

Connections

JANUARY 2026

Office Closures for New Year's Holiday

We'll be closed on Thursday, January 1st, and Friday, January 2nd, for the New Year's holiday so we may celebrate with our families. Trouble calls will be handled by our on-call technicians.



Contact Us

100 Runestone Drive / PO Box 336
Hoffman, MN 56339
Phone: 320-986-2013

Office Hours: M-F 8 am to 4:30 pm

Email: rtaoffice@runestone.com

24/7 HelpDesk for Internet
Outages and Technical Support:
320-986-6655

helpdesk@runestone.net

Visit Us: www.runestone.net

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Please let others know about your experience as a Runestone Telecom customer. Scan this code and leave a review on Google. Thanks!



Runestone
Telecom Association

2025 Fiber Project Update and 2026 Plans

As winter settled in, our construction and splicing crews closed out another busy season with significant progress. We've made strong strides across our fiber build project areas, and momentum has carried us into 2026.

Arvig (our subcontractor for mainline construction) has finished work for the season. They installed 97.23% of the mainline fiber for the Western Stearns County grant project. The remaining segments are in areas still awaiting DNR permits. In total, 358 drops and 292 miles of fiber have been completed. Any drops not yet plowed will be finished during the 2026 construction season. Crews are actively splicing, and if everything stays on schedule, we hope to begin connecting homes in February.

For the Crow Lake grant project, 24 drops and approximately eight miles of fiber have been installed, bringing the project to 18.49% of the mainline completed. The remainder of the work will be finished in 2026.

The Holmes City project has been fully plowed and spliced. Our office will begin contacting customers to schedule cutovers (transition from copper network to the fiber-optic network).

In December, our crews were busy completing fiber splicing in Wheaton. Barring any unexpected delays, we expect to wrap up the final splicing work in early January and begin customer cutovers shortly after.

Thank you for your continued patience and support as we expand our network. We're excited to bring fast, reliable fiber service to even more communities in 2026.



Runestone Telecom Director Election

This year there will be a director elected for a five-year term on Runestone Telecom's Board of Directors from District 1 (Donnelly, Norcross, Tintah, Beardsley, Campbell, Graceville, Herman, Wheaton). If you're a member from this District and are interested in running for this position, please submit a petition signed by at least 10 other members. The petition form can be obtained at our office or from our website.

Please visit runestone.net and click on "About Us > The Cooperative" for more information, including the qualifications to be a director, and the definition of members in the By-Laws.

If there's a contested race, directors are elected by ballot and the winner is announced at the Annual Meeting. Petitions may be submitted between January 9th, 2026, and March 10th, 2026, for any interested parties.

Save the Date for Our 2026 Annual Meeting

On July 8th, 2026, Runestone Telecom will mark 76 years at our Annual Meeting. Please note that the date for this event is a little earlier than in past years. We hope to see you there!



We Strive to Treat You Well

Great customer service may seem harder to find these days. Long holds, confusing menus, and faraway call centers have become the norm—but that's not how we operate at Runestone Telecom.

We live here, work here, and serve the same communities our families call home, so taking care of our customers is personal.

When you reach out to us, you're connecting with neighbors who genuinely want to help. Our team is committed to offering:

- Prompt, helpful responses
- Local expertise to help you decide the service that fits your life
- Patient support when you're learning new technology
- Friendly faces sincerely interested in what you need



Some people might consider it old-school to treat customers like friends. But for us, it's simply the way we do business. Based on what our customers tell us, it makes all the difference.

Remember to Reboot Your Router

Sometimes your router just needs a quick reset to get back on track. A reboot can help after a disconnection or a power fluctuations (like storms or electrical hiccups) when you're dealing with slow speeds, connection drops, or other odd glitches.

To reboot your router, simply unplug the power cord for at least 30 seconds, then plug it back in and wait for the device to fully restart. Do not press the reset button, as this will erase all settings and restore the router to its factory default.

Technology has come a long way from the days when routers needed frequent rebooting. Today, the routers we provide are designed to be reliable, low-maintenance, and easy to trust—simply connect and go. If you ever find yourself needing to reboot your router often to keep things working smoothly, please reach out to our office. Our IT team will help identify what's causing the issue so your service stays steady and stress-free.

If you have questions regarding your router, please call our Internet Department at 320-986-6655.





The Ransomware Playbook: What Cybercriminals Are Doing

Ransomware has grown into a polished criminal industry, run with the efficiency of a big corporation. Here's a clear, quick look at how these attacks unfold today and what actually stops them.

How an Attack Works

1. Getting In

A single mistake usually opens the door, such as a phishing email, a reused password, or an unpatched system.

2. Sneaking Around

Attackers quietly explore the network, hunting for admin credentials and valuable data.

3. Grabbing Power

They escalate to high-level access and spread to servers, cloud accounts, and backup systems.

4. Disabling Defenses

Before the big strike, they shut off antivirus tools and wipe backups to make recovery harder.

5. Stealing Data

Attackers copy sensitive files so they can threaten to leak them even if you refuse to pay.

6. Locking Everything

Files are rapidly encrypted. Modern strains finish in minutes thanks to "intermittent encryption."

7. Dropping the Ransom Note

A message appears with a link for "negotiation," often starting in seven-digit territory.

8. Pay ... or Don't

If you pay, you might get a working unlock tool. If you don't, stolen data may get posted online. Worst case is you might pay and still not get your data unlocked, and it'll be posted online.

Human error, especially clicking on unsafe links, is one of the top ways ransomware attacks succeed. Most ransomware breaches happen because of simple gaps: weak passwords, missing multi-factor authentication (MFA), forgotten software updates, or vulnerable backups. The strongest defense against ransomware isn't fancy software. It's doing the everyday basics well - using strong logins, keeping systems updated, protecting backups, and staying alert to suspicious emails. Clicking any links should be done with extreme caution, as even one careless tap can open the door to an attack.

If have questions or concerns about something that may be suspicious, please call our IT Team at 320-986-6655.

Handy Reminders

- Conveniently pay your bill with eBill and AutoPay.
- Pay your bill by the 20th of the month to avoid late fees and disconnection. Please don't use staples to attach your checks.

FRS Scholarship Reminder

Have a high school senior in the family? Make sure they know about Runestone Telecom's scholarship opportunities offered through the Foundation for Rural Service (FRS). Applications must be received by FRS no later than February 14th, 2026. Visit www.runestone.net for details.



Phone Directory Delivery

In mid-February 2026, the new phone directories will arrive by mail to customers. Extras will be available at our office.

News for Our Cable TV Subscribers

Do you subscribe to one of Runestone Telecom's Cable TV packages? If so, please review this customer information.

Cable TV Rate Adjustment

Beginning January 1st, 2026, Runestone Cable TV rates will increase slightly.

- **Broadcast** will increase from **\$42.82 to \$46.66.**
- **Basic** will increase from **\$98.01 to \$102.00.**

We work hard to keep your rates as low as possible, but the fees we're charged by channel providers continue to rise each year. These adjustments help ensure we can continue delivering your favorite channels and dependable local service.

New Members

Welcome to Runestone Telecom! We're pleased to have you with our cooperative.

Barrett

Hendrickson, Elaine... 320-528-2000

Donnelly

Eystad, Lee 320-246-2001

Lowry

Muzik, Robert L 320-283-2055

Wheaton

L&B Hardware 320-563-4255

FUSC Update

Effective January 1st, 2026, the Federal Universal Service Charge (FUSC) on your bill will decrease from 38.1% to 37.6%.

How Can Low-Income Consumers Get Help From Lifeline?

Communications services are vitally important to gain access to resources related to jobs, health care, education, and more. Lifeline is an FCC program that helps make these services more affordable for low-income subscribers.

Lifeline provides up to a \$9.25 monthly discount on service for eligible low-income subscribers and up to \$34.25 per month for eligible subscribers on Tribal lands. Subscribers may receive a Lifeline discount on either a wireline or a wireless phone service, but they may not receive a discount on both services at the same time. Lifeline also supports broadband Internet service and broadband-voice bundles. FCC rules prohibit more than one Lifeline service per household.

To participate in the Lifeline program, you must either have an income that is at or below 135% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines or participate in certain federal assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Federal Public Housing Assistance, Supplemental Security Income, the Veterans and Survivors Pension Benefit, or certain Tribal Programs. You can also qualify to participate in Lifeline if you're a survivor or your child or dependent participates in any of the programs listed above.

To see if you're eligible for Lifeline, review the detailed information available at lifelinesupport.org. The next step is to apply, and there are several ways to do that. You may apply directly through the Lifeline programs National Verifier online portal at lifelinesupport.org or by mailing a paper application form (available on the National Verifier online portal after entering your state). You may also apply for the program by working with a Lifeline service provider either in-person at a store location or online via the service provider's website, if they support that option — which Runestone Telecom does.

After you qualify for Lifeline, you need to sign up for phone and/or Internet service or ask Runestone Telecom to apply your Lifeline benefit to a service you're already getting.

Do you have questions about the Lifeline application process? Call the Lifeline Support Center at 1-800-234-9473 or email LifelineSupport@usac.org. You may also call Runestone Telecom at 320-986-2013.



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