

Take a look at cable competition in other communities.

So you think you pay too much for cable? You think competition will solve that problem? Not so fast. Let's take a look at what competition has done in other communities.

The Michigan Chapter of the National Association of Telecommunications Officers recently completed a survey of cable television rates in 51 communities throughout the metropolitan Detroit area. NATAO is a national coalition of telecommunication professionals, representing municipalities throughout the country and their interest in

CABLE CONNECTION



CAREN COLLINS

impact of competition on cable rates.

cable television franchise administration. The survey was conducted among NATAO's Michigan chapter members, many of which are served by two cable television programming providers. It was intended to examine the

Generally, the survey shows that two companies operating in the same community charge comparable rates for "expanded basic" cable service. In most instances, the entry of the second cable service provider has not resulted in a decline in a customer's rates, but may have slowed the frequency and extent to which their cable rates continued to increase.

Twenty-eight consortiums represented by 12 different cable companies were surveyed. Port Huron cable subscribers serviced by Harron Communications pay

the most at \$30.40 for 53 channels and a coaxial cable system. Canton cable subscribers serviced by American pay the least at \$22.95 for 63 channels and a fiber-optic system.

In our communities of Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi, Time Warner subscribers pay \$29.02 for 78 channels and a fiber-optic system. The survey shows 23 consortiums pay less than this fee and seven consortiums pay more.

It is difficult to conduct a survey of this nature since many cable operators offer different

levels of service. Here in Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi, Time Warner has been providing cable over fiber optics since 1996. This allows for better picture quality and more channels. There are some other companies, such as TCI, which still transmit over coaxial cable (a less reliable and lower-quality option). On the other hand, Ameritech and other companies have offered the Disney Channel free. Here, we still have to pay \$8.26 a month for that premium channel.

Despite legislative efforts by

the Federal Communications Commission in 1996 to provide consumer relief from rising cable rates by introducing competition, rates continue to soar beyond the rate of inflation.

Caren Collins is the executive director of the Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission. The next SWOCC meeting is 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 27, at Farmington City Hall. The next CAC meeting is 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 9, at SWOCC.

There's 'a whole bunch of terrific' medical sites on Internet

I spent much of last week in St. Petersburg, Fla., at a place called the Poynter Institute for Journalism Studies. It's a sort of journalism "think tank," if you will, a place where reporters and editors come for intense training on how to do their jobs better.

I'm lucky to go down there several times a year as one of the institute's visiting faculty members, specializing in new media. And last week I was helping teach a group of health and medical reporters how to use the Internet.

As I went through my presentations, a key point I kept making was that the Internet has made reporters more accountable to their readers because the information journalists used to have first and best access to, is now widely available on the Internet.

Indeed, thanks to the Internet, many consumers have become experts at what I call "do-it-yourself medicine," using the Internet to research health, fitness and disease information.

At the end of my teaching session, one of the participants, a journalist who works in Washington, D.C., came up to share with me his own story. Last year, he said, he was suddenly called home to the Midwest to be with his elderly mother, who was scheduled for emergency surgery.

As he sat in his mother's hospital room, he surfed the Internet, laptop computer attached to her telephone, desperately seeking information about the medical condition that had put her in the hospital.

What he found greatly alarmed him. "The type of

surgery she was going to have had a great risk," he told me last week. "It required very delicate work around her facial nerves. One slip and her appearance would forever be affected."

The doctor planned to get a tissue sample from his mother, freeze it and send it in for analysis. What the journalist found was that such a test in his mother's case was far from reliable.

"The medical Web site I visited said, in fact, that freezing that particular type of tissue brought dubious results. So I printed the Web page out and fixed it to her

doctor and, in fact, the surgery was canceled."

The journalist's story illustrated my teaching point perfectly. For what he experienced has been shared by millions and is one of the Internet's most amazing success stories. Indeed, just last week, a now Harris poll reported that 60 million people searched the World Wide Web for health care information in the last 12 months.

That works out to 68 percent of the estimated 88 million people now online, making health and medical news the Internet's most eagerly sought information.

And here's the most amazing part: Nine out of 10 people surveyed said they found the health information they were looking for on the Internet.

To be sure, there is a lot of quackery on the Internet. People

pushing dubious cures, alternative "medicine" that sometimes does more harm than help, dangerous drugs and dietary supplements. In fact, one place everyone should bookmark and use to check out online health and medical information is a place called "Quackwatch" (www.quackwatch.com), run by a real doctor and devoted to exposing the dumb and dangerous.

But there are also a whole bunch of terrific medical sites. Here are four favorites we shared at Poynter last week:

■ **Medscape** (www.medscape.com) - Geared for consumers and searchable.

■ **Pubmed** (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed) - This is a huge database of medical sites and Internet resources maintained by the National Library of Medicine.

Healthweb (http://healthweb.org) - My favorite. Easy to navigate, created by librarians at university medical centers; it offers current and reliable information.

■ **Find a doctor** (www.aanpna.org) - This is the American Medical Association's searchable data base that lets you find every licensed doctor in the U.S., by name, specialty or location.

■ **Mike Wendland** (The Internet for NBC-TV NewsChannel stations across the country and can be seen locally on WDIV-TV4, Detroit. His "PC Talk" radio show airs Saturday and Sunday afternoons on WAFB.

Radio AM1270. His latest book "The Complete No Geek Sprinter's Guide to the Internet" is available in bookstores or through his Web site http://www.pcmike.com

PC TALK



MIKE WENDLAND

CAMPUS PIPELINE

U OF M GRADS
The following Farmington/Farmington Hills residents graduated from the University of Michigan in December:

Jennifer Buckley, Jean Chong, Linda Everett, Avery Johnson, Ganapath Lakshminarayan, Michelle Louisa, Laura McWilliam, Elisabeth Mombance, Elizabeth Novello, Kedarath Sathu and Wendy Westover.

LOCAL POET
Shana deAvila, a Hope College senior from Farmington Hills, had three poems chosen

for the fall 1998 edition of the college's "Opus" literary magazine. She is the daughter of Linda deAvila of Farmington Hills.

MADONNA GRADS
The following Farmington/Farmington Hills residents graduated from Madonna University in December:

Pamela Brown, Cindy Klein, Natalie Huntington, Shankar Pathak, Lisa Anastasio, Charles Arakelian, Gail Bierachbach, Rebecca Culver, Geoffrey Kenny, Heather Moraskey, Lars Richters,

Marlena Stankiewicz, Nancy Reimick and Melissa Francis.

DEMOTRIAN'S
The following Farmington/Farmington Hills residents were named to the Dean's list after the fall semester at Detroit College of Business:

Justin Lawlor, Dolores Koah, Mark Lehrke, Troy Strong and Sharon Richardson.

FOREIGN STUDIES
Amishi Doshi of Farmington Hills is spending the spring semester studying in Seville,

Spain, and Lara Lonzotti of Farmington Hills is studying in Venice, Italy. Both students are part of a program at Albion College that allows students to study in different cultures.

MADONNA DEAN'S
The following Farmington/Farmington Hills residents were named to the Dean's list following the fall term at Madonna University:


Julia Altschuhl, Courtney Cerano, Melissa Francis, Denise, Kimball, Kelly Ottewill, Janice Pardy, Laura Preto, Renee Rosch,

Monica Stevens, Deborah Thams, Pedra-Tar Wright, Cynthia Richards, Peter Aho, Eleanor Adams, Lisa Anastasio, Chris Bouschet, Kristina Camaj, Nicole Clark, Valerie Congdon, Kelly Cornwell, Shelley Friedman, Maureen Fritsch, Dominica Gambino-Gorslin, Janet Halfmann, Susan Hall, Robert Hamp, Debra Harrison, Donna Hebel, Lisa Herrmann, Lynn Hoag, Geoffrey Kenny, Michelle Kolliker, Bridget Kozlowski, Douglas Landefeld, Barbara Leslie,

Maureen Lino, Tracey Lochmayer, Jodi McCarty, Kristian McClellan, Todd Miller, Heather, Moraskey, Derek Nelson, Tiffany Nelson, Rebecca Pesci, Kelli Pickot, Cheryl Pozniak, Tanya Proctor, Jennifer Radcliffe, Ayscha Rawl, Michelle Regina, Carrie Reja, Lars Richters, Jason Rotenheber, Debra Schneider, Madelena Stankiewicz, Samantha Tunstall, Joie Walsh-Blassizak, Glynette Wolk and Ann Wolska.

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