Vernon Communications COOP

MONTHLY
NEWS

WORLD-CLASS TECHNOLOGY. UNRIVALED LOCAL SERVICE.

August 2023

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CRAWFORD COUNTY

VC Co-op's fiber construction project in Crawford County will be complete by the end of the month. Over 150 miles of fiber have been put into the ground, and nearly 900 residential and business customers will now have access to the best in fiber optic technology.

This project was a long time coming for many residents of Crawford County. Many residents were unable to receive the internet speeds they need to do homework, work remotely, and have access to the basic necessities the internet has to offer.

The availability of communication is essential to today's needs and the infrastructure of broadband technology is increasingly important to everyone. We are proud to have played a role in bringing this project to fruition and we are grateful to the residents of Crawford County for their patience and support.

We are happy to report the residents who were most affected by the lack of high-speed internet now have the speeds they need to navigate the internet, stream video and work from home. We believe this project will have a positive impact on the economic development of Crawford County and we are excited to see what the future holds.

UNCLAIMED CAPITAL CREDITS

Vernon Communications Cooperative has outstanding checks that were issued in 2018 that have not been cashed belonging to both current and former members. You can claim these funds by contacting the cooperative by October 13, 2023. Our office needs to have your current address to update our records. Unless we are notified of your current address by October 13, 2023, the funds will be forfeited to the cooperative and used for our scholarship program and/or other community-based programs.

 A complete list of the unclaimed funds can be found on our website: ***www.vernoncom.coop.*** *Please call our office at (608) 634-3136 or toll free at (800) 543-2029 with information and your current address. These checks will be reissued in November.*

FROM THE CEO

It's hard to believe that it's already August! Where did our summer go? Soon kids will be returning to school and we'll be welcoming Fall. I hope that you're able to squeeze in those last summer activities you have planned!

As you read this, you may be aware the Community Channels have gone dark. I want to assure you this was a very difficult decision, but one that we feel is for the best of the membership as a whole. We know that as we progress, there likely will be more difficult decisions to be made and I want to assure you that we have excellent staff and community that provide great input when we face these difficult situations. Rest assured, we have our members needs in mind as these circumstances arise. If you were a fan of these channels, please know that we understand how disappointing this is, but the content that was provided was very likely being carried on alternative mediums, mainly through social media. I strongly urge you to reach out to your church or school and find out which social media outlet they have been using.

As it is now August, we anticipate the completion of our Crawford County Grant. We know there will be a few lingering items such as clean-up, or an occasional new drop needed, but in effect the project will be complete. We're very excited about this, as the completion will occur ahead of the initial deadline. We'll then be moving our crews into our Monroe County Grant area. Our goal is to complete those projects by late 2024.

As I've written in the past, we will continue to look for grants in an effort to extend the amazing broadband that our members currently experience to those rural communities that are underserved.

Remember.... Call Before You Dig

DIGGERS HOTLINE®

A fiber cut can wipe out service to you and your neighbors for extended periods of time. The cost of a fiber cut can be devastating.

Call 811 or scan the QR code before you dig!!

CYBER SECURITY

KnowB4

You know that little pop-up prompting you to restart your computer for a software update? The one that only seems to come up when you're in the middle of something important? As annoying as it may seem, this notification is actually a valuable asset to your cybersecurity. So, before you click the "Later" option, let's take a closer look!

What is a software update?
A software update is a new and improved version of a program, application, or operating system that you are already using. The update may include new features, bug fixes, or important security patches.

Why are updates important for cybersecurity?
Do you ever wonder how secure the programs installed on your device are? Cybercriminals do. They look for cracks in the security of programs and use these vulnerabilities to gain access to your device. With this access, they could enable a keylogger to track what you type, steal confidential information, or even install ransomware to lock you out of your files and demand payment for access. Developers help prevent this by fixing vulnerabilities as soon as possible. These fixes are included in software updates. Meaning, the longer you wait to install the update, the longer your system is at risk.

How do I check for software updates?
Any device that runs software, be it a computer, tablet, or even a smart tv, can release updates. Most software will prompt you when an update is available, but it's good practice to check periodically. Here is a general guide to checking for updates on common platforms:

Mac System Updates (for macOS Catalina)
1. Open the Apple menu and select About this Mac.
2. Click Software Updates....
3. If any are available, you will have the option to install it

Windows System Updates (for Windows 10)
1. Open the start menu and select Settings.
2. Select Update & Security Settings then select Windows Update.
3. Click Check for Updates. If any are available, you will have the option to install it.

iOS Updates
1. Open the Settings app and tap General.
2. Tap Software Update.
3. If any are available, you will have the option to install it.

Android Updates (for most devices running Android 10 or higher)
1. Open the Settings app and go to the System section.
2. Tap About Phone. (If this is not an option, skip to step 3.)
3. Tap System Updates.
4. Tap Check for Update. If any are available, you will have the option to install it.

Don't see what you're looking for? Please consult the user manual or online support for your specific device.

COMMUNITY GIVING

As part of our community giving, VC Co-op is donating 20 free tablets to local churches! This is an ongoing commitment to giving back to the communities in which we serve. Our hope is that this will enable community members who are unable to attend church services or are ill equipped to stream from YouTube or Facebook on their own, the option to use the tablets to continue to worship. The tablets will come preloaded with all the necessary apps and software, including YouTube and Facebook. We'll also provide training on how to use the tablets. Pictured right, is Trudy Wallin, VC Co-op Board of Director for District 4 and Pastor Engh from Immanuel Lutheran Church in Viroqua.

Summer is moving along quickly and before we know it school will be back in session. Buying school supplies can be a hardship for some families. The cost of supplies can take a crunch out of a family budget, especially for large families. The stigma of not having basic school supplies can also be devastating to students. Historically, Stuff the Bus program has given out over 500 backpacks filled with

school supplies such as notebooks, folders, scissors, calculators, pencils, rulers and much more to students throughout Vernon County. The McIntosh Memorial Library and the Vernon County Health Department are very excited to continue to offer this service. If you missed "Stuff the Bus" on July 29th at Walmart in Viroqua, you can still donate. If you are interested in donating, volunteering or wanting to know more, contact Maggie Strittmater at 608-636-7151 ext.7 or email her at *m.strittmater@wrlsweb.org.* Maggie is the Adult Programming and Outreach staff member at the library. Join Vernon Communications and many other local business's by helping our families in need this school year.

VC Co-op would like to give a big "THANK YOU", to Maggie Strittmater (left) the coordinator from McIntosh Memorial Library, Bailey Olson (middle) Stuff the Bus volunteer and Kaitlyn Smith (right) from the Vernon County Health Department.

The Vernon Economic Development Center (VEDA) in Viroqua recently completed their solar project. Vernon Communications helped fund the project, which was entirely funded by the community. VEDA culminates and supports entrepreneurs in the development of new businesses and fosters the retention and expansion of existing businesses. They are active in helping support economic development throughout Vernon County.

QUALITY INTERNET

Factors That Can Affect An Internet Connection

Location - A router is key to a great internet connection and the placement of that router is important. Where you place your router determines the range or coverage of your internet. Minimize the distance between the router and your devices for maximum efficiency. Place your Wi-Fi in a central location of the home, such that the internet is equally distributed to all your spaces.

Hardware - Ensure your hardware is updated as most innovation and upgrades enhance efficiency. With upgraded equipment, you'll enjoy better internet quality and speed. A bad wireless router can make your internet seem slow, causing buffering, lags and even drops in service.

Connectivity - Generally a cable connection is faster than a wireless network. Use a wired connection for devices that require high bandwidth. If you are gaming or streaming video, you may want to use a wired connection for those devices. The internet speed is equally important in ensuring a faster connection.
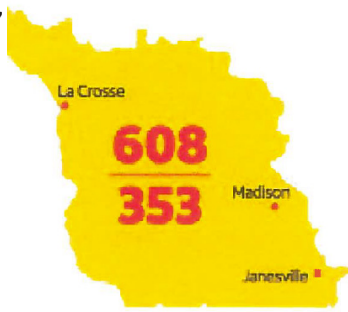
Internet Use - If you operate several applications or operations at once this could create a slower internet connection.

Number of Users - The number of internet users in your household will affect your internet's speed. The amount of devices connected at once, can also affect your connection.

Home materials - Other factors that can influence your connection are thick walls and floors, plaster walls, metal buildings, tin roof and in-floor heating.

NEW AREA CODE

Beginning September 15, 2023, customers in the 608 area code region may be assigned a number in the new 353 area code when they request new service or an additional line. Customers receiving the 353 area code will be required to dial the area code and phone number for all local calls, just as customers with telephone numbers from the 608 area code currently dial. This is to ensure a continuing supply of telephone numbers, the Public Service Commission (PSC) of Wisconsin has approved on all services overlay for the 608 area code. The 608 area code serves the southwestern portion of the state, as will the new area code also serving the same geographic area.

WE WERE THERE

This group of VC Co-op employees and their families attended the La Farge 4th of July parade to celebrate our Nation's Birthday. History repeats itself, as last year's parade was hit with rain just before the start, as did this year. The well needed rain did not delay, as it ended just in time and the parade went on as planned. The celebration in La Farge has lots of festivities to celebrate the 4th with activities for everyone.

Left, Josh Skaaland, Rob Budworth, Tammy Bankes, Monte Bankes, Christian Leal and Tracy Budworth

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

Gigaspire Wireless Router
$6 per month

Advantages:

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

EMPLOYEE NEWS

Vernon Communications hosted an informational meeting at the park in Mt. Sterling on June 29th. Residents from the area were given information about our service and offerings. Employees answered questions and handed out pertinent information. They were even given the opportunity to sign up for service if they were interested.

CABLE LOCATORS

Jason Landrath

Kevin Karowski

Bret Halvorson

Christian Leal

Josh Skaaland

Meet our cable locators. Anyone who calls Diggers Hotline to request a cable locate in our serving area, whether it be new construction, digging a trench or hole, this group of employees has 3 days to complete the locate to make sure underground lines are not damaged. Jason Landrath and Kevin Karowski are our lead locators and the rest step in when needed. ***These employees have completed over 2000 locates so far this summer!***