

Reporter enjoys pit stop in Laptop Lane at Florida airport



MIKE WENDLAND

As I write this, I'm in a m p a n s i s t a n t a t N o r t h w e s t . A f t e r w a n d e r i n g t h r o u g h a l i n e o f 72 (I counted) bodged, unbundled, tired tourists heading back to still-cold Michigan from their spring vacations here in Florida, the Northwest ticket agent could barely muster a smile.

No problem. It was indeed a surly crowd. I am not back brightly enough for both of us. I was heading home after a tough week on the road for business. So what if the line at the Tampa airport was turning mean? I wasn't going to get mad. I would soon be home.

"All I need is a boarding pass," I said, indicating I'd be carrying on luggage and his job would be easy.

"You'll need more than that, sir. Your flight was canceled." He booked me on a 10:35 p.m. flight because, he said, the airport up in Detroit had been

closed because of Friday's rains. Why don't I believe him?

"That's what we're told, sir." The line behind me was getting angrier by the minute. Word had spread and most were also heading to Detroit.

So, taking the boarding pass, now with five hours to kill, here I am in Laptop Lane. It's a comfortable cubicle equipped with a speedy Internet port to which my laptop is now connected, a Nortel telephone that I can use to call anywhere in the U.S. toll free, a FAX machine, a Pentium desktop with a nice 17-inch monitor and, Tony, my "Cyberspace concierge."

Really, that's what his business card reads.

If I have any technical questions, any difficulties hooking up, just holler, he says. I didn't. I'm attached and online in under three minutes. I hear him helping other customers though, getting their AOL accounts to log on. Showing them how to configure their network connections. He's pretty good. I could use him as a guest tech on my radio show.

There are a dozen other Lap-

top Lanes that have opened across the country, including Detroit. I found this one from a catchy sign in the hallway. "Peace, quiet and a TI Line," it promised. Looking at all the angry people waiting at the gate for a plane that won't leave for four hours yet, I shuffled in, handed Tony my Amex card and, for about \$2 for every five minutes, am comfortably ensconced in my quiet little cubicle.

It will cost me close to \$25 bucks for an hour.

I'd blow that much on dinner at the airport restaurant down the terminal hallway. I decided to settle for the peace, quiet and TI. I'll eat peanuts on the plane. And write this column.

But maybe it was meant to be. This is a pretty nifty discovery. Laptop Lane. I like it.

Meanwhile, here's what's been happening on the Net this week.

Goofing off

A new study says workers are stealing company time to surf the Web for fun, checking stock prices, porno sites and passing along company secrets to outsiders by e-mail.

In addition, nearly one out of five respondents received at

least one potentially offensive e-mail per month from a co-worker. One in three corporate workers said they spend 25 minutes or more each day using the Internet for personal reasons.

Much of that time is spent shopping, with the most popular destination sites for vacations and vehicles. Employees report worse behavior among their colleagues. Nearly one in 10 respondents say they have seen co-workers accessing adult sites, while nearly one-third say they have seen co-workers job hunting on the Internet.

The result? An increasing number of companies are limiting employee e-mail and instituting sophisticated eavesdropping and surveillance policies to monitor just what it is workers are doing when they log on to the Net. The survey of 600 users from different corporations was commissioned by Elron Software, which makes e-mail filtering software.

AOL tactics

America Online may be the world's biggest commercial online service but there's a lot of people who think it's turning into the Net's biggest bully, too. The

latest flap stems from tricky programming tactics in the latest version of AOL's software that makes it all but impossible for users to access rival Internet Service Providers (ISPs).

A suit filed earlier this month charges that it's an attempt "to eliminate competition in the Internet Service Provider Market" by preempting the existing dial-up settings of other ISPs' customers. There "is no legitimate business justification" for such action, says the suit, which is being supported by a half-dozen ISPs around the country.

And that's just the latest complaint about Version 5 of the AOL software. Other class action suits have been filed accusing AOL of making it intentionally difficult to uninstall its software and having adverse effects on other Internet programs installed on the hard drives of AOL subscribers. AOL claims it has received few complaints but when problems do occur, it's the fault of the user, not the software.

Y2K alarms

Just when you thought it was safe to open your e-mails, the Y2K alarms have found a new

cause: The current turmoil in the financial markets. You'd think they'd be hiding out of embarrassment. But not so.

Now they're using the mailing lists they collected during the height of last year's Y2K worries and telling their former followers to hold on to their freeze-dried food stocks and keep gasoline in the generator because the market crash is going to trigger the mother of all economic depressions.

What's their angle? Greed. They're trying to get people to invest in coins and speculate in gold as a protection against dot-com mania. Toss their spam in the trash. These people have no credibility.

That's it from Laptop Lane. Till next week.... 73.

Mike Wendland reports about computers and the Internet for NBC-television stations coast-to-coast. His "Net News Daily" Internet reports are on WJZ, NewsRadio 960 Monday-Friday at 6:28 p.m. and his "PC Talk" call in radio show is heard every weekend on TalkRadio 1270, WXYT. You can reach Mike through his website at www.pemike.com

OMNIBUS collaboration offers online 4-year degree programs

OMNIBUS, the online program that enables students to earn three degrees in four years, is accepting applications for fall 2000. A collaboration between Schoolcraft College and Madonna University, the Online Multi-degrees in National and International Business program grants an associate, bachelor's and master's degree with one application process and for a set fee.

OMNIBUS is designed for working adults without college degrees who have achieved a measure of success and made the decision to move forward in their career.

Tuition remains \$190 per credit hour, including all fees, books and course materials. It is guaranteed for the entire four-year program and totals \$29,000 for the three degrees.

OMNIBUS students do their work, team projects and communication online. The program stresses: Core business skills, information retrieval from electronic as well as traditional sources, skills in managing work using information technology, teamwork skills, and global management and leadership skills.

The first OMNIBUS students, who began their studies in 1997, will receive their master's degree in July 2001. Of the 16 students studying now at Madonna, 11 placed on the dean's list for the fall semester.

"The program clearly reflects the revolution in education," said Jeanne Bonner, Schoolcraft College associate dean for liberal arts, independent and distance learning. "We see record enrollments for Web-based courses. Even law and nursing courses have gone online. There is no

significant difference in the quality of the instruction a student receives on campus or at a distance."

The OMNIBUS program places emphasis on four areas, developing one during each of the four years of study: Effective communications and decision

making; global citizenship and diversity for international development; paradigms for organizational change; and tomorrow's leadership for world organization.

Orientation for new OMNIBUS students is scheduled for Sept. 9-10. There is a nonre-

fundable application fee of \$120, which is applied toward tuition. Applicants must furnish transcripts, achievement test results, a letter of intent and a letter of recommendation. In addition, there are computer and software requirements students must fulfill.

For more information, contact the Schoolcraft College Distance Learning Office at (734) 462-4599. Schoolcraft College is located at 18600 Haggerty Road in Livonia, between Six and Seven Mile roads, just west of I-275.

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Better

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"Individuals seeking changes in their eating patterns have found that the one week with individual nutrition consultation and the opportunity to experience the really delicious low-cholesterol cooking made making changes quite easy," said Weaver.

The Better Living Seminars Health Camp is staffed by volunteer professionals. The all-inclusive price is \$425 per person or \$800 per couple. For more information, contact Weaver at (248) 349-5683 or e-mail: aweaver@webbnet.net

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