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THE BATTALION

Wednesday, August 23, 2001

Cash infusion raises hopes for small telecommunication

DALLAS (AP) — A big infusion of cash for a start-up company has raised hopes for a turnaround in the battered local telecommunications industry.

Santera Systems Inc. announced last week it has raised \$110 million from private firms, one of the largest fundraising rounds this year by a private Texas company.

Santera makes what it touts as a new type of switch for routing telephone calls, one that may replace the kind of switching equipment made today by big companies such as Nortel Networks and Lucent Technologies.

David Heard, who worked for AT&T and Lucent before taking the helm of Plano-based

Santera, said phone-switching equipment is about to undergo a revolutionary change and that start-ups like his are better suited to deliver new technology than are the established players.

Heard said he is not taking Nortel and Lucent lightly, but he compares Santera to Dell Computer Corp. and Compaq Computer Corp., which shoved aside heavyweight IBM to dominate the PC market.

The big phone-equipment makers have been hit hard as phone companies and other communications service providers cut spending on equipment that moves voice and data signals around the world.

In recent months, Canada's Nortel has announced 30,000

layoffs and New Jersey-based Lucent announced 15,000 to 20,000 layoffs on top of 19,000 jobs lost since last year. Nortel has U.S. headquarters in Richardson, and Lucent is also a major employer in an area of north Dallas, Richardson and Plano called Telecom Corridor.

Still, technology start-ups in Telecom Corridor continue to attract venture funding — \$250 million in the past three months, according to the Richardson-based Technology Business Council.

"We certainly think there is still a significant amount of venture money flowing into technology companies in the corridor," said Ron Robinson, president and chief executive of the

business council. "It's a term investment. They are looking at where start-ups) going to be, wise, when the market

The bulk of Santera money came from investors, Texas-based Ventures and Redpoint of Menlo Park., Calif.

Ed Olkkola, a general partner at Austin Ventures, Santera's switching equipment can catch on with carriers.

"They've developed a product that hits on the cost issue for most carriers that is operating costs to maintain their networks," Olkkola, who also sits on Santera's board.

Rivas' fate could go to jury Tuesday

DALLAS (AP) — Convicted killer George Rivas cannot be rehabilitated and would commit violence again, a forensics psychiatrist testified, echoing words he first spoke seven years ago.

Dr. Richard E. Coons told jurors that Rivas is a career criminal who continued "business as usual" after killing Irving police officer Aubrey Hawkins on Christmas Eve.

"It is clear the concept of violence is fine with that person," he said Monday during the sentencing phase of Rivas' trial.

Coons also testified in 1994 when Rivas was tried for armed robberies in El Paso. He said then that Rivas "has no conscience" and is "physically, mentally and morally dangerous and would continue to be so in 15 years."

If given another life sentence, Rivas likely would be heralded as a "folk hero" upon returning to prison and be elevated to a leadership role among inmates, Coons said.

"He gets a lot of psychological goodies out of organizing and controlling other people," Coons said. "He will commit criminal acts of violence in the future."

Rivas, 31, has admitted he orchestrated a meticulously planned escape of seven inmates from a South Texas prison and fired some of the 11 shots that struck Hawkins.

Six members of the gang were apprehended one month later in Colorado after a nationwide manhunt. One man committed suicide rather than surrender. Rivas is the first of the escapees to be tried for capital murder.

Defense attorneys have said Rivas never wanted to harm anyone and did not intend to kill Hawkins, only to shoot him in the shoulders to disarm him. They have lobbied for a life sentence, in which Rivas could be isolated from the prison population in an administrative segregation cell.

Rivas was convicted last week of killing Hawkins during the robbery of an Oshman's Sporting Goods Store. Jurors must decide whether to sentence Rivas to death or to life in prison.

Keith Price, warden of the Clements Unit, said Rivas would be placed in the most restrictive level of isolation, where he would spend 23 hours a day in a single cell, with one hour a day for recreation. He would have no books, fan or television and could have visitors only once a month, Price said.

But Rivas could be released from administrative segregation on good behavior, Price said, and his escape chances could increase if he's taken to the medical ward.

Producer in court for drug charges

HOUSTON (AP) — A trial on drug trafficking charges is under way for John Forte, a music producer who has performed as a backup singer for Michael Jackson, Carly Simon, Whitney Houston and Eric Clapton.

Forte, 26, is accused of possession with intent to distribute cocaine and conspiracy to distribute.

Simon is expected to testify as a character witness. Simon posted \$250,000 bail for Forte after his arrest at Newark (N.J.) International Airport on cocaine charges in July of last year.

Forte has also performed with Herbie Hancock, co-produced the Fugees' hit record The Score in 1996 and sung on a solo album released by Fugees singer Wyclef Jean. He sang backup during Simon's last tour.

Prosecutors allege Forte hired two young women to pick up two packets of cocaine in Harlingen and deliver them to New York City. The two were arrested at Hobby Airport as they attempted to make a connecting flight to New York.

Defense attorney Tony Serra said Forte never knew the packets contained cocaine. An acquaintance who hired him to locate female couriers told him the

packets contained money, there was nothing about the deal, Serra said.

But Assistant U.S. Attorney Stacy de la Torre told jurors that Forte was to be paid \$10,000 for every load of cocaine the two women delivered to New York.

After the couriers agreed to cooperate

"It's quite clear from the tape recordings that Mr. Forte was tracking his dope."

— Stacy de la Torre, assistant U.S. attorney

the Drug Enforcement Administration, she said, using a tapped phone, women called Forte several times in New York.

"It's quite clear from tape recordings that Mr. Forte was tracking his dope," de la Torre said.

Serra said there is no way Forte would jeopardize a "tasteful future in music" by engaging in illegal activity. The trial is in U.S. District Judge Sim Lake's courtroom.



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