number of employees, financial strength, innovativeness of product or service and evidence of contributions to community-oriented projects. Liz Struve, Director, and Ruth Ann R. Karty, Professional Business Consultant, of the Southwest Small Business Development Center at Southwest Minnesota State University, nominated the owners for this award.

Rural Computer Consultants (RCC) opened humble offices in Bird Island in 1979 with just two employees, Brian and Kevin Sheehan. Over the next several years, they relocated to Redwood Falls, then Willmar, and then back to Bird Island in 1987, when they purchased Bird Island Computer Services. At that time, they remodeled office space to accommodate their staff of 15 employees. In 1998, Susan Peterson and Brian Fagerstrom joined the firm as owners, rounding out a sound management team. Today, RCC has grown from the original two entrepreneurs to a dedicated company of over 43 team members.

The company is the industry leader in providing back office accounting and interfaces to high tech devices needed in the fuel distribution and insurance industries. The primary goal of RCC is to create, maintain and enhance quality, affordable, complete, self-supporting software packages that are consistent and easy to use, and meet the needs of industry-specific customers; provide the highest quality support for all customers; market the packages to the specific industries, while maintaining a reasonable profit and return on investments.

RCC proves that great success can be achieved for a start-up high tech company in Rural America when the ownership and staff team are committed to their customers. The owners' leadership and clear direction have positioned them to be the industry leader in both of their markets nationwide. Their expansion into the Global market has been very successful. They have gained the loyalty and trust of their customers by following their moral compass and being confident in their business decisions.

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In 1991, they acquired Clara City Computer Service, followed by acquisition of the insurance software from Rockford Mutual Insurance Company in 1994 and struck a strategic transition from WRC Insurance software in 1997. In 2004, they acquired Central Missouri Computer Center insurance software. By 2007, the staff had grown to 27 employees. In 2008, RCC acquired Program System, Inc., a Birmingham, Alabama-based competitor, expanding their staff to 32, including the Alabama-based employees.

In 2006, RCC purchased the Bird Island Convent building for one dollar. At the same time, they donated \$20,000 to the City of Bird Island's Economic Development Authority to assist other small businesses in the community. In exchange for the purchase of the property, they agreed to make a minimum of \$40,000 in renovations to the building. They actually spent over \$400,000 with the local work force to upgrade the building and technology infrastructure.

In 2009, RCC employed 38 people and realized business growth would require additional employees and office space. Construction began in 2009 to add 22 offices to the existing building. The total square footage of the facility including the expansion is just under 16,500. The Million Dollar expansion was financed by the State Bank of Bird Island, Minnesota Business Finance (SBA 504) and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. Today, RCC employs 43 people, supporting more than 1400 Fuel Companies and 300 Mutual Insurance Companies, both nationwide and globally.

Liz Struve, Director of the Southwest Small Business Development Center at Southwest Minnesota State University sums it up: "RCC is an ideal business model demonstrating what can be accomplished by a small business in outstate Minnesota. RCC offers great opportunity and optimism for rural populations, by offering and bringing technologies to anywhere in the world."

*For more information:*

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