

# VAST NEWS

for the VAST Computer User Group

Volume 8 Number 8

August 8, 1992



**Summer Fun!**

## **TI World and Local News**

(compiled by Jim Ely from various sources,  
mostly MICROpendium Magazine)

### **Locally...**

#### **HFDC Returned... Finally**

Mike Marfisi finally got his Hard and Floppy Disk Drive Controller back from Myarc. As you may recall, Mike returned the card to Myarc for repair more than a year ago.

Thanks to intervention by the New Jersey Attorney General's Office, Myarc was forced to

take action on several person's hardware items that had been returned to Myarc for repairs. Mike's HFDC was one of those items.

Mike has since sold all of his TI equipment, and when he got the HFDC back, he sold it to Ralph Rees who has installed it into his TI and verified that it does, indeed, function correctly, now.

Glad you finally got your HFDC back after all this time, Mike.

#### **Fest Films Finally Forwarded**

We have been waiting since Fest West '92 in February, 1992 for their arrival. Well, they're finally here. The videos of the demos held at Fest West '92 PLUS the video of the First Ever TI Vendors Forum held at Fest West '92 arrived in late July. These will be turned over to

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# SECRETARY'S SLATE

## MINUTES

VAST Computer User Group  
July 11, 1992

The July 11, 1992 meeting of the VAST User Group was called to order by President Jim Ely at 10:01 a.m. All of the officers were present. A total of 23 people were in attendance, including one new inductee. The minutes of the June meeting were accepted as published in the newsletter and then Jim called for the committee reports.

**PUBLICITY:** Chairman Ray Frantz reported that he did not have a chance to contact the newspaper to take out a classified ad last month. Ray did not have anything else to report.

**LIBRARY:** The Knights reported that many new programs had been added to the library from the San Diego user group. They will attempt to catalog the contents with Ray's assistance.

**PROGRAM:** The scheduled program for next month is a demo by Chris Taylor of a high speed animator that he has been writing.

**FEST-WEST:** Ralph Rees reported that the necessary signatures to close the bank account had been rounded up and the task would soon be completed. Also mentioned was the fact that the copying of the videotape by the SW 99'ers is almost completed.

**BBS:** The BBS is alive and well and still mostly under-used.

**NEWLETTER:** Jim was overwhelmed with articles for the last issue of the VAST newsletter and wishes that everyone would keep those reviews and articles coming. He mentioned at least once that it was an issue that was totally written by club members. He would still like to see some personal biographical sketches though.

**RAFFLE:** The raffle has been doing quite well and there was a discussion of perhaps buying some commercial programs for prizes to increase sales even more.

**TREASURER:** The treasury report was given and accepted (better late than never).

After the treasury report, the subject of **OLD BUSINESS** was next. Of major interest was the topic of the group picnic. After a short discussion, Gene Gipson and Brian Mack volunteered to ramrod the event. Stay tuned for further developments.

The subject of the member survey was brought up again and Jim mentioned that he had gotten an incomplete file off of the BBS and that a new copy would be forthcoming. The survey will be taken in the near future.

Next came **NEW BUSINESS**. Bud Barnes mentioned that he may be able to arrange a tour of a local microchip manufacturing plant. He wanted to get a feel for any member interest. Many members expressed an interest and Bud promised to get back to us when he learned any further details.

— See **MINUTES** on page 3

— *MINUTES*, from page 2

Hazel Knight mentioned that she had contacted UPS about sending a package to Roumania for our "foreign exchange member." The cost is \$65 for the first pound and \$10 for every pound thereafter. It was decided that a mailer with diskette based software would be better, considering the cost.

A member asked for the total number of current dues paying members in VAST and the response was 28. (A further review of records after the meeting revealed that the number is actually 32). Tom promised to bring an updated membership list to the next meeting.

There being no further business, Jim asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:43. The vote was unanimous and Jim and Ralph proceeded to do their demo.

Respectfully Submitted.  
Tom Pfeffer  
VAST Secretary/Treasurer

— *NEWS*, from page 1

the VAST Library and be available for members to borrow for their perusal.

As the program at this month's meeting we will be showing Chris Taylor's demo from the Fest West '92 videos. (See Editor's Desk on page 4 for more information.)

### **Asgard Releases Redesigned Mouse**

Asgard Software has reduced the price on its mouse to \$39.95, a savings which Chris Bobbitt of the company says has resulted from recent design changes which he says also have produced a more reliable product.

Installed by attaching to an RS232 connector, the mouse can be used by plugging it and running any Asgard Mouse compatible program. A disk included with the device contains a driver for using the mouse with TI-Artist/TI-Artist Plus, as well as two demonstration programs.

Until November 1st, a copy of Asgard's Classic Checkers, which retails for \$14.95, will be included with each mouse ordered.

Bobbitt notes that previous problems related to sporadic shipment of the Asgard Mouse have been resolved.

### **Lou Phillips to Program for the Geneve**

Berry Miller of 9640 News has stated that as soon as the purchase of MDOS from Myarc is completed, Lou Phillips hopes to write application programs and routines for the Geneve. Since Lou developed the Geneve, it will be interesting to see what kinds of programs he writes for his machine.

### **Bud Mills Readyng SCSI Interface**

Bud Mills of Bud Mills Services and Don O'Neil of Western Horizon Technologies, who is developing the SCSI, announced that the interface for the TI-99/4A should be ready sometime this month.

A SCSI (pronounced *scuzzy* and standing for Small Computer Systems Interface) will support up to seven drives, and will allow data to be transferred to the P-Box at the rate of one megabyte per second, according to O'Neil. It will allow the TI to talk to scanners and allow

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# From the Editor's Desk

HOT! HOT! HOT! The Summer, that is...

## IN THIS ISSUE

We again have an issue that is written entirely by members of our group. Way to go, Guys!

On page 5 is *4/A FORAY*, this time talking about newsletter editors and their job. Thanks for the good words, Ralph. On page 6 is *CHRIS' CORNER*, this time discussing the primary difference between the TI-99/4 and the TI-99/4A. *VIEWS AND REVIEWS* is on page 9 with some general comments about several graphics programs. This time it is by Ray Frantz. The results of the last two meeting raffles is in *RAFFLE CORNER* on page 10. Sorry I forgot to publish the June results in the July newsletter. I'll try not to let that happen again.

There you have this month's issue...

## PROGRAM NOTES

This month's program was scheduled to be by Chris Taylor on the TIM Adaptor for the TI. Chris had returned his TI to OPA for modification and has to date not received it back. Needless to say he is a little preturbed. As you may recall, Tom Pfeffer has had similiar results when dealing with OPA. At any rate, the program this month will still be by Chris, but it will be on video tape and will be the demo he did at Fest West '92! Yes, we finally got the tapes from Southwest 99ers. Hope you enjoy the demo.

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

Here's the two month calendar with our meeting dates highlighted. Remember, we miss you when you don't come to the meetings...

SEPTEMBER 1992							OCTOBER 1992						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THR	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THR	FRI	SAT
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
27	28	29	30				25	26	27	28	29	30	31

That's it for this month.  
See you at the meeting.



## FOR SALE

RS-232 Y-Adapters for the TI. All NEW and still in original packages. Have 10 only. \$5 each.

Call Mike Grogan after 6 p.m. at 272-4315.

TI-99/4A system, includes console, P-Box with 32K, SSSD Disk Drive (original TI Drive), interface card and TI Disk Controller card. \$100 OBO.

Call Jim Ely at 966-8374

*YOU can place your ad in this spot. There is NO CHARGE to members. Contact Newsletter Editor at 966-8374. Ads should be received 1 week before the meeting date to insure placement in that month's newsletter.*

# 4/A Foray

by Ralph Rees

## ➔ IN PRAISE OF EDITORS DEPARTMENT

Have you hugged your Editor lately? Have you walked up to him and said "Hey, I enjoy the newsletter, you're doing a great job." Or even, "I think you ought to...?" Or, as irate readers of other periodicals in another time have been known to do, waved a gun under his nose to make your point?

Today's Newsletter Editors face an even worse fate, OBLIVION. In many groups their name is not listed among the officers unless they happen to wear two hats. Their pleas (please?) for articles by the membership are ignored. Even, as in some cases, their requests for a replacement fall on deaf ears. It appears to be a job few are willing to tackle.

With good reason. While most of the other officers' work is centered around the meeting (except the Secretary), the Editors' work goes on for most of the month. Searching for suitable material for the newsletter, typing articles, often writing articles themselves in order to fill the empty pages, formatting and printing the pages, having them reproduced, assembled and mailed. Quite a job.

Trouble is, it's never finished. No sooner is the issue in the mail, and often sooner, you've got to do it all over again. Like washing dishes, you're never done. Every month the newsletter's voracious appetite for TIME must be fed, month after month, and year after year.

Our esteemed editor, Jim Ely, wears THREE hats, President, Newsletter Editor AND Assistant BBS SysOp. Ask him, if you dare, which one he would like to give up. That's why I try to have an article for Jim every month. It isn't always easy but it makes me realize what the rest of the job is like. Want to hug your Editor? Promise him an article, then **DELIVER.**

(Majority of article written by Ed Machonis, I changed a few things.)

The above pretty much tells what our Editor does for us. Consider also that Jim no longer OWNS or USES a TI computer, but continues to support us. Why? I really can't speak for Jim, but I would say because of the friends he has made in the group and the amount of enjoyment he derives from same.

Have you taken a close look at how our newsletter is laid out? How professional it looks? How Jim really likes to do the BEST job he possibly can in each issue? He takes PRIDE in the way the newsletter looks, and in my opinion it really shows.

Therefore, for us to keep Jim feeling happy about spending the time he does doing the newsletter, I would recommend that EVERYONE submit an article or tidbit that Jim can use.

We have one heck of an Excellent Editor and I would hate to lose him.

FCTN +

—Ralph...❖





## Chris' Corner

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Chris Taylor

### Why the TI?

part two

What is the major difference between the Texas Instruments 99/4™ home computer (introduced in 1980) and its fraternal twin brother, the 99/4A™ (introduced in 1981)? If you said the video display processor (VDP), you're right. The 99/4 used the TMS 9918 VDP and the 99/4A used the TMS 9918A. So what, you say. That change was significant because it allowed the 99/4A to display bit-map graphics. The ability to display bit-map graphics is the cornerstone of ALL modern computers. Bit-map graphics permit almost any picture to be shown on a computer screen. They are essential for graphic user interfaces (GUIs) used on the Mac, NeXT, IBM PCs using Windows, etc. Remember that computers only show an approximation of what will be printed, if a printout or hard copy is necessary.

There are two ways that a computer programme can be useful to the vast majority of users – provide a printout or show some information on a monitor. Most of what we do with our computers is based on the output of the monitor. We change information on a display in programmes like word processing, database management, telecommunication or games. The better our display, the more easily we can work. Well, what is the TMS 9918A

VDP and how does it effect our computing displays?

The TMS 9918A is a integrated circuit that used to display computer information on your TV or computer monitor. It has four graphics modes which can be used to enhance the display of information. The four modes are graphics one which is 32 columns by 24 rows, graphics two which is the bit-map mode and not available on the 9918, a multi-colour mode which consists 64 blocks by 48 blocks and textmode which is 40 columns 24 rows. Of the four graphics modes, graphics mode one is the most commonly used mode because it is the mode in which TI BASIC and TI eXtended BASIC operate. (Due to over-scan only 28 of the thirty-two columns are used.) The second most commonly used mode is the textmode which is used in word processing programmes. Finally, there is graphics mode two or the bit-map mode which is used in drawing programmes. The multicolour mode is virtually never used.

Sprites, or movable graphics objects provide the icing on the cake for the 9918A. They permit creating figures and then moving them without having to erase the old images which slows down the computer. Games would benefit the most from sprites. However, in the modern computer arena, sprites are commonly used as mouse cursors. There are thirty two sprites available in the 99/4A, all of which can be simultaneously displayed.

In 1981, during a class field trip, I went to see the new IBM Personal computer at an IBM computer center. I was not impressed. For roughly twenty five hundred dollars you could

— See *CHRIS' CORNER* on page 7

— *CHRIS' CORNER*, from page 6

get a computer that supported only four colours on the screen at a time on a special monitor. In contrast, the 99/4A supported fifteen colours at the same time on a standard television at a fraction of the cost. Incidentally, the 9918A supports fifteen not sixteen colours. The sixteenth colour is called transparent. This transparent colour was provided in order that another hidden capability of the 99/4A would someday be used – superimposing computer graphics (like titles and drawings) over video input into the computer from VCRs and camcorders. The TI 99/4A with its 9918A was clearly ahead of its time.

A few months after the withdrawal of Texas Instruments from the home computer market, they sent me a preliminary data sheet on an AVDP – Advanced Video Display Processor. This AVDP promised eighty columns, a greater number of colours, and very importantly, software compatibility with the 9918A. It was this data sheet that altered my prospective on computers. Although the AVDP was only software compatible, the concept of compatibility fascinated me. Software compatibility meant that the VDP would work with existing software provided that there was some way to physically connect it to the computer. When I took my TI 99/4A apart I discovered that the 9918A VDP was socketed, that is, it was not soldered to the motherboard. I wondered why couldn't TI make a chip that was hardware and software compatible with the 9918A and still provide more advanced graphics features. Of course, if TI had to depend on other manufacturers to make the processor chips for them, that

would have definitely limited the possibility of TI introducing a hardware and software compatible chip. But TI made the chips, so, I don't know why they did not pursue this option.

In 1986, I learned about the TMS 9928A. This was a hardware and software compatible VDP chip. It offered all the modes of the 9918A chip (except external video input) and provided RGB video output. RGB (Red, Blue, Green) video permits crisp arcade sharp displays. No more fuzzy letters. Since the TI 99/4A motherboard was designed to accommodate RGB, all you needed to do was get a chip, open your computer and install it. To complete the process a signal convertor was necessary. Dijit of San Diego, California (no longer in business), offered a complete kit to modify the 99/4A so that it would output RGB signal. The most dramatic effect of this change occurs when you look at video games on the 99/4A like PARSEC. Incidentally, if you can find a 9928A, you can still use it without the RGB output. Simply install it in your console. It provides fifteen shades of gray which when viewed on a good amber monitor offers extremely sharp displays.

In 1987, I ordered the Dijit kit and modified one of my TI computers. This computer had already been modified to contain 32K ram in the internal sixteen bit bus. I modified the modification. The end result of the project was a high speed compact computer with both RGB and monochrome output and 32K of sixteen bit ram. The TI had almost arrived. I developed a case of Mac Attack. I could use the bit-map graphics mode to display windows and pull down menus in full colour.

— See *CHRIS' CORNER* on page 8

— CHRIS' CORNER, from page 7

Using Wycove forth as my software development system language and the Rack feature of the Horizon ram disk which offered the ability to write programmes several hundred kilobytes in size, I was ready to bring the TI back. But not quite.

The computer market saw tremendous technological changes during the mid to late eighties. IBM CGA graphics gave way to EGA and eventually, to VGA. Each of these changes seemed to completely eliminate the possibility of doing anything with the TI, especially since it was still stuck at forty columns. In 1987, the Myarc Geneve 9640 was introduced. It was software compatible with the 99/4A (using a software emulator) and hardware compatible with the 99/4A's peripherals, yet it offered far more advanced graphics. The 9640 contained the 9938 AVDP, which was software but not hardware compatible with the 9918A. It offered several additional graphics modes. The chip was manufactured by Yamaha of Japan (under license from TI, I assume). This was what I had been waiting for. I was not interested in the 9640 because I had made such a substantial investment in the 99/4A. All I needed was to have a version of the chip which was hardware compatible with the 99/4A. Alas, no such luck. At least, two companies introduced hardware adapters for the 99/4A which permitted using the chip - Dijit of San Diego California and Mechatronics of Germany. Poor sales and high cost forced both devices from the market. Currently, there is another attempt to market an AVDP chip for the 99/4A. This version features another generation of the chip, the 9958, which is compatible

with the 9918A, 9928A, and 9938. It is not hardware compatible and thus, requires an adapter. However, the adapter is internal which means that the 99/4A console can contain such advanced features as eighty columns and high speed bit-map graphics. OPA of Canada makes the adapter.

Why the TI? So far with a simple change in software - using Wycove forth - and the possibility of using a more advanced video processor, the 99/4A could be transformed to meet the demands of most computer users in the nineties. ct ❖

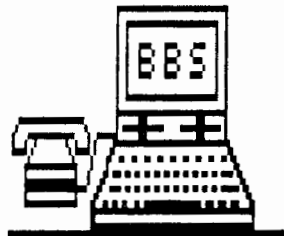
[*Editor's Note:* Chris' article for this month had a postscript to it that was as long as this article and got somewhat technical in nature. Due to space considerations it was not included here but will be used as September's **Chris' Corner** article. —Ed]

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## Just a reminder...

The VAST BBS can be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at (602) 233-0790.

This is a local call for most area residents. Give it a call for the latest information about



the VAST Computer User Group! And now it's FASTER than ever!

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# Views & Reviews

## A REVIEW OF VARIOUS GRAPHICS PROGRAMS

Reviewed (after hundreds of hours of actual use) by Ray Frantz

Working backwards... PAGE PRO 99... is so versatile because it has the capability of being able to interconnect with any other graphics program. By this I mean, that no matter what other graphics program you have EVER worked with, there is a CONVERTER PROGRAM that will allow you to use that material to create your PAGE PRO productions. To elaborate just a little... GRAPHX, RLE, MacPAINT 7, PICASSO as well as TI-ARTIST may ALL be converted, through PIX PRO CONVERTER into pictures usable in PAGE PRO. Even all the T.I.P.S. files will convert to PAGE PRO pictures with TIPS2PP2 Converter. Many of the conversions, as well as, specially created material for use with PAGE PRO are available through our own VAST library and other specialty items, through Mike Marfisi.

The obvious use of PAGE PRO is the ability to create full pages of pictures and information so as to be able to create newsletters, letterheads, forms, greeting cards... and whatever your creative mind can conjure up. BUT, Asgard goes a step farther and offers, as accessories, many OTHER programs that even extend the capabilities I just mentioned. A BANNER MAKER is available with... the ability to mix quality pictures with well formed text; PAGE PRO SIDEWAYS, al-

lows you to print ANY picture sideways... as needed for certificates; POSTER MAKER (which I showed at the June meeting), is capable of creating well defined posters up to 8 times larger (68" x 88")... and my favorite PAGE PRO F/X... Wow... with this you can reduce, enlarge, stretch, squeeze, rotate, mirror and manipulate all your Page Pro pictures.

I got carried away there because I said I would review graphics PROGRAMS, not just PAGE PRO. So, let's take a look at another Graphics program I just purchased and am enjoying... GRAPHICS GRABBER by Mark Wacholtz of Sunrise, Florida. Using this program along with TI-Artist, you have the ability to create your own personally designed graphic labels. If you are really artistically inclined you WILL be able to create some beautiful labelling in your choice of 2 sizes. I amazed myself with some really fine finished product. The program also gives you the added feature of creating Disk Sleeves, also with YOUR graphic creations thereon. A very inexpensive program for all it offers!

Mark Wacholtz also offers ARTIST CONVERSIONS which offers two (2) conversion programs... CSGD TO TI-ARTIST\_I and EX-BASIC TO TI-ARTIST\_F. The program also offers some graphics that have never been seen before... well they have NOW AND THEY ARE IN MY FILE!

Please feel free to ask for any further information you may wish to have about ANY of these programs. rf ❖

# RAFFLE CORNER

The results of the June Meeting Raffle were omitted from the last issue do to an oversight. Here are the results for the June and July Meeting Raffles:

### *For June:*

1. Tom Pfeffer won a Box of blank disks.
2. Corky Geissel won 5 disks full of assorted programs.
3. Brian Mack won a disk storage case.
4. Brian Mack also won the game "Chisholm Trail."

### *For July:*

1. Alan Nelson chose a TI Program Cassette Recorder with cable.
2. Brian Mack chose the TI Invaders game cartridge.
3. Tom Pfeffer won a box of clear plastic page protectors and 3 disks of programs.
4. Ray Frantz picked a custom made (by Bud Barnes) disk storage case.

Prizes held over for the August Raffle include a Screen Dump program and Expandable, anti-static disk caddy and cassette versions of Teach Yourself BASIC and Extended BASIC.

Chances are still only 3 for \$1 and available ONLY at the meetings.

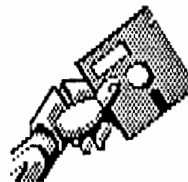
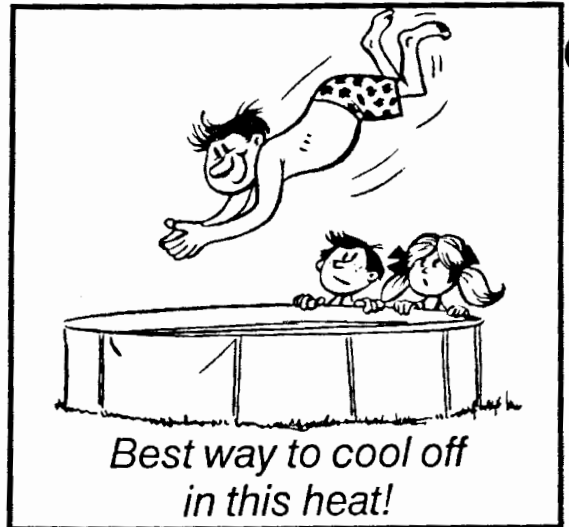
gg ♦

— NEWS, from page 3

ASCII files to be read from IBM format to TI-Writer without a conversion program.

Estimated price of the SCSI is \$170.

Bud Mills Services is at 166 Dartmouth Dr., Toledo, OH 43614-2911 or phone (419) 385-5946 (voice) or (419) 385-7484. Western Horizon Technologies is at 10225 Jean Ellen Dr., Gilroy, CA 95020 or phone (408) 848-5947. je ♦

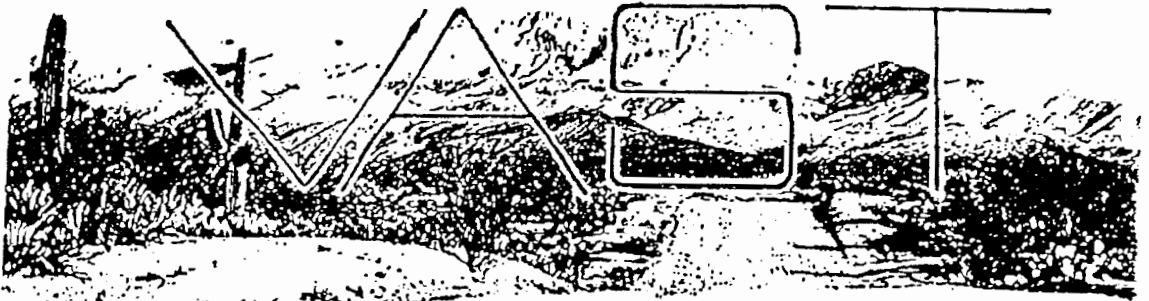


## *Mystery Game Disk of the Month*

I have been informed by Ralph Rees, our Game DOM preparer, that even he does not know what games will be on the DOM as of press time, so you will just have to come to the meeting to find out. je ♦

# THE DIFFERENCE

IS



VAley of the Sun T<sub>I</sub>-99/4A  
USER GROUP  
INVITES  
YOU

*and all Personal Computer owners and users to join them the 2nd Saturday Morning of each month between 9:00am and 12:00pm (noon) at the PYLE ADULT RECREATION CENTER in Tempe.*

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- . 24 hour a day BBS
- . Monthly Newsletter
- . Download from BBS for members
- . Computer "Hands On" demonstrations
- . Loan of a MODEM System for members
- . A library of programs for disc and cassette
- . A friendly forum for discussion of your PC problems

*For more information on VAST, contact either:*

*Jim Ely (President), 966-8374 or Tom Pfeffer (Sec./Tres.), 940-0974*

# VAST User Group Information

The VAST Computer User Group is a support group for the TI-99/4A Home Computer and compatibles.

The VAST Computer User Group operates a BBS 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The phone number is (602) 233-0790.

## CURRENT OFFICERS

### PRESIDENT

Jim Ely . . . . . 966-8374

### VICE PRESIDENT

Ralph Rees . . . . . 869-8145

### SECRETARY/TREASURER

Tom Pfeffer . . . . . 940-0974

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Hazel & Wallace Knight . . . 938-5446

### NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Jim Ely . . . . . 966-8374

### BBS SYSOP

Mike Grogan . . . . . 272-4315

Send any correspondence to the address below.

## ADVERTISING RATES

There is **NO CHARGE** to **MEMBERS** for **PERSONAL** advertising. Non-members will be charged \$1.50 per ad.

Please contact the Secretary/Treasurer for **COMMERCIAL** advertising rates.

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