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HUG

HOUSTON USERS GROUP

FIRST SUNDAY OF EVERY MONTH
2PM

NEXT MEETING: SUNDAY, AUG. 7th

HUG 1983 OFFICERS

- President -WAYNE WRIGHT
- Vice-President -JANE MCASHAN
- Treasurer -JANE ROWLAND
- Librarian -RALPH ARNOLD
- Newsletter -

-PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

One thing that still bothers me after using a TI-99/4A for quite some time is the attitude that some people have that this computer is just a toy and is of use for beginners only. If you have been in many computer stores, you know the feeling. Sales personnel in many of these stores tend to look down their noses at you if you tell them you are using a 99/4A. The primary thing this does, as far as I'm concerned, is to show either the ignorance of these sales people or to emphasize the fact that they are naturally going to promote the particular brands of computers that their employers sell.

Whenever I find myself in a situation such as this, I feel very defensive and wish that I had made preparations in advance to make these pseudo-know-it-all's aware of the power and potential of the TI-99/4A. Now that I have gotten all this off my chest, let me recommend an article that will help all of us to be better prepared to talk in specifics about the comparative features and power of our computers. This particular article was published in the May, 1983 issue of "Enthusiast 99" magazine, the official publication of the International 99/4 Users Group. The title of the article is "Benchmarks: Proving Your Computer Is The Best", by Bill Gronos. It has some accurate and very interesting facts about which you might be interested. I might mention, also, that this publication is meant for, and available to, members of the International 99/4 Users Group.

Just one more thing before I finish these comments: Although the Apple II probably has the largest user base at this time, only recently by introducing the Apple IIe has it been "upgraded" to include several of the features that are standard on the 99/4A, including upper and lower case letters and automatic character repeat by holding down a key. You know, we may just have more than a toy "beginners" computer after all.

I hope to see you at our next meeting on August 7 in Room 90 of St. John's School, at the corner of Westheimer and Buffalo Speedway.

Wayne Wright

The above areas of interest are only ideas that could be expanded on or revised. To put this into operation and to make it a success, members of the group are asked to volunteer to be responsible for a single column. Not to write the column on their own but to insure that each month there is an input for that column. Each of us come to these meetings to learn and also to be stimulated. Stand up and GET INVOLVED. This group is here to serve each of us and to make it work extra participation is required. Since each column is targeted to be about a half of a sheet, a short input like that should be easy to produce only once a month. We will be asking for Volunteers at the next meetings so be prepared to speak up. If the above suggested columns are not adequate or if enough interest is not generated then the format will be changed.

MINUTES

In this relatively new assignment of being voluntary secretary for our club, I hope that those of you that steadily come to our meetings can participate more actively in helping us all by sending your ideas & comments to our new editor Mr. Sandor A. Karpthy (ph. 463-7043).

Our July 10th meeting started out with the introduction of some new members & their interest in the home computer applications. Our president briefly explained some of the goals & interest of our club to the newcomers. ADVISE: per Jane McAshan some of the new upcoming 3rd party cartridges may not operate properly in the old consoles so, if you own one of these & decide to take it to an exchange center, TI will up-grade your unit by placing a new GROM chip. Also per J.McA Atari is writing some of their famous games to be compatible with our consoles.

You can have a new powerful programmer's reference if you buy the Guide to the TI-99/4A by C. Resena. (\$14.95). NEWS: From the Consumer Electronics Show; a new TI-99/8A 2.2 version will be available probably by the end of 83 or maybe next year???

If you are interested in what software is now available for our powerful machines, see the TI-99/4A Software Directory.

Hardware News: A miniature disk drive unit will be available. This unit uses 3 & 4 inch diskettes that are self-protected & perhaps easier to handle than the floppy disk system. Also it was mentioned in this meeting that using a multiport cartridge switch may create problems & irritation to the user unless you're sure how the switch operates. Tom Dasebrock will clarify this issue in our next meeting (I hope).

Miscellaneous News: ** MOTION ** to have a representative of TI-HUG at Computer Age during Saturday August to explain the purpose of this club to the public. By the end of July Jack Dillard of Mimosa Computer Systems will come to the Shamrock Hilton Hotel to show his fully loaded 99 system (software & hardware). He will need help for his exhibition. For further information please contact Ms. Jane McAshan on 270-1257.

END OF MEETING.

HUG NEWS & UPCOMING EVENTS

-The "COMPUTER AGE" store, located in the Sharpstown shopping center is planning to have a USERS GROUP DAY on Saturday, August 13. Their intent is to introduce the new computer purchaser to USERS GROUPS. Very few newcomers are aware of such groups, let alone know where to get in touch with them. The store plans to have a representative from each of the users groups whose computers they sell. They request that volunteers man a table on that day and talk about what HUG does and where one may join. Jane McAshan will have additional information at the next meetings. Remember, this will be a great way to get new members so Volunteer!

BEGINNER'S (...)

-Does this sound familiar? How many times have you hit the QUIT key by mistake and erased a zillion lines of a carefully prepared program? I found that by carefully taping a small flap of black vinyl over the key, that I catch myself in time and do not make the mistake anymore.

-Did you know this??? I have had my TI 99/4A for almost six months and have quite a problem trying to keep up with the extra keyboard indexes (DEL, INS etc.). Tonight I discovered that the small slot behind and above the frame for the indexes is apparently just for that purpose. I feel real foolish.

Thanks UCIA(GREER), believe me you are not the only one who makes mistakes like these. The fix for the QUIT key works fine.

NEW FORMAT FOR THE "HUG" NEWSLETTER

In recent issues of the HUG NEWSLETTER it has been emphasized that more participation is required from the members. Everyone appreciates the fact that we all have many things to do and never enough time to accomplish all that we would like to do. However we would all like to see a newsletter that is informative as well as professional. Since any one person cannot write, edit and coordinate the newsletter by themselves, why not split it up into smaller sections, each of which can be easily handled by one individual. Each section or column would have an anticipated length of a half of a page. Each column would refer to a specific topic or topic area. At the end of the month on a specified date all the columns or sections would be assembled into a final form. In this way no one person would be responsible for all of the newsletter and a number of people could get involved in a smaller and less time consuming way. The total format of the newsletter would take on a more professional appearance and at the same time cater to the interests of the individual group member.

Some of the areas of interest or columns could be:

- THE PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS-This would cover the views of the president in the name of the total group.
- MEETING MINUTES-for the last meetings. This would be a good way to record the history of the "doings on" of the group.
- HUG NEWS & UPCOMING EVENTS-This column would alert the group of upcoming events or areas of participation for interested members.
- BEGINNER'S CORNER-Since we constantly have new members who are new to the TI99/4A, this column would be a good place to learn how to program in TI-BASIC, receive programming pointers and get ideas as to why they bought the computer for in the first place.
- ADVANCED CORNER-This column would cover programming techniques for the more avid programmer. Areas in EXTENDED BASIC, LOGO, FORTH, MACHINE LANGUAGE OR any area where a more serious approach is taken to programming.
- PROGRAMMING-This is a column where listings of programs or games may be published. Members could easily copy these for themselves. Programs may be reproduced from the HUG library or those submitted by members or even some that were received from different users groups.
- QUESTION & ANSWER- Here questions that are submitted by members, or questions that were asked at the preceding meetings would be answered in more detail. Questions could be received by a note left at the meetings or in the form of a letter that was sent to an address.
- SOFTWARE REVIEW- This column would cover reviews of published software that a member bought and used.
- HARDWARE REVIEW- This column would discuss the merits of equipment that any member may want to buy.

RELIABILITY OF THE 99/4A

All computers, no matter how expensive, have problems from time to time. Any time a computer is "down", a certain amount of frustration is created, ranging from mild concern to gnashing of teeth and premature graying. When the computer is used in business, this down time can be very serious.

Most people probably think of the TI-99/4A as a non-business type of computer, but more and more individuals and small companies are finding it to be the perfect combination of low-cost and computer power that they want and need to help them conduct their everyday business operations. Naturally, these businesses, as well as individuals who own a computer for non-business use, expect their computers to be as reliable as possible. The question then naturally arises: Just how reliable is my computer?

I don't have access to industry statistics on reliability expectations and actual statistics, but it appears that the TI-99/4A is a very reliable piece of equipment. Naturally, things are going to happen to individual machines but I have been able to detect very few wide-spread problems with the 99/4A. As most of us know, when Texas Instruments discovered a potential defect concerning the transformer in the power supply of the computer, they went to great lengths to publicize it and spent a lot of money to insure that the potential for a problem was eliminated, even though there was only the most remote chance that the potential problem might actually occur.

I personally feel that Texas Instruments has taken the best approach in repairing those problems that do arise in the 99/4A and its peripheral equipment. Their exchange centers allow fast replacement of equipment needing repair with factory-reconditioned replacement units that have the same warranty as a new piece of equipment. This also means that the actual repair is done by trained TI factory personnel and reduces the chance of unreliable repair by personnel who might not have the expertise of the TI repair personnel.

Although the TI-99/4A seems to be very reliable, one item has been mentioned by several that might be worthwhile for TI to look into. This involves the computer locking up, causing the screen to freeze with whatever is on the screen remaining there, or possibly random colors covering the screen and freezing there. Some people seem to feel that the contacts or seal in the cartridge slot have something to do with this problem but others have other theories. (I know, this sounds similar to the problem with use of the original Extended Basic Command Module---but that has been fixed and this is still with us.) I have been told that TI is aware of this problem but am unaware of any action or intent to eliminate it. I hope that they will look, or already have looked, into this and remedy the thing that is causing these lock-up's.

The TI-99/4A is a very powerful and reliable computer that is underrated by many people. Hopefully, Texas Instruments will continue to take whatever action is necessary to see that problems detected by concerned users are addressed and corrected.

SOFTWARE REVIEW

Generally the word SOFTWARE implies ready to run programs that one may load into the computer and run. However, my review today is of a collection of short program sections that may be incorporated into one's own programs. The "SMART PROGRAMMING GUIDE FOR SPRITES" by Crais Miller is small and thin, but it quickly opened my eyes to the power of the TI-Extended Basic language. Mr. Miller demonstrates how easy it is to move SPRITES and make them do almost anything with minimum programming effort. Some of his examples show -How to create SPRITE patterns, -How to set one SPRITE to chase another, -How to set SPRITES to pick up objects and how SPRITES may be made to eat dots and lay down a trail. I was particularly interested in his method to generate bar-graphs. He shows how to generate a complete bar-graph, including the title and the data for the graph in only seventeen (17) lines. I am really amazed! I don't think that I have seen such excellent use of programming techniques anywhere else. The book is fantastic and I would highly recommend it to anyone who is interested in the manipulation of SPRITES and the Extended Basic language. The book sells for a mere \$5.95 and is really well worth the cost.

Sándor A. Karpathy

Hardware Review

Recently I bought a Modem for my system. For those of you who are not familiar, a Modem is a small electronics box that allows the TI-99/4A to communicate with the rest of the world over the telephone lines. The Signalman Mark III unit is a direct connect unit that is plugged in between the telephone handset and the base unit. The whole installation procedure was accomplished in 30 seconds, nothing to it.

Once hooked up, the unit worked fine. It has the capability to transmit at 110 and 300 Baud rates over the standard telephone lines. As an added benefit, along with the unit I also received a free subscription to "Source" (a savings of \$100.00), which I quickly took advantage of. I will try to report on the use of the "Source" in a later issue. What does one do with a Modem? Well, since a friend and I each bought one, the first order of business was to let my computer talk with his. The RS232 Manual has a brief program that allows two users to talk to each other live. We did have some problems at first, which was due to the type of phone that my friend has. It seems that the new phones which have the electronic pushbuttons will not work, so be careful when you buy a phone. Since I've had the Modem for about three (3) months, I have exchanged numerous programs with other HUG members and the unit has worked without problems.

As a final comment, the Signalman works so well that basically there is nothing to do - dial the phone and flip a switch. It's that simple. If anyone is interested in buying a Modem, I would not hesitate to recommend the Signalman, the unit works fine. Considering that the price is well below the TI Modem, the Signalman is an exceptional buy.

-GAMEING

Below you will find a program that was taken from the SYDNEY NEWSDIGEST just type it in and see what happens!

```
100 DIM E(24,32)
110 FOR A=32 TO 127
120 CALL CHAR(A,A#)
130 S#=""
140 FOR B=15 TO 1 STEP -2
150 C#="SEG$(A#,B,2)
160 B#="B#C#"
170 NEXT B
180 CALL CHAR(A,B#)
190 NEXT A
200 FOR D=1 TO 24
210 FOR E=1 TO 32
220 CALL GCHAR(C,D,E(C,D))
230 NEXT D
240 NEXT C
250 FOR F=1 TO 24
260 FOR G=1 TO 32
270 CALL HCHAR(25-F,G,E(F,G))
280 NEXT G
290 NEXT F
300 GOTO 110
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