

Honest, madam, this television is no idiot box

By MIKE SCANLON

Some things are just plain awesome, like out-of-the-park home runs or perfect gemstones.

Or computers. But scratch that last entry if you are talking to Vic Visocchi and his friends at the Computer Center in Garden City. They plan to make money making electronic brains work for the little guy.

The store opened earlier this month, one of a new breed of businesses springing up in the United States thanks to the advent of relatively cheap, small computers.

"Back in the '40s, not everybody had a refrigerator. In the '50s it was television and hi-fi. In the '60s it was high-powered stereo. Now, in this decade, it's computers," says Visocchi.

THAT'S EASY FOR Visocchi to say. The computer engineer has been fiddling with those mysterious devices for eight years now, the last two as a freelance programmer. Words like interface and modes, buses and chips

are his daily language.

But how does he plan to sell computers to people who won't change their own spark plugs?

"They're going to be kind of forced into it. You go to a bank now and somebody plugs your book into a computer and it's balanced. They used to do it by hand. Now, in the back of your mind you start accepting computers," said Visocchi.

"By 1985, computers will be in people's houses like color televisions were 10 years ago," said Visocchi.

Working with Visocchi are his Italian-born father Bruno and assistant Brad Cervenak.

ON A RECENT afternoon, a visitor found Cervenak adding the text of the store's lease agreement to the memory bank of an \$8,000 micro-processor.

Cervenak is a high school senior at Redford St. Mary.

"Look, if a high school student can do this, do you really think anybody else will have that big a problem?" asked Visocchi.

Cervenak, who took his first computer class as a high-school freshman,

has already had nearly four years experience with computers. He knows two computer languages and is learning a third, so maybe calling him a high-school student is telling the truth, but not all of it.

Visocchi figures the Computer Center primarily will draw two types of customers:

"Right now, if you own a computer and something goes wrong with it, you've got to send it to the manufacturer to have it fixed. Most of them are in California. Now, if you owned a television and everytime a tube blew out you had to send it to RCA in New York or somewhere, you might not think so much about televisions.

"We're going to do our own servicing right here," said Visocchi, whose latest job is programming a Ford Motor Co. computer to handle the company's money investments.

COMPUTERS AT THE store now range from that \$8,000 model, which Visocchi says is primarily a small-business computer, to a \$300 home model that will balance your check book or let you be an ersatz Bob Schembechler with simulated foot-

ball game feature. The computer's memory can even store football plays you design yourself.

Brave New World stories about computers making your coffee in the morning and opening up the garage door before they start the car are just that—stories, says Visocchi.

"You've got to wire the whole

house for that." While they haven't arrived yet, Visocchi said he also plans to sell more staid computer games for under \$100.

Visocchi's second ace in the hole, he says, will be classes at the store on how to prevent your computer from throwing interceptions or misbalancing the family books.

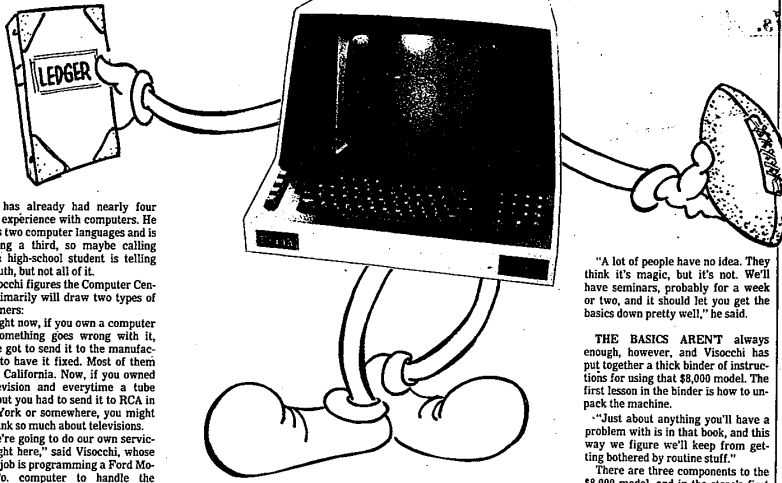
"A lot of people have no idea. They think it's magic, but it's not. We'll have seminars, probably for a week or two, and it should let you get the basics down pretty well," he said.

THE BASICS AREN'T always enough, however, and Visocchi has put together a thick binder of instructions for using that \$8,000 model. The first lesson in the binder is how to unpack the machine.

"Just about anything you'll have a problem with is in that book, and this way we figure we'll keep from getting bothered by routine stuff."

There are three components to the \$8,000 model, and in the store's first three days of operation, all or parts of the model were sold to two people. They're probably still trying to unpack it.

Unless the priest who dropped by last week stops in again and becomes a buyer. He may be able to draw on a higher power than Visocchi's binder of rules.



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