A day in the life of a busy man, or

By Paul Schindler

At 6 am or so each morning, while the vast majority of the 7000 people in the MIT community are still in bed, Jerome Wiesner gets up and starts his day. Some mornings, he will head right for the airport; other days, such as Wednesday, December 16, 1971, he spends in Boston, Cambridge, and his home, Watertown. There is no such thing as a typical day in the life of Jerry Wiesner. Evenings, he holds something out of the ordinary for the president of America's foremost technological institution. His role as administrator, public figurehead, fund raiser, and private individual of taste and distinction dictate an ever-changing pattern. But through several hours of discussion and careful planning, arrangements were made for this reporter to follow Jerome Wiesner through an entire day, from breakfast through bedtime. What follows is an attempt to blend that information with that from many other days, to get an idea of just what it is that Jerry does for a living.

The day with Jerry Wiesner began at 8:15 am, when this reporter arrived late by a quarter-hour for breakfast. Streets are as well marked in Watertown as they are in Boston, and Wiesner lives on a side street off a side street at the top of a hill. Brynids, the Wiesner's black labrador was in the yard, so I was greeted by the dog when the door was opened.

Brynids is typical of the Wiesner home and possessions. The home is not a mansion, but it is large and well kept, and in an outstanding hill top location in the midst of a suburb size lot.

The yard seemed pretty well-kept for the middle of December, and the house was "lived-in" clean mobile; it was no museum (especially the desk top in Wiesner's den) but it showed attention and care. The Wiesner's have lived in this same house for about 20 years; they moved into it not too long after he began work for the Research Laboratory of Electronics and decided to stay there when he was elected President. (Jerry relates a story of their first week in the house: the water heater broke down. Careful inspection revealed the fault to be in some copper tubing which he removed, and took to RLE. He repaired it there, replaced it, and draws hot water from the same heater today.)

It was a surprise to find everyone so wide-eyed and转弯 upon my arrival. However, Wiesner couldn't be expected to greet a reporter in his pajamas, but to be dressed for the day and alert! He gets up most mornings at about 6 am and if he is not going out of town in the morning, goes to his den and reads long papers brought home from the office, thinks or writes until about 7:30.

The Wiesner housekeeper prepares breakfast: coffee, scrambled eggs, bacon and English muffins for this particular morning. The New York Times was on the table, but Wiesner had either already read it, or would look at it later. During breakfast, he talked with Mrs. Wiesner about little things - family plans, the upcoming evening, a call yesterday from Dr. Killian's secretary about a fund-raising trip. Wiesner has a cassette player in his car, and a collection of folk music cassettes (mostly Deutsche Grammophon) which he prefers to the radio. As he listens, he turns the volume down, silently, head of the tape. But today, the final side of the sm-fi was turned to WCRB. (At home, he has a full band, and a tiny Tivoli Color TV in the kitchen. The Heatkit Color TV in his office was a gift; he didn't build it himself! - "I guess I'm a little too busy these days."

He talked a little of his days as a recorder of folk music for the Library of Congress, when "we would load all the equipment into a truck and go around the hills making recordings." He has had some of the music he himself recorded transferred to cassettes for his car player; but he doesn't keep up with the recording field much anymore, "With tape recording and associated technology, it's just too easy."

When he walks through the halls of MIT, he has a smile for all, a nod, sometimes a wink and always a greeting for those he knows, and a moment for anyone who wants to stop and chat. Questions usually bring answers; complaints often bring action. Other executives may be going mad, but extra wide ties and wildly colored shirts are not the standard for Wiesner. Paul Gray may sometimes be seen in something "tastefully colorful," but the President prefers dark suits, quiet shirts, and conservative ties. His coat stays on during the working day for the most part, except when he shaves in preparation for a long evening in public, as he did this day.

His pipe really does seem omnipresent; he smokes four pipes in his office before lunch, and puffs smoke rings during meetings, as he looks at the principal speaker's ear (about all he can see from his usual vantage point).

As he looks out at the audience, his glance moves casually from person to person and section to section. When it lands on certain people, he will smile and wink. Anyone sitting near enough the wink intended for him; it is great "theatre": most people beam and feel good.

Wiesner will occasionally pace while others speak, but always manages to seem attentive, and proves himself so when he goes on to answer the topic at hand. In fact, he does not like to sit in one place for a long time. He will stand at his desk for more than 10 minutes without getting up, or turning his chair to lean back. He often rocks his chair slightly when he is on the phone, or will tap his feet and hum softly (the humming is rare and somewhat of a syn). When he walks through the halls of MIT, he has a smile for all, a nod, sometimes a wink and always a greeting for those he knows, and a moment for anyone who wants to stop and chat. Questions usually bring answers; complaints often bring action. Other executives may be going mad, but extra wide ties and wildly colored shirts are not the standard for Wiesner. Paul Gray may sometimes be seen in something "tastefully colorful," but the President prefers dark suits, quiet shirts, and conservative ties. His coat stays on during the working day for the most part, except when he shaves in preparation for a long evening in public, as he did this day.

His pipe really does seem omnipresent; he smokes four pipes in his office before lunch, and puffs smoke rings during meetings, as he looks at the principal speaker's ear (about all he can see from his usual vantage point).

As he looks out at the audience, his glance moves casually from person to person and section to section. When it lands on certain people, he will smile and wink. Anyone sitting near enough the wink intended for him; it is great "theatre": most people beam and feel good.

Wiesner will occasionally pace while others speak, but always manages to seem attentive, and proves himself so when he goes on to answer the topic at hand. In fact, he does not like to sit in one place for a long time. He will stand at his desk for more than 10 minutes without getting up, or turning his chair to lean back. He often rocks his chair slightly when he is on the phone, or will tap his feet and hum softly (the humming is rare and somewhat of a syn).

Although the job of President may seem sedentary, there is something about it which, while not involving physical labor, still manages to tire a person. This reporter had eight hours sleep; Wiesner, it turns out, had slept only four hours the night before. By bedtime, both of us felt pretty tired, and by the end of the day, he looked tired and felt exhausted.

Dr. Jerome Wiesner from Parts A to Point B.

If his schedule includes a night-time engagement immediately after office hours, Dr. Wiesner will doze himself to MIT. (His alternative would be to ask for the MIT driver, Mr. Gibbs. Arrangements for this mode of transportation are usually made a day in advance, as Mr. Gibbs has many masters to serve in the upper echelon levels of the MIT administration.)