

Bedford faces issues over cable television payments

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TEMPERANCE — A dispute over missing money that isn't really missing has driven a wedge into what has historically been a friendly advisory committee whose job is to guide Bedford Township on issues involving cable television.

At issue is a 3-year-old decision by the previous Bedford Township Board to hire Triple L

Productions of Lambertville to televise township board meetings instead of using students from Bedford High School's broadcast journalism department to do so.

But it's not so much who is behind the camera that is causing all the consternation.

Rather it is the annual \$10,000 payments that the township used to send to Bedford Public Schools for its student camera

operators, and the fact that they stopped sending the money three years ago when the township no longer required their services.

Newly-elected township trustee Larry O'Dell said the township's cable committee has recently been marked with heated arguments and even stormy exits over whether the township should still pay the money even though the job has been given to

an outside contractor.

"I am one person on [the cable] committee, and it's been like walking through a hurricane since I got on it," said Mr. O'Dell, who replaced longtime fellow Democrat Med Barr on the committee when Mr. Barr left the township board. "I have no idea what to do with them."

Each year, the township receives approximately \$175,000 from the four percent "franchise

fee" the township levies on each monthly cable bill. The tax is imposed by nearly all local units of government where cable television operates, and once collected by the local cable company, is turned over to the local government for use as it sees fit.

Tom Dawson, senior manager of government and community affairs for Buckeye CableSystem, said his company has continu-

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ously remitted the franchise fee payments to Bedford Township since Buckeye first began providing cable services in Bedford Township in 2001. Buckeye is owned by Block Communications Inc., which also owns The Blade.

"Maybe it's just a misunderstanding," Mr. O'Dell said. "I've talked [to all the former township board members] and they all had the same idea — that they weren't getting the service they were paying for — so they discontinued the payment [to the schools]."

Bedford Public Schools superintendent Jon White, who attended the Aug. 20, 2002, township board meeting where board members approved Triple L, said the cash-strapped district "was never officially notified in a letter" that the township would cease making the payment when it did in fall

of that year. Mr. White said that since that time, the district has continued to support its broadcast journalism program with other funding.

"I was disappointed that they chose to terminate the agreement when they did," Mr. White said.

Whiteford Township Clerk Bernice Heidelberg is a longtime ex-officio member of Bedford Township's Cablevision Committee, where she represents the interests of Buckeye customers who live within Whiteford Township. She said the recent discussions over the township's abandoned \$10,000 payment to the schools is something that should be spelled out clearly in the franchise agreement.

"If the school is providing a service for local [programming] origination for the community, then maybe they should look at it and pursue [restoration of the annual \$10,000 payments]," Mrs. Heidelberg said. "I think there are some people on the committee that would like to see it restored."

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