

December 1992 "Ann Arborite" Allen Licari

# Ann Arbor Observer

DECEMBER 1992

\$1.50



## The green gizmo man

by Jim Dulzo

C. HARVEY  
CARRIS

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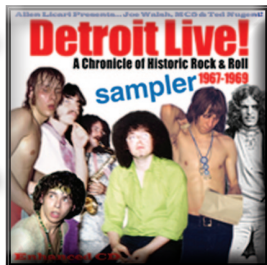
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Arts & Media



**ANN ARBORITE OF THE MONTH DECEMBER 1992**  
**The green gizmo man** LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD – *Jim Dulzo*  
**FEATURES**



## DEPARTMENTS

**UNITED EARTH FUND CHAPTER @ UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS**  
STUDENT NEWS CHAPTER - HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATIVE FOR HOPI

**P**eople care about Human Rights. UEF's Petition campaign supporting Hopi Human Rights launched from Florence, Italy. Thousands of signatures came from many countries supporting the Hopi Indians Human Rights and calling for a hearing at the Hague World Court. Hopi Representative Thomas Banyacya, Richard Kastle and Cherokee Global Health Spokesperson Rolling Thunder, collaborated with UEF to tell the story and call for action.  
[UnitedEarthFund.org](http://UnitedEarthFund.org) or [UEF1.org](http://UEF1.org)

**V**itae – Interactive Multimedia and Broadcast Producer, Audio Engineer, News Director, Editor-in-Chief, Telecommunications & Digital Networking, Musician, Bachelor of Arts in Communications.

- The Marin Symphony Orchestra, Marin County, CA.
- The Montreux Jazz Festival, Switzerland
- Graham Bond Organization @ Island Records, London, UK.

**Interactive Media, News, Web Sites & Training - International Awards**

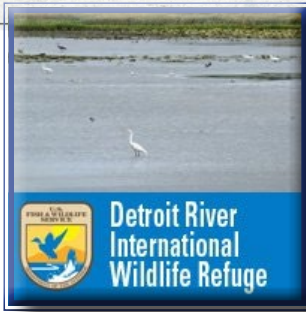
- Editor-in-Chief at UEF - Photo Journalist, Field Reporter
- News Director- Newscaster - KPOO-FM San Francisco, California.
- Broadcast Field Producer- Audio/Video/Digital Media.
- Network Technology International (NETI): Computer Conferencing.
- FCC 3rd Class Radio Operators License–Radio & Web Newscaster.
- Audio Engineer-Producer for Ted Nugent, MC5 & Joe Walsh.

**Public Service:**

- Advanced First Aid Instructor for the American Red Cross.
- Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) Instructor American Heart Assoc.
- CPR Class Coordinator for Oakland County, MI. Am. Heart Assoc.
- EMT {Emergency Medical Technician} Ambulance Attendant

Photo Credit: UEF 1978 Rome, Italy - Richard Kastle & Licari - UEF Human Rights Initiative.

## ANN ARBORITES



# The green gizmo man



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### Busy building his low-budget high-tech video production business, Allen Licari also dreams of helping to save the environment

There he is again—leaving yet another message on my answering machine, this time about some new gizmo he wants me to see. It sounds like he called from his car; his voice has that electric crackle and rushed quality of a busy pilot radioing in from a high-flying jet.

“Hi, this is Allen,” it crackles. “I’ve got a CD-I player on loan to me for the next thirty-six hours. I really think you should see it; it’s state-of-the-art stuff. I’ll drive out to your place to show it to you if you can’t come over. Call me at home or beep me. Hope all is well; catch you further downstream...”

And with a burst of car-phone static, he’s gone. *Twenty-four hours and two* more coordinating car-phone calls later, we’re at his house. Licari, a large guy in a suit and tie, leans back and spins around in the office chair in front of his home entertainment system: six TV screens, four computers, a laser disc player, a compact disc player, a double cassette deck, seven VCR decks, a video-cam, an eight-track real-to-real tape deck, a twelve-channel audio mixer, a computerized fax and voicemail machine, a color digital scanner, three printers, and, almost quaintly, a stereo receiver and loudspeakers.

He has arranged this \$90,000 warehouse of electronics on big, homemade wooden shelves that wipe out one end of the living room of his west side ranch house.

This is the headquarters for Licari and Associates, the company he started four years ago. His day job is selling real estate, but by staying abreast of home computers, home video, and home stereo, Licari has also pieced together a business that produces video pieces—commercials, info-tainment shorts, training films, mini-documentaries, video catalogs—for a fraction of the cost that a big ad agency, using full-blown professional equipment, usually charges.

Licari, forty, is driven by several burning visions. **One is his desire to help level the playing field for the little guy**—smaller businesses that just can’t afford the kinds of imagery that large corporations routinely pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for. Another is his insatiable appetite for the newest technological wonders—a hunger that goes back to his high school days, when he used to lug a big reel-to-reel tape recorder to Detroit’s Grande Ballroom or Birmingham’s Palladium and record performances by the MC5, James Cotton, Ted Nugent, and Joe Walsh.

But what really got him into low budget high-tech, he says, was his search for meaningful work and his concern for the environment.

# The green gizmo man



After he graduated from high school in 1970, Licari spent several years bouncing back and forth between the University of California at Davis and Oakland University in Rochester. He didn't like student life, but he did catch a big case of green fever from a swarm of campus environmental activists.

***His high-speed, jargony rap goes into overdrive when he talks about his dream green network.***

“I wanted to put together an interactive wildlife rescue group,” he recalls. “One that would tie in environmental groups, universities, the public. Make it real interactive, so people can get out there and do whatever the heck they want to do, but in an organized fashion. That sort of spun me into ‘God, I can’t even afford to make the pilot.’ So I started doing it myself.”

He went back to school, finishing a Degree in communications from Oakland University in 1981. For a while afterward, he tried to pull his own electronic environmental network together in California. But he found little support for it among businesspeople, who were much more interested in the bottom line than in his wide-eyed schemes involving activists, professors, cable TV watchers, computers, phone banks, and video-cams. “It’s really difficult to attract people who are both intelligent and have the economy to do something on a humanitarian

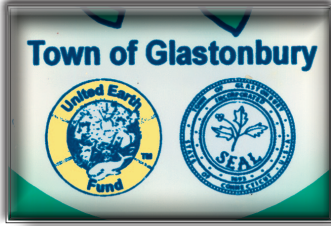
scale,” he now realizes. “It would be easier to go out and sell wiggle picture hubcaps.” Undaunted, he returned to the Detroit area and worked at various jobs—for cable companies and selling real estate—until moving to Ann Arbor four years ago and setting up shop at home.

The new CD-I player is Licari’s latest high-tech head-turner. The \$700 machine looks like a regular CD player, but it’s hooked up to a TV, not a stereo. It plays what appear to be regular old CD’s, but these things hold more than music. This one is not only loaded with bland, corporate back ground music and narration about a spray equipment company’s product line, it also has high-resolution pictures of a man spraying his lawn. He actually moves, albeit haltingly.

But, Licari says excitedly, what’s even more important about this brand new CD-I (that’s short for “compact disc interactive”) technology is that it can, in a couple of eye blinks, move from, say, greetings from a company manager to pictures of and narration about the most arcane comers of the company’s product line. Just move a pointer on the TV screen and click a button on the remote control unit and you’re there. It’s like paging through a talking book that has moving color pictures.

Licari has had some success with his low-budget studio. In his best year he billed \$150,000—not bad for a new, one-man

## The green gizmo man



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operation. But by the time he pays his creative help (writers, technical consultants, computer programmers, cinema and video producers, and graphic artists) there's not much left for him. If he's ever going to do this full-time, he needs to do more actual production and time-consuming, expensive prospecting.

Licari hopes that a boom in CD-I use could throw a lot of new business his way. Meanwhile, he's already found perhaps fifteen clients who can use his services. An architectural firm hired him to make a video catalog of its posh new homes; a building supply company {Masco Corporation} had him pull together catalog pictures of everything from sinks to toilet fixtures and roll them into a laser disc, along with narration and a small amount of interactive capability. Sarns/3M hired him to build a video kiosk that displays a video of its latest heart-lung machine technology. Touch a spot on the screen and the thing goes to whatever the viewer (probably someone attending a med tech convention) is most curious about.

These projects are hardly revolutionary. What does make them unusual, though, is that Licari can put them all together right there in his living room, using his gargantuan home system. He needs no hugely expensive video switcher—there's a home computer program that can do the same thing if you hook it up to the VCR's the right way. No \$50,000 Betacams (the TV industry standard) because "high-eight" video cameras now offer quality good enough for the applications Licari specializes in.

Licari hopes eventually to reach an operational scale that would allow him to assemble his dream green network. His high-speed, jargony rap goes into overdrive, and his intense, penetrating stare lightens up with a youthful enthusiasm when he talks about how really cool it could all be.

"It's really a very simple idea," he says. "It would take the one hundred and twenty active players—the big national and regional environmental organizations—put them in a monthly calendar to the general public, put a network out that allows groups to call into a central data bank and deliver their issues that cross-relate, so everybody knows who is doing what. So if you were doing 'Wetlands, you'd type in 'wetlands' on your computer and find out who's working on them, in what areas."

"The big problem," Licari says, "is that you have a problem in, say, the [Southwest] Four Corners area, with Kennecott Copper. There's all these little [environmental] groups trying to contribute, getting wiped out by all of these large vested interests who have money, lawyers, and the ability to communicate and get around all of these little fragmented groups. This would give those little groups a focused effort that would provide broad access."

By enabling those activists to work together, Licari is convinced that homegrown, cable-connected green cybernetics and video could Gulliverize big corporations that are indifferent to the environment. "Thinking about that is what got me to be Mr. Interactive here," he says gesturing at his ultimate home system.

- Jim Dulzo



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