

Home & Design

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Section H

Let your house do the talking

It obeys your every wish: 'Heat the tub'

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Some time soon, says a South Florida home builder, you will walk up to the front door and tell the house you're home.

Don't fumble in the dark for the keys. Say, "I'm home." Let the computer do the rest.

The elderly will hear a stern voice over speakers a few times a day. "It's time for your medicine," the house will say. A few minutes later, "It's past time — take your medicine now." A few minutes later, the computer will say, "the hell with you, I'm calling the police," as it will if your heartbeat slows, or you haven't taken the mail out of the box.

This is the house that Andrew Allocco built. Allocco, 39, is president of Better Homes Construction Services, located near Dadeland. He has opened a new division of the company — the Computer House division.

Allocco, armed with nine construction licenses and a knack for hardware and software, has made his house talk. Computer talk isn't new, but Allocco's house is. His

house converses with the owner — and runs the house via voice commands.

The Pinecrest home, Allocco says, is the first to be both computer-controlled and voice-activated.

The house, just off Old Cutler Road, does quite a bit. But, Allocco says future houses will do even more. He and his wife, a real estate broker, are going to build homes from scratch to accommodate computers.

The houses will care for the handicapped and needy, catch burglars and hold onto them, cook the dinner, store an entertainment library, as well as run air conditioning, draperies and solar panels on the roof. The houses of the future, says Allocco, will interact with robot servants, which happens to be his next project.

The price for this, he admits, will not be cheap in the beginning.

Cost hard to guess

"Our clients aren't going to be poor, at least for a while. The cost is hard to guess at — it would depend on the existing structure and how much somebody wants the computer to do — we would be starting somewhere around \$40,000."

For this, homeowners will be trained to use the terminals and wireless microphones. And, the computer won't listen to just anybody.

"We map your voice like a key," says Allocco. He demonstrates. "Announce," he tells his home.

"Yes, Master, how can I help you?"

"Family room light," says Allocco.

"What do you want me to do with the family room light?"

"Dim it," Allocco tells the machine.

"The family room light is now dimmed," he is told. When a stranger tries the same commands, the computer won't oblige.

Alarms can be turned on, or reset. The pool filter is turned on or off. The air conditioning is altered. Allocco can call his home and talk to the computer, telling it to turn up the hot tub because he's on his way home from work.

The computer can be made to tell you how many people are in the house, through infrared heat sensors. If there's one more than there are supposed to be, it calls an alarm company and tells them. Or, it can catch the thief itself.

"What I want to see," says Kathleen Allocco, "is a big cage outside. One that the computer will drop over a bad guy and hold him. Or, it could just zap him with something."

Silliness, perhaps, to Kathleen Allocco, but she has gotten stranger requests as a real estate agent — like hidden rooms whose steel walls will protect inhabitants from enemies — or the police.

An innovator

"I turned that down," Allocco said with a laugh.

Andrew Allocco has always been an innovator, says his wife, since the time as a child he rigged his bedroom with alarms to keep a maid out. His father was in construction and Andrew worked weekends and summers from an early age.

When the time came to go to college, he picked a little-known, but up-and-coming major called nuclear engineering. For four years, Allocco studied automating merchant vessels. He served for four years aboard merchant ships as an engineering officer, before marrying Kathleen and settling down on Long Island, working as an inspector of heavy machines and nuclear facilities for an insurance company.

The Alloccos purchased a night club in Nassau County — and Allocco says his disco was the first to have strobe and other lights run by computer. After their two children were born, they moved to Miami, and Allocco went to work for Farm Stores as an engineer in the company's milk production plant.

"His people at Farm Stores used to say that Andy could talk to the machines," says Kathleen. "He'd walk by a piece of equipment, and

say, 'That motor's going to go tomorrow. Replace it.' Then, they wouldn't get around to it for whatever reason, and the next day, the thing would burn out.

"He can be very annoying to be around sometimes."

"The man is a wizard," said Realtor Carlos Dominguez, who taught Allocco real estate at Miami-Dade Community College. "He is a genius — the smartest person I've ever met."

Andrew has state licenses as a general contractor, a mechanical contractor, an air conditioning contractor, a roofing contractor, an electrical contractor, a commercial pool contractor, a plumbing contractor, and is Dade certified as a master electrician and master plumber.

"Whatever he wants, he never gives up until he gets it," Kathleen adds. "He teaches the kids the same thing."

The kids — Andrew and Kelly — are remarkable themselves. Kelly, 12, recently finished a grueling four-week study program with the Greater Miami Opera — the youngest ever admitted to the special program.

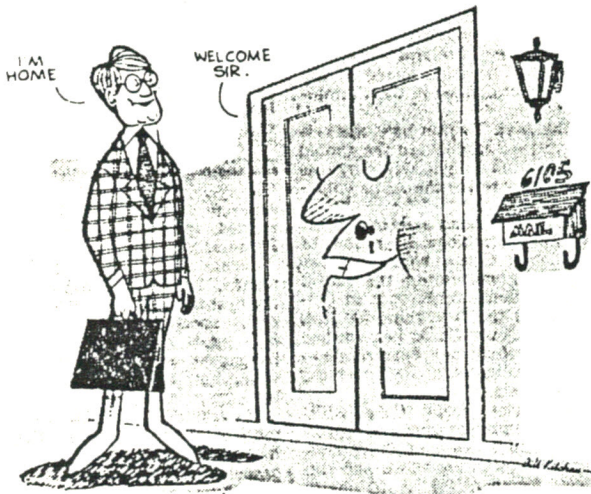
The seventh-grader at Dade's talented center at Southwood Jr. High, she was chosen as the outstanding vocal performer in the state at a major competition. She has been awarded music scholarships by the Miami Music Club and by the state Federation of Music Clubs.

Fourteen-year-old Andy quietly is making a 14-year-old's fortune in the stock market. He already owns about 300 shares of stock in dozens of companies, stockpiles a tidy collection of gold and silver, and gives advice to his parent's friends on investment strategy.

Allocco has taken an existing, "off the shelf" computer system and altered its electronics.

"This is an expensive toy right now," Allocco said. "In the future, I think it's going to be standard. It's like being one of the first

people who ever had a refrigerator or a telephone — that's certainly standard now."



Talking houses won't be cheap