Chicago TImes

Newsletter of the Chicago TI-99/4A Users Group

Editor's Notes

First and foremost I need to say a big thank you to to Mike Wright. Michael Becker had posted a short synopsis of his visit to TI-Treff. Since I knew that Mike Wright had also attended, I asked if he would elaborate on Michael Becker's article. What I received, in very short order, was a story in such rich detail that once finished reading it I felt that I had attended TI-Treff myself.

Of course this month's big story is the Chicago TI International World Faire. This is the 18th such gathering and is the longest running TI/Geneve-centric computer show in the world. Based on the amount of discussion on the TI-99/4A Online Users Group this could well turn out to be our most attended faire in several years. Part of this is, no doubt, based on the interest in the TI-99/4A and other early 80's computers as collector's items, but the community is also seeing a number of returning TI owners who are interested in rekindling the relationship with their first computer.

If you can't attend, but have access to a PC, or Mac, you can still visit the faire. Don O'Neil, of WHT, has provided server space for faire photos. Throughout the day I will be posting pictures of the faire to *http://www.homecomputercentral.com/chicago2000*

For those of you who thought that your September – October issue of the TImes might have been lost in the mail, I apologize. Nobody told me it would be easy, and the absence of the previous issue of the TImes is evidence of that. When I decided to resurrect the group's newsletter I did so with a pledge to myself that it was not going to be filled with reprints. Not that any of the previously published articles didn't have value, it's just that my belief is that when there isn't enough new material for a semi-regular newsletter, then there probably isn't the need for a semi-regular newsletter.

So it is that I have decided that the January-

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Evanston Public Library – Site of the
2000 Chicago TI International World Faire

Keeping Up With The TImes
By Hal Shanafield

Well, here it is, time for the 18th annual Chicago TI International World Faire. Our theme this year is "Keeping Up With The Times". That may sound like an oxymoron for a computer that hasn't been produced since 1983, but when you stop to think of it, it's true. The thing that has kept old text so valuable is that the basic architecture of our little beloved machine was so good and forward thinking in the beginning that we have been able to constantly upgrade over the years and still keep our computers viable.

For that, of course, we have to be grateful to all of our software and hardware designers and programmers who have continued to produce new equipment and programs. Without them the TI99/4A would be just another static display in some computer museum. Unlike some other machines for which there is no love, and therefore no support, our little machine continues to evolve and is able to use many of the latest bells and whistles of the computer world. We just do it with less fuss and less cost!

At this year's faire there will be a host of new products for the 99/4A as well as the growing list of compatible descendants. In particular developments from Europe will be highlighted at the show, which will take place at our usual venue, the Evanston

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Public Library, on November 11th, from 9:30 A.M. until 4:30 P.M.

As always there will be seminars by technical wizards, who will explain to the rest of us what wonders they have wrought. I look forward to this all year long because it is one of the few times where so many knowledgeable people will be gathered and where the exchange of information not only answers many of our questions, but also leads to the development of new hard- and software for the future. Many of the fine products we enjoy today had their genesis at earlier Faires. Because the list of speakers is still in flux at press time, we can't give you a totally accurate account of what will be discussed, but as always the seminars will be informative and interesting.

As in years past after the Faire there will be a banquet, at a nearby restaurant where we can unwind from the excitement of the day. At that time, the annual awards will also be presented. Following that, we will have an afterglow at a local cyber café, something, which proved to be popular, when we first did it last year. And for those who really can't get enough of TI'ing, there will be a get together on Sunday at a location and time to be announced at the banquet.

For those who wish to obtain more information you can reach me at (847) 864-8644, during civilized hours

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February issue will be my last issue as the "official" Editor of the TImes. That's not to say there won't be any more issues. There are several TI'ers who paid dues based on the promise of receiving a year's worth of newsletters. To fulfill our obligation, I am willing to publish a few more issues of the newsletter, but on a non-scheduled basis. One of those will be around next year's faire season. The others, as I collect enough items to justify a printing. I just no longer want to be in the position of asking people to spend their money based on the assumption that I'll be forthcoming every two months with a newsletter.

What about the continued existence of the "official newsletter of the Chicago TI-99/4A Users Group"? Well, at one time Tony Z expressed an interest in editing the group's newsletter, and I hope he is still open to the possibility. If so, then my work will just supplement his. If not, then once I've finished the few remaining issues, we'll just let the dog lie down and go back to sleep.

Interview: Paolo Bagnaresi
By Dan Eicher, Hoosier Users Group

Editors Note: Dan Eicher was kind enough to take time from his schedule to do this interview with Paolo Bagnaresi, author of BA Writer, BASIC Builder, BEAXS and a dozen other programs for the TI-99/4A. Paolo's most recent project for the TI community is TI99-PC. A PC program which reads TI formatted diskettes among other things.

DE: *How did you first get involved with the TI?*

PB: I think it was back in 1981-82. It was a Christmas present for the family, mainly for my son Giacomo and me.

DE: *What is your favorite TI memory?*

PB: The first time I finished BEAXS, emulation of Editor/Assembler module starting. The program started from Extended Basic and changed the memory environment to Editor/Assembler, thus freeing the user from the need of owning the expensive module. When I realized that the computer was working perfectly even after pulling out the XB module, I understood that I really did it. I felt like I had climbed a steep mountain and I was sitting on top of it, watching the world around.

DE: *What TI personality did you find the most interesting?*

PB: Well, I think Clint Pulley is a remarkable guy, very capable and yet very kind and easygoing.

DE: *What's you favorite TI hardware/software?*

The Geneve computer, by all means. If you want to talk about TI only, I'd say the E/A module and the TI Debug. I like programming, so there real fun for me is there, in the programming tools.

DE: *What is the hardest technical challenge you have over come on the TI?*

PB: The BagBug project (Debugger for Geneve). I think it was an extraordinarily good program for that period of time (1989-1990). I spent more than a year working on it (after work, of course). No assistance from Myarc, and there was very little documentation about the inner workings of Geneve. At the time, MDOS source code was not publicly available. Yet, my debugger was ready for release. Alas, I soon realized that nobody seemed interested in it.

That always happens: if you want a program to be

TI-TREFF 2000
By Mike Wright

The official title was: 15e TI-Treffen 2000 -- the 15th (annual) TI Fair (Europe). It was held in Gent (Ghent), Belgium on October 6-8 at Chalet Pic-Nic, Griendijk 17. This was actually a small restaurant, with a large room attached that was used for the fair. The arrangement is similar to the one held the previous year in Germany. It is incredibly convenient to have the restaurant in the same building. The owners will literally bring coffee or beer to the table where you are working. It makes for an extremely convivial atmosphere.

Northwest Airlines got me to Amsterdam on time. NW38 left Boston at 6:30P and arrived at Schiphol Airport at 7:05A. The flight took 6.5 hours. With almost zero formality, I cleared immigration and customs. The immigration saw my US passport, and just waved me through without a look.

Just outside the arrival hall I heard a welcoming voice. It was Berry Harmsen from the Dutch user group (TI-gebruikersgroep). We had arranged to meet and planned to travel to Gent together. Schiphol is a well-integrated airport. Take a sloping walkway one level down and you are at the train station. I had taken the precaution of buying my ticket in the US (from a web site). Berry picked his up from the ticket counter and we waited for the international train to Belgium, which runs every hour or so and arrives in Schiphol from Amsterdam Centraal Station at 41 minutes past the hour.

Right on time the train rolled in and we found a couple of seats in first class. The fare was $54 one way, and the trip was to be about 2.5 hours. The early morning Dutch scenery rolled by. We passed through Den Haag and made our way south to the Belgian border. In an unusual move, our train terminated, and we had to leave it and make our way forward to a replacement train on the same platform. I guess that was a little disorientating. On the new train, we met up with an Australian woman who was traveling to Paris, and that probably helped the distraction.

We detrained at Berchem, which is the first stop this side of Antwerp (Antwerpen Centraal). Antwerp is a "head station" (kopstasie), and all through trains bypass it. I said goodbye to the Australian, and Berry and I headed for the underpass to get to the right platform for Gent. Ahead of us were two young girls each carrying large suitcases. They were unable to carry them down the stairs, so they dragged them behind them -- each case hitting the stairs with a resounding thump. At the foot of the stairs, Berry and I looked at each other and he said: "Good thing they weren't carrying a laptop". I felt my blood run cold as I looked at my left shoulder. I had left my

laptop on the train! I dashed up the stairs only to see the tail end of the train disappearing through the station throat.

As you can imagine, it was a cross between the end of the world and dying a thousand deaths. I was in a state of virtual panic. Then I spotted a Belgian railway official and in a horrible mixture of Afrikaans, German, and English explained what had happened. It's no fun being the dumb foreigner!

The official took my desciption of the case and our location on the train. He was able to radio the next station and contact his opposite number. By some miraculous stroke of good fortune the laptop was found, and was sent back on the next opposing train. Berry and I were in the waiting room when he appeared carrying the errant beast. I could have kissed him -- and almost did. Even more impressive, he refused to take any money as a reward. He said he was just doing his job. That alone raised his actions to one of near sainthood in my book. I offered my profuse thanks and he just smiled and left us. We then made our way to the Gent platform.

The delay cost about an hour. Berry was wonderfully patient, and was a great comfort. I was convinced I would never see "Greta" (as in Garbo) again.

In Gent we took a taxi to the Europa Hotel. Most of the visitors to the Treff would be staying there, and would arrive at various times during the day. Berry made contact with Roger Muys, who was the local organizer for the Treff. A half-hour later he arrived at the hotel with his wife. The plan was to go Chalet Pic-Nic and finalize arrangements. Roger drove us there in his Citroen.

Chalet Pic-Nic overlooks the Watersportbahn. This is a man-made "canal" that is used for rowing, and Gent has had a rowing club since the 1800s. We were then treated to a coffee and a Belgian waffle, which is even more delicious than it sounds. I guessed my diet was down the tubes for the next couple of days. After talking to proprietor of Chalet Pic-Nic, Roger then took us into the center of the city for a tour.

It is believed that Gent was first settled in prehistoric times. The actual city was formed during Roman times at the confluence of the two rivers Scheldt and Leie. Some of the most impressive buildings date back to the 1600s. In particular there is a stunning view across a hump bridge in which three churches can be lined up for a memorable picture. Throw in a castle with moat, beautifully ornamented official buildings, and even cobblestone streets, and you have a Mecca for exploration and absorption of culture. There is just nothing like it in the US.

Our tour included the finalization of the Treff dinner arrangements at a local restaurant, which

specialized in moullen (mussels). From there it was back to the hotel, where some of the German contingent had arrived.

Perhaps many of you are wondering whether this is a travelogue or about the TI Fair. I think the point is that it can be a combination of both. You can see wonderfully different and exotic places, as well as wonderfully different and exotic TI systems.

That evening we ventured into the city on foot and found a restaurant for dinner. One huge difference in European restaurants is that if a large group has a meal, the waiter/waitress is quite prepared to round to each individual, ask them what they had, and let them pay accordingly. It doesn't take much extra effort, and is eminently fair in that you pay for what you had.

By this time I was dragging and jet lag was kicking in. We made our way back to the hotel and I called it a night.

We met up for breakfast. Although it was Continental style, there was plenty to eat, and it was included in the room rate. Roger again drove us to Chalet Pic-Nic and we set up for the day. There is a large difference between the European users and US users when it comes to equipment. This does not include the obvious differences like the TVs or monitors, which are PAL compliant. Most users have a SCSI card, and Iomega Zip drives are plentiful.

I demonstrated PC99 to some potential buyers, and showed a current customer how to transfer disks from the 4A to the PC using the PC99 r/w sector utilities. I had enough foresight to bring an AT modem cable with me, and Wolfgang Bertsch was kind enough to loan us his system for the transfer. The day passed quite quickly. I was slightly disappointed in that there didn't seem to be anything for sale. But that would change the next day.

That evening we made our way to the city center and had a first-class meal at the chosen restaurant. Belgian mussels, followed by an ice cream and chocolate sauce, and then coffee. For non-seafood lovers there were alternate choices.

The evening was completed by the handing out of the Eddi Mauk awards. He was a former Dutch TI'er. The awards included: Michael Becker of Germany for hardware contribution, Stephen Shaw of England as a long-time TI contributor, and PaoloBagnaresi of Italy. We made it back to the hotel and I again was overtaken by jet lag.

The following day (Sat.) at the Treff was more traditional. I bought the last of the current batch of the BwG disk controller from Michael Becker. Luckily I still had some Deutschmarks left over from the previous trip. Then I spotted the table of Wim Stulen, a Dutchman who lives in Vriezenveen. He

had all the "junk" I just can't resist. For example, we all need a PAL modulator, or an external 200V power supply for a 99/4. This last item has an interesting history according to Michael Becker. The unit is "console-shaped" in that it is high at the back, and slopes down to the front. The first iteration contained a full power supply with only a switch in the console. The last version contained a blank board in the power supply case, with all the power supply electronics in the console itself. This part doesn't have any number embedded on it. It was the first time I had seen one. To prevent connecting a "full" power suppy to a "full" console, later 99/4s had a pin removed so that such a situation would have no effect.

I was also able to pick up four "new" books -- in other words books that I had not seen. One was in German, the other three in Dutch. There was also a partial set of "99/4A" a publication put out by Parco Electrics in England. Other treasures included some game documentation, the Dutch equivalent of the TI Extended Basic manual, and two versions of the "Read This First" documentation in French and Dutch. But the best of all was a TI Basic Reference Card in Dutch. The afternoon concluded with an auction.

Although entrance to the Treff was free, attendees were asked to contribute 100 Belgian francs (about $2.00) in exchange for the official Treff disk, and a copy of the Dutch user group magazine TIjdingen. In addition, Fred Kaal was handing out free copies of DM-2000 version 1.8. Pretty good value for money!

I also had the chance to meet Eric LaFortune, whose program Rock Runner was distributed by Asgard. He lived in the US for a while, but is now working as a programmer in Belgium. He attributes his competency to his early exposure to the TI.

Oliver Arnold of Germany and I had a long talk about the possibility of creating a utility that would allow the transfer of a PC99 disk between the PC and the TI _without_ the use of the PC99 r/w sector utilities. CaDD has for some time offered a set of "library" routines that can be linked into a C program that offer the ability to read and write a PC99 disk sector, and identify a PC99 "disk". The suggested method was to use the TI parallel port for improved transfer speeds. Oliver and I will be exchanging routines as we try to develop this.

That night Berry and I stayed at the Treff and I met Roger Muys' sons -- one of whom had written the stock program that Roger uses. Berry and I returned to the hotel and then made our way to the city center. We found a "gastronomisch restaurant" and fortunately did not need a reservation. The meal ranks as one of the 10 best I have ever had. We, of course, had the "appropriate" wines, and finished

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with a liqueur. My seat was next to a window, which overlooked the bridge and three churches. Not a bad way to wind up the trip!

The following day (Sun.) I made my way back to Amsterdam. I did a quick tour of the city on foot and got to see the royal palace. That evening I kind of flaked out, as all the traveling caught up on me. On Monday morning I took the train to Schiphol and then sat through the 8-hour return trip (strong headwinds) back to the US.

I would like to thank all the people who made the Treff possible. Especially included are Berry Harmsen, who shepherded me when I needed it, Roger Muys, for having the foresight to live in the beautiful city of Gent, Michael Becker who fixed my 99/8 so that it now has the p-System functioning, and all the other attendees who put up with my atrocious mixture of Afrikaans, German and English -- and invariably spoke English to me. I had a great time and thoroughly enjoyed myself and hope I can manage to get to Wuppertal next year! If I have left out anyone I do apologize. Please blame it on the jet lag, and the fact that I am rushing to get this done, as I have to be up at 3:00A tomorrow morning to make a flight to Tacoma, WA.

Editors Note: I should be so lucky to write like this, even when I'm not jet lagged <grin>.

TI-Chips Accepting Nominations for Peterson Award

Jim Peterson Achievement Award Nominations (Class of 2001) are now open.
Award categories are:
- *TI-99/4A Community Service*
- *TI-99/4A Hardware*
- *TI-99/4A Software*
- *Myarc, Geneve 9640*

Rules for making nominations:
1. Nominees may be from the TI-99/4A and Geneve 9640 past or present.
2. Please submit nominee's achievement along with their name. Make sure the spelling of the nominee's name is correct and the achievement is credited to the right person.
3. Since the awards will be in the form of mailed certificates, we would appreciate inclusion of nominee's land mail and/or e-mail addresses with the nomination. (If possible.)

Submit nominations to:
Glenn Bernasek, Secretary - TI-Chips
13246 Harper Road
Strongsville, Ohio 44136-3942 USA

Or E-mail to: GBBasics@aol.com
Special Notes:
A. Nominations for the Jim Peterson Achievement Awards will be closed midnight (USA Eastern Standard Time), November 30, 2000.
B. There will be a one month editing period during December, 2000 in which corrections and/or deletions to the posted list of nominees may be requested.
C. Voting will commence January 1, 2001 and conclude midnight (USA, Eastern Daylight time) April 30, 2001.

Paolo Bagnaresi
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successful, write it for the people, not for yourself. If you write it for yourself, chances are that only people like you are going to use it: after all, how many people really like programming in assembler?

DE: *If you had unlimited time and money, what program would you like to write for the TI or hardware would you like to build?*

PB: Ok, a decompiler for C, C++, Visual C programs. Unlimited time and money? Huh, I would create a firm, say 200 hundred people, that would keep track of any C compiler that comes on the market, and write a corresponding decompiler. Not limited to the TI world, mind you. A C decompiler for PC, Mac... any computer. Maybe a commercial failure, but what the heck: you said money was unlimited, didn't you? The reason is, it's fun to disassemble what other programmers do, but you can't do that with C programs. Ok, you can, but what comes out is almost useless: a bunch of endless recursive calls. It's mind boggling. A true C decompiler would be a great gift for many programmers, I'm sure.

DE: *What is the largest TI gathering you ever attended in Italy?*

PB: Ah, this is a tough one: my memory is not very good, I'm afraid. I guess it was the TI Italian UG annual meeting, held in Milan, back at the end of the 80's. But we were roughly 30 people, to be honest. So, not really a very large gathering.

User to User Tip

I have repaired many TI joysticks using a bottle of nickel print. Brush it on like fingernail polish.

Although some prefer silver to nickel, nickel doesn't have the long-term tarnish problem that silver does.

Check your local electronics store (Radio Snack doesn't carry it) for GC Electronics part # 22-207, 2 fl. oz. bottle with brush in cap. – *Dave Fletcher*