

WESTPORT~NEWS

On the Home Front

Bi-monthly column by: Linda Skolnick

Is your House Smarter than You?

Do you remember when having a phone answering machine was unusual? Many of us really hated talking to that machine. Now, we are often frustrated when someone actually picks up.....since sometimes we'd prefer to just leave a message! So, which of today's latest home technology will become commonplace and which will not stand the test of time?

Smart Home Systems Company has stepped up to the plate. After searching their web site smarthomeusa.com, I realized that there was much to learn.

Can you imagine if your drapes opened and closed with a simple click on a remote? You can motorize your drapes, vertical blinds, shades and even miniblinds. Basically, you can motorize any window covering that has either a loop-end cord or a bead-chain cord. You could even put it on a timer, which is great for convenience, security and energy savings.

So, it's finally Friday, and you are eagerly awaiting the arrival of the mail. The Westport News is sure to be there...and hopefully a column by Linda Skolnick, Realtor Extraordinaire! Why not install the "Wireless Mail Alert"...it's only \$49.95, after all. The Mail Alert tells you inside your house when the mailman opens your mailbox door. It includes a receiver that will beep every 5 minutes for two hours plus a green LED light will continue to flash until you retrieve your mailings.

It's hard enough to get out of the house in the morning, especially this time of year, when the weather changes so dramatically day to day, one never knows how to dress. The "Wireless Weather Monitoring Station" will come to your rescue. With this product (\$402.95), you can wirelessly monitor the weather and environmental conditions outside. It comes with an indoor touch screen control for your desk or to wall mount. The unit displays and records 20 separate weather conditions including barometric pressure, weather forecast, indoor/outdoor temperatures, wind speeds and wind chill, dew points, rainfall rate and accumulation and humidity. It also includes a graphical weather forecasting system for the next 12 to 24 hours.

Maybe you are watching The Sopranos, and the phone rings. Do you get up to answer it? If you have "Caller ID on your TV", you can have the caller id information displayed right on the bottom of your television screen. Then it's your decision who rates! Of course you must subscribe to a caller id service from your local phone company, but for \$48 to \$95 extra for the monitor...why not.

And...are any of these home automations worth a thing, if you forget to turn them on. "Hal Voice Control Starter Kit" (about \$340.00) is a voice controlled digital home integration software package for your PC which can control all the systems in your home, including lights, security, climate, telephone, home theatre and the Internet. All you have to do is talk (physically) to your computer from anywhere in the world to manipulate devices like thermostats and lights. And to top it off...you do not have to completely re-wire your house. Hal sends commands from your computer over your existing home power lines to control devices anywhere inside and outside your home. You can even tell Hal "Every night at 7pm, turn on the front lights for 5 hours." Or, call from work to turn down the thermostat.

All of these gadgets are designed to make our life easier. But is the element of surprise at risk.....or does knowledge always help us make a better decision. Only time will tell. Maybe Smart House has a device that can tell the future!.