

Group W ^{Cable TV} responds ✓
to Grand Jury criticism

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By PAUL BEATTY

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — Group W Cable Corp. is accusing the county Grand Jury of "bias" in its criticism of the cable service that's been operating in north county since 1981.

The jury claimed Group W has done little or nothing to improve service since its purchase of Teleprompter Corp. in 1981 and that it should not get a renewed franchise.

Further, in an unusual move, the jury recommended that the city and county award the bid to The Greater Santa Cruz Cable TV Associates Inc.

The jury said that of four cable companies bidding for the Santa Cruz city and county franchise, only Group W failed to appear for questioning.

Group W told the jury that it refused to appear on advice of its attorney since it has a court suit pending against the county.

Since the jury could not question Group W, it published the questions it wanted to ask in the annual report.

The jury wanted to know: if Group W was spending money elsewhere that was meant to improve local service; why it would not let local

governments control rates; whether it is making improvements to influence the court suit; why it is not extending service; and if it would like to compete with a second cable company.

Group W's local manager, Stewart Butler, said today, "The questions do not address that proposal (bid) at all. Instead, they reflect a bias against Group W Cable (that is) inappropriate for a body purporting to make an objective evaluation. This can only raise serious questions about their conclusion."

Butler said the company is not spending money elsewhere that should have been earmarked to improve Santa Cruz services. He also said Group W would not let the city and county regulate rates because that is illegal.

"We have informed the city and county many times that we will provide all the rate protection the law allow but we will not conspire with them to violate laws specifically prohibiting local rate regulation," Butler said.

He said the company is doing some upgrading now "because the customers deserve it."

The jury claimed Group W was not living up to its existing franchise by its failure to upgrade the system according to schedule.

Butler said that isn't true and that the company is ahead of schedule. He also said Group W would welcome competition if the city and county franchise with another cable service.

"Our present franchises are non-exclusive and we have never opposed the lawful grant of additional franchises," Butler said.

The jury said it found Group W's reluctance to appear "puzzling, inasmuch as a Group W representative has been very vocal in the media and has traveled around the county presenting Group W's proposal to various citizen groups."

Butler said, "I do not think the escalation of the rhetoric surrounding this issue benefits the residents of Santa Cruz, instead it only aggravates a sensitive situation which has already unduly delayed the delivery of improved cable service in the county."

The county is still considering the bid proposals from the four companies.