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Area schools get cable television

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United Artists Cable of Santa Cruz County has provided schools with an extensive educational-television cable package free of charge — and it has kicked in free TVs and VCRs to boot.

Last month, United Artists finished wiring all public schools in

its viewing area for its "Cable in the Classroom" project, a venture that will offer schools a package of commercial-free educational programs, covering such areas as news, weather, sports and science. The project also provides teachers with lesson plans from over 20 news and information organizations, including CNN's continuous

international news feeds.

The package also includes a data bank of thousands of updated topics that students can use for research. Each school was given hardware and software to access the data bank, and United Artists will train teachers in the system's use.

Why is the cable company doing

all this?

"This is a way to give something back to the community," said Carole Mulford, spokeswoman for United Artists. "There are no ulterior reasons."

Although the schools have been wired for the service and many are currently using it, not all
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schools have the complete system in operation, she said. Some schools are experiencing some trouble receiving the signal, but the problems are not considered serious.

Since United Artists services do not reach South County, only schools in the northern section of the Pajaro Valley school district are wired for reception. The service is currently being used at Renaissance High, but the bugs are still being worked out of the Aptos High system.

Mulford said the idea is "not to replace the teacher with television," but to make television work for the teacher.

"Kids relate to television, whether we like or not," she said.

Lee Takemoto, a teacher at Renaissance High, agrees. Television, he said, "creates some interest that we can't produce ourselves."

Takemoto said he uses recorded programs in the classroom. Next year he hopes students can work more independently on certain projects using the system's data bank.

The idea of using educational cable shows in schools is not new. There are several cable programs currently in use across the country, Mulford said, but some of these programs air commercials aimed at teens during the shows. In some states, like California, schools are prohibited from using these programs.

One of the more popular cable shows that airs commercials is Channel One, which provides educational programs across the country.

Mulford said educational cable shows are here to stay. Similar programs to Cable in the Classroom are now being used across California. She expects the use of cable programs to continue to grow.

Next month, United Artists is taking 10 Santa Cruz County teachers to San Francisco for a day of training on the use of the data bank system. These teachers will then train other teachers.

The entire Cable in the Classroom project cost United Artists about \$180,000, Mulford said.

"It is our biggest commitment to education," she said.

Sonic Cable, which services the Watsonville area, has no immediate plans to offer a similar program for area schools. But John Adams, Sonic's general manager, said, "We are taking a look at it."