# *This Firm Catches Bouncing Checks*

## Computers, Phones, Daily Calls Help Businessmen

By CORINNE ABATT

COMP-U-CHECK President, Arthur C. Brownell (left), and Myron Paskewich, executive vice president, stop in the computer room, the heart of the verification process.

One of the biggest headaches for retailers, particularly those with a transient trade, is bad checks.

While most now ask for a driver's license number, will only accept a check for the exact amount of the purchase, and occasionally want to see other verification, the risk of loss is ever present.

Obviously, many retailers needed help in this area.

In 1967, a company, Comp-U-Check, was incorporated with the idea of meeting this need. It began operating in the metropolitan Detroit area the next year. In October of 1968, the same operation was opened in Chicago.

Myron Paskewich, of Farmington, one of the founders, is the only one still actively involved. He is executive vice president. Arthur C. Brownell, of Beverly Hills, formerly credit manager for Winkelman's, is president.

Tom Durack Jr., Livonia resident and national director of marketing for Comp-U-Check, joined the Chicago office in 1968 as district sales manager. He was transferred to the Detroit office, now located at 24400 Northwestern, Southfield, in 1970. Durack had previously worked for American Express.

Durack, 35, explains the service which Comp-U-Check offers its subscribers.

"From the time the company began operating, the purpose has been to provide retail, food and banking businesses with the ability to identify chronic and habitual bad check passers and information on stolen business and payroll checks."

At first this check verification was done by phone. A subscriber would call the company switchboard for information on a questionable check. The company maintained records from many sources on bad checks and bad check makers. If the check was on a list, the subscriber would be given all of the details, but no advice on whether or not to cash it.

When the phone call verification became cumbersome, what Durack calls "a drastic but beneficial change" was made.

Coded lists containing 44,000 individual bad check writers and more than a million individual stolen or fraudulent checks are sent out to the subscriber each month. In addition there are weekly alerts which update the bulletin with names to add and delte.

The code is used because the Federal Trade Commission restricts the full disclosure of name and identification on a protection bulletin.

The code is the first letter of the last name, the first four letters of the first name, and the first five letters of the street address. When it is available, the last three numbers of the drivers license are listed.

If a subscriber has a match between the check maker and the list, he calls the company office for further verification.

If the match is positive, the merchant may then tell his customer: "I can't accept your check: Your name is in the Comp-U-Check file." The customer then must take his gripe to the Southfield company.

The computerized lists come from several sources. Company employes are constantly gathering bad check data by visiting major retailers. All information on the bounced checks is recorded.

The Detroit Police "call alert," sponsored by the Detroit Chamber of Commerce, gives current information on stolen or lost checks. Banks are another source, and the bad accounts which have been recently closed are often a tip-off to trouble.

The daily accumulation of information is fed into the company computers.

Comp-U-Check occupies the entire floor of the brown face building on Northwestern. The largest single area is the computer room where tapes with millions of coded names are stored.

The company also has its own printing facilities for the monthly bulletins, the weekly alerts and its own brochures and promotional material.

Durack says: "The bad check passer, chronic and habitual, often uses his checking account for a temporary float, writing checks on Fridays and intending to cover them on Mondays-- which he seldom does."

In December of 1971, the company opened a check collection division.

The effort to collect a bounced check starts with a letter to the maker. If payment isn't received, two more letters, a week apart, follow. When the response is negative ("most pay with the letter series," Durack says), a phone call is made. As a last resort (things seldom go that far), the company provides ability for litigation.

A $3 collection fee is charged to the check maker and the company is 90 per cent successful in collecting the assessment.

Each subscriber to the collection service receives a monthly computer print-out on the collection situation.

**The newest, and so far the most successful, of its kind, a check guarantee program, is called Sure-Check. A subscriber to this may call on any check he questions. If Sure-Check agrees to guarantee the check, it will pay 96 per cent of the face value if it bounces for any reason except stop payment.**

"No other company in the Midwest is doing this successfully," says Durack. "There is one in California."

If there is nothing on file, the check will be guaranteed with one exception. That is the "starter" kits which a person receives when he opens a checking account before the printed checks are ready.

Durack says a person can open a checking account with a small sum, receive the starter kit and, in one weekend, pass several hundred dollars worth of bad checks.

Decisions on whether to guarantee checks are made by the security staff, several of whom are retirees of the Detroit Police bunko squad.

Andy Lovchuk, on the phone constantly with check guarantee questions, says he will turn down any name on the company lists and "anything we can smell that's bad."

The security staff has a separate room with all of the current lists right beside the bank of telephones.

**The biggest bad check problem is in the food industry. Since the margin of profit in retail food is slight, supermarkets stand to be big losers. The food chains, particularly those in large shopping malls, have a very transient clientele.**

Retailers are also aware that if they refuse to cash a check of a good potential customer, he will take his business to a competitor.

Of further help in feeding information is the company's wholly owned subsidiary, Credit Clearing Interchange of Lincoln Park.

The subsidiary does credit reports for major companies. If Comp-U-Check collectors hit a blank wall, they can skip trace through the credit bureau.

There are 50 employes in the Lincoln Park office and 52 at Comp-U-Check of Southfield.

In addition to the executive offices, printing areas, the large computer room and collection and security offices, there are several training and meeting rooms.

The computer serves both the metropolitan Detroit and Chicago areas. The company plans to go into the Flint, Lansing and Saginaw areas with the check guarantee service very soon. Milwaukee and Cleveland are next on the list of locations.

Compu-U-Check is a publicly owned company. Stock is sold in the Detroit over the counter market. It isn't presently listed.

TO CASH A CHECK -- that's the question Comp-U-Check's security expert Andy Lovchuk and assistant Marnell Wheeler deal with hundreds of times daily. (Observer photos by Harry Mauthe)

# *Campers Love Harrisville Park*

Harrisville State Park is little in size but big with campers. It's the smallest of seven state parks along picturesque Lake Huron.

But it has the second largest number of campsites, and last year ranked fourth in attendance despite its far northern location, according to Automobile Club of Michigan.

Located just south of Harrisville on US-23, the 94-acre park offers scenery, woods and a half-mile of Lake Huron sandy beach. Swimming is good.

Another highlight is a mile-long foot trail which winds through a cedar swamp and among the pines.

There also is a variety of wildlife, including birds.

Nearby streams offer fishing for trout, bass and panfish.

**Harrisville's 229 campsites are modern and have electricity. The campground has privacy due to dense tree growth and is close to the beach. There are several boat launching sites.**

Other features for campers include a laundry, city water and trailer sanitation disposal station.

Also in the Harrisville area are two county parks, Alcona County Parks Nos. 1 and 2. Both offer space for tents and trailers. Lakes around Harrisville include Horse Shoe, Jewell and Hubbard.

North of Harrisville on US-23 is an unusual attraction, Hall of Ancient Man, with many prehistoric relics and displays.

West of Harrisville, just off M-72, are the towns of Lincoln, Barton City and Mikado. All are fine shopping and service centers for visitors.

The state park nearest Harrisville is Tawas Point, just a short distance south, with 202 sites. Other nearby state park campgrounds include P.H. Hoeft, 145 sites; Albert E. Sleeper, 335 sites; Port Crescent, 181 sites; and Lakeport, 256 sites.



# *Write Your Lawmaker*

Want to tell your lawmaker how to vote?

Got a problem? Need a speaker for your club?

Congressmen, legislators and county commissioners read their mail pretty carefully and listen to the voters' problems.

Clip and save this directory of addresses and phone numbers, marking the official who serves your area.

**U.S. SENATE**

**Hon. Philip Hart, D-Mich.**
Washington: Senate Office Building, 202--225-4822.
Detroit office: 438 Federal Building, 226-3184 or 226-3188.

**Hon. Robert Griffin, R-Mich.**
Washington: Senate Office Building, 202--225-6221.
Detroit office: 1035 Federal Building, 226-5020.

**CONGRESS**

**17th District--Hon. Martha Griffiths**, D-Detroit. Includes Redford Township, Farmington City and Township, Lathrup Village and Southfield.
Washington office: 1536 Longworth Office Building. 202--225-4961.
District office: 14615 Grand River, Detroit. 273-6991.

**STATE SENATE**

**14th District--Carl Pursell**, R-Plymouth. Includes Farmington, Livonia and Plymouth.
Lansing office: State Capitol, 517--373-7908.
Residence: 670 S. Sheldon, Plymouth, 455-0646.

**15th District--Daniel Cooper**, D-Oak Park. Includes Southfield.
Lansing office: State Capitol, 517--373-7946.
Residence: 13150 Dartmouth, Oak Park. 547-5528.

**STATE REPRESENTATIVES**

**64th District--Raymond Baker**, R-Farmington. Includes Farmington City and Township and western Southfield.
Lansing office: State Capitol, 517--373-1793.
Residence: 32718 Grand River, Farmington. 476-0776.

**OAKLAND COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

**15th District--Lillian Moffit**, R-Birmingham. Includes western Southfield, northeast Farmington Township, Wood Creek Farms, Franklin Village and eastern Bingham Farms.
Office: 1200 N. Telegraph Rd., Pontiac. 338-4751.
Residence: 6828 Cathedral Dr., Birmingham. 626-9783.

**24th District--Lew Coy**, R-Wixon. Includes western Farmington Township and Quakertown.
Office: 1200 N. Telegraph Rd., Pontiac. 338-4751.
Residence: 2942 Loom Dr., Wixom. 624-1058.

**25th District--Patrick Nowak**, R- Farmington. Includes north-central Farmington Township.
Office: 1200 N. Telegraph Rd., Pontiac. 338-4751.
Residence: 33742 W. 12 Mile, Farmington. 476-8515.

**27th District--Wilbur Brotherton**, R-Farmington. Includes Farmington City, southeast Farmington Township and southwest corner of Southfield.
Office: 1200 N. Telegraph Rd., Pontiac. 338-4751.
Residence: 23622 Beacon Dr., Farmington. 474-0913.

# The Stroller ...

## *Shades Of '26!*

By W. W. EDGAR

You could tell by the glint in his eyes and the trace of a smile on his face when he pulled his chair up to the luncheon table that Don, the produce king and one time tiller of the soil, was ready to explode a verbal bomb on the diners.

So, it was no surprise to The Stroller, a long time friend, when he opened:

"Everybody is complaining about high prices these days, yet few of them recall that they aren't any higher today than they were back in 1926.

He waited a moment or two, then added: "The only thing higher today, I suppose, is lettuce, and that's because of the heavy rains in the spring and the plants never got started."

Looking around the table, seemingly waiting for reaction, and feeling no doubt that he was being taken for granted, Don took off again.

"Back in those days I was paying $3.50 a bushel for feed for the animals, and that's the price the people are hollering about today.

"The trouble is, most of the people doing the yelling are too young to remember the days before the 1929 crash when everything seemed to be going to pot.

"And another thing," he went on, "don't under-estimate the farmer. The politicians are trying it--but wait and see what happens when the freeze is taken off, beef."

Asked what he thought would happen, this wise tiller of the soil didn't hesitate to answer that the farmer isn't as stupid as the politicians would lead you to believe.

"These farmers and cattle breeders will be back on the market when they can get their price -- and I have no fear of a beef shortage as bad as some folks would lead us to believe.

"Just remember," he intoned for emphasis, "don't sell the farmer short."

**Did he feel that the 1926 trend, known to many as "the good old days," would be followed by a depression such as we had after the crash in 1929?**

Many survivors of the crash, when the banks were closed, and the workers were being paid in scrip, wonder if history will repeat itself.

"We're headed for something," he answered, "but it won't be anything like our experience in 1929. And I expect it may hit this fall."

How would it differ from 1929?

"In that crash", he said, "we didn't have any money--and with the banks closed we couldn't get any.

"This time we'll have plenty of money, but we won't be able to buy anything with it 'cause the prices will be too high.

"Take a stroll into any of our supermarkets," he explained, "and look at what's happening. Eggs at a dollar a dozen and other things like sweet corn at fabulous prices-- and we are supposed to be in boom times.

"This is just a starter. Prices will go up and up. People will have money-- but not enough."

His words and the mere mention of the 1929 crash brought chills to The Stroller, who well remembers those days for two good and sufficient reasons.

First, after being paid in scrip, which was bad enough, he suffered two 10 per cent pay cuts in the space of a week. The same was true at the other daily paper in Detroit and caused its sports editor, the late H.G. Salsinger, to send his Christmas cards with the inscription:

"Wishing you a Merry Christmas with 10 per cent off."

The second memory is that of a serious individual stepping from the elevator at the third floor of the Detroit Free Press building one Sunday midnight and asking for directions to the editor's desk.

"I'm Gov. Comstock," he said, "and I came to give him the news that I have just ordered the closing of all the banks in Michigan."

The Stroller just about choked--and whatever his friend, Don, sees in the crystal ball, he hopes it won't be a repeat of that midnight in 1929.

# Libraries Have Films For Aged

Nine local libraries have a special film service available to area nursing homes, homes for the aged and senior citizen housing units.

A collection of 100 16mm films is available for loan to licensed homes in Farmington, Garden City, Livonia, Westland, Plymouth, Southfield and Redford Township.

**The films emphasize topics of interest to older citizens and include dramas, comedy, travel, history and films on the arts.**

Recreation directors or representatives from the homes may pick up the films at the Farmington District, Farmington Public, Livonia's Alfred Noble and Carl Sandburg, Plymouth's Dunning-Hough, Redford Township, Southfield and Wayne-Westland libraries.

The libraries are affiliated with the Wayne Oakland Library System.

Projectors and screens aren't available.