

Freedom Calls



Thanks to the services of the Freedom Calls Foundation, a nonprofit organization that arranges videoconferences between Iraq and the United States, thousands of soldiers stationed in Iraq have connected with loved ones across America in real time, with stunning clarity and speed, all for free.

In Montana, VisionNet, a communications technology and videoconferencing company based in Great Falls, has partnered with Freedom Calls since 2004 to give Montanans serving in Iraq a taste of home. Troops in Afghanistan are also eligible to participate. VisionNet, which is owned by nine separate telecommunications companies, including 3 Rivers Communications, makes arrangements and donates the studio time for these conferences at no cost.

This is not a jittery web cam picture viewed on a computer screen. This is a high-quality video and audio link viewed at a VisionNet video conference facility on a flat screen television screen which allows families to connect face-to-face in real time.

VisionNet provides videoconferencing at more than 180 videoconferencing locations around the state, used by hundreds of businesses, hospitals, counties, cities and schools. Families interested in the Freedom Calls program may contact VisionNet at 1-877-449-8638. ■

2007-2008 South Directory

The new 3 Rivers Communications 2007-2008 South Telephone Directory has been mailed to all of our Southern subscribers and should be in your mailbox. Big Sky residents can pick up their directories at the Post Office. If you have not received a copy, please give us a call.

3 Rivers makes every effort to assure our customers will be in the white pages. Occasionally we miss some people, so please let us know if you have been missed.

Please note the following:

Green Time Lawn Care, Ennis 682-4605

Segal, William R. & Elizabeth Orr, Ennis 682-7730

Please clip these numbers out and include them with your new directory. If we have overlooked anyone else, please contact us so we can include your phone number in the next newsletter. Again, we apologize for these errors. ■

Scholarship Opportunities for 2008

There is such a thing as "FREE MONEY". If you are a high school senior or currently enrolled in college 3 Rivers has several scholarship opportunities for you! \$50,000 of "FREE MONEY" was awarded by 3 Rivers to local high school seniors in the past six years through our Banner Scholarship Program. Another \$ 6500 of "FREE MONEY" was given by 3 Rivers through other scholarships including the FRS and MTA for statewide students and the Klind, Gelsing and Converse scholarships for students in Augusta, Geysers and Fairfield.

If you are interested in "FREE MONEY" for college check out these scholarship opportunities.

Foundation for Rural Service (FRS) Scholarship – \$2,500 – Any high school senior that receives service from 3 Rivers is eligible to apply. Applicant must be accepted by an accredited two- or four-year college, university or vocational-technical school, have at least a C grade point average and express an interest in returning to a rural community after graduation. For additional information, visit www.frs.org. Applications are available from your school counselor, from the FRS website above or by calling 467-4132. IMPORTANT NOTE: Completed applications must be signed by our General Manager so they need to be sent to 3 Rivers who will then send to FRS by their deadline. 3 Rivers' deadline is February 15, 2008.

Montana Telecommunications Association (MTA) Memorial Scholarship – \$750 – Available to a Montana student entering college as a freshman or enrolled as an undergraduate at an accredited college or university in or out of state. Applications are available from your school counselor or by calling 467-4132. Deadline is March 14, 2008.

Banner Scholarship – \$500 – 3 Rivers offers \$500 to each participating school in our serving areas to disburse at their discretion. Please contact your school counselor for more information.

For more information or if you have questions about any of the scholarship opportunities, please contact Jodi W at 467-4132 or jodiw@3rivers.coop. ■

Did You Know?

3 Rivers always offers **two free months** when you add any custom phone feature to your existing service, including Voice Mail and Caller ID on Call Waiting! Call or visit www.3rivers.net for details.

Internet Safety

There's a show on TV called "Are You Smarter than a Fifth Grader". Traveling through Montana visiting local elementary schools has caused some 3 Rivers employees to wonder if they're smarter than a 3rd grader.

Recently 3 Rivers' Member Services Representative Kevin McWilliams and Community Outreach Coordinator Susan Wilson visited the Lima Public School and talked to 3rd through 6th grade students about Internet safety. They are proud to report that these school children are very well versed on the dangers of the Internet and are willing to pass on their own experiences concerning the Internet.

As part of our ongoing community education 3 Rivers has developed an interactive presentation for elementary school students regarding the Internet and how to surf safely.



We have visited ten schools in our service area to find out what the kids already know about the Internet and reinforce some basic guidelines. We plan to visit the rest of our communities this year.

Please contact Susan Wilson at 467-4133 to find out how 3 Rivers can help your school prepare our children for using the Internet or for the more experienced students how to surf the Internet safely. ■

SPECIAL SERVICES - LOW INCOME ASSISTANCE

Getting Connected May Be a Phone Call Away



Few can argue that having a telephone is considered one of life's necessities, yet not everyone has the ability to pay for this staple of modern American life. So what is being done to make telephone service more accessible to low-income consumers?

The Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Universal Service Fund includes a Low-Income Program that provides discounts on telephone installation and monthly telephone service to qualifying consumers. Link-Up America and the Lifeline Assistance Program are the two components of this program. Here's what each provides:

Link-Up America: Help for qualified low-income consumers to connect (or hook up) to the telephone network by offsetting one-half of the initial hookup fee, up to a set dollar amount for qualified households.

Lifeline Assistance Program: Discounts on basic monthly service for qualified subscribers.

In order to participate a person must qualify for Medicaid. Additionally, consumers living on tribal lands may qualify for further discounts if they receive Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribally-Administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, a Head Start (income-qualifying standard) subsidy, or participate in the National School Lunch Program's Free Lunch Program.

According to the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau, Link-Up America and the Lifeline Assistance Program ensure that everyone in this country has affordable telephone service – a vital link to 911, the way we look for jobs and how we stay in touch with our families and friends.

If you are a low-income consumer, getting connected may be a phone call away. For more information or to obtain a form contact your local Public Assistance office, call 3 Rivers Communications at 1.800.796.4567 or visit our web site at www.3rivers.net and click on local telephone/support/consumer tips/low income assistance. You can also contact the FCC's Consumer Center at 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322)-voice, 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322)-TTY, write the FCC at 445 12th Street SW, Washington, DC 20554, or check their web site at www.fcc.gov for more information. ■

Emergency Storm Plan



Whether it's a winter snow storm or a spring ice storm the weather can easily disrupt your electrical service. Is your family prepared for a day or even an hour without power?

The American Red Cross suggests that you have an Emergency Plan and supplies ready. They recommend these six items to have on hand for your family: water, food, first aid supplies, clothing and bedding, tools and emergency supplies, and special items for medical conditions.

It is also important that you have a corded landline phone in your home. This type of telephone does not require electricity to operate. 3 Rivers has backup generators to power our system in the event the electricity is disrupted in any of our serving areas and you will be able to use your corded phone to contact emergency services or your friends and family.

Often times cellular systems and towers are not required to provide backup power, so cell phones may not operate during an outage. This is also true if you have any cordless phones in your home that require electricity to make the connection from the base to the handset.

For safety's sake, always have at least one corded landline phone in your home. In addition, be sure to unplug your electronic equipment such as computers, modems and televisions when threatening storms are forecast. ■



Currents Contributors Acknowledgment

We'd like to acknowledge and thank the following individuals who contributed to

Currents this issue:

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