THE PARISH CABLE TELEVISION FRANCHISE IS UP FOR RENEWAL, AND NOT EVERYONE IS SATISFIED WITH THE SERVICE, OR LACK THEREOF.

In the space of a decade, cable television has gone from being perceived as a luxury item or something that served only those fortunate enough to live within the range of regular TV towers, to, if not a necessity, certainly something many people would rather not do without. Technology, prices and channels offered have changed rapidly, and cable franchise agreements with local governments haven't always kept pace.

So when Michael Fontenot moved to a new home just outside Lafayette, he reasonably expected to get his cable TV connected shortly. The small but affluent subdivision to which he moved is located just east of Broussard Road near its intersection with Kaliste Saloom Road, hardly a remote area of the parish. But Fontenot, an attorney, was surprised to discover that cable wasn't available to the Chelsea subdivision and Lafayette Cable TV had no plans to make it available.

Fontenot's complaints to Parish Councilman Daryl Schouest have come to light at a time when the franchise of Telecube Associates Inc., which does business as Lafayette Cable TV, is about to expire. And as the cable company renegotiates its franchise agreement, Schouest is hoping to get the public hearing process started in the next few weeks.

The dispute raises a number of questions, Schouest says. The only way, to make the project economically feasible was to seek the construction costs up front, according to a letter from Bruno, executive vice president of Lafayette Cablevision.

Fontenot says he was later able to "talk them down" to $10,000. Still, that's a lot to pay for the privilege of then paying for cable TV. Fontenot says his neighbors weren't greatly interested in splitting up the cost. "Some of the residents got somewhat irate because they said they were being held up," he says.

The dispute raises a number of issues. Should a private business that holds a franchise from a public body be obligated to provide service to anyone who asks for it? What if the private business investment just because it has the parish franchise. Bruno says one concern is a proposal in the city's Cablevision regulations that could force cable TV to honor exclusivity market rights. Bruno says, "We're not going to raise the bill 33 cents."

The parish agreement would also mandate that Lafayette Cable would have to provide service anywhere there are a minimum number of households per "cable mile." That minimum is in the range of 30 to 35 per mile.

Meanwhile, the company is pursuing a complete upgrade, Bruno says. It offers less than 30 channels; the upgrade would allow it to offer 54. Bruno says the upgrade will take five years, but some sections of the city and parish will be able to receive the expanded service before others.

What channels will be offered and how they will be marketed to customers has yet to be worked out. Bruno says one concern is a proposal in national copyright regulations that could force cable TV to honor exclusive market rights to particular TV shows or pay additional fees. For example, a popular show in syndication, such as "The Cosby Show," can be seen in

CABLE PRICES FOR AREA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY</th>
<th>MONTHLY BASIC RATE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF CHANNELS</th>
<th>CONNECTION FEE</th>
<th>COMPANY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lafayette</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>$20.00</td>
<td>Cable TV of Lafayette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>30</td>
<td>$34.95</td>
<td>Vision Cable of Alpine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baton Rouge</td>
<td>$15.95</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>$39.95</td>
<td>Cablevision</td>
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<td>Bossier City</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>United Cable</td>
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<td>Monroe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shreveport</td>
<td>$13.00</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>$25.00</td>
<td>Cablevision of Shreveport</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Rates are for the minimum number of cable channels available. Additional fees paid for premium channels such as HBO are extra.

Vice President Dan Quayle, on how hard it is to make time for his family in his job.

FOOTNOTES

DEBATABLE TRUTH. James Edmunds' less-than-complimentary review of Trent Angers' book "The Truth About the Cajuns" has inspired Angers to challenge Edmunds to a public debate. The review appeared in the March 22 issue of The Times, and last week Angers issued his challenge at a meeting of the Press Club of Baton Rouge, then later circulated a press release. Angers also invited photographer Philip Gould, whose work Angers criticizes in his book, to be Edmunds' partner in debate. Edmunds, however, has declined.

SCHOOL BOARD READY TO INTERVIEW: LEDA TRIES AGAIN. A committee has recommended that nine applicants be interviewed for the post of Lafayette school superintendent beginning April 11. The group includes the superintendent of Caddo Parish schools and Carrol Hebert, principal of Northside High School, as well as out-of-state applicants from Cobb County, Ga.; Fairfax County, Va.; Bay St. Louis, Miss.; Texas, New England and Arizona.

The Lafayette Economic Development Authority, meanwhile, has decided to hire a consultant to help LEDA find a replacement for departing executive director J. Allen Mouton. Although several dozen people applied for the job, board members indicated they weren't satisfied with the quality of the applicants.

money to pay," he says.

THE FRANCHISE AGREEMENT IS IN ITS 15th year and expires Dec. 10. Parish Councilman Conrad Com- eaux, a member of a council committee working on a new agreement, says it should be in place long before then. He hopes to get the public hearing process started in the next several weeks.

Under the proposed terms of the new agreement, the fee paid to the parish for the franchise would increase substantially, from 2 percent of the parish's cable revenues to 3 percent of revenue from all service including the so-called premium channels such as Home Box Office.

The city of Lafayette charges 3 percent franchise fee now. Where the parish gets about $28,000 annually from its cable franchise fee, the city brings in about $170,000. (Half of the city's franchise fee goes to fund the Acadiana Open Channel.) The new franchise agreement would expire in April 1996, at the same time as the current city franchise agreement.

Bruno says there's no increase in the parish franchise fee will not be passed directly on to consumers. "It is not a line item on the city bill now," he says. On a basic cable bill of $10.95, a three percent fee would amount to about 33 cents.

"No," says Bruno. "We're not going to raise the bill 33 cents."

The parish agreement would also
CABLE continued from page 6

on more than one station on cable, even though the Lafayette market rights belong to KLFY TV-10. Cable companies may be forced to black out other episodes on other stations under the proposed change, or, pay an additional copyright fee, says Bruno.

Although Lafayette Cable recently increased its basic cable fee, for which a customer gets 12 channels, the monthly rate is still the lowest among several Louisiana cities surveyed by The Times. (See accompanying chart.) Lake Charles had the highest minimum monthly rate of those surveyed at $16.50, although it also offered more than double the number of stations as Lafayette Cable’s most basic level of service. Connection fees also varied widely, from $15 in Lake Charles and Monroe to a whopping $39.95 in Baton Rouge.

But Lafayette Cable doesn’t do much selling of its basic service. Two recent independent inquiries by Times employees about basic cable rates resulted in higher price quotations—$16.20 a month for 24 channels. (Premium channels cost an additional monthly fee in all cable systems.) Bruno says Lafayette Cable salespeople quote the higher price because it is a better value, and will offer information on the lesser basic service rate if asked. “The concept in the industry is that you sell down,” he says.

LAFAYETTE CABLE TV DOES NOT HAVE an exclusive franchise with either the city or the parish governments, so either government conceivably could award a competing franchise to