

Oakland Schools center protects data security

By ROSE WEBER

It's a little like a Mission Impossible set. Huge banks of computers spew out folds of paper while television monitors eye other computers several floors below.

But looks aren't the only thing the data processing center of Oakland County Schools has in common with the spy series.

Words like password, code to change password, illegal command and illegal entry roll off the tongue of John Skewes, director. Secrecy is the watchword.

When the Birmingham school board recently decided to share the computer of Oakland County Schools, the only real concern voiced by board members was security of data.

In Skewes' opinion there is no one more dedicated to security of information than the operators and personnel at the data processing center.

SKEWES explained that they do not permit damaging data to be stored on tape. Only verifiable facts, not opinions, are on file.

When a school district first uses the computer, it establishes an access code word with the computer in an exact location on the data processing card.

The next use of the computer must include the name of the district and the code word in the exact location or the computer prints "illegal command, illegal entry" twice and turns off.

And there is a password to change the password. If an operator gets sick or goes on vacation and forgets to tell his superior a changed code, the superintendent can have access to the computer by using the change code procedure," said Skewes.

The password can be any combination of eight letters, and there have been some interesting ones such as "cold duck."

HE ADMITS the computer sometimes gives them trouble. Passwords that are not used often are sometimes forgotten, said Skewes who admits to having that problem.

"Then there was the time the

state police came to arrest the computer for making obscene phone calls. They forgot to change the phone number for one bank and it kept calling this little old lady and beeping at her," he said.

In spite of the lighter moments, keeping records by data processing is serious business and the center treats it as such.

No one except the district super-

tendent may approve access to the files. This includes everyone from the FBI down to school district program developers.

"If, say, a reading consultant wanted the names of students doing poor work in reading, we would tell her no, and send her back to get the information from the superintendent," Skewes said.

Even testing information, ac-

ording to Dr. Joseph Messana, measurement and guidance director, is restricted.

"If we violate this faith even once, we are out of business. In six years we never have and we aren't going to start now," said Skewes.

HE IS certain that legislation will be enacted relative to privacy of data in data processing proce-

dures. At the center the operators work for at least one year in another area before entering the processing department.

The files where the actual information is stored are in a locked first-floor wing. It may be entered only by punching keys in a coded sequence.

No people work there and it is

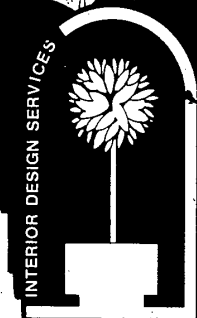
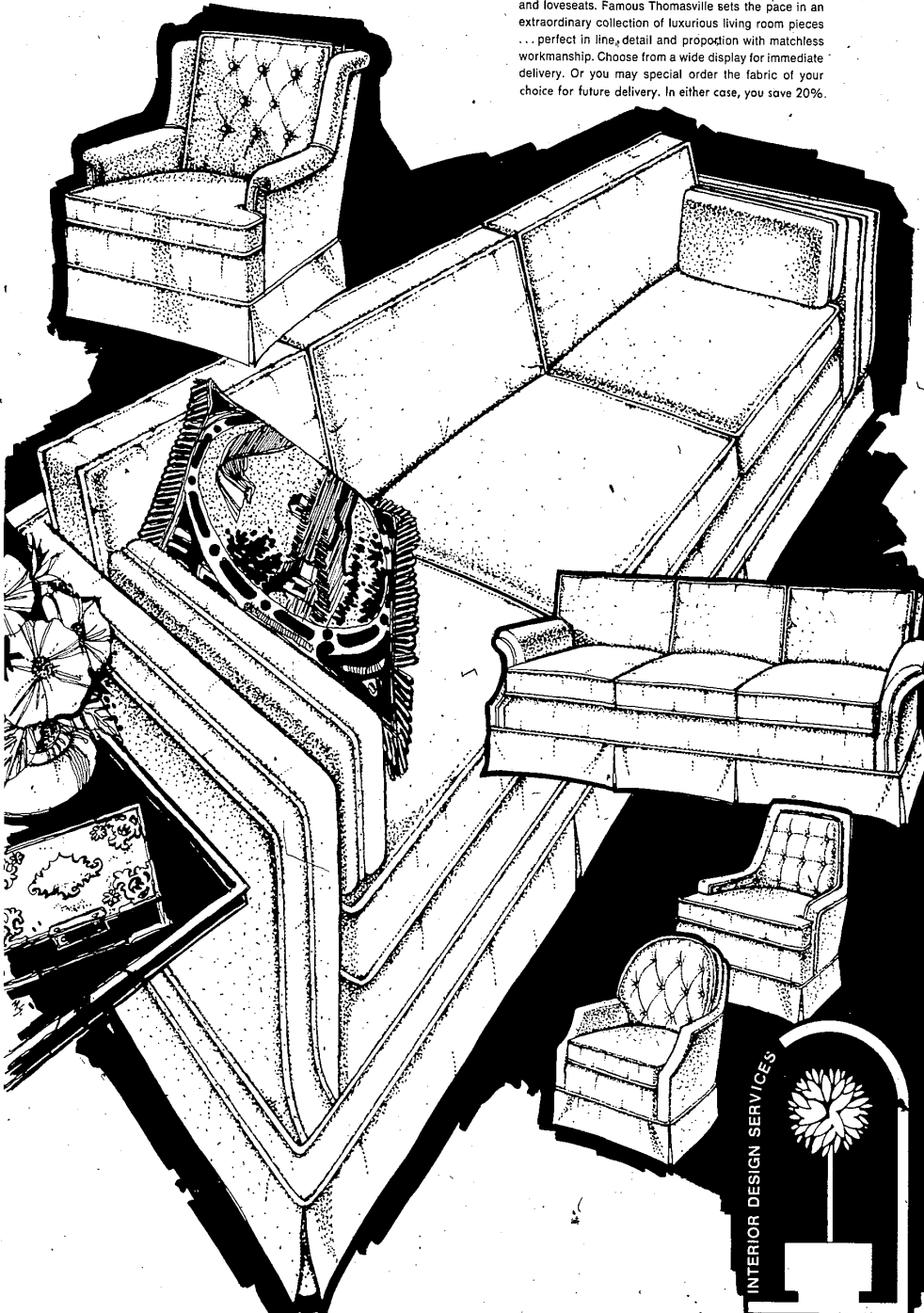
constantly monitored by closed circuit television cameras. Additional cameras are being installed so larger areas can be kept under surveillance.

"We treat the district's files as if we were only the custodian of its physical property. The information belongs to the district exclusively and no one else. That's our policy," Skewes said.

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Marathon to benefit handicapped

Shoelather properly applied in Oakland County and down Michigan's east coast from Mackinac Bridge to Pontiac can be the key to a new rehabilitation service planned for the home-bound handicapped of the county.

That's how honorary chairman Kelly Burke of the "Mighty-Mac-to-Pontiac" 99-mile marathon sums up the Thursday (Aug. 8) to Saturday event.

"The Pontiac Civitan Club is sponsoring the marathon," the WXYZ-TV newsmen said. "to focus public attention on the special needs of the home-bound handicapped and to provide funds to solve the problem."

He said the program for the home-bound handicapped will be conducted by New Horizons of Oakland County, a 10-year-old, non-profit vocational rehabilitation agency supported by United Foundation. The proposed program would benefit from the marathon. Burke said, through contributions being solicited on the basis of "so much contributed for each mile completed" by the runners.

"We have an experienced marathon team that is ready to go," Burke said. "But we are lacking in the all-important matter of getting pledges of contributions. We simply have not found enough volunteer solicitors to seek pledges throughout the county."

Any citizen of the county 14 years or older may volunteer to solicit pledges by calling "marathon" at 338-6176 in Pontiac. He said pledges also would be received at the same phone number.

The 15-man Pontiac Marathon Team will cover the Mackinac to Pontiac distance with each member running an hour at a time in rotation around the clock.

Realty exam classes set

Real estate license preparation courses are offered in two four-day accelerated sessions by Oakland University's Division of Continuing Education just prior to the September state realty examinations.

Salespeople License Preparation is Aug. 19-22. Brokers License Preparation is Aug. 26-29. All sessions are held in the Oakland Center Building on the campus in Rochester.

As a special aid for those preparing for the examination, a one-day math refresher on Aug. 23 covers prorating taxes and insurance, figuring mortgages discounts and closing costs and a brief review of basic math.

Advance registration and payment is required. Call 377-3124.