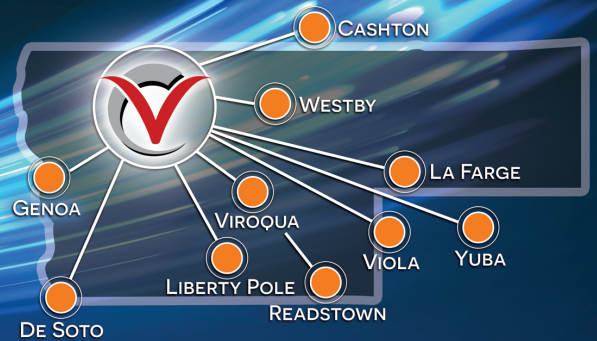


GOT FIBER? BET YOU DO



MONTHLY NEWS

WORLD-CLASS TECHNOLOGY. UNRIVALED LOCAL SERVICE.

DECEMBER 2021

Top News Inside

- **Faster Internet Speeds**
- **Happy Holidays from our employees**
- **Scholarships Offered**
- **From the CEO**
- **Entertainment News**

Vernon Communications ambitiously invested in making your services better by providing a reliable fiber optic network available to all our members. This secure network has no data caps, no contracts and a symmetrical connection that most companies do not offer. While larger companies seem to offer deals that seem too good to be true, their networks are sometimes shared connections and not dedicated. Our bandwidth speeds are what you purchased and are not shared with another household.

Beginning January 1, 2022, our base internet package will begin at 50 MEG! Members who currently have 25 MEG will be upgraded to 50 MEG at no charge! Members who have 50 MEG will be billed the base price of \$49.95, which means your bill will go down! All other speeds will remain the same. Some members may have already experienced a difference in their internet connection, as we have begun to increase speeds in certain locations. This upgrade allows our members to enjoy faster speeds at no additional cost.

Vernon Communications has been diligent in constructing a broadband network with fiber optic technology that is capable of providing our members with the ever increasing internet speeds they demand. This has been no easy task due to the vast serving area that we cover, the shortage of materials and electronics due to the COVID-19 pandemic, not to mention the cost of the project itself. The cost to install fiber can run \$35,000 per mile or even more in some rural areas. VC Co-op persevered, applied for, and has been fortunate to receive broadband grants, which allows us to expand our cooperative in under-served areas. VC Co-op has made this a priority and has invested time and money to make sure our members have the network they deserve for home and business needs.

Up to 50 MEG \$49.95 **Up to 100 MEG \$129.95** **Up to 500 MEG \$299.95**
1 GIG AVAILABLE! *All Internet packages include symmetrical upstream bandwidth for fiber locations.

FROM THE CEO

The last two articles have been devoted to writing about the cooperative's history. I left off at the end of the 1960's. I will deviate from a historical article and blend in some current events that tie into events from the past.

In the 1950 and 60's, the cooperative grew by acquiring several small companies. In the early 1980's, we had the opportunity to purchase Viroqua Telephone Co., but we turned down the offer. It was eventually purchased by Rochester Telephone out of Rochester, NY., which became Frontier. I worked there from 1978-1999 before coming to VC Co-op and saw first-hand what a large company can do to a great locally owned company. We currently surround Frontier's serving area. I refer to them as the hole in the donut. Fast forward to the last twelve years: We have almost completely overbuilt that entire company with fiber-optics by using a low interest Broadband Loan from USDA-RUS and several of the new Wisconsin Public Service Commission Broadband Expansion Grants. This last spring, we received our final grant for that area and have nearly completed construction. Approximately a month's worth of work is remaining to finish next spring. Suffice to say, instead of purchasing it then, we overbuilt it later on. We have added over 2,500 new members with many more waiting to be connected. If you know of someone hanging on to their old Frontier service, suggest they convert to a local cooperative for service.

As I mentioned last month, an attempt was made to purchase Monroe County Telephone in the 1960's. It was rejected by USDA-RUS, costing more than the cooperative could handle. We dusted off that dream and over built part of it in the Village of Cashton in 2013. Now, with another round of broadband grants coming available, your board has directed us to see if we can expand into Monroe County, taking on a large part of what we were unable to purchase over 50 years ago. We are working hard on that plan.

From 1970 through about 2008, the cooperative didn't expand its geographical footprint. It was filled with several new services and upgrades to facilities. The largest upgrade in VC Co-op's history was completed this summer. We finished placing fiber-optics to virtually every cooperative member, with a few exceptions. This was a huge undertaking with a cost of nearly \$50 million for cable and electronics. To date, we only have about 25 members left to convert, some seasonal and all on Battle Island, near the Mississippi River. We need to cross the railroad tracks to finish, which can take years to get a permit. With that said, we do have some members that have Internet and TV service that need converting to the new fiber facilities. We need help in scheduling these upgrades, so we can decommission the old cable and equipment that helps us reduce our costs.

In the early 2000's, a group of CenturyLink customers in Crawford County petitioned the Public Service Commission to force CenturyLink to sell a portion of their serving area to Vernon. This never happened. I am now pleased to announce that we recently received a Broadband Expansion Grant, the same as used for expansion into Frontier's serving area, to expand into Northern Crawford County. This grant covers 85% of the project. Crawford County and the Seneca School District will contribute another 5% and our portion is only 10% of the total \$6.775 million project. We will build 260 miles of fiber to over 1,100 new potential member locations. The plan is to begin construction the spring of 2022, and complete it in early 2023.

The state has announced another \$100 million in broadband grants. In addition to that, the President has now signed the new infrastructure bill that earmarks over \$62 billion for broadband expansion. The rules for this will not even be written until late next year, so we won't know if they will be feasible for the cooperative or not. Be assured, we are keeping our eyes on it.

In conclusion, old plans never go away. They just get saved for another day. Interesting enough, many ideas from the past just seem to need a little more time to bake.

Wishing you a Joyous Holiday Season from the employees at VC Co-op!



Alicia Funk



Angie Finney



Anthony Gullickson



Bret Halvorson



Christian Leal



Dale Levendoski



Darrel Hall



Gunnar Gretebeck



Jana Pedretti



Jason Landrath



Jeanette Cade



Jeanne Mueller



Jennifer Krings



Jeremiah Green



Joan Dickman



Joe Russell



John Hickok



Josh Fanta



Josh Skaaland



Kevin Karwoski



Lori Forde



Matt McGarry



Monte Banks



Naomi Peterson



Patty Johnson



Reggie Nelson



Stacie Ziegler



Terri Kotek



Therese Flock



Tracy Thelen



Scott Haakenson



Scott Frederick



Rob Budworth



Rod Olson



Roger Nelson



Ryan Brinkman

TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

HOLIDAY HEADACHES

And How To Avoid Being Scammed This Holiday Shopping Season

The Security Awareness Company

SAFETY CHECKLIST (CHECK IT TWICE)

WHAT PUTS CRIMINALS AND SCAMMERS IN THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT?

Poor security practices, of course! For many, the holiday season ushers in positive spirits, selflessness, and generosity. But it also brings tidings of scammers who seek to use your good spirits against you. Social Engineering 101 says leverage emotions to get to the heart of victims. And there's no better time of year to do just that! So, as you're out shopping, giving, volunteering, or whatever your traditions are, keep your guard up, and spread the news that criminals and scammers get into the spirit, too.

Swipe safely.

If possible, avoid using debit cards to make purchases. Opt for credit cards instead. Most credit card companies offer fraud protection that covers any fraudulent charges should your card be lost or stolen. If you must get cash from an ATM, choose one that's physically inside a bank and inspect machines thoroughly for card skimmers.

Joining the crowds?

Some deals get marketed as "only available in stores" and might draw massive crowds as a result. If you join them, use a healthy dose of situational awareness. **Keep an eye on your things. Know where the exits are. And be kind to those around you!**

Shopping from the house?

Cyber Monday and other holiday-related online deals provide great discounts with the convenience of shopping in your pajamas. But they're also convenient for cybercriminals who set up bogus websites to steal your info or sell inferior products. **Stick to recognizable websites, and always verify the URL before entering any personal info (look for the green padlock and HTTPS).**

Find a great deal?

As cliché as this may be, if something looks too good to be true, then it's likely a scam. Reputable sellers won't offer super expensive computers and electronics for pennies on the dollar. **Use common sense!** And avoid giving out personal details in order to secure discounts or enter drawings for free prizes. These can sometimes be fraudulent attempts to steal info.

Receive an unsolicited offer?

Beware of any offers that you receive via email or text which come from merchants you don't recognize or just look spammy. The offer could be real. Or it could be a phishing attack. **Always think before you click!**



© 2021 The Security Awareness Company - Knowledge, Inc. All rights reserved.



December 15, 2021

MOVING!

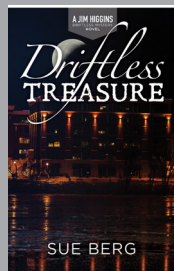
117 E. Terhune St.
Viroqua, WI 54665

608-638-2030

info@vernontechcenter.com

The Vernon Tech Center offers the same great service at a different location.

ENTERTAINMENT NEWS



McIntosh Memorial Library in Viroqua is having a year-long, humanities program called "Creating Community Beyond Biases". The library interviewed Sue Berg, a local author from Viroqua for her book release, "Driftless

Treasure". This show will be aired in December on local Community Channel 14. Sue has written a Driftless mystery series that may be purchased in local stores in Westby and Viroqua.

Season of Giving



Deb Tewalt and Pastor Skrede,
Bethel Butikk



Dorothy Peterson,
Cashton Cupboard & Closet

In December, Local Channel 14 will highlight our local food pantries. Don't miss this video to see the needs of food insufficiencies in our communities. **Open your hearts to see how you can help.**

HBO and Cinemax are offering an 8-Day preview in December. Dec 24 - 31st will have several finales, including: *Landscapers*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, and the series finale of *Insecure*. Also showing are 11 Warner Bros. Theatricals: *Wonder Woman 1984*, *The Little Things*, *Judas and the Black Messiah*, *Tom and Jerry*, *Godzilla vs. Kong*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Those Who Wish Me Dead*, *The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It*, *The Heights*, *Space Jam: The New Legacy* and *The Suicide Squad*. **Take advantage of this FREE week.**



The Cowboy Channel is bringing you the National Finals Rodeo from December 2nd - December 11th! Every night you'll see every action-packed minute LIVE as the top 15 cowboys and cowgirls in the world compete for the coveted gold buckle!



Upcoming Events

December 21
Winter Solstice



December 24
Christmas Eve
Our office will be closed



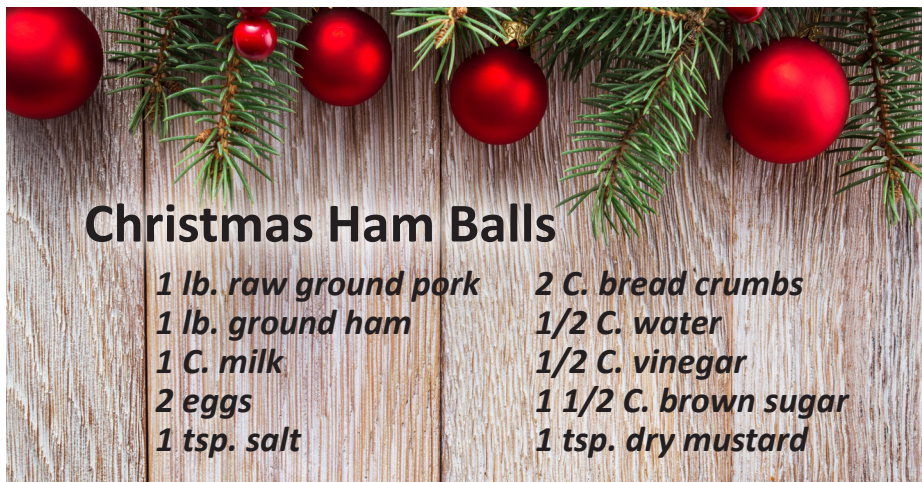
December 31
New Years Eve
Our office will be closed



103 N Main Street
Westby, WI 54667

Lobby Hours:
8:00 am - 4:30 pm (M-F)

(608) 634-3136
www.vernoncom.coop



Christmas Ham Balls

1 lb. raw ground pork	2 C. bread crumbs
1 lb. ground ham	1/2 C. water
1 C. milk	1/2 C. vinegar
2 eggs	1 1/2 C. brown sugar
1 tsp. salt	1 tsp. dry mustard

Mix together, pork, ham, milk, eggs, salt and bread crumbs. Form into balls and place into a greased 9 x 13 pan. Set aside.

Mix together water, vinegar, brown sugar and mustard. Pour over meat balls. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 1/2 hrs. Turn halfway through baking.

Serve with mashed potatoes and your favorite Christmas sides!

SCHOLARSHIPS OFFERED



The cost of education can be a financial burden to many who are pursuing undergraduate degrees. Vernon Communications offers scholarships to members and dependent children going on to further their education. VC Co-op will be offering 10 scholarships in the amount of \$1,000.00 each. Interested applicants have until February 11, 2022 and should go to our website to see instructions on how to apply: www.vernoncom.coop.

SEASON OF GIVING



The Holidays can be a difficult time for many and Vernon Communications was able to help make it a little brighter for some, by supporting a drop off location for toys and canned goods for Christmas. The Cooperative also gave a generous donation of toys for the cause. These items were delivered to Bethel Butikk for distribution.