

Features

Whiz would trade money for talk

United Press International
SCOTT AIR FORCE BASE, Ill. — Computer whiz Louis Elsen says he would give up all rights to his computer system, which already has saved the government a quarter of a billion dollars, for a chat with President Reagan.

"Yeah, I'd do it," Elsen says with a sheepish grin. "I'd probably throw away a million dollars."

Elsen developed the system in his spare time and estimates its worth at \$1 million. The Air Force estimates the system has saved the government \$238 million in just one year.

Elsen, a civilian working for the Air Force, says he would give up the chance to make money with his computer system for a two-hour, closed-door talk with Reagan on the subjects of Elsen's choosing.

"I'd like to sit down and talk with Reagan," Elsen says.

Elsen's computer system is called LOUIS, which doesn't stand for Elsen's first name but Logical On-line User Inquiry System.

"It's a coincidence it came out that way, but I'm not denying I'm proud of it," Elsen says.

One of the reasons LOUIS is so valuable is that practically anyone can learn to use it in minutes. To perform a variety of complex computer functions, the user has only to type a series of commands in simple English.

If the user gives an incorrect command, LOUIS says so.

"LOUIS is a very fast and usable system," says Elsen, a computer trouble-shooter for the Air Force Communications Command based at Scott. "Just about anyone with reasonable intelligence should be able to use this system."

Elsen claims his brain-child is almost an artificial intelligence. Four years in development and testing, LOUIS is used throughout the Air Force and some federal agencies. Air Force officials say the system's value

is its simplicity and the reduced use of computer time.

LOUIS is a tape program that can be placed into the memory of any Honeywell government computer. Once the tape is stored in the computer's memory, simple commands can be used to get information on personnel, budgets, finance, inventories, status of equipment, availability of communications circuits and whatever else government computers have stored away.

Elsen, 31, said his family background had much to do with LOUIS' development.

"When I was a kid, my dad was working at a plant and one day he pulled out a piece of welding rod," Elsen said.

"What are you going to do with it," Elsen asked.

"Anything I want," was the reply. Elsen says keeping in mind that a single item can be used for many things is important.

"I'm a very basic individual," Elsen said. "The simple approach is usually the best approach."

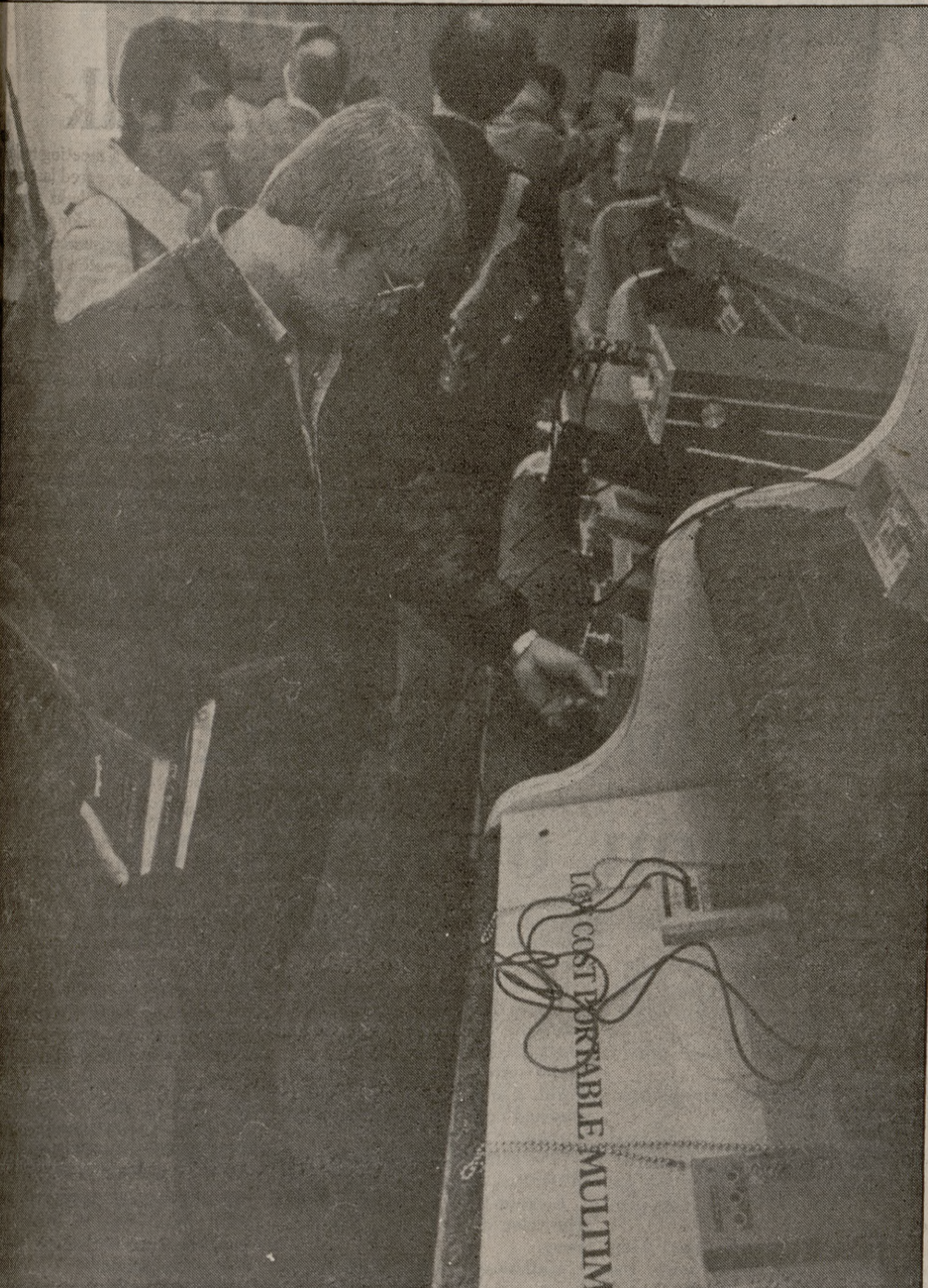
Though he is known as something of a marvel in the Air Force, Elsen has no formal data processing training and developed LOUIS on his off hours. The inscription on a cartoon over his desk reads, "Louis Elsen, a legend in his spare time."

The Air Force currently has exclusive rights to LOUIS, but Elsen says private industry may be using the system within six months.

"I didn't realize the significance it (LOUIS) would have," Elsen says. "To me, it was just a toy."

Elsen has his own computer research company, Evolving Computer Concepts Inc., in suburban St. Louis, but says he currently has no plans to market LOUIS.

Air Force work is important, he says, adding, "I'm going to be extremely cost-effective for the next eight years."



Staff photo by Brian Tate

Electronics maze

Allen Strickland, a senior electrical engineering major, looks over a variety of electronics components. The equipment was part of an

exhibit on campus by Fluke Manufacturing, an electronics company that does much business with Texas A&M University.

Former governor lauds solo practice

United Press International
INDIANAPOLIS — Former Gov. Otis M. Bowen has traded his office in the Capitol for a front spot in the classroom, but he's not steering his students into politics.

Bowen, Indiana's best-known family doctor, is encouraging his students at the Indiana University Medical Center to enter family practice — a profession he delved into for nearly 30 years before devoting full time to politics.

The former governor, who began his new career Monday as professor of family medicine, said a solo family practitioner is rarely seen now, but the times are ripe for family doctors.

"People are beginning to get more interested in somebody to look after their total body, and also to have a one-stop place for care," he said.

"I suspect the fact you can have a one-stop area (for health care) would be a money-saving thing for the family," Bowen said.

That's not to say there isn't a place for specialists.

"There is so much to know in medicine," Bowen said. "A family practitioner has to be well-versed in a lot of it, but not necessarily doing it."

"You have to recognize limitations," he said, and refer patients to specialists if necessary.

Bowen, who practiced from the mid 1940s through 1972 in Bremen in northern Indiana, doesn't mourn the demise of the solo practitioner. "Really, they kill you in a country practice," he said. "You need a little family practice group of two or three so you can have a day off now and then, and a vacation once in a while."

Bowen had a family practice until 1964, when he became so involved in politics he felt he wasn't giving enough time to his partners. He and his late wife, Beth, then ran his medical practice from the basement of their home.

The experience taught Bowen to manage his time by juggling "regular appointments, work-ins, walk-ins and sneak-ins."

The regular appointments, he said, were not much trouble. Walk-ins were people who suddenly became ill and needed to get in right away.

"Then there are the sneak-ins," he said, "like the mother who comes in for a check-up and brings three kids and says, 'as long as I'm here.'"

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