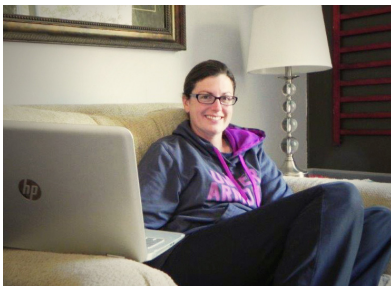


Returning to Rural

Business Feature: Anna Merriman

by Anne Boothe, Economic Development Specialist

Looking at the census data for most of the counties served by Triangle Communications, you can see a small upward “blip” in several of the population’s numbers since 2010. Yes, we’re still hindered from the dramatic drops in the 1980s but still, it’s positive. As I travel within our rural service area, I see several reasons for that “blip” and we will feature one of the best reasons here – young people “returning home to their rural roots.”



Anna enjoys a break from her work at home.

One such person is Anna (Barthelmess) Merriman.

Anna, her husband Cliff and two young children made the big move back to her hometown

of Malta. An additional bonus is that Anna also brought her job with her. Anna and Cliff have two children, Courtney (5) and Beau (3) who will soon join Malta’s elementary school population. Cliff is helping to diversify the local agriculture economy with organic crops such as Kamut and other small grains on their family farm south of Malta (4M Farms).

Anna was raised alongside two brothers on a family ranch in southern Phillips County. After high school, she attended Northwest College in Powell,

WY earning an Associate in Business degree and accepted a position with Murdoch’s Ranch and Home Supply in Bozeman. Anna returned to school at MSU in Billings, graduating with a Bachelor’s degree in Business and in 2006 began her career with Computers Unlimited (CU). CU is a Montana company founded in 1978 that has evolved into a software development leader delivering an integrated solution for industrial welding and gas distributors and medical equipment suppliers across the United States. Anna spent one year on site with CU in Billings. She retained her position as a Technical Business Specialist working as a telecommuter while she moved to Nevada, Wibaux and other rural Montana communities before steadily moving closer to home with family. Their official return to Malta was in 2012.

With her fiber fed connection and access to CU’s VPN (virtual private network), Anna is able to use price updating tools to provide support to customers on demand from home or her rented office space in Malta. Her typical work day is 8-5, but she appreciates the flexibility with CU. By teleworking, she is able to spend more time with her children and help Cliff with farm work – adding that they were able to extend a recent vacation in Texas because she could work remotely from their hotel. Anna notes that one of the disadvantages to teleworking is that “kids can be very distracting and it can be difficult turning off work at home.” She added that “when a client needs assistance, I’m available and it can be a struggle to balance



Anna and her family enjoy their time together on the family farm.

work and family outside of the typical work day. I’m very thankful to CU for their trust in allowing me to work remotely. They emphasize social connections between company employees and foster that in many ways. It’s a great Montana company.”

We applaud Anna and others like her who have “returned to rural” and are adding those “blips” to local economies and census records.

