

\$1m ASPEN sale the biggest ever

COMCO has landed the largest ever single order for its ASPEN voice messaging systems in a deal worth more than \$1 million with New Zealand Telecom.

The sale was the culmination of years of work on both sides of the Tasman.

New Zealand Telecom placed an order for four Maxums, the largest in the range of ASPEN systems, and the size of the contract surprised even AAP staff closely involved in negotiations.

That includes Richard Lawrence, manager of the New Zealand office of COMCO, AAP's communications subsidiary.

"My contact with Telecom actually goes back over two years," he said.

"When I first came to New Zealand I did a presentation for them.

"Things started warming up last October, and this year they came to a very rapid close.

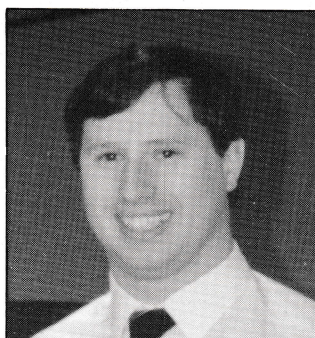
"I was expecting Telecom to buy one of the smaller ASPEN systems. But suddenly they said: 'We want four big ones by April'.

"The final negotiations took three days during which there was no sleep for those involved on either side of the Tasman.

"The order even made Octel sit up with surprise."

Octel is the California-based company which manufactures ASPEN. AAP has the sole rights to market and distribute it in Australia and New Zealand.

The ASPEN Maxum, top of



Richard Lawrence

the range, has the capacity to take up to 72 telephone calls simultaneously, and can store up to 300 hours of messages.

"Voice messaging enables people to communicate more effectively," said Richard.

"They can very simply receive messages, or record them and send them to as many people on the system as they want.

"And the voice bulletin board can get information to any number of people calling in – you could if you wanted to record a staff magazine on a

voice bulletin board for callers to listen to.

"Voice messaging also eliminates brief inter-office memos. We have very few sheets of paper floating around our office – everyone uses ASPEN."

Richard said COMCO's New Zealand technicians Frank Pollard and Stewart Baird had put in an enormous effort installing the ASPEN units.

In Sydney, COMCO national sales and marketing manager Rob Padgett called it a "magnificent team effort".

Product manager Phil Booth said: "Our NZ success heralds bigger sales for the product."

And Errol Dunn of COMCO marketing said: "The order vindicates the faith Octel has shown in appointing COMCO as sole distributor for the region.

"It also bears out our commitment to both the technology and the product."

Editorial shake-up

THE Editorial Division has undergone one of its periodic bouts of inter-related staff appointments.

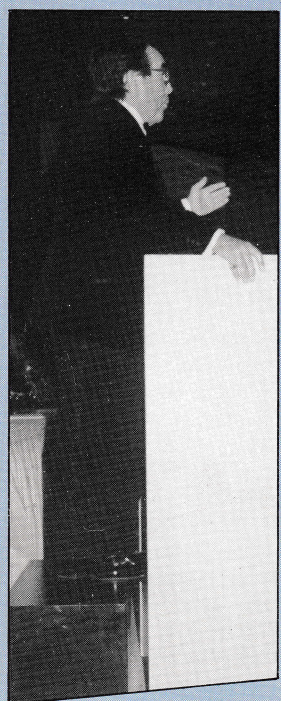
Two new EICs have been appointed, Chris Pash and Phil Dickson, to replace Col Burgess, now deputy national news editor, and John Radovan, new London chief correspondent.

John Coomber will be returning from London to the new post of national correspondent, based in Sydney.

Tom Hyland moves from Melbourne to take over as Jakarta correspondent from Jim Dallmeyer, who returns to Sydney as bureau chief.

Former AAP journalist Ian Pemberton has rejoined the company from Reuters, New York. Ian returns as finance news editor based in Sydney.

Tony Vermeer has left Melbourne to become Adelaide bureau chief.



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Flannelled fools!

SYDNEY's editorial cricketers are continuing their winning ways, leaving observers uncertain whether they're a bunch of hacks who can bat and bowl a bit, or a bunch of players who can write.

On balance perhaps even they would be forced to concede that the pen is mightier than the bat, considering the grandiloquent reports they are apt to make of their own performances.

But a win is a win, and few can argue with runs on the board.

The team has been ably led by G.T.S. (Giles) Parkinson, the only player with the statutory four initials and a convincing ring to his surname.

The season got off to a bright start when AAP downed familiar foes from News Ltd, the Bloodstains, 158 runs to 93.

Newcomer Mike Koslowski showed out with an unbeaten half century and Greg "Freddie" Truman weighed in with a typically lusty 44.

Top performance with the ball came from the wily Geoff McCamey, an ex-Bloodstains stalwart, who sent six of his former team-mates back to the pavilion, five because they had been dismissed and one because the bowler had run out of amber refreshment.

AAP then demolished a Fairfax XI, which in truth was



From left: Steve Connolly, Greg Truman, Tim Gossage, Rob Clarke, Steve Liddle, Mike Koslowski, Giles Parkinson, Doug Conway, Paul Britton, Kevin Ricketts.

a Fairfax VII with III or IV bystanders roped in to make up the numbers.

The crushing victory was a disappointment to those who had relished a return match with a side beaten in a thrilling finish the previous season.

But the depleted Fairfax outfit was a shadow of its former self, and scraped together a paltry 49 in reply to AAP's impressive 188 off 45 overs.

Opener Tim Gossage almost carried his bat in compiling one of the highest AAP scores in memory.

Gossage, a product of both the West and the Graeme Wood Running Between Wickets Academy, eventually holed out for 84.

Truman, taking his customary one delivery to play himself in, clobbered three fours and

three sixes in his 45 and then snapped up 3-24 in a fine opening spell which almost doubled as a closing spell, so brief was the Fairfax innings.

Steve Connolly and Paul Britton snapped up two wickets apiece, Britton without conceding a run.

The deceptive left-hander attributed his success to playing straight after an overnight shift, saying: "Through my eyes there were six stumps to aim at."

Britton distinguished himself again later in the season by dismissing the three top order batsmen as AAP defeated the Foreign Correspondents' Association by 34 runs.

The editorial XI then went on to score a decisive victory over a COMCO-based team, winning by 141 to 91.

DEATH OF VETERAN MONTY

MONTY Parrott, a New Zealand journalist who made his name as a foreign correspondent in Asia and served as AAP London bureau chief in the 1950s, has died aged 78.

One of the highlights of his career was an exclusive interview in Tokyo with Tojo before the Japanese wartime leader was executed as a war criminal.

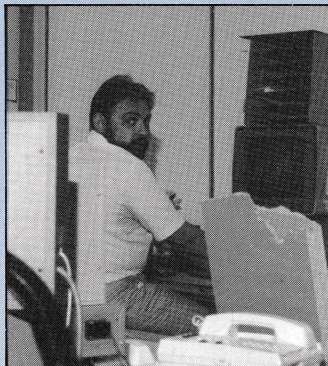
He was christened William Egmont, but always known as Monty or Mont.

Monty began his career in journalism on the old Christchurch Star and joined the New Zealand Herald in 1935.

The Herald sent him to Asia as a foreign correspondent at the end of World War Two and he became the first New Zealander to be given a staff post in Asia with Reuters and AAP.

After covering the first campaigns of the Korea war, Monty went to London as AAP's bureau chief in 1953 and later became Reuters world editor.

He was Reuters chief correspondent in the Caribbean before retiring to Omokoroa, near Tauranga in New Zealand in the early 1970s.



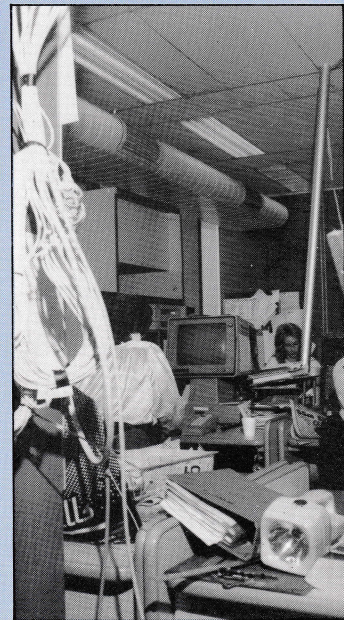
TANGLING WITH SPAGHETTI JUNCTION



CABLES drooped from ceilings like spaghetti, boxes and crates vied for floor space with Coyotes, reporters got lost among the debris and the finance editor was exiled to the tea room with her terminals.

But the hardy troops soldiered on during the renovation and re-carpeting of the Melbourne office, as newsroom photographer Mike White's pictures show.

LEFT: Paul Kabos in the thick of the action. **CENTRE:** Mary-Ellen Barker wired for action. **RIGHT:** Spaghetti Alley.



Pat bats on – 25 not out!

THE champagne flowed, cameras clicked and a special silver coffee set was presented to Pat Rawlings to celebrate her remarkable innings of 25 years with the Canberra bureau.

Pat joined the company in 1964, working part-time until 1974 and full-time ever since as office secretary.

Pat puts her long stay down to an interest in news and the excitement at being at the hub of things.

She was one of the many Parliament House staff standing on the front steps of the old house on November 11, 1975.

The sacking of Gough Whitlam was probably the most memorable moment for anyone who worked in the press gallery at that time.

She has seen many changes in the way AAP journalists work. When she first joined the company she typed copy onto "this funny old tapedeck which I guess now would be in a Telecom museum".

AAP later changed to teleprinters, which were used until 1983. "It was very different because operators were the last point before sending a story from here," she recalled.

"The journalists would type up their copy on typewriters and put it in a basket or throw it at us.

"It was really a high pressure job in those days, flat out keyboarding all day. God knows how we didn't get RSI.

"If a story was breaking at 11am, Sydney would be on the

Pat Rawlings attacks the wrapping on a gift from colleagues



phone at two minutes past wondering where it was.

"We'd say: 'If you leave us alone you'll have it.'"

Pat believes the move to computers has diminished the sense of immediacy in the office, but acknowledges for journalists it was necessary.

"It always amazed me in the old Parliament House how a bunch of people could get on so well for so long in such trying circumstances over there (in the small office)."

Pat first came to the Canberra press gallery at age 19 when she worked as a typist for the Sydney Sun.

She had briefly toyed with the idea of becoming a journalist, but as with many women

in those days she made the choice to bring up a family.

Her father was a keen trade unionist, and she believes this also gave her a taste for politics.

She remembers as a young girl in Bristol, where she lived until age 15, being involved with her father in local elections.

In all Pat has worked with eight bureau chiefs: Tom McNeil, Peter Bowers, David Barnett, Bruce Hewitt, David Jensen, Les Murphy, Bruce Jones and now Don Woolford.

Three of them – Don, David Barnett and Bruce Jones – made it to her 25th anniversary celebration, which somehow was kept secret from her.

David Jensen, now assistant general manager, spent five

years working with Pat.

"She is one of the most loyal, hard-working people in AAP. I've been honoured to have worked with her," he said.

As most people who have ever worked at the Canberra bureau will know, Pat's duties have taken on a somewhat maternal role.

"I don't mind being treated as a mother figure," she said. "After all that's what I am."

Pat has always provided the human touch, like cakes on birthdays.

"Which was why it was so wonderful," said journalist Virginia Cook, "to turn the tables and provide Pat with a real celebration, cake and all."

THE CHAMPAGNE QUIZ NUMBER 2



THIS month's quiz:

1. ART. "Forget what object you have before you. Merely think: 'Here is a little blue, here a bit of pink, here a streak of yellow' and paint it just as it looks to you until it gives your own naive impression of the scene before you." Which work by the author of these words gave its name to an entire movement in painting?

2. GEOGRAPHY. How many kilometres of coastline are there in the Australian Capital Territory – 0, 10, 35 or 50?

3. CURRENT AFFAIRS. What do the following have in common: Pakistani president Zia, in-vitro pioneer Patrick Steptoe, heiress Christina Onassis,

spy Harold "Kim" Philby, composer Frederick Leowe, actor Trevor Howard, Watergate figure John Mitchell and racing car boss Enzo Ferrari?

4. HISTORY. In 1908, at the age of two years and nine months, who became China's last emperor?

5. NEWS. Name two TV documentaries presented by Australian investigative journalist John Pilger, one on Cambodia and one on Vietnam veterans.

The correct answers to the first quiz were:
1 – Stone the flaming crows. 2 – The Daily Universal Register. Saturday, January 1, 1785. 3 – COMPAC (Commonwealth Pacific) cable. 4 – Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. 5 – Peter Norman. 6 – Forty cents. 7 – Voltaire. 8 – The Herald of Free Enterprise. 9 – Photosynthesis. 10 – Hawaii, Alaska, Maine and Hawaii. Quiz 1 winner: Sydney system controller Clem Gillian

6. AUSTRALIANA. Translate the following into Australian: "Assuredly an improvement on the optical insertion of a partially incinerated arboreal off-cut."

7. MUSIC. Sisters Patty Smith Hill and Mildred J. Hill, Sunday School teachers in Louisville, Kentucky, composed a melody in 1893 that turned out to be one of the three most popular songs in the English language, accord-

ing to the Guinness Book of Records. Name it.

8. SPORT. Which sportsman has played in World Cup matches in both soccer and cricket?

9. QUOTABLE QUOTES. Which great English scientist and president of the Royal Society modestly said: "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."?

10. FORMS OF ADDRESS. What is the address of the White House?

Entries should be sent to Doug Conway, 364 Sussex St, Sydney. First correct one opened wins instant fame and two bottles of champagne.

ANZ Skynet flying high

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Adelaide staff in their new offices, back row: Helen Brinkman, Frank Van Rooden, James Grubel, Peter Squillace, Halina Janko, Robin Ralph and Michael Mullane (now in Sydney). Seated: Carolyn McMillan, Ian Williams and Liz Cornelissen. Ian Williams has recently left the company.



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tucked away in an old part of the Advertiser building shared with the paper's rural department.

Subsequent bureau chiefs recall with fondness the cramped conditions.

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Dealing network improved

SUBSCRIBERS to the AAP Reuters worldwide "Dealing" network in foreign currencies have an improved service following commissioning of the first Sydney Dealing concentrator.

Previously Australian subscribers were linked directly to a concentrator in Hong Kong.

In the event of a major failure at OTC, they would be disconnected from the rest of the worldwide network.

"This new configuration allows AAP to have total control over our Dealing subscribers," said Alf Santomingo, Dealing co-ordinator for AAP Reuters Economic Services (AAP RES).

"The hardware in Sydney and the communication lines are duplicated to eliminate the possibility of an outage.

"The concentrator monitors the status of each subscriber constantly and displays the status on a printer and VDU screen.

"All tests, resets and downloading of new software to the subscriber's terminal controller can now be controlled by AAP in Sydney.

"Not only has the new configuration decreased the possibility of outages, but tests before and after the cut-over show the concentrator in Sydney has improved the performance of the Dealing response."

Forty-eight Australian subscribers were cut over on the first concentrator, and the remaining 36 on the second concentrator in February.

A connection to any other subscriber on the worldwide Dealing system is guaranteed to take no longer than four seconds.

JOHN Boland, former manager of AAP Reuters Economic Services has died in Sydney, aged 84.

John was Sydney manager for Reuters until 1946, when he became AAP RES manager.

He held that post until his retirement in 1968, when he was succeeded by Wally Parr.

LITTLE RONNIE STARS AS BIG P



Chief executive Lee Casey (centre) with MC Len Evans and Ronnie Corbett at an organising luncheon.



"Sold to the man with the bulging pocket" Auctioneer Len Evans in action.

Charity golf day



A GOLFER'S dream might be to fly to Queensland and back on Christopher Skase's Qintex corporate jet, stay at the Sheraton Mirage hotel at Port Douglas and partner Greg Norman in a pro-am.

That dream became a reality - for a price - at the third annual AAP Financial Markets charity tournament at Sydney's Pennant Hills course.

The alluring package was one of the items up for grabs at a fund-raising auction.

The winning bid of \$20,000 enabled two people to make the trip to Port Douglas for the Australia - Great Britain golf test.

It also helped AAP and its clients in the financial community to raise more than \$300,000 for the Smith Family, the Multiple Sclerosis Society and the St Vincent's Hospital bone marrow transplant unit.

This brought to well over half a million dollars the amount raised for charity over the three years the tournament has been staged.

Top price at the charity auction was \$35,000 for first class air tickets for two to London, with tickets to the Wimbledon Tennis finals and the British Open golf, as well as

accommodation and the use of stockbroker Rene Rivkin's stretch Rolls Royce.

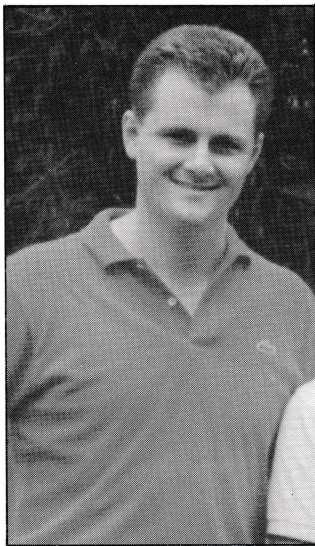
Other lots included:

- \$34,000 for a complete collection of Penfold's Grange Hermitage wines from 1952 - 83;
- \$30,000 for a trip to Adelaide and a drive in the celebrity challenge at the Foster's grand prix;



Ronnie Corbett ... a \$4,000 caricature by David Hensley of the Financial Review.

PRIZES GO UNDER THE HAMMER



AAP's Paul Spencer, owner of a solid gold golf tee.



Doug Conway of AAP (right) and Mike Bailey of Westpac, receive their trophies from Mrs Corbett.

nets \$300,000



Tete a tete. David Jensen, assistant general manager and tournament organiser, with Ronnie Corbett at the Regent Hotel.

- \$15,000 for a solid gold 22 carat golf ball weighing 26oz; and
 - \$4,000 for an autographed cartoon of celebrity guest, British comedian Ronnie Corbett.
- The auction alone, staged by MC Len Evans at the tournament dinner at the Regent Hotel, raised \$187,000.
- Other items on offer, and the bids they received, were:
- a tour of haunted hotels in Britain (\$14,000);
 - a week at the Rothbury estate making 300 bottles of your own reserve Chardonnay (\$11,000);
 - nine days for two on a New Zealand game fishing holiday (\$11,500);
 - an original red telephone box (\$5,000);
 - a cricket bat signed by the 1987 - 88 Australian, New Zealand and Sri Lankan teams (\$3,100);
 - a selection of Givenchy products and a bottle of Veuve Cliquot La Grande Dame champagne (\$2,500); and
 - Isao Aoki's golf bag (\$2,000).
- Each hole at Pennant Hills again received corporate sponsorship for the day, this time worth \$7,500.
- And a \$100-a-ticket art union was conducted with first prize of a \$110,000 BMW won by Don Cooper of Melbourne solicitors Sly and Weigall.
- Second prize of jewellery worth \$23,000 went to Mary Walter and Hillary Cotman of

Sydney's Argyle Lane Corp and third prize of a Sir Sidney Nolan painting valued at \$15,000 was won by Paul Short of the Commonwealth Bank.

Ronnie Corbett hit off in the field of 240 and was guest speaker at the tournament dinner where guests included the former Federal Government minister Gary Punch.

"The professionalism and organisation were second to none," Corbett said later.

Winners on the golf course included AAP editor-in-charge Doug Conway, who teamed up with Mike Bailey of Westpac Bank to win the four ball best ball stableford event from Ian Burt of National Australia Bank and Bill Oliver of Custom Credit.

Another AAP man among the prizes was big-hitting Paul Spencer of Pitt Street, whose prize for winning a longest drive competition was a solid gold golf tee.

The single stableford winner was Dudley O'Sullivan of St Vincents from Ron Harvey of NSW Treasury, and the best scratch score came from David Murphy of Saltama.

Penfolds Wines offered a magnum of champagne for every birdie scored on the day and a jeroboom for every eagle, a gesture which cost the company 73 magnums and one jeroboom.

Organisation is already underway for the fourth charity day next year.

Changes at the top for COMCO

COMCO has formed a management executive group to handle the day to day control of the company.

It is headed by national business manager Cliff Bowles, who is responsible for the control and administration of the overall company budget.

Its other two members are national technical manager Bill Egan and national sales and marketing manager Rob Padgett.

The group, which reports to general manager Barney Blundell, was created to "take advantage of expanding business opportunities in the light of pending regulatory changes in the telecommunications industry", a company statement said.

In another COMCO move, Brian Perkins has been appointed corporate relations manager, responsible for co-ordinating the company's corporate relations.

SFE gets RICH quick

AAP technicians have completed installation of the Reuters RICH financial information system at the Sydney Futures Exchange.

COMCO's assistant maintenance manager David Backley said the month-long operation involved installation of 62 keyboards and screens in traders' booths on the floor of the exchange.

Some keyboards had two screens hooked up, and the system had the capacity for further screens as well as an additional 32 keyboards.

The AAP installation team put the equipment in place and carried out all the cabling.

Technicians based at Pitt Street are also responsible for maintenance of the system.

David said the Futures Exchange was the sixth of eight RICH sites in Sydney (there are also four in Melbourne and one in Perth) but had the highest public profile.

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AAP's Quote Retrieval Service (QRS) proved to have the fastest response times in the world throughout 1988.

The latest figures from Reuters in London show AAP was consistently top of the pile of QRS systems.

The retrieval times are based on how fast quotes come up on subscribers' screens.

AAP's customer liaison section carries out random tests each month among the hundreds of subscribers, visiting six or eight clients in each capital city.

Reuters conducts identical tests on its systems throughout the world each month and the figures are compared.

"We were top for every single month," said AAP's QRS co-ordinator Virginia Goldhagen.

QRS tops speed table



Virginia Goldhagen - AAP's QRS co-ordinator

"While it's true that ours is a domestic rather than international service, our system is comparable with Geneva, for example, in size and in client numbers.

"And we have the added problem of huge distances to cover in Australia."

The turning point for AAP's service came in 1987 when the entire QRS system was upgraded.

"Prior to that our response times were in the 12 - 18 second range," Virginia said.

"Now we've got it down to

three seconds maximum.

"The Reuters quality standard is 12 seconds.

"Two years ago we recabled the whole QRS system on the first floor computer room at Sussex Street.

"We also carried out a lot of maintenance, and had two engineers assigned to the system instead of one to ensure its performance until the Multiquote system takes over.

"Field group technicians also helped speed up retrieval times by adding extra addresses to clients' systems.

"Our subscribers have been very impressed, particularly those who have worked overseas with their companies."

Stockbrokers' space link

ONE of Australia's largest stockbroking firms is introducing AAP's satellite communications for its branch office network.

Jarden Morgan Australia Ltd is the first Australian stockbroker to connect with the company's ISBN for two-way communications.

The ISBN link, initially operating between Sydney and Jarden Morgan's office in Townsville some 2,300 kilometres away, is used to request and receive business and mar-

ket information from around Australia and the rest of the world.

Jarden Morgan's far north Queensland office previously relied on more expensive terrestrial communications for this information.

ISBN, operated by COMCO, taps into the network of AAP Reuter Economic Services, the country's leading provider of screen-based electronic financial data.

The information is received via a 1.8 metre satellite dish.

Jarden Morgan's finance and administration manager in Queensland, Bruce Wallis, says major benefits of the AAP system include a fixed cost for communications rather than the time-based charges applicable to Telecom landlines.

"That's good news because the system is very active and time-consuming.

"Now you can leave it on for as long as you like to get information without running up massive charges."

COMCO market develop-

ment manager Rob Padgett says further advantages of satellite-based communication networks include reduced capital costs where facility sharing is used, capability of video, voice and data transmissions, and diverse routings independent of existing terrestrial links.

He says business satellite networks will become much more commonplace as companies realise their flexibility and economies.

"Satellite communications technology is well proven now.

"We have had the Australian Army set up portable satellite dishes in the desert and be talking to their headquarters within 20 minutes.

"Technology like the portable Skyswitch stations is taking satellite communication out to remote mining and exploration sites."

Jarden Morgan is progressively introducing satellite links to another seven branches.

MEDIANET SPECIALISES

MEDIANET, the AAP service that carries releases and announcements direct to the nation's news rooms, has introduced four specialist circuits, an international link and a service to suburban newspapers.

The specialist circuits are for rural, finance, energy and ethnic news.

MediaNet originally distributed news releases to geographic zones such as NSW metropolitan, Victorian regional and Tasmania.

Now subscribers can send information to these special interest groups.

A subscriber can specify, for example, Victorian Rural for a news release targeted at the rural community, and instead of going

just to the Victorian regional media it will reach a larger list of smaller rural media.

The rural service, the first specialist circuit, incorporates media outlets throughout Australia ranging from ABC Countrywide to the Wheatbelt Mercury in Merredin, Western Australia.

It includes more than 70 country newspapers, rural radio and TV shows and industry journals such as those serving sheep, cattle, pig, wheat, dairy, cane, fruit and vegetable producers.

The rural market produces an estimated \$15 billion worth of goods annually.

MediaNet is now servicing more than 700 subscribers sending releases to more than 200 individual media outlets.

A SON, Samuel, has been born to Sydney finance desk staffer Giles Parkinson and wife Patricia. Samuel weighed in at 3.7kg (about 8lbs), and "has a bit of hair", says Giles.

An encore for the bloopers!

ON the theory that we all love watching other people make fools of themselves once in a while, the best of the AAP "Bloopers Book" makes a return to the pages of AAP TODAY.

For the uninitiated, the Bloopers Book is a tatty tome of humorous howlers compiled by journalists in the Sydney newsroom since the early 1970s.

The last issue featured the mis-heard word, the mis-taken meaning and the great service messages of our time.

Judging by the response, they were proof that to err is human, to guffaw divine.

So here, by popular demand, are some more.

THE NEED TO KNOW

Much of the activity of the media revolves around the public's right to know, but some items leave you wondering if you *need* to know. The fact that heavy rain is falling in Geelong – an item which featured in the last **AAP TODAY** – probably qualifies in this category, too.

"Labor economic planning spokesman Rob Jolly says more than 92 per cent of the people leaving the State were aged between 15 and 54."

"Thousands of mums across Melbourne this morning are packing lunch for dad and the kids to take to matches in the first round of the VFL season."

Police on the hunt for a Melbourne rapist: "He was wearing a light-coloured jumper, jeans and mittens and also a condom at the time of the attack."

HEADLINES

The Blooper headline needs no elaboration:

"FORWARD WEDS HOOKER"

"MAN BETTER AFTER FALL FROM TRAIN"

"JOHNSON BRAIN SCAN – NOTHING FOUND"

"WOMEN TO GET MALE COX"

CLOSE, BUT NO CIGAR

Some reports are a mere fingertip away from perfection. The call to arms: "Dyslexics Of The World Untie" may be one. On the other hand, it may be regarded as perfection plus. Here are some items about which there is no argument.

"Homocide detectives are patrolling bars and clubs frequented by Sydney homosexuals in a bid to find some clue to the brutal killings of two homosexuals."

Miracles: "Ian Botham has claimed his 100th Test wicket in a world record time during the second Test against India at Lourdes."

If you're going to be wrong, you may as well be consistent: "Thirty-five thousand builders' labourers stepped work for 24 hours to discuss a leg of claims..."

In this vein, a news desk sub knowingly applied the following headline to a story that 20,000 Chinese had taken ill after eating a particular type of shellfish: "UNEASY CLAM SETTLES ON SHANGHAI".

POTPOURRI

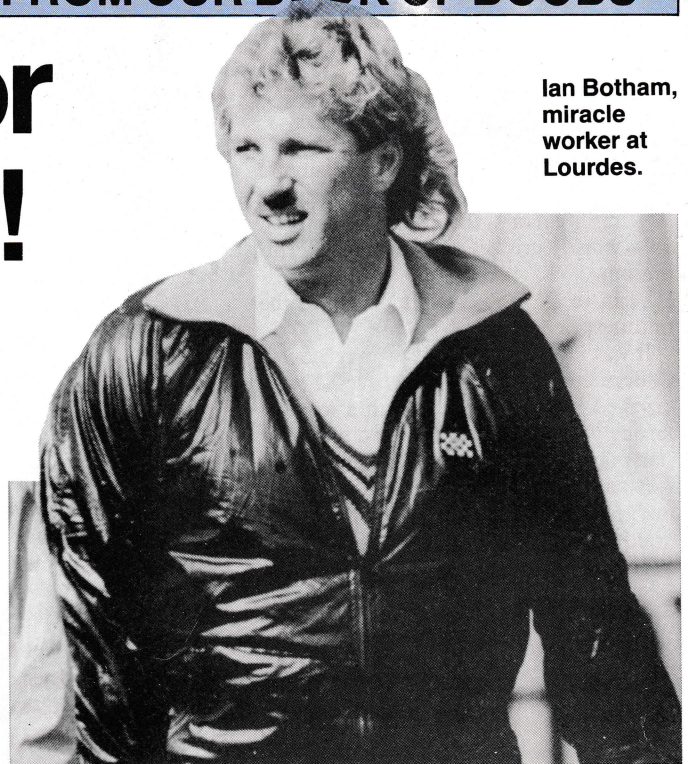
Finally, a mix of items that have that "Je ne sais quoi" ability to amuse.

"The Mayor of Springfield, Illinois, was stricken with a heart attack during a council meeting. The council voted 19 to 18 to wish him an early recovery."



The Ash Wednesday fires ... their searing intensity matched only by that of the prose they inspired.

Ian Botham, miracle worker at Lourdes.



"Mr Justice Menhennitt said Butler was a homosexual and his conduct merited criticism. But he said Eiszeles' action in placing a plastic flex cord around Butler's neck when Butler made sexual advances to him was a gross over-reaction."

"Police say Gibson, who's described as not dangerous despite a swastika tattooed on his forehead..."

Overly coy? "A young Australian accused of murder took his trousers off in the Hong Kong Supreme Court today to show the jury a wound on his thigh."

Overkill? "The horrific disaster that was Ash Wednesday blasted and seared Victoria into shock a year ago. The fearful furnace of Ash Wednesday dealt out dreadful lessons for Victorians. But what have Vic-

torians learnt from the fire shock fury that was Ash Wednesday? The holocaust that ripped through the Macedon and Mt Macedon areas..."

Remarkable foresight: "A member of the US Olympic Committee has predicted that Soviet athletes will participate in the Olympics in Moscow last year."

The Lazarus tree: "A 19-year-old man died when his motorcycle hit a tree in Whyalla. Police say it was the third fatality involving the tree in just over a year."

Straining for the local angle: "GENEVA – A major health conference involving 152 countries, including Australia, will be held..."

"Arbitration Commission talks are scheduled today on claim by mail-van drivers for nine-day week."

"A man was rescued after drowning by two lifesavers this afternoon at Anglesea..."

"Her death ended hope that she and her brothers would be Australia's only surviving quins."

"The members' car park reminiscent of Flemington on Melbourne Cup morning with the sounds of popping champagne corks and the damp morning grass wetting the souls of punters."

"A priceless portrait by Rembrandt stolen from Dulwich College art gallery in South London ... is valued at an estimated \$1.76 million."