

R U ready 4 Y2K?

Computers and their programs must be ready to recognize 00 as 2000 – or else!

MARCY OSTER Senior Staff Reporter

What will happen to our computer-run world exactly one year from now, at midnight, on the last day of the millennium?

The possibilities are endless, and no one can predict for sure.

A quick look at some of the dozens of Y2K (stands for Year 2000) Web sites, however, reveals some worst case scenarios if computers and the programs that run on them can't recognize the two-digit code for the year, '00' as 2000, instead of 1900.

No electricity. No clean water. No gas to heat your home. No phone service.

Empty store shelves. Hospitals shut down. Mass looting. Planes dropping out of the sky. No accessible money – and your bank records lost forever in cybershell.

All are possibilities, but most are not likely, say the experts.

Some of the more cautious are planning for January 1, 2000, by building bunkers, stockpiling canned food, bottled water and weapons, and buying power generators.

However, be forewarned. If you want to buy a power generator, there is currently a six-month back order, with no guarantee that it will get to you before the first of next year.

Many plan to have extra cash on hand for the new millennium in case credit cards and ATMs don't work. The government, in anticipation of this, plans to print \$500 extra dollars for every man, woman and child in America.

As Y2K approaches, My Own Meals, Inc., which produces the kosher meals-ready-to-eat for members of the U.S. Military, is touting the value of its product for (non-military) kosher consumers.

"Publicity about the potential for disaster that Y2K may bring is causing kosher consumers to focus their attention on what they would eat in

case food is not available after the turn of the century," says Mary Anne Jackson, president of My Own Meals, Inc. "Computer chips affect all aspects of food production and delivery."

Jackson, a former Clevelander, says she has seen a significant increase in orders and interest in her product, which does not need refrigeration and can be prepared with a chemical meal heater.

Whereas people in hurricane-prone Florida and earthquake-prone California have often purchased her product for emergencies, Jackson says she is now receiving orders for her TV-dinner-style meals from places like New York.

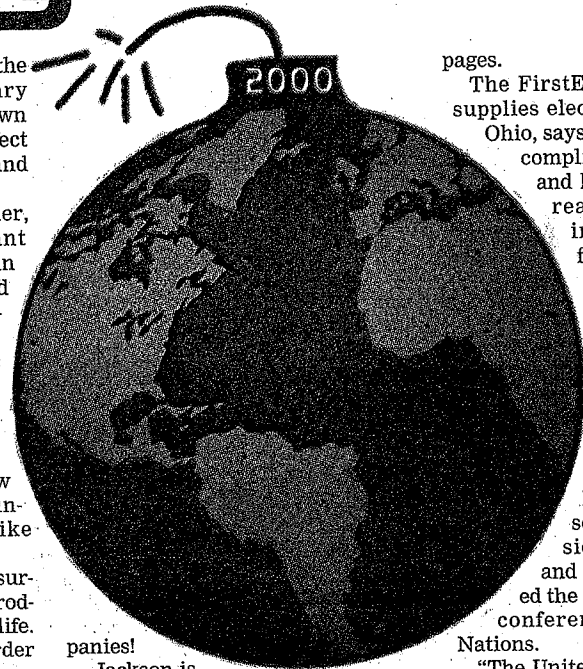
Many non-Jews, particularly survivalists, have purchased the product, which has a one-year shelf life. Jackson recently got an \$800 order from a non-Jewish woman in Massachusetts.

Jackson is concerned that her product will sell out to those for whom kashrut is not an issue, and lock out kosher consumers. "Our market is the Jewish community," she says. "If others buy up our inventory, our main market won't have what they need."

The company has already increased production, including two extra production-line runs planned for the beginning of 1999. But Jackson says she can only add a limited number of extra production runs.

The regular government MRE supplier in Texas, which had been inundated with requests from survivalists and others preparing for Y2K, are no longer taking new customers, Jackson says. The Mormon church, she adds, has cut off sales of grain to all outside of the church until after the year 2000.

As a supplier to the government, Jackson has learned a lot about Y2K. She is being required to sign a contract assuring the government that she and all of her suppliers are in Y2K compliance. This is difficult, she says, when some of your suppliers are the electric and water com-



pages.

The FirstEnergy Corp., which supplies electricity to Northeast Ohio, says it plans to determine compliance by this month and have everything Y2K ready by fall. This includes everything from customer billing and metering systems to computer systems that assist the power plant transmission network and distribution system.

Cleveland Congressman Dennis Kucinich (D-1) serves on the congressional Y2K committee and he recently represented the United States at a Y2K conference at the United Nations.

"The United States, for the most part, is far ahead of the rest of the world," Kucinich told the CJJ. "But with the high level of networked computers worldwide, the likelihood of problems for the U.S. caused by problems overseas is virtually certain."

The federal government requiring government agencies be fully compliant by March 1, 1999. While most agencies will meet the target, Kucinich says, "some, such as the Defense Department, may need more time to come into compliance."

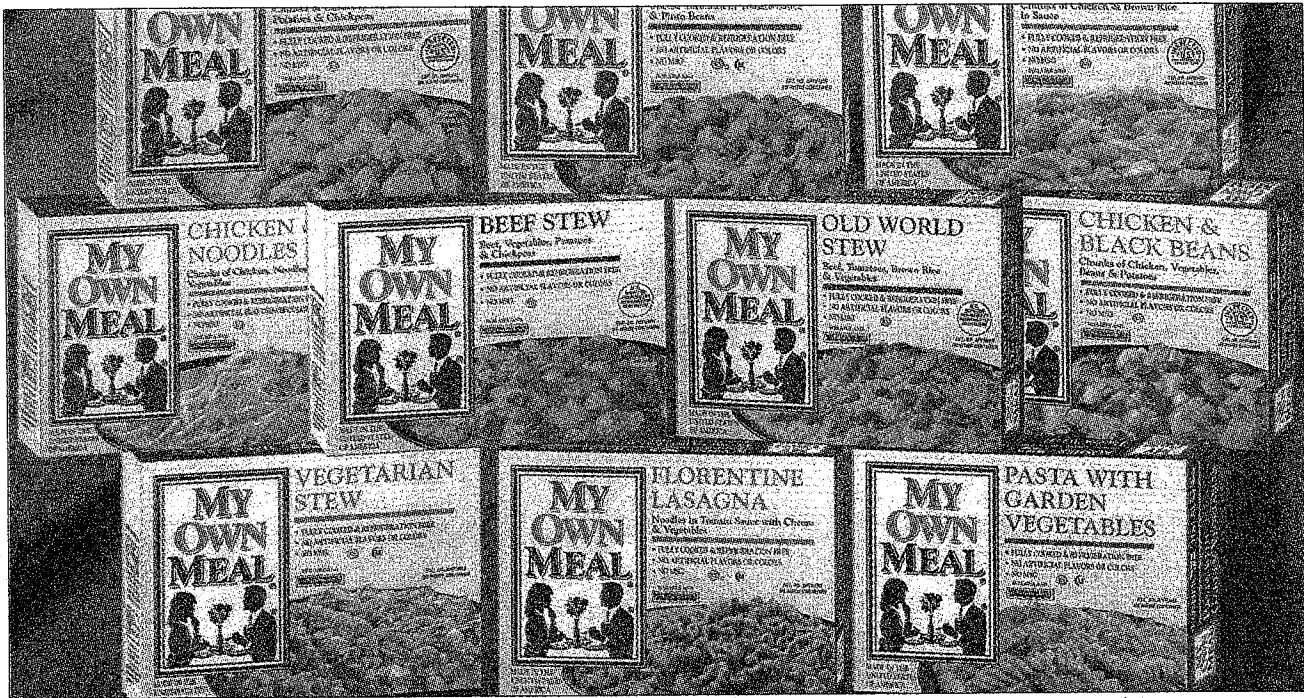
Kucinich believes that Cleveland's response is comparable to that of the rest of the nation, "spotty, but improving steadily." He believes that all levels of government need to take a more comprehensive approach at working with each other and working with the private sector.

When asked how to handle the approaching millennium, he echoed White House point man on Y2K John Koskinen: "Prepare, but not panic."

Three years ago, when Harold Neustadter approached NASA about preparing for Y2K, it was a hard sell to convince people that it would be a problem. "People did not know what y

"Prepare, but do not panic."

— John Koskinen
White House point man, Y2K



Orders for army-inspired meals-ready-to-eat are on the increase as people worry about computer glitches stalling food distribution.

were talking about," says the physicist-turned computer technician. When he approached his current employer some two years ago to start getting ready for the year 2000, he was also met with blank stares, until its parent company woke up to the potential problems.

Neustadter explains: There are three classes of problems. 1) Computers that use a clock passively, such as a cash register that stamps a date at the top of a receipt. The wrong date there will not affect the machine's operation. 2) Computers that use a clock actively to make decisions, such as an elevator which has an internal clock to calculate the maintenance schedule, and shuts down automatically if it determines that regular maintenance hasn't taken place. 3) Computers that use clocks for logic, such as those that determine pension calculations or social security.

In a number of documented cases, says Neustadter, companies came close to failure when their stocks fell to less than a third of their value due to major mistakes in their computer systems. A major company going belly up, he believes, is one of the main Y2K concerns.

"The thing that keeps America running is the financial structure. All of the major insurance and banking companies have been at the Y2K problem for years," he says.

As for himself, Neustadter, he plans to have cash on hand, something his family doesn't usually do. He may think about getting some bottled water and won't stock up on food any more than usual. "Treat it like a bad snowstorm," he advises.

Orry Jacobs, executive vice presi-

dent of University Hospitals Health Care System, is not personally concerned about Y2K, nor would he be concerned about having to be in the hospital over the change in millennium. UH has spent in excess of \$15 million making its entire hospital system Y2K compliant, he says.

Jacobs has been heading a Y2K general steering committee for the last two years. Under the committee's direction, the system has looked at all its computer hardware and software, ranging from medical devices to elevators, the telephone system to the billing system. The hospital system is also looking at its suppliers, the insurance companies and managed care plans to make sure both medical supplies and revenue will be flowing in the new year.

Most important to any potential hospital patients, says Jacobs, is that no serious problems were found with any medical devices. This means, nothing will automatically shut down on January 1 of next year, although some may give a wrong date on a printout.

In the process of preparing for Y2K, the system has discovered that some equipment is on the verge of obsolescence. These are being replaced, says Jacobs.

Every piece of life support equipment is currently being manually tested for Y2K compliance, no matter what the manufacturer promises, says Jacobs. This means that each piece of the equipment's clock is being set ahead to Dec. 31, 1999, and being watched as it rolls over to the new year.

In the event that there is no electricity, the hospital can run for several days on backup diesel power generators. The system is also look-

ing into getting additional fuel for the end of the year. All hospitals, he notes, are required by Ohio law to switch over to generator power once a month to insure that the system works properly.

Many of Cleveland's Jewish agencies have worked hard to prepare for Y2K. Most, however, did not have Y2K in mind when they upgraded old and outdated management information systems over the last few years.

The Jewish day schools currently have a computer expert as part of the Shared Services Organization, who has worked out their potential problems. Both Jewish Family Service Association and Bellefaire Jewish Children's Bureau upgraded their systems in the last two years.

One agency that is currently behind the eight ball is the Jewish Community Center. The JCC's current system is run on a bunch of pieced-together, outdated Macintoshes and PCs along with some new computers purchased for the fiscal operation.

The agency has been working with a consultant for the last year on plans to upgrade the system, and were notified about six months ago that the system is not Y2K compliant, according to JCC executive vice president Bob Cahen.

The agency now needs several hundred thousand dollars to upgrade its computer system and become Y2K compliant.

If the JCC cannot come up with that large amount of money, a back-up plan costing \$40,000 can be in place by March, Cahen says.

JCC assistant executive Alan Goldberg says the Y2K problems are wide-ranging at a large agency such

as the JCC. While the membership software is Y2K compliant (meaning that members will get their bills on time!), the system running the accounts payable general ledger is not. This means that the agency would not be able to pay vendors, nor would it be able to keep track of expenses. The JCC is also looking into changing its phone and voice mail system.

The Cleveland Jewish News is making sure that the paper will arrive in subscribers' homes on the first Friday of the millennium, as well as ensuring that both staff and vendors are paid.

CJN general manager Rob Certner says the number one concern is the editorial/production departments because "it enables us to get our product out."

CJN production head Sharon Ulsenheimer is in the process of testing those two departments' computers which, since they are reasonably new, should be in

Y2K compliance.

On the business side of the CJN, the hardware, operating systems and application programs are all in different stages of compliance. Evaluation of the system and a plan of action should be completed by mid-January, Certner says.

Coming into Y2K compliance will cost the CJN about \$75,000.

The CJN has also written to its service providers, essential to creating the product, to make sure they also will be able to deliver their services in the year 2000. These include the paper's printing company, label company, phone company, and the U.S. Postal Service.

"It really goes down the line," says Certner.

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