

Posted on Sat, Aug. 30, 2003

COMMENTARY

Duke can set up more than just your power

New customers may establish phone, cable, Internet with 1 call

GAIL SMITH-ARRANTS

When you're getting ready to move to a new city, it can take hours to contact the power company, the telephone company, the local newspaper, the post office, and on and on.

But one call can nearly do it all, for Duke Power customers.

New customers who call Duke Power to establish an account are now asked if they want to connect with Duke Power Connections, a free service that can help set up accounts for other services.

"Research out there says when people move, their power is the first thing they get connected. That's how we become the entry point," said Paige Layne, a Duke Power representative.

Here's what may be offered to a new customer: telephone service, cable connections, Internet service, local and national newspaper subscriptions, home security systems and changes of address with the U.S. Postal Service.

And this week, while checking the list of services offered, Layne found a surprise.

"I see one I wasn't aware we do, and that's lawn care," she said. "The company is always contracting with new services. That's one I just saw today."

Duke Power Connections isn't able to set up gas or water accounts yet, she said.

"Hopefully in the future we will do that. ... We're constantly trying to identify ways to improve customer service," she said.

"It's an easy way to offer something additional to customers, to improve service we're providing."

Customers who log on to www.dukepower.com also can take advantage of the service. After finishing an application online, they will get the telephone number for Duke Power Connections.

Another company provides the service for Duke Power. "It's a company in Atlanta called Allconnect," Layne said. "They actually set up the account, while you're on phone."

In Charlotte, you can first set up your Duke Power account by calling (704) 594-9400. If you're moving to a different city, call Duke's 24-hour customer service line for that area. All customers in the Carolinas can be transferred to the additional Duke Power Connections service.

Duke Power Connections can set up a variety of services, depending on your ZIP code. Spanish-speaking representatives also are available.

Layne said Allconnect pays Duke Power in this deal because, in essence, Duke is sending them fresh customers.

"It's a win for the company and a win for the (Duke) customers," Layne said.

It sounds like a win for everybody.

I've had about 10 address changes since college, and wish I could have back those hundreds (or thousands?) of minutes I held the telephone, listening for the fifth time to a recording asking me to "hold for the next available customer service representative."

Layne said the wait with Duke Power Connections -- while the service establishes multiple accounts for you -- takes an average of 20 minutes.

TIDBIT

Moving On

A class for women new to the area, "Moving On after Moving In," will be held next month at Davidson United Methodist Church. The

curriculum offers encouragement for those going through the transition of a move. The free class is open to anyone; participants don't have to be church members. The class begins at 9:30 a.m. Sept. 10 and runs for 13 weeks. Child care will be provided. Call Maureen McCracken at (704) 391-2233.

MAILBAG

More on friendliness, and the South

Here's excerpts from two letters I've received on a past column topic that is still generating discussion from both sides -- about a Charlotte newcomer who couldn't wait to leave because she found dangerous drivers and unfriendliness, too:"In 1955, I taught one year at West Mecklenburg High School. ... Then even downtown traffic was not too bad. Interstates and throughways, nonexistent. People from all over came to shop in Charlotte, especially when they wanted fine clothes. Now I avoid driving in Charlotte whenever possible because of discourteous lawbreakers behind the wheel and gridlock congestion at times.

"Methinks good manners and neighborliness are fast disappearing all over the South, though many small towns retain those attributes."

Mildred Newton

Morganton

"I need to recall my widowed Irish mama admonishing her family to 'Remember, no matter where you go in this life, you'll be taking yourself with you!'

"Relative to the newcomer to Charlotte saying she couldn't wait to leave as she had discovered rude and unfriendly people, I can only think after having spent about three-quarters of a century observing people in other states -- North and South -- that these encounters referred to are indeed universal!

"I, being born and raised in Ohio, can truthfully say that all the time my husband and I worked in raising and educating our family, we formulated plans to retire in the South -- particularly in Charlotte. We retired at last and have been a taxpayer in Charlotte

for 14 years. ... Living in a family-orientated neighborhood in south Charlotte, we have met considerate neighbors and many friendly business people.

"I guess it's just like the ol' saying: 'What you give is what you get!' We learned early on to smile a lot, and it must be contagious because that's what the Southerner responds to. This past holiday season my husband passed away, and my neighborhood surrounded me with love. ...

"If the Northerners want to whine and vent their unhappiness with the South -- perhaps in their leaving we'll just have to enjoy the little extra space and keep smilin'!"

Peg Hill

Charlotte

GOT QUESTIONS?

Newcomer or not, e-mail questions or comments to newcomer@charlotteobserver.com or call (704) 377-4444 and enter category 2300. Be sure to leave your name, hometown, and telephone numbers where you can be reached.