

Details of new cable-TV system revealed

By BOB SMITH
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United Artists Cable, the new cable-TV provider for most of Santa Cruz County, unveiled the details of its new \$20 million system last night at a gala at the Santa Cruz Cocoanut Grove.

But it will be another six to nine months before customers in the Aptos-Rio del Mar-Soquel areas begin getting the new service, General Manager Stewart Butler said this morning.

United Artists Cable bought out the old franchise holder in a settlement of a long-running legal battle between the cable company and the county and city of Santa Cruz.

United Artists pledged to completely rebuild the old cable

system and upgrade it to 50 regular channels and another five premium-service offerings. The premium channels include HBO, Showtime, Cinemax and Disney. HBO is counted twice on the premium list because it is offered on two channels, Butler said.

United Artists began hooking up some Live Oak customers to the new system this week.

The Live Oak cable system is hooked up to a Santa Cruz hub. The hubs — there will be five when the system is finished — are connected by a fiber optic cable to the cable system's new ground station in Scotts Valley.

TV and satellite signals are received and processed at the ground station, then fed into the fiber-optic system to the hubs.

The Aptos-Soquel area — everyone south of 41st Avenue — will be served by a hub to be located at the Rancho del Mar shopping center. The company, Butler said, is still waiting for building permits to begin its construction.

In the meantime, construction crews are busy stringing new cable throughout the Midcounty area.

The reconstruction project is a four-step process, Butler said this morning. First, a 1/4-inch steel cable is strung from power pole to power pole. Then new cable is hung from the support cable.

Next, a crew installs the electronic in the new cable and tests the new system. Finally, cable television crews go house-to-

house in an area, replacing the service lines running from the pole to the TV set.

Butler said the company plans to make 700 conversions in the Live Oak area this month, then about 2,000 a month until the job is done.

Conversions won't start in the Aptos area until the new hub is ready — Butler estimates September. Customers in the Soquel area probably won't be switched over until the end of the year.

When a home is connected to the new cable system, the cost of basic cable service jumps from \$7.14 a month to \$13.50. A year after the entire system is completed, the company has the right to increase the rate to a maximum of \$16.95, Butler said.