

WASHINGTON COUNTY NEWS

THE DEVELOPMENT CORNER

by Mari Detrixhe

Cars parked at cell phone hotspots will soon be history. U.S. Cellular's new tower northeast of Clyde will come on-line between now and mid-October, according to Roberta Winger, Director of Sales for U.S. Cellular in Kansas. "It will extend coverage to 144 square miles."

Ms. Winger described the territory as extending from Highway 9 east of Concordia to Belleville and Washington. She said this is part of a larger effort to provide coverage throughout central Kansas, from Nebraska to Oklahoma, and from "just west of Hutchinson to the Topeka area". In 2008, U.S. Cellular invested \$8.3 million in this network.

Meanwhile, Twin Valley Telephone is completing the cutover of the Clyde exchange to fiber optic telecommunications service. They also plan to provide cell phone service in 2008.

These changes are monumental. Rural America is the last to receive services – electricity, roads, airports, and hospitals – because we cannot afford these amenities without government subsidies. The most recent – communication – is the key that will allow us to create above-average incomes in rural America.

We've come a long way since I moved here in 1986. I thought I had moved to "Green Acres", the 1960s sitcom in which Eddie Arnold climbed the pole to answer the phone. For starters, Ed and I shared a party line with his parents and a few neighbors. When we built our home in 1989, we joined the party line of the Bachands, Landrys, Ferrons, and Kochs. More than once, Dolores Landry made the rounds to see who had left their phone off the hook.

By 1993, the access issue had become quite irritating, particularly because the Internet had been born and the world was moving on without us. My neighbor and friend Vic Koch finally called Sprint, demanding to know, "How are we supposed to get on the Information Highway when we can't even get on the phone!?" It worked. We had private lines shortly thereafter.

Cell phones were the next technological revolution. The cell phone had become ubiquitous ... though useless in Clyde and Clifton. With good luck we could make calls from outside our homes or Rosie's Bar & Grill or the beauty shop. Otherwise, a cell call required a trip to the west river bridge or the cemetery road.

Clyde's emergency crews have discovered areas east and north of Clyde where radios don't work and cell phones don't work. "This can be stressful when time is of the essence," commented one EMT worker.

Good communication opens the door to all types of economic opportunities: markets, enterprises, jobs, clients, and new residents. We are grateful for the investments made by U.S. Cellular and Twin Valley Telephone, and for the government programs that support their investments.