

Dialing Dormphone: advances on the way

By Paul Schindler

It all began 30 years ago, as Carlton Tucker, a professor in Courve VI, set up a telephone system in the main buildings at MIT. Since then, the Dormitory Telephone Service (Dorm Line or Dormphone) has grown to some 1900 subscribers; the MIT phone system is bigger than many independent phone companies.

Next fall, Dormphone will be even larger, as the system is rejoined by Burton-Connor, which will bring the number of subscriber units to about 2300. The numbers on the phones in Burton will be different than before however; all the old Burton numbers were assigned to MacGregor House. Burton returns next fall will find that they now have numbers on the 8 exchange, in the 1, 5, 6 and 700's. In addition, residents of the house will find that all old

phones have been replaced with modern, ivory colored sets (model 500) similar to those now in MacGregor.

Ken Pogram, Course VI grad student, and one of the student employees of Dormphone, assured that, "Burton won't have the installation problems that MacGregor did. In the case of MacGregor, it was a labor dispute over students working on the same project with union labor. This has already been resolved on the Burton-Connor project, and we are certain that all dormphones will be in and working before R/O week."

The Dormphone system has come quite a ways since 1960, at which time only Baker had a dial system, while East Campus and Ashdown had manual switchboards. It was at this time that MIT purchased a large amount of used phone switching equipment from the John Hancock company, and created the 9 and 0 exchanges.

Students in dormitories pay for Dormphone maintenance along with their rent, but the price is bargain basement. Although repair service has been prompt during this school year, some have noted that it seemed a little faster in the past. There

will be a definite improvement next fall, according to Pogram, as personnel are returned from various special projects which have occupied them this year. These include modernization, expansion to Burton-Connor and preparation for dial interconnection.

In particular, students on the 9 exchange will already have noticed a new more pleasing dial tone on their phones. This is a direct result of a major renewal, completed Monday evening, when an all-new solid state power supply replaced the 40 year old used motor-generator system which had served the exchange since its inception. At the same time, ringing and dial tone generators were replaced with more modern units. As a direct result of the elimination of the rotating mechanical equipment, the background noise level on Dormphone calls should be substantially reduced.

This process of making calls on the system "cleaner" was also assisted by the addition to the 9 exchange of a good external ground. This will also reduce the occasionally quite noticeable crosstalk problem from the WTBS program lines.

In the near future, modern-

ization should be taking a large step forward, according to sources close to both the housing and telecommunications offices. Within the next 5 years, the two offices will be co-operating on a phone replacement project which will eventually replace all of the older phones now in dorm rooms with new style sets. The Institute's current financial problems have delayed but certainly not killed this project.

Dial interconnection between MIT extensions and Dormphones, on a 2-way basis without operator assistance will, at long last, be a reality by next fall. Although the installation is occurring later than originally expected due to delays in equipment delivery, much of the work can be done in advance of the equipment's actual arrival. Some experimental units have been installed for the past several weeks, with the access codes released only to Dormphone employees for testing purposes. The units have passed with flying colors, and indications are there should be little, if any, problem when the final units arrive sometime over the next several weeks.

When full dial interconnection becomes a reality, any MIT

extension will be able to get a dormline merely by dialing a special 3-digit code. People with Dormphones will be able to reach any MIT extension by dialing a special 2 digit code, followed by the regular number.

"This interconnection should make it easier for professors and students to get in touch with each other," said Mort Berlan, MIT's Director of Telecommunications. "In addition, the decision has been made to allow the Dormphones access to the 8 level, which includes tie trunks to Harvard, Lincoln Lab, WGBH and other places, in addition of course to the New England Telephone toll operator at 820. This means that students will be able to call friends at other schools, and make long distance calls (either collect or credit card) right from their rooms. This should substantially increase the utility and value of the Dormphone service. It should not increase the cost."

The dial interconnection will be accomplished through the use of 20 special interconnection units provided by the telephone company which will be connected to similar units provided by Dormphone. The purpose of all the paraphernalia is to isolate the phone company equipment from the Dormphone equipment, in line with new Telco tariffs (rules) and Supreme Court rulings. But the connections are crisp, clear, and vastly superior to those offered by the current interconnection scheme (which is admittedly jury-rigged).

In line for the not-too-distant future is another interconnection system that would allow direct inward dialing of Dormphones. Although this would not mean that all Dormphones would become NET&T phones, it would mean that one's parents, for example, could reach him in his room by dialing 617-XXX-YYYY (X is an exchange code, Y is a dormline number). This service is for incoming calls only.

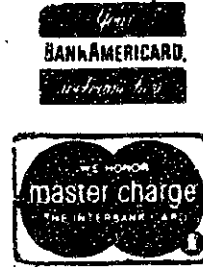
MIT, by the way, is going to the Centrex system, with a cut-over date now definitely set for August 12, 1972. A new ESS (Electronic Switching System) is being built especially for the MIT system by NET&T, and the main number will be 253-1000 (ALE-1000). The system will probably offer many ESS features, including abbreviated dialing and call transfer. In addition, it is likely that a system similar to that at Harvard will be installed; that is, all student phones (private, not dormline) on campus will be part of the Centrex, and thus effectively MIT extensions.

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