

THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD...

Though you think that you are prepared for the worst, you never really know whether you are or not until they happen. This happened to us on Sunday, April 1, 2012. The General Manager Gail Pitzer passed away of a pulmonary embolism. Though Gail was my mother and my boss, I didn't realize how many people she had touched until her memorial service. In the little town of Agate, we had the entire gymnasium packed, and that's a big event in this little community. After such a tragic event, our little "family" needed time to re-group, sort out the odds and ends that needed to be done, and come to decisions about where we go from here.

I can remember when I was 5 years old, my mom, who then worked out of our house to do the billing for the Agate Telephone Company, would be talking about how she would like to make small steps become real dreams. I grew up in this town, and I know most of the people in the Agate area. Gail worked for Agate Mutual Telephone, in various roles for over 35 years. When I lost my job in 2010, I came home for a little self-discovery, and mom immediately put me to work here at the office. She slowly started to let me take over some of her duties to give her more time to work on other projects. If hindsight could give you a heads up once in while, you would be able to see that maybe some bad things happen for a reason, and the reason I came home was to learn as much from her as I could before her passing.

Fast forwarding then to April 30th, 2012, after much thought by our Board of Directors, technician Daniel Hollembeak, and myself decided that we would partner up and try and take over the big shoes that Gail had left behind. Daniel became the new General Manager, and I, Amy Noah, have taken over the responsibility of Office Manager. Together we are teaming up to conquer this task of keeping our company going, and how to meet the needs of our customers. Daniel will be handling the decision making, system upgrades, and report to the Board of Directors. I will be handling all the billing, reporting, and financial needs of the company, and will report to Daniel.

Jason Lacik is still the technician that will be servicing your needs in the field, and Daniel will be available to help him most of the time. Larry Pitzer will also keep his normal duties as the Plant Manager. We have also gained a part-time customer service representative, Judy Hollembeak, who will work three days a week. The five of us are going to continue the work that Gail did, and continue to make improvements to our system and keep Agate Mutual Telephone running for our community.

Both Daniel and I welcome any questions or concerns that need to be addressed, so if you have any, please feel free to stop by, or call us. We are here to serve you and provide you answers to questions that may have not been addressed.

We appreciate your continued business and support, and hope even through the changes that we have had to make, we are going to move forward and continue to serve you, our customer, with the best telecommunications products available.

Sincerely,

Amy Noah

SECURING YOUR HOME COMPUTER



In today's world, home computer security means more than just watching who uses your computer and what they are doing. There are several tasks that should be done to protect your information, your data, and your peace of mind.

- 1) Install and Use Anti-Virus Programs— anti-virus programs look for contents on each file, searching for specific patterns that match a profile— called a *virus signature* — known to be harmful. When it detects a virus, it often responds by removing the offending patterns, or destroying the file. Installing and keeping the software up-to-date is the best defense you have for your home computer.
- 2) Keep Your System Patched— this refers to keeping your operating software up-to-date, by running updates periodically. This is the way the software fixes any “bugs” in their products. Most operating software has made it simple to run updates automatically or on a schedule, this is an easy way to make sure that your operating software stays up-to-date.
- 3) Use Care When Reading Email With Attachments— email viruses and worms are very common. If you have not received one, chances are you will. Here are some steps to help you decide what to do with every email message with an attachment you receive.
 - A. The Know Test— Is this email from someone that you know?
 - B. The Received Test— Have you received email from this sender before?
 - C. The Expect Test— Were you expecting email with an attachment from this sender?
 - D. The Sense Test— Does email from the sender with the contents as described in the Subject line and the name of the attachment(s) make sense? For example, would you expect the sender- lets say your mother— to send you a message with the Subject line “Here you have, ;o)” that has an attachment that says “AnnaKournikova.jpg.vbs? It doesn't make sense— so it fails the test.
- 4) Install and Use a Firewall Program— it acts like a guard when it looks for network traffic destined for or received from another computer, and determines if it should be received or stopped. The “guard” is important because it keeps the unwanted out and permits only appropriate traffic to enter and leave the computer.
- 5) And Finally— Make Backups of Important Files and Folders— this way if your computer is “attacked” you have a “spare” to go back to and get your computer up and running again!

AUTO-PAY AVAILABLE

Auto pay is available through Agate Mutual and Prairie Networks. If you would like to sign up for this, please contact us and we will get you set up.

- ◇ We accept Visa, MC, and Discover; or a draft from a bank account can be set up as well.
- ◇ You pick the payment date that you want your bill to be processed on.
- ◇ Your bill is mailed to you and marked paid, so that you have it for your records.
- ◇ There is no fee to start or stop this payment process. We provide this service to our customers for your convenience.
- ◇ Eliminates any unpaid bills to become disconnect notices in the future.

Call now and get yourself signed up! **New enrollees will be placed in a random draw for a discount on next month's bill!**

CREDIT CARD SCAMS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

Some are old, some are new, but all are actively being run by cons, so watch out!

We can lower your rate—a caller tells you that they can offer you a lower your rate on your card for an upfront charge. This is a scam, and why would you pay for someone to do something that you can do yourself? If the caller is truly a division of the issuer, you won't have to pay a fee to lower your rate.

The Fake Freeze— you get an emergency text “there is a problem with your account, your card has been frozen.” You contact the number given but the name of the bank or credit company does not match and it prompts you to enter your card information. The crooks are looking to gather your information so that your next call will be from your bank stating that your accounts have been drained. **Always** contact the phone number listed on your card— this ensures that you are contacting the appropriate place.

The 3-digit Con— you receive a call from you credit card issuing bank stating that there have been some security issues and they need to confirm your information. The real purpose for this call is to get you to tell them the three digit security code on the back of the card; more than likely they already have your card information, and this is a way to get the security code so that they can use your card for their personal use. No issuing bank should ask you for that information.

Bad Credit? No Income? No Problem!— what does the old adage say? “If it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is.” Chances are the catch is buried in the fine print, if its revealed at all. Make sure you verify your issuing source’s credibility, and read all the fine print very carefully before you sign up, or you may end up worse off than your started.

-Excerpts from article by D. Dratch, from www.creditcards.com

FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES FROM THE FCC— PART 1

In October, 2011, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) shifted the entire mantle of telephone regulation in this country. In what could be the most significant change in the telecommunications landscape in a half century, the FCC overhauled the Universal Service Fund (USF) and telephone Intercarrier Compensation (ICC) system.

Here are some highlights from the Executive Summary:

- * The USF, which has traditionally only funded the provision of Plain Old Telephone Service (POTS), it will now be expanded to broadband services. It will expand the benefits of high-speed Internet to millions of consumers in every part of the country by transforming the existing USF into a new Connect America Fund (CAF) focused on broadband.
- * The High Cost Support will be capped at \$4.5 billion annually. This is to provide more predictable funding for carriers and will protect consumers and businesses that ultimately pay for the fund through fees on their bills.
- * Connect America Fund (CAF), will ultimately replace all existing high-cost support mechanisms. CAF will help make broadband available to homes, businesses and community anchor institutions in areas that do not, or would not have it otherwise.
- * Total overhaul of the ICC system over the next few years, will attempt to eliminate the loopholes and ultimately reduce the ICC compensation that should be passed through to consumers in the form of lower phone bills. However, an increase to consumer telephone bills through the inclusion of an Access Recovery Charge (ARC) will be made, to compensate local telephone companies for lost intercarrier compensation, capped at an increase of \$0.50 a year per subscriber, and disallowed for any subscriber bill over \$30.00 a month.

Though these are just some of the changes that we are facing in the telecommunication world, it is still not certain how the funds are going to be dispersed, and ultimately how much the consumer will be paying to have these services. There have been many appeals to the FCC from the smaller telephone companies, to ask them to really think how the money is going to be dispersed, but no decisions have been made at this point. We will continue to keep up on this and pass the information along to you as we have it. But I do believe that this is just the beginning of the changes to come.



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SHORT SHORTS

There were three soldiers in the middle of the desert at their camp. They have been called to walk across the desert to the King's castle where they will serve as guards to the King. The walk will take approximately 3-days to get there. The soldiers were told that they must pack for survival for the three of them, in order to make the trek safely.

Soldier Adam returns to the barracks with a huge backpack full of food, such as sandwiches, snacks, fruit, etc. Soldier Charlie scratches his head and asks, "What is that for?" Soldier Adams replies, "In case we get hungry, we have something to eat". Soldier Charlie nods and goes back to his work.

Soldier Bob then leaves the barracks, and after a while returns with two long bamboo canisters strapped to his back, full of water. Again confused, Soldier Charlie says, "What is that for?" Soldier Bob replies, "In case we get thirsty, we have something to drink." Starting to get the big picture, Soldier Charlie nods and then leaves the barracks.

Soldier Adam and Bob patiently await Soldier Charlie's arrival with something that they can use for their long trek. After several hours, Soldier Charlie returns carrying a car door. Soldier Adam and Bob scratch their heads, wondering what good that it would be to them. Finally, Soldier Bob asks, "So... what is that for?"

Very proud of himself for finding a great tool for their long trek, Soldier Charlie replies, "In case we get hot, we can roll down the window..."



F U N F A C T S

Did you know...



- Iceland consumes more Coca-Cola per capita than any other nation.
- Peanuts are one of the ingredients in dynamite.
- A hummingbird weighs less than a penny.
- The average American will eat about 11.9 pounds of cereal per year.
- The State of Florida is bigger than the country of England.
- If you were to spell out numbers, you would have to go to 1,000 until you would find the letter "A".

Do you have something you want to put in our newsletter? Contact us.