

# Innovations help the elderly

"Older people have lived through more technological change than any previous generation in history. They are not alien to technological concepts. In fact, they accept much of today's technology as a normal part of their lives."

"Like younger people, they accept without serious misgivings the changes in lifestyle brought about by automobiles, airplanes, telephones, and television." So stated Cyril F. Brickfield, executive director of the American Association of Retired Persons.

Numerous innovations in technology have benefited the elderly. Specifically, areas include communications, personal and household security, and health technology.

MANY new communications technologies enable older people the safety and convenience to carry out many activities from their homes. These activities include security, information, entertainment, financial services, shopping education, and community participation.

Because of rapid technological advances, there has been a proliferation of new services through cable television. This communication device allows the elderly two-way communication. In addition to entertainment and security services.

Personal and household security systems also will increase as never before for the elderly. Some of the new sys-



high tech  
**Ronald R. Watcke**

tems include PASS, Lifeline, Companion Service, and SCAN.

PASS stands for Personal Alarm Security System. It is a crime prevention technique for older persons originally tested in New York City. Volunteer seniors carry a small radio providing immediate contact with police. Each radio has a unique sound for identification.

Lifeline is a personal security system specifically designed for the elderly and the disabled. It was initially introduced in 1972 and is used in over 50 communities in 16 states. It works similarly to PASS.

Companion Service is used in the homes of older handicapped persons and sends automatic alerts when help is needed. The system's sensors detect an interruption in a person's normal activities and are able to automatically dial a center for aid.

SCAN stands for Silent Communications Alarm Network. SCAN is a security system based on space technology and developed under a license from NASA. The system uses an ultrasonic

pen-sized transmitter which causes a strong pulse of ultrasonic energy to be emitted when activated. An audio alarm is set off in a central office and a light indicates the victim's location. Several additional spin-off advances have come from NASA. Most are in the health technology field.

A BIOTELEMETRY unit tracks and monitors vital functions in a person from a distance. Pacemakers have been around for several years. The new ones are designed with nickel cadmium batteries and can be used for 30 years.

Pacemakers have a 99 percent reliability and are rechargeable. In addition, an electronic sound processor automatically analyzes blood flow sound and measures blood pressure. This device is called "MEDIMAX" and is computerized.

Other new high technology developments in the health field include cloning, and freezing of vital body replacement organs.

One medical alert system in wide use is called "Med-E-Lert." It was designed

by an electronics engineer living in Florida and consists of a miniature radio which, when gently squeezed, sends an emergency signal to a control unit plugged into a telephone jack in the user's home. When activated, the control unit sends a specially coded signal to a 24-hour emergency monitoring center.

One disadvantage is that Med-E-Lert is not cheap. It costs \$1,200 per unit, plus \$180 a year to connect to a computer center.

TECHNOLOGY CAN continue to serve the elderly, but to do so effectively, the scientific, engineering and industrial communities must work hand in hand with the elderly and with those who are their advocates. There is still an urgent need to identify areas in which technology can assist older people in a cost effective way and to develop new products that older people will actually use to their benefit.

We should strive for a technology that brings people together in a greater sense of brotherhood, not a technology that tends to isolate people or to intrude in interpersonal relationships.

Sociologist Arthur Shustak noted several areas in which the elderly can contribute to insure that ours is, indeed, "a brave new world." He believes older Americans might improve the technology scenario by keeping technology well within limits by keeping "the human element" emphatically on top.

Thursday, March 8, 1984 O&E

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