

Town Debates Cost of Connectivity

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without driving to each station and manually accessing the information. Being included in the completion of Comcast's new internal system will alleviate that problem however, since data can be sent directly to public works via the new fiber-optic cable lines.

As with the police department, working with large files is a problem Public Works encounters as well. "They work with huge computer files now," said Pletzke. "Maps, pictures, images - these things have really come of age recently." As the tools Town departments use become more technologically advanced, so must the equipment the facilities use in conjunction.

Even Key facilities not directly involved in the Town's government will benefit from being included in the Town's internal computer network. Currently the Recreation Center and Tennis Center cannot receive email from Town Hall on their in-house computers. Though the directors of both centers are involved developing the upcoming 2006-07 Town budget, they are unable to access the necessary files without leaving their facility, driving to Town Hall, looking for an unused computer terminal and adding their data from there. Pletzke said that she could not justify the \$1,000 per month maintenance fee to connect the Recreation and Tennis Centers' computers to Verizon's existing technology however. "There's only one person at each Center so that's just too expensive. It's a no-brainer."

Connecting the Tennis Center to the new Comcast technology would also have an immediate budgetary impact. The Center accepts credit cards in its retail shop to pay for purchases but because they are unable to access Town Hall's payment processing equipment, the Center must maintain a separate credit card merchant account and all absorb the associated fees. If the Center were connected to Town Hall, however, they would receive the same volume discount available to payments processed through Town Hall.

It is difficult for Pletzke to quantify exactly how many man hours are lost each month within Town depart-

ments by not being connected to Town Hall's internal computer system but department heads agree it is not only frustrating but avoidable as well.

Commissioners Weigh In

Among the chief concerns of the board was whether the project can be completed in time for hurricane season. Both St. Denis and Pletzke reassured the commission that the new technology would not be put into daily use until it is thoroughly tested. Pletzke also reiterated that the Verizon technology would remain in place as a back up connection source.

Some commissioners also expressed concern about Comcast's level of, or lack of, quality customer service. Commissioner Randall Clair said that Comcast has a "consistent problem delivering (residential) service." Commissioner George Spoll echoed that sentiment. "Comcast has the most unreliable service I can imagine," he said, "and I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy."

Commissioner Robert Siekmann, however, disagreed. "I'm also on Comcast," he said. "But I've never been (without service)."

Pletzke and St. Denis assured the Commission that they type of technology used to equip a residential homeowner with a high-speed internet connection and the framework used to directly connect one Town building with another are very different types of cable and technology.

While Comcast does provide internet service to some local residences and businesses, internet service does not play a role in assisting the Town buildings in communicating with each other. "Comcast is not and will not provide us any service in that regard," Pletzke told the *Manatee River News*.

Mayor Joan Webster redirected the board and asked them to consider the original question on the table - whether money should be removed from the board's contingency fund to the project's early completion. "I'm thinking that we're taking our frustration at one type of service and using it to evaluate another type of service that is entirely different and used in a different manner

for something that would enhance our operations of the Town." She said. "I would support going forward with this."

Before making a final decision on whether to release the funds for new computer equipment, St. Denis offered to return to the next regular Workshop with additional information. He will find out who is responsible for repairs in the event of a system failure or cable damage as well as what commitments Comcast can offer to the Town for repair response times and other customer service issues.

Pletzke says, the new technology from Comcast will ultimately allow the Town to be equipped with video-conferencing, voice over IP telephone systems and other new and emerging services. But for now, the most pressing issue is getting the new equipment up and running as quickly as possible so all Town departments can work efficiently with one another.

'Big Mama' Passes

Elizabeth L. Williams, 67, of Bradenton, Florida died at 5:45 a.m. Saturday, April 22, 2006 at Blake Memorial Hospital.

Born in Lafayette, IN, Betty moved to this area in 1985 and spent many years entertaining here. "Big Mama" was adored at Shenkles, The Hunt Club, The Buccaneer and the Hilton on Longboat Key.

Betty was preceded in death by her husband Don in 1965. She is survived by her three children; Mark, Eric and Elisha, eight grandchildren and one great-grandchild. Also surviving are two sisters, Marcella Walts of Bradenton and Peggy Stachon of AZ, and brother Bob Scheetz of WI.

Services will be held at St. Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Church, 4280 Gulf of Mexico Dr., Longboat Key at 10 a.m. Saturday, April 29, 2006. There will be a gravesite burial in Lafayette, IN on June 3, 2006.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to: The Williams Children's Fund c/o Marcella Walts 3002 41st St. West, Bradenton, FL 34205

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