Asgard News

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An Asgard Publishing Publication

Editorial

Our new design, new services, a contest for a new computer, and other stuff...

Well, how's this for a change? If you've subscribed to Asgard News since issue number 1, then you are well aware that every issue has looked different. We didn't do this consciously - indeed, it was all accidental. It reflects the fact that Asgard News has evolved dramatically through its first year in print, and the skill of its editors has similarly advanced. It reflects the fact that the definition of Asgard News is as changing as the computer industry it covers. Asgard News was originally conceived as a small magazine (4-12 pages) that would be published periodically to users of Asgard products informed of new developments. However, because of the proclivities of its authors it soon expanded beyond the concept expressed in the original issue.

In fact, the "Asgard" in Asgard News declined only to a small proportion in the second issue and went up again in the third only by the length of the story on Press (which, since its arguably some of the most important "news" of 1988, if we may be allowed some minor preening, it merited the space it received). This issue may well be the least "Asgard" of all the Asgard News' published to date. This is not because we feel information about our firm is less important, but simply because there is so much more information out there that should be published.

Moving on...

You'll notice a new feature in this issue - Asgard Bookshelf. We've gathered collections of important articles and other materials on a variety of subjects found in the public domain, and elsewhere, and are making them available to our readers at a nominal cost. Depending on the popularity of this service, we may expand it to include other such works in the future. Asgard Publishing is also pleased to introduce our first book (hopefully of many), *The Adventure Reference Guide*, by Mickey Schmitt.

Well, Myarc has done it again. Sales of the Geneve have plummeted, so they responded by raising the price to dealers. Many dealers have simply

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eaten the extra cost instead of passing it onto the purchaser. Reports of Geneve dealers abandoning the market are widespread (one gentleman obtained a new Geneve for $200 from his local dealer, she was so anxious to be rid of her stock). Combine this with reports that Myarc may sue some of its "former" writers for "violating" non-disclosure agreements by producing Geneve software without selling it through Myarc, and only one thing is really clear. The Myarc Geneve 9640 is doomed to becoming an orphan in fact if not in name if this keeps up. The only question at this point is when.

My only hope for the future advancement of the TI community is perhaps quite farfetched, but certainly not impossible. There are many knowledgeable engineers and hobbiests running around now in the TI world who have designed some amazing things. Perhaps some of the more capable ones could design a 99/4A compatible (a la the Horizon RAM-disk), as a sort of "build-it-yourself-kit-project" (non-technical people could get someone skilled to put it together for them). I envision a machine based on a 99000 series processor (TI compared it favorably in speed to the 68000 in the Macintosh, Amiga and Atari ST), and the 34010 (see the article inside - "The 9900 Lives!"). It should have a native-mode operating system that is available in original source code to anyone who wants it, as well as a 99/4A emulation. A good guess would be a decent emulation would be as much as 10 times the speed of a 99/4A. It should have 1Mb of RAM, utilize some sort of logical bank-switching method, and address up to 16Mb (the theoretical limit of the memory management chip TI did for the 99000). Finally, the parts should cost less then $500 (so it could be put together with monitor for under $1500 - steep, but with capabilities comparable to a IBM PS/2 that costs twice as much).

I'm prepared to put my money where my mouth is - I will not only pay to have the best design submitted prototyped, Asgard Software will also give the person or persons a prize of $1000.00 in cold cash, as well as a thousand dollars in free connect time on Compuserve, GEnie, and Delphi. If we are able to arrange production and there is a market, we'll give the winners another $1000.00, and a royalty to boot. This is for the hardware only. After the hardware is designed we will perhaps have a contest for the software.

Payment of the prize will be made to the best design submitted that (a) meets most if not all of the design criteria, (b) functions, and (c) is closest to the target cost in parts. If you are interested, please drop us a postcard and we'll send a list of what the computer should be able to do. Stay tuned for further developments!

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The NEW 99/4A

The TI-99/4A is ten years old this year, however, this is no excuse for having an "old" computer.

A ten year old person is merely a child. A ten year old dog is middle aged or even old. But a ten year old computer is ancient! The TI-99/4A is ten years old this year. Ten years in the computer industry is the difference between vacuum tubes and transistors, between transistors and integrated circuits.

The TI computer system most of us know and love is actually more like 6 years old (circa 1983). It usually consists of a TI-99/4A console (which supplanted the "4" in 1982), a Peripheral Expansion Box (from the beginning of 1983), a TI disk controller and SS/SD disk drive (also that time frame), a 32K card and an RS232 card. If you are perfectly happy with your computer, then perhaps you should skip this article for another. However, if occasionally you find yourself reading non-TI computer magazines longingly, oogling Macs/STs/Amigas/PCs, and maybe even trying out a friends, then perhaps you DO want a new computer. If you haven't purchased one of these other systems by now, then its evident you still haven't convinced yourself you "need" one. If that is the case, then perhaps all you really want is a "new computer" - something different from the same old thing that will bring some of the fun back into computing again.

If all you have is the basic system outlined above, then you might want to first consider upgrading your disk system. A second drive, and more to the point, a new disk controller, can mean the difference between walking and running with the TI-99/4A! A second drive will give you access to some programs that were difficult or impossible to use with a single drive graphics packages, databases, word processors and more. A new disk controller (either the Myarc or Corcomp) will let you store more on a disk drive (twice as much in fact), and get it off the disk much faster (up to 4-5 times faster in some cases). This will make your old sluggish programs seems like they suddenly grew legs and learned how to run! The speed increase is particularly noticeable with disk intensive programs (of course) - anything that reads and writes to the disk frequently. In fact, the speed improvement is so great you'd think you got a new computer.

If you have a more expanded system with 360K drives, then maybe you just need a little something to bring some of the "zing" back into computing.

> “Ten years in the computer industry is the difference between vacuum tubes and transistors”

Do you look at an PC AT's keyboard enviously? If you do a lot of word processing or telecommunications, then the first thing you should consider is a Rave 99 keyboard. This little device, available with or without a keyboard (if you already have an IBM-style keyboard), will give your fingers new freedom. Not only is the keyboard more roomy, you can even define some keys to be certain oft-used commands or phrases. Available for $100-200, you'll wonder how you ever managed without it.

Perhaps you feel working in 40-columns is for the birds. If that is the case, then your best bet is a Dijit or Mechatronics 80-column card. The Dijit card plugs into your expansion box, while the Mechatronics device plugs into the side of the computer "boxcar" style. Both will give you an excellent 80-column display, which is supported by a growing library of software - including an 80-column version of Funnelweb and the Telco terminal emulator. An 80-column expansion doesn't have to be an expensive proposition either - both devices will function well with a cheap ($50-100) composite green or amber 80-column monitor - both of which provide clean, crisp 80-column displays of your on-line work or your latest novel or letter. The 80-column device itself ranges in price from $100-250, making the cost of an upgrade to 80-columns $150-350 - much less

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User Group Survey Results in

And they aren't conclusive..

■ **IN THE SECOND** issue of Asgard News we sounded the alarm about the coming death of user groups. We'd heard a number of horror stories - user groups converting en masse to PC groups, user groups disappearing altogether because the principal officer (who did all the work) decided to quit, and so on.

We decided that in order to get a more accurate picture of the current state of user groups, which we feel are the bedrock of our community, that we needed to do a survey. It wasn't an especially scientific survey, but the purpose of it was clear - (a) we wanted to find out how user groups were doing with their membership, (b) we wanted to find out if user groups offer services to new members, and (c) we wanted to find out approximately how long officers of a group have been officers. The reason for the last might need some explanation - we feel that groups that have a number of people interested

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than buying one of those dedicated word processors for $600.

If you are tired of the memory shortage, AND the keyboard AND the 40-column display, then your best bet is definitely a Myarc Geneve 9640. Used as a TI-99/4A, you get an excellent keyboard with separate cursor keys, a built-in 192K RAM-disk (more on those later), an 80-column display with Telco, Funnelweb and the My-Word word processor that comes with it, and extra memory for those applications that can use it (My-Word gives you 56K of space for your documents). The Geneve will also give you a real speed boost - regular 99/4A programs work up to 3 times faster. The $450 Geneve is certainly cheaper than spending $150 for a Rave 99 keyboard, $250 or so for an 80-column display, and then another $150 for a 192K RAM-disk. At $450 you are still ahead of the dedicated word processors, which aren't as fast or as capable.

In the software department, if you are into telecommunications, you'll be interested in knowing that Telco, pretty much the best terminal emulator for the 4A by most people's reckoning, really sings on the Geneve. Since most telecommunications services and bulletin board systems are oriented towards 80-columns, a Geneve or an 80-column upgrade for your 4A is almost a necessity if you want to fully enjoy your on-line services. Additionally, Telco gives you many capabilities not found on $100-200 terminal emulators for IBM PCs, Macs, et. all., as well as by far some of the best documentation of any program for the 4A, for a freeware price of only $20.

If you are into word processing on either a 4A (with or without an 80-column display) or a Geneve, then you'll probably want to get in line for Press (available for $59.95), which brings all the functionality of modern word processors to both machines, "what-you-see-is-what-you-get" writing, an unlimited document size, a 100,000 word spelling checker, and much more, also by the author of Telco. Press is a step above anything a dedicated word processor can provide, at 1/5 the price of a comparable PC or Mac program.

Purchasing an 80-column card and a Rave keyboard or a Geneve, or perhaps a new piece of software, can make word processing or telecommunications seem like a new experience - you'll wonder how you ever did it before.

If you are tired of using Personal Record Keeping to keep your record collection straight, and occasionally eye purchasing a PC to better organize your life, you can save yourself a LOT of money and aggravation with either a little new equipment or software for your 99/4A.

If you are serious about databases, you should have a disk system. The minimally configured disk system described in the beginning can take you a lot further then Personal Record Keeping, though. You might want to consider purchasing a modern database like TI-Base (which, at $25, makes $600 DBaseIV on a clone blush, and not just because of the price but because it can do almost as much). If learning a database language like TI-Base isn't your bag, then perhaps you should consider one of the more "traditional" TI databases like PR-Base (freeware) or First-Base ($59.95). First-Base is a quite fast, menu-driven database program with the ability to build sophisticated compound queries (like "list all the items in my inventory that cost more the $50 and are red", or something like that). The only disadvantage to First-Base seems to be the price, and some annoying bugs in printing out and sorting.

To really use TI-Base, First-Base or PR-Base, you may want to move up to double-sided, double-density disks (360K). A new disk controller is a must - either the Corcomp or the Myarc. If you have a large amount of data you wish to organize, you might want to buy more than just a regular DS/DD disk controller: the Myarc Hard & Floppy Disk Controller (or "HFDC"). The HFDC will let you put up to 720K on a single disk, controls up to 4 floppy drives of that capacity, and up to 3 80Mb hard drives! At over $300 for the card, and an additional $200 or so to set up a 20Mb hard drive, it certainly isn't a bargain, but considering you get the same capabilities only on a $1000 PC clone, it sounds a lot cheaper.

The Myarc HFDC is a really nice piece of hardware that can enhance all of your programs - including telecommunications and word processing. With it you can have all of your programs, text files and data in one place at one time. You may literally never have to search for a disk again. Hard drives are also much faster than floppy drives - up to 10 times faster than with the flexible variety.

Spending $500 for a 20Mb hard drive on the 4A may sound like a lot of money, but you have to spend usually that amount for one on a Mac, and up to $200-300 more for one of a similar size on an Amiga or Atari ST. The HFDC will also let you have up to 240Mb of storage, while a PC, Amiga and ST can never come close (and 240Mb on a Mac would cost more than a Hyundai Excel). This is one instance where the "lowly" 99/4A is considerably more sophisticated and capable than it's "more advanced" brethren.

A new database package, and if you can splurge, a hard drive (or at least higher capacity floppy drives), will make managing a database on your TI-99/4A (or on a Geneve, which can do it 3 times faster), an entirely new change of pace.

If you are into spreadsheets, you will also benefit from using a Rave 99 keyboard with a separate numeric keypad that will make entering your figures a dream.

However, if you are really serious about spreadsheets there is only one real expansion avenue - purchase a Geneve and use the expanded version of Multiplan provided. The new version lets you have much a larger spreadsheet, in 80-columns, in a program that is much faster than it is on a 99/4A. If spreadsheets are your life's work (if you are an accountant or something), then maybe it IS worthwhile

for you to buy a clone (Lotus 1-2-3 beats Multiplan hands down in many respects, and Microsoft Excel on the Mac beats everything else). However, if you do your taxes with a spreadsheet, manage a small business, or just putter around with the occasional table, then either a Rave keyboard or a Geneve will make the whole experience much more pleasurable than it ever was before.

If you are into publishing, either for a newsletter, for a school or organization, or even for a small business, then you have many possible avenues to improve the quality of your work. Publishing is usually differentiated from word processing in that the aim is usually to combine an illustration with text. If you are using TI-Artist and TI-Writer to do this, then you are to be commended for your tenacity. The alternatives to this method, fortunately, can be quite inexpensive.

If you use TI-Artist frequently you may want to purchase Font Writer II ($22.95), which to a limited degree will let you include pictures, fonts and borders in a TI-Writer document. If you can live with only one picture on a line and some patience while the program formats a document, then you can produce pretty nice looking documents. If you want a lot more precise control over your pictures, then you may want to look at Picasso (available in freeware and commercial versions), which will let you do half a page at a time, let you include a TI-Writer file, and paste TI-Artist pictures anywhere you want. The Picasso Utilities package ($9.95) will help a lot towards that end with utilities to use fancy fonts on your Picasso picture, and print out the pictures perfectly for reproduction.

If you don't have a heavy investment in TI-Artist, you may want to look at The Printer's Apprentice, which is the only "true" desktop publishing programs for the 99/4A. Like early desktop publishers on other computers, this is not "what-you-see-is-what-you-get", but more approximates a language. It is quite complex, not overly well documented, but can produce excellent output that would put a $200 program on a PC to shame. If you are willing to put in the time to learn it, at $50 or so with the companion package (required for many things) you might save yourself thousands over going with a Mac and a laser printer, and have document quality comparable to anything you can do on an average PC and dot-matrix printer.

If you don't need pictures in your printed documents, you have many alternatives - including word processors and any of a number of freeware and public domain columnizing programs, or Press (when it is released), which allows you to mix columns of text to your satisfaction, as well as simple line graphics for tables and borders.

The category of "desktop publishing" in the 4A world sometimes includes specialized graphics programs. Some examples of these include Certificate 99 ($19.95), which allows you to make excellent signs and certificates, Calendar Maker 99 ($19.95), which will let you create complex picture calendars, a variety of banner programs, and any of a number of label programs which let you create labels with graphics and such. All of these programs are just as capable as anything on any other computer, usually cost only a tiny fraction of what they do elsewhere, and run on a basic 99/4A system.

If you already have a graphics package (or several) you like to use, and are just tired of waiting forever to finish up, or perhaps of flipping disks in and out of the disk drive, there are a number of ways to make your work go faster. One thing, of course, is higher capacity disks. Programs like Certificate 99, etc., are usually limited in graphics and fonts to those graphics you can cram onto one disk at a time. You can put 4 times as many pictures on a 360K disk as you can put on a 90K disk. Also, higher capacity disk controllers are usually 1 1/2-3 times faster then the TI Disk controller.

Another way to increase the speed is a hard-drive system as described above - which not only will let you use more pictures and fonts in many programs then you ever dreamed possible, but the programs will seem to just fly as the hard-disk reads and writes data 10 times faster than a floppy disk drive. Another way to get more "oomph" from your graphics programs is a Geneve - which will run them 3 times faster. A Geneve with 360K floppy drives can print a calendar from Calendar Maker 99, say, about 6 times faster than on a 99/4A with 90K drives. Is $450 too much to spend to make calendars faster? Well, the real question should be - do I want to spend $750-$1000 to buy a PC/Amiga/ST or $1500 for a Mac to make the same calendars? If you answer to the first is "yes" then you probably aren't interested in spending 2-3 times more still for another computer!

If your interest is in games, if you have a basic disk system you really can play virtually every game for the 99/4A. If you like arcade games and are tired of the 4A's selection, then before you go out and buy a PC, ST or Amiga, I'd go spend $100 on a Nintendo. The Nintendo's graphics are better than a PC's, and are on par with the best of the ST and Amiga. It's no wonder, the Nintendo uses the 9938 graphics chip found in the Geneve and the Dijit and Mechatronics 80-column cards.

If you like adventures, then you're more in luck - there is a large variety of adventure games for the 99/4A ranging from text adventures like the Scott Adams and Infocom series to graphics adventures like Legends. If you like adventures are don't know what is all available, Asgard Publishing has a little book (see the "Asgard Bookshelf" for details) called "The Adventure Reference Guide" which lists 200 adventures for the 4A (and over 100 available in the public domain).

The neat thing about games is one good one (like Spad XIII) will really make you glad you have your 99/4A - and really glad you didn't blow $1000 on a color PC clone so you could play Pac-Man or some flight simulator that uses a thousand different key commands to fly

the silly plane. The best thing about a good game, of course is that all you need is a basic 99/4A system to enjoy almost all of them.

If you are love to program, either as a hobby or for school, then there is a whole plethora of software and hardware that will let you write anything you want on your 99/4A.

If you are into C at school, then c99 for the 4A will generally interest you (even if it lacks some full-C capabilities like structures). The cost (it's freeware) is hard to beat also.

If you want to learn Fortran or Pascal, there are good to excellent versions of each available for the 99/4A. Fortran 99 ($25-50) is an excellent Fortran IV-77 hybrid that is a pleasure to write in. Turbo Pasc'99 is a decent, if somewhat incomplete Pascal. There is also the P-Code system with UCSD Pascal, which is a much more complete derivation that lacks only speed and can be a real buy if you pick it up used.

There are also 99/4A versions of many other popular and semi-popular languages - like Lisp (Artificial Intelligence), Pilot (education), Logo (ditto), Forth (for the HP calculator fiend) and a good selection of oddball languages. If you like good, old Basic, there are dozens of utilities to expand the use and function of Extended BASIC, including Super Extended BASIC and EZ-Keys Plus. There are also many programs to speed up the language (various assembly routines packages and such programs as Smash, Pre-Scan It! and Quick-Run).

If you are into assembly you may want to look into the RAG MacroAssembler, or at least the Editor/Assembler module (if you are still using a Mini-Memory). A program such as Explorer (a fancy debugger) will also really help out in this department. If you program in c99, Fortran 99, Assembly or Pascal, there are utilities such as PrEditor (a programmer's editor), Batch-It (which lets you create batch files for compiling/assembling/linking code automatically), and many more that should be in your tool-box.

If your hardware is what has you down, a Rave 99 keyboard, or perhaps a 32K Superspace II from Databiotics ($60), will pick you up again. The Superspace includes a variety of programming tools, and is useful for assembly and compiled language programmers alike.

Do you use your computer for something else? Perhaps you use your computer for a little of everything mentioned above, but not enough of any one to justify buying a piece of hardware just to do that one thing faster. If this describes you, you are still in luck, though.

There are several pieces of hardware other then those mentioned (the Rave 99 keyboard, higher capacity floppy disks, a hard drive and the Geneve), which will make any piece of software fly, or make using your computer even easier than before.

One such item is a RAM-disk. A RAM-disk is a card full of memory chips that pretends it's a floppy disk drive. The advantage to such a device is that it works about 10 times faster than a regular floppy disk. You can boot up your word processor in 2 seconds, or go from one part of a drawing program to another seemingly instantly. RAM-disks range in size from 90K to 1.5Mb. Some are battery-backed so they don't lose their contents when the computer is shut off, and some aren't. Four or five manufacturers produce them, and they range in price from just over $100 to over $700. Even a little 90K RAM-disk at the bottom of the range could "change your life", or at least the way you run every program you have.

Another such item is a GRAM device. a GRAM device (of which there are several types under various brand names), is a little device full of memory that pretends to be a cartridge. The advantage to such things is that you can put up to 4-5 cartridges in it at the same time in some of the larger ones. No longer will you have to hunt up your Extended BASIC cartridge again - it will always be right there on the main menu of your computer when you start-up. A really popular GRAM device is the P-Gram card - which has up to 72K of memory and plugs into your expansion box. Amaze your friends by running Extended BASIC or TI-Writer with no module in your cartridge port!

Finally, if your problem is just plain speed - not the speed that the computer reads and writes data, or the speed in which you can select cartridges, or type, then you really only have 1 solution other then the Geneve (which at $450 gives you a 3-times speed increase). This other solution is considerably less expensive ($100 or less), but entails invalidating your warranty, and finding someone technical to do it for you. It is called a "16-bit modification", and in technical terms means putting the 32K memory expansion inside your console on the 16-bit bus. Combine this with a faster timing crystal, and you can get a 25-35% speed improvement in your console. The only disadvantage is that some things simply don't work at a different speed (terminal emulators, for one thing). Which means you'll have to disable the speed increase to run certain things. Another disadvantage is that unless you are a technical wiz who can juggle soldering irons, you'll probably have to find someone who is. Most user groups have at least one guy like that, some 2 or 3. If you really want this type of modification, be prepared to beg and/or name your firstborn after him/her. Some will do it for money, however (computer "habits" can be as bad as any drug addiction).

All in all, there is no reason you should be using a 6 year old computer. With any combination of the devices and software mentioned above you can make your 99/4A compete with whatever any other computer can offer, often at a fraction of the price. You won't have the latest thing on the block, but there is quite a bit of comfort not being on the "bleeding edge", as it were. In fact, there is so much available for expanding your 99/4A, it might as well be " The NEW 99/4A". ◆

User Group Survey Results in. From Page 2...

enough in being officers are probably more healthy than those groups where a few people have been doing everything for a long time.

While the number of entries in our survey wasn't overwhelming (just short of 2 dozen), we feel that the results do give us some sort of picture of the health of our user groups.

Our survey consisted of seven questions.

(1) Has your user group lost members, gained members, or stayed the same during the last year?

The results: Almost without exception, every user group with more than 25 and less than 100 members reported that membership was stable. Many reported that they had lost members over the year, but that they had gained an equivalent number or slightly more. This is a very positive sign. The largest gains and losses, percentage wise, were in those groups with less than 25 members. Those groups either reported large gains, or large losses. Groups of over 100 generally listed slight losses, with no dramatic plunges.

(2) Do you have programs or interest groups oriented towards beginning and/or console users?

The results: To generalize, virtually all user groups outside of the U.S. have such activities. Virtually all user groups in the U.S. do not. The reason for this is probably because expansion systems are much more expensive, and less common in other countries, while in the U.S. most user groups tend to be made exclusively of expanded system owners. Interestingly enough, the few user groups that DID indicate they had a substantial amount of beginning user activities are the same groups that had an increase in their memberships. I believe there is a direct correlation there.

(3) Do you maintain a cassette library?

The results: Almost all user groups surveyed answered "yes" to this question. However, many of them (particularly those in the U.S.) indicated that it wasn't being kept up-to-date with the disk library. Those same people realized that this is a problem, and some suggested it was because of a difficulty in finding cassette users willing to manage the cassette library, and an apathy among disk users to do so. Managing a cassette library is a lot more time-consuming than a disk library, simply because it takes much longer to copy and order files on a cassette system. There seems to be no direct connection between membership gains and a cassette library - even user groups with a net loss in members indicate that they maintain one to some degree. Interestingly enough, the largest groups surveyed seem to be the same ones that don't maintain a cassette library. Figure that.

(4) What were the programs for the last 3 months?

The results: The results tended to be pretty regular - popular software items (TI-Base, Funnelweb, etc.) seem to dominate the demonstration schedules. Some user groups seemed to have quite a bit of 9640-only material at their meetings, but I guess it is too early yet to see if this results in the departure of many 99/4A owners (though I imagine it will). Some user groups tried to be thematic in their programs - some would have meetings devoted to graphics, databases, word processing, expansion, etc. I think this is an excellent idea, provided that such a schedule is set up in advance, and advertised in the user group newsletter. Again, the larger user groups went against this general pattern by having some of the most technical presentations. I think we are seeing the reasons why larger groups lose members - lack of a cassette library and more technical presentations.

(5) Do you have regularly scheduled and located meetings?

The results: All user groups surveyed have regularly scheduled meetings, though some of the smaller ones rotate it among the users homes (perfectly acceptable, and perhaps more fun for the members). Some user groups have 2 meetings or more a month, while most have one meeting a month.

(6) How long have you been an officer of your user group?

The results: This question is very telling - while the average officer responding has been an officer for only about 2 to 2 1/2 years, the user groups with the largest membership declines have officers who've served for 4 years or more. The groups with the most gains have officers who've served 2 years or less. This issue is very important - virtually all clubs operate on the specific principal that the 2% most interested do 98% of the work. If that 2% isn't "replenished" periodically it can be the death of a club. Many clubs have disbanded when one or more officers has moved on to another machine simply because they've been running the group so long no one can begin to take their place.

(7) How many members does your group currently have?

The results: The groups who answered the survey ranged from 8 to over 150. The average is around 39. Actually, I think this is a pretty positive sign - user groups over 100 tend to be more impersonal, while user groups under 25 generally don't have the financial resources to do more then fight for their lives. Some user groups in the 60-100 range actively engage in local advertising and participation at local functions (county fairs, etc.) to gain members. There is no "ideal size" of a group, but I'd say 50-75 is a good number - enough where you are liable to find 5-10 people who are willing to volunteer regularly, but not too large where managing the services of the group (library, newsletter, meetings, etc.) is too much of a job for the officers.

Generally, the survey says some important things, but the most important of all is that "the rumors of the general demise of user groups is greatly exaggerated" (to paraphrase Mark Twain with

appropriate apologies). I wish I had asked a number of other questions: "(8) Do you publish a newsletter?", and "(9) What is the your age?". I've recently noticed that some groups are giving up a newsletter (not a good idea in general - but I wanted to see if there was a correlation between that and a decline in membership), and I've also noticed that in user groups in our area, at least, some of the most active members are retired people. I wanted to see if this is common elsewhere. I think this is also a good trend - many retired people can devote more of their time and energy to the group, which is the key to the group's continued survival.

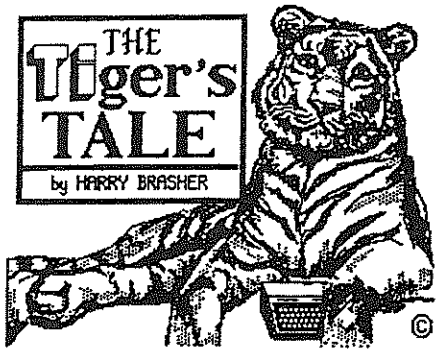
I'd like more user groups to answer this survey in order to verify some of my hunches, generalizations and perceived trends. To make it worth your while to write, I'll give anyone who is an officer of a user group which has already responded to this survey a 1-issue extension of your subscription to this magazine if you answer the questions #1 through #9 listed below.

Mail survey answers to: User Group Survey, c/o Asgard Publishing, P.O. Box 10697, Rockville, MD 20850.

User Group Survey #2

1. Has your user group membership gone up or down in the last year?
2. Do you have programs or interest groups oriented towards beginners and/or console users?
3. Do you maintain a cassette library?
4. What were your programs for the last three months?
5. Do you have regularly scheduled and located meetings?
6. How long have you been an officer of your user group?
7. How many members does your group currently have?
8. Does your user group publish a newsletter?
9. What is your age?

Please return with your name and the name and address of your user group. ◆



Harry's Corner

By Harry Brashear

"The user group is the life blood of the TI community." [period.. end of sentence, absolute statement!] That emphatic judgement made by many, may not be true anymore. In fact, in many cases, I could call some of the user groups today, the bleeding arteries of the TI community.

At some point, back a few years ago, when the TI was young, orphaned, and people had no place to turn, there was no question of the groups value. Today, because of bad management, bad judgement, and burned out leadership, there are many groups that are falling apart. When the group begins to fall, the remaining membership is in worse shape than ever.

I would like to share some thoughts with you based on my own experience and some stories I have been told.

First of all, and most importantly, not all groups are falling apart. Take the Rochester users group for instance. Two years ago, they were meeting in the president's basement because the entire group consisted of perhaps ten people. Today, they have thirty-some members and they need to meet in a school.

How did this happen, you ask? Well, one of the primary ways they have found to get membership is to call up every newspaper ad they find for used TI equipment. This accomplishes two things. 1>They find lots of spare equipment, and, 2>They always tell the seller about the user group. Many of these people are surprised to find out that the TI is not dead and come to a meeting.

Another good example is the West Penn 99ers. Not to long ago this group was on it's way down hill but, the group leaders got involved in hardware projects. With the help of people like John Wilforth, getting more out of the existing systems became a major group project. The result was a terrific boost in the membership based on this single premise. Much of the TI community now looks to this gang for many of the hardware projects that update our computers.

That is only two examples of continuing success. They are successful because the leadership of the group cares and enjoys working with the TI, but when the caring fails, so does the group. A number of things can happen to begin a general erosion of TI morale. A BBS converts from TIBBS to FIDONET... A good programmer converts to IBM and starts talking about all the $$$ he is making... A little pack of converts starts meeting in the rear and talking IBM... a newsletter editor gets lazy and starts using Ventura at work. All of these things are bad news to the TI user group because it's generally made up of followers.

The worst I have heard about is, a group with a huge treasury and a few remaining members. They are hanging in, so that they can split the money at the official fold-up. The last thing they want is new members. (Let this be a lesson... If you haven't done so, commit your treasury to the local zoo or something, should a breakup occur.)

There seems to be this "thing" that says, "if I go out and buy a new computer, I have to make everybody else do the same, and

since they are all my friends, so this makes it right." Wrong! If you are a leader, then act like a responsible leader. Stand down and move on to the IBM group. Why hang around and wreck everyone else's fun. It takes TI'ers to run a TI group, people that are looking forward to the next big breakthrough for our computer.

I have screamed time and time again, publicly, about multi-user groups. Computers of various kinds CANNOT coexist together any more than one computer's basic can be run into another. I have seen the results of letting the clones through the door and the guy with the little computer gets trampled into the dust every time.

We all take SOME interest in other computers, we have to, because that's often where ideas come from. If it wasn't for Procomm for the IBM, we probably wouldn't have TELCO. If it wasn't for WordPerfect, we wouldn't have anything to model PRESS after. Of course, TI-BASE is D-Base II through and through, so, thank God for other computers. But if the interest gets out of hand and a leader wants everyone to JOIN the rest of the flag waving techies, look out! It takes a lot of guts to stand up to these individuals, but you have to, to preserve your sanity, and more importantly, your group.

Another thing that will bring down a group is a lack of communication, both within the group and with the outside community. Without communications there is no excitement about what's to come. If I didn't think there was anything new coming, would I stay with the TI? NO! But I know there are great things coming because I read and write, and I call people to find out what's new. People tell me what's new because they know that I generate some of the excitement that drives the TI engine. I write to people all over the world.. Australia, Germany, Italy, and all over Canada and the U.S. Sure, it costs me a few bucks to do this, but it's worth it. The money that you spend on movies, dinners out, Saturday afternoon at the pub, and gasoline to do these things, I spend on long distance calls.

If your group isn't suppling you with the information you need, get it yourself and pass it back. Do you take the time to read all those newsletters that your group trades back and forth, or do you ever see them at all? If you send me a big SASE with a few comments of your own, I'll be happy to send you a list of groups, and mark off a few of what I feel have the best newsletters. Join these groups, buy MICROpendium, Asgard News, and any other periodical that might come along. If you are new to the community and feel a little left out, ask questions, or better still, write your questions down and send them to us. Next time: The Computer versus The Family Unit.

WE GET LETTERS... AT LAST!! THEM: E.S. from Sacramento, CA writes; "Stung me a bit about your "stinking dollar" to Barry Boone and Ottawa group...' I'm an innocent non-grouper with no use for either one."

...also he says; "Mostly I think you're right, but where I disagree, I still enjoy the Brash-ness; To make a point you have to holler, and a tad of exaggeration is expected and allowed for."

ME: My apologies sir, but you don't have to be a groupie to own these programs. if you would like to join my group, send me $15.00 for the membership and I'll send you both of them with your first newsletter. Just remember to pay up to the aforementioned authors.

(The gentleman also caught me up on a little mis-understanding I left concerning WriterEase. So....)

I NEVER exaggerate, but I do error occasionally. Vrs 2 of WriterEase does in fact allow user words. I was talking about Vrs 1... but I still can't get V2.0 into my RAM-disk.

THEM: Carbon copy received concerning Ottawa Users Group: Enclosed is my check for $10... [fairware price for DM1000] ...I rationalized not sending a fairware donation because I was sending one to the McGoverns; I didn't think I should also send money to you.[Ottawa group] But Harry Brashear, writing in the latest NEWS from Asgard, convinced me that my rationalization is unjust and that I should send you some money. ME: I'm PROUD of you JD! That should also help to get DM2000 here faster. ◆

The 9900 Lives

Reports of the 9900's demise have been greatly exaggerated!

The TMS9900 microprocessor, the heart and soul of the TI-99/4A, was a real breakthrough when it was introduced in 1977. It was the world's first 16-bit processor (meaning that it could process 16 bits of data at a time). It also was of a unique design, completely unlike any other microprocessor - so unique in fact that most "mainstream" programmers couldn't make heads or tails of the thing. In reality, experienced 9900 assembly programmers recognize it as a truism that 9900 assembly programs are inherently simpler to write, and shorter because the 9900 can do with one simply command what would take a, say, Intel 8088 nine separate commands. Such are the fruits of hindsight.

Unlike the 8088, the 9900 was never considered commercially successful. I put this in the past tense deliberately. Believe it or not TI produces a very popular microprocessor, today, that for many purposes IS a 9900 family microprocessor. This chip is so successful that hundreds of thousands have been sold, and people are lin-

ing up to use its successor. It is of so capable that anyone who wants to be on the cutting edge of technology uses it. It is so fast that it is 1.5-2 times faster than any other widely used microprocessor (including the 80386 and 68030 processors that are the heart of the IBM P/S 2 model 70 and Apple Mac IIx respectively).

As you might have guessed, it isn't called a 99 something. Whether it was deliberate or accidental, TI gave it and it's relatives a name starting with 34. Currently, there are two members of the family, the 34010 and the 34020. TI has also finished development of a math coprocessor that will speed up some operations as much as 100 times. The 34010 was first introduced in 1986. The 34020 is being "sampled" (IE, tested by users before its official release), and should be in production before the summer. Ostensibly, both processors are designed for graphics (in fact, they both have the moniker of Graphics System Processor). Why should 99/4A'ers be interested in something called a 34010? Well... let me continue.

Before the 34010 was released there WAS a successful 9900 family chip, called the TMS9918A. The 9918A is the graphics chip inside the 99/4A, and is responsible for sprites, text and everything you see on the screen. The 9918A was adopted by the Japanese, who used it widely in Japan in their MSX machines. Millions of such machines were sold. In fact, the interest was so strong that when TI declined to developed a compatible follow-up, the Japanese company Yamaha developed one that came to be called the V9938. The 9938 is the graphics processor used in the Geneve, and the Dijit and Mechatronics 80-column cards for the 99/4A.

Back to TI... TI decided sometime in 1982 or 1983 that the 9900 family was doomed commercially. About that time they began development of a number of new graphics chips. One was even actually halfway announced, the 9928 (which even made a circa 1984 issue of MICROpendium). Many engineers at TI who developed the 9900 family moved into this new project of the Microprocessor and Microcomputer Products division (MMP). They include Karl M. Guttag, who in 1979 designed the TMS9995 and TMS99000 microprocessors (close members of the 9900 family that are the heart of the Geneve and the TI Business Systems, respectively), as well as the 9918 that is used in the 99/4A, Derek Roskell who was the project manager for the 9995 project, Richard Simpson who designed the TMS9914 and worked on the 9995, Tom Preston who also worked on the 9995, Graham Short who designed microcomputer boards based on the 9995, and Mike Asal, who since he only joined TI in 1982, had little direct experience with the 9900 family.

Anyway, the 34010 processor was initially begun in 1982. Early versions were most likely very similar to the 9918A and its immediate derivatives, but some crucial changes were made early on. The 34010 is a 32-bit microprocessor for one thing. It includes as new features the ability (now, this gets technical), to address all memory in bits, a stack, a full set of graphics commands (like the 9938, but far more developed and capable), as well as a general purpose instruction set. Like the 9995, the 34010 has an instruction cache and full-interrupt capability, and like the 9918 family, display timing control. It is capable of processing up to 6 Million Instructions Per Second (vastly more the the 1-2 MIPS that the 99000 is capable of).

The 34010's relation to the 9900 family is most apparent in its instruction set. Like the 9900 family (and unlike every other microprocessor), the 34010 supports the ability to move data from one area of memory directly to another. This "memory-to-memory" architecture is the hallmark of the 9900 family, and one of the major things that differentiates it from other microprocessors. Also like the 9900 family, the 34010 has a large variety of addressing modes and the ability to directly call a subroutine.

I could continue further with a technical description, but that isn't the point of the article. The point is that the 34010 "family" of microprocessors is a direct descendant of the 9900 family that we all know and love. What does this mean to the 99/4A? Well, to figure that out it helps to know what the 34010 is used for.

TI advertises the 34010 as a Graphics System Processor (GSP). They like to advertise the versatility of the processor: "It was designed to support a wide range of display resolutions and pixel sizes, as well as applications such as laser printers, ink jet printers, data compression and fascimile machines". Of course, nothing TI makes is ever used the way it was originally intended - one of the largest markets for the 34010 has been been VGA graphics cards for PCs and color graphics boards for Apple Mac computers. Both TI and its customers have been selling the 34010 short, though.

The 34010 by itself could be used as the basis of a computer, even though it really was designed to work as a graphics co-processor (as the 9918A works with the 9900 in the 99/4A). The 9918A can't run by itself though, much less use high level languages like C - in fact, no other graphics processor can do either of these things too. The 34010 is unique in these things as well.

However, because the 34010 is limited in the type of RAM it can use (expensive custom designed video RAM which is faster than regular RAM), as well as the ways it uses it, it really isn't the best choice for the "brains" of a computer. These problems are not present in the 34010's immediate successor, the 34020. The 34020 is not only twice as fast as the 34010, it also eliminates the memory problems, and has even more graphics capabilities. The 34020 could the be the basis of a computer that could run 99/4A programs! In most cases, 9900 assembly language programs could be made to run on a 34020 by simply substituting the 9900 commands for the 34020 equivalent.

In essence, the 34010 processor is the "32-bit" 9900 microprocessor

that we never had. Because of the commercial success of the 34010 (and expected greater success of the 34020), the TI-99/4A DOES have a future, albeit not one that is immediately available. ◆

Jack's Jottings

By Jack Sughrue

TI-Base Tutorial Continued...

Last time we talked about the best buy of the year for 99ers: Dennis Faherty's TI-BASE (TEXAMENTS, 244 Mill Rd., Yaphank, NY 11980 $24.95 plus $1.50 S&H for two disks [one a tutorial] and 78-page manual). It still is.

In the interim between articles Dennis has improved his already-superb program remarkably. He readily incorporated many good suggestions made by newsletter authors around the whole country. At the time of this writing (March 1989) TI-BASE is at Version 2.1. The manual - now almost double in size - has been completely done over, too (except that it is still printed blue on grey), and contains much better explanations and tutorials and some descriptions of the added and changed items These changes were done so quickly and so professionally that my original very high assessment of this data base rose even higher.

This base is becoming so popular that many templates are being created to provide easier and better access to all users. Soon there will be templates in every club library in the world, the way there are TI-ARTIST pictures and TI-WRITER letter files and MULTIPLAN setups. It will stand alongside TI-ARTIST as a standard for this computer. It probably already has. Now that we've opened up TIB by designing our own template (see last ASGARD NEWS and/or recent IMPACT/99 columns in newsletters), we should be able to tie up the rest of the uses of this program fairly easily.

But, first, a little review. Always make backups of your originals before doing anything else; particularly as TIB requires the write-protect tab to be off so changes can be made right on the disk. Next initialize a disk for your data. If you have two or more drives you can do this DURING the program with the FORMAT command, but it's still more convenient to have one or more ready.

Okay. Now boot the disk. Note that it is much faster than the original version. You'll be prompted for date (Just type in 03/17/89 or whatever.) and all files created during this time will contain this date. ENTERing this will bring up STATUS report:

DATDISK=DSK2. (your DB files will go on Drive 2)
PRGDISK=DSK1 (Drive 1 for your TIB system master)
PRINTER=PIO. (port)
LINE =080 (number of columns wide)
PAGE =056 (number of lines long)
HEADING=ON (all headings will be printed)
TALK =ON (commands on screen during execution)
SPACE =01 (spaces between fields)
RECNUM =ON (displays record numbers from 0)
LSPACE =0256 (space made for LOCALS)
DATE =03/17/89 (as mentioned above)

FCTN/7 will bring up some handy DV/80 "Help" files at most points along the way or you could print them out as docs through your FUNNELWEB or TIW.

On the STATUS listed above, all that is necessary to make changes is to use the SET command at the dot in the lower left of the screen. To change your data disk from Drive 2 to Drive 3, for example, all you have to type is SET DATDISK=DSK3. and press ENTER. Next, to see that all is A-OK, just type CLEAR (and ENTER each time to perform the function) to get rid of all the junk on the screen, and then type DISPLAY STATUS. Your setup will be re-displayed with your changes listed. Very easy and quick.

Last time we made a database of videos. I chose to do that rather than the simpler address base because I wanted to show how such a base could be used in a personal, different way. Most of the letters I've received seem to be more concerned about whether the writer could find a USE for TIB. Trust me: the uses are as unlimited as your imagination.

Most people collect things: videos, stamps, teapots, watercolors, records/tapes, books, candle snuffers, quotations. TIB can help you put order into your collection. If it's at all valuable, it's important to have records in case of fire or theft or wills.

TIB could also be used to sort important household items: insurances, car papers, and so on. It is ideal for taxes. It's perfect for businesses. Exceptional for names and addresses. Wonderful for inventories. For making labels. For identifications. For mathematical (spreadsheet-style) computations. For teachers. For secretaries. For plumbers. For housewives and househusbands. For clergymen. For butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers. In short, I can't think of an occupation (or hobby) where TIB wouldn't be very handy.

As I promised last time, though, I would list and define of the common commands used by TIB.

The DISPLAY and PRINT commands are powerful tools. They let you display on screen (or print hardcopies) of any combinations of displays you wish. If you have done a LASTNAME, FIRSTNAME, STREET, CITY, STATE, ZIP, PHONE, COMMENT file and sorted it on LASTNAME, you could display in columns any combination of the above. At the dot, just type

DISPLAY ALL FIRSTNAME LASTNAME PHONE.

What I will get is a listing of the first name, last name, and phone number of everyone in the base as SORTed on the last name in alphabetical order. I could just as easily asked for the STATE sorted

on CITY or whatever. I can have as much or as little information displayed or printed out as I want and sorted any which way. If I said PRINT ALL FIRSTNAME LASTNAME PHONE, I would have gotten a hardcopy of the above. SNAP instantly dumps the current screen to your printer, so you can DISPLAY and SNAP for a quick hardcopy.

For you PRBASE, CFS, NAVARONE, DB 500 or whatever owners, TIB will CONVERT your files. Whew! That saves a lot of sweat and time. FCTN/9 will abort a process; SPACEBAR will pause it; S will continue execution. The * will permit comments (but they hog memory); the ";" will permit continuation of commands to another line; the "|" is like & in XB (sticks together things).

The PRINTER control codes include FF, formfeed; LF, linefeed; CR, carriage return; DS, doublestrike; UL, underline; EX, expanded; CM, compressed (and very useful); IT, italics; B, bold; SPS, superscript; SBS, subscript; HT, horizontal tab; ST, set tab; NM, normal. You can also go into Draft or Near Letter Quality modes.

You can APPEND records or APPEND BLANK (s), CATALOG DISK, FORMAT (to initialize), change COLOR (s), DELETE DATABASE or RECORD or FILE; RECALL deleted files; COPY files, MOVE files, MODIFY STRUCTURE; PACK, WAIT, LIST, SCROLL, SELECT (a different active database), READ, EDIT, FIND, SORT. Expressions such as ELSE, IF, WHILE (and corresponding ENDWHILE and ENDIF) are also part of TIB's massive open structure.

The powerful DO command acts like RUN in BASIC or XB. When you have created a template you wish to activate (such as a label program), DO LABEL is the way you would execute it (if "LABEL" was what you had named it).

The best way to learn to use TI-BASE is to own it and play with it. Right now it is one of the safest small investments in the TI World. The returns for such an extraordinary program are enormous, and the wealth of information surrounding it continues to grow by leaps and bounds.

There has been a large number of tutorials and reviews and template creations published worldwide on this program. Martin Smoley and Bill Gaskill have written the most extensive and lucid and intelligent articles I have seen to date on TIB. Smoley, whose articles originally appeared in Northcoast 99ers' newsletters, has a DSSD disk available in user groups that not only includes his excellent tutorials (which may be printed freely by any TI newsletter), but he has also created many, many templates. TIB templates (such as labels) make the work easier and the value greater. Gaskill has written TIB reviews for MICROpendium, but he has written some very fine tutorials in the L.A. Topics newsletter. Harry Brashear of the Western New York 99ers has been putting together disks of everything written about and for TI-BASE. Getting any (or ALL) the materials mentioned above would be the very best way to develop the best possible TIB use for your own personal and/or business needs.◆

Asgard Bookshelf

This is a service area for Asgard News subscribers. Since we began publishing this magazine a year ago, we've become aware that the majority of our customers do not have access to the magazine, telecommunications services and user groups that the rest of us take so much for granted.

So, on the anniversary of our first issue we've decided to give a little "birthday present" to our readers: a service for selected materials that we believe are a value to the TI community. While a diverse collection of materials, we believe these items have one thing in common - they inform and entertain the user/reader. Please read the end of this section for ordering information.

Software

Item	Disks	Cost	Description
Picasso 1.2	1	see below	An excellent drawing program
MDOS Development Kit	2	see below	Complete kit for M-DOS programmers
Textloader	1	see below	Write XB programs with TI-Writer!
Quick & Dirty Formatting Columnizer	1	see below	Create formatted 2-column text
Misc. Assembly Tutorials	1	see below	Collection of assembly tutorials

Textware

Item	Cost	Description
The Adventure Guide	$14.95	Lists 200 adventures for the 99/4A
The Orphan Survival Handbook	$14.95	A tremendous resource
Home Publishing on the 99/4A	$15.00	How to use the 4A to publish

The programs listed in the first part of this list may be obtained by sending $1.00 and a blank, initialized disk for each disk desired. The books are available at the price listed, plus $1.50 a book shipping and handling expenses. Please note that several of the software items are freeware - the author requests you (and we strongly urge) that you send the requested fee if you use the program. The $1.00 charge is merely a copying and postage fee. It should not be construed as a fairware contribution.

Send all orders to: Asgard Bookshelf, P.O. Box 10697, Rockville, MD 20850. Please all 4-8 weeks for delivery. This offer is limited.

New Products

New software for artists, books, utilities and games!

The Adventure Reference Guide
by Mickey Schmitt

The Adventure Reference Guide is the "bible" of TI adventure gaming. This remarkable reference is the product of nearly a year of planning, research and writing. This weighty tome lists the almost 200 adventures available for the 99/4A, rates them within their categories, lists the equipment needed to run them, reviews the most significant programs, and even provides lists where they can be obtained. Did you know that most 99/4A adventures can be had for next to nothing? This book will show you where to get them and how. 108 pages. $14.95 plus $2.00 shipping & handling.

Artist Borders III
by Paul Scheidemantle

The enormously popular Artist Borders series continues with a new volume by ace 99/4A artist Paul Scheidemantle. Author of Artist Borders II, Artist Fonts #2-5, and many popular freeware graphics packages and utilities, Artist Borders III includes borders that would put many clipart packages to shame with their detail and subject range. The 31 borders in this package include borders in geometric and decorative patterns,

(Continued on Page 15)

Geneve Corner

Geneve Specific software list continues...

Our list of software available for the Myarc Geneve 9640 has been a popular item. Before we continue it in this issue with a list of all the software released from November 1988 to February 1989, there is a new name you should add to your rolodex.

We've recently received a copy of the first issue of the Geneve magazine-on-a-disk, 9640 News. Produced by Beery Miller (5455 Marina Cove #1, Memphis, TN 38115), this quarterly publication contains, "680 archived sectors with utilities, C source code, MDOS assembly language source code, news, programs, enhancements to the Editor/Assembler module, etc.". All we can say is that it a well-done piece of work that bespeaks some thought. A trial subscription (1 issue) is available for $5.00 in the U.S., and $7.00 from elsewhere. A full 5 issue subscription is available for $25.00 in the U.S., $30.00 elsewhere delivered by surface mail, and $38.00 elsewhere delivered by air mail. If you order, remember to send your full name and address. If he can keep up the quality, the magazine will be worth far more then the asking price.

We've talked with Mike Connel again at the National Myarc User Group (11011 Ellwood Str., The Woodlands, TX, 77380-4001, (703)367-1047). He was preparing the 2nd issue of their user group newsletter when we spoke. They've recently gained access to some desktop-publishing equipment, so I expect the coming issues will look really slick. In case you haven't joined, the dues are $30.00/year in the U.S., $33.00 in Canada and $38.00 elsewhere.

The following files can probably be obtained from N.M.U.G., or from your local TIBBS, Compuserve's TI Forum, GEnie's TI Roundtable, or Delphi's TI Information Network. Some of them might be found in your local user group library. Unfortunately, we are unable to make these available to our readers because of other commitments. Now to the listing

Public Domain Releases:

XUTILS - 27-Feb-89

A collection of 5 M-DOS utilities. XDIR, XTYPE, XDEL, PROT, and UNPROT. The replace MDOS commands DIR, TYPE, DEL, and ATTRIB. Very enhanced with full drive searches (not just one directory) using full wildcards, and/or file type, slash ("/") switches to control printing, pausing, confirming, single directory searches etc. Public domain by John Johnson.

SIMON - 24-Feb-89

An M-DOS game, originally written in TI-BASIC, translated here into 9640 FORTRAN for running under MDOS. Close encounters of the SIMON kind! MDOS only. Includes documentation. By LGMA Systems.

DOSMENU - 24-Feb-89

This is a menuing system for M-DOS - it will allow you to run several applications from one menu.

INTERLACE - 21-Feb-89

A little routine to change screen interlace. Source code provided for accessing VDP R9

MORSE CODE- 17-Feb-89

This is a Morse code program written in c99 for M-DOS. Includes complete source code, including routines for generating tones.

HEAD PARK UTILITY -17-Feb-89

This is an improved head parking routine for use with the Myarc HFDC card. Used for "parking" the hard drive head when it isn't in use. Helps prevent damage to the hard disk

REMIND ME - 23-Jan-89

This program runs from the command line of MDOS, and checks a Remind Me! data file for any reminders for TODAY. If any are found, they are printed to the screen.

FILEZAP - V1.13 - 21-Jan-89

FileZap, Version 1.3, for MDOS only. This version has disk sector inspect/alter capability as well as file sector. Some- what improved disk access also. From LGMA Products, freeware.

MY-WORD - V1.22 - 21-Jan-89

New version of My-Word. A small upgrade from 1.21.

DSR-SAVE - 16-Jan-89

Save and load Geneve 9640 Device Service Routines (DSR) to Disk. By John Johnson.

PROGRAM TYPE - 16-Jan-89

A TYPE program for MDOS that types program-image type files. Useful for perhaps rough debugging, et all. By John Johnson

SHADE -16-Jan-89

A little MDOS program by John Johnson that allows you to modify the 16 colors used in 80-column MDOS mode.

G-DEBUG - 13-Jan-89

A debugger for MDOS. Freeware from LGMA Products. This debugge can be used with assembly language programs, and provides many of the same commands as the E/A debugger, but is for MDOS only.

M-DOS DEVELOPERS KIT - 13-Jan-89

A complete freeware MDOS development kit. Contains the following large collections: MDOS-PROGS,MDOS-XOPS and PROG-DOCS. MDOS-EQUTS,PROG-SRC and miscellaneous programs to experiment with. A complete MDOS software development package with utilities, docs and source code. All programs run in native mode and represent the latest released versions of the various utilities and docs. There are also some files of use to newcomers to MDOS or Assembly. By Ron Warfield.

QDE - V1.8 - 07-Jan-89

The QDE editor, version 1.8 (for use with MDOS 1.14) has several new features, including 26 line screen display, optional assembler tab stops, and a Show Directory function. Compressed. Includes docs. Part of the c99/MDOS programming environment from Clint Pulley

VIDEO XOP MANUAL - 05-Jan-89

This is the manual for Video XOPS in MDOS 1.04 and later.

ENCRYPTION - 27-Dec-88

This program runs from MDOS and encrypts a program. This is the same encryption scheme used on some commercial 9640 programs, and it is of course recognizable by the MDOS loader. If you write programs for MDOS, and if you sell them commercially, you might want to use this encrypter.

EPSON MYWORD - 26-Dec-88

Replacements for the HELP files in My-Word for Epson LX-800 owners.

ASSEMBLER - V1.4 - 17-Dec-88

QDA version 1.4. It now displays the source line with error messages and fixes the bug with /options. Fairware from Clint Pulley.

OLU2 - V2.0 - 17-Dec-88

Object Library Utility v2.0 (OLU) for use with LDR v3.1 has many new features including the ability to list library contents and an update mode, providing delete, insert, merge and replace capabili

ties. c99 source included. Part of the c99/MDOS programming environment from Clint Pulley.

GPL INTERPRETER - V1.04 -12-Dec-88

Version 1.04 of Myarc's GPL Interpreter.

MDOS - V1.14 - 09-Dec-88

MDOS 1.14 . Contains limited hard disk support.

FORMAT PRINTER - 03-Dec-88

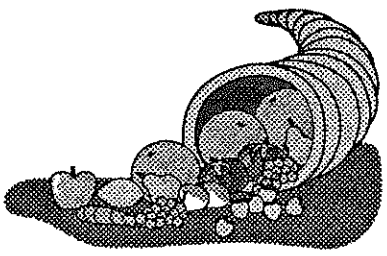
This is a nice formatting printing program for both M-DOS and the 99/4A. It prints text files with margins on a page.

PLATO FIX - 03-Dec-88

Fixes the current inability of the Geneve to run the Plato cartridge.

No commercial software products of note were released within the last month, though Myarc has promised to release its Advanced Basic on March 18th (though we've all heard that one before).

In the next issue we'll continue with our listings of Geneve specific software. We are interested in knowing if any of the readers of this column would like a tutorial on using M-DOS. Please send a note to Geneve Corner, c/o Asgard News, Box 10697, Rockville, MD 20850 with any comments.



Press Report

Welcome to the inauguration of a new regular feature - a column for owners of Asgard Software's PRESS. In this issue we'll explain why it isn't available yet and when it should be.

Unfortunately, as this is being being written (Feb.24), Press is still not available. The reasons for this are many and varied, but a short synopsis of the situation is due.

Press was originally slated for release on November 12, 1988. We introduced the program at the Chicago TI Faire to some acclaim. The copy we demonstrated was actually a "complete" version of the program - essentially most of the coding was pretty much done at that time, and the only thing that remained to be done was debugging the program. Obviously, we vastly overestimated our ability to do this quickly.

Press turned out to be a real bear to debug. This is primarily because it is so large - at nearly 90K of assembly code it is 6 times larger than TI-Writer, and fully 3 times larger than almost any other TI-99/4A (or even Geneve 9640) program. Size alone presented many problems that were literally unprecedented, and which had to be addressed in new, untried ways. Charles Earl, the author, literally invented new ways of 99/4A programming. The first major problem was that the core of routines used in the program (which can be referred to as the "subroutine library") was simply too large to keep all in memory at once. These routines are the bits of program code that the major functions of the program (search and replace, etc.) call in order to accomplish their jobs in a consistent and efficient manner. Additionally, the major functions themselves couldn't all be placed in memory at once. We had to work out a method by which all the necessary subroutines are in memory at the same time a major function is, invisibly to the user.

We managed to solve this problem (which caused much of the delay) several months ago. Since then we've worked on a different or related problem - that of giving each subroutine and major function space to work in, within the constraints of 32K of RAM. If we simply assigned each subroutine a permanent area of memory, not only would most of that memory not be used at any one time, the amount that would have to be reserved is impossible if the program is to do what its advertised to do. Charles hit upon a method by which programs ask the "memory manager" portion of the code for memory, which the memory manager then allocates from a "stack" of available memory. When the subroutine is done, the "used" memory is returned to the stack to be "reused" by another program (in gross terms).

This problem has been more or less solved, but again, we are currently working on other aspects of the same problem, too much program, too little space. The speed of the computer has never presented a problem, nor the creation of a Geneve version. When Press is finally released, it will not only leave our office with no known bugs (that is, bugs known to us), but with actually more features and capabilities than we originally advertised for the program. So much so that we are re-writing significant parts of the manual we produced for the program.

Of course, if you have placed an order for the program, you are entitled to cancel your order any time. The program could be available in as little as 3 weeks and as

(Continued on page 15)

New Asgard Products, continued from page 12

and with sport, space and home themes. This amazing package, and its brothers, can be used with TI-Artist and many other fine packages that accept TI-Artist compatible fonts to create certificates, dress up pictures, make signs, coupons and admission tickets, and just to have fun. Requires 32K, disk and a program capable of using TI-Artist fonts. As with volumes #1 and #2, this well-documented package can be had for only $7.95.

Disk o' Pyrates
by Ken Gilliland

If you thought Disk of Dinosaurs is neat, wait till you see Disk o' Pyrates! A four-disk collection, Disk o' Pyrates is as educational and entertaining as it is graphical. This vast effort includes "pyrate" artwork (9 pictures, dozens of instances and 2 fonts), pyrate games, pyrate music, pyrate utilities, pyrate animation pieces, and even extensive pyrate history lessons and biographies! This enormous work is perfect for the teacher, student, parent or even desktop publisher that wants to add a bit o' salty fun to otherwise stale history, mindless game-playing or drab documents. Requires 32K, disk, and Extended BASIC. TI-Artist or some drawing program is recommended. An excellent value at $14.95.

Calendar Maker Utilities
by Chris Bobbitt & Ed Johnson

Calendar Maker Utilities is a "must-have" companion for Calendar Maker 99 users. This well-rounded collection of utilities includes programs for creating all fonts and borders used in Calendar Maker 99, an art-print utility which lets you see on paper your artwork before printing a calendar, a utility to create a "Universal Date File" (a file containing dates that are celebrated every year, such as birthdays, religious holidays, club meetings, etc.), and merge it into your calendar, and an art disk cataloger. Calendar Maker Utilities will let you customize your calendars as never before. It even includes several new fonts for use in your calendars! Extensively documented. Requires Calendar Maker 99. A good buy at $12.95. ◆

New Versions

Schedule Manager, Version 1.2: This version is a "bug-fix" version of Schedule Manager, and hence can be obtained free of charge by any registered user simply by returning the program and the data (unmarked) disk. Several problems with the previous version (1.1) were found - including an error in calculating dates which made the program innacurate after 1990 (since the program was released in 1984, this was not noticed immediately). Again, we advise all Schedule Manager owners to return their program for the update.Send disks to: Asgard Software, P.O. Box 10306, Rockville, MD 20850

Press Report, continued from page 15

much as 2 months (or even more). However, I'll reiterate, we will not knowingly release a partially functioning or non-functioning program. Until that condition is solved, no copy (even a demonstration copy) will be distributed.

We of course apologize for the delay, but please note that once we became aware that the program was going to be delayed, we ceased all advertising of the program and informed our dealers immediately. We do not feel we've misled our customers in any way. For better or worse, we've all stumbled into an unfortunate situation. Thank you for your continued support and patience.◆

Current Versions

Program	Vers.	Last Upd.
Balloon Wars	1.15	1/1/86
Column Attack	1.0	n/a
High Gravity	2.3	5/1/88
Legends	1.1	4/1/88
Missile Wars	1.0	n/a
Haunted Mine	2.0	n/a
Doom Games I	1.0	n/a
Doom Games II	1.0	n/a
Volcano Fort.	1.0	n/a
Artist Enlarger	1.01	n/a
Font Writer II	2.0	8/15/87
Calendar Maker	1.05	6/1/88
Press	1.0	n/a
Recipe Writer	2.0	5/1/87
Schedule Mngr	1.2	4/15/87
Stamp Manager	1.1	5/1/86
Total Filer	1.0	n/a
Typewriter	1.1	n/a
Batch-It!	1.0	n/a
Bey. Vid. Chess	1.0	n/a
EZ-Keys Plus	2.0	8/15/88
Music. Synth.	1.1	11/1/86
Pre-Scan It!	1.1	10/1/86
PrEditor	1.2	12/1/88
Quick-Run	1.0	n/a
RAM*Boot	1.0	n/a
TOD Editor	3.0	3/1/87

Beginner's Corner

The main feature this month, "The NEW 99/4A", is really the continuation of this article from the last issue. However, we are far from running out of objects of discussion.

This month we are going to discuss databases and database concepts.

One of the most popular uses for a computer (only after word processing) is "database management". I put this in quotes for a very good reason - this term is often misused, rarely defined, and has been so maligned for so long it is practically meaningless. However, there IS a definition for it. Database management is the practice of managing (running, or otherwise controlling) a database. A database is simply a collection of related data. Data itself can be short lengths of text, number, prices, or really any little bit of knowledge that you'd like to store on a computer. Data can be anything from the stuff you write on a 1040 form to the birthdays of your friends and relatives to their names.

A database, as I said, is a collection of related data. What do I mean by "related"? Well, for instance, a single database might contain the names and addresses of your friends. It will most likely NOT contain the pedigrees of your dogs as well. In a database, as in life, things tend to be organized together if they belong together. You COULD put the pedigrees of your dogs with the names and addresses of your friends (perhaps), but it hardly makes sense. More likely, you might want to have a list of your friends names and their phone numbers as well. That would be related data. We can make an assumption that the only purpose of putting data in a database in the first place is so that you can get it out later in some coherent fashion. Mixing different data together isn't going to promote that. So, a database is simply a collection of data that seems like it "goes together".

A database program (often called, improperly, simply a "database"), is a program designed to "manage" your database. What do I mean? Well, to be more specific, it will typically allow you to type data into a database, find items of interest in the database, perhaps sort the data in some order, and eventually, print out part or all of the data. There are many types of databases - "flat files", "relational", (and if you are an old timer), "network" and "hierarchical". But, I'm getting ahead of myself now.

As you might have guessed, a database program is usually actually many little programs, which together are often called a "database management system" (or, in Government-speak, a DBMS). DBMS' can be as simple or as complicated as the programmer wants them to be. Some are so complicated that you need a sophisticated "language" to talk to them in - you need to type in commands in an order that the system understands in order to accomplish even the most basic tasks (like type data in). The advantage to something that difficult? Well, usually there is a trade-off between power and ease-of-use. Something that is really easy to use usually can't do anything really sophisticated, and something really hard to use really isn't worth using for anything simple - but is the only way to do some complicated stuff.

The two most common types of database management systems in the 99/4A and Geneve world are "flat file" and "relational". Actually, to be more precise, the most common type of 99/4A database is the "flat file" method. There are only two relational database management systems for the 99/4A (albeit, two of the more popular such programs). The other two types have actually never been developed for the 99/4A. There is little loss, though - a relational database is usually as capable as those two ways of managing a database.

What is the difference between the two? Well, hundreds of articles have been written on the subject, but it basically boils down to the way data is stored and retrieved. In fact, storage and retrieval are the entire reasons FOR a DBMS - everything in a DBMS is somehow related to putting data in the computer (or the database), and getting it out again. So, when we say that is the "only" difference, we paint it with a very broad brush.

Before you can understand the difference between these two systems, it helps to understand some more basic terminology. A database system can be viewed on three levels - the physical, the conceptual, and the user's view. The physical level is the way the computer views the database - it is how the computer actually stores the data in the database. The user's view is simply how the data is significant to you when you type it in - as perhaps a listing of all your computer equipment. The conceptual view is best understood as the halfway point between the two views - it is the view that both the computer and the user can understand. A typical user usually doesn't understand (and probably doesn't care) how the DBMS stores the data. The computer, of course, can hardly understand human thought processes or precepts. The conceptual level is the bridge between the two. It is typically the level in which the user interacts with the DBMS and the database.

The conceptual level is just that, an easy-to-understand concept of the database. A database is typically conceptualized as a "table". A database containing your your friends names and phone numbers might look like this in a table:

Name	Phone Number
Harry	555-1212
Jim	555-3745
Frank	555-9889
.	.
.	.
Sue	555-1313

Fortunately, a computer doesn't have too hard of a time understanding what a table looks like either. Hence, both you and the DBMS understand the data.

Now let's go into what a database itself actually is. If you examine the table a little further, you will notice that it is in two columns - one labeled "Name" and one labeled "Phone Number". In DBMS lingo, those columns are known as "fields". A field is exactly like a column in a table. The rows of the fields are the data in the database (each individual row is known as a "tuple" - pronounced "too-pull"). Tuples are also called "records" in some database programs. When you create a database, you have to tell it what "fields" you want, what type of fields they are (you will notice that the "Name" field is all text, while the "Phone Number" field is all numeric), and how much space you should give each. Once you've told the database this information, it creates on your database disk something called a "Schema" (pronounced "skee-muh"). The schema is the "definition" of the database.

Once you've created the database definition (or schema), consisting of all your columns (fields) and their lengths and types, you begin the process of actually creating the database. This is the laborious part of the procedure where you actually type all the data into the database. The part of the program where you type in the data in your database is typically called a "data entry screen". This is a bit literal - in the database world it is called a "form". Some sophisticated database programs will allow you to design the data entry screen, or form - even down to placing the fields exactly where you want them on the screen, and even screen colors.

In some database programs, the "form" is made to be part of the "schema". As you type data into the database through the form it is stored by the DBMS in another format that is more readily managed by the program. Again, that format is the physical view of the database, or the way the DBMS sees your data in your database.

After you've typed in a lot of records, or tuples into your database, you'll probably want to do something with them. There are many ways to use the data. Most likely you'll want to create a "report" - a printout of part or all of the data. You might want the data in the "report" to be sorted by one of the fields (remember, columns) in your report. You might want everyone who lives in the (713) area code. In some databases, you are limited in how you can access your data. More sophisticated databases have what is known as a "query" capability - really some way to ask "questions" of your database, such as "who are the people in my phone list named Fred, and what are their telephone numbers?". Of course, most databases won't simply let you enter sentences like that one. That is the way to get data from the database in the user's view. Usually you have to use a "query language". This language is a semi-algebraic way of getting certain records from your database. For instance, to get data from one popular PC database you would type "Select all from Myphonelist where name equals Fred". After entering that "query", the database would list all the database records with the name "Fred" in them, and incidently their phone numbers as well. Again, this is a conceptual approach. The database might convert the conceptual version of the query into something like "Select,Myphonelist,name=fred". The conceptual way is considerably easier to understand.

In order to get the list of "Freds" sorted, in some databases you have to make another table of just people named Fred, and then have the database sort it in alphabetical order. Some databases will let you combine this into one step.

As mentioned above, once you've entered data into the database you will want to create a report. Almost all databases will let you designate, to some degree or another, how you want selected records printed on the page - the order of the fields, etc. Some will let you draw lines and boxes around fields, even. This designation is called the "report". Sometimes it too is saved as part of the schema, but usually not.

As mentioned above. There are several types of databases. The two found in the TI-99/4A and Geneve world are the relational and flat-file. Before you can understand them, you should have a firm grasp of the concepts elucidated above. We'll tell you the difference between the two in the next issue of Asgard News. ◆

News

Lots of news on telecommunications wheels and deals, new software announced and revised release dates on previously announced stuff.

Compuserve gives away time

In a very competitive bid by TI Forum of Compuserve for the heart and sole of the paying TI telecommunications user, Jim Horn (SYSOP) has declared all out war on his competition (GEnie and Delphi). He not only has scheduled conferences every Sunday and Tuesday evening months in advance with some of the big names in the 99/4A world (Lou Phillips, etc.), he's also announced a promotion his competitors may have trouble meeting - at every conference one lucky attendee wins the right to roam all over TI Forum and Compuserve at will, free for an entire weekend. Perhaps we will see similar promotions in the near future by Delphi and GEnie - in a price war the customer always wins.

Form Maker 99 Late

Form Maker 99, the remarkable new form creation program from Ed Johnson, is a little late coming out of development. Reasons cited by Asgard Software (the publisher) include Ed's work on other projects (the recently completed Calendar Maker Utilities prominently), and personal obligations Ed has to his family and job. Form Maker 99 is an entirely "what-you-see-is-what-you-get" program that is aptly suited to the design of forms, maps, charts, and anything needing lines. Written entirely in assembly from scratch, Form Maker 99 on completion will let you type in 2 font sizes anywhere on a 66 line by 60 column page in any direction, using border characters to build tables and draw forms and other figures, include a picture up to the size of the screen anywhere in the form, merge in a TI-Writer file, and even create your own fonts and line patterns. Form Maker 99 can be used for many things that would be done with a traditional desktop publishing program, with a lot less difficulty. Form Maker 99 is slated for release in the first part of April, at a price of $24.95. Contact Asgard Software (P.O. Box 10306, Rockville, MD 20850) for availability and ordering information.

Art Green Releases New TI-Writer

R.A. Green, author of the RAG Macroassembler and several other excellent assembly language programs and utilities has released a major revision of TI-Writer. Major changes include: it now runs independent of the module, the speed of all features has been improved (with special attention to the move, copy and delete line functions and the cursor speed), new functions have been added to quit quickly, jump to the top or bottom of the file, etc., and so on. The revision even allows you to permanently set the screen color, printer device name, word wrap, and other functions that previously had to be set after the program started. Additionally, many bugs have been corrected in the Formatter portion of TI-Writer, and formatting commands have been added. The can be obtained from RAG Software, R.A. Green, 1032 Chantenay Dr., Gloucester, Ontario, Canada K1C 2K9. The suggested fairware donation is $10.00.

Delphi and Compuserve offer help line

Delphi's TI Information Network and Compuserve's TI Forum have recently teamed up to provide a voice help-number for users of those communications services. Help would be provided, on using each service, and locating specific messages and files. No word yet on when the service will be available, or the hours it will be manned, but interested parties can contact Jim Horn at (301)340-7179 (also Disk Only Software's number), for information.

Asgard BBS Inaugurated

Asgard Software and Asgard Publishing announced on February 25th the creation of a joint bulletin board service for the readers of this magazine, and owners of Asgard Software products, Asgard-On-Line. To begin operation on March 31st, the new BBS features the latest industry news, multiple message areas devoted to different topics, a download section containing many text files, freeware and public domain programs (as well as upgrades to certain products for registered users), electronic mail service, shopping areas, feedback directly to Asgard, and so on. The service support 300, 1200 and 2400 baud, and your telecom program should be set to 8 data bits, no parity, 1 stop bit. Because the service is experimental, the hours it is available are limited at first from 10:00PM to 9:00AM E.S.T. The phone number of the board is (703)255-3085, and is available through PC-Pursuit. Callers before and after that time will receive a person and not the board.

(Continued on next page)

M-DOS Development Package Slated

Paul Charlton, of Fast-Term and M-DOS fame, has announced the development of a complete M-DOS developer's package. The package, slated for release in April of this year, is expected to contain a Macro-Assembler, Linker, Librarian, A Make utility, 99/4A and Geneve routine libraries, and extensive M-DOS documentation. The package, to be distributed through Genial Software, is available for $69.95. No comment on this development is forthcoming from Myarc, though Myarc could conceivably have something to say about it considering non-disclosure agreements it has with Paul and its other authors. Write to Genial Computerware, P.O. Box 183, Grafton, MA 01519 for information.

M-DOS Fortran 99 to be released

LGMA Products (Box 210, RD 4, Coopersburg, PA 18036), has recently announced the near-immediate availability (March 18th) of a Geneve 9640 M-DOS version of it's popular Fortran 99 compiler for the TI-99/4A. In addition to running on the Geneve and creating assembly language applications that run directly from the command line, "9640 Fortran" has the following additions over the original 99/4A version: Support for Integer*1 variables, an improved linker which will link Fortran and assembly modules directly, an extensive Fortran symbolic debugger that will allow you to view the source as it debugs (wow!), 3 subroutine and function libraries with support for all M-DOS graphics, sound, memory, utility and I/O functions, and extensive new documentation. The compiler is distributed on 2 DS/SD diskettes, and is priced at $69.95. No price has been released on updates, but somewhere in the $30-35 range is expected. ◆

Rumors

Tenex out, Corcomp slows down, TI-Artist 3.0 expected, Texaments BBS closes, and much more.

The following column is devoted to all those bits of information that haven't necessarily graduated to "news" status yet, or those items that are either incomplete or are unconfirmed. Asgard Publishing takes no responsibility for incorrect information, and will happily publish a correction if necessary.

Tenex to Discontinue 99/4A line!

Tenex Computer Express, longtime distributors of many hard-to-get and useful programs, books and hardware for the 99/4A and the Geneve, is expected to cease distributing 99/4A products within 3-6 months. A major blow to such companies as Corcomp, Myarc, and the many software companies that have their products distributed by Tenex, it isn't readily clear who will replace them, if anyone. Tenex is noted for their wide-ranging software line that contains many programs and utilities that other distributers do not carry, including the Infocom line of text adventures. Tenex started in business distributing 99/4A software in hardware back in 1982. They later diversified into the Commodore 64 business (with success) and Apple II (with considerably less success). More recently, they've begun producing catalogs for the IBM. As recently as 2 years ago, however, the TI catalog still accounted for much of their revenue. Recently it is estimated to be perhaps 15-20%. They are, however, dropping the 4A in order to concentrate on the other product lines. If you are dissatisfied with their apparent plans, you may want to write to Tenex Computer Express, P.O. Box 6578, South Bend, IN 46660-6578 and express your support for the 99/4A.

Triton to quit selling most Corcomp stuff

Corcomp, widely known for their reliable disk controllers and other expansion peripherals (including their one-of-a-kind micro-expansion system), has apparently suffered a blow to their distribution with Triton's decision to quit handling much of their product line. The reason cited by sources was "terms and conditions", which is a fancy way of saying that Corcomp wanted too much money for their orders up front. Apparently, Corcomp has ceased all 99/4A development, and under a subsidiary is producing products for the PC world. They are, however, still manufacturing their entire 99/4A product line, with the requirement from dealers that they pay for at least part of their order in advance. With Tenex going out of the TI business, Corcomp's remaining distributor is TexComp.

TI-Artist upgrade in the works!

Chris Faherty, author of TI-Artist, is reportedly working on a new version of that very popular drawing package. While nothing solid has been heard about its capabilities, supposedly it will allow you to have a work area larger than the screen, and have more advanced drawing and font functions. Chris may have been encouraged to continue developing TI-Artist by the tremendous success of his father with TI-Base, or perhaps by more recent programs such as JoyPaint 99 and Picasso, which offer many functions not found in currently avail-

able versions of TI-Artist. No word on availability is at hand, but further information might be obtained by contacting Texaments (244 Mill Rd., Yaphank, NY 11980).

MICROpendium expresses continued support!

With all of the bad news surrounding Tenex and Corcomp, its nice to know some people out there are still supporting the 99/4A and Geneve user. John Koloen, in a recent phone conversation, said that MICROpendium is as dedicated to the 99/4A as ever, and that circulation has even started climbing. While Asgard News' own circulation is barely 1/10th of MICROpendium's, we are also happy to report strong interest from 99/4A users. It seems the only people not interested in the 99/4A in the community are those people who are belatedly throwing themselves at the IBM PC and its clones. Considering that the PC standard is rapidly heading towards obsolescence (and perhaps even "orphan-dom"), with IBM's P/S 2 computers, the strong competition from the Apple Mac II line, and even the emergence of Unix machines (one of which being Steve Jobs' NeXT), it seems kind of silly to place your bets elsewhere at this point.

Mechatronics to stop 99/4A Production

Mechatronics of Germany is stopping production of 99/4A related hardware, and is dumping its remaining stock in the U.S. and elsewhere at reduced prices. T.A.P.E. (1439 Solano Pl., Ontario, CA 91764, 714-989-9906), the U.S. distributor of their 80-column card, EPROM-burner and other items is reportedly out of stock on most things, but expects new shipments soon. The reason for their withdrawal has more to do with manufacturing, management and distribution problems than for any lack of demand for their products. Their North American distribution, in particular, was pretty weak.

Texaments Bulletin Board Down

Texaments' bulletin-board-service, TI Source, has apparently had its plug pulled. A unique multi-user BBS run on an IBM system, TI Source offered (or perhaps still offers) quite a bit of valuable information to TI-Base users. No official word yet has been received as to its future status, but people familiar with the system indicate that usage was very light. ◆

From the Mail Box

We've been receiving many letters recently, but unfortunately most of them are far to long to print in their entirety. As it is not our policy to print excerpts, many excellent and insightful letters can't be shared with our readers. If you'd like to send a letter fo reprinting, please try to keep it under 250 words if at all possible. Address all letters to The Editor, Asgard News, P.O. Box 10697, Rockville, MD 20850. All letters not printed will be answered by our staff.

BACK ISSUES AND TYPOS

Thank you for entering my subscription to the Asgard News. Judging from the No. 3 issue, the content looks excellent. Jack's lesson in TI-Base finally made me start using it.

In my ordering letter, I asked also for all the back issues: I want to be certain they are coming and are available. Also, on the mailing label it says that it expires Vol.2, No.3 - is that the last issue to be sent or is it the prior one?

(Continued on next page)

We understand occasional typographical errors, but in this issue the word "then" was used extensively (but not exclusively) for the word "than", the correction of which I hope to see in future issues.
DAVID ERICKSON
SAN JOSE, CA.

Thank you for the nice comments about our magazine - we definitely take pride in constructing it, which means sometimes it isn't always out on schedule. Regarding back issues, unfortunately No.1 and No.2 are out of print. We really don't plan to do a re-print unless we get orders for 100 or more (the minimum economical press run). Regarding the "expiration date", that is the last issue you will receive. When a subscription expires, it will say "EXPIRED" on the mailing label (as some of you will see with this issue). Finally, about misusing "then", we plead guilty and ask for a lenient sentence. Unfortunately, we switched copy editors in mid-stream and it sometimes takes a while for a new editor to get used to the grammatical eccentricities of a number of writers.

WANTS PROGRAMMING HELP

As a user that has no formal training in computers, is it possible that one day you could feature a column that deals with the how's and why's of programs? Maybe you could have one of your programmers develop a program and include his notes on why he did things a certain way. This would give people, such as myself, an insight and help us before efficient programmers. Then we too could give something back to the 99/4A world.
JAMES WATSON
MIDLAND, PA.

That sounds like an excellent idea, but for better or worse that is a little outside the boundaries we set for Asgard News. In our first issue we stated "We are a magazine for users, not programmers" , and many people have subscribed to Asgard News on that point alone. However, we are planning on a new publication oriented towards programmers, and have in fact been preparing the first issue and gathering material for the next two. ***Key Notes****, which should debut sometime in April, will cover programming with Asgard Software's EZ-Keys Plus and Batch-It, as well as sport columns for Assembly, Extended BASIC and Fortran 99 programmers. Your idea fits in well with that magazine - again, thank you! The subscription rate to* ***Key Notes****, in case you or anyone you know is interested, is $9.00 for 4 quarterly issues.*

PRESS QUESTION

When will Press be ready for release, will it be able to interface to a daisy wheel as well as a dot matrix?
FRANK MUNRO
DUNCAN, B.C.
CANADA

We currently aren't predicting a specific date, simply because every time we tried before we were wrong (obviously). Charles Earl, the author and Ottawa resident says "Real, Real Soon Now". We haven't fully decided if this is Canadian humor or not. Finally, yes, Press should work on virtually any printer when it is released.

DELIVERY PROBLEMS

At the September 11, 1988 meeting of the Western New York 99'ers User Group, Harry Brashear made me aware of your "Asgard News".

I obtained a copy of the back page of the first issue, filled out the subscription form, and mailed it with my check on September 19, 1988.

To date I have received nothing! No issues, no acknowledgement, no correspondence.

Another friend received Vol.1, No.3 several weeks ago.

What is the problem????
JAMES P. CAVANAUGH
EGGERTSVILLE, NY 14226

It sounds like you had a run of bad luck. While we don't have an "official" subscription acknowledgement card, we acknowledge the receipt of an order by sending out a copy of the last issue we published immediately. If you didn't receive one within 2-3 weeks of mailing your subscription, the likelihood is that we never received it in the first place. While the U.S. Mails are generally good, even they acknowledge that they lose a certain percentage of the billion odd pieces they handle a day.

This isn't the first time this has happened either. Even though we mail all our subsciptions out first class (which is presumably safer then 3rd class), every now and then we get a complaint from someone who hasn't received the latest issue. There is an easy way to tell if the Post Office slighted you, though.

We publish Asgard News on a semi-regular schedule. Yo u should expect to receive one in March, June, September and December. If you don't get one during one of those months, and your subscription is still in, please write!

◆

Typewriter 99

Typewriter 99 **turns your TI-99/4A or Myarc Geneve 9640 into a modern, electronic typewriter.**

Why would you want to do THAT?

Sometimes the newest way isn't always the best and most efficient way to do something. It's still easier to keep a rolodex than an electronic phone list. It's easier to balance your checkbook by hand than to do it on your computer. If you really thought about it, you could probably think of a dozen things you could do just as well or more easily by hand than with a computer.

Sometimes it's easier to use a typewriter than a word processor.

Ever try to use a word processor to type up a quick label? How about address an envelope? Ever fill out a form with a word processor? How many people use a word processor to dash off a 3 line note to a friend? For many small, every-day jobs (and most writing is just that), a word processor is too much. It's like using a jet plane to go to the grocery store. Plus, word processors are awfully intimidating to the non-computer user. Do you have a spouse or relative who won't use the computer because it's "too complicated", but is perhaps a wiz with the computer controlled microwave or washer?

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Typewriter 99 is available in disk (requires TI-Writer or Editor/Assembler, 32K and a disk system), cassette (requires Mini-Memory) or cartridge forms. It will work with any printer. *Typewriter 99* is a simple to use program that recognizes that the best way to do something is not always the most modern way.

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