

# MONTHLY NEWS

January 2025



Connecting our members with exceptional communication solutions with ease and integrity.

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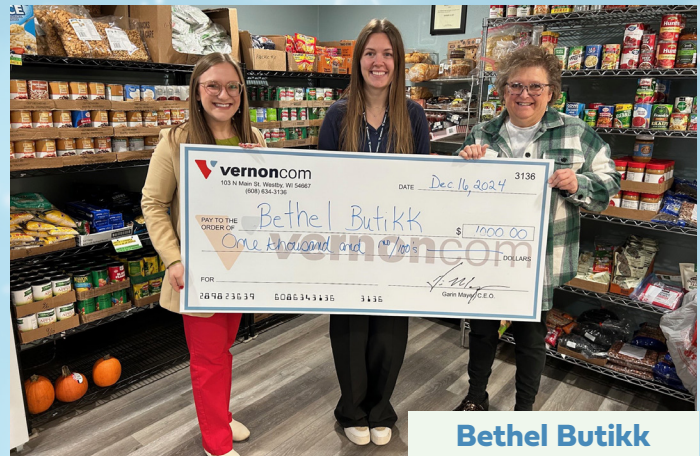
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2024 has come to an end! As we look ahead to new beginnings in 2025, we want to express our heartfelt gratitude. We are thankful for our members and we look forward to serving you in the New Year. Here are some of our accomplishments in 2024:

- **VernonCom Surpassed 9,500 Members**
- **Rebrand, New Logo**
- **\$10,000 in Scholarship Grants**
- **5 New Employees**
- **Matched Toy Donations for Christmas and distributed to Bethel Butikk**
- **Donations to Local Food Pantries \$6000.00**
- **Giving to Non Profits Exceeding \$25,000**
- **Constructed more than 270 miles of fiber**
- **Over 440 New Members**
- **VernonCom Employees and Board of Directors donated to families in need for Christmas**
- **Monroe County Grant Complete**

## Season of Giving

Food pantries in our local communities are facing unprecedented challenges this year due to the cost of food and the overwhelming need for non-perishable items. This makes people experiencing food insecurities even more difficult to feed their families. According to the USDA, more than 38 million people in the U.S., including 12 million children, are food insecure. Every community in the nation is home to families who face hunger, but rural communities are hit especially hard. VernonCom has gifted six local food pantries (Cashton Cupboard & Closet, Bethel Butikk, La Farge Free Methodist Food Pantry, Living Faith, New Hope and Viola United Methodist Food Pantry) a \$1000.00 check to help serve families in need this holiday season.



**Bethel Butikk**



**La Farge Free Methodist**



## From the CEO

Greetings! All of us at VernonCom hope you and your families, both here and abroad had a wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year. It's already 2025! What happened to 2024? Or maybe a better question is, what happened in 2024? If you recall, last winter was mild, (fingers crossed for this one as well), that allowed us and our contractors to begin work on the Monroe County grants early. By most standards, this is very early. This translated to an early finish as well, with the final work completed in early October, almost six weeks before expected.



Within the industry, the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program (BEAD) dominated most of the discussion in 2024. With its \$42.5 billion price tag, it is the single largest broadband grant to date. Wisconsin's portion of this federal grant is \$1.05 billion. These types of dollar amounts certainly

grab one's attention. As is the norm, there is no such thing as free money and the devil is always in the details. After reviewing the details, the Federal Agency has made it an uphill battle to participate in the grant.

Another bit of news that you may or may not remember from 2024: there was a Presidential election! Why do I bring this up? Well, the election results may impact BEAD. BEAD is a program that was set up under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The IIJA was signed in 2021. There are arguments on both sides, and as I write this article, a full 3 years after the IIJA was signed, not one new fiber-to-the-home customer has been hooked up. I mention this because as new administration comes to office, they will look at multiple programs that the previous administration implemented, (they always do), and if a program hasn't become fully vested, there is the possibility it could change. We will keep an eye on the BEAD program to see what develops, if anything, in 2025.

As we move into 2025, here is the annual apology for video rates. As we've discussed many times, network contracts show yearly increases, and unfortunately those increases are passed directly to you as the consumer. If you're looking to reduce costs, you may want to take a look at our streaming options if you haven't already.

We're excited to keep providing you with a great customer experience in 2025.

Happy New Year!  
Garin

## Attention Streaming Members

You may have noticed that the VernonCom Streaming App has been updated on certain devices. When searching for the Streaming App, be sure to look for our new logo! While the search function remains the same, the updated logos will be visible on Roku and Apple TV. Coming soon to Fire TV Stick devices.



## Giving



Toys are important to any child, but especially for Christmas. Toy donations to Bethel Butikk were in great need this year and VernonCom matched our members donations, toy for toy and more. Thank you to all volunteers in our local food pantries for taking the time to help those in need.

VernonCom employees and Board of Directors chipped in and made a donation to Vernon County Human Services for 2 families in need of Christmas presents for their children. Tracy Thelen (pictured right) worked with the county to get the information needed for the children's gifts, shopped, bought and wrapped the gifts. Mariah (left), a Vernon County Social Worker, delivered the gifts to the families in time to be under the tree on Christmas morning!



# 2025 Heart of the Driftless Photo Contest



**Do you love to take photos of scenery, kids and/or animals?**

We would love to see your pictures! VernonCom's "Heart of the Driftless Photo Contest" is going on NOW!! Send us your digital photos by April 4, 2025 and they will be entered into our contest. The Grand Prize winner will receive a \$100.00 VernonCom bill credit and additional winners from each category will receive a \$50.00 bill credit. Send your jpeg photos to: [contest@vernoncom.coop](mailto:contest@vernoncom.coop). Go to our website for details: [www.vernoncom.coop](http://www.vernoncom.coop)

## New Billboard Coming Soon in Viroqua...



## Scholarship Opportunities

VernonCom is offering ten scholarships to members with graduating seniors and students who are continuing their education. Go to our website [www.vernoncom.coop](http://www.vernoncom.coop) for details. Completed applications are due by February 14, 2025.



## New Blog

We now have a blog! Our website will feature insights on industry trends and updates. Go to our website and check out our first article:

<https://vernoncom.coop/how-better-connectivity-is-transforming-rural-wisconsin/>

### How Better Connectivity is Transforming Rural Wisconsin





## Business Spotlight



This month, we're shining a spotlight on a beloved cornerstone of our community: Dregne's Scandinavian Gifts in Westby, Wisconsin. For nearly five decades, it has been a local staple, blending Norwegian culture, craftsmanship, and family history. What began as a small hardware store in 1975, has since been transformed by Jana and Dave Dregne into a treasured destination that celebrates the Scandinavian heritage.

The Dregne's store we know today started roughly three years after Jana and Dave purchased the space. The addition of a Scandinavian room, inspired by the previous owner Violetta Flugstad, sought to highlight the community's Nordic roots. Since then, the Dregne family has curated a beautiful collection of Scandinavian treasures, including collectibles, Sølje jewelry, American-made glassware, Heritage Lace, calendars, and rosemaling art painted by a local artist named Mary Koehler. A recent addition, Glögg – a traditional Scandinavian hot drink, has become a hit with customers during the holiday season.

In addition to unique gifts, Dregne's offers an extensive selection of Norwegian literature, with over 500 titles ranging from language guides to cultural books. Local authors such as Jerry Apps and John Armbruster often visit for book signings, further cementing the store's connection to the local community.

A core strength of Dregne's is its commitment to family values. Despite having only a handful of employees over the years, many have stayed with the business for decades. It is important to them that each employee feels truly appreciated. During challenges like Covid-19 and road construction, Dregne's worked hard to ensure their loyal customers could still enjoy the store's unique offerings: a true testament to the dedication of its staff and the strong relationships they've built with customers.

To celebrate 49 years in business, Dregne's hosted their anniversary event. On the first Saturday of every October, the event offers a memorable way to share milestones and connect with customers while enjoying local authors, live music, and great food. Looking ahead, Dregne's continues to evolve with the times. Though the store is known for its renowned in-person shopping experience, they've expanded their reach by embracing digital platforms. With 300 items being offered on their website, VernonCom is proud to provide the internet service that supports their online sales.

**Dregne's Scandinavian Gifts is open Monday- Thursday: 10:00 am – 2:00 pm, Friday-Saturday: 10:00 am – 4:00 pm**

## Employee News



VernonCom employees endured the cold for the Viroqua Tinklefest parade on November 29th. There were many Christmas entries and floats to begin the Holiday season. A different parade route (due to the road construction in downtown Viroqua) and the cold didn't stop parade goers from watching this illuminating event.

## New Employee



Jeff Holey began his employment with VernonCom on December 2nd, as a Locator. Having a fiber construction background he will be a great asset to the cooperative. Jeff lives in La Farge with his wife

Tabitha and two children, Abigail (9) and Orlando (6). He has many hobbies which include: blacksmithing, taxidermy, hunting, fishing and producing maple syrup. He also attends many "Mountain Man Rendezvous" events with his family. Welcome Jeff to the VernonCom family.



103 N Main Street  
Westby, WI 54667

### Lobby Hours:

8:00 am - 4:30 pm  
(M-F)  
(608) 634-3136  
[www.vernoncom.coop](http://www.vernoncom.coop)



### Payment Options

Go To: [www.vernoncom.coop](http://www.vernoncom.coop)  
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(Have your account number)  
EFT (Automatic Payment) - Sign  
up and get a one time \$5.00 credit.