

# Cable TV additions will bring bigger bills

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**BOULDER CREEK** — Nothing comes for free. Although cable TV subscribers in north Santa Cruz County can expect much better service from new cable ownership, they will have to pay for it.

Over the next two years, they will have more choices, better reception and less down time, according to Fred Venegas, station manager of KRUZ, which is a department of Santa Cruz Cable Television. And their bills for basic service will increase.

Saturday, Venegas told the San Lorenzo Valley Property Owners Association at its bi-annual luncheon that although the rates would be raised, there would be "no gouging." He focused his talk on positive changes the new owner and operator of the cable system, United Artists, would make.

The ownership and operations of the cable company which services north Santa Cruz county has been in flux for most of the past decade. This has led to customer frustration, said Venegas.

Now United Artists owns and operates "the whole enchilada," said Venegas. This freedom from legal battles and franchise hassles will lead to a whole new era of customer satisfaction, Venegas predicted.

United Artists "are the people who own the theaters and they are dedicated to entertainment," he said. The contract, which had been held by United Cable TV, requires the cable company to create a "state-of-the-art system." United Artists officially acquired United Cable TV last week, according to Venegas.

He assured the group, most of whom were seniors, that both the city of Santa Cruz and the county were working with the new cable company to design a special rate for seniors and those on fixed incomes.

"It will be a percentage of the rate that others pay," he said after the talk.

He they had not been finally determined, but that basic rates would be between \$13.50 and \$16.50 for basic service. Rates won't be raised until people are actually connected to the new service, which will be phased in over two years.

The increased rates will help pay for massive improvement plans.

United Artists will spend "upwards of \$20 million," to expand service to their customers. Seventy-seven channels will be available eventually, 60 in the next couple of years, Venegas said.

Cable service will be available in areas which it had not reached previously, such as Scenic Drive in Ben Lomond, said Venegas.

Venegas said there would also be fewer cable blackouts.

"Basically, a cable system is a physical plant, people hit poles and the whole system goes out past that point," Venegas said. But when the new plant is finished, a battery-operated standby power system will kick in after a power outage or downed pole.

"It will be a state-of-the-art system," Venegas said. "We will install a fiber-optics system, which will bring clearer pictures."

An "addressable system" also will be installed which will give subscribers the ability to switch their cable options with just a telephone call. "At this time if you say you want Showtime, we have to send out a truck and that takes a lot of money. With the new system it can all be done by phone."

Vengas said the company is not expecting a quick return of its \$20 million investment, "They're in there for the long haul."