

# MONTHLY NEWS

March 2026



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

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## 2025 VernonCom Board of Directors



District 1  
Dan Nelson



District 2  
Daren Matthes



District 3  
Trudy Wallin



District 4  
Steven Woodhouse



At-Large  
Greg Lawton



At-Large  
Mark Cade

This is your current Board of Directors. The 2026 director election is in April. Districts 2 and 4 are up for election. This year, VernonCom has decided to introduce electronic voting to our members for this election. If you have an account set up with Smart Hub Order Management (SHOM), you can cast your ballot through your online account. (See pg. 4 for SmartHub set up). The cooperative highly recommends you set up an account so you can participate in the voting process. Voting through SmartHub will open on March 18, 2026. Complete ballots must be received by 10:00 AM on April 13, 2026. (No late ballots will be accepted). You may contact the office if you need to discuss alternative voting options.

## SAVE THE DATE

### Virtual Annual Meeting

DATE: April 14, 2026

TIME: 1:00 PM

Pre-registration is required for this meeting.  
Go To: <https://vernoncom.coop/annual-meeting/>  
to pre-register.

The 2026 Annual Meeting will be virtual and pre-registration is required. Go to our website and see the landing page for our Annual Meeting. You will need the account name, account number, email address and contact number to register. Once you have been vetted and approved, you will receive a link to attend the meeting on April 14th. You must register by noon on April 13, 2026. If you register and attend the meeting, a \$25.00 bill credit will be applied to the members account on the May statement. (One credit per account).

Anyone in attendance of this meeting will hear about the progress of the cooperative, financials will be presented, plans for the future, and the 2026 scholarship recipients will be introduced.

This year, VernonCom is celebrating 75 Years! We are truly honored to have supported our members through the years, and we remain dedicated to bringing the latest technological advancements to our serving areas.

We look forward to introducing this information to our members and serving you in 2026, and for many years to come.



## From The CEO

Greetings and Happy March! Hopefully most of the really cold weather is behind us. As we move into Spring, I'd like to remind you of a few details happening at the Cooperative. First, our Annual Meeting is scheduled for April 14th. Once again, this meeting will be held virtually, so make sure you register before April 13th to register and attend the meeting.



You may wonder why we've held these meetings virtually? We've seen an increase in attendance in virtual meetings and its more accessible for all members, especially those who aren't in the immediate vicinity of Westby. As we expand the

Cooperative's footprint to new areas like Norwalk, Ontario, and Wilton, we want to make sure we're providing information to as many members as possible. We appreciate you registering and attending the 2026 Annual Meeting.

In conjunction with holding the meeting virtually, we will also be conducting the election for Directors in Districts 2 and 4 electronically this year. This means that if you reside in those districts, you will have the ability to log into Smart Hub Order Management and submit your ballot electronically. This is another step to encourage member participation and we hope to see an increase in returned ballots. We hope that you'll utilize "SHOM" to participate in the election of your Directors.

With the approach of Spring, the Cooperative will again be busy building fiber to Norwalk, Wilton, and Ontario areas, along with filling in some of the previously unbuilt locations south of Sparta, including Leon. The targeted completion date of these projects is July of 2027.

Another major undertaking of the Cooperative in 2026 will be the continued replacement of equipment within the network, which includes equipment in your home. If you've already had this done, no further action is needed from you. If you have NOT had your home equipment replaced yet, do not fear, we will be reaching out to you when we're in your area to schedule this replacement at a time convenient for you. Please be on the lookout for information from the Cooperative asking you to schedule your replacement.

Thank you for being a member of the Cooperative!

Garin Mayer, CEO

# DIGGERS HOTLINE

Spring is almost here and we all want to get outside and get started on some of those outside projects. Remember to call Diggers Hotline if you are going to do any kind of digging. The cost of a fiber cut can be devastating to a budget. Here are the steps to get started:

- 1. Notify Diggers by calling 811 or visit [Diggershotline.com](http://Diggershotline.com).**
- 2. Wait three business days** for all utility operators to respond to your request.
- 3. Confirm all affected utility operators have responded to our request** by comparing the marks to the list of utilities Diggers Hotline has notified.
- 4. Respect the marks.** They are your guide for the duration of your project. If you are unable to maintain the marks during your project, contact Diggers Hotline to ask for a relocate.
- 5. Dig carefully.** If you can't avoid digging near the marks within 18 inches on all sides, consider moving your project to another part of your yard. If you must dig near the marks no mechanized equipment can be used within 18 inches of the marks; only hand digging is allowed.

	<b>Electric</b>
	<b>Gas, Oil, Petroleum or Gaseous Materials</b>
	<b>Communication, Cable TV, Alarm or Signal</b>
	<b>Water, Irrigation and Slurry Lines</b>
	<b>Sewer and Drain Lines</b>
	<b>Temporary Survey Markings</b>
	<b>Proposed Excavation</b>

Don't let an unwanted fiber cut ruin your summer. Call 811 for any digging on your property.

## KnowB4

### What Is a QR Code?

Have you ever seen a poster that had a jumbled-looking, square-shaped bar code printed on it? These unique squiggles make up a QR code. A QR code (Quick Response code) is an interactive link that you can scan with your smartphone. The link could take you to a website, start a file download, or open an app on your phone to take an action, like adding an event to your calendar. QR codes are fun, easy, and alluring because they can be placed on anything from business cards to a bag of chips.



### How Can Cybercriminals Use QR Codes?

Unfortunately, since a QR code is nothing more than a fancy-looking link, cybercriminals can use them just like they would use a link in a phishing email. There are many free websites that allow you to create your own QR code that links to anything you choose. This means that the bad guys can create a QR code that links to a malicious website or downloads malware onto your device. Once they have created their malicious QR code, it can be emailed, posted to social media, printed out on flyers, or even made into stickers and placed on top of legitimate QR codes.

### Tips to Safely Use QR Codes:

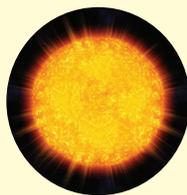
Follow these tips to stay safe when scanning QR codes.

- **Never scan a QR code from an unknown or untrustworthy source.** Did you receive a random, anonymous flyer claiming you could win the latest iPhone if you scan the code? Don't trust it!
- **When scanning a QR code, be sure to use a scanner app that provides a preview of the destination.** This feature gives you a chance to review the URL and decide if the QR code is safe.
- If you scan a QR code and the URL looks cryptic, or the website requires a login, or the site is unrelated to what you scanned, close out of your browser immediately.

**The above example of a QR code takes you directly to our website.**

### Sun Outages

It's that time of year where we may see TV signal disruption due to sun outages. Please be aware that during these times you may experience degraded and complete signal loss for our services as the sun moves through our satellite reception arc. Each dish is affected differently throughout the day, so the times listed below are an approximation of when we will see reception issues. Lastly, the dates below are based on peak signal loss and we may see intermittent signal issues leading up to these dates and for several days thereafter. Those dates are:



**March 1 - 6 12:00 AM- 4:00 AM**

## Employee News

Meet our new employees, John Strickland and Ben Schreier.

### John Strickland



"I've been an IT professional in various roles going back to the year 2000. For the last 13 years I have been a Network Engineer in higher education. I have always enjoyed the many challenges that occur within the layers of technology integration and am eager to learn from and contribute to the VernonCom Network Operations (NOC) team. I

was born and raised in Eugene, Oregon, have been in the Midwest since 2008, and have lived in Vernon County with my wife Havvah since 2021. In my free time you will most likely find me enjoying the outdoors on a hike, cycling, or in the garden."

### Ben Schreier

I have worked in the telecom industry for 20 years in coax, copper, and fiber networks. I live in Cashton with my wife Mandy, and our children, twins - Logan and Nolan age 11, Olivia 8, and



Natalie 3. When we aren't running kids to sporting events, we enjoy fishing, boating, and hunting. I am excited and am looking forward to working with the Installation and Repair (INR) team at VernonCom.

VernonCom is ramping up the speed of Calix ONT cutovers. We will complete the Readstown area by the end of March and then immediately move into the Liberty Pole area. Members will receive a letter as an initial notice that we will soon be on-site to replace your current modem with a NEW Calix ONT and to request updated email and text contact information. After that, email and text reminders will be sent prompting you to schedule your mandatory cutover appointment. A link will be provided so you can quickly schedule your own appointment, or you may call our office and a Member Support Technician will assist you. Thank you for your patience.

## Business Spotlight - The Grey Duck



Amanda Ostrem and Stephanie (Steph) Neprud are not blood related, but they call themselves sisters. They are the owners of The Grey Duck, in Viroqua, a popular clothing store that attracts women of all ages. The two were friends first and recently became business partners after Amanda's parents became ill and she needed help managing the store. Steph was always there to help Amanda out in times of need and it seemed like a natural fit for her best friend to become her business partner. Running a retail environment necessitates operational support and was hard to manage as a one person team. She approached Steph about the possibility of becoming partners and the rest is history. Their friendship comes first and they are not competitive in nature as they are genuinely happy for each other. They each have their own inventory and personal styles of clothing. Not only do the two compliment each other, but they balance each other and have similar fashion sense, an elevated casual that supports a neutral, comfortable style of clothing with softer tones.

The store accommodates women of all ages, young girls, moms, teenagers, and they also stock jewelry and accessories. Some of the popular brands they carry are KanCan, Artemis, Sunday Edition, Hem & Thread, Kendra Scott and Blu Pepper. It's an expression of their own style as they each pick out items they like and would wear themselves.

In 2018, after realizing there weren't any boutiques in the area, Amanda opened a pop up shop in Viroqua called Drifting Boutique. In 2020, she opened The Grey Duck in Westby, which opened as a home decor store and transitioned into clothing. She came upon the name by accident. A friend kidingly suggested she call it Duck, Duck, Grey Duck, because she is originally from Minnesota. After some thought, the name grew on her, and that's how it became official.

Most recently, they were featured in La Crosse's Womens Magazine. A publication that highlights women in business around the Driftless region.

The Grey Duck uses VernonCom's internet for music, ordering inventory, pricing, credit card payments, POS, their website, streamlining processes.

The store is located at 119 S. Main St, Viroqua. They can be reached at (920) 691-4089 or go to: <https://shopthegreyduck.com/>

For a chance to win a \$35.00 gift card to The Grey Duck go to: <https://vernoncom.coop/spotlight>.



### Use SmartHub For Electronic Voting

1. VIEW AND PAY YOUR BILL ONLINE

2. MANAGE YOUR ACCOUNT ONLINE

3. SIGN UP FOR PAPERLESS BILLING (EBILL)

4. UPGRADE YOUR SERVICES

YOUR VERNONCOM ACCOUNT, **MADE EASY!**

- Go to [www.vernoncom.coop](http://www.vernoncom.coop) and go to the drop down for My Account
- Then click on the red button for SmartHub. It will bring you to the Smart Hub user screen
- At the very bottom of the page it will prompt you to click on New Users
- Next, fill in the New User Registration. (You will need your VernonCom Account Number)
- You will get an email with a temporary password. Create a new password and you are on your way to managing your account

#### 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)  
and click "Pay Now"  
Call (855) 940-3938

EFT (Automatic Payment) - Sign up and get a one time \$5.00 credit.

103 N Main Street  
Westby, WI 54667

