Be concerned, not crazy about Y2K issue

came to realize there is such a thing as millennial mad-ness while driving home in bumper-to-bumper traffic the other day.

There, on my favorite radio station, Col. James "Bo" Gritz was hyping a Y2K conference he was holding in the Lansing area. The conference was spon

area. The conference was sponsored by a group he runs called something like "Save America"
Oh yeath After telling us how to prepare for Y2K, "Bo"
Gritz was also going to teach us how to be locksmiths.
I kid you not. Professional locksmiths.

It's madness I say The world truly has gone Y2K mad.

Gritz, who likes to call him-self "the real life Rambo," has joined a growing list of whacked-out weirdoes exploiting the computer glitch that threatens to disrupt computer ized systems around the world when Jan. 1, 2000, rolls

around.

I know a lot of people think
"Bo" Gritz is a hero. Maybe he was. He sure won a lot of military honors And I don't mean to take away from any of that. But I think this hero is also a huckster.

He knows about as much about Y2K as I know about

military strate-

I know nothing about military strategy, other than the fact that, like . judges, we shouldn't let some people stay in uniform too long. I do, howev-



PC TALK

er, know quite a lot about Y2K. I've been reporting on it for close to three years now.

So let me try to give you a realistic assessment on this whole issue before guys like "Bo" Gritz talk you into clean-ing out all the ammo from the local Kmart sporting goods sec-

First of all, I'll be the first to tell you that it is a fact that Y2K is one of the biggest tech-nological headaches the world has ever scen.

nas ever scen.

But it is equally a fact that
the problem is now being so
over-hyped and exploited by
everyone from religious zealots everyone from religious zealots to quick-buck artists that perhaps the biggest danger is not from Y2K but bad reporting. Just surf the Internet for proof. Yahoo lists 348 sites with Y2K in the name. AltaVista counted 427,461 Web site references to Y2K.

HotBot found 152,575 Web matches. Excite returned 80,306.

The vast majority of Y2K sites take a gleom-and-doom view. But I suggest that instead of cashing in your 401(k) mutual funds for gold and silver, look closely. Most of the sites are also selling some-thing, like Y2K survival gear, pre-packaged food or even parcels of land in "Y2K-safe communities" where people are supposedly moving to "escape coming chaos that will make our more populated areas unsafe when the comput-ers shut down."

I get asked all the time how bad I think it will be and what precautions I'm personally tak-

ing. Nothing I have seen leads me to believe that Y2K, in and of itself, will be catastrophic to society or the economy. Yes, I do expect disruptions and inconveniences. But every day, progress is being reported. The power grid is not nearly as vulnerable, it now appears, as the gloom and doomers have been claiming. Most hospital and medical couinment will work medical equipment will work just fine. The automotive industry and most of its key suppliers are well on their way to being fully Y2K compliant

II I get asked all the time how bad I think it will be and what pre-cautions I'm personally taking.

There really is some good news out there as the nation responds to this technological challenge. But good news does-n't sell freeze dried emergency

food rations.
That said, my biggest worry is that the hype will get so out of control that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy and all the sensational reporting and the sensational reporting and hysteria over this will bring about a real panic. And that could have disastrous effects on society far werse than what Y2K itself brings.

A few extra cans

So, what am I personally doing?
I am buying a few extra cans

of food every time we go to the grocery store.

I plan to have hard copies of all my financial records.

And I read everything I can about the issue.

Again, I do think there will Again, I do think there was be short-term service disrup-tions, maybe even some scat-tered power outages. So, I'llhave lots of candles, batteries for flashlights, some basic sup-

To be honest, I find myself going back and forth on this a lot. Some days, like when I read that the railroads are

read that the railroads are going to be hir really hard and will likely not move trains for some time in some parts of the country, I get really concerned. On other times, when I see that an segment of society like the banking industry is well on its way to having its systems Y2K compliant, I relax a bit.

Unfortunately, there are no clear indications on just what's going to happen. A prudent man plans for the worst. So, yeah, I am taking some precau-tions. Nothing major yet, but I'm ready to take a lot more if, come spring, it doesn't look very good.
One more thing. In the

interest of full disclosure, it's: only appropriate for me to tell you that I, too, will be conduct-ing a Y2K conference.

It's coming up in March and it deals with how to assess the Y2K vulnerability of your small business or home computers. This seminar is spon-

red by WXYT Radio. But I promise this: If the radio station sets up stands selling Y2K survival supplies, I'll bow out and tell them to bring in "Bo."

Mike Wendland reports about computers and the Inter-net for NBC-television stations coast-to-coast. His radio show is heard every weekend on TalkRadio 1270, WXYT, You can reach Mike through his Web site at www.pcmike.com

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