

BUILDING & BUSINESS

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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1993

BUSINESS SUBURBAN STARS

Suburban Stars highlights promotions, transfers, hirings and other key personnel moves within the suburban business community. Send a brief biographical summary — including the towns of residency and employment and a black-and-white photo, if desired — to: Suburban Stars, Building & Business, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 30251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150. Our fax number is 313-591-7273.

Ell V. Berger of Birmingham was installed as president of the Great Lakes Association of Orthodontists, part of the American Association of Orthodontists. He is an assistant professor in the Department of Orthodontics at the University of Michigan.



Berger

William J. Austin of Livonia, Michigan Credit Union League chairman, was elected to the Credit Union National Association's nine-member executive committee. He's chief executive officer of Livonia Community Credit Union.



Austin

Jill E. Woodward of Birmingham has been named public relations director for Detroit Symphony Orchestra Hall. She comes from Olympia Arenas Inc., where she directed all national, corporate and event PR activities.



Woodward

Maria Falck, store manager of Tiffany & Co. at the Somerset Collection in Troy, has earned the diamonds certificate of the Gemological Institute of America. Falck, a Troy

See STARS, 4F

Architecture links fine arts, high tech

■ Lawrence Tech offers an innovative program in architectural illustration. Graduates will be able to merge art skills with computer technology.

BY MARY RODRIGUE
STAFF WRITER



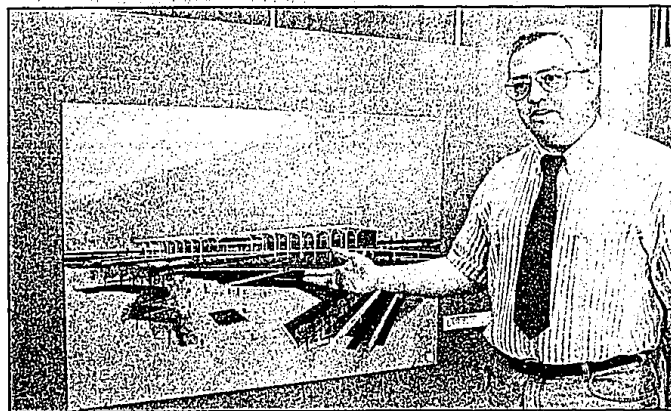
Combining technology with fine arts, Lawrence Technological University is offering architecture students a major in illustration in a first of its kind in the nation degree program.

"This College of Architecture is unique in its ability to attract faculty with strong graphics backgrounds," said Harold Linton, professor and assistant dean of Lawrence Tech's College of Architecture and Design.

"Lawrence Tech has a strong group of registered architects who are practicing illustrators and architects who can draw. This program has grown naturally out of the talents of the faculty."

Linton, who lives in Farmington Hills and has been on the faculty of the Southfield campus for 20 years, conceived the program with input from some of the nation's top architectural illustrators.

Converging on campus in spring 1992 were Sydney Mead, a Los Angeles entertainment industry mogul; Paul Stevenson Oles, co-founder of the American Society of Architectural Perspectivists (ASAP); William Mitchell, dean of the College of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Frank Costantini, former ASAP president from Boston; Richard Roehon, a local



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Learning tool: Lawrence Tech Professor Harold Linton points to an architectural illustration of the King Fahd Terminal in Saudi Arabia, produced by Kenneth Divito, a LTU faculty member and an architectural illustrator.

illustrator with a national reputation; Bob Ferrier, professor of architecture and illustration at the University of Texas; Harvey Ferrero, a cutting-edge local designer and illustrator with a national reputation; and Dick Howard, a major illustrator with Howard and Associates of Toledo.

"I presented our plan," said Linton, himself a fine arts graduate from Syracuse University. "It was

reviewed and lead to coordination of technical skills and artistry mingling together early in the students' years."

National surveys of large and small architectural firms, public agencies and related industries were conducted to gauge the melding of technology and art.

"The field of illustration in architecture has grown with the leaps made each year in computer print-

ing, ability and speed," Linton said. "I think architecture has a big role in helping the public understand the environment."

"The students having a very strong background in both design and illustration is an advantage too. When industry says, they can be visualization specialists. They can switch gears in the field."

See ARCHITECTURE, 3F

Pacesetter:
Alex J. Violassi, Virtual Services president, has helped guide the computer services firm to a place among the nation's fastest-growing, privately owned companies.



JIM HENDER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Virtual Services helps suppliers computerize

BY DOUG FUNKE
STAFF WRITER

Virtual Services, headquartered in Rochester Hills, supplies computer add-ons for automotive suppliers.

The company, started in 1984, reported revenues last year of \$6 million compared to \$3 million in 1991. With that performance, Virtual Services ranked in the top 500 — 378th, to be exact — in Inc. Magazine's annual listing of America's fastest growing private companies.

Alex J. Violassi has been president of Virtual Services since 1987. The company now employs 65 and anticipates doubling revenue again this year to \$12 million.

Virtual Services is part of an umbrella group that also includes Virtual Technology, Virtual Leasing, Virtual Soft and Virtual Circuits. Virtual Technology cracked the Inc. 500 in 1988.

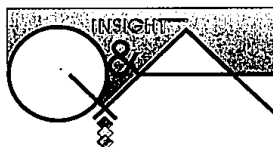
Violassi declined to discuss profit numbers, but did address several other issues during a recent interview. Following are edited excerpts.

What exactly does Virtual Services provide?

We do CAD/CAM integration and support to auto suppliers. We support equipment, software applications. We do the installation and education. We put the package together and sell it as one.

We provide a package of services. There are many spokes in a wheel. Only one is hardware. We supply the glue that puts it all together.

There's a thousand auto suppliers in southeast Michigan. We probably do business with 700 on an ongoing basis.



We hear about automotive suppliers getting squeezed by manufacturers to cut their costs. How competitive are your systems and can suppliers really afford your services?

They have to. It's mandated. To quote a job, you almost have to have a (computer-aided design) system to read a tape to find out what a part looks like.

Auto companies are trying to shorten the time from conceptual design to a car rolling off the line and the way to do that is standardize everybody on a common system.

Four CAD/CAM terminals three years ago was a half-million-dollar investment. Today, you can buy all four for under \$100,000. You've had advancement in computer technology which has spurred competitive pricing. Now, people who couldn't afford it can.

So how do you stand out from your competitors?

Our biggest asset, biggest marketing tool — and you hear that all the time but I mean it — is our people. We're in a service business. We have a talented group of engineering people. We have our reputation and that's it.

See VIRTUAL, 5F

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