The Paper Peripheral

September 1984

Putting you Online with the Central Texas 99/4A Users Group

From the President's Keyboard

Greetings, fellow users of the 99/4A Home Computer. Several interesting things have happened with the group since it we last met. Let me see if I can straighten them out and tell you about them. First, at the last meeting we voted on the constitutional changes stated in the last newsletter. They passed easily. Also at the last meeting I demonstrated the new CorComp disk controller card. Unfortunately the demonstration did not go well as we could not initialize a disk. I sent the card back to CorComp to be checked out, then found out my system began failing with the regular disk controller in it. The fault was finally traced to a faulty p-System card that, after it had a few minutes to warm up, began interfering with the normal operation of other cards. Then it crashed the system. Most peculiar! *(Editor's Note: Funny, peculiar isn't what he called the card at the time!)* I haven't gotten the disk controller back from the CorComp yet, so we haven't made our conclusions on it yet. Stay tuned.

Also last month the IRS has threatened to audit us. Seems they think we are a business and that we haven't turned in withholding on our employees. We have sent them the requested forms again and explained that we are a non-profit organization and have the red ink to prove it. Stay tuned for this too.

On to more important things! Chuck Holmes tells me that the TI exchange center has moved. It's now located at 12212 Technology Boulevard, Suite J. This is nearly walking distance from the main TI plant. Their new phone number is 250-4218 and the hours are Monday thru Friday, 8am-12 noon and 1pm-5pm. *(Further Editor's Note: I have been there personally--to exchange the p-System card. It wasn't real easy to find, but the people there were very friendly and exchanged the card for a less helpful one with no problems.)*

Speaking of TI, they sent us another care package! This one included the source for FORTH (!), enhancements for Multiplan (!!!) and enhancements for TI-WRITER (!!!!). The update for TI-WRITER includes true lowercase on the screen display, a default for the print device and, are you sitting down, the formatter no longer page feeds before every print (!!!!!).

This brings me to the next meeting, where we will present the winner of our programming contest, discuss the assembly language class, and have a BBS presented to us written by Robert Barger. I'll be making copies of the TI-WRITER and Multiplan enhancements for free anyone who wants them. All I ask is that you bring your own disk to copy the enhancements on to. The FORTH source is going directly to the library, and that is where you will be able to find the TI-WRITER and Multiplan enhancements after the next meeting.

Mike Schultz

P.S. Star Micronics has sent us the new printhead (for free). We hope that it will relieve some of the eye strain caused by Diane's condensed print!

Newsletter Exchange

Our users group exchanges newsletters with several other recognized 99/4A Users Groups. The exchange is made with the understanding that, with proper credit to both the newsletter and author (if listed), your users group can reprint articles from our newsletter and, with proper credit, we can reprint articles from exchanged newsletters. (Please feel free to correct any typos, misspelling, bad grammar, etc.; we will do the same.)

From the Business End of the Mailbox

It occurred to me that I need to explain why I'm writing this column. During the month the group receives a number of advertisements from businesses, announcing products, describing discounts, providing catalogs, and so on. This kind of mail has been especially heavy since the *HCM* magazine stopped accepting ads. Very few of these advertisements are accompanied with the requested fee for a full-fledged newsletter ad (make that none from outside the membership!), but I still feel that we need to mention these products in the newsletter--if for nothing more than to let the members know that the material will be available at the next meeting. Some of the advertisements are simple enough that I'll include the product's price and an address or phone number so that you may order directly if you want. So, without further ado, here are the ads for this month:

Data Flex software is offering a new print screen utility. They say that it's compatible with most printers and, get this, that it can be used to print the contents of a screen of BASIC or Extended BASIC program without any modification to the program and using only 1 key stroke. This feature is available for the 99/4A only. This program requires 32K memory for operation. The price is $29.95 on disk, $26.95 on cassette. The address is DATA FLEX SOFTWARE; 4420E 100N; Marion, Indiana 46952.

Schmidt Enterprises announces a new graphics package for the 99/4A. The package includes a sketch pad called Super Sketch that can be used to trace or draw a picture and turn it into graphics on your screen. There is also a cartridge with software to run the sketch pad. The cost is $60.00. They are also offering a high-quality printer that plugs directly into the 99/4A called the Axiom GP-100. The price for it is $299.95. The address is Schmidt Enterprises; 786 John Alden Road; Stone Mountain, Georgia 30083. The phone number is (404) 292-1504.

BCD Electro of P.O. Box 830119; Richardson, Texas 75083-0119 has sent us a catalog. It contains nothing specific to the 99/4A but there are a few items of interest. They offer 5 1/4" half-height drives for $169.00. These drives are DSDD and appear to be compatible with the /4A. They are also offering a pack of 10 no-name diskettes, SSDD for $13.50, DSDD for $15.50. The phone is (214) 690-1102.

John T. Dow, of Dow-4 Gazelle flight simulator fame, has written to inform us of his discount policy. The discount is 40% for orders that total over $100.00 at the discount rate. The products that he offers are: Dow-4 Gazelle flight simulator ($30.00 single copy, $18.00 discount); the Dow Editor/Assembler ($25.00, $15.00 discount); and his Assembly Language Primer ($20.00, $12.00 discount). By the way, the assembly language primer is a book, not software. He also has shipping charges: $1.00 per order+$0.10 for each program+$0.20 for each primer. The address is 6560 Rosemoor Street; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15217 or phone (412) 521-9385. If you would like to order any of these products, please bring your checkbook to the next meeting and contact me. If we can get enough orders to get the discount price I will be happy to send it off. Let me also mention that he has sent us a number of flyers describing his products. You can get these at the meeting too.

Information Associates of 4651 Abelia Court; P.O. Box 2207; Oak Grove Branch; Acworth, Georgia 30101 (800) 845-8375 has sent us a flyer describing their products. They are offering many things including the CorComp disk controller for $179.95, the 99000 expansion system for $489.95, and the 9900 expansion system for $129.95. Information Associates also has the Gemini 10X printer for $289.95, the TI-COUNT small business accounting system for $79.95, the Volksmodem for $79.95 and the Hayes 300 Smart Modem for $209.00.

CMS Systems of P.O. Box 11128; Huntsville, Alabama 35814 (205) 837-2756, has sent us a catalog of their software. There are many games, including some educational ones, a sprite builder, a disk copier and a disassembler. One of the games is actually a trilogy of adventure games that sounds very interesting. The plot revolves around freeing a sleeping princess from an indestructible glass case. These sell for $26.95, $16.95, and $16.95.

The Reston Publishing Company, 11480 Sunset Hills Road; Reston, Virginia 22090 is a Prentice-Hall Company that has several books available about the 99/4A. *Kids and the TI 99/4A* is a book designed for 10 to 14-year-olds. It is divided into 33 lessons with explanations and review exercises. Programs in the book include action games, board games, and record organization. The cost to the group is $7.00 a copy. Another book *Sprites, a Turtle, and TI LOGO* is a book designed to help children learn to use LOGO. It introduces them to the drawing turtle, the sprites, and the character tiles that will "help them create computer stories." The cost of this book is only $4.50 a copy. If you are interested in either of these books, please contact me for more information.

Mike Schultz

A Few Bytes and Nibbles

I'm afraid I'm going to disappoint a few of you this month. If you are a follower of any of our regular features, you won't find them in this issue. We had a lot of new software to review and I finally made the decision to concentrate only on that. I did try something a little different that I hope will be interesting (maybe even useful). Each piece of software has been reviewed twice. Anyone who reviews software comes to it with their own biases and needs, which may or may not be similar to yours. I hope that having two different reviewers will lend more objectivity to the final result. It may also give you a better idea of whether or not the product suits your needs.

You'll notice that Kapt'n Kluge has returned to our newsletter once again. He's beginning to be very useful! (If any of you need a definition of kluge, be sure and ask Mike at the next meeting. He's an expert.)

Tunnels of Doom fans will be glad to know that Charlie has returned from his vacating. When I told him I didn't need an article for this month, he said that would give him a chance to get ahead on articles! Uh, sure. Let's hope for the end of last month's article for next month's issue. Then we'll worry about getting ahead!

Finally, let's see if anyone actually shows up at the next meeting. Where were you guys--partying at AquaFest?

Diane Schultz

TI-WRITER Enhancements
by Ken Mathews

I think the three TI-WRITER enhancements are pretty useful. One provides lowercase letters that appear on your monitor with true descenders and ascenders. (These are the letters that have 'tails', such as d, g, j, h, and so on.) Instead of seeing small versions of capital letters on your monitor, you now get genuine lowercase letters. If you use TI-WRITER with a color monitor, I think you will enjoy this change. If you use a television set (which has lower resolution), you are going to find the letters more difficult to read.

The second enhancement eliminates that irritating automatic form-feed that occurs every time you use the text formatter to print. It began to bother me after using the formatter several times when I found I'd wasted several sheets of paper. (The paper airplane collection at my house is enormous.) If I had to choose only one of these enhancements, I'd take this one.

The third enhancement automatically inserts your printer name when you use the text formatter. Every time I use my printer, I have to enter RS232.BA=4800.LF for the printer name. With this enhancement, the software does all of this typing for you. This is great. It gets tedious to reenter the printer name over and over. The only restriction is that you must have a serial printer set up for either 1200 or 4800 baud. Since the TI-WRITER manual suggests that you set your printer for 4800 baud, this isn't a big deal.

TI-WRITER Enhancements
by Diane Schultz

When I first saw the letter from TI saying that the TI-WRITER enhancements included lowercase letters, I got very excited. I thought surely that would make it easier to use TI-WRITER. Well, having used these letters for several evenings working on the newsletter, I'm beginning to wonder. True, I've always preferred true lowercase with true descenders to small caps. But, even with a monitor, these letters can be hard to read. The resolution just isn't quite good enough. The lowercase e--which, as every schoolchild knows, is the most common letter in English--is also the fuzziest. So, do I recommend doing without them? Not really. I think we can all get used to them, just as we got used to small caps before. And having the slash drawn through the zero--a common programmer's trick that the computer industry is adopting--to distinguish it from the capital O could be invaluable. To make the letters clearer, try turning the contrast up a bit on the old TV or monitor. Also, I find the black letters on light blue background the easiest to read of all the available screen color options. Actually, the white letters on black background probably offers the most contrast, but it hurts my eyes to look at it, so that's no solution. Try them all and find what works best for you. And give the lowercase letters a try.

I am also less than wildly enthusiastic about the new formatter. First of all, the elimination of the automatic form feed can be a trap. (By the way, the automatic form feed is that wasted sheet of paper TI-WRITER shoots out of your printer each time you start up the formatter.) The reason many word processing programs have an automatic form feed is to ensure that each document printed starts at

the top of the page. If, for example, you had printed from the TI-WRITER editor, your document probably didn't end at the bottom of the page. The old version of TI-WRITER would have the printer form feed until it (the printer) found its top of form. (It does this by counting lines, so I'm told.) At any rate, the new formatter assumes that when you tell it to print that you have the printer at the top of the page. If for some reason you don't (as in printing a file from the editor), it will begin printing three lines or so down from its current position. At that point you will probably have wasted at least two sheets of paper instead of one.

Having said that, I still like the enhancement. Our printing programs at work also have that automatic form feed and I am heartily sick of throwing away perfectly good sheets of printer paper! If you watch what you are doing this enhancement will save you money--just don't take the top of form for granted!

I found TI's last enhancement, the default printer value, totally useless at first. Ken may have to type in a small novel to print from the formatter, but all I have to type is PIO.LF. The difference is between using the serial (Ken's) or the parallel (mine) ports on the RS232 card. TI sent us two versions of this enhancement, but they are both for serial printers. However, Mike used a sector editor and fixed up a third version of this enhancement, wherein the default printer value is PIO.LF. (These files will also be available at the meeting. Don't want to slight the Gemini 10-X people!) It doesn't make a whole lot of difference to me, but I can see that for those with serial printers, this is a time saver!

Final conclusion: these changes don't turn TI-WRITER into the perfect word processor--but they're at least a small step in that direction.

Multiplan Enhancements
by Ken Mathews

I'm not very impressed with the enhancements for Multiplan. TI claims that the program runs faster. I didn't time the it with a stopwatch, but I couldn't tell any difference. (If you really want to see a difference, try using Microsoft's Multiplan on an IBM PC or TI Professional Computer.) The only part that I liked was the enhancement that gives the cursor auto-repeat capabilities. This sure beats having to constantly tap on the cursor control keys. I used to get the feeling that I was practicing Morse code! I would get this enhancement just for the auto-repeat capability.

How to Get The TI-WRITER and Multiplan Enhancements

Apparently TI was very selective in sending these enhancements out. They gave them to every authorized 99/4A user group. If you would like your very own copy of these enhancements (along with instructions on how to install them), Mike and Diane Schultz are selling the diskette for $100. Bring your cash (no checks or credit cards) to the next meeting.

Editor's Note: Thanks for the plug, Ken. Actually, I wanted to sell them for $200 each (I'm saving for a trip to Dr. Who-land), but Mike got stubborn on me. For the real info on acquiring these files, read Mike's President's article.

Multiplan Enhancements
by Katie Henry

As club treasurer, and since I keep the club books using Multiplan, I was volunteered to try out the Multiplan improvements and review them for the newsletter.

According to the letter accompanying the diskette, with the new enhancements, Multiplan would be slightly faster and would have an auto-skip capability between windows. I've always found Multiplan's speed to be acceptable in such areas as reformatting windows and moving about the screen. In fact, I'm impressed by how quickly it performs even complicated calculations. However, one area in definite need of improvement is the data entry rate.

Normally, when you enter data in, say, TI-WRITER, most everything you type eventually appears on the screen. Dropped letter are rare. Not so with Multiplan; unless you enter your information slowly, watching the screen constantly, you will find that some characters never arrive, even in the middle of a word or string of numbers. This trait is particularly noticeable when entering numbers into a window directly from the main menu instead of from the ALPHA/VALUE command line. There is a brief moment of transition while the main menu changes to the ALPHA/VALUE format, and what you type during that transition period will probably never make it to the screen.

I consider this lag time to be a fairly serious drawback of 99/4A Multiplan because of the constant need to double-check the information on the screen . (I've never worked with Multiplan on other computers, so I don't know whether it's a system problem or a program problem.) I was optimistic that the TI enhancements would speed up the data entry rate. Unfortunately, I found that they really made no discernible difference in speed. Perhaps someone working with Multiplan more frequently or using the more advanced capabilities might notice an improvement in speed.

The other enhancement is the auto-skip feature. This capability is very useful for modeling and forecasting because of the necessary skipping around from window to window to change information for new calculations.

Although these enhancements don't exactly revolutionize the use of Multiplan, I think it was a pretty decent gesture on TI's part to have continued improving and supporting their product line after discontinuing the product.

TE1200 -- Terminal Emulation at the Speed of Sound?

I don't quite understand why, but for some reason Mike wanted me to review the TE1200 software for the Users Group. He said that I could relate to it better. I'm not really that big into communications, but here goes.

The software is available from Softmail Inc.; P.O. Box 645; Rockwall, Texas 75087. The phone number is (214) 722-1079. The package costs $49.95 and Mike tells me that there is no hope of getting a group discount.

The program requires the RS232 card and 32K expansion memory to operate, and may be loaded via either the Editor/Assembler or Mini Memory cartridges.

After you have the program loaded into memory using the Load and Run option of the Editor/Assembler, it displays a communication parameter screen similar to that of the TEII. Here you select the baud rate, all the way up to 9600 baud, the parity, the number of data bits to be used during transfer, and the duplex.

After you complete the first screen, you are presented with another screen that requests the character to cause the host to stop transmitting characters to you, and the character that will cause the host to start sending characters again.

Then the screen clears and the cursor appears in the upper left corner. You can now call your favorite computer, sign on, and interact with programs on it. At any time during the session, you may use the up arrow and down arrow keys to review what has scrolled across your screen. The program keeps the last 12,000 characters in memory for viewing.

Other functions are available using the control and number keys. For example, CTRL-1 lets you return to the parameter screen and change the parameters while you're still logged on to the host computer. CTRL-6 will start a file transfer that is compatible with another 99/4A running a TEII cartridge or Tex-Net. CTRL-3 can be used to stop or cancel any function.

The function activated by CTRL-4 is the most significant feature of the TE1200. It allows the user to open a logging file. All information that is transmitted from the host is written automatically to a file or printer as it's displayed on the screen. This will let you save copies of letters or articles that you read on the host computer to be reviewed later. Unfortunately, this information is not saved in a file that is compatible with TI-WRITER so you'll have to write a simple program that can be used later to copy the file into a more useful form.

The TE1200 comes in a package that clearly has labeled on it a "warranty" that is fairly standard in the PC world of software: if you open the package, you accept the software. Since it is very difficult to discover any problems with the product without "accepting" it, I feel that I must point out some rough spots in the product so you can make a more informed decision about it.

1. Manual? What Manual? This is the first disappointment with the product; there is no manual with it. There is what I would call a "help" file on the disk that contains an overview of the operation of the program. But this not very helpful if you don't have a printer to print the document, or TI-WRITER or the Editor Assembler's text editor to at least read it. The help file is also only useful if you already have some exposure to communicating with the TEII. If you are a beginner, there are no clues as to what terms such as baud rate and stop bits mean. This can easily frighten away a novice.

Another problem with the documentation is that it doesn't provide a mapping of the keyboard characters. For example, I was on a UNIX system the other day and wished to press the Escape key to terminate a long output. Where is the escape key? Beats me. After pressing

several combinations of keys and unsuccessfully trying to find the TEII manual--just in case the escape key was the same--I gave up and went to get a drink while the UNIX scrolled unwanted information on my screen.

2. Parameter screen. I suppose that I am used to the way the TEII worked, but I was surprised when the parameter screen appeared and there were no defaults. Instead I had to read each prompt and answer the questions individually. (With the TEII, the standard values are displayed already and you can zip thru the parameter screen by pressing the ENTER key several times.) Also, there is no simple recovery mechanism if you press the wrong key. In the TEII you could use the arrow keys to return to a previous prompt to change its value. With the TE1200, you must answer the rest of the prompts on the screen, proceed to the blank screen and press control 1. Then you get to answer all the prompts again!

3. This is another minor point, but... If you make a typing mistake while entering the pathname for the logging file, when you press a back arrow to position the cursor over the offending character, you'll discover that the cursor turns into PacMan and eats the characters that you just typed. The TEII at least had a nondestructive backspace.

Conclusions: If you do any serious telecommunications, then this is a good package to have, if only for the logging ability. If you are a beginner and can't find a TEII to help you get started, I'd find a friend who already has exposure to telecommunication to help you learn the ropes.

The TE1200 appears to be an okay package, but I'm afraid that it has a lot of failings in the "User-Friendly" department. I guess that is why Mike wanted me to review it, because he's rather fanatical on the subject and it would have been scorching review if he had done it. (As in frothing at the mouth.)

Kapt'n Kluge

The Kapt'n got his nickname from a friend at TI, after the friend reviewed some of Kluge's programming techniques.

TE1200 -- Terminal Emulation at the Speed of Sound?
by Diane Schultz

I must admit to being disappointed in this program. After all the nasty things I have said about the TEII, I certainly didn't expect to find one I liked less! But this is it.

Let me explain. Kapt'n Kluge covered this, but it bears repeating. The lack of defaults in the configuring menu is a serious flaw. I am not a novice when it comes to telecommunicating. But I am used to ignoring the TEII's questions, since we always take the defaults. And although I've seen the TEII configuring screen many times, I was unable to remember which answers were the correct ones. I can ask Mike--but few /4A users have that kind of resource person handy.

I was also disappointed to find that this program continued one of the TEII's biggest mistakes--it cannot upload or download from other computers. If you subscribe to CompuServe or a similar service, you will still need a special program to upload or download. I'm told that the protocol that causes this problem is an improvement (in the /4A) over the protocol used by other machines, but that's little consolation when you can't easily upload a letter written on your own time with a good text editor.

Minor quibbles: the screen color is different and not changeable. I prefer the green on white of TEII. Also, I miss the lowercase letters of TEII. I found them easy to read. Also, this TE and a computer I use to contact a friend evidently had a disagreement over carriage returns. The only thing that happened when I hit ENTER was that the cursor went away. I did not get a blank line of space (or the cursor back) until either I typed another character or the other computer sent me one. The first several times startled me--the very first time I thought the other computer had crashed!

One very good point: the auto-logging. Again, the Kapt'n covered this, but this is the main feature I was looking for in a TE. I frequently want to capture text coming from CompuServe and put it on disk so that I can share it. The TEII did not make this easy. The TE1200 makes it <u>very</u> easy. Unfortunately, I usually want to edit the files created so that I can print them all in a similar format to give to friends. The TEII made <u>that</u> easy. The TE1200 tried to make it impossible! Mike wrote me a program which converts the auto-log files to TI-WRITER usable files--the Kapt'n alluded to it, and it works well. But I resent having to do that at all. I still haven't figured out what the point of that wierd record length is, anyway!

Final conclusion: none, I'm afraid. I don't really like the program. I am unhappy with several of its "features". And I will continue to use it for the auto-logging. At least until someone, somewhere writes a good (and flexible) TE for the /4A. Sigh.

Current Officers

President	Mike Schultz	835-2377
	4200 Harcourt Drive; Austin, Texas 78727	
Vice President	Susan Donaldon	327-4165
Treasurer	Katie Henry	452-8214
Secretary	Wayne Talbot	251-3105
Librarian	Arden Huffstutler	255-2794
Newsletter Editor	Diane Schultz	835-2377

Commercial Ads

Commercial advertisements are welcomed by our newsletter. This newsletter can provide a select, specialized audience for advertisers. Advertisements also help our group by offsetting the printing and mailing costs of the monthly newsletter.

The cost of placing a full-page ad is $20. The cost of a half-page ad is $10. The ad should be camera (actually photocopy) ready. Some flexibility is allowed in the size of half- and full-page ads--but let's not overdo it!

Classified ads are free for both members and non-members. Send your ads to Central Texas 99/4A Users Group, Box 3026, Austin, Texas 78764.

Classified Ads

Would like to trade high school-level Plato programs for other high school-level Plato programs. Call 442-3679.

For Sale: Expansion Box $65.00; computer desk $30.00; Hewlett-Packard 7040A XY plotter--best offer. Call 251-3105.

Meetings Calendar

The meetings of the Central Texas 99/4A Users Group are held on the second Thursday of each month at 7:00 pm, at the downtown Austin Public Library, on the fourth floor in the auditorium.

Dates of the meetings for the rest of 1984 are:

September 13
October 11
November 8
December 13

Software Library Order Form

The following form is an order form for copies of programs which are now available in our software library. You will find a list of the in the July newsletter and at each meeting. Each program in the list is numbered and, where possible, a short description is given. Programs written in console BASIC are listed separately from those in Extended BASIC. Any hardware or software required is also listed. There is an additional list and description for special programs available from the library; to order any of these, please make special arrangements with either Arden or the group's president.

Please use this form to order copies of the software. First, circle the number of the program for which you are requesting a copy. Next, remove this sheet from the newsletter and mail it to:

<div align="center">

Arden Huffstutler
1811 Sam Bass Road
Round Rock, Texas 78664

255-2794

</div>

Arden will bring your copies to the next users' group meeting. Money will be collected at the time you pick up your copies. (If you are unable to come to the next meeting, or if you need a special arrangement, please make those arrangements with Arden.)

Remember, we are now selling copies (instead of renting them). Copies on cassette tape are $2.00 per copy. Copies on disk are $2.00 per copy, plus $1.50 for the disk. *If you do not indicate disk at the bottom of the page, your copies will be made on cassette!*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39
40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58
59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77
78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96
97	98	99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106

Please make my copies on (circle one)   **disk   cassette.**