

'Yuppy-ing' it up in the 1990s

By Susan Steinmueller
staff writer

MANY HAVE CALLED the '90s as the decade of the "yuppie." It was a time when baby boomers — those born between 1946 and 1964 — became "young urban professionals" and flaunted conspicuous consumption in fashion, food and frivolity.

In the 1990s, by their sheer numbers, baby boomers will still remain a large force in determining the direction society takes — nearly half the adults in the U.S. are baby boomers. But it's hard to say what direction that will be.

Looking at current trends, one can say that they will probably be affluent as they move into their peak earning years. They will live in two-income households, and have children later in life. They may also become part of the "sandwich generation" in which they become responsible for caring for children and older parents at the same time.

Because of the "baby bust" — the fact that there were far less people born in the last 20 or so years than in the previous 20 — baby boomers will face challenges in finding services and information traditionally supplied by younger people, such as college students.

Many of these trends were forecasted by local experts who were asked to gaze into the dawning decade and give their opinion on what lies ahead in such areas as fashion, technology and love and marriage. Here's what they predicted.

Technology — Grocery shopping, banking, buying stocks and checking up on news and weather will be just a few of the things that people will be doing from the comfort of their own home computer station in the '90s.

A NEW computer system called Prodigy, introduced to the Detroit market this year, already has put that capability at the fingertips of area residents. A joint venture between IBM and Sears-Roebuck, the service will be as common as the microwave oven or VCR is today, predicts Steven Hein, spokesman for Prodigy Services Co., based in White Plains, N.Y. In fact, it is as convenient as a telephone, with features available for a flat monthly rate, currently around \$10.

"Ever since computers were invented, people have been talking about the way they will make lives easier," Hein said. "We haven't seen that come to pass yet, but now with Prodigy, we see at last something that makes people's lives simpler, easier, and more enjoyable."

The system is easy enough for anyone to learn — "We are aimed at the general public, not the computer hobbyist," Hein said. — and one of its benefits is that it will offset some of the labor shortages of the "baby bust" generation.

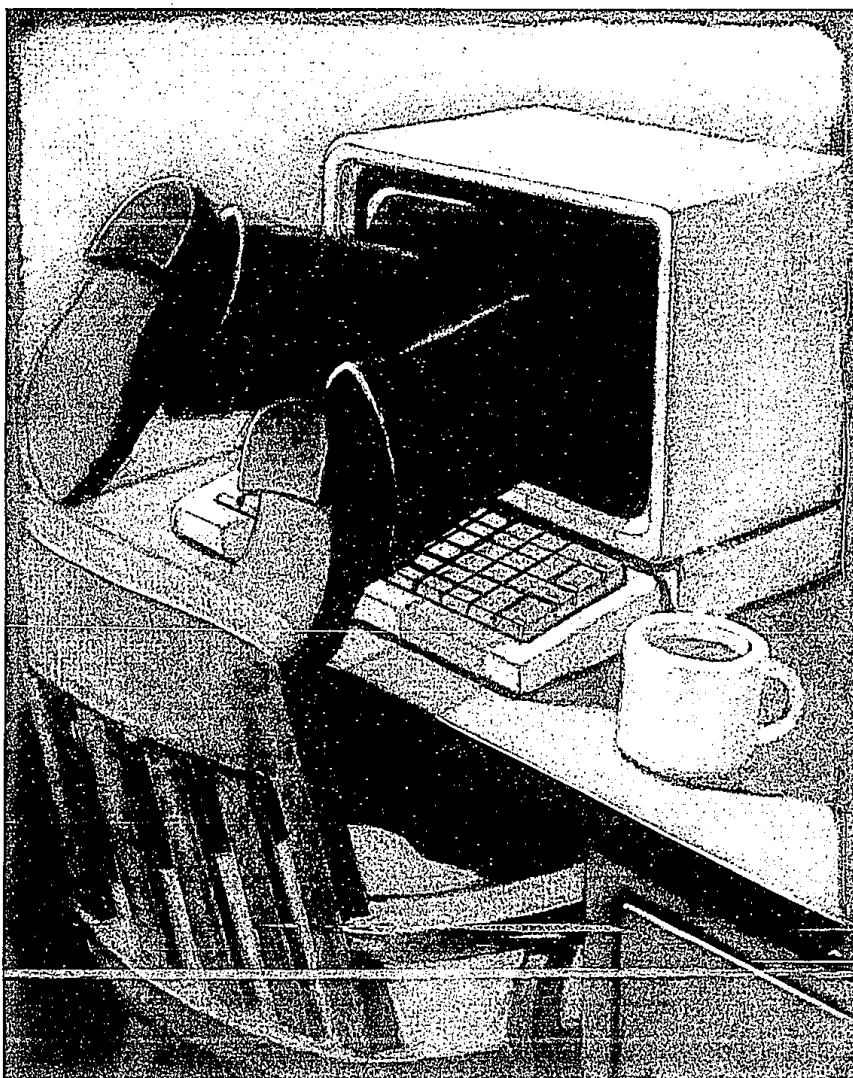
"As the 'baby bust' generation is not going to be able to provide enough services, this will likely end some of the frustration that people feel not being able to find services," Hein said.

AREA RESIDENTS will also become accustomed to even more sophisticated, and yet simplified, technology. For example, more people will be in the movies — even if they are "home movies" — as video cameras become smaller, cheaper and simpler to use.

At Don-Lor Electronics in Livonia, manager Mark Medawar said Sony's new video camera, a third of size of past models and weighing in at 2 pounds, is a popular item. The more prices come down and the more innovations offered, the more the store sells of such items, he said.

And people can also expect to see videos being used more and more, from computer imaging for teeth repair to advertising tools for local chambers of commerce.

Medawar also sees a brisk business in very large television screens and very small portable three- to five-inch screen color sets, with built in video recorders, which use mini cassettes.



And, as most have heard, compact discs are taking over the old vinyl records, which may go the way of the dinosaur by the end of the decade.

The Aging Population — More options in senior health care will be one of the trends seen in the '90s, as the population ages. That's the opinion of Linda Murphy, senior staff aide, Farmington Hills Senior Center.

"I THINK that there is going to be a focus toward using the 'continuum of care,'" she said. People will become more aware of and use other care options before taking a frail elderly relative from their home and placing them in a nursing home. Those options include adult day care, respite care, home health care and services such as Meals on Wheels.

"I think the focus in gerontology right now is to keep people in their homes and communities as long as possible," she said. Many of the services are in place in local communities, but they will be used more.

The increase in the senior population is one reason that alternatives will need to be found. Murphy said the current population of adults over 65 is 12 percent, but is expected to grow to 20 percent by 2010.

Not only is there a good chance that not enough beds will be available in nursing homes, but the cost of nursing homes is high. Such care averages \$25,000 per year currently.

Older people may also choose to retire later as the number of people in the traditional work force, ages 18 to 55, dwindles, she predicted.

"I would see the value of early retirement gradually changing so there are more incentives for older people to stay in the work force," she said. "They will be more appreciated."

Fashion — A key trend predicted by local fashion experts is that comfort will be a priority for the busy "yuppie" generation.

"I think comfort and function are going to become more important as we try to fill our schedules in every

possible minute," said Cheryl Hall, fashion director for Saks Fifth Avenue, Troy.

SYMBOLIC OF that will be the continuing popularity of the sweat suit. While in the '80s, the sweat suit "came out of the locker room and into the street" in the '90s, it will be worn for style as well as comfort.

"Now I think it's getting to the point where they are wearing them because of the comfort not because they have just come from the 'Y,'" Hall said. "That's the trend that I see — comfort with style and function."

At Hiller's Men Store in Rochester, manager Jim Dougherty said that the businessman will only experience small changes in the traditional executive look.

Ties, for instance, are getting slightly wider and there are more patterns, such as paisleys and medallions available. It is becoming more acceptable to wear colored shirts and the trend toward striped shirts will continue. Through the

Bush administration, the navy-gray suits favored by the President favors will be popular as were the brown suits made popular by Ronald Reagan.

The growing popularity of sportswear, however, is the big trend that Dougherty predicts will continue through the '90s.

"PEOPLE ARE looking for comfort and fashion when they are not working. It used to be they would just wear a pair of jeans," he said.

Another change is that cotton and natural fabrics are becoming more sought after, he said. "People appreciate natural fabrics so much more," he said. In the sportswear department, cotton has replaced wool. The thing about cotton is that it is a washable item. We are such a time-oriented society now — the cottons are a lot more functional and you can do more with them."

Environment — Environmental issues, such as recycling and the greenhouse effect, will still remain a

priority issue in the '90s. But the awareness of these issues will increase as state and federal mandates work together toward creating a cleaner planet.

"I think there will be an increase in the changes we are already seeing," said Elizabeth Harris, director of the East Michigan Environmental Council, Birmingham. "Our group receives calls from people all the time, they want to know what they can do, for example, with their used car oil."

The increase in the number of calls in the past years has been remarkable compared to the '70s."

HARRIS is encouraged by the changes she has seen locally, such as cities assuming control of or starting recycling centers and requiring biodegradable bags for lawn trash.

While she is optimistic, however, she still sees the need for change in the '90s on a worldwide level as well as the local.

"For me to be really hopeful, I would want to see a change at the corporate level," she said.

Love, Marriage, Kids — Local experts see that marriage will still be popular — but high divorce rates — today, every one in two marriages is pegged for failure — will continue.

Other trends — parents will be older and career women — will continue to make child care an issue.

"I don't see a return to the home," said Rabbi Sherwin Wine of Birmingham Temple in Farmington and director of the Center for New Thinking. "I don't see how it will be possible economically."

Instead, women will be even more conspicuous in the work place and political life, and marriage may suffer as a result of the increased demands on couples, he predicted. However, "the overwhelming majority of the people will choose to be married, they will simply be married more times."

"I think that children are being born much later now; I think we're going to see older parents," he added. "I think the '90s will be a time when there will be a great focus on child care. The issue now is how to pay for the child care we need."

Rev. Duane Doherty, a Birmingham psychologist and marriage counselor, also sees high divorce rates continuing.

"The alarming statistic is that divorce rate is higher in second marriages," he said.

EMOTIONAL immaturity — not being able to distinguish self-love from self-centeredness and materialism — are cited by Doherty as some of the things that hamper marriages. However, people will continue to reach for the stars in their hopes of a happy marriage, he said.

"Ideals are like stars, we don't reach them, we just use them to chart our course by."

Economy and Employment — "I think probably the thing that is going to mark the '90s nationally and in Michigan is a labor shortage," said Ron Tracy, head of the economics department at Oakland University, Rochester.

A labor shortage has not been seen in the area since the 1960s, but a common sight for suburban residents today are help wanted signs in retail stores, many splinting up the offer with attractive benefits packages. Shortages will mean that wages for those service jobs can be expected to increase, he said. Tracy has a good news-bad news forecast as regards the local economy.

THE GOOD news is that the area has been "growing nicely" since 1982, when the recession is generally considered to have ended, and he sees that growth continuing.

The bad news is that he predicts a recession.

"We have had seven years of growth that was unexpected as a result, we will have a recession," he said.

Tracy predicted a recession by the mid 1990s, but it won't affect the area as much as the recession of the early 1980s did, he said.

Volebeats: Band to watch in '90

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Hysterical Narcotics. Both Murphy and Niemienski joined the band in the past year. Filling out the roster is fiddle player Rebecca Kaplan and Smith.

"People know each other too well," said Kaplan, a 1986 graduate of Birmingham Seaholm High School, "and there's bickering at times."

So noted. As Jeff Oakes and Smith are talking about the band, Oakes just happens to ask his creative partner if one of the guitars is tuned. Smith says no, setting the two in a heated squabble. The two have also been known to debate on stage about what song to perform next.

Brian Oakes shakes his head and pipes in between the verbal combatants and said, "This is the

Volebeats right here."

CREATIVE DIFFERENCES serve as the AC and DC of the band. The face of the Volebeats has changed through the years. Al Oakes was in the band as was Terry Rohm. Both are credited on the group's recently released album, "Ain't No Joke" (Relapse).

Rohm was considered one of the creative forces of the Volebeats in the early going. He left the band a year ago. Rohm's departure is a touchy subject with Jeff Oakes, who politely declines to talk about it.

Out with Oakes and Rohm, in with Kaplan, Niemienski and Murphy. The lineup has been solid since.

The addition of Niemienski and Murphy brought the experiences of being in other relatively suc-

cessful bands. Kaplan's arrival on violin further enhanced the group's pursuit of a backwoods beat.

A classically-trained violinist, Kaplan went on to play in the Layabouts and Don't Look Now Jug Band. She knew of the Volebeats. Friends said she should try to join. She called and was invited to one of the rehearsals. She's been there since.

WITHOUT BEING showy, Kaplan's violin provides the perfect texture to the Volebeats' country-fied music. And like the other relatively newcomers, she's able to provide some insight on what makes the Volebeats a shade different than other local bands.

Another thing band members can agree on is that Jeff Oakes serves as chief bottleneck and

lion tamer for the outfit.

"He keeps it together," Kaplan said. "He's the one who fixes all the instruments. He's the one who organizes practices. He makes up the files . . . There's too much pressure on him because of it."

Jeff Oakes agrees, perhaps explaining his spat with Smith. Once on stage, he and his Volebeat mates perform like a family on the front porch. Guitars Niemienski and Smith provide the verve when necessary, but the rest of band keeps in step.

Jeff Oakes sings in the heartfelt stylings of Hank Williams without a wasted effort or movement. It's obvious they don't carry the music as much as the music carries them.

"A lot of the earlier stuff has a lot of heart to it," said Jeff Oakes.



Brian Oakes thumbs along on stand-up bass.

DA HANSEN