

VAST NEWS

for the VAST Computer User Group

Volume 7 Number 4

April 13, 1991

TI World and Local News

(Compiled from various sources by Jim Ely.)

OK, here we are APRIL, 1991. Boy, time really is picking up speed these days.

FEST WEST '92 Committee Chairperson Change

First, I would like to say a big "GET WELL SOON" to BUD BARNES. He went into the hospital in MARCH. Hope to see you back real soon, BUD. (See related article on page 2 for more details. —Ed)

RALPH REES has taken over for BUD as FEST '92 investigation chairperson. All people on that committee should now contact RALPH. And anyone else that wants to be apart of FEST '92 can call him at night at 869-8145. As I said last month, FEST '92 will be a group effort. The officers of VAST will not take a major role in the FEST. If the FEST is to be held in PHOENIX in '92, then it will be because you, THE MEMBERS of VAST, want it here. The officers can and will help. But you will be the work force behind it all. At the APRIL meeting, we will decide if our club really wants to host the FEST WEST '92. This is the time that you must voice your opinion. We must know now if the work is to be done in time

for FEBRUARY, 1992. If we decide not to host FEST WEST '92, then it will be in TUCSON, again...

TI-BASE Help Available

If anyone wants to get the most out of TI-BASE and needs help, then help is here. I picked up a newsletter that is nothing but TI-BASE help. It is put out by BILL GAS-KILL. The work is well written and easy to follow. Bill gives very good examples that show you what you need to know when using this data base program. The cost is not bad at all. Bill even shows you how much

he makes on this newsletter, which, by the way, isn't much.

After the printing of 6 newsletters per year, mailers, and postage, he makes \$7.56.

Then he says that in 1991 anyone who subscribes will also get at least 1 disk filled with programs

that run out of TI-BASE. This means he will

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spend another 25¢ for a mailer, 65¢ for postage and 25¢ for the disk. Now his profit is only \$6.41 per year. As you can see, he is not in it for the money. He enjoys what he does. To order, the cost of Volume 1, numbers 1-6 (1990), is only \$4.00 each and a bargain!! The cost for Volume 2 (1991), is only \$20. What you will get is 6 issues of at least 12 (double sided) pages of the best help you can find on any one program. And at least 1 disk of application programs. What a deal!!!

You can order by writing:
THE TI-BASE USER
2310 Cypress Court
Grand Junction, CO 81506

You asked for help. Here it is!! Order today.
(Above two items submitted by Mike Grogan.)

Bud Barnes Hospitalized

Bud Barnes was hospitalized during the month of March with chest pains. This is the second time in the last six months. The chest pains, as it turned out were being caused by what is known as a HIATAL HERNIA, a swelling of the stomach above the opening in the diaphragm near the esophagus. The way I understand it, this prevents you from swallowing solid foods easily.

As things progressed, this problem also caused some heart spasms, which were also treated. Bud had to remain in the hospital until his doctor could confirm 48 hours without any chest pains of any kind.

He was released from St. Luke's Hospital

early in the week of April 1st. and seems to be doing much better now.

Bud is the parliamentarian at the meetings and was chairman of the FEST WEST '92 committee, which he has now relinquished to Ralph Rees.

He is now back on the VAST BBS and a welcome sight to all the users. Hang in there, buddy!

BULLETIN! The above article was written April 4th. On Saturday, April 6th, Bud was re-admitted to St. Luke's Hospital ^{Grogan} with severe chest pains. Bypass surgery is now being considered. Best of luck, Bud!

From the Editor's Desk

Well, I looked at my calendar and it is April already! The other thing I noticed was the lack of ANY notable holidays. Usually there is some kind of holiday every month and Easter is usually in April, but not this year. Anyway, happy April Fool's month?!

FEST WEST '92?

I see several people are wrapped up in the commotion about having the FEST WEST in Phoenix next year. That is good, but let me remind you that the event HAS TO BE a group effort and not an individual effort. It will take EVERY MEMBER'S HELP to pull off such an event and do it right. If YOU really aren't committed, if YOU really

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SECRETARY'S SLATE

MINUTES

VAST COMPUTER USER GROUP

MARCH 9, 1991

The monthly meeting of the VAST COMPUTER USER GROUP was held on Saturday, March 9th, at the Pyle Adult Recreation Center in Tempe. The meeting was called to order by President Mike Grogan at 10 a.m. All officers were present and there were 29 members and guests.

The minutes of the February meeting as published in the VAST NEWSLETTER were accepted after being corrected to state that the phone bill for the BBS had been paid thru July and not June.

The Treasurer's report was accepted as read by Mike Marfisi.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Mike Grogan reported that the BBS seems to be running just fine from his home. There have been some reports of the BBS failing to connect for some people. Mike suggested that if anyone has a problem they should call him at home as he is usually available and may be able to correct the problem.

Mike Marfisi reported that he would be adding a new version of TIPS 1.8 and several new graphic files within the next week.

OLD BUSINESS

We spoke to the folks that are in charge of

the Pyle Center about using other rooms in addition to our regular room on meeting days. This would be done if we planned a large demo or work session and wanted to split up. We were told that if a room was available, there would be no problem.

NEW BUSINESS

Several members of Southwest 99'ers joined us as guests. They came to present a proposal to VAST that we host the 1992 FEST WEST in February 1992. After a fine presentation and a question/answer session they retired so we could discuss the proposal.

After much debate three votes were taken.

Question #1: Are we at all interested in hosting FEST WEST 92?

Results: 8 yes, 5 no.

Question #2: Shall we commit VAST at this time to host the FEST WEST 92?

Results: 2 yes, 11 no.

Question #3: Shall we inform SW 99'ers that we will not host FEST WEST 92.

Results: 4 yes, 9 no.

As a result of the votes it was moved, seconded and carried that we table the vote until next month and form a committee to give the matter further study. A committee was formed including Bud Barnes, Hazel

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Knight, Ralph Rees, Tom Pfeffer, Ed Morse and Mike Scheller. Bud will act as chairman. The committee will follow up with the SW 99'ers to get more info and do what ever investigation they deem necessary to bring a recommendation before us at the next meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 11:55 a.m.

Respectfully,
 Mike Marfisi, Secretary
 VAST COMPUTER USER GROUP

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don't have the time, if YOU really don't want it here in Phoenix, please speak up now so any planning committee can pass the event on to the Southwest Ninety-niners for a full planning effort. I understand they will be present at the upcoming meeting again to answer any further questions we might have. We need to decide this issue at this meeting!

IN THIS ISSUE...

I have dropped back to only one installment of *NEW-AGE/99* this month, after several months of two installments per issue. Jack Sughrue, who writes the articles, has again taken ill and we do not have much more from him to be caught up with all articles. This month's installment, part 2 of the review of Comprodine and some of its programs, starts on page 5. There are several views of why we should or shouldn't have FEST WEST '92 in Phoenix next year.

On page 7, Ralph Rees devotes his *FORAY 4/A* column to it, on page 1, Mike Grogan gives his reasons, and on page 8 is *YET ANOTHER VIEW* with Jim Wayne's view of the FEST. *ON THE LIGHTER SIDE* has an interesting letter written to an anonymous TI Computer hacker that you might find interesting, if not apropos. Our *MEMBER PROFILE* this month is of Wallace and Hazel Knight. That is on page 10 and on page 11 is *VIEWS & REVIEWS*, a review of TI-SORT by Bill Gaskill. I hope you enjoy this month's issue.

UP-COMING MEETINGS...

Here is the calendar for the next 2 months with our meeting dates indicated...

MAY 1991							JUNE 1991						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
			1	2	3	4							1
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
26	27	28	29	30	31		23	24	25	26	27	28	29
							30						

THANKS...

...to those of you who submitted articles to this month's newsletter. That makes for a nice newsletter written primarily by the members of the Group.

And that's a wrap!

Jim Ely, Editor



~~~~~  
 W-AGE/99 \* NEW-AGE/  
 99 \* NEW-AGE/99 \* N  
 EW-AGE/99 \* NEW-AGE  
 /99 \* NEW-AGE/99 \*  
 ~~~~~

by JACK SUGHRUE,
 Box 459, East Douglas, MA 01516

#10

COMPRODINE, PART TWO

One of the nicest features of JIFFY CARD (\$15) its single-sheet manual. This includes pictures of its 68 graphics along with a sample of a card itself. The rest of the manual serves as a quick reference sheet. It's simple, direct, easy. No 40-page tutorials; no heavy-duty programming knowledge required. All you need is one drive, 32K, and a printer: a neat, compact, delightful piece of software that does exactly what it's supposed to quickly and well.

JC takes about a minute to load from XB, but, once loaded, all borders, large fonts, and small fonts are awaiting your keypress. There are 8 prompts for you to follow step-by-step with active keys listed on screen at all times, so you are gently guided through all your creations. You first set up a location for your card-cover graphics; then you type the title and select a border by tapping the spacebar to cycle through. Next you choose the ONE graphic to be placed in those areas you designated in Step One. This same graphic may even be overlapped in repetition.

Text is now entered. Say what you want to say. Next do the same for the inside of the

card. Then choose one of 7 small fonts for the front and again for the inside. It's fairly easy to toggle between the different parts of the card to make changes. Finally, you may print the card. Before you do, though, you may opt to SAVE it for posterity, as previously made cards may be LOADED quickly and modified easily. Basically, that's it.

For TI owners who wonder how the fun went out of computing, this is a program to get it back. In the three weeks I've had JIFFY CARD, I've already used it over a dozen times.

Now I wish I had spent a few more dollars to buy the color version of my NX1000 printer, because there is also COLOR CARD (\$25), the mouth-watering color version of JC. Both versions come with a template for xeroxing or just cutting exact-size envelopes for these cards. A thoughtful touch, that. CARDS 4ALL OCCASIONS (\$10) is an "as is" or easily personalized collection of spiffy cards for easy JC loading.

Once you've mastered JIFFY CARD, you should find JIFFY FLYER (\$10) or COLOR FLYER (\$20) a piece of cake. The commands are very similar for the making of an easy to read, easy to create, eye-catching one-pager for yard sales, announcements, pronouncement, mini-posters, whatever. These programs also use the same (CSGD) graphics which can be imported from everywhere or purchased in a maximum diskful (127 pictures) for \$10 (CSGD GRAPHICS). A 50-file collection of borders and fonts may also be purchased for \$10

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(CARD/FLYER GRAPHICS). It's this sort of companion support that makes these inexpensive JIFFY programs even more valuable. That's why so many people are happy that COMPRODINE is also distributing Great Lakes Software (at an incredibly low \$10 for each item): JOYPAINT 99, PAL, CLIPART DISK (which is a nice trio); CERTIFICATE 99, COMPANIONS 1 & 2, GRAPHIC COMPANION (which is a nice quartet). JOYPAINT is an excellent artist program, particularly with the PAL. CERTIFICATE 99 is, to date, the state of the art certificate maker for the TI. The support material for both programs make them extremely valuable tools (toys) for any owner.

BANNERS 99 and EXTENDED BUSINESS GRAPHS are the other two Great Lakes products distributed by COMPRODINE.

However, they have many more of their own products. PICTURE IT (\$10) and PRINT IT & PLUS (\$13) convert instances to banners, to Funnelweb, or to Extended BASIC for printing through your Writer files; prints incredibly professional disk catalogs, titles, labels, with excellent user-designed materials, including sprites.

BINGO (just \$5) not only lets you play two screen boards but allows the printing out of boards for everyone. Good graphics and speech. FORMSHOP (\$15) permits very flexible creation of forms for business, hobby, or personal use with the same ease as the JIFFY programs.

If you've gone to a TI fair recently and

looked up at a gigantic computer-made poster, it was done with GIANT ARTIST POSTERS (\$15) which lets you take any TI-ARTIST screen, whether acquired or created, and print it out in sizes from 10 by 14 inches to 5 by 8 feet! For these king-size jobbies I would recommend printing it out just before you go to bed and pull it off in the morning. Although the program works very fast (and easy), printing anything that size takes a considerable time.

COMPRODINE also publishes a neat, professional date-tracking electronic calendar with lots of features. Similar to SCHEDULE MANAGER (Asgard) and REMIND ME (Genial), REMINDERS helps you to organize your life in positive, realistic ways. A good buy at just \$10.

But the new gem of the COMPRODINE treasure chest of software goodies is ARTIST PRINT SHOP. Written by Paul Coleman in fast and comfortable c99, this program uses TI-ARTIST graphics and fonts without conversion. So you could draw from the thousands of files already in user-group libraries, hidden in BBS listings, or ordered from commercial sources; or you could create your own in TI-ARTIST and use them directly.

Basically, the 3-disk package (\$25 - and an additional \$10 for the not-required [but recommended] BORDER MAKER package) permits the creation of very dramatic signs, letterheads, banners, and flyers.

Follow the 18-page manual through one full time, performing each of the easy tasks, and

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you will be immediately comfortable with all of the sections, as they have a very similar structure. After a couple creations the manual is no longer necessary. I used it only two days before I gave an hour-long demo of all its sections at the recent New England Fayuh. Most of you would have only needed two hours, but I tend to play with things for a while BEFORE using the manuals. My sisters Sonia and Pat both claim I was dropped on my head numerous times as a baby. In any event APS is an easy-to-use even for me type of program. And varied and useful and fun.

The BANNERS section of this large piece of electronic wizardry is one of the most flexible I have ever used. It provides both text and graphic options rarely seen on most banner programs.

The SIGMAKER makes very dramatic signs, flyers, pages using a large and a small ARTIST font and 5 different graphics which can be mirrored, magnified, and/or multiplied for all kinds of flexible creations.

The STATIONERY portion also offers some great flexibility with some exceptional results.

In short, ARTIST PRINT SHOP would be a nice addition to your collection of super TI programs.

Your best bet would be to write COM-PRODINE for a catalog (or order any of the above adding \$1.50 S&H for one item or \$3.00 for two or more) to 1949 Evergreen Ave., Fullerton, CA, 92635. j.s.

4/A FORAY

by Ralph Rees

Arrgghh!! Taxes! Poverty! No blood from a turnip!! It's too much!! Enough!, Enough!

Jump In With Both Feet Department

OR

Look Before You Leap Department

Well Folks, here we are. The time has come for us to decide if we are ready, willing and able to hold the TI Fest West in 1992. You need to really think about your final decision in this matter.

Personally, I like the idea, BUT I take this position with some reservations. Here's my thoughts on both sides of the fence.

JUMP IN - A fair has got to be fun to attend.

LOOK IST - There is a good possibility that running the fair may prevent us from seeing a lot of it.

JUMP IN - The possibility of putting more \$\$\$ into our group bank account.

LOOK IST - The possibility of depleting our group bank account AND making ALL members liable for any contract default.

JUMP IN - Being able to meet TI Celebrities.

LOOK IST - Will we be able to convince enough of them to COME to make a nice fair.

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JUMP IN - Able to see the newest in software/hardware and purchase same.

LOOK IST - The vendors will need full systems to demo their wares. This means that the group will need to loan them. Are you willing to loan your system?

There are probably many other PROS & CONS to this decision and I only listed a few that I can think of. The bottom line is, doing a fair like this and having it done RIGHT will require a LARGE amount of PEOPLE that are willing to HELP now AND later. Please think about what YOU will do to help BEFORE making a decision.

Now, just let me climb down off this soap-box...

— Bored? Call The Board!

For those of you that have modems and RS232's and don't call our BBS, WHAT THE HECK IS THE DEAL?!? Our bulletin board is the best thing going for the latest information on what some people in the group are doing, thinking, scheming, dreaming, etc. On top of that, Our local member and resident sports nut, Tom Pfeffer, has been very busy in the last few months uploading some very desirable files that YOU might want. Mike Marfisi has uploaded at least a zillion TIPS files and even I stick something up occasionally. So take a chance, dial the number, log on, read some messages, LEAVE a message or two, download a file, upload a file and have fun! I try to call every day and suffer from withdrawl when I can't. It's the REAL deal!

That's all I have this month. See YOU at the meeting. —Ralph...

YET ANOTHER VIEW...

by Jim Wayne

FEST WEST '92 IN PHOENIX????

At the last meeting, we talked about hosting the '92 FEST WEST. Great!! I have never been to a TI FEST. We voted, to look into the cost of such an event. The up front cost is the main concern. From what SOUTH-WEST 99'ers told us it could be around \$2000. Do we have that kind of money in the club funds? I don't think so. Besides something like this should come from a group effort. So I was thinking of how we could earn that kind of money. Here is a small list. Maybe you could think of more ideas. Or better yet, YOU could volunteer your help in any way you can. This way we will not have to go to TUCSON for the FEST WEST weekend!! And think of the publicity our club would get. And this is one way WE, as a group, can give to the TI community.

First, we could hold a car wash and we could sell pop or coffee while they wait for their car.

Maybe we could hold an auction at a meeting. I'm sure everyone has at least one item they could donate, and what is not sold could be put up for sale at the FEST. The money would go to pay for the FEST.

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Mike Grogan told me that **ELECTRONIC MATERIALS & COMPUTERS** is going to hold a computer swap-meet before long. This would be a good way for our club to be known. And maybe raise some money. They said that they will advertise on the radio and newspaper for the space rent.

This would be cheap publicity.

All in all, we need to give of ourselves for the good of the club, and for the good of the TI community.

That's all for now. If you like your computer and would like to keep people writing programs for it for a long time to come... then you are like me. And I think we should host the **PHOENIX FEST WEST '92...**

Keep on compuTIng!

j.w.

.....

ON THE LIGHTER SIDE

Some time ago I saw a cute story that went something like this:

Did you hear about the computer programmer who went to the refrigerator for a drink and found a note from his wife saying, "I've decided to leave you:" ...and it was dated a month ago?!

Rumor has it that the following is a copy of the original document!

TO MY DARLING HUSBAND,

I am sending you this letter in a bogus software company envelope so that you will be sure to read it. Please forgive the decep-

tion, but I thought you should know what has been going on at home since your TI entered our lives two years ago. The children are doing fine. Tommy is seven now and is a bright, handsome boy. He has developed an interest in the arts. He drew a family portrait for a school project. All the figures were good but yours was the best! The chair and the back of your head are realistic. You would be very proud of him.

**APRIL FOOL!**

Swenson, the department head, has taken a real interest in my career and has become a good friend to us all. I have discovered that the household chores are much easier since I realized that you didn't mind being vacuumed. Sorry about the feather duster making you sneeze.

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Member Profile

This month, our member profile is of Wallace and Hazel Knight, written by Hazel.

This is a *ME*, *WE*, and *HE* biography.

While *I* was in high school, Wallace was away in the Navy. In 1945 *WE* married and thereafter had a son and daughter. *WE* moved to Phoenix in 1958.

When the company *I* had worked for re-organized in May, 1983, *I* took early retire-



ment which included a gift of my choosing. I wanted a computer but felt *I* would never buy one for myself. So that was what *I* chose, one of the last full-priced Tl's.

When Tl's went on sale for \$50, Wallace suggested that *WE* get another one just for parts, and that was the beginning of our "HIS" and "HERS" Tl's.

HIS has since been upgraded with the addi-

tion of a RAVE 99 keyboard interface.

WE really lucked out when *WE* got a PE Box on sale. *WE* didn't really know what it was for, but *WE* bought it.

WE joined VAST and got the help of several people when it (the computer) just wouldn't do anything.

Wallace wanted *ME* to type in some programs, but *I* convinced him that *HE* could, even with only two fingers!

Needless-to-say, *HE* now types faster than *ME*.

Many hours have been spent proofreading typed-in programs, but *WE* now have the CHECKSUM proofreading program which catches most of the typing mistakes. Being more familiar with program typing, *WE* now also recognize some program errors as *WE* type.

HE has been retired to *HIS* Tl for about 5 years now, from carpentry and electric motor repair. *I* am retired, working part-time.

I enjoy many of the games my Tl plays. *HE* just likes typing in new programs and re-organizing them.

WE both enjoy making our own Christmas cards with our Tl's.

I hope to learn to program real soon. h.k.

(*Editor's Note* — Wallace and Hazel attend almost every meeting of VAST (they supply the coffee!) and are the current software librarians. Hazel is also currently on the FEST WEST '92 proposal committee.)

Views & Reviews

TI-SORT

The Incredible Software

Review by
Bill Gaskill

TI-SORT, which is marketed by Texaments, is yet another 100% assembly language program to come out of the Inscebot Inc. tables in Port Orange, Florida. It is the very first multi-format sort utility for the 99/4A that I am aware of. This means that the program is designed to sort virtually any type of data file that can be generated on a 99/4A, from disk-based relative access files to memory-resident data files most commonly generated by Basic and Extended Basic programs.

THE PRODUCT:

The \$14.95 (plus \$2.50 S/H) package comes with a SS/SD diskette and a laser-printed, 20-page manual. Loaders are provided on the program disk for Extended Basic, Editor/Assembler or Mini-Memory environments. A 32K memory expansion card or unit and at least one SS/SD disk drive are required. There are no printing facilities programmed into TI-SORT so a printer is not needed.

SUPPORT:

TI-SORT is warranted for a 90 day period from date of purchase, with a \$5.00 replacement fee required after the 90 day warranty

has expired. Upgrades are also offered at 40% of the original purchase price with the return of the original diskette. Free telephone support after the sale is offered, both by Texaments via their BBS (516-475-6463) and Inscebot Inc. at 904-767-3922.

OVERVIEW:

Except for the Extended Basic loader, TI-SORT is 100% assembly language coded. As delivered, it consumes 114 sectors on disk in four program image files, one DF/80 file and one DV/80 README file. Depending upon the loader (XB, E/A or MM) and the disk media used (Floppy disk, Hard disk or Ram disk) TI-SORT can be up and running in from 3-20 seconds. It both loads from and sorts files (reads/writes) to any available media. Although there is no specific information in the manual about brands or kinds of storage media supported, I tested TI-SORT on the Horizon Ram Disk, a floppy drive using the TI controller card and a 20mb hard drive using Myarc's HFDC. It worked flawlessly on all of them. The program supports a record sorting capacity of 32,767 records if you have the storage media to hold that much data.

TI-SORT contains three basic or main operational screens; a main menu, a structure file creation screen and a sorting screen. There are about 10 different help screens available and three "other" screens that pop up during I/O errors and the like. The colors for all screens are white text on a light blue background.

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IEWS & REVIEWS, from page 11

PROGRAM OPERATION:

TI-SORT is a single purpose utility designed to place an existing data file in either ascending (A-Z) or descending (Z-A) order. It does so by reading a structure file on the data base to be sorted and then ordering the data file based upon the field(s) in the structure file that you tell it to use for the sort. If you are working with a TI-Base data file the structure file already exists, because TI-Base created it when you designed the file. For other types of files you must create the structure file. This means that you must know the lengths of the fields in your data base, the data type (Alpha, Numeric, Date etc.) and the delimiters used to separate the data in those fields if you are sorting a delimited data file. Once the structure file has been designed you may select one or more fields in the file to use as sort fields. There will always be one major sort field and there can be up to 8 minor sort fields in a structure file. A total of 17 fields may be defined in a record in a structure file.

Once you have designed the structure file, which you can save to disk for future use, the sort is performed. The method used for the sort is to read in as many records into memory as possible, order them based upon your instructions in the structure file, and then write the sorted records out to disk in a temporary scratch file. This process is repeated until the end of your data file is reached. At that point TI-SORT reads in the scratch files and merges them together as one data base in sorted order. An actual re-write of the data file is performed with

each record being given a new record number and physical position on disk.

PERFORMANCE:

The method used to order data (the creation and then merging of multiple scratch files) is the reason why such large data files can be sorted by the program. The power and utility offered with this kind of sort method is also a weakness when very large data files are being sorted. Large data files require multiple scratch files. Multiple scratch files require a lot of free disk space. Thus a person with only one SS/SD disk drive would only be able to sort a file that was approximately 1/2 the size of a SS/SD disk or about 175 sectors. Larger data files than that would require a larger capacity disk or another disk drive on which to store the scratch files.

Some may argue that another downside to this method of sorting is the time that it takes to sort a file compared to a sort program that stuffs all the data into RAM at one time. While disk sorts are noticeably slower than RAM sorts, this argument holds no water with TI-SORT. If the file being sorted can all fit into memory at once, which means it is under 16K in size, then TI-SORT will do a RAM sort. Data files in that size range don't require the use of scratch files. So in those situations, TI-SORT performs as quickly as any other sort program.

With larger data files, which no ram-based sort program can handle, the media used for the sort makes a considerable difference in the speed of the sort. Floppy disk sorts are

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the slowest because floppy disk drives are slow. Ram disks are the quickest media because all data is handled electronically on a Ram disk with no mechanical parts or rotation of a disk involved. Hard disks are the most desirable because they are almost as fast as Ram disks and they possess a much greater storage capacity. A file sorted by TI-SORT on a Hard disk will be ordered about 10 times faster than the very same file, sorted by the same parameters, on a floppy disk. Thus from a performance perspective, TI-SORT's sort speed is not a feature of the program as much as it is a feature of the media used for the sort. My benchmark testing, done with under 16K-sized data files, showed TI-SORT to be only slightly slower than J. Peter Hoddie's Sort Experiment program. By "slightly", I mean less than three seconds slower. With files larger than 16K the only benchmarks that I created were those that compared floppy disk, to hard disk to ram disk sort times, since TI-SORT has no competition with files of this size. (yes, the Sort Experiment can handle files up to 24K, but as a practical matter, the file size is limited to 300 records when using an 80 byte record, which is what I used for all benchmarks).

EASE OF USE:

In designing TI-SORT, author Dennis Faherty appears to have taken a couple of lessons from the IBM PC world as far as the on-screen HELP is concerned. First, HELP is accessed through the expected Fctn 7 (AID) key to maintain consistency with TI-Base and the standard that Texas

Instruments set in the design of the software that they produced for the 99/4 and 4A. Second, the help is context sensitive. That means that different help screens appear based upon where you are at in the program. So the help screen that is displayed is related to the function that you are about to perform. A wonderfully refreshing touch in a 99/4A piece of software. When Fctn 7 is pressed the help screens literally explode from the middle of the computer screen and then disappear at the touch of any key. The information displayed on the screens is simple but useful.

Perhaps the most difficult part of using TI-SORT is the need to understand the structure of your existing data base so that you can tell TI-SORT what it is. How do you go about determining field lengths, data types and data delimiters that make up a file's structure? Well, the answer to most of these questions is to read the TI-SORT docs and to pay attention to the help screens. They will make up for a lot of the slack in knowledge that might be present. Another source of answers is to go back to the docs for the program that generated the data file to be sorted and also to examine the file that you created that you now want to sort. All of these sources put together will usually give you the answers you need. For the novice user though, it may prove a little intimidating.

DOCUMENTATION:

The 20-page, laser printed, 9" X 6" booklet that comes with TI-SORT is perhaps the

See VIEWS & REVIEWS on page 14

IEWS & REVIEWS, from page 13

best docs that Inscebot has ever produced. Besides the extremely professional quality of the booklet, the instructions are clear, concise and complete — a superior effort on the part of author Dennis Faherty. He covers everything from "how-to's" to an explanation of the sorting algorithm used in the program.

CONCLUSION:

TI-SORT is an extremely powerful and well thought-out piece of software. It fills a void in the productivity-oriented user's library that has become more and more obvious now that available software and storage media are beginning to support much larger data files. The documentation for the program is detailed, well-organized and beautifully executed. Except for the need to understand the structure of the data base to be sorted, TI-SORT's operation rates extremely high in the ease of use category. For \$14.95 plus \$2.50 to cover shipping and handling, you simply can't go wrong in purchasing this program.

REPORT CARD:

- PERFORMANCE A
- EASE OF USE A-
- DOCUMENTATION A+
- VALUE A+
- FINAL GRADE A+

This review was in the SEPTEMBER, 1989 MICROpendium. I think it's time for another printing. After talking with BILL

GASKILL, he gave me a copy on disk to put in VAST NEWS.

If you need to sort ANY data on your TI, then this is a must have. m.k.g.

LIGHTER SIDE, from page 9

The house is in good shape. I had the living room painted last spring. I'm not sure if you noticed it. I made sure that the painters cut air holes in the plastic drop cloth so you wouldn't be disturbed.

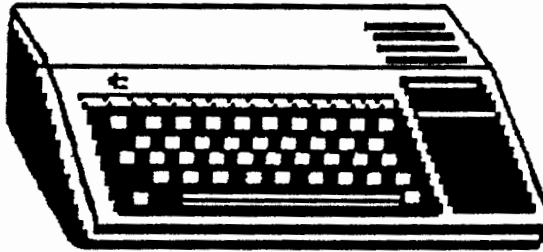
Well, my dear, I must be going. Uncle Lar I mean Mr. Swenson, is taking us all on a ski trip and there is a lot of packing to do. I have hired a housekeeper to take care of things while we are away. She'll keep things in order, fill your coffee cup and bring your meals to the desk, just the way you like it. I hope you and your TI have a lovely time while we are gone. Tommy, Jen and I will think of you often. Try to remember us while your disks are booting.

Love
Mary

(This "Letter" has appeared in several newsletter. I'm not sure which one we borrowed it from, but thanks to all. —Ed.)

FOR SALE

2 consoles
 TI PE-Box (includes TI 32K card, RS232 card and TI disk controller card, 1 SSSD drive and 2 SSDD drives)
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