



Ansley leaders discuss new cell tower, pitfalls of rural service

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ANSLEY U.S. Cellular President and CEO John Rooney visited Ansley Monday to celebrate the construction of a new cell tower near town and ask for support to continue universal service found under its current format.

Rooney spoke during a press conference in the Ansley City Auditorium, which also included short talks by Ervie Ferguson, Fire Chief for the Ansley Volunteer Fire Department and Lanette Doane, Ansley Village Clerk and Treasurer.

The new U.S. Cellular tower is just northeast of Ansley.

After the formal ceremony, Doane said the new tower should improve cell coverage north of Westerville.

Doane acknowledged the terrain in that part of Nebraska is always going to affect cell phone coverage. Reception is going to be better at the top of hills than the bottom.

Doane also was glad to learn from U.S. Cellular officials that the company had built a new tower near Dunning. Doane said her husband works for the railroad and he says he is out of cell phone range about the time he gets to Merna.

Written information provided by U.S. Cellular at the press conference said that the three towers "are among the first the company has built in Nebraska with federal USF funds."

Doane and Ferguson said other cell phone companies also provide service in the Ansley area. Alltel has had a tower in Ansley for a number of years, while Viaero also has just completed a tower to serve the area.

Doane, though, said people in the Ansley area should not be content to have service from just one cell phone service provider. She said that creates a monopoly.

"Competition can improve service," said Doane, who added customers can then pick the service that is best for them.

Rooney also said that rural customers deserve the same choice and level of services that people in urban areas can receive.

There is a proposal that would place an interim cap on the high cost service portion of the universal service fund that is intended to serve rural, high-cost areas.

After the press conference Rooney said that the cap would mean that "there is no incentive to expand" the number of towers in rural areas of Nebraska.

During the formal press conference, Rooney said that cap would interfere with U.S. Cellular's plans to build 66 new tower sites in the next five years. Rooney described the people who support the cap as "elite, effete" people who live in the urban areas of the country.

He contended their attitude is that "fall in a ditch in a rural area of Nebraska, look for a pay phone."

During her portion of the official press conference, Doane said that "Ansley is the heartland of Nebraska and Nebraska is the heartland of the country. Home-based business and the entrepreneurial spirit are very much alive in this part of the country."

Doane said there are a number of home-based Nebraska businesses that are doing business globally.

Rooney asked those at the meeting to go to the Connecting Rural America Web site to learn how to contact their U.S. Senators, Congressman and others to express their opposition to a cap on the federal USF.

However, proponents of the cap say it is intended to be a temporary measure until reforms can be made in funding and distribution mechanism.

Some critics of the current program say that it does not make sense to subsidize multiple carriers in a rural, high-cost area.

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