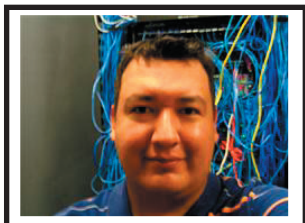


Kirk's Computer Services



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Owner: Kirk Keepseagle

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Opened: January 2006

What if you were literally broke and wanted to start your own business? How would you climb out of debt and build a future for yourself?

This is Kirk Keepseagle's story: At age 18, this Fort Yates native got a couple of credit cards and, like many young people, racked up some debt. After his junior year at University of North Dakota in Grand Forks, he had to drop out and move back home with his parents. "I only had 3 pairs of pants and 4 shirts that I'd wash over and over again for my job at a local restaurant," he says.

Kirk looked around for a better job opportunity and discovered a niche market in Fort Yates: computer service, repair, and networking. His parents paid for him to take some online courses. From June 2004 to December 2005, Keepseagle became A+ certified as a computer technician from the Stratford Institute with a 4.0 GPA. He also finished with 4.0 honors from the Cleveland Institute of Electronics with a diploma in networking and computer technology.

In the spring of 2005, Kirk attended business entrepreneurship training sponsored by the Tribal Business Information Center and the Small Business Development Center in Fort Yates. Director Jonathan Anderson says, "Kirk learned a lot about goal setting, marketing, production and financing. I could see he would have a significant competitive advantage because the schools, local businesses, and tribal office were being charged outrageous fees plus mileage for someone to come to Fort Yates and work on a computer."

So Anderson helped Keepseagle get a business plan together and prepared him for his bank loan presentation. "A lot of people who take the entrepreneurship class are intimidated by bankers, but Kirk wasn't. He didn't give up, even though he had some credit problems."

Kirk managed to convince Starion Bank on the first try to give him financing. The rest he obtained from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe through their Business Equity Loan program. Keepseagle recalls, "The thing that excited me the most was going to buy my equipment to run my own business: laptops, tool kits, a network tester, software—all the gadgets I needed to test computers and networks. Within a month, I had my first contract with Head Start and the business took off!"

He opened Kirk's Computer Services out of his truck in January 2006. Today, he has 35-40+ large clients like school systems and programs throughout the tribal organization. He averages about a dozen individual and agency projects each month. "I have so much business, I could take on another employee, but it's simpler on my own right now." Kirk says people have asked him to open a retail outlet to sell computers and software, but he doesn't think he's ready to own a storefront and employ salespeople.

At age 31, Keepseagle still dreams of returning to UND and finishing his biology major and his master's in physical therapy. But for now, he's happy doing what he's doing and paying his bills and having money left over to spend. "I'm really good at propriety stuff like servers, routers and firewalls," he says. "I even got a live streaming video surveillance feed to work through the internet at Head Start when no one from Bismarck would touch it. It was new to me, but I enjoyed it."

Anderson says Kirk is a role model for the reservation because he is an enrolled tribal member running his own business. Keepseagle says, "There's a lot of 'can't do' attitudes here, and if someone steps forward with a 'can do' attitude, I'll help them go forward with their own business."

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