

TSTCI INFORMATION

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FOR TSTCI MEMBER COMPANIES

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www.tstci.org

Texans Helping Texans

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Texas Statewide Telephone Cooperative, Inc. is a statewide telecommunications non-profit organization representing the interests of Texas rural independent telephone systems. All member companies are regulated by the Public Utility Commission of Texas.

H I G H L I G H T S

2007 TSTCI LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE



On January 23, 2007, TSTCI member company representatives began their morning with a hearty Texas-style breakfast buffet. President Weldon R. Gray welcomed attendees, turning the podium over to TSTCI Legislative Advocate, Bill Stinson, to introduce a special guest, Texas Department of Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples.



Commissioner Staples addressed issues of importance to rural areas, such as economic development, water issues, and the provision of advanced services, as well as issues affecting businesses, including the business “margins” tax passed last session and the property tax changes. He indicated that he looks forward to working with our member companies on rural issues in the future.

After a brief update from Legislative Committee Chair, Robbie Allen, and from TSTCI’s Attorney, Don Richards, member company representatives headed for the Capitol to visit with legislators and inform them of issues important to the rural telecommunications industry.

At 6:00 p.m., the doors were opened for a reception in honor of the 80th Legislature. TSTCI representatives, Legislators and their staff were treated to delicious hors d’oeuvres, refreshments, and live music by Cheyenne.



A BIG THANKS TO

Cap Rock Telephone Coop., Inc.

and

Eastex Telephone Coop., Inc.

For sponsoring the band and helping make our reception such a success!

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TSTCI BACKS SBC IN SUPREME COURT ARGUMENT IN FAVOR OF USF SURCHARGES

TSTCI joined in support of SBC in a recent argument before the Texas Supreme Court regarding a private lawsuit attack seeking refunds from telephone companies of the line-item on customer bills for universal service charges.

On Wednesday, January 24, 2007, attorneys for SBC argued before the Texas Supreme Court in an attempt to force a state district judge in Hidalgo County to dismiss a private lawsuit which challenges the USF surcharge on customer bills. The lawsuit, a “class action” on behalf of all of SBC customers in Texas, seeks to require that SBC refund to customers the USF surcharge from 1999 to the present. The local district judge in Hidalgo County refused SBC’s motion to dismiss the case. SBC appealed to the Texas Supreme Court under a “Writ of Mandamus” to ask the Texas high court to require the local judge to dismiss the case.

The plaintiffs, who are local exchange customers of SBC, have alleged that the Public Utility Commission acted without authority in setting the amount of the USF surcharge and authorizing SBC to put that charge on their customer bills.

TSTCI was first to file an “amicus curiae” (i.e. friends of the court) brief urging that the Supreme Court grant the SBC request and order the lawsuit dismissed. Based on the legal doctrine of “exclusive jurisdiction”, TSTCI argued that any legal challenge to the USF surcharge is required to be filed first at the PUC, and then appealed to the district court in Travis County. Any other state court is without jurisdiction to even consider the issue. TSTCI, later joined by TTA and attorneys representing the PUC, argued in briefing to the Texas Supreme Court that the Texas Legislature vested exclusive authority to the PUC regarding all matters involving the USF. TSTCI also argued that the case could set a dangerous precedent regarding the billing of surcharges for all the other 50-plus telephone companies serving in the state.

After the Supreme Court heard oral arguments January 24; they indicated the record in the case was closed, and a ruling would be forthcoming after the Court studies the legal arguments.

And the Winner is . . .

Last month a contest was held to identify a pirate among us. Those who guessed that Captain Braidbeard was in reality, Mr. Scott Hart of South Plains Telephone Cooperative, can give themselves a pat on the back.

The winner of the Wal-Mart gift card (generously donated by Captain, uh, I mean, Mr. Hart) was Mr. Steve Singletary of Taylor Telephone Cooperative.



2007 TSTCI PLANTMEN'S CONFERENCE – MARCH 7-9

Don't Forget to Make Your Room Reservations and Register!

The conference is being held at the Renaissance Worthington Hotel in downtown Fort Worth, Texas 76102. For room reservations, call the hotel at 1-817-870-1000 or toll free 1-800-433-5677 and ask for the TSTCI Plantmen's Conference group rate of \$177 for a single or double room (plus tax). You must call by February 12, 2007. Reservations requested after that date will be on a space and rate available basis. Check-in time is 3:00 p.m.; check-out time is 12:00 noon.

Be sure to check out the agenda on the TSTCI website (www.tstci.org) to see the updated list of speakers. You won't want to miss this valuable program or the Tabletop Trade Show on Wednesday evening. For registration information, contact Martha Shepperd at 972-243-8705 or by e-mail: martha@tstci.org. Registration forms are also available on our website.

INTERNET PROTOCOL CAPTIONED TELEPHONE SERVICE ELIGIBLE FOR COMPENSATION FROM INTERSTATE TRS FUND

Last month, the FCC adopted a Declaratory Ruling finding that Internet Protocol (IP) captioned telephone service (IP CTS) is a type of telecommunications relay service (TRS) eligible for compensation from the Interstate TRS Fund (Fund). The Commission acted in response to a petition by Ultratec, Inc., that was widely supported by the disability community.

An IP captioned telephone call can be set up similar to a two-line captioned telephone call, except that the line from the user to the provider would be via the Internet, not a second PSTN line. The consumer would make a voice to voice call to the other party on a standard telephone and the PSTN; at the same time, the voice of the called party is directed from the consumer's telephone to a personal computer (or similar device) that routes it to the provider via the Internet. The provider, in turn, sends back to the consumer the text of what was spoken. As a result, the consumer can both hear (to the extent possible) what the called party is saying over the standard voice telephone headset, and read the text of what the called party said on the computer or similar device.

This service must meet applicable TRS mandatory minimum standards. The Commission said it expects that, as with captioned telephone service, the service will be provided in a way that is automated and invisible to both parties to the call, and where the captions are delivered via an IP network to the user fast enough so that they keep up with the speed of the other party's speech. Further, the Commission conditioned its approval of the petition on Ultratec's representation that it will license its captioned telephone technologies, including technologies related to IP CTS, to all providers at reasonable rates.

IP CTS calls will be compensated, on an interim basis, at the IP Relay compensation rate. The Commission also concluded that providers seeking to offer this service and be compensated from the Fund may seek certification from the Commission as an eligible provider. The Commission noted that this is an interim measure and that it intends to revisit the cost recovery methodology for this service in the future, including jurisdictional separation of costs.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Network Technician for Texas Lone Star Network—Texas Lone Star Network is looking for a Network Technician to be based out of our 702 Colorado POP in Austin, TX.

Job duties: Monitor the Texas Lone Star Transport Network using the DPS Telecom T-MonXm surveillance platform. This person will respond to alarms and customer trouble calls, isolate trouble, notify responsible parties and coordinate repair and restoration of the facilities and circuits. The technician will install, test, and repair various levels of transport and private line circuits and equipment. This will include but not be limited to DS0 thru Oc-n circuits. The equipment would include Alcatel 1610, 1640, 1648; Cisco 15454; CAC 1/0 DACS; DPS Telecom TMON and Netguardian; as well as associated Battery and power modules. The technician may be required to travel throughout the TLSN Network to install and/or repair this equipment. The technician may be required to work overtime, some weekends, and hours other than a normal 8-hour day tour.

Job qualifications: The candidate is required to be qualified in the installation, provisioning, maintenance, repair and use of the following equipment: Alcatel 1610, 1640, 1648 transport equipment, Cisco 15454 and DWDM equipment, Central Office Power, Various DACS equipment, various test sets and test equipment, Fiber testing and cleaning.

This is an hourly paid position with pay commensurate with experience and qualifications. The Texas Lone Star Network offers a comprehensive health and 401k benefits package to its employees.

Please contact Bill Russell (brussell@tlsn.net) or Brad Seymour at 830-693-5532.

Upcoming Events

February 2007

4-7 NTCA Annual Meeting & Expo – Lake Buena Vista, Florida

March 2007

7-9 **TSTCI Plantmen's Conference – Fort Worth, Texas**

8-9 UTCLE Telecom, Cable & Wireless Conference – Austin, Texas

April 2007

3-5 Texas Communications Expo EXPO 2007 – Belton, Texas

16-18 NTCA Legislative & Policy Conferences – Washington, DC