

TI-99ers in the '90s

Classic Computer Column
by Barry A. Traver

Lima Fair: Good to Excellent!

As readers of this column know, one indication of the continued interest in the TI-99/4A is the fair phenomenon; i.e. the scheduling of TI fairs, fests, conferences, expositions, meets, what-have-you.

Two important fairs took place this past May. I didn't get to attend the Annual Meet of TI99/4A Users Group UK in Chester, England on May 26. However, I did have the good fortune to attend the TI Multi User Group Conference that occurred on the same date at Ohio State University Lima Campus, Lima, Ohio. It was the first fair I've attended since Tucson in February, since circumstances forced me to cancel my plans to attend TICOFF in New Jersey in March, the Ottawa TIFEST in April and the Boston Computer Society Home Computer Fayuh earlier in May.

Now, Lima isn't a big city like some others that host TI fairs (e.g. Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, San Francisco, etc.), but this fair has steadily gained an excellent reputation as one especially worth attending. Dr. Charles Good, a professor at Ohio State, is one of the people to whom credit is due (hence my title "Lima Fair: Good to Excellent"), but others of the Lima Users Group (e.g. Dave Szippi) contributed their share to the fair's success as well. Something like this is a team effort, and thanks should also go to Ohio State Lima for providing the fine facilities.

Although the Lima Fair was officially sponsored by a student organization, attendance was anything but limited to students! Considering the distance traveled by attendees, the event was more a national or international event than a regional one. For example, one of the many TI user groups who had a table at the affair was the Kawartha 99ers User Group from Peterborough, Ontario, Canada. Speakers, vendors and attendees came from many different cities and states. I came from Philadelphia, myself, as one of the invited speakers.

Speaking of speakers, one of the highlights of the Lima Fair was the large number of presentations scheduled. Speakers included Chris Bobbitt, Asgard Software; Gary Bowser, OPA or Oasis Pensive Abacutors; Charles Good; Bruce Harrison, Harrison Software; Jim Horn, Disk Only Software; Irwin Hott, Harold Hoyt, Bill Hudson, Beery Miller, 9640 News; Bud Mills,

Bud Mills Services; Jim Peterson, Tigercub Software; Karl Romstedt, Paul Scheidemantle, Gary Taylor; and myself, Genial Computerware, as well as columnist for Vulcan's Computer Monthly. All in all, there were 17 different presentations, most of them lasting approximately an hour.

If you were not present, at this point you may be tempted to be a bit envious or disappointed that you missed all this. Well, don't be! First, I will do my best to inform you about what took place at Lima. Second, there will be future TI fairs, and perhaps an account of Lima will motivate you to attend the next one near you. Third, user groups--no individuals, please!--can order the Lima presentations on videotape from Charles Good at cost by sending him either \$15 for the three videotapes (at least 16 hours of viewing) or by sending three new blank tapes plus \$3 for shipping. Send your orders to: Dr. Charles Good, Box 647, Venedocia, OH 45894. If you aren't a member of a TI user group, join one. Or if there isn't one to join near you, start one!

Presentations

Charles Good and Jim Peterson demonstrated Airtaxi and other educational software by Don Shorock. Most of Don's educational programs have been fairware. He is especially known for his foreign language drill disks, using native alphabets, to which additional files of words can be added. Languages already available include Czech, Danish, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Japanese, Latin, Norwegian, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Swedish and Vietnamese. Don is adding other languages as there is interest.

Don has done other types of programs as well, including geography, history and mathematics. Airtaxi is not fairware, but a customized commercial program that teaches U.S. geography in addition to being a game that is fun to play. The cost is \$15 for disk version or \$20 for cassette. For additional information or a software catalog, write Don Shorock, P.O. Box 501, Great Bend, KS 67530.

Charles Good also gave a preview of Funnelweb version 4.3 with enhanced Disk Review. Funnelweb is a fairware Extended BASIC environment created by Tony and Will McGovern, and it keeps getting better and better. Version 4.3 was premiered at Lima--Charles Good received it from Australia just a few days before the show!--and was available for purchase at \$1.00 for two disks (the low price to encourage customers to be conscientious about mailing in their fairware donation to

the McGoverns). As I understand it, most of the improvements in Disk Review are related to the 80-column version, but you may expect to see some of these same features in later releases of the 40-column version as well.

Gary Bowser demonstrated the latest hardware and software from Oasis Pensive Abacutors (OPA). Gary is doing a lot of worthwhile things, but I can only mention a couple of products here. For software, his Diskodex is an excellent way to get your disk collection cataloged and organized. For hardware, his Rambo (Random Access Memory Bank Operator) is a complex chip and PCB which plugs into a Horizon RAMdisk and allows it to have two completely different memory paging and access modes. I expect to have more information for you on Rambo or other OPA projects in a future column. In the meantime, you can write to OPA Oasis Pensive Abacutors, 432 Jarvis Street Suite 502, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4Y 2H3.

Speaking of hardware, Gary Taylor gave a very interesting demo of TI's CC-40, TI's hexbus peripherals and a Mechatronic hexbus drive. For those of us who occasionally think of what might have been, a nostalgic look at the Texas Instruments Compact Computer 40 and some of TI's other products that never got to mass distribution was fascinating.

Jim Horn offered some fine thoughts on how to give away computers. He has already helped a number of people get TI-99/4A computers "out of the closet and into the classroom." In my opinion, I think this is an exciting project. Although the TI-99/4A has certainly shown itself to be a serious computer for adult use, it's still also a great computer for children. And with color graphics, sprites, multi-voice music, speech, easy-to-use cartridge software, it really shows off its talents in a school setting.

Chris Bobbitt showed not only the latest software from Asgard, but also the Asgard Mouse and other hardware. Asgard's Spell It! spell checker is a real improvement over anything available previously. It works great with TI-Writer, Funnelweb or MyWord; price varies according to your disk system setup. The Asgard Mouse (at \$49.95 plus shipping and handling) is nice in that it comes with software for interfacing with your Extended BASIC or assembly programs, or using it with TI-Artist.

Paul Scheidemantle spoke on Asgard's Page Pro and the graphics utilities for the program. Page Pro has become a favorite desktop page-making program for the TI-99/4A. For more information on any of these

products, contact Asgard, P.O. Box 10697, Rockville, MD 20849; phone: 703/255-3085.

And More Presentations

Bruce Harrison gave away some secrets of assembly language programming for the TI-99/4A. I dealt with some of Harrison Software's musical offerings in my May column, but there is some new news. First, disks earlier being sold at \$4.50 have increased in price to \$5.00--still too low, in my opinion!. Second, there are some new titles available.

One title I really like is "Remembrance: The American Revolution," which includes one anthem and 23 military marches, mostly from the period of the American Revolution or earlier. The music is "played" on fife and drum or other appropriate 18th-century instruments (cost: \$5.00). Another great new disk is "Mozart Serenade," which includes "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" (K. 525), two piano sonatas (K. 311 and K. 331, the latter containing "Rondo alla Turca") and 12 variations on "Ah! vous dirai-je, maman" ("Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," K. 265, Cost: \$6.00). Order from Harrison Software, 5705 40th Place, Hyattsville, MD 20781. If ordering the "Mozart Serenade," specify whether you want it in DSSD or on a SSSD floppy.

Beery Miller spoke on 9640 News, a disk newsletter for Geneve owners. Since I already mentioned the diskazine here in a previous column (May 1990), let me mention that Beery has other items available specifically for the Myarc 9640: two games--Barricade in ABASIC (\$15) and MDOS Tetris (\$15); and Windows 9640, which provides multi-tasking support for up to eight programs simultaneously in their own windows (\$15 for 9640 News subscribers; \$25 for others). Write Beery Miller, 9640 News, 5455 Marina Cove #1, Memphis, TN 38115.

Bud Mills spoke on the latest hardware from his company. Products available from Bud Mills Services (166 Dartmouth Drive, Toledo, OH 43614; phone: 419/385-5946) include Horizon RAMdisks and various memory cards, including the Phoenix and the Memex for the TI-99/4A and Myarc 9640. Also, his P-Gram is a gram cartridge emulator that fits right in the Peripheral Expansion Box. Some of his products are available in kit form.

A number of people spoke on matters related to programs or programming in Extended BASIC. Karl Romstedt came with some origin label making utilities in XB. Har

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Hoyt spoke on useful applications for Super BASIC; for those who have that particular extension of TI Extended BASIC. Irwin Hott spoke on using Alsave and Systex, two methods for embedding assembly language routines within Extended BASIC programs. Bill Hudson showed a fast assembly language pre-processor for use with XB programs.

I spoke on how XB programmers can easily use assembly in their XB programs. These five presentations provided evidence that Extended BASIC is still very much alive as a programming language, although it may often be enhanced with assembly language.

I suppose for the sake of completeness I should mention that I also gave a preview of the latest issue of Genial TRAVeLer, newsletter-on-a-disk. The Genial TRAVeLer is a diskazine of articles and programs for the TI-99/4A. It is available at \$36 for one volume, \$65 for two volumes or \$90 for three volumes. Each volume includes six issues of floppy disks and often a few free bonus disks. If you want to know more about this proj-

ect, write to Barry Traver, Editor, Genial TRAVeLer, 835 Green Valley Drive, Philadelphia, PA 19128; phone: 215/483-1379.

As I said, these presentations are available on videotape for user groups. Although a video camera was used at the Lima Fair, I'd like to mention here that if you have a VCR and a way to record the voice of the person speaking, you do not have to have a video camera to record presentations at user group meetings. Just feed the video output from the computer into the VCR.

The Lima Users Group records their meetings on a regular basis for the sake of those who may not be able to attend, and other user groups can easily do the same. If you record your meetings, let's start sharing those tapes since that's an excellent way for us to learn from one another!

Getting back to Lima, a lot more was happening in addition to the speaker presentations. There were several rooms filled with hardware/software vendors (e.g. Disk Only Software, L.L. Conner Enterprises and Ramcharged Computers) and representatives of various user groups. Even when some companies could not make a personal appearance themselves, their products were usually still in evidence. I can't men-

tion everyone who was there and everything that took place, but let me close this column with a mention of just a few additional items that may be of interest.

Releases

It looks like Myarc may have some future competition regarding their Hard and Floppy Disk Controller. Chris Pratt of ESD (Electronic Systems Development Corporation) announced plans to release their own HFDC, which, according to ESD, will have a "new revolutionary design using surface mount parts." Reportedly, its unique design eliminates heat problems on the card. Moreover, the card features an EEPROM which allows future DSR upgrades to be loaded by disk, and set-up information stored in the EEPROM eliminates dip switches on the board.

Modestly, ESD claims that the card is designed by an electronics and computer corporation which supports its users. Since the software and hardware was apparently not completed in time for the show, we'll have to wait and see if and when the product actually is available.

Typical of his generous spirit, Jim Peterson released many Tigercub Software programs (with exception

of the Nuts & Bolts disks) for FREE DISTRIBUTION, providing that no price or copying fee is charged. If you want more information, send \$1.00 to Jim Peterson, Tigercub Software, 156 Collingwood Avenue, Columbus, OH 43213, requesting his latest TI-PD catalog, including supplement #8.

William A. Shores (5737 Glendale Drive, Pockport, NY 14094) introduced an Extended BASIC Module Expander, which gives you XB and five other cartridge selections all in one. The hardware kit is available for \$25 plus \$3 shipping. There is an important limitation, however: only modules with 16-pin proms can be used with this expander. Before deciding on purchase, you should also check out the module expander available from Gary Bowser, Oasis Pensive Abacutors (address given earlier).

Well, there's much more that could be said about the Lima Fair, but this report should give you some idea of what it was like. Not all fairs may be as professionally done, but they are fun to attend--at least that's been my experience. So if you have an opportunity to go to one, go for it!

In the meantime, keep on computin'.

ADAM News

Classic Computer Column by Faye Deere

Next month in Vulcan's Computer Monthly if all goes according to plan, you will be reading about ADAMCON 02, the second annual ADAM convention.

It is being held this year in Toronto, August 15th through the 18th, and organized and hosted by the Metro Toronto ADAM Group (MTAG) and the Loyal ADAM Users of the Golden Horseshoe (LAUGH).

When I attended ADAMCON 01, held in Orlando in October of last year, I had a wonderful, informative time. I learned a lot, saw a lot of things that were being developed for the ADAM, and a lot that had already BEEN developed for the ADAM.

I don't think Coleco had any idea of the real potential of the ADAM, or they would never have cut it loose and made it an orphan! This year, I expect to see much more, and I will let you know all about it approximately three months later. That's how long it takes an article written today to get to you. That means that you should be reading about ADAMCON 02 in the November issue.

Look for it! I had such a good time last year, that I talked my hus-

band into joining me at this one. We should have some great things to tell you! I have been reading a lot lately about the art work you can do with your ADAM. Now, I want you to know right from the beginning, that I am NOT an artist.

When they were handing out talent, I thought they said something else, and decided to pass. I cannot draw a straight line, so to speak. The best I can do is cross stitch embroidery, which means that someone else provided the ready made pattern; and, in most cases, even the color chart. Armed with an ADAM computer, however, I have been able to accomplish some awesome things!

Before I tell you about the things I have done "all by myself", let me tell you that there are an abundance of public domain artistically oriented programs out there. They consist of drawing programs, already drawn or digitized pictures, and viewers for those pictures. This means that you don't HAVE to be an artist to enjoy the benefits of art work.

Right off the top of my head, I can't tell you if there are public domain programs that allow you to print this pre-drawn art work, but you might look into Simple PAINTER 1.1, the forerunner to PowerPAINT that Solomon Swift of

Phoenix 2000 (formerly Digital Express, and The Softworks Factory), donated to public domain. If I remember correctly, the copy I added to our club's public domain Library did allow you to print out to a dot matrix printer.

I used my ADAM printer for a long time, but I finally opted for a dot matrix printer when I got tired of waking everyone up when I used it late at night. It seems that I do my best work when everyone else is fast asleep.

Also, I found that the graphics that you can do on the ADAM printer is very limited. I soon found that you can do lots of varied things armed with a dotmatrix printer. Most of the graphics programs being developed today are designed to be used with a dot matrix printer.

There are three main reasons for this. The dot matrix printers are faster, quieter, and allow for incredible flexibility. In fact, all of the art work you will see in this article was accomplished on a dot matrix printer. There are, however, two programs by Strategic Software that were written primarily for ADAM printers, although they CAN be modified to be used with a dot matrix printer. These programs are SignSHOP, a program for printing signs, banners, and greeting cards,

and NewsMAKER, a program that allows you to mix text and art together, in a column structure suitable for putting together a newsletter.

Shortly after I bought a SHOWOFF II program, written by Solomon Swift, I discovered that I could do some very impressive art work with it. First of all, SHOWOFF II is NOT a graphics program. It is a word processing enhancement program written to help you run your dot matrix printer efficiently. However, last winter I had the flu, and didn't feel like doing much of anything.

My brain refused to function properly, so I started playing with SHOWOFF II. I tried several different things, and shortly came up with a working artistic conception. What I did was get a needlepoint pattern and follow it using different letters to signify different colors and textures. Since SHOWOFF II allows you to manipulate the spaces between letters and rows of letters, what I ended up with is the following picture of a "partridge in a pear tree". For someone with no artistic talent, I think it came out fairly well. (Figure A.) Sometime later, I purchased Solomon's awesome PowerPAINT program. Here, again, you need equipment in addition to your original ADAM computer purchase. You need at least a 64K memory exp.