

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Electronic Worksteaders Say

BY JUDITH HIGGINS DONOHUE

Next time you're sitting in morning rush hour traffic on Banksville Road or waiting in a blizzard for a standing-room-only bus to carry you to the office, think of Ed Dumont. As you are fighting frostbite or cursing PAT, he is already at his drawing board, producing architectural drawings and sketches in the comfort of his Pinewood Drive home.

After commuting to a downtown firm for several years, the landscape architect-turned-illustrator decided the 9 to 5 routine was not for him. "My creativity doesn't turn on at 9 a.m. and off at 5 p.m.," he says. "I'm doing more work — better, more creative work — than I have ever done," says the CMU grad. "I've been able to experiment with new techniques and take risks I could not have taken at a big company."

Ed is one of the growing number of Mt. Lebanon people who have traded daily commuting, parking hassles and office politics for a home-based busi-

ness — a trend sociologists have dubbed "worksteading." Personal computers with letter-quality printers, FAX machines, door-to-door express mail service, affordable copiers and expanded home telephone options have made it relatively easy to work from home. Changing attitudes among employers and clients have also accelerated the trend.

According to LINK Resources Corp., a New-York based market research firm that tracks work-at-home trends, more than 26 million Americans, almost one-quarter of the U.S. labor force, work at home at least part of the time. In 1988 alone, 4.2

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Illustrator Ed Dumont (left) poses with his family at his Pinewood Drive headquarters: Nancy, Hallie, 6, (right), and Derek, 2.



Family and vocational lives are nicely balanced for Michele Hansen, pictured here with 18-month-old Douglas. "I can be with the children when I want, and work when I need to," the Beverly Heights resident says.



PHOTOS BY ROBERT HENSHAW SUDER

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Matt Graham

"I am enjoying this new career so much. I've never been so motivated."

Diane Williamson

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Continued.



"At home" doesn't mean "at ease." Crystal Drive's Jule Appelbe, above, puts in more hours as an at-home research analyst than in her former life as a secretary. Software developer Matt Graham is in his Academy Avenue office from 7 a.m. until dinner time.



million Americans started working at home for the first time.

Dennis Moran, founding partner of one of the city's most successful design firms, was one of those. "I remember it vividly," he recalls. "On Sept. 1, 1988, after 15 years of commuting downtown, I decided I had had enough of the office routine, the commute, the 9 to 5 stuff. On Oct. 12 I left, taking just my chair and a suitcase full of stuff."

Today Moran and his wife Margaret are thriving as "worksteaders," doing marketing communications out of their home on Summer Place. Moran works from about 8 a.m. to 6 or 7 p.m., creating annual reports, brochures, and sales tools, and planning corporate image campaigns. Margaret helps with the business side of the operation, including the bookkeeping.

"Not only am I producing more than I did before, but my stress level has been reduced significantly," says Moran. "I don't think I could ever go back to the old way."

Neither would Pat Quolke, a public relations consultant for Bell Atlantic Systems. Having worked for both agencies and corporations, Quolke knows what she's not missing and appreciates the autonomy and flexibility that come with working from a basement office at her home on Overlook Drive.

Quolke works two or three days a week for several clients, writing, doing media relations and organizing special events. With the help of an afternoon babysitter, she is able to combine the advantages of a career with those of a stay-at-home mom.

"If I have to run to a printer or drop off a press release, I take the kids along. People know I work at home and I think they respect the choice I've made. The best part is I can say 'no' when I want to," she says.

Office-based workers reported that they were either happy at work or at home — rarely both. Ninety-seven percent of respondents said that working at home brought closer family ties.

Worksteaders agree that one of the best features of self-employment is being able to say "no thanks" to a job — a luxury few corporate workers enjoy. They also agree that working at home enhances their family life.

"It's great to know that I can take a break to kick a soccer ball around with the kids," says Dumont. "I'm glad my kids (Hallie, 6, and Derek, 2) will know what their dad does for a living."

For Moran, being at home means being able to drive 15-year-old Evan to MLHS each morning, and sharing a few minutes with him after school.

"Our family life has definitely been enhanced by my working at home," says Michele Hansen, who operates a word processing service out of her Beverly Heights home. She quit her job at the University of Pittsburgh when her first child was born five years ago. She began her "cottage" business three years ago and is delighted with the results. "I love being home with my family. I can be with them whenever I want, and I can work in my office whenever I need to. It's a perfect arrangement."

A recent study by a researcher from MIT's Sloane School of Management indicates that Hansen's feelings are typical. While home-based workers at the British-based firm International Computers, Ltd. were able to derive simultaneous satisfaction from their work and their home lives, office-based workers reported they were either happy at work or at home — rarely both. Similarly, in a recent survey of the American Home Business Association in Darien, Conn., 97 percent of the respondents said that working at home resulted in closer family ties.

It would seem that working at home would be fraught with temptation — the temptation to abandon the drawing

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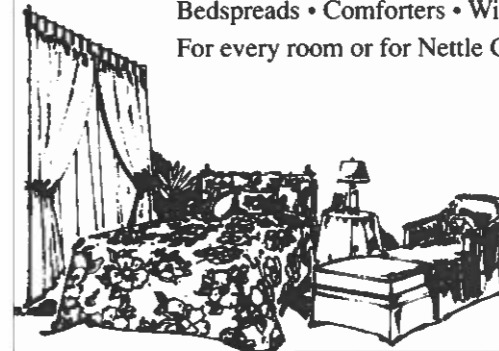
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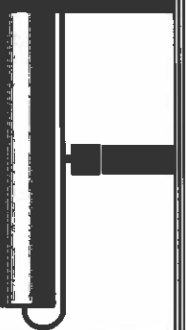
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board for "quick trips" to the refrigerator — or even the mall. But Mt. Lebanon "worksteaders" claim they are rarely distracted. "I know that I have a certain amount of work to do and it simply must be done," says Jule Appelbe of Crystal Drive. "My family understands that. My children have grown up with the business. They know that when I am in my office, I need to be working."

A former secretary and the mother of four sons ranging from 8 to 17, Appelbe now analyzes industrial research data at home for Marketing Services Associates. Although the hours are unpredictable — she worked 240 hours in January and admits she has "pulled an occasional all-nighter" — the job allows her to be home before and after school.

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"It's the nature of the business," says Appelbe, who often spends evenings and weekends on the phone with the 25 researchers whose data she compiles. "It's different when you're at home in your jeans. It's not like putting in a 12-hour day at an office. You have comfort and flexibility in your own home."

Physical separation is essential, according to those interviewed. Each one has a private space — a converted den, an extra bedroom, a finished basement devoted exclusively to their job.

Mt. Lebanon worksteaders have no regrets about their decisions to abandon the workplace.

Matt Graham, who develops software for the construction and design industry, commutes "down the hall" to his Academy Avenue office. He has divided the four corners of his small home office into "the mail room, the operations center, the warehouse, and the library."

It's important to have your own space — not a shared space — where you can be officially "at work," Graham suggests. "I'm in my office by 7 a.m. each morning, and rarely come out until dinner time," he says. He is often back in the "office" in the evenings.

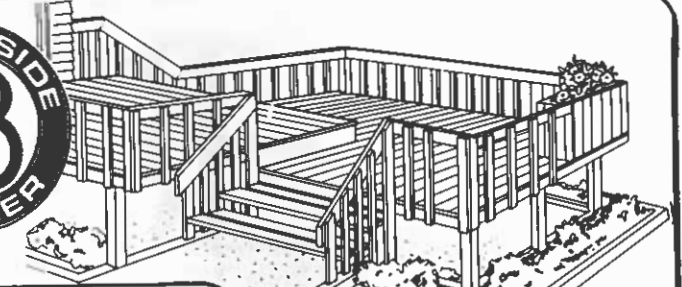
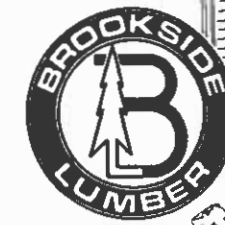
Diane Williamson has converted a sunroom in her North Meadowcroft Avenue home to a desktop publishing center. The availability of affordable, user-friendly computer technology has allowed the former elementary school teacher the opportunity to "shift gears."

"I am enjoying this new career so much," she says. "I'm constantly learning and finding different ways to approach projects. I'm starting to experiment with new ideas. My days just fly by. I've never been so motivated." In recent months Williamson has developed a nice market niche, developing promotional materials and newsletters for nonprofit organizations in the South Hills.

Mt. Lebanon worksteaders have no regrets about their decisions to abandon the workplace. While some miss the camaraderie of the office and others worry that they may not be considered as successful as their competitors in high-rise office buildings, none would return to the 9 to 5 routine.

"Most of the people I deal with admire the decision I've made," says Ed Dumont. "Dozens of people have said, 'I wish I could do what you're doing.'"

Why don't they?
"Because it's risky," says Dumont. "There are no guarantees — but then, what guarantees do you get in a big corporation? Here's what I'd tell anyone who's thinking about working at home: If you have a marketable talent that can be done at home; if you're willing to put in long hours; if you have the support of your family and friends and some good business contacts, then do it!"



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