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Bob - Businesses

By Jennifer Read

The Intelligencer

Telephone Answering Service is part of many Quinte residents lives — albeit an invisible one.

Chances are when a salesman calls in for his messages after lunch or a doctor answers her pocket pager, they're linked to TAS.

Bob and Sheila Smith, partners in the Bridge Street West business — regarded as the "elite" among answering services in the Quinte area — say their employees are the secret to the company's success.

TAS — with offices in Belleville, Picton and Trenton — employs a total of 42 people at its three offices and service shop. It offers area customers the latest in communications technology: from tone pagers to cellular phones to two-way radio systems.

And without the highly-trained, cheery, professional voices that make up TAS's switchboard, the company

wouldn't be where it is today, said Bob.

"They're the front-line people," said Sheila. "We get lots of comments on their friendliness and eagerness to help."

Switchboard supervisor Barbara Grieve said it takes between three and six months to train a new employee.

"It's such a complex and constantly-changing job that people don't feel they have it completely mastered for several months," said Grieve.

At any time during the day, switchboard operators — a maximum of five — each handle up to 80 lines, some with more than one customer. They receive "just enough information about each client to conduct their business," said Grieve.

Doctors, lawyers, heating companies, towing services and private residences are just some of TAS's clientele. They also monitor approximately 700 alarms and respond to medical alert alarms, which enable the ill or disabled to quickly call for assis-

tance if they're alone, Grieve explained.

TAS's peak periods in its 24-hour, seven-day-a-week operation are mid to late mornings, noon and between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. But Grieve says "we can't always count on that.

"This is a very unpredictable operation. Expect the unexpected is a good motto," she laughed.

Since April 1, 1980, Bob and Sheila have been improving on an already successful venture.

"TAS has been in Belleville since 1955. Part of our aim is to give the Quinte area the best communications coverage it can have," said Bob.

The business is one-third answering service, one-third paging and one-third two-way systems. Bob says they're considering updating the circa 1920 switchboard system to the latest automated equipment.

"We now rent our switchboard from Bell, but the equipment is becoming obsolete. It will cost a great deal to change over to the automated system; but it's something we have to consider. Technology is changing rapidly."

Telephone Answering Service