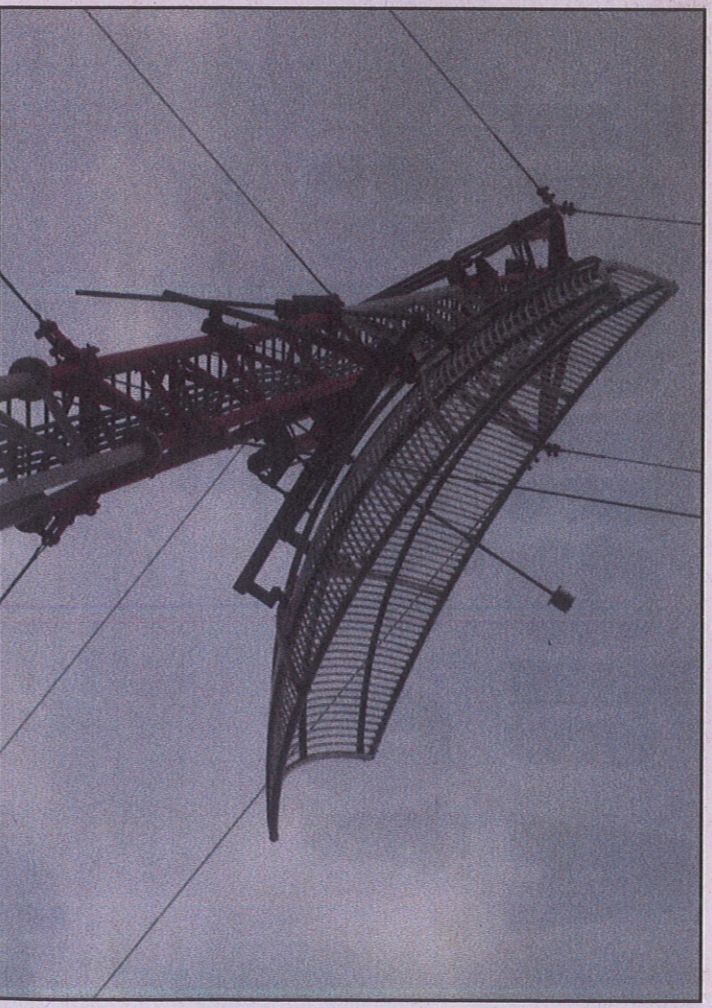




TVL CEO Catherine Rumlilat cuts the ribbon to open the new communications tower at Futuna (right), bringing modern communications to the island for the first time.



TVL connects Futuna to the world

Story and pictures by Richard Michael

PEOPLE in Futuna are now connected to the world via internet and mobile phone services after four years of almost no communication.

The joy overflowed when Telecom Vanuatu Limited (TVL) managing Director Catherine Rumlilat officially opened their new tower at Herold Bay village along with TVL's chief marketing, commercial officer Gerome Guicherd, TVL staff and senior government officials.

Mrs Rumlilat said that through TVL, Futuna people can now use internet in their phones and are able to send and receive e-mails by their computers.

She said that Futuna residents are now able to send SMS messages and call relatives with full communication restored back in Futuna. Up until four years ago there was a landline service but the cable was damaged and unable to be repaired.

"We are looking towards providing all the communities with the same telecommunications service to allow social and business development to everyone," she said.

"This is consistent with TVL's commitment to develop rural areas in Vanuatu and to support communities.

"Futuna is the 71st island in Vanuatu to be connected to the TVL mobile network.

"Vanuatu's historical telecommunications company keeps on extending and expanding its coverage throughout the archipelago in order to bring communities together.

"TVL is the only telecommunication company existing in Aneityum, Erromango, Banks and now Futuna."

Port Vila MP Edward Nipake Natapei confessed to his own people that he listed Futuna at the bottom of the list of telecommunications during his time in power as the telecommunications minister.

He said that in Futuna's way of respect, chiefs and leaders have to serve the others first before serving themselves.

"With this reason, when people asked me about the telecommunication in Futuna I told them that it will be the last island to be served with telecommunication," he said.

"I am very sorry to reveal this today because it has taken many years of patience but I reckon people are now happy as the day we were waiting for has come."

He congratulated the TVL management for their ongoing hard work despite the aggressive sales of their opponent, the Digital telecommunication network, but he said they still dominate the communication sector in some islands in the country.

He asked TVL to continue providing the good service it does within the country in the future.

"We are lucky to have communication access because TVL is still around in the country and thanks to the management for providing telecommunication to people in such a remote islands like in Futuna."

Mr Natapei said over the past few years, communication has had a long passage before reaching Futuna.

He said communication had to pass through Aneityum first before re-transmitting the information to that rocky island by a tele-radio. He said sometimes it took time for an answer

as this is how the information travelled: Port Vila - Aneityum - Futuna - Aneityum - Port Vila. He said the launching of the tower will reduce that old lengthy process to the direct calls.

Mr Natapei urged the Futuna people who are leaving in Port Vila and Tanna to send more credits to their own people who are residing back in the island to pay for the service that has been provided by TVL.

"I climbed up the hill with nothing in my hand but I was very tired and hardly imagined how the indigenous people came up the same way with a tower," he said.

"But it is through your hard work, community works, co-operation and faith, the tower is now built here."

He urged them to look after it because it is very expensive and offers a better service than most of the countries in the region and he also urged people to rally behind the TVL.

The delegation was greeted with a famous Futuna traditional dance followed by plentiful refreshments.



Guests at the opening, including MP Edward Natapei, had to take a boat trip, then climb to the top of Harold Bay hill, pausing on the way to inspect a monument to the footpath builders.



Visitors were warmly welcomed, with traditional dancing and children waving flags, and later (right) locals checked out the technology that will connect them to the outside world.