

Sound abound

Home entertainment systems are a necessity for the technologically inclined



Mirror photos by Gary M. Baranec

Altoona resident Shawn Gioiosa's home entertainment system consists of a 51-inch HDTV, a sub woofer, DVD player and CD player, with six-speaker surround sound.

BY JIMMY MINCIN
jmincin@altoonamirror.com

Shawn Gioiosa knows about home theater equipment. And he's willing to share that knowledge with the world. In addition to writing promo ads for the shows on TV Land, he composes a series of ads, called "High Tech," designed to educate the rerun network's target audience, baby boomers, about modern technology such as surround sound systems, digital cameras, video cables and remote controls.

Gioiosa, 36, of Altoona, works from home for the New York City-based network.

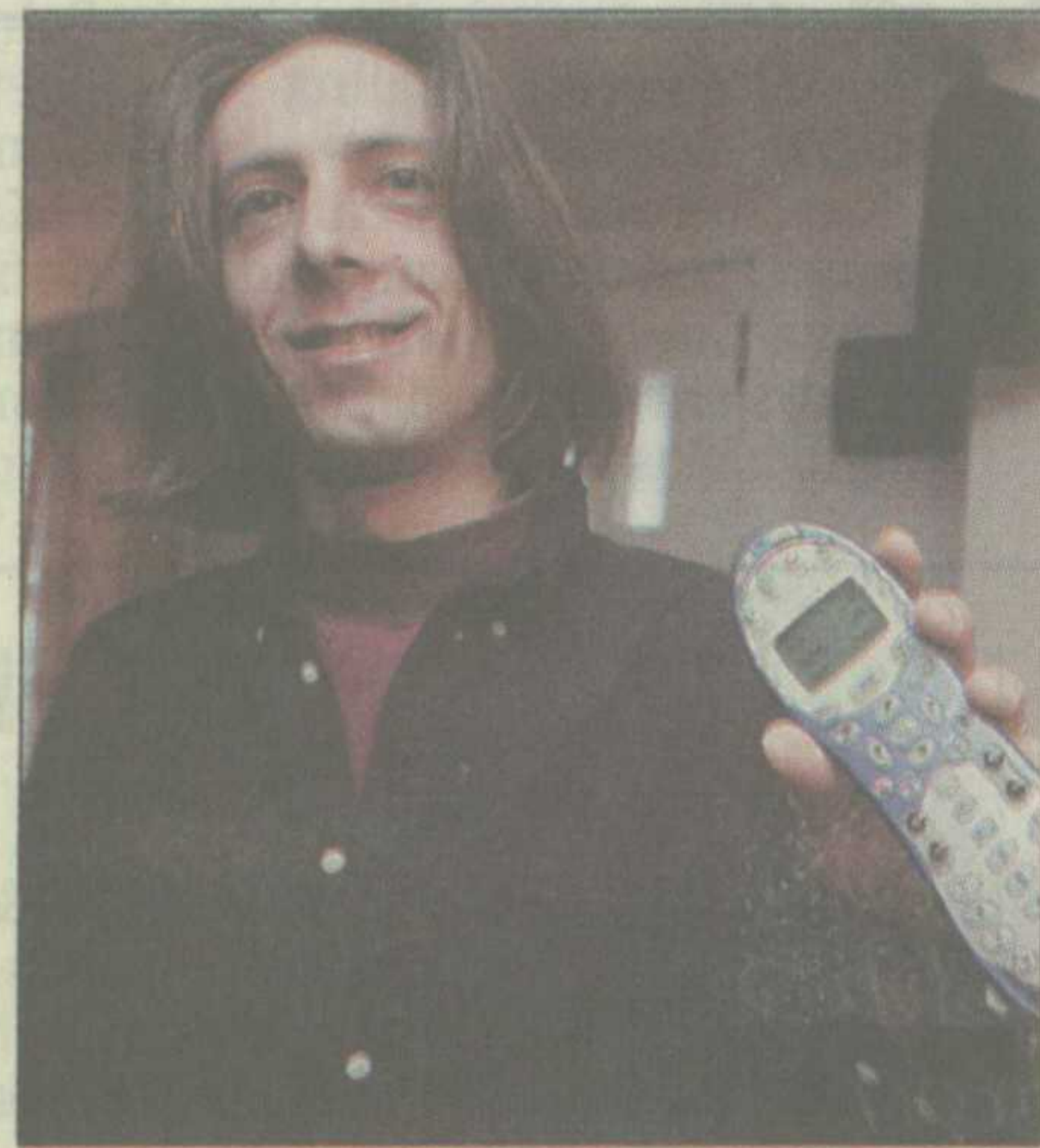
"Here, it's easier to concentrate," he said. "The only distraction I have is me."

So far, he hasn't distracted himself from his passion for digital sound and image. One look at his home theater system tells the story.

His system comprises a 51-inch, high-definition TV, 7.1-channel surround sound receiver, DVD and CD player, six speakers and a subwoofer. From the outset, he had a clear vision of what he wanted his system to be.

"I wanted to recreate the movie theater in my living room, but keep within a budget," he said.

Describing his \$6,000 setup as "middle of the road," Gioiosa said it's unnecessary to pay a fortune for a new home theater system. In fact, he thinks



Gioiosa, a writer for TV Land, can control his whole home entertainment system with this Harmony remote control.

it's better to pick out what you want now and wait until it goes on sale.

"You don't need to have the latest technology," he said. "I built my system over the course of four years, so people shouldn't think they have to lay out a ton of money to start with. My system's by no means the most expensive — I got a lot of it on clearance."

Gioiosa also stresses the importance of doing research before making a purchase.

"There are a lot of great resources on the Internet," he said. "Find out as much as you can on any piece of equipment you want to buy — before

you buy it. Also, write down the dimensions of every component to make sure you have enough room for what you want. Things often look smaller on a showroom floor."

Matt Muccitelli, owner of Park Audio and Video in Duncansville, said a typical home theater system comprises a TV, five speakers and a subwoofer. His store, which specializes in custom design and installation of home theater products, stocks systems that range in price from \$300 to more than \$1,000.

Finding the right product comes down to individual needs and home design, he said.

"It's just a matter of what works best for certain homes," he said. "It depends on the construction and layout of the rooms in the house. Some rooms allow for in-wall and in-ceiling speaker installation and some rooms don't. Home theater systems aren't a one-size-fits-all type of thing. All rooms are different."

Looking beyond Internet research, Muccitelli, 27, of Altoona recommends seeking professional advice before making a single purchase. This entails finding a reputable seller who shows an interest in your home theater objectives.

"Find someone who will sit down with you and take the time to design a system that will fit your room and lifestyle," he said. "Professional advice makes the difference between

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Home theater installation tips

■ **Account for power requirements:** Make sure your home's circuits can handle the power load placed on them by home theater devices. If load is too heavy, reconfigure your equipment so you don't blow a circuit.

■ **Go easy on cables:** Treat cables gently. If cabling is bent or crushed, the signal will be impeded and the system's audio/video quality will not reach its potential.

■ **Don't forget surge protectors:** Home theater electronics are designed to provide a larger-than-life viewing experience, but they're extremely delicate. One power surge is all it takes to fry audio/video components beyond use.

■ **Give your equipment some breathing room:** Electronics tend to not function well when they're overheated and kept in close quarters. Correct spacing and thermal management are key to a smooth-running system.

■ **Keep dust in check:** Dust interferes with the functions of home theater components and can shorten the life span of a system. Dust your components thoroughly and often.

■ **Hang onto warranty documents:** Keep all paperwork for manufacturer's warranties. Register your equipment with the manufacturer as soon as possible, then store all documents in one place for quick and easy reference.

Source: CableOrganizer.com

THEATER: Consult a professional

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having an average system and a good system.”

Also, people often overlook the importance of selecting the right remote control, Muccitelli said. Buying one that is programmable and universal allows for one-touch control of the entire system.

“People who purchase a universal remote will enjoy their system a whole lot more,” he said.

For audio-visual technology buffs like Dave Vallani, owner of DATA music services in Altoona, the most enjoyable aspect of a home theater system is its surround sound capabilities.

Vallani, 54, of Altoona also teaches basic and advanced audio classes at Penn State Altoona. As a professional recording technician, he called the room-filling power of surround sound systems “stunning.”

“You have depth of sound — left, right, center and behind you,” he said. “In a movie, good sound designers can really create an illusion of space with respect to audio and effects. Whether it’s a good movie or an orchestral recording, the sound quality of multi-channel HDTV is incredible.”

What is that?

Surround sound: Refers to the application of multi-channel audio to channels “surrounding” the audience. The first incarnation of the technology was surround sound 5.1 which included five speakers and one subwoofer — also referred to as Dolby Digital and Digital Theater Systems (DTS) sound.

Subwoofer: A speaker designed to reproduce very low bass frequencies (usually those between 20 Hz and 125 Hz). It usually is larger than the average speaker and require more power to operate than their small speaker counterparts. It is used in order to provide the

powerful audio rumble or punch commonly used in movies and music.

Universal Remote Control: It often replaces the factory-issued remote control included with a television, cable box, VCR, DVD player or stereo system. It usually can be programmed to operate several electronic devices, reducing the need for individual controllers.

HDTV: It stands for “high definition television” and broadcasts video digitally, in contrast to the common analog formats PAL, NTSC, and SECAM. It first became available in 1998.

— www.wisegeek.com

With digital surround sound, consumers experience a realism that was missing with traditional, two-dimensional speakers (left and right only), Vallani said.

As a former film major, Gioiosa couldn’t agree more.

“I mainly did it for ‘Star Wars’ and ‘Lord of the Rings,’” he joked. “There’s something about the walls rattling and the furniture vibrating when

things blow up. It’s a visceral experience.”

But one thing Gioiosa doesn’t joke about is the prospect of living without his home theater system.

“It’s amazing how used to it you get,” he said. “I hate to use cliches, but it feels so real. I wouldn’t want to go through football season without it.”

Mirror Staff Writer Jimmy Mincin is at 946-7460