

# village view

by Andrea Leonard

You've probably heard about some of the services telephone companies in other parts of the country offer their subscribers. In some places, you have a wide choice of Dial-A-Service numbers you can call for a variety of information.

You can receive religious guidance and support by picking up your phone, dialing a number and listening to the recording Dial-A-Prayer is playing at that moment. People who've used the service feel it's helped them through times of

despair; they also say they're surprised how often the prayer is suitable for the situation at the time they call.

They might find they could get similar support if they were to turn to their Bible, open it at random, and read the first verse to catch their eyes.

It's probably more effective, however, to hear a strong voice delivering the prayer. People often dial-a-prayer because they are lonely, and the sound of the voice coupled with the words of reassurance and concern relieves their solitude. They feel someone does care.

In New York City and some of its suburbs a new service began this past summer. The Dial-the-Dow-Jones-Report offers hourly updates on the market's most active stocks, world news that affects the market, and the D-J averages at

the moment.

The service is available weekdays from 9:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; on weekends there's an analysis of the week's events on Wall Street.

If you're having problems with your house plants, you can Dial-A-Plant and receive timely tips on their care. You'll learn which prefer sun, and which flourish in filtered light; you'll be advised which need watering every day and which should be dried out before getting another drink; you'll be advised which to spray and which to water from below.

Modern communications technology has even kept pace with the growing faith in astrology. You can Dial-A-Horoscope to see what the stars have in store for you. There are a dozen different numbers; one for each of the twelve signs of the Zodiac.

If you're a gambler, you can get the word on whether your nag came in by calling the Off-Track Betting Results, or the New York City Report.

New York Telephone often offers a daily Dial-A-Money-Saving-Tip featuring Sylvia Porter's ideas on personal money management. Everyone could use a daily money-saving tip. One of them might be "Save 10 cents by not making this kind of call."

Would you use Dial-A-Service if it were available? Would you pay ten cents to hear a prayer? You might at the moment when you really needed a prayer; some of us might feel the need of it every day.

Do you enjoy your house plants enough to spend ten cents to hear how to provide better care for them? Would it be worth a dime to you to get an up-dated market report or find out which horse won a race?

How about weather forecasts? There's a local number you can dial to hear an up-to-the-minute report of the weather; I've used it occasionally. It's a public service of Radio Station WOCB in West Yarmouth and may be one we're not making full use of. Usually when you hear about it, it's over the radio, and when you're listening to the radio, you get a weather report every 15 or 20 minutes and don't need to dial for it.

Sometimes, though, you don't want to wait for the radio to provide a forecast; you're in a hurry; you want to know immediately. It's very convenient to call for it. Dial 775-0500.

In some places you can dial for the correct time. I don't know of any such number here on the Cape.

New Yorkers and residents of some other large cities may get a laugh a day if they Dial-A-Joke. Many places offer a number to hear the latest sports scores.

It wouldn't surprise me to learn that you could Dial-A-Weight-Watcher's-Menu or a Hint-from-Heloise to help dieters and housekeepers. Dial-Dear-Abby could supply instant advice to the love-lorn and otherwise emotionally confused.

Dial-A-Traffic-Jam might steer drivers away from road tie-ups. If the service ever became available locally, the possibilities for service to tourists are wide-open.

Dial-A-Tide and Dial-A-Fish-Story could tell fishermen when and where and how to be certain of a good catch, with advice on bait and lures, the best lakes and streams for your choice of game fish, or the spot in Vineyard Sound where the most blues or stripers were running at last report.

One reason why New England may not be offered such services, however, is the different rate structure between the two areas. New York Telephone charges on the basis of message units rather than flat rates for unlimited service for local calls.

It works out, as a rule, to approximately the same per-month cost since a generous number of free message units is allowed each month. After those have been used, there's a ten-cent charge for each additional message unit.

In New York, if you call beyond your own local area, the additional cost is charged in message units rather than tolls; that is, if you live on Long Island, it could cost two message units to call Manhattan instead of the one to call your neighbor.

If you called Westchester, you might be charged three units. And for each three minutes you talk, an additional charge is made.

The New England Telephone Company would need to revamp its entire rate schedule to provide this sort of Dial-A-Service to its subscribers since there's no limit to the number of local calls we make for our flat, once-a-month rate. We pay extra only for toll calls or additional special services.

Which system works best for the consumer? A lot depends, of course, on how much you use your telephone. If you do a lot of visiting over the wire, you'd want to keep the system New England Telephone presently offers.

If you use your telephone infrequently, and have one in the house only because you might need it in an emergency if you were sick or the house caught on fire, you'd benefit if the company changed to the system of computing telephone charges used by New York Telephone.

And, if you're the kind, like millions of others, who'd pay a dime for Dial-A-Services, you'd be pleased if the method of computing rates were to change; then some of these services would probably be available to us, as subscribers to service of the New England Telephone Company.

Meanwhile, we'll just have to struggle along without them. When we stop and think about it, we're probably equally as happy without these conveniences as we'd be if they were available. How much - really - do they add to the quality of life?