

MONTHLY NEWS

January 2026

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

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Giving Continues in 2025



Garin Mayer, CEO, Therese Flock, Member Support and Susan Noble (VEDA)

Vernon Economic Development Association (VEDA) received a \$2,000.00 donation from VernonCom for food pantry's Community Hunger Solutions (CHS) program. CHS sources excess fresh produce and dairy products from farms in our bountiful Driftless Region and distributes this nutritious food to area pantries, meal sites, and food banks where many elderly and low-income families who are struggling with hunger go for help.

The food is delivered to more than 20 food pantries and meal sites in the region, serving at least 2,500 elderly and low-income families per month. These communities include Viroqua, Viola, La Farge, Westby, Hillsboro, Ontario, Soldiers Grove, Gays Mills, Cashton, and Wilton. For some of these partners, CHS is the only source these pantries can obtain perishable items from and they are thrilled with the quality and freshness of items that CHS delivers.

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La Farge Free Methodist



Pastor Mark Phillips and Kathy Madden, Member Support



Janice Von Ruden, Ginger Von Ruden and Jana Pedretti, Member Relations , Mgr.



Board president Trudy Wallin, Becki Rider, and Austin Kropf

December is a month of giving and VernonCom made donations to eight local food pantries. In addition to the VEDA donation, \$1,000.00 was given to Bethel Butikk in Westby, Cashton Cupboard and Closet, La Farge Free Methodist Food Pantry, Viola Methodist Food Pantry, Living Faith Food Pantry in Viroqua, Gays Mills Food Pantry, Wilton Food Pantry and New Hope Food Pantry in De Soto. As food insecurity rose this year, the local pantries were profoundly grateful for VernonCom's support.

CEO Attends Summit in Washington D.C.



Garin Mayer, CEO, recently attended the NTCA TEPS, or NTCA Telecom Executive Policy Summit, held in Washington D.C. U.S. House of Representative Derrick Van Orden, represented Wisconsin's 3rd District.

The purpose of the visit was to encourage Representatives that reform of Universal Service Funding (USF) is needed, along with other legislation designed to help small rural providers. Strong reliable broadband is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity. Keeping families connected, supporting local businesses, and ensuring rural areas aren't left behind as technology and demand continues to grow.

Donations Continue...



Christina Stone and Board of Director, Daren Matthes



Debbie Groves, Board of Director, Steve Woodhouse and Linda Kunert



These amazing volunteers were very thankful to receive Christmas toys for Bethel Butikk. The need for toys was great, and VernonCom matched the donations they received from our members. Special thanks to the non-profit, Power of 100, for their donation. Families were able to go to the Butikk and pick out toys for their children, just in time for Christmas.



Several deliveries of toys were made to Bethel Butikk

Scholarship Opportunities



VernonCom invests in the future of our youth by offering scholarships to students of members who are committed to continuing their education beyond high school. Go to our website: www.vernoncom.coop for details. The application deadline is February 13, 2026.



2026 is VernonCom's 75th Anniversary. We look forward to celebrating with you!

2025 was a busy year at VernonCom

- Exceeded 10,000 members
- Over 25 miles of mainline fiber construction
- 9 food pantry donations
- Over 200 toys delivered for Christmas
- 35 employees
- \$10, 000.00 paid in scholarship grants
- Participated in seven local parades
- Over 1,000 new Calix ONT's installed since August
- Invested thousands in donations to local communities
- 3 NEW serving areas (Norwalk, Ontario and Wilton)
- Canned food items collected for food pantries
- Over 700 new members
- School and sporting event sponsors
- Supported local restaurants weekly
- Community event sponsorships
- Vernon County Fair sponsor
- Members of local Chambers
- Donations to police & fire departments
- Streaming classes offered
- Local businesses highlighted monthly
- Two member appreciation picnics

Employee News

Congratulations to Jeff Holey on his one year anniversary of service to the cooperative. You will see Jeff working outside in all kinds of weather during construction and in the off season.



There were lots of ugly sweaters in the office during the Christmas holiday.



It was a **GRINCHY** dress-up day!



The Twinklefest parade in Viroqua on Black Friday is an extraordinary event with lots of festive floats, lights, and more lights to kick off the Holiday Season!

Business Spotlight



Dode (Crystal) and Jim Hanson have owned Kickapoo Hardware & Mercantile in La Farge for four years. Once they became empty nesters, they were looking for a life change and weren't quite sure where it would lead them. Jim had been employed by Kimberly Clark in Appleton for many years and the company decided they were moving 425 employees to Chicago. Jim knew in his heart Chicago was not for him, so the decision was made to move. Dode grew up in La Farge and Jim is from a small town as well. After living in Appleton for many years and Dode wanting to get back to her roots, they started thinking about moving back to La Farge. The previous owner of the hardware store wanted to sell, and as fate would have it, they knew it was meant to be. From there the rest is history.

If walls could talk this hardware store would be able to tell stories. The store is 150 years old and is the oldest building in town! In 1899 a referendum to incorporate La Farge as a village was held in this historic building. It opened as a general store, became a furniture store, dress shop, and a classroom. Also hosted basketball games, wrestling matches, movies, as well as a spot for community entertainment.

When Dode and Jim opened the store, they wanted to keep it as a hardware store because it is known as the most historic hardware store in Wisconsin. They have added products along the way, as well as service offerings such as a UPS drop off site, and UHaul rentals. Because the area is known for the outdoors such as camping, fishing, hiking and hunting, the store sells items to accomodate those activities. Generally, the store is hardware in nature so you can purchase housewares, plumbing, electrical, heating, automotive, paint supplies and even ammunition. People visiting from out of town have access to supplies during their stay.

Some fun facts about the store are: When the store originally opened its doors, it had no electrical or plumbing supplies, as they were not needed back then. The store is older than Coca Cola and sliced bread! The store even has a 1966 Rockola jukebox.

The couple remodeled the second floor of the building and it is now an Airbnb. When time allows, they will eventually remodel the other half of the upstairs for an apartment rental.

In November, Kickapoo Hardware & Mercantile was awarded, New Small Business of the Year for 2025, and was given that award at the Vernon County Awards ceremony in Coon Valley.

One of the first changes in the building when they first opened the store was adding internet from VernonCom. They use it for ordering, banking, research, and an online auction service. When customers come in to purchase items they are unfamiliar with, they get online and help the customer with their needs by using YouTube to help them with their specific project.

The store hours are: 8 am - 5 pm, Monday - Friday, and 8 am - 1 pm on Saturday.



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<https://www.kickapoohardware.com/about-us>



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