

# Tahiti Telecom

French Polynesia Postal & Telecommunications' Bi-Monthly Newsletter - Vol. 1 • N° 2 - January - February 2003

## New Sign Language



New «Post Office» sign for new OPT branch in Tahiti's south coast Commune of Papara

Overseas visitors to various parts of Tahiti & Her Islands will now be able to find OPT branches and available services thanks to a program installing «Post Office» signs that are lighted up at night. The «Post Office» sign is part of an OPT sign and is grouped with signs for three OPT affiliates. There's TNS (Tahiti Nui Satellite), French Polynesia's only 100% digital satellite television service. There's Vini, the OPT's mobile (cell) phone network. And there's Mana, French Polynesia's Internet service provider. Besides the island of Tahiti, these new signs are programmed for two popular Leeward Islands visitor destinations—the town of Vaitape on Bora Bora and the city of Uturoa on Raiatea. ▶

### ▶ INSIDE ◀

## TAHITI TELECOM Newsletter

- Cook Islands Inaugurate Satellite TV Service.....Page 2
- Replacing a Telecommunications Satellite in Another World.....Page 2
- Joint Search for Mobile Phone Solution.....Page 2
- Metu@ : Tahiti's Democratic ICT Solution.....Page 3
- Tahiti Ready for Internet Broadband & Mobile GPRS...Page 4
- 8 Hotels, 2 Cruise Ships Offer TNS TV.....Page 4

## Tahiti Weighs Broadband Choice: Satellite or Cable?

French Polynesia has decided to provide broadband service simply because «we have no other reasonable choice», according to French Polynesia Postal and Telecommunications Department (OPT) General Manager Geffry Salmon. Now the OPT faces a choice of how «are we going to handle the enormous increase in bandwidth»?

The OPT has only two options available, Salmon told the 25th Annual Pacific Telecommunications Council Conference, PTC2003, held Jan. 19-23 at the Hilton Hawaiian Village in Honolulu. The conference theme was «Global Broadband/Global Challenges». Salmon's speech was entitled «Why Broadband for French Polynesia and How?»

French Polynesia's options are satellite or undersea cable, said Salmon, who is serving his second term as Pacific Islands PTC board member.

Satellite service providers have so far provided positive answers, although operational deployment still has to be clarified along with legal issues involving long-term ownership of satellite capacity vs. cable, he said. But undersea cable definitely can be considered as a suitable option, Salmon said, offering as advantages:

See *Tahiti's Choice*, Page 3 ▶



OPT GM Geffry Salmon (far left) and OPT Int'l Relations Manager Maui Sanford (3rd from right) at PTC 2003.

## Tahiti Helping Cook Islands with Internet & Mobile Phone Network

The French Polynesia Postal and Telecommunications Department (OPT) has offered to further help the neighboring Cook Islands with its multi-media development.

Following last year's hookup of three English-language television channels via Tahiti Nui Satellite (TNS) in the Cook Islands, the OPT has more recently proposed helping its Polynesian neighbors expand their Internet services and develop a mobile telephone network. Those subjects were discussed when French Polynesia Vice President, New Technologies Minister and OPT Board Chairman Edouard Fritch visited Cook Islands Prime Minister Robert Woonton earlier this year. Woonton said the OPT's help to develop Internet services would include the outer islands.

Jean-Marc Mouret, head of production for the OPT's newly created Television Center, and Maui Sanford, the OPT's international relations manager, accompanied Fritch to Rarotonga. Mouret and Telecom Cook Islands Ltd. (TCI) technicians made tests of a hookup between TCI's telephone satellite and the OPT's Internet satellite. The successful results confirmed that such a hookup giving Cook Islanders access to the Internet is technically working. That means the Cook Islands can provide Internet



OPT's Jean-Marc Mouret testing satellite Internet access in Rarotonga with TCI engineer Robert McFadzien.

connections to its residents in the most remote islands with the OPT's help. The access begins by dialing up the Internet through the Cook Islands' regular telephone network. The Internet's websites become available via satellite. The OPT is making a cost study before submitting a final Internet hookup proposal to TCI. ▶

## Joint Search for Mobile Phone Solution

Telecom Cook Islands Ltd. (TCI) and Tahiti's OPT are discussing the development of a digital mobile telephone system «for Rarotonga, Aitutaki and perhaps one other island», Cook Islands Prime Minister Robert Woonton said recently. Introducing a dual system for the Cook Islands and Tahiti would also have benefits for French Polynesia, Woonton said. «The Cook Islands' Rarotonga Cellular system could act as a back up for the Tahitian one, and vice-versa», he said. Woonton discussed the mobile telephone system with French Polynesia Vice President Edouard Fritch and OPT officials when they visited the Cook Islands earlier this year. French Polynesia's growing and expanding GSM mobile phone network has reached some 90,000 subscribers in eight years. «The OPT and TCI are presently negotiating together with a supplier to provide a GSM cellular system for Rarotonga and for some islands in French Polynesia,» a TCI report states. «This is very much in the preliminary stage of negotiation,» the report adds.



«Hello, the Cooks?»

The OPT has replied to TCI's needs by proposing that Cook Islands telecommunications specialists be included in Tahiti's testing of new equipment later this year. TCI is prepared to rent satellite time from the OPT's present space capacity surplus, and is willing to join with the OPT in future satellite use negotiations in order to obtain economy of scale. That assumes the Cook Islands' existing telephone network can be adapted to new satellite configurations. «TCI is currently working with an equipment supplier on this task,» the TCI report states. TCI is seeking a solution to provide both voice and Internet services. ♦

## Cook Islands Inaugurate Satellite TV Service

French Polynesia Vice President Edouard Fritch emphasized the potential of partnership telecommunications development in a speech during the inauguration of the Cook Islands satellite television service. The inauguration earlier this year involved Marama Television Network, the Cook Islands' version of Tahiti Nui Television. Cook Islanders have been watching English language movies, cartoons and a 24-hour live news channel imported via satellite from Tahiti since last September. «The technical solutions put into operation in Tahiti allow the largest number of viewers to have access to information, including those outside of French Polynesia,» Fritch said. «Our partnership is an example of how such solutions are credible and it marks the beginning of a genuine cooperation in the area of



Tahiti Vice President Edouard Fritch (2<sup>nd</sup> from right) arrives in Cook Islands

new technologies and information,» he said. «And it opens a new path of regional development that could spread to other economic sectors.» ▲

## Marama TV Network to Expand

The Cook Islands' Marama Direct to Home Television service plans to soon add a fourth, and perhaps a fifth, satellite channel and offer a second multi-channel package. Eurosport, which offers a variety of European sports events, will be the newest addition to the satellite broadcasts that Cook Islanders can receive via French Polynesia. Tahiti's OPT has obtained confirmation from Eurosport for rights to broadcast to the Cooks. The fifth possibility is a music channel, M6. Cook Islanders have been watching three satellite channels since last September under an historic regional audiovisual partnership agreement. That agreement between Tahiti's OPT and the Cooks' TCI

covers many of Rarotonga's estimated 9,000 residents and the some 5,000 outer islands residents. CNN, Cartoons Network and Turner Classic Movies (TCM) are offered on the Marama Television Network's Marama 1 package. Cook Islanders will soon be able to sign up for Marama 2, which will offer Eurosport along with the three other channels. The agreement allows TCI to benefit from the OPT's bulk rate purchase price for decoders and satellite dishes, providing the equipment to Cook Islanders at «much cheaper costs». Meanwhile, the OPT has provided the necessary software and process management so TCI can monitor via the Internet the quality and availability of channels on the Marama Bouquet. ♦

## Replacing a Telecommunications Satellite in Another World

The French Polynesia Postal and Telecommunications Department (OPT) recently faced one of its biggest challenges ever. Its technicians had only 16 days to prepare 41 satellite ground stations for a scheduled replacement of a fixed orbital satellite at exactly 4 a.m. on a specific date.

What is pretty much a routine, relatively simple countdown, button-pushing operation in much of the rest of the world became a potentially staggering logistical nightmare for French Polynesia. Although the OPT offers Tahiti & Her Islands' some 245,000 residents some of the world's most sophisticated telecommunications services, not all of the 35 islands and 83



One of French Polynesia's 41 ground satellite stations is on the Tuamotu

atolls have air service, or even a local OPT office. So when Intelsat announced a replacement of one of its 24 satellites 20 days earlier than originally scheduled, the OPT's GESTATER (Earth Station Operation Group) had its work cut out for it. Working on a tight schedule, the OPT organized the visit or presence of technicians for the 41 ground stations.

One mayor from a Tuamotu island with no airport or runway and not even an OPT branch had to take the weekly cargo boat to Papeete and be trained by OPT technicians on how to hook up his island to a new satellite. In the Austral Islands to the south, a mayor who also heads up the OPT branch, required special

instruction because he had never had training as a technician. And the island has only a cargo ship service every month-and-a-half. But when 4 a.m. arrived on the given day, the changeover occurred instantly at 36 of the 41 ground stations. The remaining five had their telecommunications links with the world cut off for only one hour. And by 5 a.m. the same day

the 41 ground stations served by the Polysat network in French Polynesia were hooked up to the new Intelsat satellite.

OPT General Manager organized a gathering in Papeete for those who participated in the satellite changeover, praising everyone involved for their «excellent work». ▲

# METU@: Tahiti's Democratic ICT Solution

French Polynesia's role in the information and communications technology revolution is quite simple and very democratic, according to OPT General Manager Geffry Salmon. «Every individual everywhere in French Polynesia should be able to send and retrieve any kind of information at a reasonable cost.» That, he said, is the reasoning behind METU@, the OPT project aimed «at the citizen and not the consumer».

The Tahitian word *Metua* means «the one who leads the way», Salmon said during his PTC2003 speech. Because METU@ was a political choice, the French Polynesia government and the French State could take the lead, making the project a top priority, he said.

## ■ US\$500,000 BUDGET WITH 3 GOALS

A nearly US\$500,000 budget was created with three main goals:

- Provide equal access to information at a reasonable cost for everyone;
- Take advantage of new technologies to fulfill users' needs in various and specific situations;
- Offer all contents as they appear by using current terminals (mobile phones, PCs, TV sets).

The French Polynesia government also decided to provide regulatory and tax incentives, tax free measures for multimedia equipment, such as PCs and software and protection of network privacy and security, support that would not have been possible had METU@ remained only an OPT project, Salmon said.

METU@ also had an objective of contributing to French Polynesia's economic growth by enlarging the pool of qualified workers, generating new business opportunities and attracting overseas investment capital, he said.



Dramatic illustration used during OPT GM Geffry Salmon's speech to the PTC 2003 conference

## ■ OPT UPGRADES FOR ICT REVOLUTION.

The government put its administration online by creating Internet websites for each ministry. Intranets were built, information was shared and expertise was promoted through tailored programs, Salmon said. Culture, tourism, local events, even a Tahitian dictionary and Tahitian music were put online.

To handle all this new information and communications technology, the OPT built reliable infrastructures and expanded its network from 30 earth stations to 44. «We also bought new satellite capacity and had OPT's organization evolve in such a way that decisions regarding investments and services in the outer islands could be made

at the local level,» Salmon said.

French Polynesia's voice communication links with the outside world were consolidated with the creation of Tahiti Nui Telecommunications. This is a joint venture between the OPT, France Telecom and its international affiliate, France Câbles Radio (FCR).

The most recent added technologies involve Internet broadband service for the most populated Society Islands; KU band for the outer islands with very low population density and high geographical constraints; and GPRS for voice and data mobile telephone services. The broadband service soon to be launched will take advantage of a fiber optic line installed around the island of Tahiti. ▴

## Tahiti's Choice: Satellite or Cable?

▷▷▷ Cont. From Page 1

- «The possibility of a progressive implementation of bandwidth;
- «Strong interconnection competition in Hawaii and on the U.S. Mainland that will hopefully give us better prices for landing rights;
- A window of opportunity that has opened up due to difficulties vendors are facing and will probably continue to face for the rest of this year.

«If we agree (that) bandwidth needs will grow exponentially in the years to come and that satellite and cable are available solutions, the real question is: what about the costs per Mbps induced by these solutions? Experts are telling us that the cable option is the most viable solution,» he said. The OPT criteria necessary, regardless of which option is chosen, include, he said:

- An ability to master the OPT's



Maui Sanford (2nd from right), OPT international relations manager and member of PTC Advisory Council member, attended both the PTC2003 conference and the Pacific Islands Telecommunications Association (PITA) meeting, along with Moana Brotherson (far left), head of the OPT's newly created Communications and Multimedia Center

international relations;

- Easy bandwidth growth implementation;
- Lowest cost mid-term and long-term solutions (evolution of capital and operating expenses vs. growth of bandwidth);
- Long-term secured capacity.

The jury is still out as far as which choice is better for French Polynesia, Salmon said.

«More studies are to come, especially to evaluate the cost of cable maintenance compared to the rental cost of satellite service, which has more capacity to match the needs of our population.»

And, he added, more contacts will be made in coming months to build a business plan that takes into account a potential three-way split of financing costs of a third each between the French State, French Polynesia and the OPT. ▴

## Did You Know?

- **Mana** became Tahiti's Internet provider in January 1998 with 300 customers.
- **Mana** has 11,000 subscribers today.
- **Mana's Internet International** satellite hookup has a capacity of 14 megabytes, with a 55% utilization rate.
- **Mana** offers Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) service to the most populated islands of Tahiti and Moorea, the Leeward Islands, the Marquesas Islands of Nuku Hiva and Hiva Oa, Rurutu and Tubuai in the Austral Islands and the Tuamotu atolls of Rangiroa and Manihi.
- **GSM Vini** was launched as Tahiti's mobile telephone service in June 1995 with an expectation of having 6,000 subscribers by the end of 2001.
- **GSM Vini** had 5,000+ subscribers in 1997, only two years later.
- **GSM Vini** had nearly 90,000 subscribers by December 2002.
- **Tikiphone**, the OPT affiliate that operates GSM Vini, is expecting 109,853 subscribers by Dec. 31, 2003.

## TNS - At-a-glance



- **TNS** reached 50% of the paid TV audience on Tahiti and Moorea last year, according to a five-week-long MBA Consultants-Louis Harris poll. **TNS'** audience rose from 4% in 2001 to 6% last year, the term «audience» referring to the percentage of the population viewing TNS at least once during the day. One «cumulative audience» percentage point represents some 1,100 persons.
- The same poll found that **TNS**, with 8% of the market captured twice as many viewers as its closest rival and three times as many as a second competitor. The 8% involves **TNS'** market share of the public's total TV viewing time.
- **TNS** began broadcasting on June 29, 2000, beginning with 11 TV channels and 3 radio stations. On Dec 20, 2001, there were 23 TV channels and 5 radio channels. **TNS** subscribers totaled some 11,000 in December 2002.

## Tahiti Ready for Internet Broadband & Mobile GPRS

The French Polynesia Postal and Telecommunications Department (OPT) is on the doorstep of two new, exciting chapters in its rapid development of Information Superhighway technologies. Within a very short period of time the OPT expects to announce the launching of Internet broadband



service and General Pack Radio Service (GPRS) for its booming Cellular Mobile Radio Telephone System, known locally as the «Vini», the mobile phone named after a tiny bird found in Tahiti & Her Islands. Broadband Internet service is known locally as ADSL, or Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line. It's the «fast lane» for today's modern Internet users. Broadband will provide them with rapid digital Internet access, and simultaneous telephone conversations over the same line while online.

Both the GPRS and broadband technologies have been thoroughly tested and are ready for use, according to the respective OPT affiliates, *Tikiphone*, the GSM affiliate, and *Mana*, the Internet service provider for French Polynesia.



GPRS is a new non-voice value added service that allows information to be sent and received across a mobile telephone network. It supplements existing Circuit Switched Data and Short Message Service (SMS).

Like the broadband system for the Internet, GPRS reduces the time it takes to transmit large documents, making the cost less expensive. ▴

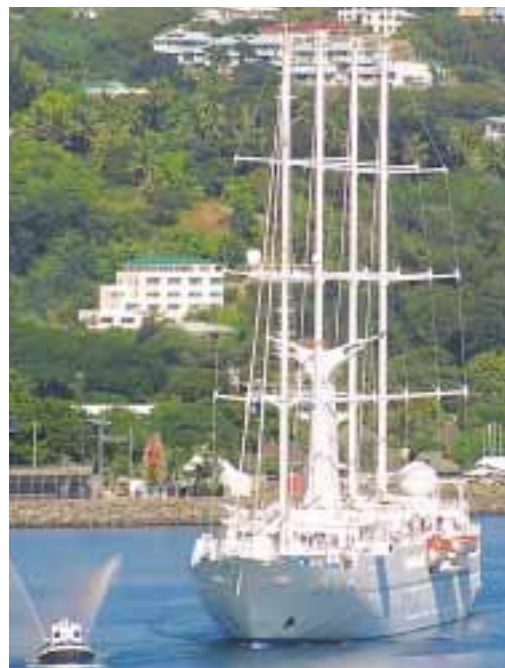
## 8 Hotels, 2 Cruise Ships Offer TNS TV

Nearly 25% of the hotel rooms and 67% of the cruise ship cabins in Tahiti & Her Islands offered *Tahiti Nui Satellite* (TNS) television programs to their clients at the start of 2003.

The 200-room Sheraton Hotel Tahiti was the first to sign a contract with *TNS* for a special tourist industry eight-channel package. That occurred last June, offering visitors *CNN*; the French 24-hour news channel *LCI*; *Eurosport*; *M6*, a French music /series / movie / documentary channel; and two local TV channels, *RFO* and *TNTV*. The hotels and cruise ships also have a choice of two optional movie channels—*Cinestar 2* and *Turner Classic Movies* (TCM), which offer several movies in English and French subtitles.

Since then the 64-room Bora Bora Beachcomber Intercontinental Resort, 80-room Bora Bora Lagoon Resort, the 120-room Bora Bora Nui Resort & Spa, the 10-room Hotel Hinano on Raiatea, the 100-room Le Meridien on Bora Bora, the 30-room Le Maitai Dream on the Tuamotu atoll of Fakarava and the 107-room Sheraton Moorea Lagoon Resort & Spa have signed up for French Polynesia's only 100% digital satellite television service. *TNS* is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the French Polynesia Postal and Telecommunications Department (OPT).

The two cruise ships that offer *TNS* TV to passengers are the 344-cabin *Tahitian Princess* and the 74-cabin *Wind Star*. Both offer regularly scheduled year-round cruises among Tahiti & Her Islands. *TNS* also



*Wind Star* passengers may keep in touch with world news via *CNN*. (Photo courtesy of French Polynesia Presidential Press Department)

is viewed in two hospitals, reported Aroma Salmon, head of *TNS* for the OPT. ▴

### Tahiti Telecom

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