



MONROE COUNTY GROUNDBREAKING

Vernon Communications celebrated the expansion of broadband internet service in Monroe County with a groundbreaking ceremony on Tuesday, August 15, 2023. The ceremony was held at St. Mary's Distillery near Cashton, and was well attended by local officials, community members, representatives from Vernon Communications, the PSC and Monroe County employees, townships and Broadband committee.

This groundbreaking signifies the beginning of a fiber-to-the-home grant project bringing internet to more than 1,250 homes and businesses in Monroe County.

Garin Mayer, CEO said, *"I'd like to thank the State of Wisconsin for funding a robust Broadband Grant program, and the PSC for awarding these 2 grants that will allow us to continue to expand world class fiber optic broadband to rural Wisconsin residents who need it. These 2 projects will be Vernon Communications Cooperative's 9th and 10th grants, which I believe shows how successful the State PSC grant programs have been in Southwest Wisconsin and how committed Vernon Communications Cooperative has been to providing rural fiber broadband"*.

Phase 1 of the construction project is already underway, and is expected to be completed by the end of 2024. Upon completion, the expansion will provide high-speed internet service to underserved locations in the area.

The expansion of broadband internet service in Monroe County is a major economic development initiative. High-speed internet is essential for businesses and residents to stay competitive in the 21st century economy. The expansion will help to attract new businesses to the area, and will also help to support existing businesses.

Representative Loren Oldenburg gave praise to VC Co-op stating, *"I want to give a big shout out to Vernon Communications and their board of directors for stepping up and doing this because it all comes down to them making that choice to serve Monroe County. It's a great opportunity for everyone."*

We are committed to providing our customers with the best possible internet service, and this expansion will help us to reach even more people in our community.



MONTHLY NEWS

WORLD-CLASS TECHNOLOGY. UNRIVALED LOCAL SERVICE.

September 2023

Top News Inside

- Ground Breaking in Monroe County
- Tablet donations
- CPNI
- Telehealth

FROM THE CEO



Hello All,

As you'll see throughout this month's newsletter, we've officially kicked off the Cooperative's fiber- to-the-home projects in Monroe County. These two projects were possible with Public Service Commission (PSC) grants and the public/private partnership with

Monroe County. We'll be extending world-class fiber optic broadband to over 1,250 new locations. If you're reading this, and have our broadband service now, I think you can appreciate how excited the residents within these two grant areas are to receive that same excellent broadband!

As we've now entered September, thoughts turn to Fall activities. I love most of what Fall brings, hunting, fishing, hiking, the general outdoors, but there is one activity that is my least favorite and that is contract negotiations with T.V. networks, such as Time Warner, ESPN, Big 10, etc. These networks routinely ask for significant rate hikes to continue to carry the channels you watch. We try our best with our partners to limit these increases, but sometimes that means a channel can go dark until terms are agreed to and it can also mean that we agree to pay the increased rate. Unfortunately, we've reached a point as a cooperative where we can no longer absorb these rate hikes and we're forced to pass along the programmer rate increase to you, the consumer subscriber.

What drives these increases you ask? Well, every major sports negotiation that results in a network carrying games usually comes with a larger contract, and a higher cost to us and you the consumer. Or, when a network has a very popular show, like Yellowstone, we will see that network ask for more at the next contract negotiation.

We will continue to try and limit these increases. I want to make you aware of the potential increases, and why. I'll bring you updates as we enter our contract negotiations with the networks.

Remember.... Call Before You Dig



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



Chatbots are applications that can simulate real conversations. Many legitimate organizations use chatbots for customer service, such as helping customers troubleshoot problems with products. Some chatbots use artificial intelligence (AI) for more advanced tasks like writing essays, creating art, and more. Unfortunately, cybercriminals can also use chatbots for malicious purposes.

Chatbots on Scam Websites

Cybercriminals can use chatbots to make their phishing websites seem more legitimate. For example, cybercriminals can add a chatbot to their scam websites. If you click a link to the scam website, the chatbot will pop up and guide you through the process of entering your sensitive information. The interactive experience makes the website seem legitimate, so you may be more likely to fall for the scam.

Chatbots and Phishing Emails

Cybercriminals can use AI chatbots to create text for phishing emails.

For example, cybercriminals can enter a simple prompt like "Write a phishing email that appears to come from Google". The chatbot will create an email that appears to come from Google and asks you to perform an action, like clicking a link. This way, cybercriminals can use chatbot text to target you with phishing emails.

What Can I Do to Stay Safe?

Don't fall for chatbot scams!

Follow the tips below to stay safe:

- Even if a message seems legitimate, remain cautious. Cybercriminals can use chatbots to impersonate organizations, brands, and people.
- When you receive an email, stop and look for red flags. For example, watch out for emails that prompt you to click links.
- Verify that messages are legitimate before sharing any sensitive information. Contact the sender directly by using another method of communication.

A testimonial from a happy customer in the De Soto area:

"Your technicians were competent, friendly, and interested. They handled the internet problem like aces and deserve a medal! They took care of the problem without me being there".

Steve

COMMUNITY GIVING

VC Co-op donated tablets to local churches that is part of our community outreach program. Pictured below are some photos of members of churches that previously sent us their Sunday morning services.



Bethel Home



Coon Valley Lutheran



Good Shepherd



Grace Church



Redemption Chapel



La Farge Free Methodist



Westby Coon Prairie



Our Savior's



Immanuel Lutheran



Middle Coon Valley

CPNI

What is Customer Proprietary Network Information (CPNI)?

When setting up service with Vernon Communications or any communications company, it is required by law to fill out a CPNI form.

Why do customers need to fill out the CPNI form and present a password when inquiring about their account?

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires we have password protection on our customer accounts before we are able to provide any CPNI Information regarding their accounts. They are doing this to protect customers from hackers and or criminals from accessing phone records, and using any of the customer's account information for criminal activity such as identity theft. In December 2007, the FCC adopted new rules for telephone companies to protect their customer's information. This is very similar to HIPPA in the healthcare world.

CPNI includes where, when and to whom a customer places a call, as well as the types of phone service offerings to which the customer subscribes, and the extent to which the services are used.

What type of information is protected by CPNI?

- Time of calls
- Called phone numbers
- Locations of calls
- Cost and billing of calls
- Service features
- Premium services, such as call directory assistance

September Calendar

September 4 - Readstown Labor Day Parade

September 10 - Cashton Fall Festival Parade

September 13 -17 - Vernon County Fair

September 23 - Viola Horse and Colt Parade

September 30 - Retreat World's Fair

See Us There!!

BOARD REPRESENTATION



Brad Gabrielson
District 8



Marty Stenslien
District 6



Steven Woodhouse
District 1

Because of new grant areas and the passing of Miles Bohland from District 5 (De Soto), Districts for 3 Board members representation have changed. Steven Woodhouse is now representing Genoa and De Soto and will also be representing members in the new district of Crawford County. Marty Stenslien previously represented Westby Rural and Cashton, but will now represent Westby Rural and the Monroe County grant. Brad Gabrielson from District 8 is now representing La Farge and Cashton.

BROADBAND DELIVERS HEALTHCARE

On average, rural residents are older and face higher incidences of chronic and acute medical conditions, including cancer and diabetes. In addition, rural residents must travel farther to access health care. Broadband-enabled telemedicine promises easy access to greater health

care benefits and significant economic benefits for rural America.

Telehealth is expected to grow 25% in the next few years.



48M Americans live in rural areas.



Rural areas have **25% fewer physicians** per 100,000 residents than urban areas.



Rural telehealth can enable, on average, and per medical facility, more than

\$30,000 in savings



from avoided travel expenses, lost wages, and hospital costs.

60% of the nation's 7,200 Health Professional Shortage Areas are in rural counties.



Rural telehealth can increase annual local laboratory and pharmacy revenues

\$12,000-\$45,000



EMPLOYEE NEWS



VC Co-op sponsored "Vernon County National Night Out", which was held on Tuesday August 1, 2023. National Night Out is a community building event that promotes a safer community. There were approximately 2,800 people that attended the event. Attendees received a free meal and there were fun activities for everyone. VC Co-op hosted a "Phishing" game to teach kids the importance of staying safe online. The event is also a safety and teaching event for young and old alike.



VC Co-op employees at the groundbreaking ceremony at St. Mary's Distillery, near Cashton



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Lobby Hours:

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

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