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# Public Utility Connection



Volume 5 Issue 1

Public Utility Commission of Texas

Spring 2002

# "Do Not Call" list grows to half a million

More than 500,000 Texans have signed up for the Texas "Do Not Call" list since January 1, 2002.

The list, created by the "Texas Telemarketing Disclosure and Privacy Act" of 2001, helps consumers stop unwanted telephone solicitation calls to their homes. Residential customers may register for the list for \$2.25. Registration lasts three years and extends to most telemarketing calls. Businesses may not sign up for the list.

Customers may register for the list by calling toll-free 1-866-TXNOCAL(L) (896-6225). The automated, toll-free hotline operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Customers may also register online at www.texasnocall.com with a credit card, or request a paper application from TEXAS NO CALL, P.O. Box 313, E. Walpole, MA 02032 and pay by check or money order. Checks should be made out to "Texas No Call."

The intent of the legislation is to stop unwanted telemarketing calls to customers from companies with whom the customer does not have an existing business relationship. However, companies may continue to contact customers with whom they have an existing relationship. In addition, companies

See "Do Not Call" p. 2

# New year ushers opening of retail electric market

Texas' retail electric market is now open, giving most customers of investor-

owned electric utilities the power to choose a new electric company. The new law is designed to give customers greater control and



lower the price of electricity over time, make new services and products available, and assure continued reliable service.

The new law allows municipally-owned utilities and electric cooperatives to decide

whether they want to offer their customers choice. Customers of municipally-owned utilities or electric cooperatives who are interested in having choice should contact their local utility or city government. Your local provider can give you more information on its plans to provide choice.

Shopping for a Retail Electric Provider (REP) is easy. REPs will compete against each other to sell you electricity - often offering lower prices, added customer service, renewable energy options or other incentives or promotions. Simply compare

See Some Texans to Pick, p. 3

Letter from the Commissioners —

## Most Texans can now choose

Dear customer,

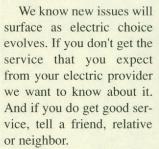
The opening of the state's competitive electric market has given most Texans the power of choice. Most Texans that can now shop for their electricity provider are saving money.

New providers already are serving more than 150,000 Texas households. Most are saving money. Some are willing to pay a little more for investing in cleaner energy. All have one thing in common. They're taking advantage of greater customer power to find the best value.

The search for value doesn't have to be a lonely one. Lawmakers approved funding for customer education so you can learn more about electric customer choice without bias.

Take advantage of this by visiting www.powertochoose.org or call toll-free at 1-866-PWR-4-TEX (797-4839) to get the information you want.

We're also strengthening our customer protection staff. An overwhelming number of complaints about phone service in Texas have caused us to redouble our efforts to prevent things like slamming and cramming for electric customers.





Klein



Perlman

Because as more and more Texans make an informed choice about electricity, more eager competitors will enter the market with attractive prices to help save you money.

Sincerely,

Commissioner Becky Klein Commissioner Brett Perlman



## "Do Not Call" list grows as Texans respond

#### continued from page 1

with prior business relationships may contact customers for one year following the termination of the relationship. Also, if a customer requests contact from a company, the company may respond to that request. Non-profit and political organizations also are exempt from complying with the list.

The "Do Not Call " list will be published quarterly and telemarketers must update their "Do Not Call" list from the published list each quarter (January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1). Telemarketers must pay \$45 for the list each time they update.

Telemarketers will have 60 days from the date a number appears on a published list to update their internal databases and remove numbers. The first published list was made available to telemarketers April 1, 2002.

During the registration process customers will be advised on which quarterly list their telephone number will appear. Telemarketers who violate the "Do Not Call" law can face penalties up to \$1,000 per violation.

The law also gives consumers the right to sue a telemarketer in civil court for damages.

Customers may file a complaint alleging a violation with the Customer Protection Division of the PUC, or you may wish to contact the Office of the Attorney General.

Contact the Customer Protection Division toll-free at 1-888-(TTY 782-8477 1-800-735-2988) customer@puc.state.tx.us.

Customers reporting a violation may also want to contact the Office of the Attorney General Customer Protection Hotline toll-free at 1-800-621-0508.

When filing a complaint with the PUC, the complaint should

### Electric "No Call" list available

In 1999, the Texas Legislature enacted a law restructuring the retail electric market. A provision in this law allows business and residential consumers to place their telephone numbers on an electric "No Call" list, similar to the Texas "Do Not Call" list to avoid solicitation calls only from Retail Electric Providers (REPs). Consumers may pay \$2.55 for five years to place their information on the electric "No Call" list.

To add a telephone number to the list, call toll-free at 1-866-TXNOCAL(L) (896-6225). Customers can also regisrequest application online www.texasnocall.com. To request an application and pay by check, money order, or credit card write to TEXAS NO CALL, P.O. Box 313, E. Walpole, MA 02032.

Keep in mind, the statewide "Do Not Call" list applies to all telemarketers including REPs. Therefore, customers will be shielded from REP calls if they sign up for the statewide "Do Not Call" list.

However, a \$2.25 registration is only good for three years on the statewide list. Customers may sign up for the electric "No Call" list for five years for \$2.55. If they choose, customers may sign up for both lists for \$4.80 and it is good for five years.

explain in detail the problem, the company involved, steps you have already taken to remedy the problem, if any, and the action you think should be taken.

For more information about the "Do Not Call" law, contact the PUC's toll-free hotline at 1-888-782-8477.

### **Public Utility Connection**

**Customer Protection Division** Public Utility Commission of Texas P.O. Box 13326 Austin, TX 78711-3326

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PHONE: 512-936-7000 FAX: 512-936-7003 TTY: 512-936-7136

#### QUESTIONS OR COMPLAINTS

1-888-782-8477

customer@puc.state.tx.us

WEB SITE: www.puc.state.tx.us Texas Electric Choice: 1-866-797-4839

www.powertochoose.org Spanish: www.poderdeescoger.org

## Do you have a utility complaint?

To contact us with a complaint or a question:

Call: 1-888-782-8477, or in Austin 512-936-7120

**Fax:** 512-936-7003

E-mail: customer@puc.state.tx.us Write: Public Utility Commission **Customer Protection** P.O. Box 13326

Austin, TX 78711-3326

### Include:

- Your name, address and telephone number
- Utility's name, address and telephone number
- Account number, if any
- · Explanation of the facts and the solution you want
- Your bill or any other documentation

Se habla español



# Most Texans can pick provider of electricity

continued from page 1

offers from REPs, much as you do when shopping for groceries or any number of other consumer products or services. Electric Choice allows you to decide what is best for you!

All REPs must be certified by the PUC before they can offer electric service to customers. The PUC monitors REPs to ensure each company meets standard financial and technical requirements.

Customers who did not choose a new competitive REP were switched to their utility's Affiliate REP during the January 2002 billing cycle. For example, electric customers in Dallas, which is in TXU Electric's (now called Oncor) service area, were transferred to TXU Energy Services. Non-choosing electric customers in Houston were transferred to Reliant Energy Retail Services.

Residential and small non-residential electric customers (with a peak demand of 1 megawatt or less) who remain with their Affiliate REP will get a regulated rate, called the "price-to-beat." Large commercial customers who do not sign a contract with a competitive REP may negotiate rates and terms of service with the Affiliate REP.

The Texas Electric Choice website at www.powertochoose.org, now has an easy way to compare offers of Retail Electric Providers (REPs). Visit the "Choose Now" section and enter your Texas ZIP Code to find out who is providing service in your area and to compare prices, terms of service, sources of power generation, environmental information and more.

You also may choose to use a buying agent, known as an Aggregator, which can help you find the best deal. An Aggregator represents a group of customers who have banded together through, for example, their church or synagogue, neighborhood association, or employer. Aggregators may recruit members from anywhere there is Electric Choice, and all must be registered with the Public Utility Commission of

### **Power To Choose**

Customers in these electric service areas can now choose a competitive electric provider:

- TXU Electric
- TXU SESCO
- Reliant HL&P
- Texas-New Mexico Power Company
- AEP West Texas Utilities
- AEP Central Power and Light
- · Sharyland

\*Customers of municipallyowned utilities or electric cooperatives who are interested in having choice should contact their local utility or city government. Your local provider can give you more information on its plans to provide choice.

Texas.

An Aggregator conducts research on electricity prices, contract terms and conditions and other services that their customers want, and recommends a REP. Aggregators shop for their customers and often help them save time, effort and money.

It is important to remember that competition takes time to develop, and some areas of Texas may not yet have active REPs in their market. Visit the Texas Electric Choice website frequently for updates.

If you are new to Texas or are moving to an area of electric competition within the state, you may contact any certified REP offering electric service in your area. The REP will process your request and provide you service.

# Low-income Texans get lower rates

While more and more Texans are taking advantage of a new state law that gives them the power to choose the company that provides electricity to their home or business, many may not be aware of new programs designed to assist low-income customers.

The PUC has established the LITE-UP TEXAS (Low-Income Telephone and Electric Utilities Program) to provide a 10-percent discount on electric rates for qualified low-income customers.

Low-income customers will automatically qualify for the 10 percent discount if they already get certain benefits from the Texas Department of Human Services, such as Food Stamps, TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), low-income Medicaid or if they are a Qualified Medicare Beneficiary.

Other low-income customers may be self-certified for the discount by having a household income at or below 125% of the federal poverty level. An application form or additional information can be found by calling toll-free 1-866-4-LITE-UP (1-866-454-8387).

By calling the toll-free number, qualified low-income customers may also obtain registration information on the Lifeline program, which reduces basic monthly telephone rates by \$3.50 and waives the federal subscriber line charge.

Generally, it will take 60 to 90 days to be fully processed for the discount.



# Choice brings different look to electric bills

Most customers of investor-owned electric utilities now have the power to choose a new electric company. Even if you do not choose a new retail electric provider (REP), the bill you received

beginning February 2002 looked different.

commercial customers who

remain with the Affiliate

REP will be charged a lower

rate, called the "price-to-

beat." Depending on where

you live, this rate is any-

where from 3 percent to 18

percent off December 2001

Customers

choose a new competing

REP can save even more.

You also may choose a com-

pany that provides renewable

No matter which REP

you choose, you will receive

a single monthly paper bill

for all your electric service

charges. You may request

electronic billing from your

REP for easy payment. The

Public Utility Commission of

energy or other services.

Residential and small

# **Establishing New Electric Service**

If you are moving to Texas, or moving within the state to a city or town with electric competition, you may contact any certified Retail Electric Provider (REP) offering electric service in your area. For a list of REPs, call toll-free 1-866-PWR-4-TEX (1-866-797-4839), or visit www.powertochoose.org.

Once you have selected the REP of your choice, you will be provided with a Terms of Service document. This is your contract for electric service. Your REP will process the request to initiate your electric service.

Select your REP of choice early, before you move into your new dwelling, to ensure that you have electricity when you move in.

Texas (PUC) requires REPs to provide you with bills in a standardized easy-to-read format.

Your bill may include a "bundled rate" for electric service or an

## **Electricity Payment Tips**

- Payment Assistance Funds. REPs may have funds to assist customers in times of need. If you know that you cannot pay your bill, contact your REP.
- Average Payment Plan. All REPs must offer an Average Payment Plan that allows a customer to pay a similar amount every month.
- Bill Deadline Extension. Customers that cannot pay their electric bill on time should contact their REP to see if it offers a Bill Deadline Extension.
- Deferred Payment Plan. Customers may be eligible for a Deferred Payment Plan that allows them to make payments on their bill over time.
- Energy Efficiency Programs. Programs are available to help make homes more energy efficient. For information, contact the Texas Department of Housing & Community Affairs toll-free at 1-877-399-8939.

itemization of "transmission and distribution service," "generation service," "System Benefit Fund," and, where applicable, "transition charge" and "nuclear decommissioning fee." Perhaps more importantly - so that you know what electricity is costing you, your electric bill will include "the average price you paid for electric service this month" listed in cents-per-kilowatt hour. This will allow you to easily compare the rate you are paying to offers from other REPs.

Electric bills must also include a toll-free number for your REP's customer service center and a 24-hour toll-free number for outage reports.

# Speaker's Bureau plans visits across state

Texas Electric Choice Speaker's Bureau will be at the following meetings and special events.

Informational material will be provided at these events and Texas Electric Choice representatives will be available to answer questions.

- May 13 League of Women Voters of Tarrant County, Fort Worth
- May 14 Arcadia Recreation Center, Dallas
- May 15 Concord- Senior Center, Dallas
   Aldine ISD Luncheon, Houston
- May 16 Harry Stone Recreation Center, Dallas Bonnie Brae Neighborhood Associa-

tion, Fort Worth

- May 17 Webb County Community Action Agency, Laredo
- May 18-19 Taste of Addison, Dallas
- May 18 Christian Hope Scholarship Banquet, Houston
- May 19 True Light Baptist Church-Baccalaureate Service, Houston
- May 23 McAllen's Citizen's League, McAllen
- May 24 Area Agency on Aging, Houston
- May 25 Forest Lawn Baptist Church- Homebuyer Seminar, Houston
- May 27 Community of Faith-Church Picnic, Houston
- May 28 Current Events Club, McAllen

- Mayor Pro Tem Gordon Quan's Senior Citizen Expo, Houston
- May 29 Juanita Craft Senior Center, Dallas
  - Park South Seniors, Dallas
- May 30 Texas Department of Human Services, Fort Bend County, Houston
  - Laredo Chamber of Commerce, Laredo

For more information on the Texas Electric Choice Speaker's Bureau or to schedule a speaker for your group or organization you may contact Grace Godines at (512) 936-7131 or email her at grace.godines@puc.state.tx.us.

Please allow 4-5 weeks lead time to schedule a speaker.



# Many entities oversee telecom technologies

For most people, the telecommunications industry can be very confusing. New technologies have brought about new questions concerning regulation and governance.

The Public Utility Commission regulates some telecommunications issues, while the federal government regulates many others. Additionally, many technologies are so new they are virtually unregulated at this point.

The PUC is primarily responsible for regulating the local telephone service market. This includes companies that provide you with local dial-tone residential and commercial service.

Some of the better-known companies are Southwestern Bell Telephone Co., Verizon, Valor Telecom, Inc., AT&T and Sprint, but many companies offer this service.

These companies' service quality is regulated by the PUC. The PUC also investigates complaints and formulates policies related to local telephone service providers in the state.

The PUC has limited jurisdiction over long distance telephone service. Mainly, the PUC may investigate "slamming" complaints. Slamming occurs when a customer's long distance service is changed without his or her authorization. Additionally, the PUC has some jurisdiction over intrastate long distance communications, or long distance communications that take place within the state of Texas.

The Federal Communications Commission has jurisdiction over interstate long distance service, or service from state to state.

In addition, the FCC has limited authority over wireless communications through its Wireless Telecommunications Bureau. The PUC has no authority over wireless communications.

High-speed Internet service or Internet service provided through other Internet Service Providers (ISP) is largely unregulated in that no specific government agency has jurisdiction.

Complaints regarding Internet service should be directed to the companies' complaint resolution department.

For more information about the PUC's role in telecommunications regulation, visit our website at www.puc.state.tx.us. To learn more about the FCC's telecom authority, you can visit their website at www.fcc.gov.

# **Customer Connection fact sheets** available on variety of new topics

The Public Utility Commission (PUC) is committed to giving Texans accurate and complete information on a variety of utility topics.

One of the ways the commission does this is through the publication of this newsletter. Another is through the distribution of fact sheets by the Information and Education (I&E) section of the PUC's Customer Protection Division.

These fact sheets offer a wealth of information on topics ranging from slamming to electric submetering.

Four new facts sheets have been

produced recently.

They include:

- · Texas "No Call Lists"
- All About Provider of Last Resort (POLR)
- Your Electric Bill In A Competitive Market
- Switching Electric Providers In A Competitive Electric Market

Call us toll free at 1-888-782-8477 to request a packet containing these or all of our available fact sheets or you may find them in the Customer Assistance section of the PUC Web site at www.puc.state.tx.us.

# ERCOT has key role in competition

As you learn more about retail electric competition in Texas, you will notice the name ERCOT. It stands for the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, Inc. Think of ERCOT as the traffic manager for 37,000 miles of transmission lines in Texas

ERCOT oversees about 85 percent of the electrical load of the state, including all areas now under full retail competition. Unlike other transmission networks that cross state lines, ERCOT is contained entirely within Texas, and that's one reason why Texas is able to move forward with competition faster than most other states.

Last year ERCOT completed the necessary functions to deliver the proper level of electricity throughout its control area for the competitive retail market. As an independent system operator, ERCOT now provides the electricity market scheduling, bidding and metering functions required under competition.

What that means is that competitors on both the wholesale and retail sides of the electric industry have equal access to the grid and can do their business in an equitable manner. When that happens, customers can begin to enjoy the savings that result from a competitive industry.

The services provided by ERCOT aren't free. They add about 25 cents a month to the average household electric bill.

ERCOT has almost 300 employees and operates from offices in Taylor and in Austin near the Austin-Bergstrom Airport. You can learn more about ERCOT at www.ercot.com.



# Web site helps Texans choose provider

Texas Electric Choice – the educational campaign created to inform Texans of their right to choose their Retail Electric Provider (REP) – has completed an overhaul of its Web site.

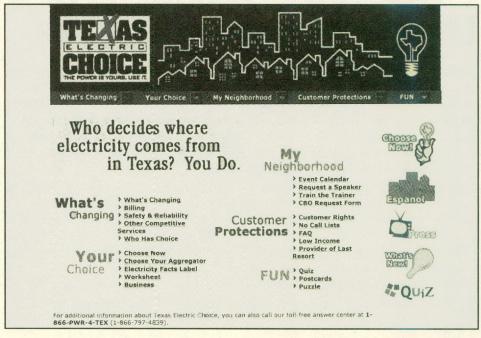
Web site changes include a clearer site map, more concise information and the incorporation of a REP comparison chart for easier shopping.

The "What's Changing" section covers issues such as: billing, safety and reliability, other competitive services, and who has choice.

The "Your Choice" section covers important information consumers will need to make a choice. Within this section is a listing of certified REPs. Consumers can key in their zip code and receive a listing of REPs serving in their area. The listing will include a chart that provides pricing, estimated monthly savings, terms of service and power generation for each REP. Consumers may also choose their REP online.

The section also provides information on choosing an Aggregator. An Aggregator is an entity registered with the PUC to bring a group of customers together to buy electricity in bulk.

The Electricity Facts Label and REP worksheet provide hands-on information what consumers should know about potential REPs. The "Business" section provides helpful information for small business



owners (one megawatt or less).

The "My Neighborhood" section features upcoming events and procedures on requesting a speaker for an organization or group.

The "Customer Protections" section features a section on customer rights that covers non-discrimination, slamming and cramming, dispute resolution and privacy of customer information.

Also listed is information on the two statewide "No Call" lists available to consumers.

The "Frequently Asked Questions" sec-

tion addresses questions perhaps not covered elsewhere. Information on low income assistance and how to apply for the LITE-UP TEXAS and Energy Efficiency Programs are also available in this section. Information is also given on the Provider of Last Resort or back-up utility along with five tips to avoid electricity contract termination.

The entire Web site can be found in Spanish at www.poderdeescoger.org.

Consumers are encouraged to visit the Web site often for updates and other useful information.

## Texans responsive to Electric Choice campaign

Record numbers of Texans are learning about their power to choose an electric provider since the opening of the state's competitive electric market on January 1.

During the first month of electric competition, Texas Electric Choice, a public education campaign created by the PUC, saw dramatic increases in callers to its answer center (1-866-797-4839) and visitors to its web site (www.powertochoose.org).

"This incredible response to the opening of Texas' competitive retail electric marketplace is a strong sign that customers are interested in learning about electric choice and how they can benefit from it," said PUC Commissioner Rebecca Klein.

"We continue to encourage consumers to learn as much as they can in order to make the decision that's best for them," she added.

- From Jan. 1, 2002 to March 31, more than 100,000 people have called the Texas Electric Choice answer center.
- The answer center averages 315 calls per day, 2,187 per week and 9,432 calls per month. The most frequently asked question in March was in regard to establishing new electric service.
- Since Jan. 1, 2002, more than 375,000 visitors have logged onto the Texas Electric Choice web site.
- The web site averages 3,122 visitors per day, 12,489 visitors per week and 55,020 visitors per month.
- Since the kick-off of the Texas Electric Choice education campaign in March 2001, more than 162,000 people have called the answer center and more than 770,000 people have visited the web site.



# New area codes for NE, West Texas

Two areas of the state will see area code changes next year following rulings by the Public Utility Commission (PUC).

A new area code, 430, will take effect in Northeast Texas next year as part of an all-services overlay for telephone customers currently in the 903 area code and West Texans will get two new area codes as part of a geographic split of the 915 area code into three individual area code regions.

### 903 Area Code Overlay

Last year the PUC approved the 430 area code overlay after public comment indicated a preference for this option to introduce a new area code. The all-services overlay assigns the 430 area code to the entire 903 region. All customers will be required to dial 10 digits to complete a

local call.

Existing customers will keep their current number while new numbers will be issued with an area code of 903 or 430.

In order for customers to get familiar with the overlay, a period of permissive dialing, when customers can begin dialing 10 digits, will run from July 20, 2002 through Feb. 14, 2003. Beginning Feb. 15, 2003, there will be a recorded reminder for those who do not dial the 10-digit number. Effective April 19, 2003, incorrectly dialed calls will reach either a wrong number or a non-working number.

Phone numbers with the 430 area code will be assigned no earlier than April 2003.

### 915 Area Code Split

Meanwhile in West Texas approximate-

ly two-thirds of the customers in the current 915 region will have to change their area code after the PUC determined the three-way split is the best way to preserve local interests. The El Paso area will retain the 915 area code while the two other areas will be divided by two north-south boundaries.

The Midland-Odessa region will be assigned the new 432 area code and the San Angelo-Abilene region will get the new 325 area code.

The current schedule calls for the two new area codes to be introduced in April 2003 followed by a recorded reminder to dial a new area code in October 2003. Mandatory dialing using the new area codes is scheduled to begin in December 2003. An extensive customer education program will begin in early 2003.

For more information about the new area codes, please contact the Public Utility Commission toll-free at 1-888-782-8477 or visit us online at www.puc.state.tx.us.

# Retail Electric Providers must get PUC certification

When you choose a new electric provider, you are choosing the company that provides or sells you electricity - a company called a Retail Electric Provider, or REP. These companies purchase electricity from competing power plants, and electricity is delivered to your home or business over the same poles and wires that are in your neighborhood today.

But before a Retail Electric Provider (REP) can begin to offer electric service to consumers in Texas, they must complete a certification process with the Public Utility Commission. This certification process looks at the REP's financial situation, demands they adhere to PUC Customer Protection rules, and that the company maintain an office in Texas. REPs must also maintain continuous and reliable electric service, and must respond to commission inquiries or customer complaints in a timely fashion among other strict requirements.

Currently, over a dozen REPs are offering service to residential customers in Texas. Some services they may offer over the company you were use to dealing with in the past include lower prices, renewable energy options, added customer service or other incentives.

The REPs are:

- TXU Energy Inc. 1-877-460-7066
- Reliant Energy Retail Services
  1-800-R-ENERGY
- First Choice Power, Inc. 1-866-4-MyChoice
- Green Mountain Energy Company 1-866-GREEN-TX
- Entergy Solutions Ltd. 1-866-368-3749
- WTU Retail Energy 1-866-322-5563
- CPL Retail Energy 1-866-322-5563
- Utility Choice Electric 1-866-839-2782
- GEXA Energy 1-866-961-9399
- ACN Energy, Inc. 1-800-348-6496
- Cirro Corp. 1-866-MY-CIRRO
- Energy America 1-888-305-3828

## Summer Energy Savings

Air conditioning - Operate on a medium setting and use a thermometer to see that it's no lower than 78 degrees. Maintain a clean filter.

Lights - Replace old incandescent bulbs with new compact fluorescent bulbs. You will get the same amount of light for 1/4 of the cost. Turn off unneeded lights, even when leaving the room for a short time.

**Refrigerator** - Keep it operating efficiently. Clean the condenser coils, make sure the rubber gasket on the door provides a tight seal.

Windows and doors - Storm windows and doors can reduce the amount of cooling or heating through single pane glass by 50%. Keep blinds and drapes closed to keep your home cool. Drapes block out sunlight and heat better than blinds. Caulk around windows and door frames to stop air leaks.



### Contact your telephone provider

### Telephone (Long distance)

AT&T 1-800-222-0300 www.att.com GTE 1-800-483-3737 www.gte.com MCI WorldCom 1-800-950-5555www.mciworldcom.com 1-800-444-3333 www.excel.com Excel Sprint 1-800-877-7746 www.sprint.com Touch 1 1-800-286-8241 www.touch1.com

### Telephone (Local)

GTE Southwest 1-888-972-1889 www.gte.com Southwestern Bell1-800-246-8464 www.swbell.com Sprint (Centel/ 1-800-488-7995 www.sprint.com United)

### **Free Directory Assistance**

Many local telephone companies now provide electronic versions of the White and Yellow Pages on the Internet. To look up local and long distance numbers via the Internet, try one of these Web sites:

www.anywho.com www.people.yahoo.com www.switchboard.com www.whowhere.lycos.com www.worldpages.com www.bigbook.com

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