Southwest Ninety-Niners Newsletter

contributed by

- Tom Wills -

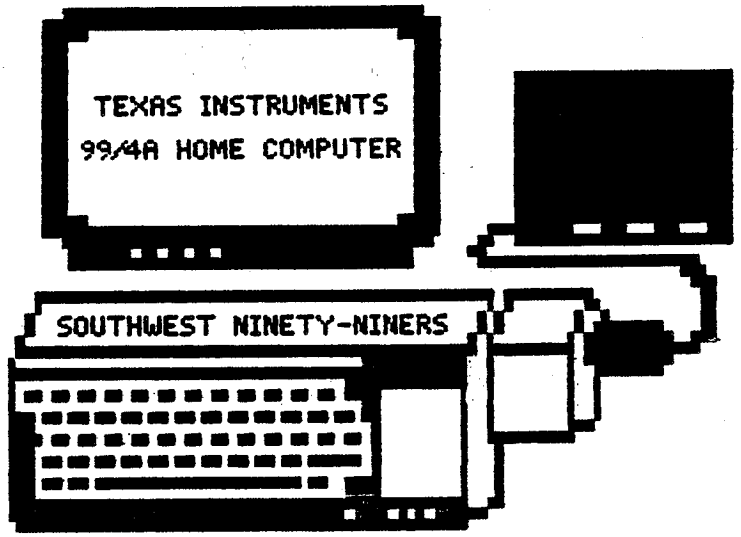
compliments of

TI99ers
On-Line
User Group

www.ti99ers.org

NOVEMBER 1987

P.O. Box 17831 Tucson, AZ 85730



ATTENTION MEMBERS

Next Meeting: November 3, 1987 at 7:30pm. Location-Tucson Fire Department Training Center on Ajo Way just west of Park. BJ Mathis will demonstrate a new program that gives disk users a menu similar to the Horizon RAM Disk menu.

Geneve Users Workshop: Date to be announced, check with Ed Hallett.

Fest West 88 Committee: 3rd Monday of each month at 7:30pm (November 16th). If you are interested in helping prepare for our booth at the the Fest West in Las Vegas, whether going or not please come. Mathis Home - 5941 E 26th - 747-5046

TI Users Workshop: 3rd Tuesday of each month at 7:30pm (November 17th). Bring all your TI-99/4A questions and problems to the Mathis Home - 5941 E 26th - 747-5046

Advanced Languages Workshop: 4th Tuesday of each month at 7:30pm (November 24th). Includes: FORTH, A/L, etc. Rod Stallard's Home - 7575 E Logan - 745-6071

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Please note the changes in the Workshop meeting dates and Workshop titles. The two workshops at our home have been consolidated into one, as most of the people who come to one, come to both of them. Ed Hallett will be setting up a Workshop for the Geneve owners/users soon. Those who are interested please get in contact with him.

This month I will appoint a Nominating Committee to help us select those individuals who will run for office and lead our group during the next year. Now is the time to assess your participation and get involved. Don't saddle the same people with all the work, volunteer to run for an office. WE NEED YOU!

I wish to thank Les & Marie Merryman and Scott for coming to demonstrate the Geneve at our October meeting. And I thank each of you who attended, for coming to the meeting. We had a nice turn out.

BJ - 747-5046

Summary of Last Month's Meeting

The business portion of the October meeting did the following:

1) voted unanimously for the group to rent a booth at TI FestWest for $50. Several products were identified to sell at the exhibition, one of which requires a little participation from many members.

Reports and advisements were made on:

1) floppy disks available to members at ten for $4 (paper jackets)

2) Ant Farm BBS now 1200 b.p.s. again, with upload capability

3) Geneve 9640's available at meeting for payment and pick-up

The program portion of the meeting was a talk by Les Merryman of L & M Systems about Myarc products, and an eye-catching demo of the Geneve 9640 computer.

Dave Wolfson, Sec'ty.

LIBRARY NEWS

We are glad to see the hard copy library being used. Please remember, to give everyone a chance to use the materials, return materials within one month.

Several people have been using, and we hope, enjoying the Newsletters. For the benefit of those who have been taking full folders and would like to read the latest news from those groups, we will start a new policy this month. After the Newsletters have been cataloged, they will be put in folders labeled NEW and will circulate for one or two months before being filed with the older Newsletters. So more people may see the new Newsletters, we suggest you take a folder at the meeting and bring it to the Thursday night meetings so someone else may read them before the next meeting.

Ida McCargar

Bytes & Jots

The "Orphan's Survival Handbook" by Ron Albright is available for $17.95, from DISK ONLY SOFTWARE PO Box 244 Norton VA 22079. Updates are available for $8.95.

At our September meeting the SW99ers decided to buy an ExtendedBasic for use on the Ant Farm as Extended Basic owned by the group failed. The "new" ExBasic was immediately put to use on the Ant Farm. The Group also voted to purchase a Super Extended Basic to be put in the group library. Super ExBasic has come and been given to Ida for the library.

The "Orphan's Survival Handbook" by Ron

for the Fest West, Ida found out the PSA SMILE# doesn't do Tucsonians any good as PSA doesn't fly to LasVegas from Tucson.

Compute America mentioned in the article by Bill Queen last month, is off line temporarily and possibly permanently.

I loaned someone the Tenex catalog. If you borrowed one, please return it at the meeting.

The December meeting will be our Christmas party. Please plan to bring spouses and goodies to share.

BJ Mathis - 747-5046

CATLIB

Fairware Review by Todd Clifton

Most TI users now have a disk drive and more than 20 programs. Every TI owner that fits this description has had to face the problem of how to track their ever growing library of files. For quite a few years most of us have used Master Disk File(MDF) by Extended Software. This is a fine utility written in Extended Basic. I have tried other programs that tried to acomplish the same thing, but they all fell short in one area or another. The biggest strength of MDF is the way it formmated the information on a collection of files into a useable printout. However, its main drawback is it runs painfully slow (XBASIC). In my opinion execution speed could be overlooked as the information provided is far more important.

Well, then came along Cataloging Library by Marty Kroll Jr. and shot down all my notions about what a disk tracking program was all about. I'll be frank and not mince words: It's GREAT!! Not many programs will let you have your cake and eat it, too. As I mentioned, the best part of MDF is the way it formats and prints out the data. Cataloging Library formats and printouts are almost identical. The main difference is CATLIB is 100% A/L. This spells F A S T. It would be great if Mr. Kroll had come along and decided to write an assembly version of MDF, but that wasn't enough. Along the way Marty Kroll streamlined all the routines that make MDF so tedious to use. Generally speaking the program has all its data memory resident so additions, deletions, and updates are handled almost instantly. You will be thankful for this the first time you use it. Both programs read the disk directory and create data files to track the files. Therefore the first time you use them you have to insert each disk you have so the program can read the directory. I have 80 disks and almost 1000 programs and files. It takes 2 hours for MDF to create its data file while CATLIB took just 20 minutes. Let me point out again, you only have to do this the first time you use the program. It would take the whole newsletter to list all the improvements, so I won't. Instead, get this program from the group library and be surprised at this new QUALITY FAIRWARE product.

Usually this part of review is saved for a listing of drawbacks I found. As good an effort as this is I still found some things that it would be nice for CATLIB to do. However, as I was writing this article for the newsletter BJ called to tell me she had obtained a new version of CATLIB (V.5). I'm glad I got this new version otherwise I would have felt pretty foolish printing this part of the review! The 3 pet peeves I had about V.1.4.1 were its not being usable from the X-Basic environment, global string search for partial file or disk names wasn't allowed, and a pretty inflexible print routine. All of these shortcomings have been corrected as well as some neat new features added. The new features include the ability to merge separate data files, an even faster A/L sort routine, and a more comprehensive documentation file. One heck of an improvement over an already fine program!

If this is still not enough, at the end of the updated doc file Mr. Kroll promises a new program called CATLIB Companion. This new program will allow the installation of a comment section after each entry in a CATLIB file. Sounds super! I can hardly wait.

HARDWARE DEFINITIONS

by J. Peter Hodie Boston Computer Society, MA - Aug '87

DISK CONTROLLERS: There are 3 main disk controllers out there, made by TI, CorComp, and MYARC. They all vary in their capabilities, so let me first list the different features a disk controller can have. All disk controllers can support double sided disk drives. This means that if you have drives that can store data on both sides of the diskette, any of these controllers is capable of using that feature. Many disk drives can support what is called "double density." This is a method for packing double the data onto a disk. Most disk drives these days are 40 track, which is standard, while some can support 80 track. 80 track means that you can store twice the amount of data as on a 40 track disk. However 80 track drives usually require more expensive diskettes because the data is so compact on the surface of the disk. Disk drives vary in the time it takes them to access data. The slowest speed is about 20 milliseconds (ms). There are drives that are as fast as 3 ms, although these are more expensive.

The TI disk controller can handle up to 3 double sided, single density, 40 track, 20 ms step time disk drives. In other words, the TI disk controller is the bottom of the line in all respects. Ryte Data currently has available an EPROM set for the TI disk controller that will allow it to access 80 track drives, however I do not know enough about the product at this time to make any comments on it.

The CorComp disk controller can handle up to 4 double sided, double density, 40 track, 20 ms to 6 ms step time drives. This means you can have one more drive than with the TI controller, and each drive can hold double the data. The drives can also be accessed faster. The CorComp disk controller has some nice extra features including a good disk manager (it was the basis for DM1000), and a number of extra CALLs. The disk controller literally takes over the computer on power up, however, which causes some compatibility problems. This can be fixed by purchasing a new EPROM set from MG for about $35.

The MYARC disk controller can handle up to 4 double sided, double density, 40 or 80 track, 20 ms to 6 ms step time drives. This is essentially the same capability as the CorComp card. You can only use 80 tracks if you purchase a special EPROM from MYARC for about $50 that supports 80 track drives. The MYARC disk controller comes with probably the best disk manager program for the /4A, and has a built in CALL DIRectory command to catalog disks from BASIC and Extended BASIC. Also, the MYARC disk controller is noticably faster than the others because of the approach MYARC took in designing the card.

RS232 CARDS: There is very little to say in this area. There are cards available from TI (very rare these days), CorComp and MYARC. They all have 2 RS232 ports and 1 parallel (PIO) port. The CorComp will not work with the MYARC print spooler (more below on that), whereas the MYARC and TI will. The CorComp has what some describe as a "kuldgy" PIO port, however it works as well as the others. The MYARC supports some extra software commands to allow for 19.2K BAUD (the others stop at 9600, real slow <grin>), inverted busy in software rather than hardware, and some other details. MYARC also has an EPROM that will make the PIO port act like the thermal printer (TP) if you need something like that. However, really all these cards are pretty much the same. Most people prefer the TI card, and shun the CorComp. The MYARC is probably the best and most readily available these days.

MEMORY CARDS & RAM Disks: There are more memory cards out there than almost anything else. TI made a 32K memory card. That was it. Most RAM disks, but not all replace this card. If you just want a 32K card, they are available from MYARC and CorComp,

and there is no difference worth discussing between these two cards. They both seem to work reliably. Foundation made a 128K memory card that replaced the 32K memory expansion and gave you an extra 96K of memory that could function as a RAM disk. Unfortunately, their RAM disk software was terrible. Quality 99 software and others have since released new software that makes this card acceptable, however since it is out of production it can't really be strongly recommended. A modification of the Foundation to a 512K RAM disk is now possible.

MYARC makes a memory card which replaces the 32K memory card, and comes with either 256K or 512K of memory. The memory beyond the first 32K can be divided between a RAM disk and a print spooler, although the print spooler will not work with CorComp PIO port. For an additional $50 or so, you can get MYARC Extended BASIC II, which is a much faster, more powerful, and slightly buggier version of Extended BASIC that will work with the Foundation card or the MYARC memory card. CorComp makes a 256K and 512K card, and these both function as RAM disks. I don't know much about these cards, except that they are reported to work quite well, so again I will make no comments.

The Horizon RAM disk comes either as a kit or assembled, and provides a very reliable 90K or 180K RAM disk. It can also be upgraded to 256K. It supports a very powerful operating system including replacing the TI title screen with a custom menu of programs. The Horizon RAM disk does not replace the 32K card and thus can be used along with a MYARC or Foundation RAM disk.

PRINT SPOOLERS: Your printer is much slower than your computer. Your computer could print a full TI Writer document in a few seconds. Your printer couldn't. A print spooler is a device that accepts your document as fast as the computer can send it, and then the spooler sends it to the printer, while you can continue to use your computer for other things. The first print spooler was part of the CorComp Triple Tech card. It has 64K of memory and runs independently of the computer. The MYARC print spooler is part of the MYARC 256K and 512K cards and can be anywhere from 1K to 400K. The MYARC print spooler is software driven, so if your computer fails while the spooler is printing, your document probably won't be finished. Furthermore, some programs lock out the MYARC print spooler so that it can't print at all until you exit that program. However, for most uses the MYARC spooler is adequate.

There is another class of print spoolers, which are separate hardware devices that go outside your expansion box. These will work with any computer. They are usually 128K of memory, and run about $90 or so. These work quite well, and if you don't want the added features of the Triple Tech card (clock and speech synthesizer in the expansion box) or the power of the MYARC memory cards, these are a very economical solution.

SPEECH in the BOX: There are two ways to get the speech synthesizer into your expansion box. You can either get the CorComp Triple Tech card with its print spooler and clock, or the Rave 99 speech card. Both cards require that you already have the speech synthesizer as they both just provide a connector for it. The Triple Tech card will not work with the 9640. The Rave card will, however it did not work well with all speech synthesizers, at last check. Rave has been good about trying to resolve this problem, and since their card is only about a third the cost of the Triple Tech card it does provide a reasonable alternative.

CLOCKS: There are several clock cards available, all radically different. The MBP (MPB?) clock card is one of the earliest, and works well. The CorComp Triple Tech clock is probably the most popular, although CorComp also makes a standalone clock for those who don't want the entire Triple Tech card. John Clulow recently designed a memory card you can build which includes a clock similar to the MBP. The problem with all these clocks is there is almost no software that supports them. Bulletin

board programs can use them, and a couple programs by John Johnson use them, but mostly you'll have to write your own software to handle these clocks.

IBM STYLE KEYBOARDS: There are two sources for IBM keyboard interfaces. The first was from Rave 99, and they are quite well established now. They have support for special Multplan and TI-Writer modes to minimize key strokes, and installation is straightforward. The second source is ML Systems. They supply only a keyboard interface, you supply the keyboard. The Rave folks will supply you with a keyboard, if you wish. The ML Systems supports keyboard macros, where one key stroke can send up to 12 key strokes to the computer. This is a powerful feature, however if you wish to customize the macros you must pay an additional $20. There have been reports the ML Systems interface is less reliable than the Rave, however I suspect this is due to the keyboard being used and not the interface. Because the ML Systems interface is considerably less expensive than the Rave, it might be worth taking the chance. One thing I can't stand about the ML Systems is it uses the ESCape key to replace the function key on the /4A, whereas the Rave uses the ALTernate key. The Rave choice makes much more sense, using the ESCape key is horribly awkward. Look at an IBM keyboard sometime and you'll see what I mean.

THINGS MY MODEM TOLD ME

FCC THREAT TO TELECOMMUNICATIONS

by Walt Howe Boston Computer Society, Aug '87

The FCC is threatening to impose new hourly charges for connecting to long distance telecommunications services through the phone lines. The effect of these new charges may be to add up to $5 per hour to the charges for such information services as CompuServe, the Source, DELPHI, GENIE, TELENET, TYMNET, and other. PC PURSUIT, TELENET's $25 per month service must certainly change their rate system if the proposal goes through, too.

A great deal of misinformation has been published and appeared on bulletin boards about this proposal. Unfortunately, the effects of this misinformation will be to reduce the impact of letter writing. The following paragraphs will try to present a balanced picture and tell you what you can do about it. For this information, I am indebted to TELENET and the BCS Telecommunications Group.

The most common mistake is to think the proposal levies fees voice telephone users do not have to pay. Sample letters have appeared that made this incorrect assumption, charging the fees are unfair, because voice users do not have to pay them. This is not true. When you use any long distance voice service (except major corporations' own internal systems), you pay access charges from your local phone system to the long distance carriers. The data networks have had favored status up until now, paying no such fees. What the FCC is proposing to do is to eliminate the favored status, and levy access charges similar to those paid by the long distance voice services!

To successsfully counter the FCC's proposal, we cannot argue that modem users are being penalized unfairly in comparison with voice users. Such arguments will just end up in the wastebasket unread by anyone but office assistants. We also cannot argue that the imposition of these charges was unfair because there was not adequate notice. When the favored status was granted in 1983, the FCC warned it was only temporary. They are just proposing to do what they have said they would do all along.

So, why should we fight the proposal at all? From the FCC's viewpoint it is quite reasonable and proper. The local phone companies have actually been subsidizing these calls, and they deserve a fair shake, too. From our standpoint in the TI community, the impact will be to greatly increase the cost of communicating with others around the country who help keep our orphan computer going. Most of our new library software reaches us directly or indirectly over the phone lines, and is then passed along to members through our library or over the local bulletin boards. If we had to depend on the mail, we would never even learn of a lot of the fine software in the public domain or fairware. The role telecommunications plays in the life of our computer is enormous, even for those who do not own a modem.

For us to do our part in fighting this proposal, not many of us can muster strong business oriented reasons why it should not be adopted. Most of us must focus on the impact on individual users - the home computer owner! The worst thing about the proposal from our standpoint is the burden will be placed quite unfairly on the home computer owner, and large businesses will bear the least impact. Another weakness in the proposal is it is intended to pay a fair share of the local phone company expenses - which are largely fixed expenses for equipment. The costs to the phone companies we are paying have relatively little to do with the hours of connect time, yet we are asked to pay on a per hour basis. Our most effective arguments will not be to claim there should be no additional charges, but to seek a fairer basis for charges that will not penalize the home user so disproportionately. The charges, by their nature, will reduce calls substantially, reducing the flow of information to the home user. We will all suffer, whether we own a modem or not.

In order to fight the proposal, we must send as many individual letters as possible to the FCC and to Congress. Arguments should be rational, not emotional. Form letters should be avoided. Facts should be specific and accurate. Refer to the proposal on the top of your letter, as follows: "Before the Federal Communications Commission, Washington, DC 20554, General Docket Number CC 87-215 in the Matter of Amendment of Part 69 ofthe Commission's Rules relating to Enhanced Service Providers." If you want the best chance for all commissioners to see it, send 5 to 11 unfolded copies in a flat page size envelope to Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, 1919 M Street NW, Washington, DC 02554, Attn: CC Docket 87-215. Sign the original in black ink. Send a copy or better yet, an orginal letter to your Congressman and Senators, too. Stress the impact to you and your organizations. Do not attack the people who have proposed it. Provide reasonable alternatives, if possible.

GENEVE WIDOWS?

from HOCUS - September '87

Three women are sitting in a bar discussing their lovers. The first says, "Mine's a wrestler. He's very forceful and aggressive in bed."

The second one says, "Mine's an artist. He's very delicate and gentle with me in bed."

The third just stares bleakly down at her drink. "Mine's working on the new 'Myarc 9640 Geneve' computer," she says,. "He just sits on the edge of the bed and tells me how good it will be when I finally get it!"

BUYER'S GUIDE

The following information is provided as a service to our members. The items listed are for sale by the individuals indicated and are subject to prior sale. The group assumes no responsibility for items listed and makes no claims as to their condition or interface capability with the TI-99/4A computer. Only computer related items will be accepted for publication in this newsletter.

WANTED - Super Sketch - Call Peggy Giddings 795-1915 or 621-7374 (work).

WANTED - Peripheral Expansion System reasonable price - Dan Benavides 578-0588 and Jerry Patty 884-4043.

TI-99/4A Console & Home Budget Management $35. Call Darlene Webb 885-0347.

32K Memory Card $55, Axiom Parallax-TI Interface $35, 64K Printer Buffer $60. Call John Hale 296-5602.

TI-99/4A Console $35 o.b.o. Call Ejaz 623-8257.

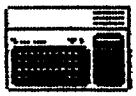
Modules: New/Unused Items: Super Extended Basic $60, Disk Banks $3ea, Reading On $7, Munch Man $3. Used Items: Terminal Emulator II $6, Tax Investment Record Keeping $4, Household Budget Management $3, Personal Real Estate $4, Home Financial Decisions $3, Personal Report Generator $6, Personal Record Keeping $6, Early Learning Fun $3. Call Jack or BJ 747-5046.

TI-99/4A Console $35. Call John Hedspeth 885-0859 or 745-7253 (work).

TI-99/4A Console, TI Joysticks, Thermal printer, Cassette Recorder, 12" TV(BW), all for $125 o.b.o. Call Paul Garrison 747-3884(Days) or 573-0572(Evenings).

FOR MEMBERS ONLY: These items are for sale by SW 99ers, they are used. Call Jack or BJ 747-5046. P-code Card(no docs or disks) $50, Personal Report Generator $6, Personal Record Keeping $4, Tax Investment Record Keeping $4, Terminal Emulator II $6, Home Financial Decisions $3, Household Budget Management $3, The Attack $3, Munch Man $3, Jawbreaker II $4, Tombstone City $3, Music Maker $7, Flip 'N' File for Modules & Cassettes $4, Cassette & monitor cables $3 ea.

HAPPY THANKSGIVING



SOUTHWEST NINETY-NINERS!!