

# SATELLITES

## Teleconferencing Capabilities At York

By ELAN KATTSIR

Have you ever wondered why there are two satellite dishes on top of the Stedman Lecture Halls?

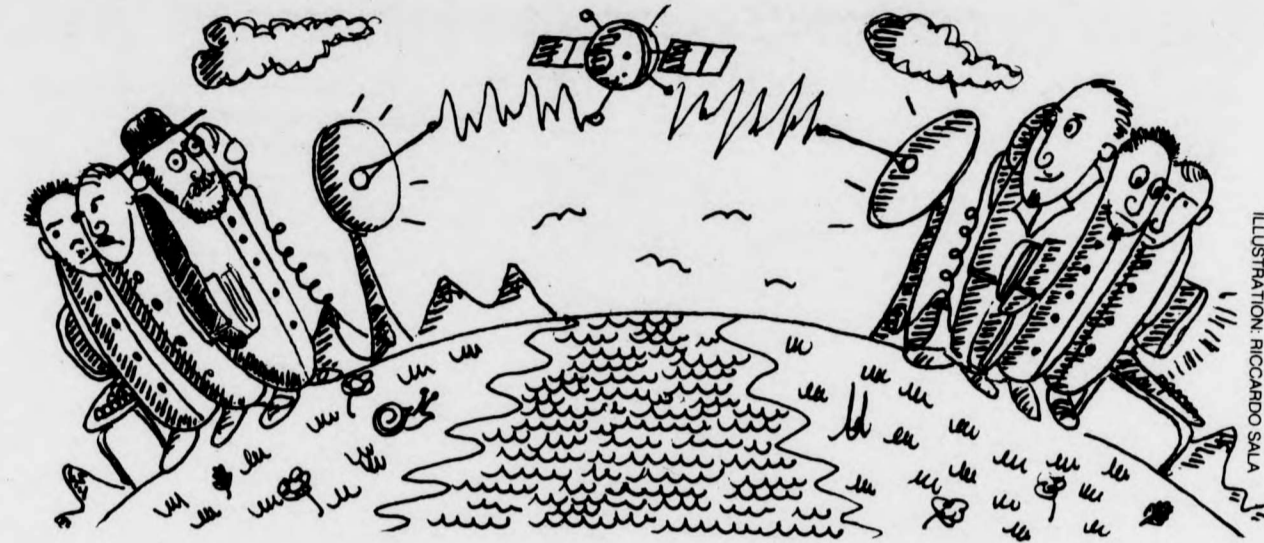
Are they for monitoring Martian chatter? Keeping an eye on Soviet satellites? Pirating TSN, First-Choice, or the Playboy Channel?

Well, no. None of the above. Nothing quite so frivolous.

According to David Homer, Director of the Department of Instructional Aid Resources — the body in charge of the dishes — “the two microwave dishes are a key aspect of York’s attempt to partake in the world of the 1990s — a world totally different from the 1980s or ‘70s.”

When satellite dishes are combined with two other technologies — the Rolm telephone and the computer — “the potential in terms of information accessibility, dissemination and interaction is phenomenal,” said Homer.

The dishes have been in operation for less than two years, but have



already proven to be an invaluable resource to campus and non-campus groups.

Tonight, for example, leading authorities in the field of artificial intelligence will share their knowledge with individuals here at York in a teleconference.

An estimated 50 participants from York and 70,000 participants from

over 1,200 locations around the world will discuss the issues involved in trying to make a computer “think.”

The teleconference’s sponsor, Texas Instruments, will not charge receiver of the programme a licensing fee, saving the University the several hundred dollars the privilege usually costs.

But even without sponsorship, teleconferencing is cost effective. In tradition conferences — in addition to air fare and hotel accommodation — a participant has to miss three days of work for a one-day conference. Teleconferences save these financial and time costs by bringing the conference to the participant, rather than vice versa.

Furthermore, nothing else allows hundreds of thousands of members of a select audience to participate simultaneously in a conference setting.

Last spring, a teleconference on the use of technology in teaching language skills saw 25-30 people from York and 10-15 colleagues from U of T learn about some of their field’s latest developments.

Other recent teleconferences include one on teleconferencing itself, and several corporate introductions to new products. Kodak, for example, introduced sophisticated new photographic products and techniques to film enthusiasts.

The teleconference market is just beginning to grow, and York is steadily increasing its involvement. Presently, York hosts a teleconference about every three weeks.

The satellite dishes also serve other purposes. York monitors NASA’s channel which, before and after shuttle missions, transmits data of particular interest to scientists. Several York professors have already used this exclusive information and have informed Homer that it was “invaluable.”

Satellite dishes can be utilized in other areas as well. For example a consortium of universities on the East coast of the United States transmits courses for individuals either unable or too busy to attend school in person. Also Carleton University, in cooperation with the Soviet Embassy, has been picking up programming off a Russian satellite for use in their Soviet Studies Programme. Carleton’s project, according to Homer, is difficult because the satellite, rather than being fixed in orbit like most communication satellites, roves in a figure-eight pattern and must therefore be tracked constantly.

In addition to campus needs, York’s satellite dishes could potentially serve the local community. For example, a group of nurses from Humber Memorial Hospital recently requested the facilities for a teleconference on infectious diseases. However, inability to facilitate Humber’s needs illustrates a major problem in making the most of the dishes: lack of space.

“Have you even tried to book a room for 150 people for three hours on a Tuesday evening at this university? It’s impossible,” Homer said.

He estimated that the two dishes together cost just under \$20,000 — paid for by the university — but quickly added that this is a difficult figure to arrive at as the dishes are a part of the television distribution system, which includes the antenna on top of the Ross Building and miles of cable distributed throughout the university.

Before the system was installed two years ago, each residence had its own antenna. The system now carries — in addition to the Toronto stations it is required to carry by law — Buffalo and Barrie stations, and an information channel run by York’s Communication Department.

But, as Homer pointed out, the regulations covering York’s television distribution system are vague. The system is not classified as a cable company by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunication Commission CATC, and therefore it is unclear whether the system can carry things such as pay-TV.

However, Homer said that the dishes simply can’t be dedicated to any one channel — such as TSN, for a given time because there are so many things to be received.

“There are 25 birds above the equator, each with 22 or 30 channels. If you know which bird to look at, you can get it.”

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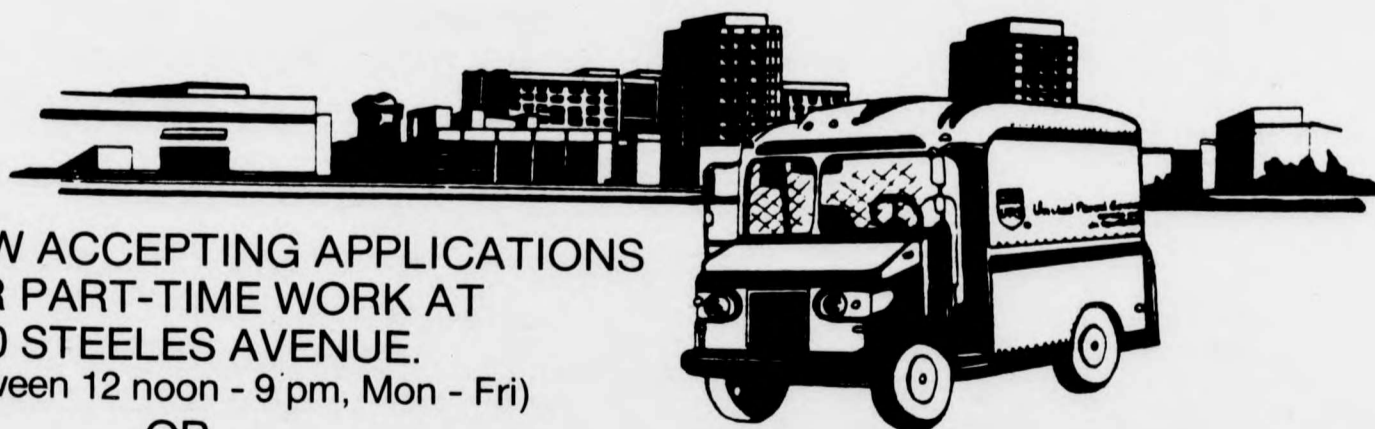
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