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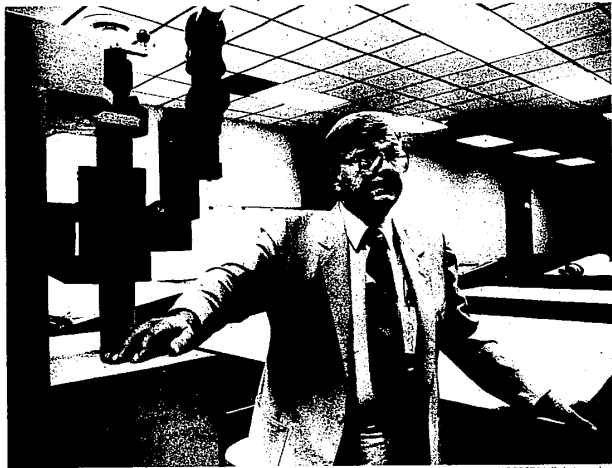
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'Automaton I' being built

Humans could go hungry as robots eat up the jobs



Verne Wesman with a half-scale model of Automaton I.

By Craig Piechura
staff writer

Without sidestepping the volatile automation issue, Verne Wesman says he intends to build a series of 6½-foot robots that will take jobs away from human beings.

"These things put people out of work," said the president and sole employee of Automaton Corp. of Farmington Hills, an affiliate of Marathon Industries.

Wesman isn't losing any sleep over the idea of displacing machine shop employees with his yet-to-be-built "Automaton I."

"My feeling is we're forcing people to upgrade themselves by learning new skills," said Wesman, 47, of Livonia. "The way productivity in this country has been going lately, I think that's a good thing."

A half-scale working wooden model of the two-armed robot, built by Wesman's 76-year-old father, John, is on display at the firm. Machinists at three firms owned by Wesman's business partner, Dan Greenbury of Farmington Hills, are busily assembling the robot's prototype, hoping to finish in time for the Autofact Tool Show on Nov. 10-12 at Cobo Hall.

Wesman makes the distinction of calling the robot a "medium technology" robot, as opposed to costly, "high technology" robots programmed by sophisticated computer electronics.

If successfully completed, the Automaton I will perform milling, drilling and tapping functions now done by machine shop employees or tool and die workers, Wesman said.

THE ROBOT'S arms are designed to swing 180 degrees and lift, swing and rotate pieces weighing up to 75 pounds into place within .008 of an inch precision. At least that's the expectation for the machine still under assembly.

Wesman was asked what makes his machine a robot.

"I think it is that it's easily programmable to do various tasks," Wesman said. "The program is easily changed because there is no computer. And like a robot, the machine is self-contained."

As director of engineering at Marathon Industries, Wesman said he took on the additional task of designing and building the "Automaton I" as a challenge with the hope that the firm's foresight will pay off financially.

Technology is becoming more accepted by the general public and the work force, Wesman said.

"It's a tedious job (the machine will perform) for one thing," Wesman said. "It's repetitious. And to be honest, in my opinion unions have overpriced themselves so it makes sense for manufacturers."

The idea for such a robot, Wesman said, came to him when he worked at Ford Motor Co.'s Livonia transmission plant.

"GUYS OR GALS sat at a machine doing a job all day long for two shifts," Wesman said. "Now I can't see anybody wanting to do a job like that all day long. But the pay's good so they stay there."

The original name for Wesman's "Automaton" robot was the "Cretin," another word for idiot. Wesman changed it to the more diplomatic "Automaton," explaining that "people might resent being replaced by an idiot."

But in addition to performing menial jobs on which men and women now work, Wesman said robots can perform jobs that would be impossible for humans. Robots, for example, can work in heat-treat furnaces or around radioactive materials.

But like all machines, robots have their limitations, Wesman said.

Simulating the simple human task of sipping coffee without spilling the contents of the cup is an incredibly complex task for a machine to perform. The skill requires smooth, simultaneous lifting, pulling and turning motions that can be performed at present by only the most expensive, electronically controlled robots, Wesman said.

"I wouldn't try to compete with the human body," the robotics engineer said. He added that the Flash Gordon fantasy in which all our earthly needs are served by computers or androids is still firmly entrenched in fantasy land.

Zeroing in on the real problem of drunk drivers

By Mary Rodrigue
staff writer

A 17-year-old youth with two drunk driving offenses is getting help through Alcoholics Anonymous, thanks to a new program for drunk drivers arrested in the Farmington area.

The youth is one of 70 persons who has participated in PAUSE (Personal Alcohol Use Status Evaluation).

Created by Magda Schneid, senior substance abuse counselor at the

Farmington Area Advisory Council, the program emphasizes on getting offenders to realize they have a drinking problem.

Long a part of mandatory sentencing for drinking drivers, such schools on the county level have emphasized high-way safety over self awareness.

"Our goal is recognition that there is a (drinking) problem," Ms. Schneid said. "Recognition is the tool. Alcoholism is a progressive disease.

"We give them enough information

so that they can identify themselves as a first step or second step alcoholic."

NOT ALL OFFENDERS are alcoholics or on their way to becoming one. She estimates that more than half of the 70 clients she's seen so far have drinking problems.

Group dynamics plays an important role in the sessions, which run on consecutive Mondays for five weeks.

"At first there's resentment because they're not here by choice," she said. "I try to break down that reluctance by getting them to talk about themselves.

"We start with the early physiological and psychological signs. A psychological symptom might deal with internalized thoughts, such as 'I deserve a drink because I've had a hard day.'

"One client in the August group said, 'I need to work on my shyness, not rely on alcohol to do it for me.'

"Such recognition is rewarding to Ms. Schneid, who admits the success

rate isn't always high.

"I can only suggest to the person that they need help," she said.

Of the 70 PAUSE graduates, not one has had subsequent alcohol related driving offenses in Farmington, according to Carol Laconis, chief of probation for the 47th District Court.

One of the reasons for PAUSE, created last March, was because teen-agers convicted of drunk driving offenses were having a hard time getting to the classes offered by Oakland County in Pontiac and Southfield.

"THEY DIDN'T HAVE cars, or their license was suspended," Ms. Laconis said. "We wanted to give them an alternative program in the neighborhood so they could choose."

First time offenders are usually sentenced to six months probation, court fines and costs in addition to the mandatory school.

Ms. Laconis is impressed with

"Recognition is the tool."

— Magda Schneid

PAUSE for her own reasons.

"It's intimate. People sit around and talk. It's educational, not therapeutic. There are no gory movies or lectures. "Some come to terms with their problem or go onto therapy."

As probation officer, she schedules the sessions and directs closeout interviews.

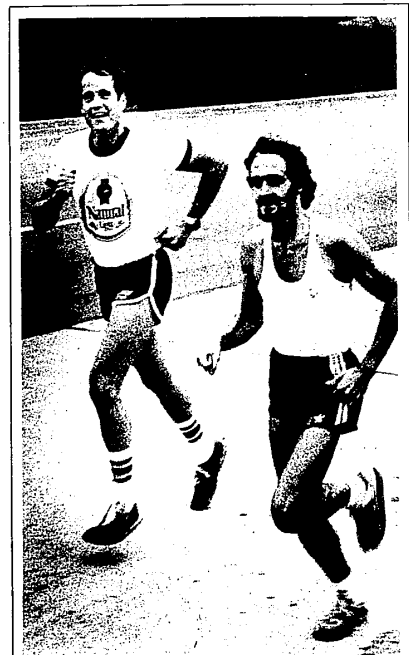
"I've had 90 percent positive feedback."

Alcohol related offenses comprise 75 percent of the caseload in district court — assault and battery cases, abuse, prowling, shoplifting and driving under the influence.

"I don't need any more customers," she says.



Magda Schneid



A 'fair' jog

Jogging from the steps of the Capitol to the Michigan State Fairgrounds on Eight Mile in Detroit for the official start of the State Fair were Doug Gaynor and Bill Benton. The two Farmington Hills city employees made the 100-mile run to promote city parks and recreation departments across the state. Gaynor is the director of parks and recreation, and Benton works in the finance department.

Youths disillusioned by court

By Gary M. Cates
staff writer

Four teen-agers arrested June 10 at a field party for Farmington Hills high school graduates were found guilty of disorderly conduct Thursday by District Judge Margaret Schaeffer.

Judge Schaeffer delayed sentencing until completion of a pre-sentencing report on those found guilty — Scott J. Cady, 19; Alan R. Hamel, 18; Darrel E. Kraft, 18; and Dale Petty, 18.

The youths represented themselves at the trial. Kraft said hiring an attorney wasn't practical because of the mi-

nor nature of the misdemeanor charge. Farmington Hills police officers testified that those attending the party June 10 threw bottles and rocks, shot fireworks and shouted obscenities at the officers when asked to leave.

Kraft claimed "there was no rock throwing." The students also maintained they didn't hear the officers asking the crowd to disperse.

City attorney Larry Sherman said the youths saw others leaving when officers arrived at the scene and said the youths should also have left.

THE YOUTHS attempted to bring out police practices in handling parties

in previous years. Sherman objected that such practices did not have any relevancy to the June 10 incident and the judge disallowed testimony on the matter.

Kraft said after the trial, "We've had parties there (in the field) in the past and nothing was ever done. We had a quarter of the people this time and the police reacted in this manner."

In his comments to Judge Schaeffer, Sherman compared the acts of the students to the actions of youths in Liverpool and called the June 10 party "a very explosive situation."

In speaking to the youths, Judge

Schaeffer said that graduation should be a joyful time, not a time to be in court.

Other youths found guilty of disorderly conduct in the same incident have been fined \$50 plus court costs and sentenced to three days labor around the court building.

Kraft said he was upset about the possibility of having to pay a fine and court costs, and/or working around the court.

"I'm working until the day I leave for school (college)," he said. "Taking time off work and paying a fine will set me back financially."

Cable TV targets smaller audience

By Craig Piechura
staff writer

By its very nature, cable television public-access programming serves a small audience.

In the lingo of the new technology, locally originated shows and public access fare is called "narrowcasting" as opposed to "broadcasting."

Public-access channels might feature a videolapped Brownie troop talent show or live coverage of the high school football game.

Locally originated shows are produced by the staff at a cable-television studio. Public-access programs are

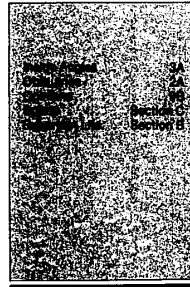
usually filmed and produced by non-commercial groups which request air time.

The three cable companies bidding for the franchise to serve Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi — MetroVision, Omnicon, and United-Niederlander — are trying to convince officials in all three cities that their package best serves the community.

In their bid proposals the companies explain the extent of local programming planned and its expense.

MetroVision of Atlanta estimates that it will produce 15 hours of local

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