

Competition

It's still a possibility for SWOCC area

Why don't we have a cable competition here in Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi? I hear that question almost every day. We all see the benefits of competition in other products and services, so we expect the same from cable.

Many feel that if there was a competitor in our cities, we would have lower cable rates and more choices. Even if we don't see those immediate advantages, most consumers just want a choice.

First you should know that we would like to see competition too. In fact, it's written into the contract. The cities' contract with Time Warner Cable is non-exclusive. That means any other cable operator is welcome to come in. But we can't force them to make that business decision. It's up to the company.

Now, the bad news: there is very little cable competition across the country. In fact, there was virtually no competition whatsoever until the phone companies got into the game (Ameritech, US West, etc.). That's because cable companies just didn't compete with each other. Some say it's not financially viable, others say it's just staying off each other's turf. But, for whatever reason, it just didn't happen.

Many who called our offices or spoke up at the Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission (SWOCC) public hearing in January, made a special request for MediaOne because they have relatives or friends in other cities with MediaOne and have seen advantages over what they now receive from Time Warner Cable. But, I can tell you right now that there is no city in the country that has a choice of both Time Warner and MediaOne. Again, that's because the cable companies aren't competing head-to-head.

But the phone companies are. Here in the Metro Detroit area, Ameritech has agreements with

CABLE CONNECTION



CAREN COLLINS

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more than 40 cities. They have also had discussions with our cities. But to provide service they must abide by our ordinances, negotiate a contract and build a system. All that takes time. And keep in mind, most of those who have called, crying for competition, want it to provide Internet service because Time Warner Cable doesn't. But, Ameritech doesn't offer Internet service via cable either.

That's not to say that another cable operator isn't a possibility. Again, our city representatives are talking to Ameritech. And there is so much going on nationally, that I wouldn't be surprised if things changed here as well. For example, your friends with MediaOne won't have that company much longer. Because of all the national transfers, mergers and acquisitions, MediaOne will soon be AT&T. Then that will change to Comcast. And in Northern Michigan, all the Bresnan systems will be Charter Cable. That company also submitted transfer papers to Farmington and three other systems that are currently a Time Warner entity. Read the trades, and there's a new announcement each week.

Caren Collins is the Executive Director of the Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission. The next SWOCC meeting is 4:30 p.m., Tuesday, Aug. 10, at Farmington City Hall. The next CAC meeting is 7 p.m., Tuesday, Sept. 14, at SWOCC.

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few of them and ask them how they feel about a few of the issues. It really establishes a wonderful relationship," she said.

Since gaining a seat on appropriations, one issue has cropped up that Johnson will be heavily involved in, which is Oakland's status as a tax donor county. Some Oakland lawmakers are arguing that the county sends off to Lansing far more in tax dollars than it receives back in services.

Johnson has requested reports from the Senate Fiscal Agency and the Department

STATE NEWS

of Management and Budget to determine what the level of donation really is. She is concerned that taxes paid by large corporations through their headquarters in Oakland, even though the tax liability was generated at outlets elsewhere in the state, may skew the numbers to make it look like Oakland donates more than it

actually does.

If an ability to see the validity of differing sides of an argument doesn't always get mentioned or headlines, Johnson insists it is necessary to find real solutions up in Lansing.

"In appropriations, you are really negotiating with all sides, and with an administration that is constantly saying no. You have to be able to see all sides. No one can be that certain," she said. "And I've never gotten good headlines."

Laurel from page A10

issue that makes Livonia a great place to live, work and raise a family."

Laurel Park has become the cornerstone of upscale development in that area, according to Cindy Ciura, Schootak's vice president of corporate market-

ing. "They wanted upscale department stores, housing and we were able to provide all of that," Ciura said. "Now there are dozens of fortune 500 companies along that area."

Laurel Park was successful in setting a tone for future development, and a lot had to do with its

marketing techniques, said Ken Kelsey, Livonia Chamber of Commerce board chairman.

"They don't call it a mall even though you and I both know it's a mall," Kelsey said. "It's a thing to set themselves apart. It's good marketing. Part of its success is its central location near I-275."

"That's probably one of the best areas to get to from anywhere, including Detroit, Ann Arbor, Southfield and Farmington," Kelsey said. "They started out as a high-class place and they kept it that way."

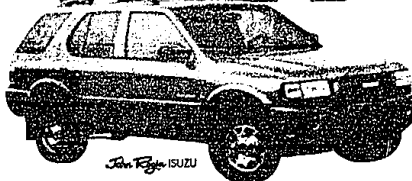
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