

Observer enters new publishing era

Old-fashioned paste up gives way to computer pagination

BY BOB NEEDHAM
STAFF WRITER

Johann Gutenberg wouldn't know what hit him. "If the inventor of modern type wandered into the Observer & Eccentric newsroom these days, he would probably be struck speechless by the advances in the technology he pioneered. Hot type and 'cold type' have long since reached the status of nostalgia, with computers taking over many functions once performed by hand.

Beginning with today's issue, your hometown Observer takes the transition a step further, starting to create entire newspapers — including text, photographs and graphics — on a computer screen. Combine this with a much more advanced word processor and library system than the papers had been using, and it all adds up to a package that would take Gutenberg's breath away.



New skills: Southfield Eccentric editor Wayne Peal picks up pagination tips from West Bloomfield Editor Phil Sherman.

"What we really hope to do with this system is to produce more timely news for the readers. It gives editors a great deal of flexibility in determining how the page looks. . . . The basic design of the newspaper is not changing, but the way stories and photos are placed on a page may appear different."

Randy Borst
O&E graphics coordinator

are placed on a page may appear different."

The outgoing system involved a mixture of "dumb" terminals — a computer keyboard and display terminal with no computer brains — and IBM-compatible personal computers tied to a mainframe, a large, powerful computer serving the entire newspaper chain.

The new system is a wide-area network of Apple Macintosh computers bought through Baseview Systems of Ann Arbor. The word processing software is a Baseview creation called NewsEditPro, while editors will build pages using QuarkXPress, an industry standard program.

"They (NewsEditPro and the Macintosh) are both extremely easy to use. Some electronic page assembly systems are horribly complicated, and the Baseview system, we determined, provides the best ease of use," Borst said.

"So far, what I've heard from the editorial staff, it's gotten rave reviews."

Southfield copy editor Marilyn Yaquinto described the new system as user-friendly once the initial learning curve is over.

"Dumming pages by hand was often a guessing game, since you couldn't see the finished product," said Yaquinto. "This

"What we really hope to do with this system is to produce more timely news for the readers," said Randy Borst, the Observer & Eccentric News-papers graphics coordinator, who has been working on the transition. "It gives editors a great deal of flexibility in determining how the page looks. . . . The basic design of the newspaper is not changing, but the way stories and photos



PHOTO BY DAN DEAN

Welcoming technology: Enlargers, sinks and chemicals were cleaned out of the Eccentric photo lab and were replaced with computers. Here Birmingham photographer Steve Cantrell learns about the new system from O&E graphics coordinator Randy Borst.

gives instant feedback when you do something right . . . or wrong."

Gary Moultrup — a technician/trainer for SCC, the O&E's parent company — has helped install the Baseview system at several SCC subsidiaries. He explained that O&E will have three different data base servers — the part of the network where everything is stored — located in Livonia, Birmingham and Rochester.

Each server is a large-capacity (2-gigabyte) hard drive with special software, and a backup drive attached to it. The three servers are linked together and to the central library server, which has a 12-gigabyte capacity.

Skip Wood, vice president of manufacturing for SCC, listed several reasons for changing systems.

"First, the old . . . system we have is no longer sold in the market. Secondly, support for that system . . . becomes more tenuous. Third, it's a proprietary system (using its own, nonstandard software).

"The last issue is, (the new system) provides us the flexibility

we need for dealing with the marketplace."

That flexibility comes in large part from creating pages on computer pagination system. Previously any breaking news would cause someone to rip up a page and lay it down again.

Eventually, advertisers may benefit: "As the system matures . . . we will hopefully be able to have ad deadlines that move closer to press time," Wood said.

More flexibility comes from keeping data — in this case, the content of the newspaper — in computer form rather than just on paper. The new system will provide nearly instant access to past issues, and has the ability to conduct advanced searches for particular items.

The company's O&E On-Line computer information service might make good use of the digital nature of the papers' content,

and all sorts of possibilities open up for allowing the public access to back copies, Wood said: "It's hard to do those things unless you're in a digital data base environment."

Technological issues aside, Moultrup said most people learn to love the system. "I think most everybody likes it quite a bit," he said. "You've got a lot more control over the end product than you've ever had before."

women's and
che bella! shoes

CLEARANCE

Now in progress

Hurry in now while the selection is best. Select from shoes

In our Women's Shoe Salon and CHE BELLA shoes, all at reduced

prices...all perfect for wearing right now.



Jacobson's

336 W. MAPLE RD. • BIRMINGHAM
MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, AND SATURDAY, 9:30 AM TO 6 PM
THURSDAY AND FRIDAY, 9:30 AM TO 9 PM, SUNDAY, NOON TO 6 PM.
PHONE: 644-6900 • FAX: 645-5067

Making the news

