



TACOMA USERS USERS GROUP NEWSLETTER

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TACOMA, WA 98442

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Letter from the President

By now I am sure you have all noticed a somewhat new look to our newsletter. Doesn't that look great? The actual printing of the newsletters instead of copying makes the letter more readable. Many thanks to Art Daniels for his expertise and professional work in this great effort. We all need to assist in this effort by turning in articles of interest or programs we want to share or maybe some item you have For Sale - whatever we have that would be of interest to others. Very often we see programs or articles by Ron Prewitt and others. Thanks very much.

Be sure to check out the list of TI WRITER MNEMONIC (MEMORY) TRICKS in the January Newsletter. The association of CTRL(Letter) with the MNEMONIC is a big help in remembering the function you want. As suggested in the December newsletter, put these on a sheet or add to the list that you keep handy by your computer.

COMMITTEES - again?? Just a reminder that we need help from everybody to keep this club going. Do it by chairing or working on a committee. These are all listed and functions outlined in our constitution. If anyone needs a copy, let me know. Please respond.

The subject of demos after our business meetings came up and a suggestion was made that we could demonstrate some programs to show how they operate and what they will do. We need to know what programs you would like to find out about. So check over the library and find a few that you would like to see demonstrated. Jot down the numbers and names of programs and let me know. I am sure I can find someone that can handle it.

Again, a reminder, turn in newsletter articles so everyone else can find out what you know or have discovered.

Till next time, Vern Schrottenboer

DO IT AGAIN

by Joe Nollan

Extended Basic has a nice little used feature hidden in the fctn(8) or REDO key. By pressing fctn(8)REDO after entering a line you can get the line back. Let's try it. Key in this line: 100 CALL SOUND(140,1500,0) press ENTER. We can run this one line program and hear a beep sound. Now key in the line number(100) and use fctn(X) for the EDIT MODE then press ENTER. By pressing REDO at this time we can get our line back. Notice that the cursor is over the line number and it can be edited along with the text. Let's change the line number to 110 and press ENTER. List the program and you will see that we have two lines now. If you RUN it you will hear a longer beep.

So far we have learned how to COPY a line. If you want to MOVE a line make a COPY with the new line number then delete the original line.

Now let's TRY this. Use the EDIT MODE and REDO to get line 100 back. Notice the cursor over the line number? Press fctn(1)DEL three times and the line number will be gone. Press ENTER now and see what happens. You should have heard the beep sound. Press REDO and our CALL SOUND will be back. Press ENTER to hear it again. So what, you say. Well, suppose you don't like the sound of the beep. Press REDO again and EDIT the frequency(1500) to 1400. Press ENTER to hear the new beep. You can REDO-EDIT-ENTER until you get the sound you want. Now let's put it back into our program. Press REDO and you will see the new CALL SOUND statement. It needs a line number to be in a program so let's give it one. Press fctn(2)INS and then 100 and a space then press

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ENTER. Now when we list the program we will have a NEW sound at line 100 and the copy of the OLD sound at line 110.

Being able to see how a line will work as we program is quite handy. We've seen it work to EDIT a SOUND and it will work with others as well. I like to use it with a DISPLAY AT to check centering, for instance. Remember that if there are any variables in the statement that they will be zero's but you can EDIT them out replacing them with values.

We have learned how to COPY or MOVE a line and how to TRY the line. Remember this about REDO: There is a limit on the length of the line and if the line is a long one then the end of it will be missing with REDO. The limit is five lines.

Now you have something new to spend hours at the keyboard with. Enjoy it.

Joe Nollan - 572-4680

FROM THE LIBRARY DESK

I MISSED THE LAST MEETING AS MOST OF YOU KNOW. THE WIFE AND I SPENT A WEEK IN SUNNY HAWAII. ONLY ONE MINOR PROBLEM. IT RAINED 5 OF THE 7 DAYS WE WERE THERE! OH WELL, IT WAS WARM ANYHOW.

I'VE BEEN GIVING A LOT OF THOUGHT TO HOW THE LIBRARY IS BEING UTILIZED. WE HAD GOOD RESULTS BEFORE XMAS. SINCE THEN, NOT TOO MANY THINGS HAVE GONE OUT. SO, I'M GOING TO DROP THE PRICES AGAIN FOR A WHILE TO TEST OUT MY THEORY. AS OF THE TIME YOU GET THIS LETTER, ALL REGULAR PROGRAMS WILL BE LOANED OUT AT HALF PRICE. (THIS DOES NOT INCLUDE ANY GIFT PROGRAMS, PRIZES OR PROGRAM CREDITS).

AT THE SAME TIME, ALL OF THE LOANER PROGRAMS IN THE MACHINE LANGUAGE SERIES WILL ALSO BE REDUCED. DISKS THAT WERE \$5.00 ARE NOW \$3.00, THOSE THAT WERE \$8.00 WILL BE \$5.00 AND INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS WILL BE \$1.00 EACH. I WILL HAVE A NEW LIST OF PRICES FOR THE 9000 SERIES AT THE NEXT MEETING THAT WILL REDUCE THESE PRICES ALSO.

NOW, I'LL FIND OUT IF THE PRICES ARE SLOWING THE LOAN-OUT OF LIBRARY MATERIALS. I WANT TO GET MORE OF YOU INVOLVED IN GETTING PROGRAMS FROM YOUR LIBRARY. IT BELONGS TO YOU, NOT THE CLUB OFFICERS OR ME! WE DO RAISE MUCH OF OUR OPERATING COSTS FROM IT BUT I'D RATHER HAVE LOTS OF USE AT LOWER PRICES THAN LITTLE USE AND HIGH PRICES. LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS FOR A MONTH OR SO!

AT THE LAST MEETING, I ANNOUNCED I WAS GOING TO START USING "ARCHIVER". AS YOU ORDER DISKS, YOU'LL RECEIVE A COPY TO DE-ARCHIVE THE ONES YOU GET. IF YOU DO THIS WORK FOR ME, (WHENEVER POSSIBLE) I'LL BE ABLE TO HANDLE THE LIBRARY MUCH EASIER. IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM, GIVE ME, WALLY, TOM, ART OR JOE A CALL. IT IS VERY SIMPLE. IT WILL WORK WITH A SINGLE DRIVE AS LONG AS THE PACKED FILE DOESN'T USE MORE THAN HALF THE SECTORS ON A DISK. IF YOU HAVE 2 DRIVES, NO PROBLEMS SHOULD BE ENCOUNTERED.

THANKS FOR YOUR HELP, AND I'M WAITING FOR THE RESULTS!

BOB HAUN, 584-3938

MEETINGS - 1st and 3rd THURS. - 8 p.m.
South End Pool Building -- 402 E. 56th Street -- Tacoma, WA

PROGRAM THOUGHTS

CATALOG AND LOADER PROGRAMS

I want to take a little time to discuss catalog and load programs. In our library at present there are 30 programs which will catalog a disk. Some clarification is needed as to what these programs are supposed to do.

The purpose of a catalog program is to catalog the contents of a disk. They should be written in BASIC so that no module is required. I like to have one on my disk so that I can determine how much space is available and what the files are. The program should give the following information about the disk: the DISKNAME, number of sectors AVAILABLE, and number of sectors USED. The following information about each file should also be displayed: FILENAME, SIZE, TYPE, and PROTECTION. With this information we can see at a glance the contents of our disk. This of course requires that the program prints to the screen (Some do not). A hard copy is often desirable and should be an option. Some. There are a number of "bells and whistles" which may be included but I feel that they defeat the purpose of a short program to look at your disk with. If you need more features use a DISK MANAGER program.

Another type of program similar to a catalog program is a load program. They display a "MENU" and allow you to RUN listed programs. One type is written knowing the disk contents and therefore does not read the disk. This type is fast but if you add or delete a program then the load program needs to be edited. This problem is avoided with a program that reads your disk and displays the programs on the screen. You can run your program with the press of a key. There is a full range of features with this type of program including: DELETE a file, provide a hard copy, print a DOC file and more. In my mind these features belong with a DISK MANAGER.

Here are my ideas concerning load programs. A better term is auto-loaders since that is what they do. When X-BASIC is selected, it will LOAD and RUN a file called LOAD which is great for children or those with no keyboard experience. With them in mind I prefer that the program read drive one automatically and that only the PROGRAM files be listed. Now with a RUN "DSK1.LOAD" statement at the end of each program they will return to the LOAD menu. With this system a child can run a program, (game or song, etc.) and when done can run another with no need of any programming knowledge and all with single key presses.

One problem that becomes apparent when a program runs another, is that any graphic characters that have been redefined will remain that way in the next program. This can cause some serious problems when a program is using the lower case letters in the instructions and you can't read them because they retain the graphic definitions given them in previous programs. The load program should reset all characters and colors before running the next program. Remember that a CALL CHARSET will reset the upper case characters only. The lower case characters will not be affected and retain previous definitions. A CALL

CATALOG and LOADER PROGRAMS (continued)

DELSprite(ALL) will clear the sprites from the screen and a CALL MAGNIFY(1) will reset the magnification to the default value. Add a CALL SCREEN(8) just in case the last program set it to black in which case the LOAD menu would have black characters on a black screen.

At present there are only two AUTOLOAD programs that will work properly when run by another program. Tom Fenton's with the LCM (True Lower Case) feature, and mine with a machine language character reset. All the others in the library will show scrambled characters when run by another program which can be very frustrating for children and advanced programmers alike.

The next generation is a program that writes a program, and in this case, a load program. When this type of program is run it will read your disk and create a file in merge format which when named LOAD on your disk will auto-boot with X-BASIC and run the program which you select from the menu. It's pretty slick, however the library version has a limit of 20 programs on a disk. I have written one with a 127 file capability and full character reset and will get it into the library.

Now comes the cold blooded part. A single catalog program will replace 11 of those in the library. Any new programs will be compared with this program and unless they have a special redeeming feature they won't get into the library. There is just no need for multiple programs doing the same thing. It can be difficult to choose one by reading the library catalog and this clean-up should help. The load type programs will remain with the exception of exact duplicates. Yes there were a few in the library which were simply copies of the same program. I guess it's good to say that our library has grown to almost unmanagable size. I plan to do my part at cleaning it up. I hope also to demonstrate some of these programs as they enter the library so that the members will be aware of what we have. I have been suprised myself.

How did I learn all this, you ask. Well, my project for the month has been to clean up some of our library, notably the catalog and load type programs. We have about 30 of them and I am suprised by the number containing bugs or not working at all. There will be quite a few deletions I'm sure. I have been through the DISASSEMBLER programs and deleted a number of them, since they were lower quality than others and much slower. I have put the remaining programs together as one library entry and have updated the DOC file with it.

For those who may have the GROM-DUMP and couldn't figure it out you may want to take a look at the new version. I edited some of the files and used programs that we are familiar with. The DOC file has been changed to reflect these file changes and also to clarify the process to dump GROM to disk. I've done it and it works.

HAPPY COMPUTING, Joe Nollan 572-4680

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*****
*                                     *
*      FONT WRITER                  *
*                                     *
*      Review by                     *
*      Steve Langguth               *
*      Ozark 99'er Users Group      *
*                                     *
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REPORT CARD

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Performance.....B-
Ease of Use.....A-
Documentation.....A-
Value.....B-
Final Grade.....B

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Cost: \$24.95

Manufacturer: Asgard Software
P.O. Box 10306
Rockville, MD 20850

Requirements: console, monitor or TV, memory expansion, disk system, RS232 interface, "Epson-compatible" printer, Extended Basic. (TI Writer or similar editor and TI Artist strongly recommended.)

I wanted to like Font Writer, I REALLY did. The ad in MICROpendium described it as "the greatest thing for 99/4A computer graphics since, well, the introduction of the 99/4A". It was compared to programs like Printshop and Newsroom for Apple, Atari, and Commodore computers and Fontrix for the IBM PC. Supposedly, we could now "combine any TI-Writer text files, TI Artist or CSGD fonts, and TI Artist instances the way (we) want them" and "make an otherwise drab report, letter, or article come alive". Well, apparently the person who wrote the copy for the ads doesn't expect much creativity from 99/4A users because Font Writer provides only a limited ability to combine the various graphics files and text on the same page. I have seen pages created with the Newsroom program in various newsletters, and after working with Font Writer for several weeks, I was not able to produce anything even close to their quality. The various programs that make up the Font Writer package all work pretty much like the documentation says they will, it's just that they are not as powerful as the ads would have you believe. If you purchase Font Writer expecting to get a 99/4A version of Newsroom, you WILL be disappointed. This review will attempt to give you a better idea of what you CAN do with Font Writer. If it fills your needs, by all means BUY IT. Just don't think that because some other programs are mentioned in the ads that Font Writer is in their league.

But that's enough (too much?) about the evils of advertising. Let's look at Font Writer itself.

Performance

Font Writer has three main sections. The Font Editor is used to create or "edit" character fonts and graphic images. The Font Manager allows the user to manipulate font files in several ways, such as merging two font files into one, and to convert graphics and pictures created with the Character Sets and Graphics Design (CSGD) packages into TI Artist image format, or vice versa. Finally, the Formatter is the part of the package that allows the user to combine text and graphics on the same page. The program is written in Extended Basic with assembly language subroutines, which probably explains why it seems to run fairly slow at times.

The Font Editor is similar to many of the other character/sprite editors most of us have seen before. It consists of a large grid of boxes that are turned on or off one at a time to create the particular character you are working on. In the lower right corner of the screen is a smaller box that displays the current character in its normal size. Along with the ability to move the cursor around the grid one box at a time, this Font Editor allows the user to jump eight boxes at a time at the press of a key. Also included is the ability to invert an image around either a vertical or horizontal axis, (which makes converting a "p" into a "q" or an "m" into a "w" a snap). Images can also be "slid" right, left, up, or down within the grid at the touch of a key. One feature that this Font Editor has which makes it more powerful than some others is the ability to define and use "Macros". Character sets are made up of pieces, many of which are common to several letters in the set. The Font Writer Editor allows the user to "assign" a macro to each of these pieces (for example a vertical or horizontal line of a certain length); and then instead of drawing each piece over and over again as each letter is designed, the macro functions can be "called" one at a time to "piece" together each character. Once a user learns to use this feature it can save a lot of repetitive drawing. All of this makes it fairly easy to create new fonts or modify old ones. The Font Editor will only accept fonts that can be used with TI Artist, however fonts created with CSGD and be converted using the Font Manager section of Font Writer. This means that the large number of fonts available for both TI Artist and CSGD can be used, which is a plus because time does not have to be spent creating fonts from scratch.

As I mentioned above, the Font Manager portion of Font Writer allows the user to convert CSGD fonts to the TI Artist format. It also allows conversion from TI Artist format to that used by CSGD. (In other words, if you have a version of a font that works with one of these programs, you can now manipulate that font so that it will work with all three programs.) The user can also change formats for the various graphics, pictures, and instances used by the respective programs. And finally, the Font Manager will allow two different font files to be "merged" and saved as a single file (for example, putting the numbers from one font together with the letters from another).

The third part of Font Writer is the Formatter. This is the portion that allows the user to combine text with the various graphics. This Formatter is very similar to the one that comes with TI Writer. It requires the user to use a text editor program to create a text file with various formatting commands included that tell the printer what to

do. Many of the formatting commands are identical to those in TI Writer, some vary only slightly in how they work, and some are unique to Font Writer. Those that are unique fall into two groups. The first group puts the printer into graphics mode and allows text to be printed out using one of the fonts from TI Artist or CSGD. This group also contains commands that allow the user to position graphics from either TI Artist or CSGD on the page. The second unique group of commands allows the user to select various "printer-resident" print styles (pica, elite, condensed, expanded, etc) without having to remember the proper codes.

All of this sounds pretty powerful, and it is. But it is rather limited, too. A file can only use one font. If you want a headline in one font and the body of the text in another, the only way you can do it is to use one of the type styles built into the printer for either the headline or the text. Text and graphics can be printed on the same line only if the text is printed with a font file. There is no way I could find to print two different graphics on the same line. Printer-resident type styles cannot be used on the same line as graphics. The ".CE" command, which is supposed to work with fonts and graphics, as well as with regular text, worked fine on the text but poorly when the printer was in graphics mode. Finally, there is no built-in way to get text printed out in multiple columns (just like there is no built-in way with TI Writer). Even with these limitations, a lot of creative things can be done with Font Writer. However, it definitely does not provide the flexibility of page layout that other programs (e.g. Newsroom for other computers and The Printer's Apprentice for the 99/4A) do, and that's why I feel the ads are misleading.

Ease of Use

In general, Font Writer is very easy to use. The Font Editor section has "drop down" menus and the choices in both the Font Editor and the Font Manager are very straight-forward. The "macro" functions may be a bit confusing at first, but like many powerful features of other programs, they become easier (and more useful) with practice. The Formatter is almost "second nature" to anyone who is familiar with the TI Writer formatter. Only a few new commands have to be learned. The only real problems I encountered were with the ".CE" command (as I mentioned above), and with several of the formatting commands that were supposed to change the printer type styles for me (elite, expanded, etc). Apparently a Gemini 10X is not as "Epson-compatible" as I thought. Luckily, the author supplied a list of the line numbers where the various codes were in the program, so they were fairly easy to change.

Documentation

The documentation for Font Writer is well-written. Each of the three main sections of the program has a separate part of the instructions to describe how it is used. The Font Editor instructions are in the form of a tutorial, which is helpful in learning how to use the various features of the Font Editor itself. The Formatter

instructions consist of a section showing how to run two "tests" to check how well the Font Writer Formatter works with your printer, a section describing how to prepare text files to be used by the formatter (which contains the list of formatting commands recognized by Font Writer), a section on sending various control codes to the printer, and finally, a section on how to run a file through the Formatter. The Font Manager instructions simply describe each of the menu choices available in the Font Manager section and what it does. Also included at the end of the documentation are several charts. The first chart is simply a list of what functions various keys perform when using the Font Editor. The second is a list of the Macro commands. The third is a list of Formatter commands, and the last lists the printer control commands. These charts are particularly useful as a quick reference after you have had some experience using the program. My only complaint is that in several places, the instructions were not specific enough about whether only TI Artist files or both TI Artist and CSGD files could be used. By experimenting it seems that the Font Editor will only use TI Artist files, but both the Formatter and the Font Manager will use files from TI Artist OR CSGD. Just where which kind of files can be used could have been specified a little more.

Value

If it did everything that the advertising implied it would, a price of \$24.95 for Font Writer might be appropriate. But there are programs available for the 99/4A that do a better job of mixing text with graphics that cost less, and to use Font Writer most effectively you will have to either already own or purchase TI Artist, and/or CSGD, and/or one of the various companion disk sets with ready-to-use fonts and graphics. Compatability with other programs is good and the capability to change fonts and graphics from one format to another is one of Font Writer's strongest points. Nevertheless, at least a portion of Font Writer's value is derived from these other programs. All of this makes its \$24.95 price seem a bit high.

In summary then, Font Writer consists of a powerful Font Editor, a useful Font Manager, and a somewhat limited Formatter. If you are looking for a "page layout" type of program that gives you a lot of control over the placement of text and graphics using multiple fonts on the same page, this program will disappoint you. But, if you already own TI Artist or CSGD, and you are looking for an easy-to-use program to occasionally add a small amount of graphics to your text files, you will probably be well-satisfied with Font Writer.

DISCLAIMER

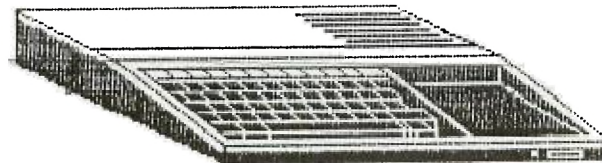
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