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WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* December 2025 NEWS

VERNON
Electric
COOPERATIVE — WESTBY, WISCONSIN
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



REINDEER ACRES HOLIDAY CHEER TAKES FLIGHT

"NOT-FOR-PROFIT" MEANS "ALL FOR YOU"

WATER HEATER WOES

BEST OF KIDS AND CRITTERS



THE SEASON OF GIVING

by Craig Buross, CEO & General Manager



As the holiday season approaches and the air turns crisp, we're reminded that this truly is the season of giving—a time for gratitude, generosity, and looking out for one another. At Vernon Electric Cooperative, that's something we take to heart year-round.

You've probably heard us talk about our concern for community. It's not just a nice phrase—it's one of the core principles that makes electric cooperatives like ours different from other utilities. We're not just here to keep the lights on (though of course, we're always working hard to do that). We're here to make life better for the people we serve—our members, our neighbors, and our friends.

Over the years, we've faced challenges together, and every time, our co-op family has stepped up. We've come together to support those in need,

Because when you're part of a co-op, giving back isn't a requirement—it's simply what you do.

to keep our community strong, and to build something better for the future. That spirit of generosity is never more evident than during the holiday season.

Take our Operation Round Up program, for example. Thanks to the generosity of members like you who round up their electric bills to the

nearest dollar, we're able to provide support to organizations like the Vernon County Historical Society and the Supportive Housing Program through Couleecap, Inc. A little change truly can make a big difference.

We're also proud to support local students with scholarships and through the Youth Leadership Conference held each year at UW–Stout. Students have the opportunity to enhance their leadership and teamwork skills while learning about the cooperative business model. Some even go on to serve on the youth board and attend the Youth Tour in Washington, D.C.—where they see democracy in action and dream big about their futures. That's giving in one of the most meaningful ways—by



Cooperative Principle #6: Cooperation Among Cooperatives. Vernon Electric Cooperative teamed up with VernonCom to host the member picnic this year at Readstown Tourist Park in June.

investing in tomorrow's leaders.

Because we care deeply about safety, we also spend time visiting schools and community events throughout our service area—holding demonstrations and teaching people of all ages how to stay safe around electricity. We believe knowledge is a gift too, and we love sharing it.

You'll also find our team out in the community beyond work—coaching youth sports, volunteering at local events, serving on non-profit

boards, and partnering with our local chambers of commerce to keep our economy strong. Because when you're part of a co-op, giving back isn't a requirement—it's simply what you do.

While the holiday season is a festive time, we also recognize it can be difficult for some. If you need advice on saving energy, want to explore payment plan options, or simply have questions—please don't hesitate to reach out. This is also a great time to remind everyone to submit **2025**

rebate forms before the December 31 deadline. We're here to help, not just during the holidays, but all year long.

At Vernon Electric Cooperative, we believe concern for community is more than a value—it's the heart of who we are. During this season of giving, we're especially grateful to be part of such a caring and generous community. From all of us at VEC, we wish you and your loved ones a joyful, safe, and bright holiday season.



Top left to right: Operation Round Up donations help local organizations like the Vernon County Historical Society. Local students representing Vernon Electric Cooperative at the annual Youth Leadership Conference at UW-Stout. Bottom left to right: Vernon Electric linemen share important lessons on electrical safety during National Night Out. Vernon Electric linemen work year-round to keep the lights on and our communities connected.

KINDNESS MATTERS:

FOUR DECADES OF GIVING

By Leah Call

As the Holiday season approaches, stores bustle with shoppers, kitchens fill with the smell of cookies, and homes sparkle with twinkling lights. For Vernon Electric Cooperative members Ken and Kay Deaver, the weeks before Christmas have a much deeper meaning. For more than 40 years, the Deavers have poured their time and their hearts into making the holidays brighter for kids and families across Vernon County through the Toys for Tots program.

The story of Toys for Tots can be traced back nearly a century. The first effort began right here in Wisconsin by La Crosse resident Fred Kramer who collected and distributed toys for children in 1934, thirteen years before Marine Corps Major Bill Hendricks launched the national program in 1947. Today Toys for Tots is a nationwide effort with chapters in all 50 states.

The Deavers first got involved with Toys for Tots at the request of former Viroqua Fire Chief Lloyd Ray, who



Ken and Kay Deaver, longtime leaders of Vernon County's Toys for Tots program.

helped start the program in Vernon County. Sundays after church were spent sorting donations and packing boxes with toys, hats, mittens, and socks – a tradition that continues today.

“Lloyd was the one who really got this going for the kids, and it was stuff that was needed, not just toys,” Kay recalled.

When Lloyd passed away in 1993, the Deavers stepped up to lead the program. Working alongside them are 8 to 10 dedicated volunteers, affectionately called “the best elves in the whole wide world.”

A Community Effort

From mid-September through mid-December the Deavers and the elves gather every Tuesday to plan, sort, and pack items. Churches, organizations, and businesses from throughout the county join in to support the effort.

Many area businesses collect toys

and monetary donations, while fire stations serve as both drop-off locations and fundraising hubs. One of the biggest fundraisers annually is the Viroqua Fire Station chili supper, held the first Wednesday in December.

Vernon Electric Cooperative has supported the effort over the years, serving as a donation drop off location for its members.

Families in Need

Each year Toys for Tots brings holiday joy to as many as 600 children in Vernon County. Parents or guardians experiencing financial hardship can register for the program between November 1 and December 12. Applicants provide necessary paperwork, proof of address, and age of their children.

“We pack everything on the Saturday before the pickup date,” Kay explained.



Donations under the VEC Christmas tree.

Each family receives a large gift bag filled with coats, hats, mittens, and two or three age-appropriate toys. Gifts are selected based on age group: 0-2, 3-5, 6-7, 8-9, and 10-13. Every bag includes a handmade quilt from area church groups, a book for each child, and a game the family can enjoy together.

When pickup day arrives, the joy is contagious. “It’s a fun, fun day,” noted Kay. “Our families get involved, too.”

The day is filled with smiles, hugs, and sometimes tears — from both recipients and volunteers. “Your heart feels so good after that day; the feeling lasts for the whole year,” said Kay. “It warms your heart clear down to your toes to think that you have helped a young family.”

Over the years, Kay has been deeply moved by how often recipients return to give back. “People who used the program for a couple years get their lives turned around, and they come back to help someone else.”

The work doesn’t stop when the



Cole Cary shops for toys for the program.

holidays end. “We are picking up things all year long — finding items on sale, and shopping after Christmas for the next year,” said Kay. “We’re helping families in Vernon County, and we try to spend the money here, too.”

The Spirit of Giving

After four decades, the Deavers remain humble about their role. “To be honest, Kenneth and I still don’t know how we got this job,” said Kay. “But it doesn’t take just two people — it takes everyone. It’s a community effort.”

The spirit of generosity in Vernon County is what makes the work so meaningful. “I can’t say enough about Vernon County. We may be one of the poorest counties, but we have some awfully giving, wonderful people.”

And that, she adds, is what it’s all about. “Kindness matters. That is a big part of why we do this. This program is our Christmas. We’ve never regretted a minute of the time we’ve put into it.”

Vernon County parents or guardians interested in registering for the Vernon County Toys for Tots program should stop by the Viroqua Police Station or call 608-637-2121. Online registration is available through the Police Department website. All information is kept confidential.

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

Our scholarship deadline is Wednesday, January 21.
Students can apply by contacting their guidance
counselors or visiting our website at
www.vernonelectric.org/scholarships.



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