Editorial

Newsletter complaints and the Fine Art of Making Enemies

Over the last year I've learned why most software companies don't get into the newsletter business.

For one thing, it's a lot of work! Getting the newsletter printed is only part of it - there is also the problem of getting it ready for mailing, and even just hauling it around between the printer, our office and the post office is a chore (try hauling around 3-4 full Xerox boxes all day - great exercise!).In addition to the physical aspects of producing a newsletter, there is also the befuddling administrative side - keeping track of who should and shouldn't get what issue, keeping track of address changes and copies the post office lost of the last issue mailed. Finally, there is the problem of creating the newsletter - begging columnists to send in their columns on time, finding original material, choosing what to publish and then laying out the newsletter.

I've gained a new appreciation in the last year of what a User Group newsletter editor must go through - and to think they actually volunteer to do this! I believe you'll find the definition of "newsletter editor" in the section on "masochist" in the dictionary. Any user group that has a few dollars to spare in the treasury should buy some sort of gift for the individual that puts together your newsletter. A new

car or a boat would be appropriate, but I'm sure they'd settle for some fancy new hardware (which they could then write about in the newsletter!).

Another reason that software companies don't publish newsletters is that it is far too easy to make enemies with one. An editor that wants to put together a truly interesting newsletter is stuck between the interests of the readers (who want to know all of the dirt) and those of his/her competitors, dealers and assorted "industry insiders" (who don't want all of the dirt known). Because we haven't found a balance between these interests, we've managed to hack off someone or another with every issue we've published.

In the first issue we started what is now a tradition of critical review of Myarc's actions and lack of action. Though some of our readers think our focus is inappropriate - other manufacturers make mistakes (and Asgard has made more than its share) - but we justify it on the grounds that Myarc has sought to make themselves the cornerstone of the modern TI community. Sometimes what we say about Myarc or the Geneve upsets our 9640 readers, sometimes they just nod in agreement. As for Myarc, they've never commented on anything we've published to date, even

though we've sent them every issue. We will happily publish any remarks they may want to send.

In the second issue we managed to get the L.A. 99'ers (or more specifically, head honcho Terrie Masters) upset with us by claiming they distributed a fairware item. Terrie and I have never really been on good terms for one reason or another, but this incident caused a shouting match that GEnie regulars still recall.

An innocuous comment by one of our columnists (the ever-controversial Harry Brashear) in the third issue, relating to a problem he had at one time with McCann Software, got us a real nasty letter in response and threats of a lawsuit. Even the vendor list in the third issue was controversial!

Finally, in the last issue (#4), a typo by Jack Sughrue in his TI-Base tutorial (he said TI-Base was in version 2.1 and not 2.01), and a Rumors entry on Texaments' BBS being down (it had been down for over 2 weeks at that point), resulted in a somewhat sarcastic letter from owner Steve Lamberti. I sent Steve an actual copy of the magazine (it was obvious from his letter he'd never seen that issue), and the only thing I've received from him since is press releases. I hear they intend to publish a newsletter for TI-Base owners - all I can say is "Good Luck, Steve". The newsletter business ain't as easy as it sounds, and it sounds like you've fallen into the trap Miller's Graphics, Ryte Data and now Asgard Software fell into.
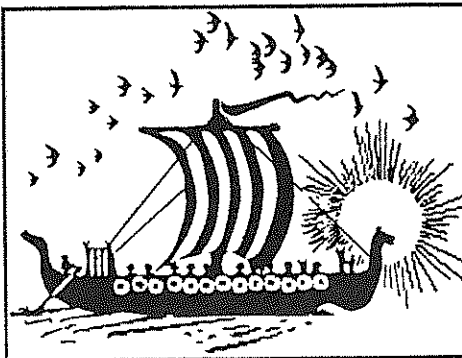
If past history is any guide, it looks like this issue will probably engender as much controversy as the rest of them. In fact, even mentioning McCann's letter (he told us we couldn't re-print it - and I don't think we would have anyway) will probably get us in trouble with him again.

If there is one thing that ties all of these things incidents together, it must be that almost every time we upset someone, he/she only found out about what we said second-hand. The fact that someone would make threats and accusations based on second-hand knowledge says only one thing to me - the TI community takes itself far too seriously. I can understand someone being upset if we actually slandered them in print, but in all of these situations conflict occurred because of misunderstanding, or reading the worst in what we published. I will state categorically that we've never consciously or even unconsciously attacked anyone in print - we don't use yellow paper.

The TI community should quit being so paranoid. There isn't enough money in it to justify this kind of attitude. Even those of us who try to make a living supporting the machine are barely scraping by most of the time - but at least I get a lot of satisfaction from my work if not frills like fancy cars, medical insurance, etc. I'm not complaining - if that stuff was really important I don't think I'd have trouble getting it in another occupation. The reason I stick with Asgard is it is the only job I've ever looked forward to going to. The way I look at it is that it's been 6 years since TI DISCONTINUED the machine - we've all been living on borrowed time for years. Everyone should enjoy the machine instead of fighting over it.

Oh, one last thing - don't take my complaints about editing this magazine too seriously either. Another thing I enjoy is complaining about too much work. But if the truth be known - I'd rather be too busy than not busy enough.

User Group Listing

Not only are user groups not dead, they are all over the place!

Computer user groups are the bedrock of the TI-99/4A community. These clubs of sometimes fanatical users range in size from 6 to 600 people, and are a self-renewing source of new software, new hardware and new ideas about our computer. User group newsletters and BBSs tie 99/4A users all over the world with invisible strands of information into one large family. People who belong to user groups often have more in common with people thousands of miles away then their next door neighbors.

Users groups are almost without exception run by volunteers who give of their time in order to help educate their friends in the many possibilities of our little machine. User groups exists to turn the novice and uninitiate into sophisticated users.

If you do not currently belong to a user group, you should consider joining the one closest to you in the list below. If none is really close, you should consider joining by mail to at least receive the newsletter, and perhaps gain access to the group library. User group libraries contain, on average, thousands of programs on every subject matter imaginable.

The following list of user groups was compiled by Jim Peterson of Tigercub Software (please see his ad elsewhere in this issue). According to him, it is up to date as of April 22, 1989. This list is sorted by state. Please send any corrections to *UG List, c/o Asgard Publishing, P.O. Box 10697, Rockville, MD 20850.*

United States

Alabama

SHOALS 99'ERS
PO BOX 2928
MUSCLE SHOALS, AL 35662
766-2032

TIBUG BIRMINGHAM
728 JEFFERSON BLVD
TARRANT, AL 35127
(205)849-5592

SMAUG
2006 RIVERSIDE DR.
MOBILE, AL 36605
(205)867-7193

C.A.T.I. 99/4A UG
PO BOX 11751
MONTGOMERY, AL 36111
(205) 284-1804

WIREGRASS 99ER UG
102 AUBURN DRIVE
ENTERPRISE, AL 36330

Arkansas

MOark 99ers
2806 OSAGE DRIVE
SPRINGDALE ARK 72764-6923
(501)442-0856

Arizona

SOUTHWEST NINETY-NINERS UG
P.O. BOX 17831
C/O WESLEY ENG
TUCSON, AZ 85730
(604) 747-5046

VAST 99 USER GROUP
1425 E. DEL RIO DR.
TEMPE, AZ 85282
992-7668

ARIZONA USERS GROUP
4328 E. LAPUENTE AVE.
PHOENIX, AZ 85044

California

BREA 99ERS UG
C/O KERRY GRISSOM
16328 PLACID DR.
WHITTIER, CA 90604
(213)943-6631

KINGS 99/ER UG
299 W. BIRCH AVE.
HANFORD, CA 93230
(209)582-1385

E.T. 99ER CLUB
P.O. BOX 2752
COSTA MESA CA 92628
(714)855-0480

TI-SIG
SAN DIEGO COMPUTER SOCIETY
PO BOX 5263
SAN DIEGO, CA 92105
(619)264-6515

NOR-CAL TI UG
P.O. BOX 112
OCCIDENTAL, CA 95465
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NORTH COUNTRY 99ERS
P.O. BOX 2500
ESCONDIDO, CA 92025
(619)747-3567

LA 99ER COMPUTER GROUP
P.O. BOX 67A79
LOS ANGELES, CA 90067-1079
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Jack's Corner

Jack Sughrue's column is not appearing in this issue because Jack was the victim of a terrible auto accident last month near his home in E. Douglas, Massachusetts. Jack, well-known in the TI community as the author of the Plus! freeware package, the Impact 99 columns and numerous tutorials here and elsewhere, underwent extensive surgery and currently is recuperating at home. A hopefully temporary loss of sight has been keeping him away from his computer and books, and driving him stir-crazy in the process. Jack is the father of four (all out of college now), and is a highly-regarded teacher in the Framingham Public School system where he uses the TI-99/4A to teach gifted as well as disadvantaged children. Also, he is the author of several books (including several poetry collections), and has been a part-time radio host, a community activist, and an avid collector of books and records.

Please send all expressions of support to: Jack Sughrue, Box 459, E. Douglas, MA 01516.

Bug Report

The initial shipment of Page Pro 99's contained a small error in the Extended BASIC loader for the Geneve version of the program. This error was corrected immediately, and all copies shipped since 6/12/89 contain the correction. The uncorrected line is in the file **PP-LOAD2**. The incorrect line is line 2, which in that version reads:

2 DISPLAY AT(1,1):"Page Pro 99 - 9640 Load":RP$("@",...

The line should read:

2 DISPLAY AT(1,1):"Page Pro 99 - 9640 Load":RPT$("@",...

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SAN GABRIEL VALLEY 99 UG
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WEST COVINA, CA 91792
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TI RIVERSIDE USERS GROUP
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SNUG (SACRAMENTO 99ERS)
7661 PLAID CIRCLE
NORTH HIGHLAND CA 95660
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SFV 99ers
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TUJUNGA CA 91042
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AVTI USERS GROUP
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LANCASTER CA 93539
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THE TRI-VALLEY 99ERS
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80932
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COLORADO USERS GROUP
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Connecticut

NUTMEG NINETY NINERS
139 GRASSY HILL ROAD
WATERBURY, CT 06704-1234
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LAS VEGAS NV 89126-0301
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RENO NEVADA 89506
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WARREN, NJ 07060

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SHRUB OAK, NY 10508
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BAYSIDE NY 11364-1497
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ROCHESTER, NY 14616
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(716)778-9104

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GROTON, NY 13073

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GRAND FORKS, ND 58201
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CIN-DAY USERS GROUP
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PIQUA, OH 45356
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20311 LAKE ROAD
ROCKY RIVER, OH 44116

GOLDEN CRESCENT 324-
4388

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FAIRVIEW PARK, OH 44126
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LIMA AREA TI UG
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Oklahoma

SOONER 99ERS
C/O GARTH POTTS
12513 HICKORY HOLLOW DR
OKLAHOMA CITY, OK
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CENTRAL OKLAHOMA 99ers
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MIDWEST CITY, OK 73110-
5646

Oregon

EUGENE 99/4A U.G.
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PORTLAND USERS OF 99s
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CAPITOL AREA USERS GROUP
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MECHANICSBURG PA 17055

NITTANY USERS OF T.I.
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359-0380

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WACO TX 76714-7053

CENTRAL TEXAS 99/4A UG
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AUSTIN, TX 78720-0246

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SUN CITY TI-99/4A C.C.
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EL PASO, TX 79906
(915)751-1967

DALLAS TI UG
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WEST JORDAN, UT 84084
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OGDEN TI UG
1396 LINCOLN AVE APT B
OGDEN, UT 84404

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NORFOLK, VA 23513
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ROANOKE VALLEY 99ER UG
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1150 BRUXELLES
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CARLTON PLACE, ONT
CANADA K7C 3W3

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CANADA

KAWARTHA 99ERS
P.O. BOX 373
PETERBORO ONT
CANADA K9J 6Z3

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NORTH BAY, ONTARIO
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TI's Computer Success

Texas Instruments has finally become a success in the computer industry - by selling Apple Macintosh II computers.

For years, TI has been working to develop Artificially Intelligent computer hardware and software. Their top of the line is a horrendously expensive machine called the Explorer, which is widely considered the premier tool of Artist Intelligence (AI) researchers. TI sells everything from $100,000 AI computers to $100 micro-computer versions of Lisp (a language for AI). While AI has yet to prove itself very marketable, it already is used in things that touch most everyone - TI has sold expert systems (programs that are an "expert" on a specific narrow subject) to do everything from manage the recipes at Campbell's Soup to the use of docking facilities at airports around the nation.

TI's most recent endeavor in the Artificial Intelligence market has been a version of their Explorer computer on a card for use in the Apple Mac II (which itself utilizes significant amounts of technology Apple licensed from TI). The Apple Mac II containing the Explorer card, which has both the TI and Apple logos on the case, sells for around $30,000. Considering it is nearly as functional as the $100,000 Explorer, interest in the AI Research community is high, and the computer has been selling well.

In fact, TI intends to ship hundreds and even thousands of these computers over the next year for use with several newly developed AI applications - a typical one being the replacement of the Chicago Commodities exchange with an electronic trading floor. The Mac II/Explorer combination should soon be found in the offices of government agencies and large corporations around the country.

TI's success, in fact, may spell trouble for their biggest competitor in the AI market, Massachusetts-based Symbolics Corp. TI is already the largest AI computer maker in the world (over IBM and the rest), and Symbolics' technology is quickly falling behind TI's in both price and performance.

Perhaps TI has finally found success in a computer industry that has long looked at TI as only a components manufacturer. ✤

Desktop Publishing on your TI-99/4A

There are many things that a computer is useful for, and there are some things that people try to do on a computer that are more efficiently and easily done by hand. How many address-book programs have been sold when a simple rolodex will let you find a name and phone number before you can even get the computer up and running?

In the last 5 years, computer graphics have gone from one of those things more easily done by hand to something many people wouldn't consider doing otherwise. Computer graphics have gone from the frivolous and inconsequential, the purview of arcade games and educational programs, to an important industry all by itself. We've gone from a day when people bought computers to manage a database, write, and keep a budget to one where those same people wouldn't imagine doing any of this without fancy lettering, lines, pictures and borders.

Computer graphics are used to accomplish real work in the real world. They are used to draw up signs and banners for the neighborhood block party, design invitations and maps, create a vast variety of forms for use in business, schools and organizations, create greeting cards, labels, and even entire newsletters for small clubs and business.

Graphics have been similarly transformed in the TI-99/4A world. Since 1983 we've seen a steady stream of new programs for the 99/4A that let you do more with graphics on a machine not previously know as particularly graphical. At first we had simple drawing programs like Draw-A-Bit and Draw n' Plot which would let you draw with lines, points, boxes and circles. Later, more sophisticated programs like GRAPHX, TI-Artist, JoyPaint 99 and Picasso appeared which will let you type in fancy text, use "clipart" (pre-made artwork), and create larger and larger pictures over more and more of the page. At the same time, dozens of specialized programs appeared (such as Certificate Maker and Calendar Maker), filled would let you create more complex things a drawing program is hard-pressed to do.

However, graphics have evolved even

PAGE PRO PICS
VOLUME 6 – PUBLISHING TOOLS

PAGE PRO 99 TIMES

PAGE PRO 99 RELEASED!

Rockville, MD- Asgard Software demonstrated its long awaited Page Pro 99 at a press conference today to thunderous applause. After the preliminaries, the President (and chief bottle-washer) of Asgard, Chris Bobbitt, ran the program through its paces. Spectators were impressed with the program's graphics capabilities (you can have up to 28 pictures of any size on a page at once), the ability to see the page on the screen before printing it, its ease-of-use (it's completely "what-you-see-is-what you-get"), the multiple font features, and the line-drawing options.

Mr. Bobbitt did caution, "This isn't a full-scale desktop publisher, instead we like to call it a 'page-maker'", but most attendees felt the program would let the user do most anything that so-called desktop publishers could, and much more easily too. The general opinion from those who had a chance to use the program was that being able to see everything on the screen as it would appear on paper was a leap beyond anything else for the 99/4A or Geneve 9640.

When asked, attendees listed as reasons for purchasing the program many other things it offers including the ability to use standard TI-Artist artwork, the ability to type in any direction, being able to print out the page at several dot densities, and also the ability to import TI-Writer files were all mentioned. Reviewers also liked its Myarc MFDC and 9640 compatibility, and the general stability of the program (which users speculate was because of its lengthy testing period).

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I LIKE IT TOO!

PROGRAM FEATURES

o 28 Pictures/page
o Large font and a small font on each page
o 2 linestyles/page
o See page on screen before printing
o Print in single, double or quad-densities
o Type up/down/left or right
o Import TI-Writer files
o Save/load page
o Uses TI-Artist Instances & Fonts
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MADE WITH PAGE PRO 99

Sample Pages made with Page Pro 99 by Asgard Software

further elsewhere into the "Desktop Publishing" program. Desktop Publishers (or DTP programs) combine some features of drawing programs with those of word processors, along with other new and sophisticated functions to let you create virtually anything on your computer that involves mixing text and graphics. DTP programs usually will allow you to do anything the specialized programs can do (though not as easily), and most of what people use drawing programs for (except create artwork). Desktop Publishers are used to make everything from full-length magazines and books to labels, signs and greeting cards.

Several programs have been developed for the 99/4A over the last two years (notably, The Printer's Apprentice and Font Writer II) which were designed to bring some of these capabilities to the TI-99/4A, but no program has yet been developed that offers a full-range of DTP functions and is easy enough for the average user.

The problem for Desktop Publisher developers on the 99/4A has been a critical lack of memory. Graphics take memory - lots of memory. In fact, the average 640K IBM PC clone is hard-pressed to keep up with the requirements of DTP programs. Professional level DTP software typically takes 1-2Mb at a minimum, and would really only be happy with 4Mb, 8Mb or even 16Mb. Such programs are huge and expensive (one, called Interleaf Publisher, requires as a minimum system a Mac II with 4Mb and a 120Mb hard disk drive, and costs $2,000!). How can a TI-99/4A with 48K (or even a Geneve with 512K) hope to compete?

The solution with both The Printer's Apprentice and Font Writer II was to sacrifice the most obvious memory-hog - the "what-you-see-is-what-you-get" user interface common on DTP programs. In short, with both of these programs you literally don't see a page until you print it out, and if it comes out wrong you may have to modify dozens of things to get it right. If this isn't bad enough, both programs have inadequate manuals that are rarely explicit enough for the sophisticated much less average user, and it is a wonder that anyone uses either program for Desktop Publishing. For a long time, DTP on the 99/4A and Geneve has been a province of only those with a lot of time on their hands, as well as in-depth knowledge of computers. Needless to say, the average user has been excluded from this revolution in graphics.

Now, a program has been released that tries a different solution - sacrifice some of the power of DTP programs in exchange for ease-of-use. In fact, this program really can't be called a Desktop Publisher in the true sense of the word - instead it should be called a "page-maker" because it is oriented towards making one page at a time. DTP programs are designed for documents of any length. This program is called Page Pro 99, and is from Asgard Software.

The central focus of Page Pro 99 is a "what-you-see-is-what-you-get" page display. The screen is a window on your page, which you can move around at will. Page Pro 99 is the only program that will let you see an entire page of text and graphics on the screen at once - the most any drawing program is capable of doing is half a page. Page Pro 99 combines some of the features of word processing, with bitmap fonts and graphics from TI-Artist, along with line-drawing capabilities. In sum, it will let you put pictures of any size and shape on the page, type text in various fonts around it, and draw (or rather, type) lines and borders.

After you have created the page, you can save it for later use, or print it out on an Epson or compatible printer in a variety of print qualities (from "rough-draft" single-density up to "reproduction quality" quad-density).

Page Pro 99 offers some features you will find in professional DTP programs. For instance, you can type in any direction you choose, and you can import text files from popular word processors as well as save the text on the page as a standard text file. The program is very simple to use, in part because what you see printed out is literally what you see on the screen, and in part by design.

For instance, to load a picture on the page all you do is put the cursor where you want the picture to start on the screen, press the command key and enter the disk file-name. The picture will be loaded on the spot. You can have the picture displayed as-is or in outline form (which permits faster editing and allows you to type in blank space within the picture). To draw lines, all you do is press another command key, and the letters on your keyboard become line symbols. A little chart of which key is which symbol appears at the bottom of the screen. To get an upper right hand corner symbol, for instance, you'd type "A". Being able to change the direction the cursor goes while typing permits you to draw boxes and such with

minimal keystrokes.

The program does have some limitations, though, over other DTP programs for the TI-99/4A. For instance, you can only have 28 pictures on a page at once (though unlike some they can be of any size - even up to the size of the page - can overlap and be on the same line). Also you are limited to only one large font, one small font and one line font on a page at once. The manual for the program is thorough, and describes a work-around for that limitation that involves creating titling with another font in TI-Artist, saving it as an "instance", and bringing it into Page Pro as just another picture on the page. In this way you can create very complex pages with seemingly dozens of fonts on the screen at once.

Other utilities, such as Artist Enlarger, Graphics Expander and TI-Artist will allow you to blow up, reduce and rotate pictures and fonts for Page Pro. Page Pro 99 is, through conversion utilities, compatible with TI-Artist artwork. This allows you to use a variety of drawing programs and utilities with the program.

Page Pro 99 also includes a few utilities of its own. Other than the conversion utilities, one is provided that takes a TI-Writer file, converts it into two-column text, and saves it in one page blocks ready to be imported into the program. This makes making a newsletter quite a bit easier. In addition to the utilities, Page Pro includes a selection of example fonts and pictures (to get you started) and 8 example pages including a Quick-Reference sheet, example greeting cards, a form, an ad, stationary and a letterhead created with the program. If you learn best by example, then the many examples provided will get you started quickly.

The program includes two manuals as well - a program reference manual and one which contains a lengthy tutorial, documentation on the utilities, tips on using the program, and extensive technical documentation for programmers writing utilities for the program. The tutorial takes you through the process of creating one page a step at a time. Page Pro 99 is compatible with all floppy controllers, RAM-disks, the HFDC card (it supports up to 28 character hard-disk path-names), and the Myarc Geneve 9640 (it includes a Geneve version).

Because the program is relatively simple to use, it brings a taste of Desktop Publishing to the average

user who needs to create forms, labels, greeting cards, and even short newsletters on a 99/4A or Geneve. If enough people purchase the program, future versions will be produced that extend the page-making, font, picture, print-out, and multi-page capabilities of the program. Already packages of clip-art and fonts are available for the program (see the announcement for Page Pro Pics in this issue).

As it stands now, there still isn't a Desktop Publishing program for the TI-99/4A or Geneve that is both very powerful and easy to use (in fact, there are few computers that can boast such programs). However, Page Pro 99 provides a functional mixture of ease-of-use and capability that will allow you to create all but the most complex pages on your screen with a minimum of effort. When all is said and done, programs are judged mainly on how easy they are to use and how good the output looks. Page Pro 99 does pretty well on both accounts.

Where to go:

Page Pro 99
Asgard Software
P.O. Box 10306
Rockville, MD 20850
(703)255-3085
Suggested Retail $24.95
(credit cards accepted, add
$.75 S&H when ordering)

Public Domain Software!

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Computer Contest Update

Judges Panel Chosen

In the last issue we made a minor splash by announcing a contest to build a new TI-99/4A compatible computer. Despite what some may think, we did think about this before spilling the ink. Asgard Publishing doesn't think you can build a computer with idealism, but it certainly helps.

To date we've received letters of interest from about a dozen hobbyists and engineers around the world. In fact, we expect to see the first submissions coming in "Any Day Now". To that end, we've put together a panel of judges to examine the entries to see, among other things, whether the design is possible or not. The panel contains the following members:

Tony Lewis: A well-known hardware hacker from North Carolina. Tony has worked on numerous projects in the past for the TI-99/4A. His current projects include technical specifications for interfacing to a 99/4A (which is mostly done and is in peer review), and an inexpensive 80-column card for the 4A. In addition to being a judge, he will most likely enter the contest (but he doesn't get to judge his own entry)

Bud Mills: Bud is the owner of Bud Mills Services - the developers of the P-GRAM card and the well-known Horizon RAM-disks. Bud is modest about his talents, but nevertheless is a well-known and respected hardware expert. His current projects include finishing the HRD 3000 series RAM-disks, which will bring RAM-disking into a new age for the 4A.

John Willforth: John is a respected hardware guru from Pennsylvania who has been involved in numerous projects through the years aimed primarily at enhancing the console directly (though his Prototype board is well known too). John works for Data General and is an "old-timer" in the computer world - he learned to program before many of our read-

ers learned to talk.

Chris Bobbitt: The resident "software expert" (to use the term loosely). Chris is the owner of Asgard Software, and will be evaluating the design for difficulty in developing system software for it.

We have also selected another group of judges - our readers. We intend to publish descriptions of the entries as they come in, and would like to hear the opinions of our readers - what you like/dislike about each design. Here is your chance to tell the hardware experts what kind of computer you would like to use.

Requirements Clarified

Really, there are very few requirements for this project. The sponsors of this contest are interested in receiving as many creative solutions as possible - and to that end has tried to keep the specifications to a minimum. In short, the computer must conform to the following:

● It must use a 99000 series processor (either the 99105 or 99110)
● It must utilize a 16-bit bus of your choice
● It must offer the ability to address at a minimum 1Mb of RAM, and preferably the 16Mb that TI Business systems utilizing this processor can address.
● It must utilize a 34xxx series graphics processor (we originally suggested the 34010 but Mr. Lewis made us aware of a less-expensive member of the family that is almost as capable).
● It must have some sort of sound processor - your choice as long as it can be made to emulate the one in th 99/4A
● It must be designed to be stand-alone - that is not run from the P-Box. Because it is a stand-alone device utilizing its own bus, provision must be made for peripherals and storage devices. The computer should a disk controller and various ports (RS232, Centronics Parallel, Mouse port,

etc.) integrated on the mother-board. Other ports such as DMA ports, SCSI, etc. are not required, but will be looked favorably upon in judging.

● The motherboard should be buildable with standard components, standard power supplies, and less expensive PC-board technology. Room should be left on the board for socketing of chips, and expansion card slots (perhaps perpendicular to the motherboard like PCs). The board should be in a form factor designed for use in a PC-style case.

There are a few requirements that aren't necessary to be met:

● The machine doesn't have to be 100% 99/4A compatible - as long as it can run Extended BASIC and many assembly programs I think the 4A community can live without MBX and Plato.

● Compatibility with 99/4A cards is not expected, or even encouraged. Hardware compatibility necessarily means design compromises that effectively reduce the speed and capability of the design.

● It doesn't have to cost under $500 to make in single-unit quantities. The ultimate cost of the boards and parts (excluding peripherals such as cases, keyboards, monitors, disk drives, etc.) should be in the $500 range in quantity.

We can already guess what kind of letters we'll receive from people - "You mean it won't use my HRD? It won't run Plato??". We have to face it folks - TI kludged the design of the 99/4A. They did a lot of things which really slowed down the machine, like hampering it with an 8-bit bus and slow clock speeds. The Geneve represents about the best a 99/4A can be. If you want a machine that is about 100% 99/4A compatible, and has more memory, better graphics and a nice keyboard, buy a 9640. If you want something that is 80-90% 4A compatible, and can outperform systems costing $3-4000, and has a future outside the 4A community, buy this thing.

Distribution Methods Set

We feel that the major problem the 99/4A community has had since it was the 99/4 community is that the machine of choice is only available from a single-source. When TI made the 4A they not only had a headlock on peripherals, they also tried to freeze out 3rd party software support entirely until the end. Myarc hasn't been as hostile as TI was to outside support, but they have done virtually nothing to

encourage outside developers, even something as simple as documenting the machine and its operating system.

We'd like to change this situation by opening up the manufacturing of this computer. When a design has been selected and a working prototype is made, we intend to give a license to manufacture the machine to every sponsor of this contest (in other words, the judges panel who've given their time and support, the Miami 99/4A Users Group, the Western New York 99'ers, Tigercub Software, GEnie's TI Roundtable, CIS' TI Forum, and Asgard Publishing). Any user group or individual who would like to kick $200 in for more prize money will also get a license. These licenses are transferable, and entitle the bearer to manufacture and distribute the machine in any form as long as it is the same design.

What we hope to see is a dozen little enterprises selling systems in a variety of configurations, from bare boards with the parts up to complete systems, at a comparable range of prices. Through competition and entrepreneurial spirit, the price to the consumer would be kept reasonable, and innovation would be encouraged. In the beginning at least, licensees will be invited to join a cooperative for making the boards and purchasing parts in large lots to keep prices down for everyone.

The system software for the machine will also be developed, in part through a similar contest, by Asgard Software. This software will be licensed to machine licensees - and all machines will be required to be able to run it (in order to insure compatibility between different systems). However, individual manufacturers can develop other operating systems at their option. Asgard Publishing will release complete technical documentation to this operating system, along with full source code. Manufacturers can bundle this documentation at their option.

Of course, all of this assumes that someone sends in a workable, buildable design. In order to do this, some incentive must be made for the author. Unless quite a few individuals and groups join as sponsors, the prize money won't be overwhelming - probably not worth the labor it will take to build the design. Chances are the rewards for designing this computer will be less tangible (perhaps your name signed on every PC board, something to put on your resumé, the adulation of thousands, and knowledge that you extended the

life of the 4A community for another 10 years, etc.), but perhaps if enough people kick in it will be worthwhile to enter, and since winners also get the a license to build the machine, maybe you can manufacture and sell them for profit too.

What does Asgard Software and Publishing get out of all this (other then a $2000 expense for taxes)? We might extend the life of our market for another decade. Plus, we'd have the knowledge that we helped keep our little 99/4A alive.

For more information:

If you are interested in becoming a sponsor, send a letter giving your name or organization name and address, and the amount pledged, to Computer Contest, c/o Asgard Publishing, P.O. Box 10697, Rockville, MD 20850. If you'd like to comment on the specifications, send letters to Contest Coordinator, c/o Asgard Publishing, P.O. box 10697, Rockville, MD 20850.
&

Computing and the Family Unit...

What is a wife? It's that person that screams down the steps, up the steps, or across the room... "Get off of that.. (expletives deleted) computer, and come to supper!!". She might also say, in tone so sweet, "When are you gonna quit playing with that stupid thing and come to bed?!"

She is the "little woman", that just doesn't understand your attachment to that "stupid computer". If she understood it, she might be jealous of it, especially since it seems to supply most of your emotional needs. But she doesn't, so she can't be expected to react in the rational manner you expect her to.

Then, there are the kids... you're always there, you don't hang out in bars, or in front of the TV set, but somehow, they seem to think you're missing from their lives. What you do when you're at home, somehow eludes the logic in their heavy-metal battered minds. They think you should be at an AA meeting. THAT, at least, they could better cope with, and it wouldn't be nearly as embarrassing.

What do these people want from you anyway. Haven't they considered what you COULD be... slopping around the house in your underwear, swilling beer, chasing wild women, mass child murdering. Why there are all kinds of possibilities that could place you in the ranks of "normal" humanity. Instead, you play it safe, and just sit around tapping on your computer keys, and nobody understands you.

I, for one, have found that the computer can substitute for everything that the family unit should be. It's communication, it's silent, does exactly what you tell it, doesn't listen when you curse it, and gives you something to look forward to on weekends and holidays.

Many of your friends are a thousand miles away.. your wife is always complaining about the phone bill. And speaking of which, don't you have to be there when the phone rings at 2AM. My heavens, computer people don't even begin to function until the rates go down at eleven PM. How often has it happened? Your best friend, (that you have never met) calls at a wee hour to discuss an important piece of software. Who, but the other half, yells down the steps, in panicked tones, "Who's on the phone?", then skulks off to bed mumbling obscenities about computer people.

Life is a never ending conflict between you, the family, and, the computer. It's a problem that I am not, nor ever have been, subject too, because my wife and I constitute a computer family. The kids, however, (twenty-four and sixteen) are generally outside of our unit, looking in... I wish they weren't, but they are. It's their fault, not mine, I refuse to take responsibility for their "down-with-technology" attitudes.

They are inconsiderate... begging for supper at nine-o-clock, when my wife is trying to get her job done on Delphi. As a MS-DOS SIG manager, she has to begin work a six. When she doesn't respond to their pathetic whimperings they crawl over to my side of the room. They are grasping at straws, but I am, however, more sympathetic than their mother. I hand them a can of tunafish and explain the term "MICROpendium deadline". They don't want to use the can opener, (as if all this is the fault of electric current) and scream about "hot" meals. Such nonsense. If the can of tuna was hot, you would have to take TIME to eat it, or even have to put it on a plate.

They have a pathological fear of high tech. We want one of their

rooms for a new computer room... grow, damn it, grow!

I have been married to the same woman for twenty-five years, I know what makes her tick. For her twenty-fifth anniversary present, (she wanted roses) I had a choice between a trip abroad, an emerald ring or something in silver. I chose the latter, giving her a 286 machine with a forty meg hard-drive and two and a half megs of ram. She was awestruck, demanded to know where the money came from, and then threw me out of the computer room so she could set up.

She defends my gift decision to her family by pointing out, "the motherboard has lots of silver in it." They go away then, convinced that while insanity never ran in their family before, it had to start somewhere. With luck, my wife's inheritance could put a VAX in the basement... we may need BOTH the kids rooms.

We never go out... the children get fidgety during the winter. They think we should go to the movies. This nagging need of theirs to "do things"is another of those natural wonders put here to louse up my deadlines. It has been remedied by the advent of a VCR and a video rental store right across the street. I must admit, since the TV is just around the corner, I have enjoyed listening to some of the latest Hollywood spectaculars. I have noted also that even with my printer running, my trained ears can detect certain sweaty sounds that allow me to dash in and catch the love scenes. I haven't missed a thing, and under the circumstances, it's about the best I can ask for, or have time for. Ah Ha, family computing, if only I had this little TI twenty-four years ago, we would have HAD the kids rooms.

Families have friends. Friends become friends because they have something in common. We have friends, and we have a LOT in common. They come to my door around nine, and stay all night. I consider it an educational experience for the children. They learn the true meaning of words like "eccentric", "nerd", and "strange". And they learn to ask questions, like "who was that", and, "do THEY know he's loose?"

Speaking of which, do you realize there are some really gifted computer hackers that learned everything while residing in famous institutions? With a little planning, a moment of rehearsed insanity, and a smart lawyer, you too can get a masters in computer engineering. It won't cost you a dime,

but you have to learn to spell R^E^H^A^B^I^L^I^T^A^T^E.

These friends have advantages. The kids hide under their beds and the little woman wouldn't THINK of offending one of my friend's friends, namely me, as long as he's around. As far as I'm concerned, a computer person is a computer person, even if he does clean his nails with a hatchet. It's all part of the act... I think.

My youngest talked for weeks about this fantastic boyfriend she had, but refused to bring him home. Finally, one day, he came to our door and was admitted. In ten minutes, my wife had sucked him into a game of King's Quest. Three hours later, Studly went to the kitchen for tunafish and an argument started between him and my daughter. The only thing I plainly heard was when he yelled, "Your parents are NOT weird!" She threw him out the back door and ended the relationship. It was a shame too, because he seemed like a nice kid, and a heck of an adventure gamer. My child is young and doesn't have a handle on the meaning of priority yet.

All in all, it's a good life, but in the last year, I know of three divorces that used computers for grounds. One was averted by throwing hubby's Amiga into a chipping machine, but the other two are final. I don't want this to happen to you so I offer these words of wisdom.

1. Don't name your computer Abigail, or refer to it in feminine gender words.

2. Negotiate! "Yes, I'll buy you a new car if I can order a ram disk." That's not at all an unfair bargain. While she's driving around town in the new car, you get valuable hours of hassle free computer time.

3. Buy her a clone. Whether she uses it or not, she will get feelings of superiority. (It's her position in the family unit that is threatened by the TI.) This artificial ego builder will cool her jets for a little while anyway.

And finally...

4. Send your children to military school. I didn't... I regret that error in judgement.

These great truths have been written with the kind permission of my loving, understanding, and frequently distracted wife, Hollie.

Till next time...... htb

Press Report

Press is coming along quite nicely! Thank you! And other stuff...

As this is being written, Press' is starting to look more and more like a word processor and less like a disparate pile of assembly language code.

After long months of honing and perfecting the "innards" of the program, author Charles Earl has finally turned his attentions to the parts the user sees. In the last few weeks he has put the pieces together to get the menus, some menu functions, and almost of the editor functions working. Currently, you can sit down, open a document, enter in your text (complete with all text attributes such as bold, underline and italics), edit the text normally as you would in TI-Writer or in other programs, save your document and quit. The program will let you edit in 40 or 80 columns (depending on your system), and in either bitmap or text modes (bitmap shows you all of the text attributes on the screen, while text modes are provided for speedier editing). The program never loses a keystroke, no matter how fast you type, and will let you type up to 256 characters per line. You can even bring up a help screen at the touch of a key.

For the technically minded, major portions of the program, which ended up being re-worked almost in their entirety, are now showing signs of being completed and thoroughly bug-free. These include the memory management (which is crucial in a program 4 times larger than the available memory of a 99/4A), disk input/output, screen i/o (in all graphics modes), the menu system, and the editor functions. Currently, we are in the process of beta testing the editor and Charles is working at turning on the various special functions, some of which have to be re-worked because of changes in the program.

Some features have been added beyond those originally called for in the specifications and advertisements for the program - these include complete mouse functions

and mouse editing (even a mouse menu!) for 9640 and 4A mouse users, the text editing mode (as well as the announced graphical editing mode), and an expanded list of editing functions. We are also exploring the possibilities of an M-DOS mode version for the Geneve, and would be interested in knowing what kind of interest there is in it.

If all goes well, we may be in a position to send demonstration versions to interested user groups in a month or so. Interested groups should drop a postcard, with the name and address of a person to be held responsible for safekeeping the demo copy, to Asgard Software, P.O. Box 10306, Rockville, MD 20850.

> **Assuming Murphy's Law doesn't rear its ugly head, and that our recent progress continues unabated, we may see a marketable version before the end of the summer!**

We've said it before, but it should be repeated: when Press' is completed it will be the most capable word processor ever designed for the TI-99/4A and Geneve, and will be comparable to anything for any other computer. Assuming Murphy's Law doesn't rear its ugly head, and that our recent progress continues unabated, we may see a marketable version before the end

of summer. The author of the program has been putting 10-16 hours a day for the last 5-6 months into completing the program.

On a semi-related note, we've received several letters from people to the effect that they don't intend to order anything further from Asgard Software until Press' is released. While purchasing anything is necessarily a personal decision, we feel it is unfair to make that sort of ultimatum, and we'd like to explain why.

Most programs manufactured and distributed by Asgard Software are the work of independent contractors, which we call "authors". These authors sign contracts with Asgard Software to develop a specific program or package. During the development phase, Asgard Software provides technical, research and financial assistance. When the program is completed, we perform beta testing, document, manufacture and distribute the program.

Sometimes we approach individual authors to develop specific programs, and just as often an independent contractor will approach us with a program in varying degrees of completion. Occasionally, an author will approach us with just an idea that needs a little help germinating. We work with the author to create the best program possible.

This somewhat unique division of labor allows Asgard Software to be amazingly productive. In 1988 we announced 27 new products. By June of 1989, all but 1 is currently available (guess which one isn't). We are proud to point out that this is more than any 3 of our competitors combined produced last year. This year promises to be just as fruitful. We are currently contracting for upwards of 20 new releases within the current year, from a dozen authors.

The point to all this is that when all is said and done, a program is the work, and property of its author. That is why the majority of our offerings say "Copyright Donn Granros", or "Ed Johnson", or "Jim Reiss", or "Paul Scheidemantle", and they don't all say "Copyright Asgard Software".

Our authors do most of the work of transforming an idea, a set of blueprints, or a concept into a working program. They deserve the credit when it works. When a program doesn't work, we share the blame since part of our job is testing software. Also, we take the blame when a program isn't

released on time - since another part of our job is to set release dates. However, it is unfair to expect one author to take the blame for another authors unfortunate problems.

So, if you are upset about the delay with Press' , send us a nasty letter or cancel your order. Don't boycott our other offerings - the authors of those works have nothing to do with Press' , and it isn't right to penalize them for it. Support people who still write programs for the 99/4A, or they might not support you when you want it.

Current Versions

Program	Vers.	Last Upd.
Balloon Wars	1.15	1/1/86
Column Attack	1.0	n/a
Doom Games I	1.0	n/a
Doom Games II	1.0	n/a
High Gravity	2.3	5/1/88
Legends	1.1	4/1/88
Legends II	1.0	n/a
Oliver's Twist	1.0	n/a
Volcano Fort.	1.0	n/a
Zoom Flume	1.0	n/a
Artist Enlarger	1.01	n/a
Disk of Dino.	1.0	n/a
Disk of Pyrates	1.0	n/a
Font Writer II	2.0	8/15/87
Calendar Maker	1.05	6/1/88
Music Pro	1.0	n/a
Page Pro 99	1.0	n/a
Press	1.0	n/a
Recipe Writer	2.0	5/1/87
Schedule Mngr	1.3	3/15/89
Stamp Manager	1.1	5/1/86
Total Filer	1.0	n/a
Typewriter	1.0	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

For updates send to:
Asgard Software, P.O. Box 10306, Rockville, MD 20850

Geneve Corner

We are continuing our popular Geneve software list in this issue with releases from March to June of 1989. You will note that the vast majority of new releases are for use in MDOS mode. While actual applications have yet to materialize, utilities and development software are appearing at a rapid clip. Many of these programs can be obtained from The National Myarc Users Group (11011 Ellwood Str., The Woodlands, TX 77380-4001, (713)657-1047), or from Delphi's TI Information Network, GEnie's TI Roundtable or CIS' TI Forum.

Before launching into the list, we'd like to discuss an item of interest for Geneve users. We've had the pleasure of evaluating 9640 Fortran over the last few months, and we are very impressed with this new release for MDOS mode programmers.

To begin with, 9640 Fortran is one of the most professionally packaged pieces of software for the Geneve. The program comes packaged in an attractive spiral-board manual with a nice, color printed cover. The software comes on several SS/SD disks, and can be readily installed on higher density floppies.

While the manual is not really designed for the Fortran novice (it is more reference then tutorial), it gives very lengthy and detailed explanations of the use of the 9640 Fortran development system, the syntax of 9640 Fortran, libraries and utilities. If something could be added to the manual, it would be more extensive appendix information on MDOS, and perhaps a bibliography of books for the individual wanting to learn Fortran. Some of the explanations of the MDOS specific library routines are a bit cryptic and brief too - a copy of the 9938 manual would be nice to have if you plan to do any extensive graphics programming. Overall, though, the manual is well-designed and usually thorough in what it covers.

9640 Fortran is a complete development environment for MDOS. It includes an editor (a version of the QDE Editor by Clint Pulley), a compiler, linker/librarian, loader

and a symbolic source-level debugger (which means you can view the source code as the program is being run with the debugger). While no benchmarks have been done, I guess it is safe to say that 9640 Fortran programs are "blindingly fast". Comparing it to 99/4A assembly language in speed would not be unreasonable.

Finally, the firm that developed and supports 9640 Fortran, LGMA Products (and owner Al Beard), seems to be truly sensitive to the needs of the people using his language. Since the release of the program, Al has provided at no cost many additional routines, extra documentation and extensive technical support on several on-line services (notably Delphi and CIS). This isn't a formal review, but we'll give the language an A for completeness (needs only more Fortran 77 functions), an A- for the manual (needs only more video and MDOS information), and overall an A+ for effort (Great job, Al!)

9640 Fortran has a suggested retail price in the $69.95 range, and can be obtained from the manufacturer (LGMA Products, Box 210, Apple-Butter Hill Rd., Coopersburg, PA 18036), or from Disk Only Software (Box 4170, Rockville, MD 20850). It is worth every penny of the asking price. Now, to the new software!

MEMTST   24-Jun-89
A memory diagnostic utility with graphics for MDOS mode. By Ron Walters.

CLRDMO   20-Jun-89
A package of Advanced BASIC tutorials and sample programs. Details use of TCOLOR and PALETTE commands. By Walt Howe

KGMUS   18-Jun-89
The source code to 3 music pieces written in c99 for MDOS by Ken Gilliland.

KGMUSI   18-Jun-89
Compiled c99 music pieces by Ken Gilliland - Mozart, Wagner and Mozart. PATCH program required.

ABASIC   13-Jun-89
June 6th version of Advanced BASIC.

SYSTEM   13-Jun-89
Version 0.95H of MDOS with Harddisk support. Required to run The June 6th ABASIC.

BLOCKM   10-Jun-89
An archived replacement BLOCKM routine for 9640 Fortran. Replaces routines HBLKMV, HBLKCP, LBLKMV, and LBLKCP. For 4.3 of 9640 Fortran and MDOS 1.14

9640   10-Jun-89
Part of an ABASIC label program for the 9640. Requires the June 6th version of ABASIC.

9640-L   10-Jun-89
Second part of label program above.

NITEMK   21-May-89
A quick tune from Mozart's "Little Nite Music". By Ken Gilliland.

PLOTHS   20-May-89
High-speed plot routines for MDOS c99, by Clint Pulley.

IRAND-   18-May-89
A replacement version of the IRAND random number routine for 9640 Fortran. By Ron Warfield.

INF   15-May-89
A replacement interpreter for running Infocom games from MDSOS mode in 80 columns.

INFOCM   14-May-89
A program that allows you to run Infocom games from GPL mode in 80-columns, or in 80-columns from a 99/4A with an 80-column card.

MTEXA   10-May-89
A multi-tasking graphics example called CHAOS written in 9640 Fortran

MTMAN   10-May-89
A multi-tasking manager that allows you to run several applications simultaneously.

CHAOS2   09-May-89
A 9640 Fortran graphics demonstration by Ron Warfield.

C99MR2   07-May-89
Part 2 of MDOS c99. Includes documentation and release notes. Fairware by Clint Pulley.

C99MR1   06-May-89
Part 1 of MDOS c99. Contains programs and tools. Complete c99/MDOS package with many new functions.

LMCM   29-Apr-89
Two new subroutines for 9640 Fortran by LGMA Products - CALL LMCM and LMMC which perform logical moves of Video RAM between CPU and VRAM.

CIRCLE   26-Apr-89
A circle drawing routine for 9640 Fortran by LGMA Products.

EXPAND   25-Apr-89
A tutorial on using Expanded Memory with 9640 fortran by LGMA Products in response to several requests.

CHAOS   19-Apr-89
A little graphics demonstration written in 9640 Fortran by Ron Warfield.

MOVEWI   18-Apr-89
A 9640 Fortran windows demo. Shows how a chunk of the screen can be captured in an array and then restored later.

WINDOW   18-Apr-89
A short MDOS program that demonstrates graphics-enhanced windows for MDOS and Fortran 9640. By Matt Beebe

SECTOR   14-Apr-89
Version 1.2 of Sector One - a sector editor for use with the 9640 and the HFDC. Fairware by Randy Moore.

MULTID   12-Apr-89
Five simple multi-tasking demos using assembly language. Includes instructions.

ABASIC   05-Apr-89
Report on bugs and changes in the manual for Advanced BASIC by Walt Howe. For March 31 version but applicable in later versions too.

DEMOS   04-Apr-89
Two quick demonstrations of 9938 graphics capabilities

TASK   31-Mar-89
A set of programs demonstrating multi-tasking through 9640 Fortran. Runs 3 independant processes at once. By Ron Warfield.

LMAKER   25-Mar-89
A fairware program by Charles Earl that turns any E/A 5 assembly program into a file loadable from MDOS as part of the GPL interpreter .

MDM4.   22-Mar-89
A 2 sector program that allows MDM5 to be loaded directly from the MENU program. By John Johnson.

TUT964   19-Mar-89
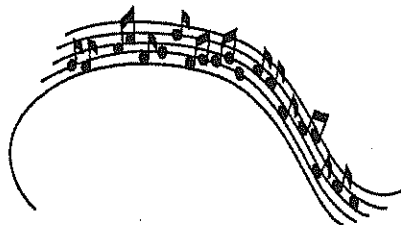A Tutorial and history of 9640 Fortran by Al Beard of LGMA Products.

GMENU6   16-Mar-89
An MDOS menuing system done with batch files. Designed to run from a HRD but workable from floppies.

MENU23   16-Mar-89
Version 2.3 of Randy Moore's Mouse Menu for the 9640. Part of the GPL interpreter - it allows you to select and run programs using the mouse. Freeware.

LX800 14-Mar-89
Replacement My-Word HELP file
for LX-800 printer users.

GRFFNS 13-Mar-89
An interim release of graphics, joy-
stick, mouse and sprite functions
for MDOS c99 by Clint Pulley.

PATCH 13-Mar-89
A c99 program that reads a direc-
tive file and patches the running
version of MDOS to correct some
bugs in it. Required to run some
c99 programs. By Clint Pulley.

Timely Tutorials

On Using TI-Artist Fonts...

Welcome to a new section of *Asgard News* . This area is designed to help the average user better use his/her software and hardware. In future issues we'll cover different programs and devices, and show you how to do something that is poorly explained (or even not explained) in the manuals. We'd like to start by discussing TI-Artist.

Because Asgard Software publishes a large selection of TI-Artist compatible fonts, pictures, borders and utilities, we are often asked questions that should be addressed to the manufacturer of the program instead. The manual

that comes with TI-Artist is not nearly explicit enough for the average user, and leaves out a considerable amount of information.

The procedure for loading and using TI-Artist fonts is not at all well explained in the manual accompanying the program. Some people have figured out how to use Artist fonts through trial and error, but there are many users that are unable to do utilize this most powerful capability of TI-Artist.

To load TI-Artist fonts, use the following procedure:

1. Turn on the computer, and load TI-Artist as detailed in the manual for the program.

2. When the Main Menu appears, select option #2, "Enhancements".

3. The "Enhancements" section will display a "graphical" menu when it has loaded. The menu options can be selected either by moving the joystick over the box representing the option desired, or by pressing the Letter in the upper left-hand corner of the box.

4. Select the "Alphanumeric Entry" option (the box on the lower right hand side of the screen), by pressing "A", or by moving the cursor with the joystick over the box and pressing the "fire" button. Once selected, a short menu will appear:

1. Load Character Font
2. Type Text on Screen

Pressing the space bar returns you to the previous menu.

5. Select #1, Load Character Font (by pressing the "1" key) and then type in the Font filename. Please note that all font filenames in TI-Artist end with a "_F" (that is, an underscore and then the letter "F"). ***NOTE*** **THE USER SHOULD NOT TYPE THE "_F" WHEN ENTERING THE FONT FILENAME.** The user should enter all of the filename except for the "_F". Please also note that TI-Artist expects you to enter the Device Name of the disk containing the font file as well. So, if the user wants to load a font from a disk in disk drive number one named CHALK_F, he/she should type:

DSK1.CHALK

and press *ENTER*.

Random Tip

Do you ever need to create really nice looking printout from your computer? Do you do reports, or use computer graphics to make ads or newsletters or such? If your answer to either of these questions is "yes", there are a few relatively inexpensive ways to vastly improve the print quality of even cheap dot-matrix printers.

For one thing, always have a supply of fresh ribbons on hand. Using a ribbon that looks like it will wear out at any second isn't going to produce nice quality print on any printer. If something is important enough to slave over it for hours to get it right, then it is certainly worth investing $3 for a new ribbon to print it out properly.

If your printer has the ability to use single sheets, you may want to strongly consider purchasing a ream (500 sheets) of Laser Printer paper. Why use Laser Printer paper on a dot-matrix printer? Laser-printer paper is specially made to be less porous, whiter and brighter than standard Xerox or printer paper. Hence, anything printed on it stands out better, won't smear ink so much, and reproduces much nicer. You can typically buy small packages of it at office supply stores for $15-25, but I highly recommend going to a discount mail order office supply company (like Quill, at 312-634-4800), and purchasing a ream or two of Hammermill Laser Plus for

$12-15. It will probably pay for itself on your first big job.

The last way to improve the quality of your printouts is to use the right software. Some programs print better than others. For instance, if you are printing out graphics you definitely don't want to use TI-Artist. Instead, if you have GRAPHX, convert your TI-Artist screen into GRAPHX format and print it out that way, or use one of the freeware printing programs such as Robert Coffey's PRINT7AL (which produces the darkest printouts we've ever seen). Picasso users may want to invest in Picasso Utilities, which includes a Picasso version of PRINT7AL.

If you are printing text, remember to use the near-letter quality mode of your printer if you have one, or enhanced double-strike if you don't. The simplest way to use either mode from your printer is through your word processing program, or from buttons on the printer. Another way to do it is to write a little BASIC program that sends the appropriate codes to your printer.

Finally, remember that all of your work on your computer only looks as good as it prints out.

6. After the font file loads, the user will be returned to this Alphanumeric Entry menu again. Now, the user should select option #2 (by pressing the "2" key). TI-Artist will ask you if you wish the text to be outlined. This is entirely the option of the user (it doesn't matter to the function of the program either way). After choosing this option, type a sentence. TI-Artist will only allow you to type the letters that are found in that font. After typing in the sentence, press *ENTER*.

7. The screen will clear and the drawing area will appear, with a blinking box on the screen. Your sentence is "in" the box. Use the joystick to position it wherever you want it on the screen and press the "fire" button. A copy of the sentence will be "dropped" where the box is located, and the box will blink again (you can drop the sentence as many times as you like). Press the space bar to return to the Alphanumeric Entry menu.

8. The user can continue loading fonts and typing sentences to his/her heart's delight. To draw around the text, for instance, quit from the Enhancements menu (by returning to it and pressing *FCTN=*), and select TI-Artist from the Main Menu. When TI-Artist is loaded, you can draw by pressing the space bar and moving the cursor with the joystick, and pressing the "fire" button.

That's it. Until next time, happy computing!

User Group Survey Update

There is still time to send your answers to our second user group survey. Of course everyone who answered the first is disqualified from entering again. Those answering the following questions receive a free 1-issue extension of their subscriptions:

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 cassette users?
3. Do you maintain a cassette library?
4. What were your programs at your last three meetings?
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 have?
8. Does your group publish a newsletter?
9. What is your age?

Send all answers to: User Group Survey, *Asgard News*, P.O. Box 10697, Rockville, MD 20850

Beginner's Corner

Database Tutorial - Part II, Choosing a Database

In the previous issue (Vol.1, No.4) of Asgard News, we discussed basic database concepts in depth. In this issue we promised to discuss the differences between the two most commonly found "databases" in the TI-99/4A world - relational and flat file database management systems.

To recap: a database is a collection of related data, while a DBMS (DataBase Management System) is a program used to put data in, and get data out of a database. It is common for magazines and database "experts" to call the latter by the former term, but technically that is incorrect. A DBMS is not a database. Again, a DBMS is a program and a database is any file of data.

Databases store data internally as records, which we best understand as a row in a chart. The way data is stored and type of data in a database is usually saved in a separate file called the "schema". Each row, or record, of the database is known in database terminology as a "tuple".

The purpose of creating a database is to get the data out of it eventually in some desired manner. To this end, all DBMS programs have at a minimum three basic functions: the ability to enter data for storage (using a "form", or data entry screen), the ability to manipulate and/or select data, and the ability to take part or all of the data and print it out (as a "report"). All DBMS' perform these tasks in different ways.

As mentioned in the previous article, the two types of Database Management Systems found in the TI-99/4A world are the "flat-file" and the "relational". As there are only 2 true relational databases for the 99/4A, the vast majority of databases are flat-file databases.

The difference between the types of DBMS' lies in the second major function, the way the data is manipulated.

A flat-file DBMS is more or less based on the concept that all of the data is to be stored and manipulated within a single database. That

database can be sorted, or tuples may be recalled from it using simple or sophisticated methods. But in the end, the only data that can be accessed at any one time is that within the single database selected. An example of a flat-file DBMS is a mailing list program. The mailing list program, or the flat-file DBMS set up to hold a mailing list, will allow you to simply enter and recall names and addresses. A sophisticated flat-file DBMS like First-Base will permit you to even enter a sophisticated "query" (a request for a specific type of data in an English-like command phrase - for example "select all where name equals fred").

A flat-file DBMS is excellent when the data isn't overly complex, or there is no need to take data from several databases at once. Flat-file DBMS' are often at the core of dedicated database programs, such as programs to manage Genealogies, Stamps, Coins or any other collection. Virtually all mailing list programs are flat-file DBMS'.

However, if you want to place some parts of your mailing list (say the names and phone numbers) in a second list, or merge your mailing list in with your Christmas card list and remove those names that are duplicates, then a flat-file DBMS will typically not be up to snuff. If you need to manage more than one database simultaneously, the best solution is a relational DBMS. A relational DBMS will let you take "related" data from different databases, and combine, compare, and/or merge it. Some relational DBMS' permit hundreds of databases to be accessed simultaneously, but the two for the 99/4A, TI-Base and the Acorn DBMS, permit 5 and 3 respectively. This is not to say they are necessarily inferior programs - even only 3 databases open at once is more than enough for most relational DBMS needs.

A Relational DBMS (or RDBMS to extend the terminology), is the only way to organize some sorts of data. Say you run a small company and want to keep track of the names and addresses of your customers. You would like to be able to enter in a purchase order from a

customer, and have the DBMS automatically read in the customers address from your address list. You'd like to save the order itself in a 2nd list for use in purchasing inventory. Finally, you'd like to create a 3rd list with the name of each customer, the date of their purchase, the date it was shipped and the date the invoice is due. The only way you could do this is if you were using a RDBMS. A RDBMS is the only DBMS that will let you take data from disparate databases and combine it into new databases.

At this point you should fully understand that selecting a DBMS for your data is not simply a matter of choosing what is currently the most popular DBMS on the market. You will save yourself a lot of trouble by figuring out which kind you need beforehand.

Which DBMS is right for you? Well, as you may have guessed it depends on what you are trying to organize. One rule of thumb is to always try a flat-file DBMS first, and if it isn't adequate, then go onto a relational database. This is of course assuming that the relational DBMS you choose will read the database files you created with the flat-file DBMS. If not, you may find yourself re-entering lots of data.

Instead of this method, you could keep in mind that a flat-file DBMS is typically adequate for managing a mailing list, a list of the serial numbers of your household items and such, and a relational DBMS is best for managing a small to medium sized business, keeping a sophisticated inventory, and so on. Using a relational DBMS to manage a small household goods inventory would be like using a jet plane to go to the corner store, while trying to manage a business with a flat-file DBMS is usually an exercise in frustration.

There is a more scientific way to select the type of DBMS that is right for your data, though. It involves analyzing your DBMS needs and then selecting the DBMS based on your analysis. This method isn't really as difficult as it sounds, either.

The first thing you need to do is to get out a piece of paper and a pencil and write down a list of what you want to put in your database. For instance, if you are trying to make a list of the people you write letters to you might want to write down the following:

    Name
    Street Address
    City

    State
    Zip/Postal Code
    Telephone number
    Country (optional)

Now imagine that each item is a column in a table. Next, as you know a table can only be so wide and still fit on a page. You will have to allot space for each column in the table. Assuming you are assigning the number of characters allowed for each item (or "field") in your database, you might want to do it as follows:

    Name   15
    Address 20
    City   10
    ...

Now, imagine that each row of the database is an entry, and write in a few of your friends' names and addresses. Check to see if all their entries for each field fits - if not perhaps you should allot more space.

Whether you realize it or not, you now have a database - you can enter in this information as you see it on the page and it will function in most any DBMS. However, we are trying to figure out what kind of DBMS you need first.

Now comes the tricky part. You have to ask yourself why you are collecting this data, and what you intend to do with it. If you just want to keep this list, perhaps sort it and print it out on labels or on paper for reference, then a flat-file DBMS is certainly all you need. However, if you want to take a few items from this list, and keep it in a second list (perhaps one containing the person's name, their phone number and their birthday), then you need a relational DBMS. You need to "relate" data in one database (this one) with another one (one containing just names, phone numbers and birthdays). Most likely when you change a persons phone number in your main list you'd also want it to change in your other list. These are the kinds of things relational databases do.

Generally, if you can keep all the data you want to organize in one database, then you should use a flat-file DBMS. Otherwise, you should use a relational database management program.

Whichever database you need, you should hold onto this piece of paper. It is always a good idea to plan out a database on paper ahead of time, and try to think about other ways you may use this database in the future. No matter what kind of DBMS you choose, changing a database after you've

created it and started using it is usually a pain.

If you think a flat-file DBMS is what you need, you have many options - depending on how much equipment you have. If you only have a cassette recorder and a console, you are pretty much limited to either Personal Record Keeping or the Navarone Database modules. If you have a disk system, your choices are much greater. You can purchase a commercial program such as FirstBase (which has a lot of bugs but is relatively easy-to-use and quite powerful), or freeware programs such as PR-Base or Creative Filing System.

If you need an RDBMS, a disk system is required. Between your two options, TI-Base is probably your best bet. It isn't as easy to use as Acorn's DBMS, but it is considerably more powerful (since it's programmable), is becoming a database of choice and hence is widely supported, and is also relatively cheap at $25. Considering it packs much of the functionality of many powerful databases in the PC world which cost $200 and even $300, it is a tremendous bargain. However, it isn't for the average user.

In conclusion, before you purchase any DBMS, first try to understand how a one works, then write down what you need a DBMS to do for you. It's also recommended that you don't purchase the first thing that comes along. Try one of the freeware flat-file DBMS' first. If it meets your needs, you won't have to go any further, if it doesn't, you don't have to send in your donation and you can buy a more powerful one.

Where to Go:

TI-Base
Texaments
244 Mill Rd.
Yaphank, NY 11980
$24.95 plus $1.50 S&H

Navarone Database ($39.95)
Personal Record Keeping ($15.95)
TexComp
P.O. Box 33084
Granada Hills, CA 91344
$3.00 S&H per item

PR-Base
William Warren
2373 Ironton Str.
Aurora, CO 80010

Creative Filing System
Mark Beck
8 Forestridge Cir.
Valdosta, GA 31602
$15.00

New Products

For more information, or to order any of the following new items, send to:

U.S. Residents, please add $0.75/order, Canadians add $1.25 and all others add $4.00 for Airmail shipping.

Page Pro 99

The is a remarkable new page-making program for the TI-99/4A and Myarc Geneve 9640 that permits you to make an entire page at a time on the screen.

Page Pro 99 is the only page-making program for the TI-99/4A that operates under the principal "what-you-see-is-what-you-get". It features the ability to place up to 28 pictures of any size and shape (up to the size of the page) anywhere on the page, as well as type in any direction in both a large and small font of your choice. Lines, boxes and borders may be placed with similar ease.

Created pages may be saved for later use, as well as printed out in any of three print qualities: "rough-draft" single-density to "reproduction quality" quad-density.

Written entirely in assembly over a 2 year period by author Ed Johnson. This extensively tested program is compatible with standard TI-Artist fonts and pictures, Epson or compatible printers, all floppy controllers, the HFDC, any RAM-disk and of course the Myarc Geneve 9640.

The package is extensively documented, and includes several utilities, including one that turns TI-Writer text into 2 column pages for use in Page Pro 99. This program is ideal for signs, forms, advertisements, maps, graphs, stationary, charts, labels, certificates, reports and even newsletters. Sample pages, fonts and pictures are included. The suggested retail price of this program is $24.95.

Page Pro Pics

For users of Page Pro 99 - Page Pro Pics is a series of 7 disks containing collectively over 300 pictures! Each volume in this series consists of 30-100 large, detailed and finely crafted pictures on a specific topic. The current disks available are as follows:

Volume #1 - Animals 1: A collection of 35 large animal pictures
Volume #2 - Holidays: Over 30 excellent pictures for those special days of the year
Volume #3 - Computers/Transportation: A selection of almost 50 pictures of vehicles and computers.
Volume #4 - Home/Misc.: A huge collection of over 100 common every-day items from books, to maps, to personal items, tools, etc.
Volume #5 - People: 34 pictures of "people" ranging from generic pictures to famous personalities.
Volume #6 - Publishing Tools: A priceless collection of 29 pictures ranging from borders to attention-getters such as arrows, etc. Great for newsletters and ads!
Volume #7 - Animals 2: Another selection of 35 beautiful animal pictures.

Each volume in this series is available for $6.95. All 7 can be purchased together for only $34.95 - only 13 cents or so per picture.

Page Pro Fonts

This is a collection of all new fonts designed specifically for use with Page Pro 99 by well-known graphics artist Paul Scheidemantle. The Page Pro Fonts series consists of a large selection of new small fonts, large font analogues to the small fonts, and a collection of unique large fonts by themselves. These finely-crafted typefaces allow you to more easily create professional quality pages with Page Pro 99. Volumes #1 and #2 are scheduled for release for July 15th, and carry a suggested retail price of $7.95/volume. Both volumes of fonts, which together contain 18 small fonts and 25 large ones, can be obtained for a special price of $13.95.

Legends II:The Sequel

If you like Legends, you'll love Legends II:The Sequel - a new adventure for Legends gamers by adventure artist Donn Granros.

In this all-new game you and your party of brave adventures is Shipwrecked on a new land leagues from home. The local residents of the town of Grumble (near where you landed), are friendly enough, but you don't have nearly enough money to charter passage home again. So, donning your armor and spell books, you have to go out and seek new fortunes - but is that all there is to it?

In Legends II you'll explore a vast new land with dungeons and new places to visit, try out new spells, fight new monsters, and even visit a city. This fascinating sequel has even better graphics than the original! While Legends is not required to play Legends II, it is certainly recommended.

Legends II:The Sequel has a suggested retail price of $17.95. Both Legends and Legends II:The Sequel, the best graphics adventures ever produced for the TI-99/4A, can both be purchased for a special price of $36.95 - a savings of almost $4.00 over the suggested retail prices of both.

Zoom Flume

An excellent new adventure for the Adventure module by Oliver's Twist co-author Lynn Gardner, Zoom Flume is set in a water-park. The object of the game is to have as much fun as you can within your budget in this amusing new type of adventure game. Be careful with your money though, you want to have something left over at the end. This game is available on disk and cassette, and carries a suggested retail price of $7.95.

Music Pro

Music Pro is a word-processor for music (or, a MUSICal PROcessor) by David Caron and Lucie Dorais of the Ottawa TI-99/4A User Group. Music Pro has a full-featured editor that will allow you to create music by typing notes on a staff - even directly off of standard piano sheet music. You can easily move your cursor around to delete and insert notes and phrases, and even transform blocks of music to different durations or frequencies.

Very fast and friendly, Music Pro will let the professional as well as the novice musician, or even just a music buff, quickly and easily enter large pieces without having

to learn any special notation particular to the program. Unlike some music programs for the 99/4A, you don't have to make all the notes the same length within a measure - Music Pro will automatically take care of different voices with different durations playing simultaneously.

After entering in the music, you can compile the music into assembly language data for rapid playing. Or, you can save or load in pieces for editing at any time.

Finally, Music Pro is the only music program for the 99/4A that will allow you to print out your work in sheet music form (one voice at a time) on your Epson or compatible printer!

Music Pro includes a detailed, well-written manual by Lucie Dorais, and includes many sample songs and a keyboard overlay strip and keyboard note map in TI-Writer format. It requires a TI-99/4A with 32K, disk and Extended BASIC (*Note* will NOT function with the Geneve 9640 due to differences in the key-scanning routines). It is available for a suggested retail price of $17.95.

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.

Item	Disks	Cost
Picasso 1.2	1	see below
RAG Writer	1	see below
Telco	2	see below
Quick & Dirty Formatting Columnizer	1	see below
MDOS Development Kit	2	see below
Enhanced Display Package	1	see below
Hot Bug	2	see below
The Adventure Guide	n/a	$14.95
The Orphan Survival Handbook	n/a	$14.95
Home Publishing on the 99/4A	n/a	$15.00

Please send an initialized disk and $1.00 for each disk requested (2 disks and 2 dollars for 2-disk packages). 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 asks (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 orders to: Asgard Bookshelf, P.O. Box 10697, Rockville, MD 20850. Please allow 4-8 weeks for delivery. This offer is limited 🐦.

The News

New releases, new announcements, new support and new controversies.

Texaments BBS Up

Despite our report to the contrary in the last issue, Texaments TI Source BBS is up again after what turned out to be only a 2-3 week respite. This multi-line BBS (which runs on an IBM clone), provides technical support for Texaments' products - specifically TI-Base and TI-Artist.

Author Defends TexComp

Outspoken 99/4A fairware programmer Ray Kazmer, well known for his wonderful graphics programs (Woodstock, etc.) and his article in MICROpendium and elsewhere, recently wrote Asgard a letter defending TexComp's right to sell fairware and public domain programs. While several user groups and individuals have expressed outrage at TexComp for selling such software, Ray defended TexComp by pointing out that selling fairware is an accepted practice for other computers, and a service for those 99/4A owners that don't belong to user groups. Asgard News would be very interested in comments from our readers on this subject.

Triton promotes TI magazines

In an apparent attempt to serve its customers better, Triton has recently opened their catalog, the most widely distributed periodical for the TI-99/4A, to ads for other 99/4A magazines. Last year Triton distributed over 700,000 catalogs to TI-99/4A owners. A recent catalog featured an advertisement for MICROpendium magazine - its first real exposure to a huge number of 4A owners. Getting the average TI-99/4A owner into the community can only help the 99/4A survive and prosper in the coming years.

Asgard On-Line Isn't

Asgard Software's own BBS, Asgard-On-Line, has fallen prey to technical difficulties and isn't available for use, despite optimistic predictions to the effect in the last

issue of this magazine. Work on it has proceeded slowly over the last few months because of other commitments the firm has made to its Fall development schedule. No word is available at this time about when it will be up, but you can expect an announcement here when it is open for business.

International TI Expo Date set

The Mid-Atlantic 99ers are throwing what they bill as the "TI International Expo '89" on September 16, 1989. To be held in Washington D.C., visitors are expected from throughout North America. Several major software and hardware vendors are scheduled to be present, including Myarc Inc., Quality 99 Software and Asgard Software. Well-known TI personalities such as Barry Traver are expected to also give presentations. Also billed as a family event, organized tours are planned for out-of-town visitors to the many museums and sights in Washington D.C. (including the U.S. Capitol building, the White House, The Air & Space Museum, etc.). Other area attractions include Civil War battlefields, a large variety of museums and tours, and the sights of nearby Baltimore and Annapolis. For more information about the show, write to: Mid-Atlantic 99'ers, TI International Expo '89, P.O. Box 4005, Rockville, MD 20850.

Mechatronics 80-column Card Update

Users of the Mechatronics 80-column card for the TI-99/4A now have available a software and hardware upgrade for this device from well-known programmer Barry Boone - the author of the popular Archiver program. This comprehensive package includes new firmware that fixes many bugs and errors in the card's software as well as adds new features, a selection of new software for the 80-column card including picture viewers, word processors and more, and lastly, extensive new technical and non-technical docu-

mentation for the card. This package takes much of the frustration out of using the card, and is highly recommended! To order, send $20.00 plus $2.00 S&H to Barry Boone, P.O. Box 1233, Sand Springs, OK 74063.

New Service for Modem Users

Many of our modem using readers are familiar with PC Pursuit, a service of GTE/Telenet which allows users in one city to call BBSs in other cities around the country for a fixed rate per hour. PC Pursuit users were recently stung with steep rate hikes that made using regular long-distance services (even AT&T) attractive alternatives. Now, the Galaxy Telecom Division of GTC, Inc has contracted with the Tymnet system to bring a similar such service to modem users. Serving 91 cities in 28 states, including much of the East coast and Midwest, Texas, Arizona, Colorado, California and Washington, Galaxy Telecom charges at most $1.50 per hour and a monthly fee. After an initial sign-up fee of $50, users can opt for either a monthly fee of $10.00 and $1.50 per hour used per month, or a $25.00 charge and $1.00 per hour used. There is no limit on the number of hours that can be purchased. A service such as this permits modem users to call 99/4A and other bulletin board systems all over the country at a relatively low cost - feasibly below that of using big telecommunications networks such as CIS and GEnie. To sign up, or for more information, call Galaxy's own BBS at 804-495-INFO.

Picasso Available

Tenex, which is currently restructuring their TI-99/4A products division, has declined the marketing rights to Picasso 2.0 (the commercial version of this popular program), so Asgard Software again has assumed the rights to sell this program to the general public. Those interested in purchasing this update over the fairware version, which includes bug fixes, an "icon" mode and several new window-mode functions, can obtain it from Asgard Software for $14.95. The Picasso Utilities package, which contains utilities to print out Picasso pages and use large fonts on a Picasso screen, can also be obtained from Asgard for $9.95. To order, send to Asgard Software, P.O. Box 10306, Rockville, MD 20850. Please add $0.75/item S&H.

Rumors

Things to come, things that came, and things that don't know where they are coming from!

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

Corcomp HASN'T gone under

Our discussion on Corcomp in the News section of the last issue has created a flurry of rumors on the old grapevine, many of which aren't true. As far as we can determine, Corcomp HAS NOT gone out of business, and it still manufacturers TI-99/4A related hardware. It HAS been confirmed that they aren't developing any new 99/4A products. Corcomp has lately been focusing its efforts on producing products for PC compatibles under a different name. However, it still manufacturers 4A products as demand warrants. It is also expected that Corcomp will continue to provide service for the thousands of devices they have sold over the years, but further details on that are unavailable at this time.

M-DOS Development Package Late

The M-DOS Development Package by Paul Charlton, and announced for release in April by Genial Computerware, still hasn't materialized as the beginning of July approaches. No word is available when it will be making its appearance, but rumor has it that only the documentation is awaiting completion. But then, we first heard this rumor a month ago - how long can a manual take to write?

TI-Artist Upgrade still in the Works

While Texaments has refused to make an official statement to the effect, rumors about the next version of TI-Artist in the works abound. According to reports, the program is being completely over-

hauled, and is expected to have, among other things, more room for fonts and such features as the ability to rotate an object in 5-degree increments. The consensus among professional artists contacted was that more than anything the program needed a significant speed improvement, particularly of the zoom mode.

MICROpendium subscriptions up

Why says the 99/4A world is dwindling? A little bird reports that MICROpendium's circulation has never been higher - possibly due to exposure in Triton's catalog. Many software and hardware vendors talk of doing a better than usual business, particularly during the historically slow summer season. Speculation has it that part of it may be because of a series of software breakthroughs that have been made over the last year - Telco for Terminal Emulators, TI-Base for databases,etc. - 99/4A users are sticking around to see just how many things this little machine may be made to do. New hardware such as the HFDC has also kept many users around. Some even report that piracy of software is down - something struggling 99/4A software vendors can only hope for.

Genial Relocates?

The major partner of Genial Computerware, J.Peter Hoddie, has announced that he is re-locating to the San Francisco area. A recent graduate of Boston College, Mr. Hoddie is evidently taking his newly minted Engineering Degree to employers in the thriving Silicon Valley area, away from ailing Massachusetts. No word is available at this time of his future plans for Genial, and the status of his partnership with co-owners Corson Wyman and Barry Traver. The current address for ordering and software support of Genial Computerware is P.O. Box 183, Grafton, MA 01519. We will of course keep you updated of any new addresses as they become available.

From The Mail Box

We've received many interesting letters lately that we'd like to share with our readers. If you have a comment or question, please feel free to write to: The Editor, Asgard News, P.O. Box 10697, Rockville, MD 20850. Please keep letters under 250 words in length or they can't be printed in their entirety. All letters sent to Asgard Publishing are unconditionally consigned for publishing by Asgard News, and become for the purposes of copyrights the property of Asgard Publishing. All letters not answered in print will be answered directly by our staff.

Calendar Maker Question

My question concerns Calendar Maker 99, will it support larger print (I have a Panasonic 1080i)? Also, why is Picasso recommended if it supports TI-Artist Instances?
SR. PAT TAYLOR, B.V.M.
DUBUQUE, IA

It's always a pleasure to get a letter from you Sister Taylor! To answer your questions: Calendar Maker 99 currently prints a calendar the normal

way on a page. We have seriously considered producing one that prints sideways, but for better or worse this would necessitate an entirely new program that is incompatible with the old one. If there is enough interest in it, though, we will gladly take up the challenge. As for the use of Picasso pictures on a page instead of TI-Artist pictures, the answer is a bit technical. Epson-compatible printers have 480 dots across on a page, while TI-Artist pictures are only 256 dots across. So, to print a TI-Artist picture across the page you have to distort it some. The only program that supports a picture 480 dots wide is Picasso, which is available in freeware and will allow you to use TI-Artist pictures. We figured this would be the best solution. However, we weren't prepared for the widespread lack of knowledge about Picasso. Since there is so much confusion, we've been preparing a book on the program ("Using Picasso Publisher"), which thoroughly documents the program, and gives extensive information about using it to make certain things and with other programs. This $5.95 book will be available from Asgard shortly.

Wants to find a User Group

Enclosed is a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Will you please send me a list of user groups and mark the ones you think have the best newsletters? I subscribe to MICROpendium, Asgard News and the Chicago Users Group. There isn't a user group close to me. Everything has to be done by mail. I like to see reviews of new and old software, sometimes simple explanations in a program review helps me. My grandchildren and I do enjoy my TI computer.
MARY PRESLEY
NOWATA, OK

Since I'm sure that many of our readers are suffering a similar problem, we've decided to publish a lengthy list of user groups graciously provided by Jim Peterson of Tigercub Software. I'm not sure where Nowata, Oklahoma is, but we

have 2 user groups listed for Oklahoma - one in Oklahoma City and one in Midwest City. As for which user groups publish the best newsletters, we really can't tell because we only receive on the average a dozen or so newsletters a month. Many which we receive are excellent though. Finally, regarding reviews of software, we do have a stated policy of not formally reviewing software, however in the issues ahead you'll find a new section devoted to tutorials of popular programs.

Needs Software

I am not a programmer and am at the mercy of those who can and do program. I am a "user" of programs. I feel it it people like myself that really use the programs that others write. Sometimes a "general" database is just not right - it is too large and intimidating, takes too long to set up and is not user friendly. I also need a program that is designed for making greeting cards only. It needs to be able to use TI-Artist and CSGD art. The program needs to be written so that it uses all four quarters of the page. After it is written I hope someone will modify it for use with color printers such as Star's NX-1000 Rainbow.
LAUREL CRENSHAW
JUNCTION CITY, OR

It's nice to hear from a user! We are all users to some extent, but the opinions of one who doesn't program are valuable to a software company. I do agree that sometimes a general database is too much for some jobs. Of course you'd expect that from a company that publishes specialized databases. You may want to read our Beginner's Corner in this issue and the previous one for a discussion of databases. As for making greeting cards, there are two programs that fit the bill. One is Page Pro 99, which is a general page making program but can be readily used to make greeting cards. The second program is specifically designed for producing greeting cards - Jiffy Card by Comprodine (633 Hollyburne Ct., Thousand Oaks, CA

91360). *Jiffy Card also supports the NX-1000 Rainbow, and may be your best bet. As a friend of mine put it, though, "when I need a card I go to the drugstore" <grin>.*

Renewal Suggestion

Please find enclosed a check for $9.00 for 4 issues of your Asgard News magazine. I also have a suggestion. Every time a renewal is due, send a form attached to the magazine.
STEVE SMITH
ST. CHARLES, MO

Thanks for the suggestion Steve, and we'll consider it. Right now we are currently planning to send people postcards telling them their subscription is up when it is time for renewal.

Wants a freebie

It's hard to believe that we are another year older! And you say my subscription is due to renew! Ok, you win!! Enclosed you will find a check for $9.00 of my hard-earned money for another year of TI gossip... what can I say? I love it! Keep up the good work! It's nice to know us orphans still have a relative to help us along. By the way, your article entitled "The New 99/4A" was the best computer essay that I have come across. If you have anything FREE to give away, my address is enclosed.
TONY CONSOLA
PLAINFIELD, IL

<Blush> Thanks for the support Tony! We received many nice letters with similar comments from those who renewed, and we appreciate the interest in our work. We do expect everyone to tell us what they DON'T like as well. In fact, we do have something "free" to give away, to user groups at least. We'll send reprints of our "The New 99/4A" article from our last issue to any user group that sends us a self-addressed, stamped envelope. This is printed on 8 1/2 x 11 inch paper, and so a large envelope is necessary, and remember to send plenty of postage. This offer is good while supplies last.

Needs Running Start

I download programs from GEnie and am unable to get them to run. I don't know what to do to get them to run. I know a lot of them need a LOAD program but I don't know what type of program is it: BASIC, Extended BASIC, or Editor/Assembler. How do you tell? When you list the disk it only says PROGRAM, not what type of program.
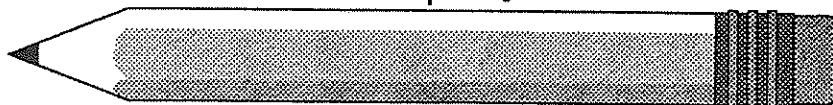RICHARD C. ARTHUR
TALLAHASSEE, FL

Your question is one that has plagued a lot of beginners since the 99/4A came out. Unfortunately, there is no one easy way to tell what type of program a PROGRAM is, short of reading the documentation that comes with a program. Many programs, particularly those on BBSs and the Telecommunications networks, come with instructions store d in a Dis/Var-80 file (or D/V-80 - same thing). Use TI-Writer or a derivative to read them prior to using the program. Assuming you don't have TI-Writer, or the program doesn't come with disk-based instructions, then the next way to figure out what type of program a PROGRAM is is tried and true trial and error. First, assume that all programs are Extended BASIC (most are). Try loading them by selecting Extended BASIC from the title screen, and typing RUN "DSK1.filename" (where "filename" is the name of the disk file). If you get an "I/O Error 50", then it must be an assembly PROGRAM and not Extended BASIC. If the program starts to run and then crashes for some reason or another, then it is TI-BASIC-only (TI BASIC has some features that Extended BASIC doesn't have). Every PROGRAM program will be one of those three things. If you download a program that has more then one file to it, look for the one named "LOAD" on the disk catalog - typically that is the start program, and virtually all files named "LOAD" are run through Extended BASIC. That's all there is to it.

Looking for Printer

I have a Texas Instruments 99/4A and am interested in purchasing a printer if available for this model.
RUTH FARMER
TAMPA, FL

Ms. Farmer - virtually any printer can be used with a TI-99/4A. For instance, the printer that the typesetting for this magazine was produced on is connected to both our TI-99/4A and Myarc Geneve 9640 with a standard parallel cable - and this is a state-of-the-art laser printer costing upwards of $5000 (100 times what the machine cost!). Assuming your price range is considerably lower, essentially you can attach any printer designed for a IBM PC or compatible to a TI-99/4A. The only thing that is requires is that you have what is known as an "RS232 card" on or in your TI-99/4A. If you don't, that is the first thing you'll need to purchase. We re commend that you purchase a printer that is Epson-compatible - since the vast majority of TI-99/4A software require s Epson compatibility. Other then that, you can select anyone you want. If you are looking for something less then $200, we recommend either the Epson LX-810 or the Star NX-1000. If your price range is in the $200-400 area, then you can purchase a low-end 24-pin printer (such as the Epson LQ-510) for about $350. Our own office has settled on Epson equipment because it is extremely reliable (TI itself sold Epson printers as the "TI Impact Printer"), and supplies are easy to come by (Epson printer ribbons are as cheap as $2). You DON'T want to buy an orphan printer or a name brand you've never heard of. Orphan printers often have their own ribbon type - and you'll end up paying our hundreds of dollars extra in the long-run on ribbons - more then enough to pay for an Epson itself. Non-name brands are often shoddily built. Pay a little extra and get reliability - because printers are the most often used peripheral on any computer. ♠

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