



2023

Heart of the Driftless Photo Contest



MONTHLY NEWS

WORLD-CLASS TECHNOLOGY. UNRIVALED LOCAL SERVICE.

February 2023

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Vernon Communications holds the **"Heart of the Driftless Photo Contest"** each year. The contest is open to any member who loves photography. In past years, we have received many photos of this beautiful Driftless region. Some of the photos are used for our annual calendar and other marketing and social media platforms. This year the contest is slightly different as we are adding an animal category to the contest.

The categories are:

- Animals
- Events
- Landmarks/Scenic Views

We would love to see your photos! **Grand prize is a \$100.00 credit to your Vernon Communications statement.** In addition, one entry from each category will be awarded a \$50.00 bill credit. Go To: **www.vernoncom.coop** for contest rules.

Send us your digital photos in high resolution format to: **contest@vernoncom.coop**. Submissions must be in by April 7, 2023. Winners will be announced in June.

SAFER INTERNET DAY

Safer Internet Day is on Tuesday February 7, 2023. This day promotes internet safety and more responsible use online. Internet safety and awareness is for everyone.

TIPS:

- Limit personal information
- Keep privacy settings on
- Make online purchases from secure sites
- Choose strong passwords



FROM THE CEO

Happy New Year to you and your families! VC Co-op is very excited for what 2023 will bring to the cooperative. You may recall that VC Co-op previously applied for, and was awarded three Wisconsin PSC grants. Those grants are Crawford County Phase II, and Monroe County Phases I and II. The grants awarded have build out obligations, which means the cooperative has to finish construction on Crawford County Phase II by the end of 2023. The build out for the Monroe grants need to be finished by the end of 2024. We have made great progress on the Crawford grant and we look forward to wrapping that up this year, while we also gear up to begin the Monroe projects. These projects will bring the same excellent service and fiber-to-the-home that our current members enjoy to an additional 2,000 + locations that currently have zero or very limited broadband. The cooperative seeks grants for these types of projects to lessen the financial burden on the cooperative. Grants are monetary awards that the cooperative doesn't pay back, so they differ from loans, but they do come with the previously mentioned build out obligations.

We have all been affected by the increase to consumer goods, due to supply chain issues and an aggressive inflation rate. The cooperative has also been impacted. We've seen materials more than double in price, and lead times push out to more than 24 months on some of our essential equipment. Our efforts have always been to try to lessen the impact of these changes to our members, while still providing World-Class service. Unfortunately, we've reached a point where some of these costs can no longer be absorbed. You will see adjustments to some of the cooperative's rates on your March 1st billing. The 50 x 50 mb will increase \$5.00/month, from \$49.95 to \$54.95. Some good news though is the 100 x 100 mb service, which was previously \$129.95 will now be \$84.95/month, a reduction of \$45.00/month! Our package discounts, for those members with multiple services, will also be reduced. Lastly, our video product pricing will increase, which is directly related to the increases we receive from the programmers. I would love to be able to hold video rates steady, but we are constantly forced to accept rate increases from programmers, and unfortunately must pass those on to our members.

After much deliberation, this has been a difficult decision and we understand that rate increases are never favored. Because of the rising cost of almost everything, we understand that this affects our members.

We thank you for your ongoing patronage to the cooperative and trust that we will continually provide you with the premium quality service we are known for.

Scholarships Available

Vernon Communications offers scholarships to students pursuing an education post high school

Go to: www.vernoncom.coop

Scholarship deadline is February 17, 2023

CYBER SECURITY



Stay Safe With Always Listening Devices

With the overwhelming popularity of always-listening devices such as Alexa, Google Home, and smartphones, you've probably heard stories of these devices joining in on conversations without being prompted. Perhaps it's even happened to you!

While this idea can be alarming and unsettling, there are ways to protect your private information, and conversations, from these always-listening devices.

To help you stay safe from these devices, here are some tips:

- Review and delete voice recordings: Your device will store your search and activity history to create a customized experience for you. However, you can review and delete these recordings from the device of your choice in order to protect your privacy.
- Mute the microphone: You can mute your microphone to ensure that your device is not listening and recording when you are not using it. The recording capabilities will remain off until you turn them back on.
- Don't link accounts with sensitive information to your device: If you have any accounts containing your sensitive information in them, it is best not to link those accounts to your device. This will keep your sensitive information secure from potential data breaches.
- Change the settings to automatically manage data stored by the device: Personally managing what data is being linked with your account will give you more control on the information that is being stored by your device and will save you time when deleting your history.
- Turn off your device when you're away: When in doubt, turn it off. If your device does not have a power button, simply unplug it.

By creating a habit of unplugging and deleting voice recordings from these always-listening devices, you can help to make sure that there is an extra layer of protection between your always-listening device and your private information.

DIRECTOR POSITIONS

Seeking Nominations for Director Positions

Vernon Communications Cooperative (VC Co-op) announces director terms will expire in April for **District 1 (Genoa), District 2 (Liberty Pole/Readstown) and District 3 (Viola/Yuba) director seats.** Each district will elect one director. All members who receive service from VC Co-op and reside within the district boundaries are eligible for nomination for the director seat. Nominating committees are meeting and will select candidates to fill the three-year terms that will expire in 2026. Ballots will be prepared and mailed to each member in these districts by mid-March. A committee will tabulate the ballots and the results will be announced at the Annual Meeting on April 27, 2023. *Any member wishing to run for one of the board positions should contact VC Co-op at (608) 634-3136 for a list of the nominating committee members.*

SAVE THE DATE

***Vernon Communication's Annual Meeting
Thursday April 27, 2023.***

More information will follow.

February 2023 Highlights

February 2 - Groundhog Day

**February 3-4 - "100 Year" Anniversary
Westby Snowflake Ski Tournament**

February 7 - Safer Internet Day

February 12 - Super Bowl LVII

February 14 - Happy Valentine's Day

February 20 - Presidents Day

February is American Heart Month



WiFi CONNECTION



There are many factors that can influence the performance of your WiFi connection.

- **Physical Distance** - WiFi routers do not have the same transmitting power as cell towers. Cheaper and older routers can be a culprit. A low end router does not always provide a reliable wireless connection.
- **Obstructions** - WiFi signals can be blocked by objects, such as walls, duct work, furniture and home appliances.
- **Interference** - WiFi signals occupy the same radio frequency as actual radios, cell phones, microwave ovens, baby monitors and many other devices. These can cause interference with WiFi signals.
- **Bandwidth hoggers** - Bandwidth hoggers, such as video chatting and streaming on multiple devices, can take up a lot of bandwidth. You may need a larger internet connection.

Here are some suggestions to improve the performance of your WiFi connection:

- **Select a good place for your router** - A place that is not too close to metal objects and appliances are the best locations for your router. The biggest emitter of electromagnetic waves tend to be in the kitchen where the stove, microwave and dishwasher are kept. Metal is the top disrupter of a WiFi signal. The best location is in the center of the room and elevate the router above floor level. WiFi signals radiate outward in all directions, not just horizontally. When your router is on the floor, its ability to emit strong signals is limited.
 - **Update your router** - We constantly hear about malware attacks that are costing businesses and individuals billions every year. Many attacks would not be possible if all routers were kept updated. Once malware infects a router, it can steal bandwidth and spread itself across the network to other devices.
 - **Make sure your WiFi is password protected** - You should encrypt your WiFi and protect it with a password that cannot be guessed.
1. Include a combination of uppercase and lowercase letters, symbols, and numbers.
 2. Don't use common passwords such as 123456.
 3. Make sure the password is at least 8 characters long.
 4. Don't include personal information in the password, such as your name, pet name or phone number.
 5. Use a unique password and don't write it down on a piece of paper. If you can't remember it, use a password manager.

ENTERTAINMENT



**HBO and Cinemax Free Preview:
February 3 -6, 2023**



LOCAL CHANNEL 14



Western Wisconsin Video Production will record the "100 Year Anniversary" of the Westby Snowflake Ski Tournament on February 3rd, under the lights. You will not want to miss the competition of this

extreme sport! Western Wisconsin Video Production also brings us local high school sports (wrestling, boys and girls basketball) in February.

Super Bowl LVII will take place in Glendale, Arizona on February 12, 2023 at the State Farm Stadium and televised on Fox..



Gigaspire Wireless Router \$6 per month

Advantages:

- Receives Gigabit broadband data
- High-performance system (Wi-Fi 6)
- 6x6 streams of Wi-Fi



For the best internet experience, make sure you have a good working router.

EMPLOYEE NEWS



Continuing education is especially important in technology. Because technology evolves so rapidly, it is important that our employees get the education they need to do their jobs. VC Co-op is continually making sure our employees are educated in their fields of expertise. The Wisconsin State Telecommunications Association (WSTA) serves as a voice for the industry with experts that develop, review and support policies to promote the deployment and accessibility of communications and broadband products and services. Four employees (*Gunnar Gretebeck, Monte Banks, Rob Budworth and Joe Russell*) attended the WSTA Broadband Forum in Stevens Point in January. Also in January, *Jana Pedretti* attended the WSTA Marketing seminar in Wisconsin Dells. Another industry association is the Wisconsin Statewide Telephone Cooperative Association (WSTCA), which holds informational meetings and literature for telecommunication cooperatives. Three employees (*Bret Halvorson, Kevin Karwoski and Konner Krause*) will attend the plant conference in Eau Claire in February. A larger group of employees were educated on a new mapping system for the cooperative, which is especially important for our new fiber builds.

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**103 N Main Street
Westby, WI 54667**



Lobby Hours:

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

(608) 634-3136 • www.vernoncom.coop