

Thompson, George

Intelligencer, Feb. 12, 1994.

The modern phone

Technological advances often considered suspicious

By Jennifer Bell

The Intelligencer

George Thompson probably would have appreciated the convenience of cellular telephones during his nearly 40-year-career with Bell Canada.

As a salesman for Ottawa-area small business customers back in 1947, Thompson spent 50 to 60 hours a week on the job — and on the road.

That was during a time when customers couldn't even direct-dial the exchange they wanted — all calls were handled through operators.

Thompson, who moved to Belleville in 1969, (he retired here in 1984) saw quite a bit of southeastern Ontario and Quebec in the 1950s and '60s as area manager for Bell.

He enjoyed the numerous challenges he faced in the three decades with the corporation.

Converting the system from operator-dialled to direct-dialled calls in 1956 saw Thompson promoted to assistant manager for Ottawa.

A good portion of his day was spent instructing customers on the changes necessary to convert to the new system.

"It was interesting," recalled Thompson, 69, "that many rural customers did not consider direct dial to be an asset."

"A lot of them relied on the lines (party lines were shared by as many as 10 customers) to call their neighbors together for things such as haying or threshing. They were a great way to get people together in a hurry."

New challenges and responsibilities

kept Thompson on the move through the 1950s and '60s, when he spent time in Smiths Falls, Montreal, Arnprior and Ottawa before coming to Belleville in 1969.

Direct dialling of long distance was another project that kept Thompson busy.

"That's when telecommunications really started to take off," he recalled.

He retired in 1984 as the city's Bell manager "after the last big jobs were completed," he joked.

But his community involvement has abated not one whit.

He sits on the board of Bridge Street United Church and is president of the church's foundation, which assists charitable organizations both local and abroad with funding.

He is a life member of the local Tele-

Where are they

NOW?

phone Pioneers, an organization for retired Bell Canada employees.

He has served with the Hastings County Children's Aid Society, the city's Non-Profit Housing Corporation, Belleville General Hospital's Board of Governors, the Ontario Housing Corporation and Belleville's Chamber of Commerce, most notably during its 1978 Centennial effort.

As a Rotarian, he also assists with the service club's annual Music Festival (he used to play the trumpet in the Navy during the Second World War).

And when he finds the time, Thompson indulges his love of woodworking and stained glass.

He enjoys making furniture and several years ago was "unofficial handyman" for wife Dorothy's Women's Christian Association group.

And he enjoys being "grandpa" to the five grandchildren his two daughters and two sons have given the couple.

"I guess you could say I'm retired...but it doesn't feel like it. There are too many things to do."

Con't →