

Who's doing windows?

New program revolutionizes personal computing

Welcome to the Computer Insider. The Computer Insider is a bit different from the computer columns with which you may be familiar.

Here we aren't going to provide arcane technical information full of jargon. We're just going to discuss ways in which you can use that personal computer sitting on your desk a little bit better, even if you wish someone would take the thing and toss it in front of a truck.

You might say this is a computer column for people who don't care one way or the other about computers but are forced to spend eight hours a day using one. Just so we don't get off track, every so often, I'll reach into the mailbag and answer a few of your questions.

Send 'em here to the paper. They'll find me. Enough of that. Let's get to it.

Should you be doing windows?

If you or your boss has read just about anything in the computer mags lately — heck, if you were watching CNN when the announcement was made — you've heard the



the computer insider

Peter Stephenson

hype about Microsoft's Windows 3.0. "This thing is gonna revolutionize computing, you bet." At least that's what the pundits all say. The big question from the perspective of a lot of business computer users seems to be, "huh?"

I spend a fair amount of time on the Prodigy service, and there's a lot of talk about Windows 3.0 there. Most of the talk is really just confusion.

There's a whole bunch of head scratching going on about Windows these days. Even so, in the less than three months Windows 3.0 has been on the street, Billion dollar Bill Gates, the wonder boy at the helm of Microsoft, claims to have shipped almost a million copies. McDonald's can't even sell Big Macs that fast. There must be a reason.

It turns out that there is, and it's a very good reason. If you have the

right personal computer, Microsoft Windows 3.0 will make your computing a lot easier. I know, people have been telling you that since you got the thing and nobody's delivered yet. The only caveat is that you need at least a 286 PC with a megabyte of memory. You really should have a 386 with about three megabytes. But there are a lot those PCs out in the business world. And, with prices for hardware coming down, there'll be a lot more.

So what to do?

Unlike most of the stuff that the technocrats want you to add to your PC, Windows 3.0 actually simplifies using the machine. Practically all programs under Windows run from neat little pictures on the screen called icons.

You don't even need to select from a menu. Just take your mouse, move

its arrow on your screen to the picture of the application program you want and click the mouse button twice. That's all there is to it.

There's lots more Windows can do, too. For example, it can let you use several programs at the same time.

That means that a program with a lot of work to do won't make you wait while it churns. You just move on to another application and let Windows and your PC do the rest in the background.

Windows also lets you move text from one program to another with its clipboard. Look up something in a database, put the info in the clipboard, and move it to your word processors. All with a few clicks of the mouse button.

Yep, Windows 3.0 probably will revolutionize personal computing. If your boss brings Windows 3.0 to you and says you're gonna love it, give it a shot.

Peter Stephenson is a computer consultant, lecturer, nationally published columnist and author who lives in Rochester Hills. Questions may be addressed to him c/o The Observer & Eccentric, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

Consumers promises stable heating prices

Despite soaring oil prices, Consumers Power Co. says its natural gas customers can anticipate stable home-heating prices and ample supplies this winter.

The Jackson-based utility, serving many Oakland, northwestern Wayne and Livingston suburbs, has 100 percent of its fuel requirements secured by firm, long-term supply contracts with interstate pipeline suppliers and producers, according to Michael G. Morris, executive vice president for natural gas and marketing.

"These agreements protect our customers against historically uncertain energy prices which have rapidly increased for other home heating fuels," Morris told a Lansing news conference Monday.

Consumers Power's gas customers can expect costs similar to last winter — a 22-percent decrease from five years ago. For a normal month this winter, a typical CP residential gas user will pay \$112.81, based on consumption of 25,000 cubic feet. CP serves 3.4 million Michigan residents.

Home heating oil and propane consumers are seeing sharp cost increases, and Morris said the company is receiving 80 to 90 requests per day for natural gas service — double the rate of the same time last year.

CP's large natural gas storage capacity allows it to buy gas during off-season periods, when the cost of gas decreases.

Local residents serve charity

Larry Michael of Birmingham and Betty Kiser of Farmington Hills are among the officers recently elected to the Eastern Seal Society of Oakland County.

Michael was elected vice president and Kiser secretary during the organization's 44th annual meeting

Sept. 26 at Larco's Restaurant in Troy.

Richard Mintz of Royal Oak and Jeffrey Sutherland of Oxford were elected president and treasurer, respectively. Mintz and Sutherland were also elected to the board of directors.

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