

# HC & G

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TECH SUPPORT

## Security Counsel *by Lockbart Steele*

STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR HOME EVEN WHEN FAR AWAY

Labor Day weekend is, like it or not, the end of the summer for most of us. While longtime Hamptonsites know there's no better season on the East End than autumn, the sad reality is that the time most of us get to spend at second houses decreases along with the daylight.

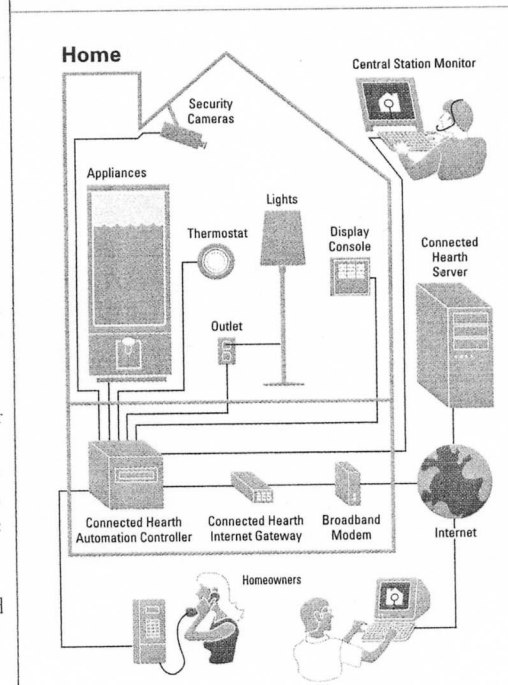
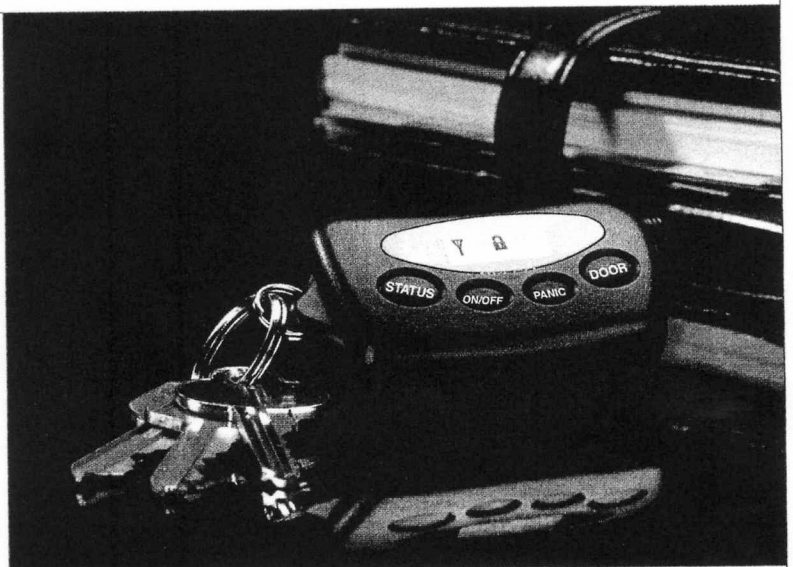
So it seems hardly fair that, on top of less leisure time, homeowners also must deal with numerous uncertainties about the houses they are leaving behind. And yet, for second home owners, that's almost universally the case.

"Until three years ago, I was a Hamptons second home owner in East Hampton," recalls John Thorsen. "I'd hear nothing but horror stories from other second-home owners. The things they'd go through to make sure their pipes didn't burst in the winter—things like leaving cabinet doors underneath the sink open. It got to the point where when I'd drive out, I'd round the corner to the house and I'd have a moment of anxiety. Was the house still there? Was everything OK?"

For people with similar concerns, the options have been relatively limited. One popular non-technical solution—hiring a caretaker to look in on the property—is an old option, but it lacks immediate notification in the case of a serious problem. At the other end of the spectrum, "smart homes" offer remote control over many aspects of a home—but at a very steep cost and with a surprising lack of Internet-enabled controls. Now, however, several companies (including one founded by Thorsen himself) are creating more practical solutions that let homeowners stay in touch with their homes from virtually anywhere on the globe.

Thorsen's company, called **Connected Hearth**, is based in Amagansett. A former software developer, he started with the simple idea of giving homeowners the ability to remotely control factors like the temperature in a house by using a web browser on any Internet-connected computer. His solution (the **Connected Hearth Internet Gateway**), however, allows for more than just temperature control.

For a starting cost of about \$6,000 (quotes are tailored for the size of the residence), **Connected Hearth** gives a homeowner the ability to control two thermostats, up to 16 lights and appliances, and to check in on four webcams positioned throughout the house. The company's server connects to the house every 60 seconds, checking the status of the security and fire alarms, plus any water sensors. In an emergency, emails will automatically be sent to email addresses specified by the homeowner—or even as a text message to a cell phone. Users can also check in on the status of their home via the web and make adjustments as they



**Pocket Change** | Security manufacturer Napco recently introduced the *NiteScene* keychain (ABOVE). The device gives control over a home security system from outside a home, and can turn on certain lights remotely, too. **Look, Ma, No PC** | **Connected Hearth's** *Internet Gateway* system (LEFT) has one key advantage (besides its cost): with no computer to maintain at each individual residence, the system is far less susceptible to problems after a power failure. See *Resources*.

see fit. The only pre-existing requirement for the service is a high-speed Internet connection—no in-home computer is required, which Thorsen says is important because the service will continue to work even after a blackout—without the need for an on-site reboot.

Not surprisingly, other companies have spotted the same need in the home security market. Napco Security Group, based out of Amityville, NY, introduced a high-end security control panel earlier this year that endeavors to give owners some remote control over their properties. By Internet or by phone, temperature settings, for instance, can be adjusted.

But the control panel, called the X255, offers its greatest value in the pure home security sphere. Its name stems from the fact that the panel can divide a house into 255 separate zones, making it possible for owners to isolate an alarm for a work of art or a wine cellar. And, once programmed, the panel will tell you which zone is experiencing problems when you're alarming it—saving the mad dash all over the house to find out which window was left open. The panel can also be operated by a key-chain, allowing easy disarming of an alarm—much like turning off a car alarm.

"We developed this system especially for our higher-end clientele," says Richard Soloway, Napco's chairman. Napco has one other new product that might be of interest: motion sensors that can tell the difference between a cat and an actual intruder. A step in the right direction, to be sure.



*Screen Saver | High-end home security systems can often interface with home automation systems. AMX's new Madero touchpanel line (ABOVE) shows video from rooms around the house. New View | Similar functionality comes with Crestron's latest line of home automation products, including this touch panel (LEFT). In Control | Home security systems from Napco (RIGHT) can give homeowners remote control over aspects of their residence. See Resources.*

