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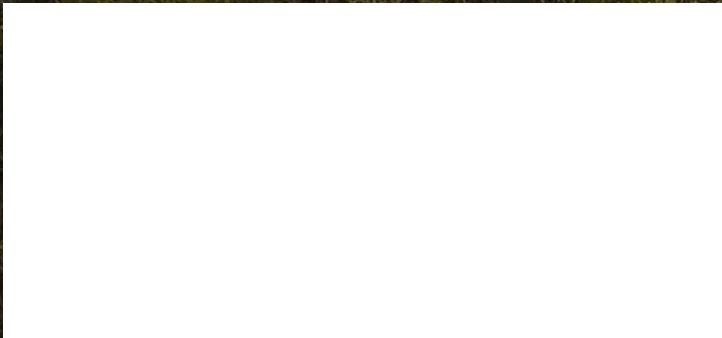


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HEAT PUMP WATER HEATERS: The Latest Rage, for Good Reasons



by Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager

As the world moves towards sustainable and energy-efficient solutions, heat pump water heaters (HPWHs) have emerged as a popular choice for many Vernon Electric Cooperative members. These devices offer significant energy savings and are an environmentally friendly alternative to traditional water heaters.

HPWHs operate differently than traditional water heaters. Instead of generating heat directly, they use electricity to move heat from one place to another, making them two to three times more energy-efficient, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. They work great even in cold-climate states like Wisconsin, where your home's air around the water heater can be used as a source of heat.

One of the main benefits of HPWHs is the potential to save money when heating your water. Although the initial cost of a heat pump water heater can be higher than that of a conventional water heater, the energy savings over time can offset the higher upfront cost. Other benefits include free cooling in the summertime as the HPWH absorbs heat from the home to heat the water in the tank and provide dehumidification of the home. One challenge of heating water using heat pump technology is the relatively slow recovery of hot water in the tank. The other is the cooling effect near the water heater when it's operating in the winter. These challenges are addressed with backup electric heating elements, which the water heater can automatically or manually switch to when needed. Some HPWHs can even be adjusted remotely with an app on your smartphone.

Rebates and Incentives

To encourage the adoption of HPWHs, various rebates and incentives are available. These programs can significantly reduce the cost of purchasing and installing a heat pump water heater.

Vernon Electric offers heat pump water heater rebates for our members, up to \$300 (see website or call our office for details).

Wisconsin's Focus on Energy program provides instant discounts on qualified HPWHs. Ask your plumber or

installation contractor if they work with a participating distributor and if the water heater you choose qualifies for an instant discount. Discounts may qualify for up to \$300.

At the federal level, the Residential Energy Efficiency Tax Credit allows homeowners to claim a tax credit of up to 30% of the cost, up to \$2,000, for installing an HPWH. This program is currently available through December 31, 2032.

Federal Regulations

The federal government regulates heat pump water heaters to ensure their energy efficiency. The Department of Energy (DOE) sets energy conservation standards for all major household appliances, including HPWHs. The Energy Factor (EF) measures a water heater's efficiency. For HPWHs, the EF must be 2.0 or higher. The higher the EF, the more efficient the water heater is.

The DOE also requires manufacturers to display the EnergyGuide label on their appliances. This label provides information about the estimated annual energy cost of the appliance and allows consumers to compare the energy use of different models.

In April 2024, The DOE finalized congressionally mandated energy-efficiency standards for a range of residential water heaters. The standards would require the most common-sized electric water heaters to achieve

efficiency gains with heat pump technology, helping to accelerate the deployment of this potentially cost-effective, clean energy technology while also reducing strain on the electric grid. Compliance will be required starting in 2029 for the new standards adopted in April, which would result in over 50% of the newly manufactured electric storage water heaters utilizing heat pump technology, compared to 3% today.

Heat pump water heaters offer an energy-efficient and environmentally friendly solution for heating water. With rebates and incentives available, the cost of purchasing and installing a HPWH can be significantly reduced. Furthermore, federal regulations ensure that these devices meet specific energy efficiency standards. Therefore, when considering a new water heater, a heat pump water heater may be a viable and cost-effective option for you.



Photo by Hot Water Solutions



Norwegian Hollow has a Hideaway

By Leah Call

The secret is out. Norwegian Hollow Hideaway, about 8 miles east of Viroqua, may be a bit off the beaten track, but it is well worth the drive—both for the scenery and the food. Founded in 2006, this restaurant and bar has a rich history and unique charm, attracting a diverse clientele for nearly two decades.

Situated in rural Vernon County, Norwegian Hollow Hideaway began as a joint venture between Matthew Mills and his father. The father/son duo ran the restaurant for several years before selling it to an employee. In 2019, Matthew Mills and his wife, Janae, repurchased the establishment. Together the couple continues to build the Hideaway’s reputation as a unique dining destination.

“We are pretty much in the middle of nowhere, in an old town that used to be here called Purdy,” explained Matthew Mills.

Since Purdy was in a flood plain, most of the businesses and homes are gone. However, the region’s beauty remains along with Norwegian Hollow Creek, a Class 1 trout stream that draws fishing enthusiasts from far and wide.

“We have a two-bedroom Airbnb upstairs that we rent out mostly to fishermen year-round, whether it’s ice fishing in the winter or fishing in the nearby trout streams in the spring, summer and fall,” noted Mills.

A Diverse Clientele

The Hideaway draws a local crowd throughout the week and a mix of residents and out-of-towners on weekends. While fishermen make up a portion of the out-of-town clientele, the restaurant is also a popular stop for motorcyclists. “We have a pretty good crowd that comes over from Iowa—a lot of motorcycles and UTVs,” said Mills.

The Hideaway serves motorcycle groups of up to 200 people throughout the summer. In addition to visitors from Iowa, Mills welcomes groups of motorcyclists and fishermen from Michigan, Indiana, Alaska, California, and beyond. The restaurant typically serves these large groups pre-arranged meals. “It might be a burger bar, BBQs, pizza, whatever they want,” added Mills.

On the Menu

The Hideaway's daily menu includes burgers, sandwiches, and house-made pizzas, as well as daily specials.

- **Wednesday and Sunday:** Pizza and wings specials
- **Tuesday:** Sautéed shrimp
- **Thursday:** Mexican-themed night featuring nachos, taco salads, taco pizzas, and soft-shell tacos
- **Friday:** Traditional fish fry, offering cod and walleye, both batter-fried and broiled
- **Saturday:** Steak specials, including hand-cut Ribeye, prime rib, and whiskey-marinated sirloin

On a Friday night, the Hideaway's dedicated staff serves as many as 300 people. "We are really fortunate to have a really solid staff," said Mills. "Some have been with us for 15 years."

Events and Entertainment

The Hideaway hosts a volleyball league in the summer months and offers live music and entertainment periodically throughout the year. Diners can choose indoor seating or grab a seat on the large deck that seats 30 to 40 people for a memorable dining experience in the heart of Vernon County's picturesque countryside.

Discover upcoming events and specials on Norwegian Hollow Hideaway's Facebook page.



UNLOCK COMFORT AND SAVINGS

If you're working on your summer to-dos, consider adding home weatherization to your list. We typically think about weatherizing our homes during winter months when we're standing next to a chilly window or a drafty exterior door. But weatherizing your home provides comfort and energy savings year-round, especially during summer months when your air conditioner is working overtime.

According to energystar.gov, a home with insufficient insulation and air leaks wastes more than 20% of the energy used to heat or cool the home—that's essentially throwing money out the door. Fortunately, most weatherization projects are easy to DIY and can be completed in a day.

The most straightforward, and most cost-effective weatherization strategies include air sealing around windows and exterior doors.

If you have older windows, odds are you have air escaping through tiny cracks and gaps around the frame. Do a quick visual inspection. If you can see any daylight around the frame or the windows rattle easily, you likely have air leaks. Also, check for any small cracks around the frame that may not be visible in sunlight.

If you suspect you have leaky windows and plan to apply new caulk, be sure to remove the old caulk and clean the area well before application. Caulking materials vary in strength and properties, but you'll likely need a half-cartridge per window.

Silicone caulk is a popular choice and can also be used to seal joints between bathroom and kitchen fixtures. If you have any leftover caulk, use it to seal those areas.

Another effective but simple weatherization project is installing weatherstripping around exterior

doors. The most common types of weatherstripping options are V-channel, felt, and foam tape. To choose the best type for your home, consider temperature fluctuations and weather exposure. Most homeowners opt for felt or foam tape; both options are easy to install but must be replaced every couple of years, depending on wear and tear. Weatherstripping should be installed around the top and sides of the door.

If you see daylight around the bottom of an exterior door, consider installing a door sweep in addition to weatherstripping. Door sweeps are available in aluminum, plastic, vinyl, and felt options.

Weatherstripping can also be installed around windows, typically to the sides of a double-hung or sliding window, or around the window sash. If you're unsure how to install weatherstripping or apply caulk, check online for step-by-step instructions and video tutorials.

Another way to improve comfort in your home is by adding insulation. While this is a more costly project and requires a professional's help, it's an effective way to decrease heat flow, which impacts energy use in winter and summer months. Older homes may need additional insulation to either replace older materials or meet newer efficiency standards. Contact a qualified installation specialist if you suspect your home's insulation levels are inadequate.

In addition to saving energy, air sealing can help you avoid moisture control issues, improve indoor air quality, and extend the life of your heating and cooling system. Weatherize your home to unlock year-round comfort and savings on monthly energy costs.



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