# TI -99ers In The '90s

*Classic Computer Column*
*by Barry Traver*

This month's column may be both untypical and controversial, but it addresses a subject that many TI user groups are finding it important and necessary to address, whether they want to or not. It's the matter of the connection (or disconnection) of the TI with the IBM (or PC clone) world.

Back in the June 1990 issue of Computer Monthly (that's right, over a year ago), my column dealt with "a number of TI/IBM connections, particularly those made possible by Mike Dodd's PC-Transfer and PC-Transfer Utilities." Mike's programs allow the transfer of various types of files, including text files, Microsoft Multiplan SYLK files, DIS/FIX 128 files (e.g., GIF and RLE pictures), and files with or without a Paul Charlton XMO-DEM TIFILES header between an IBM disk and a TI disk. The tone was upbeat and positive as I dealt with these and other TI/IBM connections (e.g., the porting over of many public domain IBM graphics to the TI world by Ron Wolcott in his TI Print Shop or "TIPS" project).

Although I still see the TI/IBM relationship as a positive one, many TIers today seem to be fearful of a TI/IBM "disconnection." That is, they see "Big Blue" as a possible threat to the continued existence of the TI and TI user groups. In some cases, that fear may perhaps be justified (e.g., some believe that the TI was overwhelmed by IBM when the Rochelle, New Jersey fair, earlier known as TI-COFF, was renamed Family Computer Exposition, attempting to attract a broader audience), but I continue to believe that the relationship can be mutually beneficial if handled properly.

True, allowing an IBM "takeover" of TI user groups will certainly not help TI-99/4A owners, but I also think that ignoring the fact that many (or, in some TI user groups, most) TIers have regular access to a PC at home or at work can be harmful as well to our continued survival. In my opinion, we ought to do more exploration of the ways in which the TI and the IBM can work together as friends, rather than being regarded as simply enemies.

### INCREASING USE OF THE PC AMONG TIERS?

There appears to be increasing evidence that more and more TIers do have regular access to a PC. As president of the Philadelphia Area TI Users Group, I did an informal survey of the members present at our last user group meeting. Three facts emerged: (1) most of those present had access to a PC at home or at work, (2) they had no intention of abandoning their TI (in fact, some volunteered comments about their relative dislike of the IBM), and (3) some seemed apologetic or embarrassed about their association with a PC.

I admit that the last "fact" may be a somewhat subjective impression on my part, but I do know a number of TIers who are consciously avoiding letting it be publicly known that they also own a PC. Since some of these are leaders in the TI community, it may be that they are afraid of being considered "disloyal," if the facts be known. Or it may be that they are afraid that such information may not

sorted. Several different reports are available that provide the kind of information needed to effectively manage an exchange program.

On-screen help is provided for virtually every screen, and a tutorial-like help section is provided without ever leaving the program."

In short, it's a rather comprehensive utility, as you can see! Equally full-featured and sophisticated is Bill's Membership Manager, which offers automated tracking and record keeping for your computer user group membership. Since I believe that TI user groups are crucial to the continued surviving and thriving of the TI community, I am very happy that Bill has made these programs available to make life much easier for the officers of such groups. If you are looking for a good way to keep track of membership or of newsletter exchanges for your user group, I encourage you to check out TI-Base and these excellent TI-Base applications by Bill Gaskill!

## Page Pro Products & Productivity

If TI-Base seems to be the most popular TI database management program at the present time, then Ed Johnson's Page Pro 99 seems to be the most popular TI desktop publishing program around. The popularity of both can be seen in the support each has received. Rather than attempt to squeeze all the information here about Asgard products related to Page Pro 99, I'm going to recommend that you send a postcard to Asgard Software (P.O. Box 10306, Rockville, MD 20849), requesting their 12-page 1991 Asgard Software Page Pro 99 catalog. (Even if you have Asgard's Fall 1990 general software catalog, you should order this one, because it contains at least seven products not listed earlier in the general fall catalog.)

Who needs Page Pro 99 or related programs? Anyone who is interested in making banners, posters, certificates, calendars, business or school forms, labels, classroom displays, tests, greeting cards, advertisements, newsletters, letterheads, stationery, booklets, flyers, tickets, letters, or anything else you can think of that involves putting text and/or graphics on a piece of paper!

So send a postcard to Asgard Software, or phone Asgard's owner, Chris Bobbitt, at 703/255-3085, or contact him on CompuServe (72561, 3241), Delphi (C_BOBBITT), or GEnie (C.BOBBITT). Chris, by the way, is the author of a useful new program, Page Pro Banner Maker 99. (Chris also assisted Ed in the writing of Page Pro 99.) Yes, I know, there are many other banner programs around, but Chris believes that "Page Pro Banner Maker is the best banner

program for the TI-99/4A and the Myarc Geneve 9640--period." In support of that statement, he presents some persuasive arguments.

Many banner programs (as you probably well know) tend to produce banners with text and pictures that are "blocky and crude," but this new program--supported by a rapidly growing library of Page Pro pictures and Page Pro Headline fonts--seeks to move beyond that. Page Pro Banner Maker is flexible, friendly and fast. But that's not all. There are yet more reasons why this program is more powerful than its forerunners. Let me let Chris present his own case....

Page Pro Banner Maker "allows you to enter up to 280 letters and 32 pictures in a single banner--where the pictures and the letters can be interspersed in virtually any way imaginable. You can also create and save banners, and then edit and reuse them later-- something lacking in other banner makers. ...[T]he Banner Editor gives you a clear on-screen representation of how your banner will turn out--eliminating guesswork.... [The program] has 80-column support; it works with a hard drive; it has an easy-to-use interface that allows you to select pictures and fonts direct from catalog listings, etc."

The cost for Page Pro Banner Maker (including 16-page manual, a program and an example disk with seven fonts and nine pictures, and a reference sheet for the artwork) is $12.95 plus $2.50 shipping and handling. If you make use of banners, I recommend that you try this program.

In addition to commercial programs published by Asgard, Page Pro 99 has received fairware support as well. Let me mention a few products and addresses. Ed Johnson (399 S. Lexington Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105) has released TIPS2PP (converts TIPS pictures to Page Pro 99 format) and Page Pro Font Editor (creates new Page Pro fonts). Paul Scheidemantle (2762 Lovington, Troy, MI 48083) has made available a Page Pro Picture Cataloger (creates catalog of Page Pro pictures). Bill Gaskill (address given earlier) has come out with a Page Pro Editor/Formatter (helpful, according to Chris Bobbitt, in generating text for newsletters). And Chris Bobbitt himself has released Medical Clipart, "an extensive collection... useful for physicians and students." (Incidentally, this information on fairware products itself comes from a helpful "Page Pro Productivity Chart produced by Chris.)

## More Asgard News

I haven't seen the actual program yet, but I understand that Joe Delekto's Screen Preview program is now available (including disk and 12-

page manual) from Asgard Software for $12.95 plus $2.50 shipping. From the description, it sounds a bit like Harry Wilhelm's Paper Saver program (in that it allows you to see on the screen in miniature what your formatted printout will look like), but Asgard's Screen Preview sounds more powerful (in that Asgard's program actually allows you to make changes in the text while running the program).

Screen Preview is a replacement for the TI-Writer formatter (it supports most but not all TI-Writer formatter commands) and runs from the TI-Writer Utility option (or any equivalent). Here's how Asgard describes the program: "This program... will format your text file, with embedded TI-writer formatter commands, to the screen in a miniature format. ...[Y]ou can view an entire page at a glance, checking margins, page breaks and other formatting. If you see an error, you can point to the line that needs correction and change the text on the fly. Finally, when the page is done to your satisfaction, press a key and it's printed on your printer, and you can move on to the next."

According to Asgard, Screen Preview not only works with standard floppy disks, but "is also compatible with hard drive systems and most RAM-disks." If (like many people) you use your computer mostly for word processing, you could find this product to be very helpful. I plan on giving it a try myself.

A while back, Asgard released two programs that I do not believe received the attention they deserved: Harry Wilhelm's EZ-Keys Plus and Charles Earl's Batch It! (I hope to deal with both in a future column to try to rectify that deficiency.) I am happy to observe that Asgard has just released Batch It! 2.0, which is an extensive upgrade to the original Batch It!. Batch It! does for EA5 programs in a sense what EZ-Keys does for XB programs: it allows you to create programs that run behind and interact with other programs.

That is a powerful ability, but to explain it would take more space than I have for this month. Let me be content to mention that Batch It! 2.0 is now available from Asgard for $17.95 plus S & H (or, if you have the earlier version, you can upgrade it by sending your original disk plus $5.00). Asgard has also announced that version 1.1 of YAPP ("Yet Another Paint Program," but this one is for those with 80-column cards) is available for $29.95 plus S & H. Or, if you already have YAPP, you can get the upgrade by sending your original disk plus $4.00; include an additional $3.00 for a disk of YAPP format pictures and TI-Artist fonts.

If you don't have an 80-column card yet, you'll be glad to hear that Asgard has decided to go ahead with its EGI ("Enhanced Graphics Inter-

face") project. Write or phone Asgard for further information.

Also, I should mention that version 1.01 of Jim Reiss' popular Pix Pro utility is now available ($14.95 plus S & H, or original disk plus $3.00 for upgrade; include additional $3.00 for two disks full of sample MacPaint pictures in archived format).

## Ticoff Report

On Saturday, March 9, I attended the "Family Computer Exposition and Ham Radio Festival" (a.k.a. TICOFF in earlier years) at Roselle Park High School, Roselle Park, New Jersey. As the name change indicates, the event is no longer restricted to TIers. But I still enjoyed myself, especially meeting old friends face-to-face and making new ones, which is to me often the best part of any gathering of TIers.

TI vendors personally represented included Asgard Software (represented by Bill Reiss, author of Tournament Solitaire and brother of Jim Reiss, author of Pix Pro and other fine Asgard programs), Colonial Software (15 Wyda Court, Colonia, NJ 07067-1918; phone: 908/815-1279; a source of fairware and public domain software for the TI-99/4A and MYARC 9640), and Rave 99 (John McDevitt, 112 Rambling Road, Vernon, CT 06066; phone 203/871-7824; maker of several models of a new peripheral expansion box for the TI-99/4A and/or MYARC 9640). Also, although I did not get to talk with him myself, Joe Ross (author of cSHELL 99, which looks like a great program) was also present.

There were lots of bargains around (can you believe an empty used PEB for $15?). Joe Ross (119 Knollwood Terrace, Clifton, NJ 07012) was selling his cSHELL 99 (a interesting program that I somehow hadn't really come across before, although it looks good enough that I may comment on it further in a future issue) for only $20 (usual price $30). You could purchase the latest copy of MICROpendium or Computer Monthly for only $1 each, or get a copy free if you wanted to sign up for a subscription.

Out of town TI "celebrities" present that I especially enjoyed talking with included Mike Wright (who came all the way from New Hampshire) and Harry Wilhelm (author of The Missing Link, EZ-Keys Plus, etc.). I also got to meet (for the first time, I believe) Ed Machonis, founder of the QB-99ers and author of many popular label printing programs (e.g., MAC-LABELS, which was recently printed in MICROpendium). Ed, by the way, was one of the speakers at the gathering. He was introduced to me by Andy Becker, author of the PEEKG routine in-

# Commodore Corps

*Classic Computer Column*
*by Gary A. Edwards*

## Feature: Computer Talk

The hot topic of conversation for Commodore users these days is how to transfer files between the Commodore 64 or 128 to an MS-DOS PC. Although all computers are fundamentally similar in how they work, different brands offer different advantages. A lot of users who buy an IBM compatible computer also hang on to their Commodore.

A Commodore 64/128 has many benefits. It has a superior sound chip, color, sprite capabilities and the ability to use an ordinary television set. Many computer users turn on their Commodores for relaxation and variety after a long day of staring at a monochrome screen filled with words or numbers.

Pioneer Commodore users have millions of bytes of text files stored on their 1541 formatted floppy disks. On the surface it seems simple to transfer old text files from a C 64/128 to an IBM compatible PC. This simple idea, in practice, turns out to be an illusion.

There is a plethora of programs in the IBM world that directly read disks from almost every computer except Commodore. I have tried many ways of transferring files to my IBM clone. None of the easy solutions work well or simply. If speed is not of the essence, it seems there should be some BASIC or other program that could transfer files. If you know of some way not mentioned in this column, please advise me for future publication.

I will describe my trials and errors and final success. My expectation is that you will avoid the pitfalls I have faced and save yourself some trouble.

First, a couple of words about file transfers between any two makes of computers. You will usually find it possible to transfer only ASCII text. ASCII is the common code chosen for alphanumeric characters. The ASCII standard gives each character and number a number. This means that an A typed on two brands of computers would have the same numeric code. This makes it possible to transfer TEXT files from one brand of computer to another.

You may be able to transfer a PROGRAM file between an IBM and a Commodore 64 disk, but the program will not work. It will only work on the computer intended by the programmer. Text files are the only files that you can transfer successfully. You will be able to use any decent terminal program to transfer text files to your IBM clone.

One day, my new IBM clone arrived at my house. I had several files that I had written on the Commodore 64 in SpeedScript, SuperScript and GEOwrite. I wanted to transfer them to the IBM clone.

I tried the most logical and simplest way (to me) first. I connected the wires from the modem on one computer to the other. It quickly became clear that you need software that is compatible with both machines. There is no terminal program I know of that will work directly between a Commodore 64/128 and an IBM clone. To transfer files you have to dial a phone number from one modem and have another modem answer the ring. If you hook up one modem directly to another, there is no phone number to dial.

Marte Brengle states, "The easiest way to transfer files is to send the files via modem from one computer to the other. On CompuServe there is a file called MO2MO.TXT in Library 2 of CBMCOM that will show you how to do that. Just make sure your CBM program can send direct from disk (don't use a protocol to transfer text files)."

For some reason, this system never worked for me. Perhaps I didn't make sure all the cables are the proper ones and fit snugly onto their connections. I tried to hook up the two modems directly via an RS232 cable. I tried two different RS232 cables and neither worked. I experimented with some advice and help from Kent Sullivan of DEL who provided a null modem cable. I even swizzled a couple of pins. This is done by connecting both ends of a paper clip to different pin connections on the end of the null modem terminal connector. This could easily fry your motherboard. Don't try this without expert advice. I still couldn't transfer files. Nothing worked, so far.

Now we are progressing from the ridiculous to the sublime. Eventually, we may arrive at the most practical solution for you.

The next obvious solution is to connect a line from the modem on the Commodore 64/128 to a phone line. Then connect a line from your phone system to your IBM clone. The shortcomings of this idea soon become obvious. With one method you need two phone lines in your house, with outlets for both next to your computers. This is cumbersome and, for most of us, too expensive. My teenagers don't even have their own phone lines.

To inject a little humor, another method involving the phone system requires two different houses. You would need to find a friend with a Commodore 64/128. This isn't too difficult. Then, you would need to run over to your friend's house and load a terminal program into his computer. Then, you would rush back to your house and load your IBM clone with a terminal program and set it for auto-answer.

After that, you run back to your friend's house and dial your own house's phone line. Then, you rush back to your home and have your IBM answer the phone and download the file(s).

Another more serious option is to give your friend the files you want to transfer with detailed instructions on what you want to do. Perhaps your friends are more reliable than mine. I find this system too cumbersome to be practical. I am only including it here to be halfway humorous.

A more practical and useful method is to transfer your text file(s)

to a Bulletin Board System (BBS.) This might be your local neighborhood BBS or a commercial BBS, such as CompuServe, Q-Link or whatever. Then, you connect to your BBS with your Commodore 64/128 and upload the file(s) you want transferred to your personal storage area.

After you upload your file(s) you disconnect your Commodore. Then, hook up your IBM clone to the phone line, load your terminal program and download the file(s) from your BBS's personal file storage space. This works simply and well.

Trick question... guess the downfalls of this idea. For us who are tight with our budgets, this method is expensive. You have to pay for charges for the connect time for a commercial BBS. You also pay for long distance charges if you don't have a local access number. Also, most neighborhood BBSs don't allow space for you to upload large files unless you are privileged to enter the inner sanctum at the highest level.

There is a program called the Big Blue Reader which reads IBM formatted disks. You then convert the file to the C64/128 format. Or you can read a C64/128 format file and convert it into the MS-DOS format. According to Betty Clay on CIS, "Big Blue reader runs on both the 64 and the 128." The essential element is that you need to use a 1571 disk drive. You have to format the IBM formatted disks on one side only. You do this by changing to your A: drive and formatting the floppy disk with the DOS command:

FORMAT A:/1

Converting from C64/128 to IBM is easy if you have an Amiga. You read the C64 files into your Amiga with the Disk-2-Disk software. Then send the files to an IBM disk using Dos-2-Dos software. The disadvantage is that you have to be able to afford a C64/128, an Amiga and an IBM clone... pretty heady stuff even for us dyed in the wool computer freaks.

My friend, Harold Riggles, provided the first workable solution for me. This solution requires a C128. We used a program from the February 1988 Compute! magazine. On page 82 there was an article entitled "The 128/MS DOS Connection" by Ernest R. Hunter. I first formatted some disks in the IBM format on one side as described above. Then, I converted my C64 text files to ASCII. I then hand carried my IBM formatted disks and my Commodore compatible disks with ASCII files on them to Harold's house. We used his C128 to

cluded in XXB/1-5 and the Genial TRAVelER.

TI Faires, large or small, are always an enjoyable experience. If all goes well, my own agenda for 1991 includes the Northeast TI-99/4A Home Computer Faire (or "Boston Fayuh") on April 6 and the Multi User Group Conference (or "Lima Faire") on May 18 (contact the Lima User Group, P.O. Box 647, Venedocia, OH 45894 or phone Dave Szippi evenings at 419/228-7109, if there's still time to make this one!). If you missed these, you can start now to plan for the Convention planned for Tacoma, Washington this fall, the weekend of September 21 (I

understand that further information can be obtained by contacting Barb Wiederhold at 206/546-1865 or 206/546-1205).

One evidence of the TI being alive and well is the various TI conventions scheduled for this country and elsewhere (such as the Ottawa Faire in April 1991 that I was unable to attend). If you can attend any of the ones I do, be sure to say hello. If you can't make them, I'll try to give you reports of what took place in future issues of Computer Monthly.

Keep reading, and keep writing (my address is 835 Green Valley Drive, Philadelphia, PA 19128; or phone 215/483-1379, as long as you don't phone collect!). Until next month then, keep on compuTIn'! ∎