



Four members of the day shift of Collegian, Inc. (left) are at work in their basement office in Carnegie. From left to right are Karen Depew-Michael, Pam Bartoletti, Sandy Fisher and, in the foreground, production manager Meg Irish. At right, Anne Johnstone and Steve Auerweck of the night shift examine the layout of what will become a newspaper page.



Notes from the underground

By MIKE JOSEPH
Collegian Copy Editor

It's easy to go unnoticed at 3 o'clock in the morning. About that dark hour, five full-time employees of Collegian Inc. emerge from a small obscure room in the basement of Carnegie. They are now toward bound, having just completed a process that six others on the day shift had begun in the same room 19 hours earlier. They've just made a morning newspaper.

For the 11 members of the Collegian production staff, going unnoticed is nothing new, though it might be a bit ironic. Their product, The Daily Collegian, gets a lot of attention: First-period sojourners to Willard regularly have to avoid tripping over huge bundles of Collegians stacked in the lobby there; the potters in the Arts I ceramics room are always on the hunt for Collegians to protect their clay work; and every now and then an issue finds its way into a waste basket on the higher levels of Old Main.

So the people who build this thrice-weekly newspaper ought to be observed now and then to reveal what pains go into building a waste basket filler. None of the eleven, by the way, are the Collegian staff writers, whose names are forever splashed across this sheet. The people in this story have nothing to do with news reporting; or do they have everything to do with it?

Their jobs, simply stated, make the

newspaper readable. Operating an imposing array of machines, they make eye-catching art forms out of advertisements and set thousands of words of type, turning this into mats, then onto film plates that are subsequently taken to the printing press. They do all of this so that the paper, by 8 a.m. is in Willard, the HUB, Kern, Pattee and various other spots.

Meg Irish, the 22-year-old production manager of the shop, explains that the production is called photo-offset, that is, a lot of camera work. Type-setters turn news stories into computer tapes — great lengths of inch-wide strips filled with tiny holes. The holes represent letters that will eventually become the English language again.

The tape spools are run through another machine that does much work in little time. This hard-working machine is called the Nine Thousand, either because it does 9,000 different things or because it has 9,000 buttons, keys, knobs and dials. When the Nine Thousand eats the computer tape, it decodes each hole to find out what letter is represented. The Nine Thousand then finds the letter on a film strip of type — a font — and snaps a picture of the letter onto light-sensitive paper. The machine divides the letters into words and spaces them so they come out even at both the left and right ends of the lines. It does this at the rate of 60 lines of type a minute.

Nearly as smart as any English major,

the Nine Thousand even knows enough to hyphenate words between two consonants, though words with four consonants in a row somehow baffle the machine. "The only thing it can't do," Irish says, "is hyphenate Pittsburgh and Schwab."

Yet another machine is needed to develop the light-sensitive paper into advertisements, news stories or headlines. But when that chore is finished, the fun begins. "Cutting and pasting 502," Irish calls it. "A graduate level course."

Every advertisement, every news story, every headline, by-line, cut-line and picture must be sized, sliced up with a razor blade and pasted onto a mat the size of a newspaper page. "Everyone has cut his finger at least once," says Pattie Pritchett, the night-shift supervisor. Pattie has cut hers more than once. She can be seen at midnight hunched over a mat, razor blade in hand, concentrating like a surgeon. With her nose about six inches from her work, she operates on words. For example, if the word "Oswald" — as in Lee Harvey — has somehow come out of those magic machines as "Waldo," she can flick the razor blade a couple times, transpose a letter or two, find an "s" from discarded copy and become one of the few who know how Oswald was really put together.

When the mat is finished — letter-perfect, it is hoped — Steve Auerweck takes over. Auerweck is the cameraman,

but he operates no ordinary camera. It's big, nearly big enough to sleep in and big enough to hold a piece of film the size of a newspaper page. Auerweck takes a picture of each mat and gets the film ready for the printing house.

In addition to camera work, Auerweck does a little of everything — typesetting, proofreading and page-building. His least favorite of the four tasks? "I wouldn't be here," he says, "if I had to type copy full-time."

Earl Davis, the same cantankerous Collegian columnist, does type copy most of the time, but he refuses to acknowledge any boredom from the job. He only admits that "it's amazing how sore your arms get." Davis says that typing the copy gives him a chance to read as much as possible while on the job. "Usually it takes a long time to finish something — because it gets interesting and I just start reading it," he says. "I can make myself find something interesting, but sometimes it's just wading through an ocean of verbiage. But, Davis adds, "you figure in a great span of writing, there's got to be a kernel of good in it."

Anne Johnstone, a typesetter as well as a page builder, disagrees with Davis. She gets bored. "It's possible to go into a kind of daze typing a story," Johnstone says. "When I see the paper the next day, it all looks vaguely familiar, but if I were quizzed on a particular story that I'd typed, chances are I wouldn't have the slightest idea of its content."

One of the operators of the Nine Thousand, Pam Thurston, says one of the biggest difficulties in typesetting is the bad writing given to them by Collegian writers. "We get a lot of poorly edited copy down here," she says.

Thurston recalls that one time last term a Collegian sports writer gave a typesetter a story that was so marked up with editing directions that he could hardly read it. The sports writer, she says, felt so bad that he gave the typesetter a dollar to type it.

A string of paper dolls hangs in one corner of the basement shop. The dolls are simple silhouettes, the kind scissored out of a single newspaper sheet that has been folded several times so that the dolls, when unfolded, look as if they're holding hands. Production manager Irish says the dolls are an in-joke for the day shift.

"They're the kind of dolls you make in kindergarten," Irish says, and then, joking, "building ads is kindergarten work."

Whatever kind of work is involved in building ads, Sandy Fisher and Nancy Brassington agree that without precision and without some pride in their work, the ads can turn out ugly, or worse, inaccurate. "It's not a job for bored housewives," Fisher says.



Cameraman Steve Auerweck (far left) has the big camera turned on him. Earl Davis (top left) reads a news story before he sets it in type. Brad Harkness (lower left) composes an advertisement on the Nine Thousand. The second component of the Nine Thousand is in the background. At right, night-shift supervisor Pattie Pritchett proofreads headlines.

Pam Bartoletti and Brad Harkness remember how the omission of a single letter in an ad a year ago cost the Collegian a regular advertiser. "It was the worst mistake I've ever seen," Bartoletti says, adding that the mistake was made by a former employee. In issue after issue of the Collegian, according to Bartoletti and Harkness, an advertisement for Joe the Motorist's Friend had been, in some way, incorrectly built, usually with wrong prices. The ad, it seems, had become sort of a nightmare for the production staff. "We kept doing and doing his ad wrong, and then doing it wrong again," Bartoletti says. "And nobody wanted to do it."

But the minor price mistakes in Joe the Motorist's Friend ads were all topped by a major blunder in one issue, the issue that made Joe an ex-client. In that issue, Joe the Motorist was called, not a Friend, but a Fiend. Just last week, Harkness says, Joe the Motorist's Friend decided to try his luck once again with the Collegian.

Although the production staff is in no way responsible for the news and editorial content of the paper, the relationship by name — Collegian — sometimes proves troublesome. In April the Collegian ran a story critical of how the municipality was getting rid of pigeons. An extermination company had been hired to bait the pigeons with poison. At about the same time Irish had called an exterminator from the same company to get rid of roaches in her apartment. When he learned that she worked for the Collegian, Irish says, he started to scold her for the newspaper story. Finally, she says, "he sprayed the whole place and said there wouldn't be any more roaches, but I've still got roaches, so I doubt that they got many pigeons, anyway."

"A problem," Irish says, "is that everything the Collegian does is associated with you."

Generally, though, the production staff doesn't mind being associated with

the students upstairs. Karen Depew-Michael says she and the five other women on day shift worked during Alice Doesn't Day — an all women's strike day promoted by NOW last October. "The paper had to get out," Depew-Michael says.

There is, of course, no reason at all that the production staff shouldn't empathize with students. The staff itself is heavy with college education, characteristic of employment throughout State College. "This is what happens to all the English majors," Thurston says, noting that four of the staff have bachelor degrees in English.

Also in line with employment in State College, the production staff has a high turnover. Irish has worked there the longest — four years.

Irish, who has worked for the Doubleday publishing house, is one of the few women production managers on newspapers. At a National Typesetting convention in Harrisburg recently, there was Irish, one other woman and about 100 men.

"This is the only job I know that can give you an ulcer and bore you to death at the same time," Irish says. "When I'm 30, I'll look 60, and then I'll be in trouble because there's no retirement plan at the Collegian."

Both Irish and night supervisor Pritchett have to worry about deadlines. If the newspaper page negatives are not delivered to Himes Printing Co. by 3 a.m., Collegian Inc. is charged extra for the delay.

So when it's after 2 a.m. and Pritchett still has a page or two to be built, precision must sometimes be traded for time. "We know we're not perfect," Pritchett says. "You can have two or three people go over a story and you might still get a mistake."

And who wants mistakes? Certainly not the Collegian production staff. Mistakes might make their work noticeable, and they've been doing fine without being detected. "We care for the paper very, very much," Pritchett says, "even though our names are not on it."

Photos by Barry Wyshinski

