

# BitChin' & Moaning

## User Unfriendly

By Judith A. Habert

*It was 11:30 and I was running late. Not an unusual occurrence for me, as most of my friends and relatives can attest. They have actually gotten into the habit of giving me scheduled arrival times for parties and functions that are a half hour prior to the actual start. It's not really my fault; I always start out on time, but something or someone seems to sabotage my good intentions.*

It was the first day of a new computer class that I was required to take for my job. I ran out the door, dropped the kids at the sitter, and suddenly realized that I had no earthly idea where I was going. I knew what college it was, but that was about it. I had left the course confirmation at home. The college had about 82 buildings and approximately three million classrooms. Panic started to set in. Okay, let's be rational, all I had to do was call the school and ask where my course was being held. Now that should be easy, I thought. I will just call and find out where the class was being held. I searched in my purse for my phone only to realize that in my rush to leave home I had left it on the dining room table. No problem I thought, I will just find a pay phone. I found one pretty quickly but it was out of order, of course. Then I found another, which kept spitting my money back at me. Finally, on my third attempt I found a working phone. Okay, so this call would most likely cost me more than my computer course, but I was late and, let's face it, I was desperate. I called information and was given the number. The automated voice spit out the number with such authority that when John's Pizzeria answered I was sure I wasn't hearing straight. Luckily, John was a student at the college in question and happened to have their number memorized. I hung up and dialed again, it rang and rang and rang and finally, as I was about to tell my tale of woe, I was met with, "You have reached the

university general information system. If you are calling from a touch tone phone, press 1 now." So I did. I glanced down at my watch and prepared to recite my story, but to no avail. The instructions continued. If you know the extension of the party with which you wish to speak, press 1 now. If not, press 2 for a general listing of university offices and services." That was me, I guessed, so I pushed 2 and held my breath. In 10 minutes I'd be officially late for my first class. Then the listing began. Forty-eight different departments and not one of them was called "Help for those too stupid to bring the course information with them." My finger was shaking and my mind was in a state of utter confusion. I had to decide, so I picked number three, Student Services. Student Services does not include information on where your class is, although I did learn the hours of the student union and the special of the day in the cafeteria.

Out of desperation I decided I would try to outsmart the cunning computer by not admitting I was using a touch-tone phone so a real person would pick up. They wouldn't know I was lying, would they? After 22 rings (yes, I counted) I finally heard a human being on the other end. After explaining my predicament she responded, "Oh, you want Student Services." Before I could get out the fact that I already knew the cafeteria

special and the date of the next beer blast, I was back in the system. I finally reached someone in the computer science department, who, after seven minutes of dead air, finally located my class.

I quickly found a parking spot in what turned out to be the furthest lot from my building—just as the skies opened up for a torrential downpour. I was a half-hour late by the time I made it to my classroom. Luckily, the professor had been late as well; I silently wondered if she too dealt with the automated operator from hell. The professor began her lecture and we followed the instructions. It took about 10 minutes for her to realize that the software for which the class was being taught had not been loaded into the system. So she sent us home.

