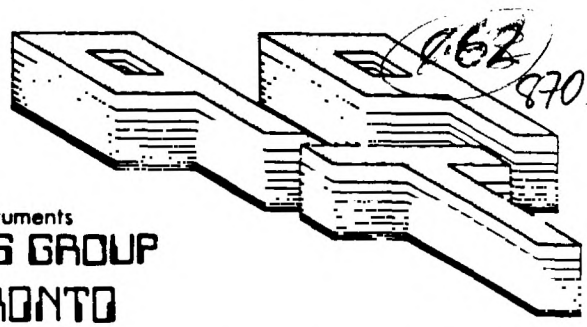
NEWSLETTER 919

MAY 1987 ISSUE



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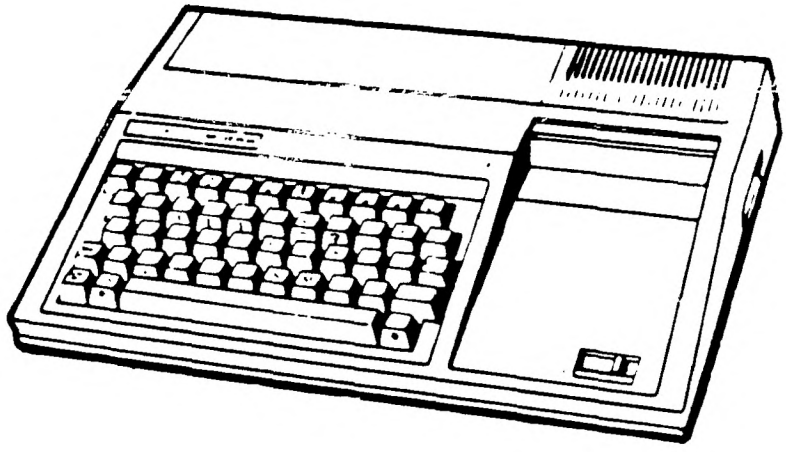
FOR THE TI-99/4A COMPUTER
and compatibles



Question: What does a TI-99/4a, a swan and a high school near Ottawa have in common? For the answer, check inside this issue.

FROM:
919 Users Group
#109-2356 Gerrard St. East
Toronto, Ont., M4E-2E2
CANADA

TO:

Edmonton UG
Box 11983
Edmonton, AL T5J 3L1

Steve's Tidbits #9

-by Steve Mickelson, CIS 76545,1255; DELPHI SMICKELSON

On behalf of our fellow members, I would like to express our deepest sympathies to Neil Allen, for the recent loss of his mother.

If this newsletter is a day or so late it is partially due to the fact that our normal date of publication coincided with Queen Victoria's birthday. Also, the executive was busy preparing for the TI-Fest in Ottawa, May 17. I was surprised to see my copy of April's Newsletter 9T9 was post-marked April 21 and arrived May 3, what could I say that hasn't been said already.

See a report on same elsewhere in the newsletter. I shot alot of pictures there, you can expect to see them in future issues of the newsletter.

The 9T9 Users Group was well-represented. Thanks to Randy, Gary, Andy, John, Cecil, Sylvano, Steve (Finley), Jim and Blair, (I hope I didn't forget anyone), for being at the booth at one time or another. As far as sales of the disk-of-the-month, hats and back-issues of the newsletter; they went very well! From the sales of these, our club made enough money to purchase a speech synthesizer and Horizon RAM-Disk board kit(less components), a copy of "The Orphan Survival Guide" for the library, and pay for our booth at the fair. You may expect a more detailed report at the next meeting.

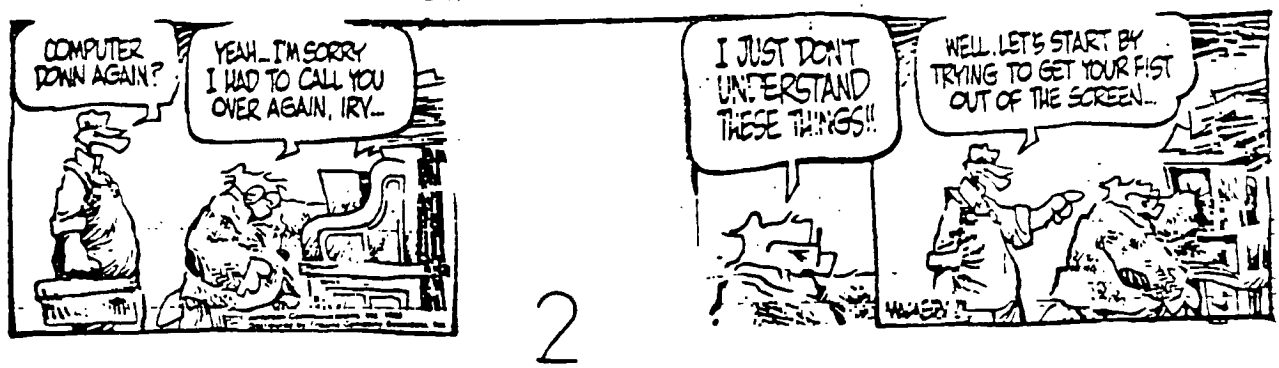
May I say thanks to all the spouses of those who attended the fest. I noted that Jeanne La Flamme's husband stayed at the hospitality suite a bit longer than either Sophie or Suuzi. Also, Cherry, Doreen and Sophie did take turns at our table, from time to time. This help and support was greatly appreciated.

Last month, listings of about 18 disks were somehow deleted from Gary Bowsers article. Sorry about that we'll re-try next month.

Also, missing on the sign-up procedure for DELPHI; after you connect and see the various characters on-screeh. You enter an upper case A, carriage return. Then type in DELPHI and follow the procedure as outlined in the Walt Howe article.

A previous TIdbit had a short console BASIC entry to set the printer in compressed mode. This worked with my two previous printers, the names somehow deleted from the article. They should have read Gemini 10X and TEO Dot Matrix.

Gary will have his "trick of the month" answer in the June issue of the newsletter. That's it for now.



First Impressions of Ottawa's TI-Fest

-by Steve Mickelson

Have you ever attended a party, expecting a ho-hum affair and end the evening with the feeling that it turned out better than you had ever hoped. Not only did we see most the latest offered for the TI, we met many of the well known personae of our community and gave great exposure of the Toronto 9T9 Users Group through sale of disks, newsletters and hats, (and adding to the clubs library and computer system at the same time). One vendor remarked, having attended both the last Chicago Fest and the one in Ottawa, the latter had better attendance.

Here is an outline of this "gathering of the clan" of TI-ers:

Ominous beginnings:

Having left Toronto early Friday, we chose to detour highway #7 and dropped by John Hannaford's Store in Port Perry, shortly after 10 AM. Unfortunately it was closed, (a sign posted "OPEN at 10 AM). We waited twenty minutes, and so we continued-on. We could see through the window there still were some TI software on the store shelves.

We arrived at the Talisman in the early afternoon, registered and found that the hospitality suite not open. Things looked a little ominous, so we decided to find a restaurant so all wasn't a loss.

Looking better:

We returned to hotel and decided to check-out the hospitality suite and found it open, things were looking better. Randy and Gary had arrived, from Toronto. In the next couple of hours we met fellow TI-ers from Ottawa, Fredricton, Sudbury, North Bay, Peterborough and Montreal.

Also were the hardware/software dealers; Bob Boone, Jeanne LaFlamme, Jeff Guide, Bruce Ryan. The good word came from Jeanne who told me that Lou Philips and Walt Howe were going to demonstrate the Geneve'.

I overheard that Jeff Guide had brought a couple 9640's in. He had spent several hours " wading " through red tape at customs to clear the books, software and hardware for his table at the fair. It turned out orders brought-in by Lou Philips would not clear customs until next Wednesday or later.

New Products:

I arrived early at the fair, an hour or so before the "official" ribbon ceremony. Activity was already brisk with clubs and vendors going from booth to booth see at first hand many of the new products.

Seen at the fair was a operating system for the Maximem. The source disk has now been changed to allow other drives. DM-1 has been replaced with DM-2. The changes involve erasing and re-writing an EPROM in the Maximem. Cecil had left his Maximem and either he or Andy could give you more info on the upgrade.

Also in view were both styles of the RAVE keyboards for the TI-99/4A. They consisted of IBM-PC and -XT keybords which interface to the console through an interface board which is mounted in the place of the old keyboard. A cosmetic cover plate covers the gap left by the removal of the old keys.

The Ryte Data XT style expansion box for either the TI-99/4A or Myarc 9640 was shown as well as the modified TI disk controller card with new EPROM operating system which gives the user double-side/double-density from the quad density, 80 Track Drive.

Available, but not running were Gram Cards; Horizon RAM disks(both kit-form and assembled); 80-column cards; disk drives; Horizon memory upgrade kits.

There were alot of new and popular software, including SPAD XIII, DM-1000, graphic utilities and Gary Bowsers "Slide Show" program, among others.

Our booth was quite busy throughout the day. A special vote of thanks to Randy who, along with Gary, hauled both his and the club's systems, along with hats, newsletters et al up to Ottawa and doing much of the work of the logistics involved. My job of photographing and interviewing for the newsletter was a far easier task!

Geneve was there too!

Perhaps the busiest table throughout the day was manned by Lou Philips of Myarc and Walt Howe of the Boston Computer Society. Though not directly involved in sales, the two **working** Geneve's impressed all. Rather than go on with specs and statistics, I have taken the initiative of arranging a demo of a production line model 9640 in the near future. A seminar was also set-up to demo the unit. Seeing TI-Writer in full 80 columns, with added features such as editor and formatter resident in RAM, "wild card" string searches, deleting one hundred lines of text in a couple of seconds, along with an AT keyboard was too much for this newsletter editor to take.

By 9:30 I gave-in and purchased the last one Jeff Guide, who had the "best price" for the Geneve'. The unit I have needs the new MDOS to run with my, early production Corcomp disk controller. The GO.95, was upgraded by EPROM GO.96, which Lou Philips had picked-up from Paul Charlton while enroute to Ottawa. My unit goes through self-check all 512K memory is O.K., but it will only work with the Myarc disk controller card, with the MDOS shipped with the unit. The upgrade to permit access to TI and Corcomp disk controllers should be in the mail.

Demonstrated were a couple of graphic programs, an uncompleted MYART program, an enhanced 80 column TI-Writer, Console Basic, and Parsec. To get speech from Parsec, the TI Speech Synthesizer had to be brought inside the P-Box. This was achieved using an adapter board manufactured by RAVE. The user gets to run Parsec at any of 6 speeds in the "TI-99/4A mode"; one being the same as run on a TI-99/4A. Running Parsec at 6 (the fastest), speed caused the laser bursts to cycle faster as well as the speed of travel, very impressive.

Blair and Gary have orders in for 9640's and I understand another member has one on order. I will hold back any further description, as this newsletter will have an article on the Geneve', albeit an early production model.

More goings-on:

Randy presented, on behalf of those in our club, a cheque for the DM-1000 utility, to be Bob Boone and the Ottawa Users Group. All who contributed will be eligible to receive all upgrades, as they are released.

Randy and Cecil were among the dozen or so who received door prizes, congratulations to you both!

There was a lunch/snack concession set-up, as well as a room for used hardware, software, books, etc. I picked-up a binder with a collection of back-issues of MICROpendium, (dating as far back as the first issue, Feb., 1984). This is where our club purchased its newly acquired Speech Synthesizer.

Following the fair, a banquet dinner was held, at the Aristocrat hotel. Towards the end, an award was presented to Barry Traver, author of Archiver and other software, for his overall contribution to the TI community. It was, also announced that a design has been adopted for NUAC.

Was it worth it?

The fair was quite an experience. Just the experience of meeting talented individuals, see new hardware and software, and mixing with others all dedicated to our beloved orphan, was well worth the trip and the $1.00 admission charge. Watch for photo's of the event; the people and products in future issues of the newsletter.

The following article appeared in the April/87 issue of MICROpendium magazine re: the recent Gram Kracker series, followed by a reply which was read by myself in April's meeting.

> To clear up on other matter, we gave credit where it wasn't due in a February User Note. We attributed the note to Terry Atkinson of the Toronto Users Group. We published an item from Newsletter 9T9, the group's publication, that told how to use GRAM Kracker to remove the foreign language references from the TI-Writer menu.
>
> Says Terry: It seems that people like to give me credit where it is NOT due. A great many tutorials, reviews and the like come my way. I also write a considerable number of both. I generally like to share good material with others in the TI community, and honestly try to give credit where credit is due.
>
> Despite claims to the contrary, I do not write for any particular magazine or newsletter. I spread the word through my own BBS or by uploading material to either STC, CIS or Timeline (now defunct). I think this is where the problem comes into play. Just because I upload an article, does not mean I have written said article. I always include the author's name when known. Otherwise, I state that the author is unknown. (Articles or software written by me are public domain, and may be used any way one sees fit).
>
> To that end, I did not write the article. I don't even own a GK. I believe I uploaded the article to TimeLine quite some time ago, and the name of the original author escapes me (if I knew it at all).

MICROpendium Magazine
P.O.Box 1343
Round Rock,Texas, 78680
U.S.A.
Attention: Laura Burns, Editor

The following will be read at the April 28 meeting of 9T9 users group and published in the May issues. Copies will be sent as indicated:

An open letter re:Page 6,April 1987 Issue of MICROpendium,

Since I took over duties, as Editor of Newsletter 9T9 last September, I had a mandate to expand our newsletter to a larger format,(minimum of 14 pages per issue). As we didn't have enough submissions from our membership, we re-printed material from other newsletters, as well as the various databases which support the TI-99/4A. We do try to give credit to the source and author of articles, relying upon the body of the article for the author's name. Unfortunately, we don't have the resources to check all articles. We regret the error.

The article in question was downloaded from the now-defunct Timeline service, by fellow club member Gil Tennant. Credit for the article was given to Terry Atkinson, no other reference to any other author was made in the document, which was edited only for spelling and the 80-width format used by the newsletter. As we exchange with TINS,(to which Terry is a member), I did ask Terry, through Source mail last December, if he had read his articles which we were then publishing. His reply was because of the nature of his work, he often cannot make it to his group's meetings and hadn't had a chance to read them.

I hope this clears our position on this matter.

While I have your attention, you made an offer to TI users for a free sample issue of MICROpendium. This offer appeared on page 6 of the October, 1986 issue. I announced the offer at our October 28 meeting. At our next meeting I was told by a fellow member, that his request was answered with a letter detailing your publication's subscription rates.

Anyhow, I find your publication first rate; keep up the good work. Let me know if I could be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Steve Mickelson

cc Terry Atkinson
Newsletter 9T9

Newsletter Editor/President 9T9 Users Group
15 Kersdale Ave., Toronto, Ont.,M6M-1C9
Canada

April 28,1987

This article came from Timeline; see the note following it -Ed.
REVIEW Submitted by:TERRY.A147E
CorComp 512K Ramdisk: A first-impression report.
by Terry Atkinson. 17 Jul 86.

Having received the ramdisk this past Monday, I have not yet had the opportunity for a comprehensive test of the ramdisk....hence...this is merely a first-impression report. A more comprehensive report will follow in due course.

The version number on the bottom of the unit is #60630. Bear this in mind as it may be important to others at a later date.

The 512K ramdisk is about 9"(l)x5"(w)x2"(h) and fits neatly alongside the consol, with other peripherals such as 9900 clock, synthesizer and 99/8 system chained outward. The preceding system is that which this report is based upon. Moreover, a good friend of mine, Tony McCabe received his ramdisk just before I received mine, and has the same system less the clock. In comparing notes, we arrived at basically the same conclusions.

The 512K actually has 524,288 bytes of memory, and formats like a disk drive, except it has 2048 sectors. (a DSDD disk has 1440 sectors). I have not yet "pushed it to it's limit" to see if all of those sectors are useable, but that is on my list of things-to-do. Recall that for a DSDD disk, sector 0 (AU0=bitmap) is completely filled if all sectors are used. To overcome this, I "think" CorComp has used AU0 and AU1 for the bitmap. This poses certain problems for cataloguers copiers as you might appreciate. Even Xbasic cataloguers will "bomb-out" if you try to get a listing of the programs contained in the Ramdisk. Supplied with the ramdisk is a resident cataloguer with features such as: Copy, Catalog, Rename, Protection, Format and Delete. There is no provision for printing the catalog to a printer, but DM1000 seems to work well with the ramdisk for most purposes.

The resident manager is not very impressive. Using the Copy function, three sub-options are presented. I find these features "archaic"...somewhat like the old DM II module. Option one allows you to specify a single filename to copy, and you can copy from any drive to RD or RD to any drive (as expected). The second option will scan through all the filenames on the source drive (one-at-a-time) and lets you select Y/N to copy (or not). The disk-copy (3rd option) allows you to copy a whole disk to RD. But here's the hitch. If the source disk is [illegible], then so will disk to RD. But here's the hitch. If the source disk is [illegible], then so will be your RD, therefore, only 360 sectors in the RD can be used. So, to utilize all 2048 sectors of the ramdisk, you must copy files either singly or selectively. If CorComp had been smart, they would have used DM1000 for the resident manager as Horizon had the foresight to do. I'm sure the OUG would not have complained in the least. As I mentioned, DM1000 does work well with RD. The comprehensive report I intend to prepare will give more details.

The resident manager can be called from basic or Xbasic by a simple command "CALL FM:R". Loading is very fast Additional commands are: 'DELETE "SD.1"' which tells the ramdisk that it is now to respond to DSK1. v((at which point the REAL DSK1 is inoperable). It can be configured to any drive from 1 to 5. The default is DSK5. In addition, it can always be accessed as "DSKR", and also by disk-name. In fact, you can do anything with the ramdisk that can be done with a "real" disk-drive, from opening files to "running" a program from it. Of course, loading of programs is almost instantaneous....which is standard for any ramdisk I have seen, and is one of the big reasons for buying such a peripheral in the first place (my opinion, naturally).

Another command is 'DELETE "LOWER"', which loads a lower-case character set with true descenders. The charset is not bad, and the command should be used in a program. For those who like to have a different character set in the command mode, type this in Xbasic command mode: DELETE "LOWER"::ACCEPT AT(1,1):A....then, when the cursor jumps to the top of the screen, hit FCTN 4. Your charset will be changed. However, if you make an error, it will reset to normal. And that concludes the new commands available. Not an impressive list, to be sure.

The RD is NOT battery-backed. It DOES have it's own power supply so that you can turn off your peripherals and consol and still have the programs intact in the RD when you re-boot your system. Power up/down must follow a prescribed sequence. The RD had a toggle switch on the front (which simulates a write-protect) , and a power indicator light. Power down: RD switch down, off consol, off peripherals. Power up: RD switch up, on peripherals, on consol. Correct sequence ensures your progams will be intact in RD. Incorrect sequence will most definetly blow one or more programs away...and may cause the RD to re-initialize. I have also found that when my consol locks-up (for whatever reason) some programs are "wiped" too. A power failure will also blow the RD programs away since it is not battery-backed.

More good features include the ability of having two 512K RD's on the same system, bring the total RAM (disk) to over 1megabyte. For use on TI systems, one RD must be the CARD version, and the 32K card MUST be removed. Then, the other RD MUST be a Stand-Alone-Unit (SAU). With the CorComp 9900 system, the RD is *IN ADDITION* to the 32K of the 9900 system. A second RD can be chained. However, if two RD's are used, one MUST be configured as DSK6 by repositioning a jumper wire either on the SAU or on the card. From then on, it can only be accessed as DSK6. If you purchase a 256K ramdisk (card or sau) you can upgrade it yourself to 512K by installing the appropriate ramchips (8/256Kx1 dynamic ram). However, the card/sau will only be wafranted as 256K if this (simple) operation is carried out.

The RD is initially selected at CRU >1000, and can be changed to CRU >1400 to allow for the use of other ramdisks. This is why most assembly language loaders will not work, as they do not follow the "standard" TI method of DSR links. Later, I will describe some of the loaders which do work, and some that don't.

That's about all the good points of the system. Now, on to the bad points. First and foremost is the "manual". CorComp has NEVER produced a good manual, at least, on the first run. They seem to "push" the hardware on the marketplace while largely neglecting the manual. This one is no different. It is merely six sheets of 8.5x11 paper, printed both sides in two columns, folded and punched (the holes are punched right through the text on a couple of pages). They didn't even bother to staple it together! The above method provides for 24 pages of condensed print, of which 5 sides are blank. Moreover, pages 6 through 12 are essentially reproductions of the TI Xbasic manual regarding file accessing, loading and running programs. Since 1 page is the cover, 1 page is warranty info, 1 page is a disclaimer and 1 page is a table of contents, this leaves only 8 pages of "new" information. However, those 8 pages give you everything to know, even if you need a magnifying glass to read it.

"Other" managers such as DM1000 and the SD command of TI-WRITER do not return the true number of sectors used/free. In fact, mine shows 1920 sectors (480?) total, even though the format showed 2048 sectors initialized. Now 512-480=32K (missing). Remember that the SAU RD, when used with the 9900 system is supposed

to give the full 512K IN ADDITION to the 32K of the 9900. Is this a coincidence or have I misread the documents?. I will also note at this point that at one part in the manual, it states 1900 sectors are available. Here's a table of those "inconsistancies":

RMGR	DM1000	TI-W	(SD)
FREE	1292	1823	1600
USED	628	97	318
TOTAL	1920	1920	1918

I don't know why they came out this way, but I'm sure someone out there will figure it out. I can't. The actual program size count is 625 sectors. 625+3=628, so therefore I can only assume the accurate one is the resident RMGR. In case you are wondering what the +3 is all about...recall I suspected that there were two AU0's (disk bit-map) set aside to accommodate the extra sectors. This supports that theory. Finally, the RD does NOT act as a print-spooler. I was hoping it would have this feature, and was disappointed when I found that it was not the case. At any rate those are my three main peeves. The remaining complaints I have will assume the RD is configured as DSK1.

1. Many loaders" will not work if "run" from DSK1. In all fairness, though, I would not have expected otherwise. Strangely, DM1000 loader DOES work, although once loaded, the screen APPEARS to have frozen. But, just hit FCTN 4 (TWICE) and the program is there! Strange!! Remember, this is using the DM1000 loader!

2. Even though DM1000 "MGR1" is in RD, you cannot make a permanent change to the color scheme and output file attributes. Boot-up will be in the (ugh) white-on-blue default, and if you want them changed, you must do so each session.

3. Standard Xbasic disk-cataloguers (CATS) cannot catalog the ramdisk. Some investigation reveals that the opening attributes do not follow the standard...i.e. OPEN #1:"DSK1.",INPUT,RELATIVE,INTERNAL

4. Both Tony and I have been having trouble "running" Xbasic programs which have been "loaded" from RD. I suspect that some (or all) of these programs have had "glitches" introduced...perhaps from improper flash-up or shut-down of the system.

5. Sometimes, when programs are "saved" to the ramdisk, a file will be over-written. I am not sure about this, but it may have been due to the fact that the programs on the ramdisk were loaded there with DM1000 and not RMGR. It will take a lot more experimentation to find out where that bug creeps in.

6. Tony has had trouble logging a "session" to RD with Fast-Term. I have not yet had that problem. Since we are on the subject of Fast-Term, I hope to be able to find a way to print-spool to RD by finding where the appropriate PAB is and altering it to specify DSK1. as a filename, rather than those available at this time. (See the DEFAULTSET program). Maybe Paul Carlton will put out a change when he is finished his 1001 other projects.

7. While the FUNNELWRITER version 2 loader works well, version 3 does not. I will test version 3.3 when I get it.

I phoned CorComp already, and explained some of the problems I was having. A day later, Tony did the same. Although the party at CorComp didn't alleviate my frustrations, he told Tony that new eproms would be shipped to Tony and I. Seems there is already a version change. Remember that number I gave you at the beginning? Well, that is the initial version. I will give another go at it when I install the new eprom.

Now, to end on a positive note before my conclusion. All TI software such as TI-WRITER, Multiplan, Editor Assembler, etc run extremely well in RD. For example, TI-WRITER loads in less than a second. Saving files is very rapid indeed, as is loading of files. DM1000 loads as quickly as TI-W, when loaded through TI-W option 3, as does Fast-Term. Program files and DF80 assembly programs which are loaded through the E/A options 5 and 3 again, load very quickly.

Conclusion. I cannot, at this time, recommend the Corcomp 512K Memory Plus Ramdisk, because of the "faults" in the system. Hopefully, the new eprom will change my mind. As everyone knows, I am a staunch supporter of CorComp, and I am not out to "smear" them. But, again, they have left themselves open to criticism by "pushing" a product out on the marketplace before it has been thoroughly tested. Again, both Tony's unit and mine react in a similar manner. Inconsistancies in the manual 2440 sectors (formatted), 1920 sectors (showing), 1900 sectors (in manual) is just one example, and could have been explained further. I will keep everyone posted on new developments as I discover them, or, as they are brought to my attention.

PARTING NOTE: This file was saved to DSK2 in 29 seconds. It took only 4.5 seconds to save it to the ramdisk. Total: 56 Sectors. Later...

Terry.A147E.

(Ediors note the above article was passed on to me by Gil Tennant, who downloaded it from Timeline, before it folded. I have not touched,(deleted or added to the text. The only editing has been the Adjust,Fill,Margination, and spacing to conform to Newsletter 9T9 Format. Previous articles on the same disk, name the Gram Kracker series, mentioned in MICROpendium were credited to Atkinson in a similar way -Editor)

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The following was downloaded from DELPHI and origionally appeared in F.L.U.G. Newsletter.

THE MYARC 9640-A "USERS" POINT OF VIEW

-by Richard A. Fleetwood, President-Forest Lane TI Users Group Dallas, Texas

Is it really worth it?

Before I answer that question, let me tell you what I have done, what I have had, and what I was able to accomplish. This story starts off with a message left on the Genie information system by one of the frequent users there. This particular message, if I remember correctly, was left around mid december of 1986. It specifically stated that Myarc was sending out DEMO units of the new computer for users groups across the country to actually see, feel, and play with. Until this time, the Myarc super computer had only been an idea, a hope, a dream, a empty keyboard/housing at a TI Faire, or a nonworking wirewrapped pcboard at another Faire. This user stated that Myarc had shipped him one of the beta units to show to his users group, and that Myarc was offering to do it for other users groups just for the asking. I agree that this could have been one of Myarc's best possible methods of drawing free publicity for the 9640, if only they culd have done a few more things.

I proceeded to call Myarc the next day, and with a few more phone calls, and a letter or two, just to be on the safe side, I was able to get Myarc to send our users group a 9640 to show at our meeting in February. All was well and good, until the unit arrived. I got the package on a friday afternoon, with my wife calling me at work to say it had arrived. I didn't get home from work til late that evening, and the first thing I did was print out 300+ pages of the DOS and Users manuals. Around Midnight Friday, I was finally able to get to the point of actually setting up all the hardware, plugging the 9640 computer card into my pbox, then plugging the IBM keyboard into the proper port. Now, all I had to do to boot the computer was to turn on the pbox. At powerup, the 9640 goes IMMEDIATELY to DSK1 looking for a file called BOOT. BOOT is the actual 9640 Disk Operating System. Well, upon powerup, the screen display showed some strange characters then just sat there. I wondered if this was what it was supposed to do, and decided it was not. I could tell that the system was locking up without booting properly. I then began a long night (from 1 am til 5:30 am)of rebooting the pbox, trying to load the DOS. I think I was able get the DOS to load maybe 15-20 times, out of about 200 boots. I had no idea what the problem was. My personal system has a Myarc controller card, and two YE-Data YD-580 half Hi ds/dd drives. I thought that the problem might have been a bad disk sent, or that maybe my drives or controller may have been a little touchy. Oh well, I thought, I'll do the best I can. Of the very few times the DOS loaded, I tried using the demos that had been provided by Myarc. These demos consisted of two graphics demos running at unbeleiveably fast speed, two basic demo programs, Myarc XBII, version 2.11 running out of the 9640(instead of 3.0), A mouse graphic drawing demo, 80 column TI writer, and Fastterm. The only thing I got to run in those 5 hours was the Block demo, and basic(once!). Nothing else would load up completely, if at all. I gave up thinking it was my systems fault, and not the 9640.

After getting dressed at 5:30 am, and heading out to my monthly flea market jaunt, I got back home at 12:00 to get ready for a 2:00 pm users group meeting. I tried several more times, and was able to get the 80 Col. TIW to load once, and Basic to load one again. I had a backup idea for the meeting--I had a copy of the 86 Chicago TI faire on videotape, and brought that just in case the unit never did run. Well, at the meeting, after doing the usual business, we proceeded to try to boot the system. Unfortunately, right at the moment of turning on the clubs TI moniter, the moniter decided to die right there. This was no fault of the 9640, just bad luck for the club(and bad timing). To make a long story short, all we saw of the 9640 demo that day was what we saw on videotape. A lot of people who had come to the meeting just to see the 9640 in action were disappointed-others were quite disillusioned. It was not meeting up to any real expectations. After the meeting, we tried the computer in another system and it did the same thing. Later that evening I had to take my wife to the hospital for the delivery of our third child, so needless to say, the 9640 saw no more action that weekend. I called Lou Monday morning to report the happenings and to see what to do next. One of the things he asked me, after I reported the symptoms, was to ask me if I had set the DIP switch on the Myarc controller card to FASTER access. Well, I had not been told to do that at any time previous to that, so of course I had not. Well, he figured that was the problem. I spent a few more minutes that afternoon playing with the dip switches, and tried several more times to load the DOS. Still no luck, so I packed everything up and mailed it off to Myarc the next day.

Checking back with Lou a week or two later, I still had no idea of what was goin on, and why it hadn't worked for me. Lou at that time said he would send another unit, this one an ACTUAL production model, for me to demo at the other users group meetings in the Dallas area. I of course jumped at the chance, because I wasn't going to give up. I heard thru the grapevine, and thru BBS's across the country, that other users groups across the country were getting units such as the one I had recieved, and several were reporting the same difficulties. Strange....

Lou shipped another unit the last week of February, which looked to be a different board, and in fact what we received could NOT have been a production model. It had several dozen jumper wires spread around it, and several items were missing, or not fully mounted. The most obvious item missing was the SOUND CHIP. Also not on the card was the Clock circuit, containing the real time clock and date function that is supposed to be part of the system. Lou had called early friday, and wanted me to return his call so he could tell me about this particular card. I called him and he was able to give a little more insight about some of the peculuarities of this card. First and foremost, this particular card had a PAL (Programmable Array Logic) chip RTVed to the top edge of the card. There were several jumpers from this chip running to may other circuits. The most obvious one went to the 9995 microprocessor. Lou said the PAL chip had been installed to SLOW DOWN this card, due to it running TOO FAST! There was some problem with the beta software that required these hardware mods for the time being. He then went on to tell me about the latest software additions and changes--he had sent an updated demo disk with the new programs. Later that evening, I set the system up, and low and behold, it booted properly the FIRST time! (remember the dip switch? I left it OFF!). Lou had seen fit to include a two page set of notes made by Lance Parr, of the Corpus Christi TI Users Group, about how to operate(or at least load) some of the Demo software. Well, that friday night turned out to be another sleepless night. I still had loading problems with the DOS, but it was NOWHERE near as bad as the first unit. I was able to load and use the BLOCK Demo, the LINES demo-both at FANTASTIC speed-, two DIFFERENT drawing programs for the mouse,(one, called DRAW, had three pictures that could be loaded and displayed. I only got one, FOX1,to load and display..the other two would never load). In the regular drawing mode, there was an awesome color palet of 256 colors displayed along the bottom of the screen. With the mouse, and manipulations of the mouse left and right buttons, in the proper order, you could change between the different modes. Unfortunately, this is an area that caused some problems at all three groups....none of the demo programs, except for the cartridge saver program by Peter Hoddie, had any SPECIFIC documentation on how to get the most out of the program. In an effort to give you an idea of what I was up against, try thinking about giving a child the keys to the family car and telling him to go get some groceries. He might have seen people drive him around, but he doesn't know how to get the car into the proper gear, and its up to him to try to figure it out while on the run, so to say. Unless the author of a program TELLS you how to provide input, and what to expect when input is given, then how is a new program for a brand new computer supposed to be learned, without much time and effort on the poor soul who has to do the demo in a very short time frame? I did the very best that I could with all the programs, but a few (mainly the DRAW program, only the most visually appealing program they sent) were not up to the level they could have been if much better documentation would have been provided. Many of the people who attended the demos remarked about this very thing, ad all I could tell them was 'Sorry'.

But enough about that....there WERE several programs that seemed to work to the limits of the hardware. The 80 Column TI Writer , loaded from the DSK1> prompt while in DOS by typing EDIT, seemed to work flawlessly. On my 12 10" color moniter, I could make out the very small characters easily enough to use this mode. The display was actually 80 columns by 26 lines, with the last two lines being status lines. All functions that I tried worked, with a noticable increase in speed. As a sidelight, when the 9640 finally makes it to the consumer, it will come with a VERY enhanced TI Writer package, with the biggest change being a 56k buffer. This may not seem like much, especially when you have 512k of memory to play with. Myarc is going to release an even BETTER TIW by this summer that will let you set your own buffer size. In fact, with the extra memory, you now have both the EDITOR and FORMATTER in memory at the same time.

Another program that worked as advertised was the 99/4A mode. In DOS, at the DSK1> prompt, typing 99/4A proceeded to load the GPL Interpreter that has been probably the biggest challenge to design for this new computer. In this mode, you could load ANY cartridge dumped with either the GRAMCRACKER or the CSAVE program provided, into the system and run it as if it was a real 99/4A. After loading the interpreter, the screen displays the question "Which Cartridge do you wish to load?". You simply type in DSK1.FILENAME, and it goes to town. After the cartridge is loaded and drive activity has stopped, pressing enter brings up the familiar TI COLOR BARS <press any key to begin>!! Pressing a key then shows the menu listing the cartridge you just loaded.

Since this particular unit did not have a sound chip, and since practically ALL TI modules had sound of SOME KIND, most of my programs I tried locked up at the point where you would normally here some familiar tunes. I was not bothered as much by lockups as I was that this unit was not COMPLETE. Oh well, ke sera!

I didn't get a chance to play with FASTTERM version 2, since I didn't try putting a RS232 Card and modem in the system the short time I had to play with it. I was assured that it worked though, with the only major change being the addition of the 80 column display. Again, lack of documentation was a problem in trying to examine this program when I did run it. To get into 80 column mode, all it takes to toggle it on and off is CONTROL-Q.

Coming back to the Disk Operating system, this is where the 9640 is going to shine. Built into the DOS are most of the E/A functions, the EDIT command to enter TIWriter, all the disk and harddisk managing functions, the Date and Time commands, and literally dozens of commands to do nearly everything possible with MS-DOS, as used with IBM systems. The docs I have seen compare Myarc's DOS to MS-DOS Version 2.1. The manual for the DOS is over 100 pages, and seems to

cover everything in great detail. Ditto for the portion of the manual for the ADVANCED BASIC 3.0. 3.0 fully supports TI extended basic, all earliers versions of Myarc XBII, and almost every command available in the GW Basic found in IBM Computers.

The memory of the 9640 is very adaptable. You have 512k of CPU memory to play with. This memory can be divided into RAMdisk, spooler, and actual program space by a few simple commands in DOS, or by using a CONFIGSYS file at bootup. The Yamaha 9938 Video processor chip has another 128k of VDP ram which should be really useful for all those humongous arrays we can now play with. Then there is the addition of the Myarc 512k card, to give you a grand total of over 1 MEG of available memory space!! To use the 512k, you will have to send it back to Myarc for some simple modifications.

Getting back to the original question about the 9640 - " is it really worth it?" -- all the whoopla, all the talk about a mesiah, of a new age of computing for everyone, and so on and so forth? Only YOU can answer this question. As for myself, I have decided I DO need a 9640. After running the FLUG TIBBS for over a year and a half, and fighting MEMORY FULL errors everytime I add a line of change to an existing one, and just wanting to have more speed and power, I think the 9640 will fit the bill. It will be like a breath of fresh air to do as much programming as I want without having to delete something I just did to make more room for a better idea. I will also make great use of the new TI Writer, since that is the program I use over 50% of my computer time. I guess the biggest change I am looking for is for all the barriars I've been facing for the past year to be blown away, with a wide new horizon of possibilities just waiting for me. The 99/4A is a fantastic computer and I love it dearly. I know lots more then the average individual about the inner workings, and can appreciate the time and care that TI put into the design of the machine. The 9640 greatly improves upon the ideas, while moving our system from that of an orphan system to that of being state of the art.

Of course, you might also say that I want the 9640 for the same reason I got my 99/8 that I have on my desk here. I just like machines that are one off, yet have power that you can't fully appreciate until you have actually had a chance to use it. With many hundreds of disks, and lots of TI 99 hardware besides my basic system, and all the time I've spent learning everything I can about the 99, I AM NOT about to waste it on another totally new computer system like many have done in the past year or two. I'm doing what I enjoy, and I recommend that you do too. If you think you can HANDLE the 9640, then get it. It'll only open your eyes to REAL power, while losing nothing out of your present system. If you prefer to limit yourself to a 9974a console, pbox and drives, thats all well and good. I'll still be right beside you when new software and ideas come out. Of course, I will probably have a full 9640 system sitting right next to my full blown TI 99 system sometime in the near future, but I'm going to enjoy the best of both worlds!

So, to answer my question....."yes, it IS worth it!"

This article did appear in the Ottawa Users newsletter quite some time ago. It was downloaded from Compuserve and has appeared in a few other newsletters. I think it still timely and of interest, considering the "global" aspect of community-Ed:

A View Of The TI-99/4A From Europe

THE VIEW FROM MILAN ITALY-by Paolo Bagnaresi (Author of BA Writer)

From the Ottawa TI 99/4A UG Newsletter, August 1986 issue This is a letter written by Paolo to Bob Boone of Ottawa.

TI-99/4A seems to be the fourth largest used computer, Commodore VIC 20 and C-64 being first. They are followed by ZX Spectrum and QL (Sinclair) and Apple II. However, PC IBM and compatibles are catching up really fast. Other Computers, Atari 510-1040 ST, Apple MacIntosh ; are slowly increasing their market share. Commodore Amiga hasn't shown up yet: It will be available in the next few months.

TI-99/4A typical configuration is console and tape recorder. A 5-10 percent of owners have also the disk drive system, expansion memory, a RS232 and a printer. Few users also have a second drive and maybe some fancy disk controller (CorComp or Atronic, this one from Germany).

Users of TI-99/4A have not gathered into any user group. This may be due to the Mediterranean way of life: everybody does not trust too much anybody else. Moreover, in a user group you would have to work for free. Are we crazy? We do not like to work even if we get paid for, let alone for free. No way we will do it. Some others argued that a TI club could be seen as a blatant American supporting team: we could be bombed by our mighty neighbor on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea (Khaddafi) as a dangerous US base (since we would have US computers we might as well have some US missle, couldn't we?). I think that it is mainly for this second reason why we do not have a user group.

There is a wild Frontier life here. You exchange a program for another program, sometimes for two programs, if you are lucky. If you do hot have anything to exchange with, chances are you are gonna pay for that program you want. Mind, we are talking about programs that have been imported, that are copyrighted, that are sold by dealers in North America at regular prices. Anyway, no one here seems to give a damn about copyright, about rewarding a programmer. The only concern seems to be "is is copyable? that's enough, what the hell!

Here the real smart guy will join a user group in the US, get some really good stuff and then he will sell it all over Italy: prices for any program from US span $15 to $35. To the smart guy that programs costs $2.00 each, the copy fee he paid to the US user group! Good business, isn't it? Here there is a real spaghetti market. Only spaghetti, the meat balls are gone forever.

I know one of those smart guy, he lives in Bologna. He used to write US user group pretending he was an user group! He was also able to get his name published on Home Computer Magazine, Oregon, USA. In this way he was able to receive a vast number of programs. Now he can sell you ANY program you can think of, no matter what. Obviously, having been in this business for over three years, he did not have time to learn to program yet. But after all, who cares ? Good money will come to him as a steady flow anyway: net income, no income tax to pay, no anything. Good life, isn't it?

Ah, I forgot to tell you: documentation will not be provided by the pirate. It is like a "mafia": a dumb user it is not supposed to have the right to know how to use a program. The less he knows, the better for the pirate distributor. Obviously the dumb user gets hungry for some understandible program. Eventually, he will some other program from the pirate distributor, a program that will be more or less the same as the one he bought previously. That program was rather useless, wasn't it? The next one will be the same. By now, the trend has already been started. The dumb user gets addicted to the pirate distributor. He will consider him like a good willing person who does his best to help the fellow man. T pirate distributor is his friend, no doubt about it. If only those darned programs were easier to use....

On the other hand, photocopies are too costly and too time consuming. As a result, intelligent users will have to figure out by themselves how to use that pirate program: well, well, well, that is the fun or it, isn't it?

So much for the bad news. As for the good news: we have none. Here everybody seems to be waiting to see when the new Myarc computer will be working and ready to be shipped to Europe.

As for the rest of Europe. Germany (and Austria) are the strongest market for TI-99/4A. There are several companies that are developing good hardware and software. Most of what is available in Germany is already imported in North America by RYTE DATA of Canada.

France used to be a good country as for TI-99/4A. After all, the fabulous "TENNIS" game, by Nicesoft, come from Nice, France. There was a French magazine "99 MAGAZINE", from Paris, that used to be pretty good. Unfortunately, it ceased publishing last year. Now we do not hear too much anymore from our cousins on the other side of the Alps.

We do not know what is going on in England. We know the Queen is still kicking and alive (God save Her), but we are afraid that TI-99/4A is dead there. I'll be happy to be wrong on that assumption.

Greece does have some small market, but the seem to have only the console, no disk drive and only a few few memory expansions.

We do not know anything about Spain, aside from the fact that Bill Gronos lives there.

Back to Italy. There is a slow, but steady, shifting of users toward the PC IBM (and compatibles). Each month some friend calls me up and says: "Paolo, I am sorry, but I wanna sell out my system. Can you Help? You see, I have been offered a true PC IBM compatible. It's such a deal... I know, I know, we said we will never give away our beloved TI-99/4A. But you see I simply need it for work. They recently asked us employees to become PC IBM expert. Our office will be fully equipped with lots of PCs. and I don't want to be the least informed person in my office. C'mon, don't take it so hard, after all, we did not marry TI did we?"

This rap kinda goes on now and then. Boys, does it give me a chilly on my back! Will I be the last survival of an dwindling race?.

If you ever publish this article, I would be glad to receive a copy of that newsletter.

I developed a small assembler routine, named PARTS. It is good to partition the MYARC RAM DISK, and choose the drive number to emulate while in assembler. These functions can be easily performed in Basic by two CALLs provided by Myarc. However, when you are in Assembler, no hints have been given by Myarc on how to perform the same task. I faced this problem. My solution seems to work well. As explained in the source code, it will work also in a running extended basic program, while with normal Myarc calls you can't do that. It is possible to modify the source code, just to change the drive # you are emulating in a running extended basic program. You are free to publish it, if you think it is worth it.

Yours truly,

Paolo Bagnaresi
Via J.F. Kennedy 17
20097 San Donato Milanese, Italy
Phone 514.202 (Milan Area Code: 2. Calling from U.S. dial 011-39-2 first)
- Upload to Compuserve by Art Byers, 73157,3017 Assembler routine referred to above will be u/l as soon as I have possession of it on disk. -Art

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TI ACCOUSTIC MODEM FOR SALE

For sale: TI Acoustic Modem
Never Used. $45.00

Contact: Jiri at 762-5783

A Handy Dandy TI-Writer Users Reference Guide

By Bob Stephens

EDITOR COMMAND	FCTN	CTRL	EDITOR COMMAND	FCTN	CTRN	EDITOR COMMAND	FCTN	CTRN
Back Tab		T	Ins. Blank Line	8	0	Quit	=	
Beginning		V	Insert Character	2	G	Reformat		2orR
Command/escape	9	C	Last Paragraph		6orH	Right arrow	D	D
Delete Character	1	F	Left arrow	S	S	Roll down	4	A
Del. end of line		K	Left margin rel.		Y	Roll up	6	B
Delete line	3	N	New page		9orP	Screen color		3
Line #'s (on/off	0		New Paragraph		8orM	Tab	7	1
Down arrow	X	A	New Paragraph		8orJ	Up arrow	E	E
Duplicate line		5	Next window	5		Word tab		7orW
Home cursor		L	Opps!		1orZ	Word wrap/fixed		0

Load files: LF (enter) DSK1.FILENAME (load entre file)
LF (enter) 3 DSK1. FILENAME (merges filename with date in memory after line 3)
LF (enter 3 1 10 DSK1.FILENAME (lines 1 thru 10 of filename are merged after line 3 in memory)
LF (enter) 1 10 DSK1. FILENAME (loads lines 1 thru 10 of filename)

Save files: SF (enter) DSK1.FILENAME (save entire file)
SF (enter) 1 10 DIK1.FILENAME (save lines 1 thru 10)

Print files: PF (enter PIO (prints control characters and data listing)
PF (enter) C PIO (prints with no control characters)
PF (enter) L PIO (prints 74 characters with line numbers)
PF (enter F PIO (prints fixed 80 format)
PF (enter) 1 10 PIO (prints lines 1 thru 10)
NOTE: The above assumes PIO, DISK.FILENAME, and RS232 are also valid!
To cancel the print command press FCTN 4.

Delete file: DF (enter) DSK1.FILENAME

Setting Margins and Tabs: (16 tabs maximum)
L — Left Margin R — Right Margin I — Indent T — Tab
Use ENTER to execute or COMMAND ESCAPE to terminate command.

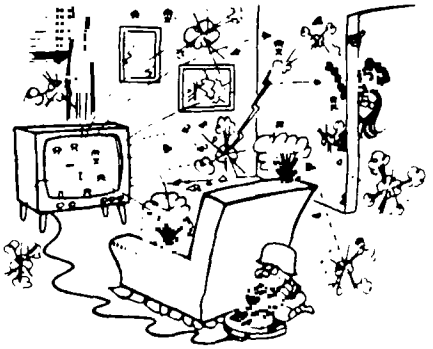
Recover Edit: RE (enter) Y or N

Line move: M (enter) 2 6 10 (moves lines 2 thru 6 after line 10)
M (enter) 2 2 10 (moves line 2 afterr 10)

Copy: same as move except use C instead of M.

Find String: FS (enter) /string/ (will look for string in entre file)
FS (enter) 1 15 /string/ (will look for string in lines 2 thru 15)

Delete: D (enter) 10 15 (deletes lines 10 thru 15 in memory)



"If you ask me, these video games are getting too realistic!"

L. HERMAN IN FRIENDS

Download from the Source ---

```
100 !**********************
110 !* GRAPH PAPER PROGRAM *
120 !*  FREEWARE  2/19/86  *
130 !*   COPYRIGHT  1986   *
140 !*     BY: TOM WYNNE    *
150 !*       VERSION 2.0    *
160 !**********************
170 CALL CLEAR
180 CALL SCREEN(4)
190 ON WARNING NEXT
200 CALL CHAR(140,"FF888888FF888888",124,"8080808080808080")
210 CALL HCHAR(1,1,140,768)
220 !
230 !WARNING! DO NOT REMOVE ANY PART OF THIS PROGRAM
240 !
250 DISPLAY AT(1,1):"|    GRAPH PAPER PRINTER":"|       COPYRIGHT  1986"
260 DISPLAY AT(3,1):"|     DISTRIBUTED UNDER":"|  THE FREEWARE CONCEPT":"|":"|
IF YOU USE THIS PROGRAM,":"| PLEASE SEND $2.00 TO:":"|"
270 DISPLAY AT(9,1):"|          TOM WYNNE":"|      16223 70TH PL W":"|     EDMOND
S, WA 98020"
280 DISPLAY AT(14,1):"|ENTER NUMBER OF SQUARES TO":"|BE PARTITIONED: (1-30)"
290 ACCEPT AT(15,25):P
300 IF P<1 OR P>30 THEN 310 ELSE 320
310 DISPLAY AT(17,1):"|INVALID NUMBER!" :: GOTO 280
320 DISPLAY AT(17,1):"|ENTER PRINTER NAME:":"|PIO.CR"
330 ACCEPT AT(18,2)SIZE(-26):PRN$
340 DISPLAY AT(20,1):"|POSITION PRINT HEAD BELOW":"|THE PERFERATION AND PRESS":"
|ANY KEY TO PRINT..."
350 CALL KEY(0,K,S):: IF S=0 THEN 350
360 DISPLAY AT(24,1):"|PRINTING..."
370 OPEN #1:PRN$,OUTPUT
380 A$=CHR$(248)&RPT$(CHR$(128),7)
390 IF P=1 THEN NOPART=1 :: P=29 :: BLK1$=RPT$(A$,P):: DPB=8*P :: GOTO 420
400 BLK1$=CHR$(248)&RPT$(A$,P)
410 DPB=8*P+1
420 DOTS=INT(960/DPB)*DPB+2
430 N2=INT(DOTS/256)
440 N1=DOTS-N2*256
450 BOXES=DOTS/DPB
460 ROWS=INT(130/P)+1
470 PART$=RPT$(CHR$(8),DPB)
480 FOR J=1 TO ROWS
490 IF NOPART=1 THEN 570
500 PRINT #1:CHR$(27);"A";CHR$(1)
510 PRINT #1:CHR$(13);CHR$(10)
520 PRINT #1:CHR$(27);"L";CHR$(N1);CHR$(N2)
530 FOR I=1 TO BOXES
540 PRINT #1:PART$;
550 NEXT I
560 PRINT #1:CHR$(8);CHR$(8)
570 PRINT #1:CHR$(27);"A";CHR$(5)
580 FOR X=1 TO P
590 PRINT #1:CHR$(13);CHR$(10)
600 PRINT #1:CHR$(27);"L";CHR$(N1);CHR$(N2)
610 FOR I=1 TO BOXES
620 PRINT #1:BLK1$;
630 NEXT I
640 PRINT #1:CHR$(248);CHR$(248)
650 NEXT X
660 NEXT J
670 PRINT #1:CHR$(27);"A":CHR$(1)
680 FOR J=1 TO 2
690 PRINT #1:CHR$(13);CHR$(10)
700 PRINT #1:CHR$(27);"L";CHR$(N1);CHR$(N2)
710 FOR I=1 TO BOXES
720 PRINT #1:PART$;
730 NEXT I
740 PRINT #1:CHR$(8);CHR$(8)
750 NEXT J
760 PRINT #1:CHR$(13);CHR$(10);CHR$(12)
770 PRINT #1:CHR$(27);"@" :: CLOSE #1
780 DISPLAY AT(24,1):"|WANT ANOTHER COPY? (Y/N)"
790 CALL KEY(0,K,S):: IF S=0 THEN 790
800 IF K=89 THEN 210
810 IF K=78 THEN 820 ELSE 790
820 END
```

DICK LUCAS, MASTERS AGENCY