

Living Quarters

# Computer whizzes apply skills to locating apartments

By **DIANA AYRES**

Tuesday, March 3, saw the launching

of Apartment Data Services' offering to the locator trade, its computer-gener-

ated property information system, "The Apartment Book." To mark the

occasion Duddles-ten Properties threw a seafood bash at their Loop Central offices on Westpark that drew an enthusiastic crowd of apartment managers and locators, lured by the prospect of lunch and hearing the two young originators, John Severance and Nick Senofsky, explain the workings of the ADS system.

Severance and Senofsky are quick to point out that their backgrounds are in computer programming. They chanced upon the locator angle when Severance was in the throes of relocating. Endless

phone calls and time expended in getting a place to live convinced him that here was an application for data base programming.

Chums from A&M days, Severance and Senofsky had planned initially to market both hardware and software, but quickly found that the locators were not game to deal with computers. So they had to retreat to the idea of marketing information derived from their programs instead.

"Our goal is to make the book the most effective apartment-locating tool available,"

says Senofsky. Data from the city's apartments, advertisers and non-advertisers alike, is put into a logical format and collated in a three-ring binder. It includes items as detailed as floor plans and the availability of buses. This base information is sold for \$25. Subsequent updates to The Apartment Book, mailed out three times a week, cost \$17.50 a month. The production also serves as a convenient advertising vehicle. Mike Biggs, Vice President of Apartment Operations for Duddles-ten Management Corporation, says

that apartment locators are an integral part of their business, especially in the current soft market. He feels that locator commissions provide the best direct dollar benefit for the company, because they get qualified residents and rental income in return.

What is a locator's function? She (95% of the crowd on March 3 was female) qualifies the client, ascertains what he wants — size, location, etc. At the same time she performs an important service for the apartment management in verifying employment

and salary, previous residence and credit status. In fact, many locating companies guarantee 90-day occupancy.

Anne Rozelle of Apartment Living Locators goes on to say that a good locator then will escort the applicants to prospective apartments. Her job is finished when a lease is actually signed, because the locator's commission is paid by the apartment owner. That amounts to 200 percent of the first month's rent.

That setup makes the service free for the consumer.

Rozelle adds, "All apartment locators must be licensed real estate salespeople and have undergone the same education and licensing procedures as those who specialize in selling."

The agencies range from one-man operations like Ed Nelson's Habitat Hunters (Nelson works out of his own neighborhood and specializes in that area — most of his business is by referral) to firms like Rozelle's with several employees that, again, prefer to stay within a geographical area to

companies with multiple offices like Apartment Selectors.

Valerie Patton, of this last group, has a good word for the industry. "There have been a lot of corporate moves here lately," says Patton. "Companies are taking advantage of a low cost of living to relocate in Houston. Business is picking up." She notes that the owners are sprucing up their communities or are being bought out by management companies who will upgrade them. "There will be a better product as a result," she says.



**John Severance and Nick Senofsky are collaborators in the production of 'The Apartment Book.'**