Verizon Communications has proposed selling some 2.6 million access lines in upstate New York for $7.7 billion that opponents say would most likely result in substantial job loss and may also lessen the service quality that the region receives.

To Verizon, such a sale of major portions of its wireline network would allow it to focus more attention to areas where it feels it has more growth and profit opportunity -- its wireless division.

Peter Thonis, a spokesperson for Verizon, told the BellTel Newsletter that Verizon continually evaluates its assets and properties based on strategic fit and financial performance. And that while the company has previously acknowledged sale discussions have taken place, no definitive sales agreement has been announced.

"Every time we sell properties, the provisions vary based on a variety of factors, including the outcome of negotiations with the buyer, existing contractual provisions, external environments (and) location." Union leaders have been saying that the real reason behind Verizon's strategy is to decrease its massive debt and recoup from bad investments. "This sale would be used to reduce Verizon's $44.7 billion debt... and used to finance the expansion of wireless," says Communication Workers of America Local 1103's Chris Cutter. "This would be bad for the upstate customers and for an already bad (upstate New York) economy."

In a continuing effort to stop Verizon's proposed sale, hundreds of CWA members and other supporters of the workers assembled in the Empire State's capital, Albany to persuade state legislators against allowing such a deal to happen.

If Verizon is able to push ahead with a sale, union leaders say up to 5,500 members of the CWA, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), in addition to thousands of other company employees' jobs may be at risk in New York.

Pamela Harrison, president of CWA Local 1103's Life Members Council and a member of the Association of BellTel Retirees, C. William Jones.

That presentation played a key role in the Becthrs' decision to join the Association, ironically becoming its 100,000th and 100,001th members.

Meet Luther and Margaret Becraft – The Association of BellTel Retirees’ 100,000th Member

Luther and Margaret Becraft spent most of their careers working to keep people connected, while providing for their own families. When Luther retired in 1981 and subsequently Margaret retired in 1993, they were determined to remain involved in the lives of retirees.

Luther and Margaret maintain active lifestyles that include membership in the Telephone Pioneers of America and the Retirees of the Communications Workers of America, Local 2202. During an April 2004 meeting of the Pioneers, Luther and Margaret heard a speech by President and Executive Director of the Association of BellTel Retirees, C. William Jones.

That presentation played a key role in the Becrafts' decision to join the Association, ironically becoming its 100,000th and 100,001th members.

(Continued on page 8)
PROTECTING RETIREE PENSIONS AND HEALTH CARE BENEFITS

Corporations have unleashed waves of cutsbacks in company-paid health benefits for retirees who now bear increasing and unforeseen costs for health care. These companies are breaking their promises to loyal workers who earned these benefits through years of service. 

ACTION, COSPONSOR AND URGE THE PASSAGE OF H.R.1322, THE EMERGENCY RETIREE HEALTH BENEFITS PROTECTION ACT

This legislation closes a loophole in ERISA and will protect retirees from the reduction or cancellation of benefits once they have retired. Further, it provides recovery for retirees already affected.

UNDERFUNDING CORPORATE RETIREE PENSION PLANS

H.R. 1776, legislation currently proposed in Congress, will allow corporations to legally under fund pension plans. If enacted, the bill would allow large corporations to change the method of calculating pensions worth billions in funding downward – endangering the solvency of many pension plans.

ACTION, OPPOSE H.R.1776

Legislators must oppose H.R. 1776 and any other proposals that could endanger the solvency of corporate pension plans. Corporations cannot be let off the pension funding hook!

For those who have access to the Internet, you can get more information on these issues from employer websites that you can use or revise and send to both of your Senators and your Congressional Representative. Go to www.nrln.org find “Write to Congress,” enter your zip code and click on “Go.” This site also gives you the names and contact information for your representatives.

President’s Message by C. William Jones

I urge Congress to revisit the Medicare Prescription Drug Act next year to amend sections that adversely impact corporate retirees. Safeguards must be added to prevent action from eliminating currently provided benefits.

ISSUE 2: DRUG IMPORTATION

Millions of America’s retirees are seeing their pensions, Social Security income and savings eaten away by the high cost of prescription drugs. Some simply cannot afford the drugs their doctor has prescribed for them.

ACTION, SUPPORT S.2328

Congress needs to pass this legislation making it legal for the importation of prescription drugs into this country. We are supporting S.2328, a bi-partisan bill introduced in the U.S. Senate that would legalize the importation of prescription drugs and would implement a system to guarantee their safety.

ISSUE 3: DRUG IMPORTATION

In the last edition of the BellTel Retiree, we asked members to tell us what they think on the topic of “If America has room for a third major political party?”

It would involve other, larger, or small, group of retirees who want to protect the pension. I’m all for working with the group. Two old friends, both just retired from Verizon are eager to join the “cause.” I appreciate the publication.

William A. Goetz Jr.
Stradford, PA

“I’m with you. Go for it and I’ll volunteer as much as possible. Just the challenge will wake them up.”

Ronald Kukla
Via E-mail

“...In your recent letter you suggest the need for a 3rd political party. May I suggest we already have a very good one called the Constitution Party. Adding still another would only split the independent vote in favor of the major political parties...”

William Mallack
Colonia, NJ

Editors Note: This is an important election year for America and especially America’s retirees. We encourage all of you to get out and vote, in local, state, and national elections. Make every retiree vote count and have an impact. We also strongly encourage every retiree to make sure to vote for the independent candidate of your choice this year to make sure that a 3rd major political party to at least make the other two parties honest and separate. One, for one have voted for 3rd party candidates in the past, and was told that I wasted my one vote. I felt it was not wasted because it voiced my true opinion and not some wishy-washy middle of the road candidate...
Messages are sent directly by the Association’s President and Executive Director, C. William Jones, about once a month and when there is vital or breaking news that retirees need to know and/or act on.

To enroll, go to the BellTel website (www.belltelretirees.org) and scroll down the left hand side of the home page until you find the “Keep Me Posted” icon with a picture of a man reading a newspaper. Click on the picture and enter your e-mail address. Then click the submit button and the subscription process has been completed. Shortly after signing up you will receive confirmation e-mail. It is fast, simple and free.

Should a subscriber wish to cancel their subscription, they can just as easily revisit the original “Keep Me Posted” sign-in screen and choose “unsubscribe.”

We urge you to join with many other members who have taken advantage of this valuable, no cost, and trouble-free service.

Making a Difference for Non-Profit Organizations:

Members who use the Internet can also easily make donations online as well. Through a service called Network For Good, users can safely and efficiently make donations to many non-profit groups around the nation, including your own Association of BellTel Retirees.

We encourage Association members to use this service, accessible through our web site to give your annual contribution to support the Association and its team of retiree volunteers in the fight for pension and benefit protection. Besides being safe for users it is also more efficient and cost effective for the Association, versus processing checks via a mail in system.

Free & Easy Communication with Congress:

Finally for members who wish to access the latest or archived versions of the BellTel Retiree newsletter online, or if you wish to use the Association’s web site to write to Congress, click on the “BellTel Retiree Newsletter” icon at the top of the web page. When a box pops up asking for a “User Name” and “Password” enter “belltel” for both. Also, click the box that says “Save this password in your password list.” This will enable you to bypass entering a user name and password each time you access the newsletter or communicate electronically with your members of Congress.

Attention All Snowbirds:

For those of you who temporarily relocate to warmer climates for the winter months, won’t you please take the time to drop us a note or an email so that we can update our records and forward all important retiree communications to you, where you are when the mercury begins to drop.

This helps your Association substantially by allowing the most direct and immediate correspondence with our members. It also eliminates substantial cost of return postage and clerical assistance to add or delete multiple addresses for some members in our database.

We would be more than happy to redirect your mail to your snowbird address for the colder months and then revert to your main address for the remainder of the year.

Just drop us a note, either online at association@belltelretirees.org or through the U.S. Mail at P.O. Box 33, Cold Spring Harbor, New York 11724.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Association of BellTel Retirees Inc. is dedicated to promote the protection and enhancement of the pensions and benefits for retirees and beneficiaries of the companies and subsidiaries that make up the Verizon Corporation.

The Association will convince the company to properly care for its thousands of dedicated retired employees. The Association will conduct activities designed to educate elected federal, state and local representatives and promote the passage of legislation which will protect and guarantee, rather than invade, our hard-earned pension and benefits funds.

United Airlines May Default on Pension Plans

United Airlines has said that it would not contribute to its employee pension plans while it remains under bankruptcy protection. Such a move could save it more than a billion dollars in the next year, and pension experts say it increases the likelihood that United would terminate some or all of the plans causing distress and hardship for the company’s retirees.

As recently detailed by the New York Times, a full-blown default by United on all four of its pension plans would send tens of thousands of current and future retirees, and billions of dollars in unfunded obligations, to the government’s pension insurance program, dealing the program its biggest blow since the government began insuring pensions in 1974. Such a huge default could also set off a chain reaction, prompting other airlines to reduce their own costly pension plans to stay competitive.

In the Winter 2003-04 issue of the "BellTel Retiree," we wrote about the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation being financially at risk and in potential need of a Congressional bailout. In the same issue an article “U.S. Airways’ Double-Take Over Its Former Pension Fund” dealt with similar moves by another major airline bailing out on its retirees.

The drastic move by United, while harming thousands of retirees, would improve the company’s chances of attracting lenders to help it emerge from bankruptcy. In a so-called distress plan termination, the government takes over the failed pension plan’s assets and liabilities.

The Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation is not allowed to reject such a termination, although it can go to court to try to get more resources from the defaulting company, as it did with U.S. Airways.

United workers can also try to block such a voluntary termination, either in court or by striking, but this is a dangerous path as if they win in halting the pension plan termination, it could force the company to liquidate, leaving neither a pension plan nor jobs.

If United does terminate the plan, it would be the largest loss in the federal pension guarantee fund’s history. Previously the largest pension failure so far, was $3.6 billion by Bethlehem Steel in 2002. In total, United’s four employee pension funds would have a total deficit of $7.5 billion if terminated, according to the bankruptcy court.

Most of that loss would be borne by the federal agency, but some would be passed on to the employees whose pensions might exceed the limits of the program’s insurance coverage.

As of last year, the federal pension agency was running a deficit of $23.4 billion. In March, it disclosed that it had classified $23.4 billion of airline pension obligations as “reasonably possible” to default.

United is the world’s second largest commercial airline.
Verizon, Pfizer, and AIG Make Dow 30

B ecause this year Verizon Communications was one of the three corporations added to the prestigious Dow 30:

- P: People are concerned that
- C: Communities will not be
- E: Economically supported

The last time so many stocks were replaced in the Dow was November 1999. During this change Microsoft, Intel, Home Depot and IBM Communications replaced Sears Roebuck, United, Carbide, Chevron, and Goodyear on this important company index.

The companies included into the Dow 30 were very happy to hear their names of inclusion and the boost it gives to each of their stores.

Bob Varentz, Verizon's spokesman said, "Obviously we're very pleased about it. We think it reflects well on the strength of our business models.

MEANINGFUL TIPS FROM A FELLOW RETIREE

Meaningful tips from a fellow retiree.

- Replace low return assets with top performing Federal "Tax-Free" bond funds yielding around 6.5%.
- Replace costly Bell Atlantic Supplemental Life Policy with
- Save up to $10/yr. 10 Yr. Term Policy with NO premium increases. Call for Free Quote.
- FREE review of your telephone holdings and their future prospects.
- Phone for a free review of your investments and learn more if you qualify for these benefits.

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Will Verizon Sell Upstate New York Land Lines? (Continued from the cover)

For all of us, especially ratepayers in places like upstate New York, that intent would not be met unless each sale was permitted to move forward.

In late spring the New York State Assembly held hearings to gather testimony including witnessed from the Public Service Commission (PSC), which must okay the transactions to gain approval.

Some speakers expressed opinions that any buyer would not care for the asset system, and that they might abandon them to the communities they serve, as Verizon would.

John Parente a longtime member of the Association of BellTel Retirees Board of Directors, who also attended some of the proceedings before the legislature and the PSC said: "Workers are naturally concerned that some Wall Street raiders will come in and pillage the company. This would severely damage the economy if local jobs are moved to other communities and that intent would not be met by Alltel or CenturyTel."

The deal stipulated that the workers' contract would follow the workers but problems arose concerning the interpretation of the contract, predominately with Alltel.

"Once the contract expired, workers had to strike to try to retain just some of the most basic protections included in the pre-existing contract with Verizon," says a retiree. "We expect even worse than this if the contract expired, CWA said, "Workers are naturally concerned that some Wall Street raiders will come in and pillage the company. This would severely damage the economy if local jobs are moved to other communities and that intent would not be met by Alltel or CenturyTel."

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To the sale of special Pioneers 7-shirts that day will benefit the chapter's volunteer efforts.

All retirees, even those from outside Virginia, are invited to participate in this marvelous outing and opportunity to support the local Pioneer efforts in Virginia. For reservations or questions, contact Pat Curvan- Moses (757) 471-6231 or Pioneers49@aol.com.

We would be happy to have someone attend your event, schedules permitting. If you have a local Pioneer club or informal group of Verizon retirees that would be interested in an Association of BellTel Retirees representative speaking with your members and handling out information about our efforts on behalf of retirees and retirees in economic need. Please contact the Association headquarters at (631) 367-5067, or association@belltelretirees.org.

Do you have a Pioneer or Retiree News to share? If you would like to tell others about major retiree gatherings and events in your area, send us detailed information of the gathering's purpose, location, and contact information (name, number, e-mail, mailing address) to be listed on a calendar of retiree events. While we can't guarantee publication, we will consider every submission.

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We've retired over 1,000 Management BEW & CWA Members!
“I think it is wonderful that the Association has that many members that are ready to fight for our interests. It is very surprising that we ended up being the 100,000th member,” said Becraft. Luther Becraft said, “I first heard about the Association from John Harper, President of the Tidewater Chapter of the Pioneers. Hearing President Jones’s speech and learning more about BellTel’s support of retirees convinced me that my wife and I needed to join.”

“When we retired, we felt like the world forgot about us and there was nobody looking out for our interests. Now, we are part of a group that looks out for each other and is always in your corner,” said Margaret Becraft. Luther and Margaret feel fortunate to be members of the Association of BellTel Retirees. Several years ago, the Becrafts learned that the Association of BellTel Retirees has been petitioning Verizon to improve pensions for its retirees around the country. “It takes the strength of an association like BellTel to force management to reward retirees for their years of service. We all worked hard for our pensions, we deserve every benefit we receive,” said Becraft. Luther Becraft is a life-long Virginian and began his career working for the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company in 1948, earning $31 a week. He first worked as a lineman for five years. Becraft then worked as an Installer/Repairman for ten years before becoming a Communication Rep #2 in 1968, position he held until he retired. Margaret, a 41-year veteran of the telephone industry, first worked for Southern Bell in Georgia, moving to Southwestern Bell in Wichita Falls, Texas and finally settling in Virginia in 1966, working for C&P Telephone and retiring as a Business Service Representative. Margaret explains her travels, “my first husband was in the military, so we moved around a lot.”

Reflection on their careers, the Becrafts say, “It gives us a great deal of pride that we played a role in the amazing growth in the telephone industry. We saw first hand how the equipment changed over the years and how hard we worked to keep this country connected.”

A recent back injury and illness may slow Luther Becraft down a step, but it has not slowed him and his wife from living. They both are on the Board of Directors of Lake Estates Retirement Community and they live and work closely with their local church, the Thalia Lynn Baptist Church, where they first met and later got married in 1988.

The Becrafts civic involvements have allowed them to meet many different seniors and discuss the issues that affect their lives.

“We have a good pension but some of our friends are not as lucky. They need our help and we will be there to lend a helping hand as much as we can,” said Mr. Becraft. “That is a big reason my wife and I decided to join BellTel. These days you feel as if the pension benefits you worked so hard to secure are under attack. The only way we as retirees are going to be able to protect our livelihood is by uniting to fight off those attacks,” said Becraft.

This summer, the Becrafts have been spending a lot of time traveling and spending time with their extended families. One of their many responsibilities is as “trip coordinators” for the BellTel/Verizon Local 2202, scheduling trips to Hawaii, Pennsylvania and New York. “We traveled to New York a year after 9/11, and the World Trade Center. It was very important to us to be able to remember the tragedy, but also see the beginnings of the Towers’ reconstruction,” said Margaret Becraft. Most recently, the Becrafts have been spending a lot of time traveling and spending time with their seven grandchildren. “The summer has given us a chance to see how much they have grown; two of our grandchildren have just graduated from high school and are thinking about college.”

In the fall, Luther and Margaret will once again get active. “We are looking forward to learning more about our fellow retirees and working to ensure that our pension and benefits remain intact. If we have to go to Washington and demand our fair share, we are ready to do so,” said Becraft. As the 100,000th and 100,001st member of the Association of BellTel Retirees, Luther and Margaret Becraft have plenty of support in their fight.

by Richard S. Knapp

In a recent issue the BellTel Newsletter (Spring 2004 – Corporate Outsourcing (Our Jobs, the Corporations, and American Economy)) we presented an article about outsourcing and some of the negative impacts it would have on the job market. Knowing this would not stop people from engaging in this type of dishonest business, we thought our readers might want to read this article again. It is the first part of an interview with the labor economist, Richard S. Knapp.

I have a special interest in this topic, as I have been involved in the labor movement for over 30 years and I was a Director of Corporate Services. Knapp has been a member of the Board of the Association of BellTel Retirees for over 20 years and is heading in examination into how the protection and preservation of American jobs today can aid the economic presentation of our retirees.

**Exp. Date

**Signature**

**Name**

**Address**

City/State/Zip Code: ____________________________

Telephone: ____________________________

**Cash**

**Check Enclosed**

**Credit Card Acct #**

**Exp. Date**

**Charge Contribution to my**

**Visa**

**MasterCard**

**E-mail_______________________________**

**Management**

**I retired or expect to retire in (year) _____ from (Co.) ____________________________**

**Note:** All names are kept strictly confidential.

Fall 2004

**BellTel Retiree**

**PO BOX 61, Glen Head, NY 11545-0061**

**Retiree Spotlight:**

Meet Luther and Margaret Becraft – The Association of BellTel Retirees’ 100,000th Member

(Continued from the cover)
Caring & Assisted Living Help

For many older Americans that can no longer perform everyday activities, assisted living can be an answer to their difficult life choices. A growing number of assisted living facilities are emerging, full of energy and in good health. By 2030, about 23 percent of the 35 million people that are age 65 and older chose to move. Nearly 60 percent of the relocations were made locally within the same county, with 22 percent within the same state but to a different county.

For those people who decide they need a change in environment, the favored locations are changing. Although Florida still remains number one when it comes to the number of residential retirees, in 2010, it does not have the fastest percentage of migration gain. That honor goes to California and Nevada.

The Census Bureau finds that California has lost an enormous number of retirees, losing more than 34,000 retirees in a five-year period. New York holds the number one spot for the most outmigration, probably due to its climate, and Illinois is ranked number two in the retiree outflow category. On the other side of the spectrum are Arizona and Nevada which experience high levels of inward migration.

The Census says many retirees will choose to remain in their familiar environment, where they are close to their children and family or perhaps health reasons don’t permit them to move elsewhere. For those that do choose to leave the state it seems that their choice in retirement spots is to warmer, lower cost states.

Most People (65 & Older) Leaving

Florida 149,440
Arizona 53,241
Nevada 22,189
North Carolina 20,922
Texas 17,957

Most People (65 & Older) Arriving

California 149,440
New York 114,171
Illinois 84,119
California 34,171
New Jersey 23,151
Michigan 21,949

Should Stay or Go?

Where American Retirees Are Moving

For nearly three decades he hosted an exercise show, was a body builder and athlete. At 61, he swam the distance of the Golden Gate Bridge pulling a boat that weighed a ton behind him. Now he’s reaching 90 years old he credits his lifelong dedication to health and exercise. "My top priority in life is my workout each day," he said in a recent interview.

But a healthy body is just one piece of the puzzle. Reducing stress not only improves one’s health, but also increases one’s attitude. Studies show that people who reach their centennial mark have a positive outlook when dealing with stressful situations. Research also suggests that socializing keeps people healthier and allows them to recover from ill health quicker.

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Losing weight or staying at an ideal weight coincides with two other elements of other ailments. Reducing stress not only improves one’s health, but also improves one’s attitude. Studies show that people who reach their centennial mark have a positive outlook when dealing with stressful situations. Research also suggests that socializing keeps people healthier and allows them to recover from ill health quicker.

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Fitness guru Jack LaLanne is a prime example.

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