

## ANNUAL PREVIEW

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# Cell towers: change, conflict and debate

While society demands instant communication, the facilities that make these services available often provoke the scorn of public opinion

By **George Fredette and Nick Cricenti Jr.**

Uncle Ben probably never imagined the ensuing frenzy that would follow his introduction of quick-cooking rice. Americans soon demanded instant meals, instant access and instant results. In this age of instant everything, the ability to have instant communications has become a driving, and sometimes contentious, force in the telecommunications industry.

The hallmark of instant communication is the wireless phone. Wireless phones not only carry voice, but also receive e-mail and text messages and provide access to the Internet. With today's phones, a person's community has no geographic limits. Access has no time limits. Our dependence on wireless communication is absolute. Today's business community and our social community would be crippled without it. In fact, there is one wireless phone contract for every two people in the world, and there are more wireless phones active in the United States than there are people.

Why then are the facilities that make these services available the scorn of public opinion?

Cell towers carrying these antennae dot our landscape. Along our roads, and among the hills and fields of our towns, cell towers support the instant communication that has become the lifeblood of society. But some claim that these towers cast a long, dark shadow on the beauty of our landscape.

Imagine how the townsfolk in the late 19th century buzzed when overhead wires were first installed to carry electricity and telephone service to their homes and businesses. Perhaps debates defending the convenience of power and criticizing the blemish of poles and wires on the landscape dominated conversations in barbershops and meeting rooms. Thank goodness that technology and progress won that debate.

With all change, conflicts arise. But reasonable people can reach amenable solutions. The key to reaching reason-

able solutions is a willingness to listen and understand the needs and desires of all. Some people have deemed antennas and towers as unsightly; to others the view is not bothersome. Service providers have an obligation to provide wireless service to as much of the region as possible. This coverage does not only include commercial and transportation,

but residential areas as well. Federal law does not allow towns and cities from banning towers and antennas completely, but there is certainly room for reasonable regulations that can limit the impact of towers and antennas.

Better cell tower solutions may be found in stealth facilities, or alternate technologies. But while today's

society demands instant communication, instant results may need to wait while creativity and teamwork find the next best plan to eliminate dropped calls.

*Nick Cricenti Jr. is president and George Fredette is vice president and secretary of SFC Engineering Partnership Inc., Manchester. They can be reached at 603-647-8700 or through sfceng.com.*

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25 Sundial Ave.  
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