

Area cable rates are similar

So what are people paying other area cable television companies? Here is a comparison of the rates and number of channels that area cable companies have said they offer:

Tele-Media: As of April 1, \$18.50 a month for 32 basic channels. A converter box is provided for free, but residents must pay an extra \$3.50 per month if they want a remote control for the box and don't receive any premium channels such as HBO. If they receive one premium channel the remote control is \$2.50 per month. If they receive two or more, the remote control is free.

Service Electric (serving the Wilkes-Barre area): \$18.50 a month for 36 basic channels. Customers without cable-ready televisions or VCRs must rent a converter box for \$3.95 a month if they wish to receive all of the channels. There is a \$25 charge to have the converter box installed.

Blue Ridge Cable: \$16.90 a month for 29 basic channels in Sweet Valley, or 27 basic channels in Noxen. Customers without a cable ready television or VCR must purchase a converter box if they wish to receive all of the stations. Converters are available from the company for \$26.50, or are provided free with the subscription to a premium channel.

Verito Cable (serving the Plains Township area): \$17 a month for 33 basic channels. Converter boxes are provided with a \$25 deposit for regular converters, and a \$40 deposit for those which can decode premium channels.

Cable TV (serving Jackson Township): \$17 a month for 38 basic channels. Converter boxes are provided with a \$15 deposit for manual converters, and a \$25 deposit for remote control converters.

Cable TV

(Continued from pg. 1)

the cable rates.

"I know it's on our agenda and we're going to talk about it," said Wagner. "We've talked with our solicitor but there's not much we can do. We're going to write a letter to protest it. Kingston Township has done it and they've asked us to join them."

Don Cooper, president of the Dallas Borough Council, said that while he hasn't had many complaints, the rate increase has made the council decide to take a look at what the borough's rights and responsibilities are concerning cable.

Donald Zagorski, general manager of Tele-Media says that the increase is needed because a third of the basic channels have gone up in price.

"The sports channels are really where we see it," said Zagorski. "A lot of the other channels have really held the line. One of the big problems, everybody hears about the million dollar sports contracts. The team managers pass that cost onto the stations which air their games, which in turn pass the cost on to local cable television companies."

Among the channels with the biggest increase in fees they charge the cable companies is TNT with a 300% increase, said Zagorski. Other channels that have also had

hefty increases in price to Tele-Media are ESPN, Sports Channel Philadelphia and Arts and Entertainment.

"The cable rates in this area have been held to an artificial low," said Zagorski. "I operate systems in three states, this is the best package at the lowest cost. We know the value is there. If the subscribers didn't think we were worth what we were charging they'd stop subscribing."

Which is just what Helen Cybulski of Dallas said she was considering doing. "But what do you do in that case, put the antenna back up?" said asked.

"I was going to get cable, but if they're that high I won't," said Donna Corvey of Shavertown.

The Kingston Township supervisors are investigating whether they can regulate cable rates because there are only five over-the-air channels: 16, 22, 28, 38 and 44, and the Federal Communications Commission permits municipalities to regulate cable rates if there are less than six.

Zagorski says there are six over-the-air channels, and the sixth is the Catholic TV channel, which comes in on 33. "That one we receive on our antenna just like you do at home."

Zagorski said that deregulating



SIGNALS FROM THE SKY - Jim Daubert of Franklin Township shows off his family's 10' diameter dish antenna. (Post photo/Grace R. Dove)

Satellites offer one alternative to cable

By GRACE R. DOVE
Post Staff

Five years before cable TV came to Franklin Township, Fred Risch could pick up only a very fuzzy Channel 22 on his TV set. But when the station moved its transmitter, Risch's TV couldn't pick up anything.

So Risch bought a satellite dish with access to 112 stations from 14 different satellites. Since TV Guide printed which satellites carried which channels, all he had to do was select a show, program the dish and wait for it to align itself with the right satellite. Instant perfect reception and a whole new world of entertainment was the result.

"Then they started to scramble certain channels and you had to buy a decoder if you wanted to see them," Risch said. "Now I understand that dish owners must purchase packages of the programs that they want, with nothing extra added."

He finally sold the satellite dish and hooked up to the cable. He says that the cable costs just as much as his satellite program package did, and he doesn't have to wait for the dish to find the satellite when he wants to change channels.

The average ten-foot diameter dish antenna costs \$1,995, installation included, according to Dave Katyl, owner of Katyl Satellite in Dallas. Although approximately 200 channels are available, program packages must be purchased and the built-in decoder programmed for the package.

"Customers select only what channels they want and can set their dishes to screen out 'R' or 'X'-rated movies," Katyl added. "Certain high-tech dishes will even automatically turn the VCR on and record programs automatically."

The average program package, Katyl said, runs roughly \$25 per

month, depending on how many channels are selected. Adding or deleting channels is as easy as making a phone call.

Aside from the initial cost, a satellite dish can have several drawbacks.

Joy Daubert learned about some of them very quickly when she bought her dish. "I can only get about half of the satellites because the trees around my house block the signal," she said. "And I can't get some good channels like CNN."

Because many satellite channels are blocked from their dish, the Daubert family also has cable TV, with basic service, Disney and Home Box Office, for \$41 a month. They pay an additional \$23 per month for satellite service.

While cable TV hookups allow several TV sets in the same house to pick up different channels at once, the satellite dish can only handle one channel at a time. And weather can interfere with reception, Katyl said.

Despite the initial cost of the antenna, Katyl sees the demand for satellite antennae increasing.

"For example, all Yankees' baseball games are available on satellite, but only some are on the cable," he said. Satellite services plan to run special summer Olympics packages similar to those offered on cable. And satellite technology is constantly improving.

Mrs. Daubert agreed. "Although my dish won't pick up CNN, it picks up all of the unedited news material beamed from all over the world to the major networks. I see footage of news events that viewers without a dish don't."

The satellite dish of the future will be smaller and more efficient, Katyl said. Prototypes similar to the European mini-dish are being experimented with, although several problems remain to be worked out.

the cable industry has helped companies expand their coverage to areas they wouldn't have gone to before.

"Franklin Township would not

have cable television if we did not have deregulation," said Zagorski.

Tele-Media purchased their cable system from Dallas Cable Vision in 1986, and since has

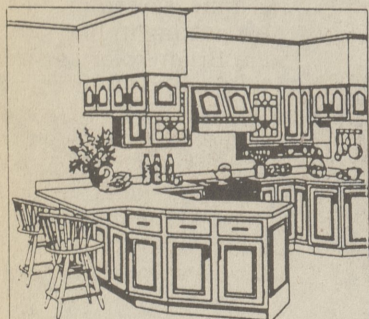
expanded its coverage area from 115 miles of cable, to over 200 miles. In 1987 the charge was \$9.50 for 12 channels. Now there are over 30 stations on basic cable.

"If we went back to the days of regulation, you'd get 12 channels and that would be it because we wouldn't be able to afford to do more than that."

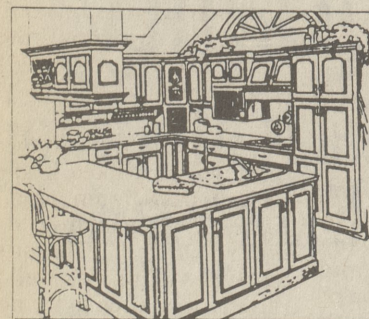
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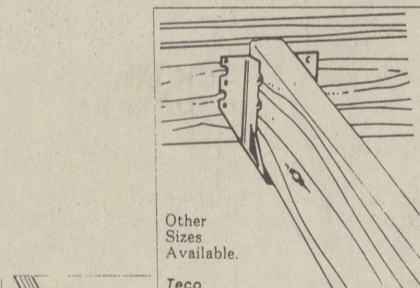
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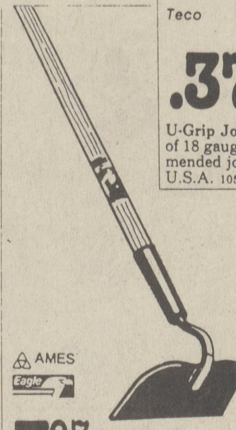


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