Bill Milner at PERMISNY.

(Photo by Jean-Charles Ferland)

everything it could be expected to do. I also enjoy the keyboard; it feels good on the fingers. My typing is less than proficient and I feel very comfortable working with it."

Milner also has some complaints, not least of them the presence of an American dictionary in the word-processing program. (This is being partially remedied with the installation of a British dictionary in the near future.) Another suggested improvement: he would re-design the desk calculator with a percentage key and a visible column of numbers so that he can keep track when adding.

Richard Têtu, PERMISNY's legal advisor, is convinced that once the system is in full operation, it will save time and energy, and be particularly suited to the needs of counsellors in his mission. "Multilateral posts like ours have a long working day. COSICS will help overcome the different working hours here and in Ottawa. While the U.N. General Assembly and Security Council are in session, we can send reports and resolutions to Ottawa at 9 p.m. and have their response the next day."

Hélène Lafortune shares Têtu's enthusiasm. Also a counsellor at the mission, Lafortune's responsibilities include human rights and humanitarian issues at the U.N. "My needs are to do final reports, to communicate quickly with Ottawa, and to reduce the difficulties caused by our different working hours."

Typically, before COSICS, Lafortune would draft her reports by hand and her secretary would type them. After a few hours of instruction and help when needed from one of the secretaries, Lafortune now uses COSICS' word processor.

She also finds COSICS convenient for sending messages electronically to Ottawa after normal office hours. "Now I don't have to leave a little note for myself to phone tomorrow. I'm really convinced that I save a step every time I use COSICS."

Any complaints? Lafortune said she found the COSICS *Users' Guide* too complex for the first-time user, and proposed a simpler, more basic version for beginners to cut their teeth on. (In fact, it has since been replaced with a new training guide that is much easier to use than the original draft.

Eventually there will also be a more detailed user reference manual with each machine.)

Lafortune also suggested that laptop computers would be a very practical addition to COSICS for officers who have to work at home, or for preparing reports while travelling on the job. (COSICS terminals cannot be portable because they are not "stand-alone," that is, they are connected to central computers, and for security reasons.)

Other than these comments, Hélène Lafortune, like the others who participated in the pilot, had little negative to say about the COSICS system. All looked forward to receiving training so that they could use it as much as possible in their daily routine.

Planning for People

As COSICS is phased into the Department, more and more people will be affected by the system. While the purpose of COSICS is to increase productivity, its successful implementation depends as much on human factors as on technological ones.

Office automation is bound to change the way people work. Some effects — faster communication with colleagues, equipment compatible throughout the Department — are clear, but other effects may not be so evident. Many people may wonder how and how much COSICS will affect their job.

Other questions also come to mind: Is the system difficult to learn? Will it be a help or a hindrance? Will it mean more work, or different work? These are common and understandable questions: the human side of bringing automation into the workplace.

With these questions in mind, management appointed a committee to concern itself with the introduction

of COSICS and its effect on employees. The committee, called the Working Group on Adaptation to Modern Office Technology, is co-chaired by Peter Walker, the ADM of Personnel, and Michael Bell, the ADM responsible for COSICS. The Working Group comprises senior departmental officials and draws on the expertise of specialists.

Its creation recognized that the introduction of technology into an organization like ours provides an excellent opportunity to go beyond the immediate technological advances and improve the environment of the organization as whole, even in some cases providing opportunities for more interesting jobs.

"Making that a reality is the challenge that management has given us," said Bill Sinclair, a special advisor to Peter Walker on the human relations side of COSICS. Currently, the committee has members working on training, communications and evaluation, as well as a subcommittee, the Task Force on Job Design.

Job design is a new approach for the Department, and differs from position classification. The intention is to provide possible "job profiles" for staff members in order to guide managers and supervisors in workflow management and workload allocation as they adapt to the new work environment resulting from COSICS.

The job profiles will help managers to see new possibilities for their employees, to move beyond the traditional distribution of tasks, and in some cases give employees additional responsibility.

The impact of COSICS will be felt among all members of the Department, but probably the most widespread effect will be on the working relationship between officers and secretaries.

Officers will not only be able to do their own work at terminals, (as many already do on personal computers), but also send their work directly to

colleagues. CATS (COSICS Automated Text Storage) will give them faster access to reference material in departmental files, and the ease of leaving COSICS messages will reduce the constant interruption of the telephone and eliminate "telephone tag".

Meanwhile, the secretary's work could evolve, for instance, into providing more administrative or research services; in effect returning to the secretary some of the more interesting and challenging responsibilities that have gradually disappeared from the typical secretarial work package because of the heavy load of mechanical tasks like typing and photocopying.

In brief, the role of the job design teams is to develop possible job profiles and give them to managers as a model. "We want managers to recognize the opportunities for change, not to stifle them," Sinclair comments, noting that the process of job design will evolve over time.

People from the various occupational groups and the different streams, as members of the Task Force on Job Design, are working with their peers to help develop job profiles.

In the meantime, the Working Group is using resources both inside and outside the Department to smooth the way. Some of the areas being explored are ergonomic and environmental factors, counselling and incentive awards.

To help with the task, they have called upon consultant Mary Baetz, a specialist on the impact of automation on employees and author of the book *The Human Imperative — Planning for People in the Electronic Office.*

Sinclair reflects,"This is a brand new experience for all of us. We have to learn from the experience of others, from the experts and from our own pilot projects, and make changes along the way."

The Automated Filing Cabinet

Where do electronic folders go? Into an automated filing cabinet, of course.

With a capacity roughly equivalent to the four-drawer legal-size cabinet in which you now keep files, COSICS' personal automated filing system will be linked into your terminal to store all your records. In it, you will be free to store documents created internally or acquired from outside sources, as well as spreadsheets and databases.

Shared Filing

In addition to this personal "filing cabinet," you will have access to a shared cabinet for reference materials or for drafts that several people are working on. The organization of the cabinets will be determined by the needs of each branch or mission. For example, a trade or relations division at Headquarters could have a shared cabinet, a large mission could have several cabinets, while a small mission might want only a single common cabinet.

Departmental Records

For departmental records, a central information storage and retrieval system with its own computer has been installed at Headquarters. The new system, called COSICS Automated Text Storage (CATS), will capture all official messages or documents sent within or outside the department.

With CATS, everyone, whether at home or at a post, will be able to request information through a Bureau Information Control Officer (BICO) located in Ottawa. Posts will continue to have their own registries to look after paper documents. However, they can be more selective in what they themselves keep, with the assurance that any material can be obtained through the BICO.