



# Solutions

Computing • Personal Finance • Consumer Issues • Workplace

## Freshmen phone home

Advice for parents and new college students about shopping around for deals on long distance plans.

D3

## SMALL BUSINESS

# HVAC zones create office comfort

New systems more pleasing, more efficient

By Erika D. Smith  
Beacon Journal staff writer

Her cubicle is too cold, so she turns up the heat.

His cubicle is too hot, so he turns it down.

No one's cubicle is just right. Sound familiar?

Every day, employees across the country come to work armed with gloves, fans and layered clothing for the thermostat war. The daily battles can be heated or humorous, and often, the biggest casualty isn't frost-bitten fingers, but energy efficiency.

Unfortunately, there's no universal solution to this problem. No heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system can please all people all the time.

"Everyone's comfort envelope is a little different and everyone wears different clothing," said Brian Fiegen, a manager of applications engineering for Trane.

In general, women are more likely to shiver at the office than men. Women have less body mass than men, meaning they have more surface area relative to their size so they have more opportunity to shed heat, according to Dr. Alice Pomidor, head of the geriatrics department at Akron General Medical Center.

But it's not just gender that affects a person's thermal equilibrium. Race, weight, age and

Please see **HVAC, D2**



LEW STAMP/Akron Beacon Journal

Richard Lubinski, a consultant with Think Energy Management Inc., helps clients such as the Sheraton Suites in Cuyahoga Falls manage energy efficiently. Zones of control are hooked up to a building automation system that manages everything about the atmosphere in the building, from the temperature to the amount of ventilation.



SHOUN A. HILL/Knight Ridder/Tribune

Lori Abraham, a 38-year-old legal secretary, may not have sick days but she raves about the "paid time off" program her Orlando, Fla., law firm introduced in January 2000.

## WORKPLACE

# Companies drop sick days

Many employers switch to paid-time-off programs that combine sick time, vacation, personal leave

By Harry Wessel  
Orlando Sentinel

**ORLANDO, FLA.:** Lori Abraham doesn't get any paid sick days, even though she has worked at her firm for 16 years.

She's not complaining. Instead, the 38-year-old Gray-Harris legal secretary raves about the "paid time off" program her law firm introduced in January 2000.

Under the program, there are no sick, vacation or personal-leave days. Instead, the days are lumped together in a "paid time off bank" to be used for whatever reason she chooses.

For Abraham, a wife and mother of an 11-month-old son, the paid-time-off bank has

meant more time with her family, and more flexibility when planning that time.

"It's the greatest plan. I don't know of anybody here who doesn't like it," said Abraham, who annually receives 27 days of PTO, corporate shorthand for "paid time off."

Such testimonies are becoming commonplace as paid-time-off programs proliferate. About two-thirds of U.S. employers now offer them, compared with one-third of employers who reported doing so in 1999, according to the Society for Human Resource Management's annual benefits survey.

There are many variations

Please see **Sick, D3**

## PERSONAL FINANCE

# Partial help against identity theft

Credit-reporting services reduce the effect of fraud on you, but only partly

By Andrea Coombes  
CBS MarketWatch

**SAN FRANCISCO:** The ads are everywhere: "Get a free credit report when you sign up for a credit-monitoring service for 30 days!"

There's no question free credit reports are useful, but some say the credit-reporting services that go with it - usually regular e-mail alerts on your credit report to help you detect fraud quickly - aren't comprehensive enough, and are too costly for many consumers.

Still, with identity theft increasing at exponential rates,

Americans appear willing to pay for solutions. Sixteen percent of American consumers in a recent survey said they had purchased a privacy-protection product to help avoid identity theft.

"It takes on average well over a year before people learn they've been a victim of identity theft," said Alan Westin, president of the Center for Social & Legal Research, a nonprofit group that commissioned the survey.

"If you buy these products you're much more likely to learn very quickly that something is going on," Westin said.

Based on an average annual

price of \$75, some say these products represent a \$2.5 billion business.

While most experts agree that frequent credit checks are important, some say they should be free. "The more often you check your credit, the quicker you're going to detect if you're a victim, so credit monitoring is useful," said Beth Givens, director of the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse [www.privacyrights.org/](http://www.privacyrights.org/).

"But I really question the need for consumers to have to pay for such a product," she said.

Currently, those who are un-

Please see **Credit, D2**

## Resources on the Internet

For more information on consumer practices that can help prevent identity theft, try the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse

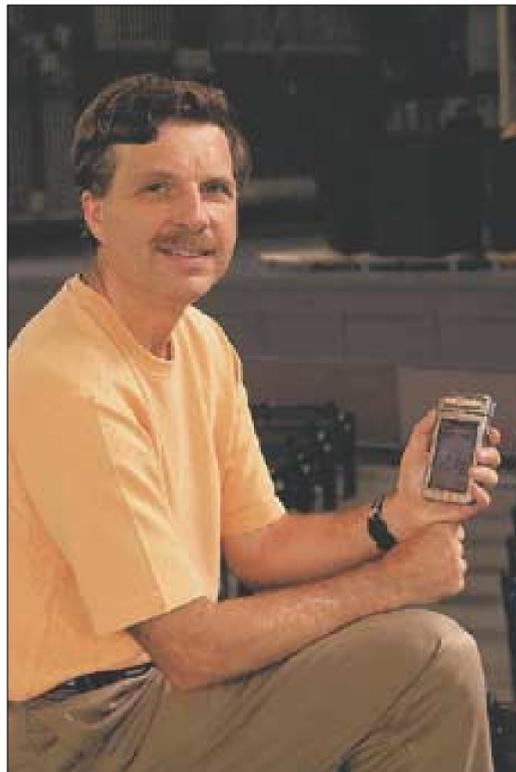
[www.privacyrights.org/](http://www.privacyrights.org/)

The Identity Theft Resource Center

[www.idtheftcenter.org/](http://www.idtheftcenter.org/)

FightIdentityTheft.com

[www.fightidentitytheft.com/](http://www.fightidentitytheft.com/)



JIM McKNIGHT/Associated Press

Roland Valliere has a hand-held computer that contains a video introduction and listening notes for a performance of Igor Stravinsky's *Suite from the Firebird*.

## TECHNOLOGY

# Hand electronic device helps demystify Mozart

Testing being conducted on Concert Companion in an effort to make classical music popular with more folks

By May Wong  
Associated Press

**SAN JOSE, CALIF.:** In an age when the Internet provides lightning-fast answers and life can be a blur of accelerated events, the symphony remains a sanctuary. Audiences are expected to sit down at concerts, calmly flip through the program notes, then hush.

Trouble is, only a third of the audience really understands what's going on. The rest stay ashamedly mum, and try to make whatever sense they can of the intricate layers of music.

All that may change with a new hand-held electronic music guide that tracks a concert in real time.

The Concert Companion is still being tested but is already generating buzz in the classical music world. It may ring a sour note with traditionalists. But it could also boost music appreciation for concertgoers who can't tell adagio from a mezzo-soprano.

Conceived by former Kansas City

Symphony executive Roland Valliere, the Concert Companion displays a sort of musical road map during a performance, cuing users' ears for, say, the oboes, muted cellos, or double basses. Users can also switch to more detailed content, reading, for example, that Igor Stravinsky was 26 when he wrote "The Firebird," a Russian fairy tale of good versus evil.

Consider it Haydn in your hand, Mozart for the masses.

A musician at the back of the hall wirelessly turns the devices' digital pages from a laptop. Users can turn off the backlit devices at any time.

The gadget has been tested by small groups at four performances, including a concert at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center in upstate New York. So far, Valliere is using off-the-shelf Sony Clie hand-held computers for prototypes, but the idea is to develop dedicated Concert Companion devices - something

Please see **Device, D3**