

Thu., Apr. 24

Strategize for Peace: Meet to discuss future of peace movement. 6 p.m. Faulkner Gallery. Contact marky@umail.ucsb.edu.

Off-Road Rules: Forest Service open house on off-road program in Los Padres National Forest. 5-8 p.m. Ojai Ranger Station, 1190 E. Ojai Ave. Call 646-4348.

Fri., Apr. 25

Male Violence Symposium: Santa Barbara Rape Crisis Center hosts multimedia presentation on violence against women. 1-3 p.m. Schott Center auditorium. Call 963-6832.

Grand Jury Deadline: Volunteer applications due. South County applicants, call 568-3130; North County 346-7464.

Veterans Demonstrate: Veterans For Peace invite public to weekly vigil. 5-6 p.m. Santa Barbara Main Post Office. Call 564-2698.

Sat., Apr. 26

March For Peace: Weekly anti-war rally and march. 11 a.m. Vera Cruz Park. Visit www.nion-sb.org.

Isla Vista Plans: Discussion of downtown Isla Vista, follow-up on UCSB/TV interface. 9 a.m. Isla Vista elementary school. Call 568-2882.

Dune Training: Volunteer training at Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes Center begins. 9 a.m.-3 p.m. 1055 Guadalupe St., Guadalupe. Call 343-2455 ext. 105.

Mon., Apr. 28:

Hydrogen Energy Forum: Examination of promise and difficulties of hydrogen as a fuel alternative. 7-9 p.m. Faulkner Gallery. Call 964-5320.

Candles on Overpass: Weekly candlelight vigil on Anapamu pedestrian bridge over Highway 101. 7:30-8:15 p.m. Visit www.nion-sb.org.

Thu., May 1

San Jose Creek: Stakeholders review planning issues. 7 p.m. Goleta Valley Community Center. Call 568-3546.

Ongoing

Cheap Nonprofit Offices: Discounted office space available from city of Santa Barbara. Call 963-7567.



From left: Attorney Pete Bezek, J. Paul Gignac, and Robert Curtis—representing Verizon customers—outnumbered Verizon's attorney Joseph Lee, far right, during a court appearance Tuesday to discuss the whopping settlement the phone service must pay.

The case was initially filed in August 2000, after Anderson told Bezek she couldn't get a clear accounting of her overcharges from Verizon. Bezek had heard similar complaints from an Orange County woman, Linda Roark. Suspecting the problem was systematic, involving millions of customers, rather than isolated, Bezek filed a class action suit.

With millions of Verizon customers in 30 states nationwide, the stakes are enormous. (Certainly, Verizon's decision to settle the California case will instigate similar litigation in other states.) For several months, the company was issuing as much as \$24 million in long-distance overcharge credits a month. Bezek stumbled onto internal memos in which Verizon managers warn customer service representatives to be careful not to be too "customer friendly" when issuing such credits.

Verizon records revealed service reps were instructed first to offer credits worth no more than "5-10 percent" of a customer's long-distance bill. One deposed Verizon manager testified that when customers refused that offer, "then we're to re-rate it to the proper amount, whatever it is." Bezek claimed Verizon vigorously fought efforts to depose company officials or inspect company records.

Darla Anderson said she didn't expect to see any of her settlement for months. As to how she'll celebrate, she said, she wasn't sure. "Maybe break a bottle of champagne over my telephone, what do you think?" The settlement is expected to be finalized next month and after that, Verizon customers who are eligible for a payment will be notified by mail.

Wake-Up Call

Verizon to Pay \$20 Million Over Long-Distance Rip-Off

by Nick Welsh

What began a few years ago with a few people scratching their heads over the surprisingly high cost of their long-distance

phone bills concluded Tuesday morning in Santa Barbara Judge Thomas Anderle's courtroom with the announcement of a \$20 million tentative settlement agreement between Verizon of California and as many as 600,000 customers affected statewide.

The matter was scheduled to go to trial early next January. While admitting no culpability and denying accusations of fraud, Verizon has agreed to reimburse any

customers—such as Santa Barbara attorney Darla Anderson—who had been overbilled for their long-distance phone services. Represented by attorneys Pete Bezek and J. Paul Gignac, Anderson was one of four plaintiffs in the class action case.

Anderson had contracted to obtain her long-distance services from MCI, but going through her bills one day, she discovered AT&T (owned by Verizon) was billing her. Furthermore, she was being overcharged. When Anderson notified Verizon, the company was quick to apologize, but refused to give her a cash refund, offering only credit instead. "In other words, they got the free use of my money," said Anderson. In her case, that proved to be \$836.51.

PAUL WELLMAN

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

- The *Washington Post* reported on Monday that, "With little to show after 30 days, the Bush administration is losing confidence in its prewar belief that it had strong clues pointing to the whereabouts of weapons of mass destruction concealed in Iraq, according to planners and participants in the hunt..."

- The *Los Angeles Times* reported Tuesday that the Bush administration is now trying to open up the waters off the coast of Alaska to oil exploration and extraction, following its failure to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling. The area proposed is in the Beaufort Sea, within three miles of the refuge. It has already been explored a great deal—with great expense and little result—but the

administration "proposes to offer millions of dollars' worth of incentives" to encourage further attempts, said the *Times*.

- According to the AFP news service, "The chairman and two members of President George W. Bush's cultural advisory committee have stepped down in protest over the United States failure to stop the looting of Baghdad's museum." The *Observer* in England reported that the agency in charge of reconstruction of Iraq had written a memo to the U.S. Army in March stressing that the museum was "a 'prime target for looters' and should be the second top priority for securing by coalition troops after the national bank." Two weeks later, the memo still had not been read.

—Olivia Kienzel

Our Gang

A role-playing exercise where at-risk youth got to be overhearing police officers and police officers pretended to be uncooperative gang members was one of the highlights of the Pro-Youth Coalition's "Unity in the Community" retreat at La Casa de Maria last weekend. Pictured is Officer Kent Wojciechoski getting "handcuffed" by Luis, a La Cuesta continuation school student who

remarked, "Now I know how cops feel." Part of PYC's Gang Risk Intervention Program (GRIP), the two-day event included nature hikes, trust exercises, presentations from agencies such as the Santa Barbara Teen Legal Clinic, discussions from young people transitioning out of the gang lifestyle, and swimming and basketball leisure time. The weekend closed with dedication of a Peace Circle—a ring of rocks painted by the youngsters in the spirit of ending street violence.



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—Cathy Murillo