

Techno-age appliances, gadgets now available

BY JAMES AND MORRIS CAREY
FOR AP WEEKLY FEATURES

We recently returned from the 2002 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, which is a widely covered trade show.

Jam-packed exhibits filled three mammoth halls and most attendees set their sights on companies that unveiled all the latest and highly anticipated "electro-techno" wonders in television, audio and computer equipment.

We first went to the areas we know are of special interest to homeowners — appliances.

Imagine combining a refrigerator and an oven. The folks at Duck Creek Energy did. They added space-age, mini-refrigeration (developed by NASA) to existing oven and microwave technology, along with remote access and control through personal computers and Web-

enabled cell phones. The result — a prototype refrigerator/oven worthy of *The Jetsons*.

Soon, your oven will keep food a cool 38 degrees all day until you've pre-programmed it to switch over to the cook mode. And when you come home, you'll have a hot home-cooked meal ready and waiting.

Working late at the office, stuck in traffic, changes of plans? No problem. Just change commands, by computer or phone, and it will be ready when you are. While not yet on the market, it soon will be.

For more info on when and where, call (440) 838-5189.

Energy conservation also was featured, with more products carrying and promoting the now familiar "Energy Star" label. To date, consumers have purchased more than 630 million electronic products with that label.

Last year, it saved enough electricity to power 10 million homes and reduced air pollution equivalent to that of 10 million cars.

Go to www.energystar.gov for more info.

Other nifty gizmos and gadgets eliminated the TeleZapper, which eliminates annoying telemarketer calls. Just plug it into any phone jack and plug in your phone line.

Nine of 10 telemarketing calls are dialed by computer. Now when you (or your answering machine) pick up such a call, it detects it in less than a second and "snaps" it with a reverse signal that says your number is disconnected.

Your number then is removed from their list, which means they won't be calling again and your number won't be passed on to others. Before you know it (for about \$50), these annoying calls

will just about stop.

For more info call (888) 217-9792 or go to www.telezapper.com.

Another neat item was a mini video camera that looks like a spotlight bulb. It's good for added outdoor security.

Now when something goes bump in the night, you can see what's out there (whether or not you also have a motion-sensor controlled light fixture).

Just screw the SecureView light bulb camera into any socket. The video signal travels over your home's existing electrical wiring without additional drilling or cables.

Plug the small decoder box into a wall socket and connect the video cable to your television set. These bulb cameras are easily relocated and also have built-in infrared to see in the dark. Both outdoor PAR-38 and inter-

ior R-30 style bulbs are available.

For more info, go to www.wawa-views.com or call (888) 727-7388.

Perhaps of greatest interest were the model "concept" homes showing how many of today's newest technologies are being brought together to make our lives better, more entertaining and more efficient.

One was the CEDIA house by the Custom Electronic Design & Installation Association.

Here we experienced the "e-home" with mini-LCD video monitors. Touch screen controls and keypads for data entry were strategically placed throughout.

The result? Vast programming capability that fully automates everything from heating and cooling to the elimination of tedious repetitive tasks like pre-setting household lighting for various needs and closing or opening drapes at cer-

tain hours.

The CEDIA house, check-full-of-small, wall-mounted or flip-down screens for television entertainment, visual monitoring and entering control commands for whole-house efficiency and optimum energy savings, soon will be the norm.

For more, call (800) 689-5329 or go to www.cedia.org.

Plan ahead, wherever and whenever you can, for all the wonderful stuff that's just around the corner. When remodeling or building, use upgraded wiring (at least CAT-3 or CAT-5 cable) and install conduit (electrical metallic tubing) so you can fish in new wires without tearing up walls.

Wiring today? Think tomorrow. For more home improvement tips and information, visit our Web site at www.onthehouse.com

Doors also carry efficiency ratings

Your home's entry doors allow more than people to enter and exit the house. They can let cold air out in the summer and warm air out during the winter months.

Even though less than five percent of the energy loss in a house is from an entry door, some are better than others where leaking away energy dollars is concerned.

Homeowners looking for a more energy-efficient door can find them in three kinds of materials — wood, with a lower energy-efficiency R rating of 6; steel, with a R rating of 8-11; and Fiberglas, the highest energy-efficiency R rating of up to 16.

Homeowners, however, will have to decide between energy efficiency and aesthetics.

Wood doors look nice, but have the lowest energy-efficiency rating and can warp.

Steel doors offer great strength but can dent.

Fiberglass doors have the highest energy ratings and can with-



Larry Kaufman

stand dents. Once they're painted, it's often difficult to tell a Fiberglas door from a steel door.

Doorlites, or window sections, in another or consideration when buying a door. Doorlites that are pre-installed at the factory are the most energy efficient, while those that are cut out by the dealer are least efficient.

The only disadvantage of pre-installed doorlites is that if the glass breaks (very unlikely), the whole door has to be replaced, which is more expensive.

And while doorlites may add an aesthetic element to doors, they will reduce the R value to about 7 for steel or Fiberglas models.

Doors also are rated for how long they can withstand fire. Typical homes feature doors

that can hold off fire for 20 minutes. Businesses generally use 90-minute doors, although I've seen some approved 90-minute doors that employ a wood frame, which negates the ability to fend off fire.

One last thing to consider is the sweep, or bottom plate on the door, which is designed to prevent leaks at the bottom of the door. Some have pre-set sweeps, but most common are adjustable sweeps because they allow dealers to adjust them to eliminate air leakage.

Other similar options are a door shoe, a vinyl gasket threshold and an interlocking metal threshold.

Just remember your mom was right when she told you to always close the door behind you.

Larry Kaufman of DTE Energy's Residential and Small Business Marketing group has conducted more than 60 energy savings workshops for the utility and is an expert advisor on home energy efficiency.

When older parents join household

FROM HOME SERVICE STORE
FOR AP WEEKLY FEATURES

Elderly parents sometimes move into that new home as permanent guests.

When that kind of reverse relocation happens, adult children become part-time caregivers, landlords and companions as well as full-time children. It's not an easy situation, but it can be dealt with.

According to a firm that oversees remodeling projects necessary to ready homes for live-in parents, adult children can undertake a number of projects to provide a safe and secure environment while assuring the least interruption to family life.

Think safety first.

■ Install exterior handrails to all steps into the home. This includes front and back doors, and garage entries. In some cases you might want railings on both sides of steps.

■ Install bright exterior lights above all entryways.

■ Make certain interior stairs are well-lighted.

■ Non-skid steps reduce the chance for slippage. Low-cost adhesive strips are available.

■ Carpet interior stairs and hallways.

■ Place emergency numbers near a phone installed in the parents room.

■ Fire and carbon dioxide alarms should be in working order.

■ Railings are a good idea in showers, bathtubs and along walls.

■ Install bathroom rugs with rubberized bottoms. They lessen falls.

■ Place, non-skid strips in tubs and showers.

■ Add lamps to the parents' room for extra light, but keep cords out of the way.

■ If possible, locate parent rooms on the first floor to mini-

mize use of stairs.

Family dynamics are a significant issue. The schedules of you and your children will differ markedly from those of your parents. Consider adapting your parents' quarters to allow them as much privacy as possible.

A small bathroom, television set, telephone and even small refrigerators offer parents a semblance of self-reliance without excluding them from family life.

Of course, every home has unique challenges as it is reeded for aging parents. Visit with local contractors for advice on heating and cooling systems, insulating rooms against noise and other ideas you might not think about.

Consult seniors' agencies that offer insights into your particular situation. Visit your local library for books such as *The Aging Parent Handbook* and *How to Care for Aging Parents*.

Read the Eccentric every Thursday and Sunday

Delinquencies decrease

(AP) — The percentage of Americans behind on home mortgage payments decreased in the last quarter of 2001, an industry group reported Monday.

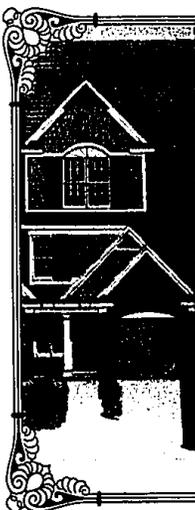
The unexpected drop backs the emerging view that the national economy is on the mend, though that assessment could still prove slightly premature, said Douglas Duncan, chief economist for the Mortgage Bankers Association of America, which released the survey.

"It's a good sign," Duncan said. "It supports the view that the economy is expanding." He attributed the decrease in delinquencies in part to lower energy prices and wave of home loan refinancings that have put extra cash into homeowners' budgets.

The aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks also may have contributed to a temporary increase in short-term delinquencies in the third quarter that now is abating, Duncan said.

Mortgage delinquencies were a seasonally adjusted 4.65 percent in the October-December period, down from 4.87 percent in the third quarter, but up from 4.6 percent in the fourth quarter of 2000, the group's latest national survey showed.

A mortgage is considered delinquent when a payment is at least 30 days past due. Delinquencies decreased for all three home mortgage types — conventional, for which the delinquency rate was 3 percent; insured by the Federal Housing Administration, 10.97 percent; and insured by the Veterans Administration, 7.7 percent.



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