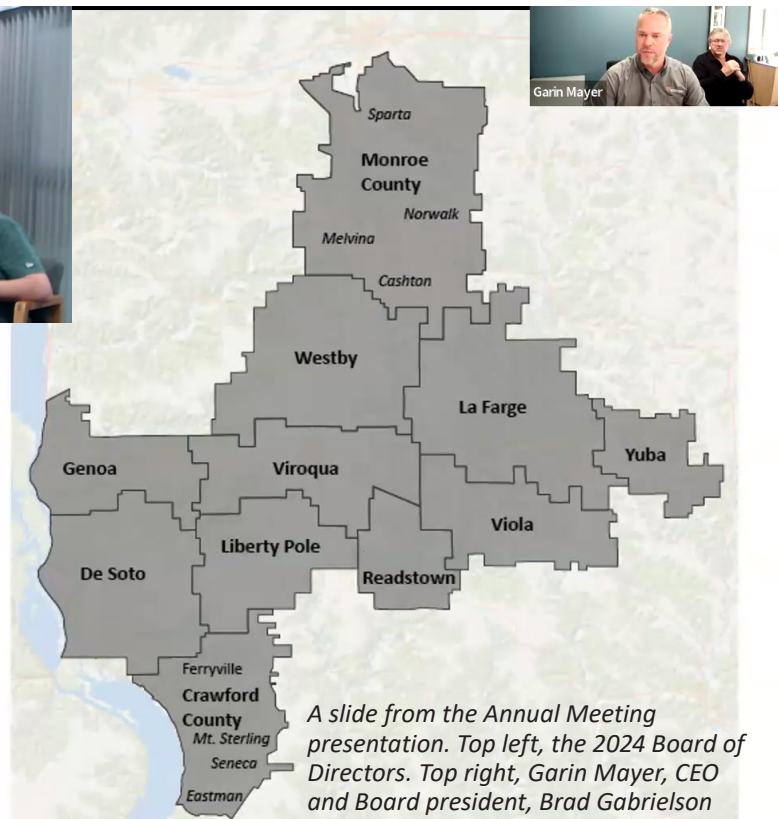




Vernon Communications Serving Area

2024 Annual Meeting



A slide from the Annual Meeting presentation. Top left, the 2024 Board of Directors. Top right, Garin Mayer, CEO and Board president, Brad Gabrielson



MONTHLY NEWS

WORLD-CLASS TECHNOLOGY. UNRIVALED LOCAL SERVICE.

May 2024

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The 2024 Vernon Communications Cooperative Annual meeting was held virtually on April 11, 2024 at 1:00 pm. The meeting was conducted with a PowerPoint presentation and an agenda of speakers. A virtual meeting has opened up the opportunity for more members to attend. The attendance was high and anyone who viewed the meeting received a \$25.00 credit on their VC Co-op billing statement.

The meeting began with the "Pledge of Allegiance", and was called to order by Board President, Brad Gabrielson. Garin Mayer, CEO made the opening remarks and although a motion was made to bypass the reading of the 2023 annual meeting minutes, the report was available for anyone to read. The 2023 financial report was given by Scott Haakenson, Controller. Garin Mayer, CEO reported on the progress of the cooperative and the current fiber construction project happening in Monroe County. He also touched on our serving area, the retirement of two employees, Terri Kotek and Matt Mc Garry and the hiring of two new employees, Amy Swiggum and Todd Tunks. He also announced the director election results for 2024 from District 4 (Viroqua) and District 6 (Westby Rural and Monroe County Grant). The elected director for District 4 is Trudy Wallin and for District 6 is Mark Cade. They will both serve for 3 year terms. Garin also thanked Marty Stenslien for serving the cooperative as Director for 23 years. Jana Pedretti, Member Relations Manager announced the 2024 scholarship recipients as seen on pg 3.

Thank you to all who attended the meeting and we look forward to serving you in 2024.

FROM THE CEO



Greetings to you and May! I can't believe we're already 5 months into 2024! The winter was wonderful, unless you're a winter activities fan of course. As you may have heard me say in our 2024 Annual meeting, the mild winter allowed us to continue construction almost non-stop in our Monroe County Grants. This is great as it hopefully allows us to shorten the timeline those new members are waiting for service from

the Cooperative.

With the great weather, we've seen members begin ditch, prairie and field burning. I can't stress enough that you should be careful when burning! If you're considering burning, take a look at your ditch, look for posts with orange signs indicating the Cooperative has facilities in the vicinity. There may be a hand hole that contains the fiber optic cable that carries service to you and your neighbors. Those boxes can and do catch fire, which in turn may burn up that fiber, disrupting service to you and your neighbors. Unfortunately, this isn't something the Cooperative absorbs, you would be responsible for those restoration costs and they can quickly add up into the tens of thousands of dollars!

I want to also update you on the Broadband, Equity, Access & Deployment (BEAD) program that has been discussed at several annual meetings. The program continues to progress through it's steps, at the time of me writing this, the Volume I proposal of the PSC has been approved by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). I know you're probably wondering what this means. Unfortunately, there simply isn't enough room in our monthly news to explain it in detail. Here are some of the basics if you're curious. The Federal Government allocating over \$42 Billion in the infrastructure bill to provide Broadband connectivity to those in need. They assigned this program to the NTIA to administer. NTIA asked State agencies to apply for grants. In Wisconsin, the PSC created the application and was awarded just over \$1 Billion in funds to extend Broadband to all those in need. The PSC and NTIA are now working through how those funds will be allocated. The current stage we're at is what they call the "challenge" process. In this stage, the final eligible locations will be determined. Once the challenge window closes, the PSC will identify areas that may be applied for, or bid for. At that point, we as the Cooperative would then weigh out all of the regulations/stipulations/opportunity concerning the identified areas and make the decision to participate. We're closely monitoring the stipulations of this program currently, and will continue to do so through the programs timelines.

If you're interested in more details, I suggest you go to the NTIA's website and/or Wisconsin PSC's and the UW Extension website.

- **NTIA:** <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/funding-programs/broadband-equity-access-and-deployment-bead-program>
- **WI PSC:** <https://psc.wi.gov/Pages/ServiceType/Broadband/GrantLocalPlanning.aspx>
- **UW Extension:** <https://economicdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/topics/broadband/>

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.
- **Create 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.

2024 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Congratulations to these 10 students who will receive \$1000.00 each towards their college education. Vernon Communications announced the 2024 scholarship recipients at the virtual annual meeting on Thursday April 11, 2024. These students were selected from an outside committee of Co-op members. The cost of continuing education has become a financial difficulty for some students and the burden of student loans can be overwhelming. Vernon Communications values education and considers it a priority in our community giving. We wish these students and all students the best of luck in your ongoing pursuit of a higher education.



Rachel Diehl
Viroqua, H.S.



Cole Fletcher
Viroqua, H.S.



Hayden Fowell
La Farge, H.S.



Hailey Gander
Kickapoo, H.S.



Chelsea Gronning
De Soto, H.S.



Lillian Sanders
Cashton, H.S.



Liliana Rozeske
Viroqua, H.S.



Makenna Rudie
Westby, H.S.



Maycee Olson
Westby, H.S.



Kirsten Wood
La Farge, H.S.

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WESTBY ROAD CONSTRUCTION



Road construction on Main Street in Westby is underway and the traffic flow will be changing after Memorial Day.

There will be one lane of traffic going South in the front of our building and going North the traffic will move one way on Bekkedal Avenue behind our building.

For the safety of our members the drop box in the front of our office will no longer be accessible. We now have a new drop box behind our office in our parking lot. You can either drive or walk up to put your payment in our new box, along with the other usual forms of payment. If you need to come into our office after May 27th, the main entrance will be on the South side of our building. Thank you for understanding during this road construction project, as we continue to serve you the best way we can.

CAPITAL CREDIT ALLOCATIONS

What is a capital credit allocation?

This month's invoice contains a notification about your capital credit allocation from the Cooperative. We would like to give thanks to Dave Maxwell and Vernon Electric Cooperative for allowing us to use an adjusted version of the article they included in their newsletter:

Your cooperative generates margins (profits), which are returned to the members over a period of time. The cooperative must generate enough revenue to cover all costs of providing services and operating the cooperative. Any margins left at the end of the year are allocated to the members as capital credits.

Once a year, a formal audit confirms the cooperative's income and expenses. Income remaining after deducting all expenses is the "net margin." This amount represents members' capital credits. Capital credits are divided among the members, who are the owners of the cooperative, in proportion to the amount of telephone, internet and/or television service each member has purchased. This follows the cooperative principle that ownership benefits are generally in proportion to usage.

Although the margins are annually allocated and assigned to members, they aren't necessarily distributed at that time. Capital credits represent an important source of financing for the cooperative. Just as the benefits of a cooperative are tied to use, so is the responsibility to finance the business. The cooperative is financed when you pay for telephone, internet and/or television service and through the Co-op retaining capital credits.

Your board of directors, made up of members just like you, decides on the amount of capital credits that can be distributed back to the members each year and still keep the cooperative on a sound financial basis. The retained amount belongs to you and will be paid out at a later date.

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT



Blush Roots Boutique is a quaint, busy, little store with a large variety of clothing, shoes, perfume, jewelry, gifts and more in downtown Westby. Owner, Kari Davidson has always had a passion for fashion, clothing and shoes.

After working as a paralegal in La Crosse for 15 years, she decided she would follow her dream and open a clothing store. She started small in a store on Main Street during the pandemic in October of 2020 and after realizing she needed more space she moved to West State Street in Westby in 2021 and has never looked back. The store has lots to offer with a wide variety of women's clothing from casual, trendy to Boho, chic and sizes that range from small to 3X. The store employs 5 people working at various timeframes. Kari is married to her husband Geno and a busy mom of two (Ashlyn and Riggs). She also has a spray tanning business that she runs out of her home near Westby. Kari states she could not run her business without Vernon Communications internet. She uses it for Point of sale, receipts, the bar code scanner, Wifi, ordering of clothing, social media and music. She points out when she was opening her business, she had so many things to take care of and tasks that needed to be complete before her opening, she forgot to call to set up her internet. She called VC Co-op the day before her opening and we got her on the calendar and set up minutes before the opening! The building had not been used for some time, so there was wiring that needed to be done and a fiber modem and router installed. The entire job was complete just minutes before the store opened!! She was very grateful for our employees to have completed the project prior to opening.

Blush Roots Boutique is open Wednesday - Friday, 11 am - 5 pm, Saturday from 10 am - 3 pm and Sunday from 10 am - 1 pm.

Westby road construction will not impede on store hours and they will conduct business as usual with the exception of a possibility of a change in summer hours. Stop by to see what Blush Roots Boutique has to offer. Vernon Communications is giving away a \$35.00 gift certificate to the store goto: www.vernoncom.coop/ spotlight. Watch for it!

EMPLOYEE NEWS



25 years is an employment milestone for **Scott Frederick** and his dedicated service to the cooperative and we congratulate him. Scott works as a Plant Maintenance Supervisor. He was recognized at an employee meeting on March 21st.



Tracy Budworth (Director of Marketing) also celebrated an anniversary on February 27th. This was her 1 year anniversary and she was recognized at the same employee meeting.



Burning ditches in road right of way can cause serious problems for our equipment. A recent burn caused damage to one of our vaults and residents in the area were without service for several hours due to the burn. Several employees were called to the scene to repair the damage to our equipment and get service restored to our members. **Please pay special attention when burning this season to prevent a costly mistake.**



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



Lobby Hours:

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

(608) 634-3136 • www.vernoncom.coop

PAYMENT OPTIONS

Go To: www.vernoncom.coop and click "Pay Now"
Call (844) 827-4766 (Have your account number)
EFT (Automatic Payment) - Sign up and get a one time \$5.00 credit.