

# Internet users complain ATMC says plan charge only to cover high costs

By Richard Nubel  
Municipal Editor

Atlantic Telephone Membership Corporation officials have denied the contention of petitioners who say a recent move to limit Frequent Caller privileges was actually a ploy to secure more Internet access business for the co-op.

ATMC serves most of Brunswick County including Boiling Spring Lakes and St. James Plantation west of Southport.

Member relations director Percy Woodard Tuesday said he had not seen a copy of the petition circulating in the county, but recently the coop raised the rate for its Frequent Caller Plan, a calling option that allows customers to pay a flat rate for all calls made within a 40-mile

Internet subscribers to do business with ATMC.

"Take the Internet, for example," a letter from a group calling itself the Frequent Caller Committee says. "There are many Internet providers who offer unlimited hours at a low cost. However, we are now literally forced to use your Internet services due to the fact that most Internet connections are based out of Wilmington, North Carolina. Therefore, our unlimited hours have become quite limited."

Boiling Spring Lakes and St. James Plantation customers also have used ATMC's Frequent Caller plan to access Internet service provided through The State Port Pilot and Brunswick Computers in Southport.

Not so, says Woodard. He said a local commercial Internet access provider in Shallotte has been the biggest beneficiary of the switch in ATMC's Frequent Caller policies.

"Millennium Computer Applications has benefited by getting more customers," Woodard said. "Customers are going to Millennium Computer because they have a cheaper rate than we do."

Woodard said ATMC's recent rate adjustment was an attempt to recover the high costs associated with computer users who tie-up lines for hours on end.

"We had people with computers who stay on forever," Woodard said. "We've had to add more circuits. The contention was we shouldn't subsidize those customers. I think that was the intent."

Petitioners also say it is impossible to monitor the number of hours they access the Frequent Caller option in a month.

"If you will not return the Frequent Caller Plan as it was originally, then we are asking that you at least provide us with monitors," petitioners wrote.

Whatever the difficulties are associated with ATMC's Frequent Caller Plan, the recent rate adjustment and time limitations have not translated into additional Internet access customers for the co-op.

"I'm sure people feel that way," Woodard said. "But that's not what happened and that was not the intent. When you have competition right here in town that has more customers than you do, that argument just doesn't work."

An accompanying letter from Joshua Montgomery of the Frequent Caller Committee says over 200 signatures have been obtained on petitions calling for a return to old Frequent Caller policies.

"Members are reported to have said they are willing to take whatever steps necessary, including picketing, to restore unlimited calling within a 30- (to) 40-mile range," Montgomery wrote.

'When you have competition right here in town that has more customers than you do, that argument just doesn't work.'

Percy Woodard  
Member relations

radius, regardless of number or duration.

He said the Frequent Caller rate was increased from \$26 per month to about \$41 per month.

"Also, with the increase in rate, there was a limitation placed on the number of hours" the Frequent Caller option could be used, Woodard said.


Petitioners say that limitation on the number of hours the Frequent Caller option may be used forces

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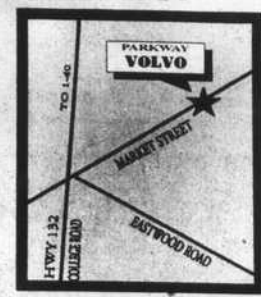
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