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MONROE COUNTY HERALD

Monroe County's #1 Award-Winning Newspaper

VOLUME 163 | NUMBER 16 MONDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2022 ONE SECTION | 14 PAGES

Provider hoping for \$9M grant for first phases of broadband project

By PAT MULVANEY
Contributing Writer

Monroe County moved one tentative step last Wednesday toward its plan to provide high-speed internet throughout the county.

The Monroe County board voted to enter into a public-private agreement with Vernon Communications Cooperative in order to apply for up to \$9 million in grant money through the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC).

Supervisors Ron Luethe and Jen Schmitz, who are co-chairs of the county's broadband committee, gave a presentation to the board last Wednesday, outlining the plan to bring high-speed internet, also known as broadband, to underserved parts of the county.

The two ways to get broadband are through either satellite transmission or fiber optic lines. The county is focusing on fiber optics because it is the most reliable and easiest to upgrade.

While the county is working with four separate broadband providers, Vernon Communication Cooperative is the only one that provided a comprehensive monetary plan by the Dec. 1 deadline to apply for the PSC grant. While other

providers were interested, they couldn't come up with cost figures, according to Luethe.

Vernon is working on a multiphase plan to install fiber optic cable through much of the southern part of the county. If it is awarded the grant, it will use the money to fund the first two phases of the project.

Phase one entails laying broadband infrastructure in the towns of Portland and Leon and the Town of Sparta south of Interstate 90. Phase 2 would expand the infrastructure to the towns of Jefferson and Wells.

The phase 1 grant would be for \$4.4 million and would fund 70% of the project with the remaining funding coming from Vernon Communications and Monroe County, each contributing \$947,000. The phase two grant would be for \$4.6 million, with the provider and county kicking in 15% apiece.

On Wednesday, the county board agreed to earmark \$1.7 million of its \$9 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for broadband infrastructure, which will go toward its match on the project if Vernon Communications receives the grant.

The other three vendors the broadband committee is

BROADBAND cont. pg. 2



Black smoke rises over the site of a one-vehicle crash. One person was killed in the accident. Contributed photo.

Sunday morning single vehicle crash reports one fatality

On Sunday at approximately 10:40 am Sparta Police were called to Wisconsin St (State Highway 16) and Aspen Blvd for a reported single vehicle injury accident. Arriving officers located the vehicle on fire and witnesses removing two individuals from the vehicle. A 67-year-old female died at the scene. A 67-year-old male was transported to Gundersen in La Crosse by GundersenAIR with life-threatening injuries. During the crash, a fire hydrant was sheared off and ended up inside a nearby unoccupied building. The crash remains

under investigation by the Sparta Police Department and Wisconsin State Patrol Technical Reconstruction Unit. The road remained closed for approximately 4 hours. Sparta Police Department was assisted by the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, Sparta Ambulance, Sparta Fire, Sparta Public Works, Monroe County Medical Examiner's office, Monroe County Communication Center, Monroe County District Attorney's Office, and GundersenAIR. There was no update on the male at press time.

ROLLING HILLS SENIOR CARE FACILITY PROJECT



Rolling Hills Administrator Linda Smith and County Board Supervisor and Rolling Hills Committee Chairman Toni Wissestad in one of the future sun rooms that will be available to residents to look out over the countryside. Herald photo by Logan Everson.

Rolling ALONG

A peek into the progress at county senior care facility

By LOGAN EVERSON
Contributing writer

Progress on the new county nursing home is well underway, but not without some hiccups.

The estimated \$21.1 million dollar facility is on track to meet its owner occupancy date of August 1st of this year, but it has had its fair share of supply chain issues causing some minor delays. Most notably, the permanent heating.

"They can't start the flooring until the permanent heating is installed," said Toni Wissestad, a County Board Supervisor and Chairman of the Rolling Hills Committee.

The \$2.43 million dollar HVAC system is funded by the American Recovery Plan Fund (ARPA). Expected delivery is sometime next week.

Delays aside, the progress that has been made is substantial. Over 600 windows have been installed, which is something that Rolling Hills Administrator Linda Smith is very adamant about.

"Fresh air flow is important to creating a healthy environment," said Smith. "We learned from COVID that fresh air should not be taken for granted. Across the street [in the old facility], there are many windows that do not open."

ROLLING cont. pg. 13



- BY-THE-NUMBERS**
- 80,000** approximate sq. ft
 - 50** skilled nursing beds
 - 24** community-based residential care beds
 - 24** assisted living apartments

See more project updates, photos and more online:
www.co.monroe.wi.us/departments/rolling-hills-rehab-center/rolling-hills-project

LEFT A worker puts finishing touches on a drywall corner intersection of ceiling and wall. **BELOW** A portion of the courtyard. A cement slab in the middle will provide a level space for activities such as live music. Herald photos by Logan Everson.



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ROLLING HILLS SENIOR CARE FACILITY PROJECT

Rolling **ALONG**

Herald photos by Logan Everson



A worker on a lift checks over the painters' tape in one of the future gathering areas in the skilled nursing portion of the facility.

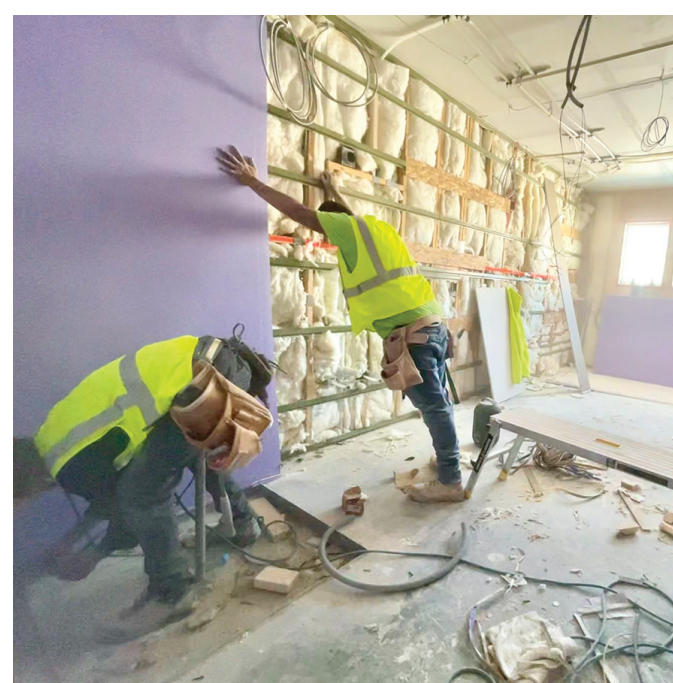


Linda Smith and Toni Wissestad pictured in one of the many in-suite bathrooms.

“We’re so fortunate to have local businesses that can provide us with quality service and craftsmanship”

- Toni Wissestad

Monroe County Board Supervisor and Rolling Hills Committee Chairman



It got a little dusty while workers sawed at the wall and floor abutment in one of the future spa areas.

ROLLING
continued from front page

So far, less than 50 change orders have been submitted by contractors due to minor omissions and value-adding options. The project was designed by Community Living Solutions of Appleton and construction is being managed by Krause-Anderson from Madison.

Local businesses from Sparta have had their bids approved. WESCO Home Furnishings was awarded the furniture and appliance portion. Pica Grove received a portion for signage, as well.

“We try to keep the work local. However, we’re under contract to accept the lowest bidder except when red flags pop-up. We’re so fortunate to have local businesses that can provide us with quality service and craftsmanship,” said Wissestad.

21,108,608.76 dollars in approved funding

271 days since construction began **154** days until projected move-in day

600+ windows

Completed Work In and in Progress

- MEP Attic & in-wall rough-in Areas C-E
- Blocking Area E
- Insulation and drywall Areas C-E
- Install aluminum soffit, fascia, and gutter system Area A-B
- Paint Areas B-C
- Install vinyl windows Areas A-J
- Install patio doors
- Install ceiling tile grid Areas A-C
- Install ceramic tile Areas A-B

Work In February

- Install remaining windows
- Build porches and port cochere
- Begin siding installation
- Aluminum entrances Area A-B
- MEPF finishes Areas A-C
- MEP chase (below fire lid) rough-in Areas C-E
- Install ceiling tile grid Areas C-D
- Install ceramic tile Areas A-B
- Painting Areas C-E South
- Finish carpentry Areas A-B
- Install racks and equipment IT Rooms

Upcoming Milestones

- Install Generator - March 2022
- Asphalt Parking Lot- May 2022
- Install Monument Signage- May 2022
- Owner occupancy- Estimated August 1, 2022



It may not look like much now, but this will be the main kitchen that will be supplying food to the in-house residents as well as the senior meal sites throughout the county.