

Don't count on refund; rates remain the same



CABLE CONNECTION

You may not know how much you pay for a loaf of bread or your monthly power bill. But chances are, you know exactly how much you pay for cable each month — and you don't like it.

Recently, local franchise authorities (the folks — usually, cities — who regulate cable in individual communities) met here to discuss rates and what we can do about them. It looks as though most residents in the Metro area are paying anywhere between \$23 and \$40 for basic and expanded basic channels (channels 1-64 & 75 in Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi). We pay \$29.02 for this service.

You may recall that last summer, the FCC ruled that Time Warner was to refund rates (85 cents per subscriber), but that Time Warner appealed this decision. After numerous filings ... they filed, we filed, they filed again ... the FCC handed down its "final" decision recently. It has accepted Time Warner's amended filings and now finds in Time Warner's favor.

So, to make a long story short, you won't be getting a refund on last year's cable rates. The FCC has also accepted the rate that Time Warner is charging this year.

This possible refund involved only the expanded basic tier (channels 1-64 & 75) which the FCC regulates. But the FCC would never have investigated this if SWOCC had not filed on your behalf. When rates went up, we received calls and letters which were enough for us to complete the appropriate paperwork and send it on to the FCC. Although the FCC's final decision was not in the subscriber's favor this time, we will continue to file on your behalf whenever we hear from you.

What, if any, control does your city have regarding the cable company's charges to subscribers?

scribers?

The Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission (SWOCC), which represents the cities of Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi, cannot legally prevent any rate increase by its cable operator, so long as that increase does not exceed the maximum allowed under a complex formula created by federal law and enforced by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Municipal review responsibility is limited specifically to the tier of channels defined as "basic service" (up to channel 23). Should SWOCC's review process identify a possible violation of the maximum, this would be reported to the FCC.

This year, as with past rate hikes, we hired a consultant to conduct this review. For the increase that went into effect in January, we have not found any violations. In the past, we have found violations. This resulted in an \$88,727 refund to subscribers in service rates in April 1994 and a total \$44,323 refund in installation charges in December of 1994 (\$1.25 to each subscriber).

The rate process is cumbersome and costly. That's why Congress had originally called for a sunset of this regulation in 1999 when it thought there would be effective competition that would regulate rates. But that competition has not occurred. So now there's talk on Capitol Hill of extending regulation until there is effective competition.

Here in the Metro area, Ameritech provides cable competition in the upstate of 25 communities. The trouble is, that FCC research and our own local surveys have found that rates did not go down when Ameritech entered the picture. We'll continue to explore all possible options to ensure that you pay the lowest rates possible for cable service.

Caren Collins is the executive director of the Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission. The next SWOCC meeting is at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 29, at Farmington Hills City Hall.



Check swing

Diamond gems: Farmington High baseball boosters Jim Hopson (left), Tim Schaffer, and Walter Christensen present check for \$4,400 for the school's baseball program to Charles Vaine, booster club president. Money was raised from a joint American Legion and VFW Vegas party recently.

Well-wishers give director of Special Services big sendoff

Farmington Hills Special Services director received a sendoff akin to one of the sports his department oversees.

Amid a few fouls balls, many well-wishers drove home the highlights of Dan Potter's 12 years with the city at his retirement party May 21. Some 150 people attended the event at the William Costick Activities Center.

City Manager Daniel Hobbs commended Potter's many accomplishments, which included service on the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Commission on Aging, the Council of Community Resources and the Interagency Council.

Hobbs cited Potter's leadership in helping the community pass the recent parks millage. "He made sure that the right kind of information was out before the public so that they could make an informed decision," Hobbs said. "Approval of this new ten-year, \$20 million program will be one of Dan's greatest legacies to the city."

During Potter's 12-year tenure, the city also acquired more than \$5 million in grants for park development and bought and renovated what became the William Costick

Activities Center.

There have been other highlights, too, Hobbs added. Under Potter's stewardship:

- The city bought and developed Pioneer Woodland Hills and Founders Sports Park
- Built Farmington Hills Ice Arena
- Created the senior adults and teens transportation programs
- Created a mobile recreation program
- Expanded and improved San Marino Golf Course
- Guided the expansion of the Senior Adult Nutrition Program
- Helped create the Farmington Community Arts Council
- Helped initiate the Council of Community Resources and the Interagency Council
- Improved athletic fields
- Established a partnership with Farmington Schools for field and facility maintenance, field usage and outdoor education
- Administered a department that doubled in size from 1986 to 1998.

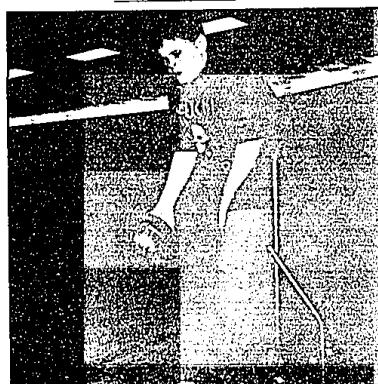
Baptist Manor puts out call for volunteers

The third annual Detroit Baptist Manor Volunteer Day will be 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, June 6. Volunteers are needed to help with weeding, planting flowers, painting and window washing. Participants are also asked to bring their own tools, such as shovels, rakes, gloves, paint brushes, etc.

The day kicks off with donuts, coffee and assignments at 9 a.m. and later includes lunch. In case of rain, volunteers will be working indoors.

Detroit Baptist Manor is located at 30239 13 Mile. Sign up by calling Sandi: 539-3131.

A roll for the blind



Pin down: Jared Stofflett, 12, of Farmington Hills, who has been blind since birth, recently bowled in his third bowlathon for Seedlings Braille Books for Children. For every \$10 raised through the bowlathon, another low-cost Braille book is provided to blind children and their families.

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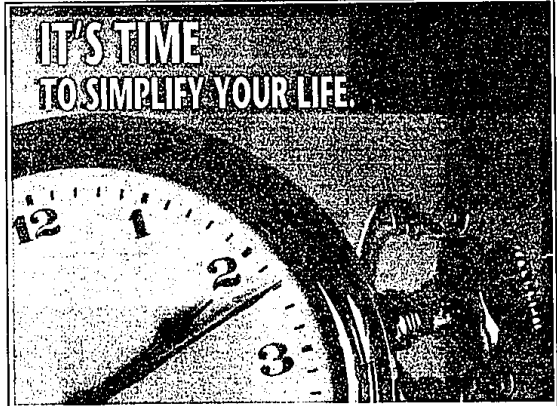
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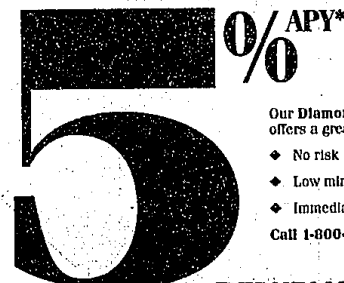
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