

**Wishing you a Joyous Holiday Season from all of us at
Vernon Communications Cooperative**



MONTHLY NEWS

WORLD-CLASS TECHNOLOGY. UNRIVALED LOCAL SERVICE.

Top News Inside

- Large Business of the Year
- Toys for Christmas
- VC Co-op calendars out
- Holiday Shopping Safety Tips

LARGE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR



It is with great honor that Vernon Communications was awarded the "Large Business of the Year" from Vernon Economic Development Association (VEDA). On November 8, 2023, VEDA hosted its first ever Vernon County Awards event in collaboration with Hillsboro, Viroqua, and Westby Chamber of Commerce's, Coon Valley and Stoddard Business Associations and Friends of Readstown. Vernon employees accepted the award at the banquet held at Hillsboro Brewing Company in Hillsboro. There were over 180 nominations submitted by Vernon

County residents and businesses and the categories were: Small Business, Large Business, Emerging Business, Person of the Year, Volunteer of the Year, Non-profit of the year, 5-12 Educator of the Year, Rising Educator of the Year, Special Educator of the Year, Event of the Year and People's Choice. We are elated to have been chosen for this award and are proud of our employees who serve our members with the customer care they deserve.



Hillsboro Brewing Company - Pictured left, Scott Haakenson, Amy Swiggum, Jana Pedretti, Jen Krings, Reggie Nelson and Garin Mayer

FROM THE CEO



Happy Holidays to all of you. As you're reading this, I sincerely hope you and your family had a wonderful Thanksgiving! If your family hunts, I hope you harvested what you were after! I'll also take a minute to wish you a Merry Christmas and a safe and splendid New Year.

It's been a very busy 2023 for the Cooperative! From construction to movements in our workforce, we've stayed busy. As you'll see in this edition of our newsletter, we've welcomed Todd Tunks back to the Cooperative. We're excited to have him back with his past experience, and the knowledge he's gained elsewhere, we look forward to his help on the Monroe Grant. And although we've already touched base on this in previous newsletters, I want to say we're very fortunate for the staff we have, and the quality employees that have joined us in 2023. Without these employees, awards like Vernon County's "Large Business of the Year" wouldn't be possible.

Our Crawford County Grant has now wrapped up and we've moved our focus to the Monroe County Grants. This weather has been great in helping us get a jump on these grants. We will have a lot of work to complete yet in 2024, and we look forward to adding new members as we complete the build. We continue to review grant opportunities for the Cooperative. The Federal Government has created a \$42.5B grant called Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment, or BEAD. The State of Wisconsin's portion of this is \$1.055B. We are reviewing how this grant may help the Cooperative deploy much needed Broadband access to rural Wisconsin residents. We will continue to update you through this process.

Thank you for being a member of the Cooperative!

How much Internet Speed do you need?



Go to: <https://www.consumerreports.org/electronics/internet/how-much-internet-speed-do-you-need-a1714131782/>

CYBER SECURITY



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.

100 Mbps Internet FREE For 30 Days



Take advantage of this special offer until December 10, 2024
www.vernoncom.coop/100-promo

TOYS FOR CHRISTMAS



Bethel Butikk's "Operation Christmas" program served over 1500 people last year providing toys for families in need at Christmas. Families within income guidelines are able to go the store and pick out toys for their children during the week of December 4th. VC Co-op is taking donations until December 4th and will then deliver them to Bethel Butikk for distribution. Consider making a donation and help bring joy to families at Christmas. Donations after December 4th can be made to the Butikk.



Stop by our office and pick up a **2024 VC Co-op calendar**. The monthly photos are selections from our photo contest. *Quantities are limited.*

GIFT CERTIFICATES AVAILABLE

We all have them? That hard to buy for person that seems to have everything. Consider a gift certificate from VC Co-op.



EMPLOYEE NEWS



Welcome back Todd Tunks! After working in Illinois for the past 7 years, Todd has accepted the position of Outside Plant Manager with the cooperative. Todd previously worked for VC Co-op for 19 years as a Network Engineer. Todd will oversee the Installation and Repair, Construction, and Engineering departments. Todd began his employment on October 30th.

Congratulations to Josh Skaaland and Roger Nelson on their 5 year anniversary for serving the cooperative. Josh works in Installation and Repair and Roger is our Facilities Technician. Both employees stated they couldn't believe it has already been 5 years of employment!



A plethora of "Trick or Treaters" showed up for Halloween in downtown Westby. Young and old alike weathered the cold, brisk air. You never know who will show up on Halloween. Cruella and her Dalmations were the theme this year in the office!

VETERANS DAY



Gary Gilbertson from WVRQ was the guest speaker for VC Co-op's Veterans Day employee meeting. Gary is a well-known radio personality who served in the army from 1966 - 1969. He spoke of the time while he was stationed in Fort Leonard Wood MO, and his deployment in Kaiserslauter, Germany. Gary has a lifelong passion for broadcasting and his job in the army was just that. In those times there were no cell phones,

computers or social media, so radio was the only means of communication, making it a very important part of serving in the armed forces. Gary has been employed at WVRQ since 1965, working as a sales person, covering live sports and the polka show. *Thank you Gary for serving our country and for all you do for our communities!*

SAFETY TIPS FOR SHOPPING ONLINE



TIP # 1

CHECK YOUR DEVICES

Before making any online purchases, make sure the device you're using to shop online is up-to-date. Next, take a look at your accounts and ask, do they each have strong passwords? Even better, use two-factor authentication.

Protect your devices by keeping the software up-to-date. These include items like mobile phones, computers, and tablets, but also appliances, electronics, and children's toys.

- Once you've purchased an internet connected device, change the default password and use different and complex passwords for each one. Consider using a password manager.
- Check the device privacy and security settings to make sure you understand how your information will be used and stored. Also make sure you're not sharing more information than you want to provide.
- Enable automatic software updates where applicable, as running the latest version of software helps ensure the manufacturers are still supporting it and providing the latest patches for vulnerabilities.



TIP # 2

ONLY SHOP THROUGH TRUSTED SOURCES

Think about how you're searching online. Are you searching from home, or on public Wi-Fi? How are you finding deals? Are you clicking on links in emails? Clicking on ads on webpages? If it looks suspicious, something's probably not right.

- Before providing any personal or financial information, make sure that you are interacting with a reputable, established vendor.
- Always verify the legitimacy before supplying any information. If you've never heard of it, check twice before handing over your information.
- Most of us receive emails from retailers about special offers during the holidays. Cyber Criminals often send phishing emails designed to look like they're from retailers that have malicious links or ask for you to input your personal or financial information.
- Don't click links or download attachments unless you're confident of where they came from. If you're unsure if an email is legitimate, type the URL of the retailer or other company into your web browser as opposed to clicking the link.
- Never provide your password, personal or financial information in response to an unsolicited email. Legitimate businesses will not email you asking for this information.
- Make sure your information is being encrypted. Indications that your information is encrypted include a URL that begins with "https".



TIP # 3

USE SAFE METHODS FOR PURCHASES

If you're going to make that purchase, what information are you handing over? Before providing personal information, check the website's privacy policy. Make sure you understand how your information will be stored.

- If you can, use a credit card instead of a debit card. There are laws to limit your liability for fraudulent credit card charges, but you may not have the same level of protection for your debit cards. Because a debit card draws directly from your bank account, unauthorized charges could leave you with insufficient funds to pay other bills.
- Check your credit card and bank statements for any fraudulent charges regularly. Immediately notify your bank or financial institution for unapproved charges.
- Be wary of emails requesting personal information. Attackers may attempt to gather information by sending emails requesting that you confirm a purchase or account information. Legitimate businesses will not solicit this type of information through email. Do not provide sensitive information through email.
- If you receive a suspicious email that you think may be a phishing scam, you can report it at <https://www.us-cert.gov/report-phishing>.
- If you believe your personal or financial information has been stolen, report it right away to your local police and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). There's information on the FTC website, <https://www.identitytheft.gov/>, about how to report.
- Immediately change your passwords. Use complex passwords, and a different one for each account. A password manager can help you do this.

Learn more at cisa.gov/shop-safely



December



December 4 ***Last day to donate to toys for children - Bethel Butikk***
December 21 ***First day of winter***
December 24 ***Christmas Eve***
December 25 ***Merry Christmas (Our office will be closed)***
December 31 ***Happy New Year***



103 N Main Street
Westby, WI 54667

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

(608) 634-3136 • www.vernoncom.coop