

DALLAS TI HOME COMPUTER GROUP JULY, 1985

Meetings: 7:00pm, 3rd Friday each month
At Northlake College, Room B-206, Irving, Texas

>>> NEXT MEETING: Friday, 19 July, 1985 <<<

President: Richard Roberts (SOURCE: TI3552; STARTEXT: 8742)
Vice-President: Dan Johnson
Secretary: Louis Guion (STARTEXT: 77536)
Treasurer: Earl Bullock
Editor: Robert Lee Hoffbauer

This newsletter is the official publication of the DALLAS TI HOME COMPUTER GROUP, a non-profit organization serving member/users of the Texas Instruments 99/4A HOME COMPUTER. For more information you are invited to attend our next meeting or send a SASE to: DALLAS TI HOME COMPUTER GROUP, ~~Northlake College~~ Irving, Texas 75061.

PRESIDENT'S SCREENDUMP: Richard Roberts

The main program for the July meeting will be MULTIPLAN, assuming that there's a few people left around that have not gone on vacation! It has been quite a while since we have covered Multiplan, and there are many new members in our ranks that have not seen it. And for those who do use it, we intend to have something for you as well. The main thrust will be to show WHAT can be done with Multiplan, and HOW to do it. It will not be a tutorial, as such, but rather an "applications" demonstration.

In fact, I would like to invite those experienced Multiplan users to bring along what they feel is their MOST UNIQUE application program. If we can get four or five people to do so, we will take a vote for the Most Unique application, and award the winner a small prize, still to be determined (don't worry, it will be worth the trouble). The program should be useful in some way, and will be donated to the club library.

By the way, if you have been planning to purchase Multiplan, you better look fast. In the past month, all Toys-R-Us stores marked it down to \$19.90. Most stores had some remaining in stock, but they may be gone soon, if not already. And for some lucky soul, Multiplan will be offered in this month's software raffle. See details below.

Concerning the Novice Group, which has been meeting separately during the main program, I have been hearing some (g)rublings of disappointment since the June meeting. Most of it centers around what topics should be covered during this meeting. When I envisioned this concept, I did not foresee that this meeting would become more popular than the main program, and because of that, it is failing to accomplish it's intended goal.

The main idea was to provide a basic computing concept, whether it be BASIC programming, or a trouble-shooting question and answer session, but to make it simple and easy to grasp. The general idea was that certain members would be TOO new to computing to gain much from the regularly scheduled program. These people need to walk away from the User Group meeting, and feel like they gained something in the process, and this meeting was designed to accomplish that.

I believe that it is time to re-think the concept, and bend it until it accomplishes the above stated purpose. I need constructive ideas from any member who wants to maintain this meeting. You may feel free to call me at home or talk to me at the next meeting. Because it does seem to fulfill a need that many members have, I don't want to do away with it completely, but we must integrate the two needs, that of the novice and the advanced member, so that they work in harmony, rather than causing division.

Louis Guion, who has been revamping the club's software library for the last few months, wanted me to clarify that nothing has changed regarding availability of software from the library. He has been working with the backup library, and Glenn Ashe still retains the master copy, so requests can still be fulfilled as before. Hopefully, the newly revamped, and vastly expanded library will be available soon, but in the meantime contact Glenn with your requests.

Earl Bullock, Treasurer, gave the treasurer's report. His report reflected the balance in our account after the recent purchase of the two 5000 disk drives for the bulletin board system.

Two of the five visitors present joined our users group. They are Charlie Howard and Bob Leroy of Dallas. Charlie had attended in the past and finally decided to join us. The other visitors were Warren Grinberg, Jim Stewart, and Gary Fuquay. Gary and Jim are members of the NET99ER's group from "half-way to California" (Hurst).

NEW BUSINESS: Members were advised to notify David Martin if they do not have a permanent name tag. President Roberts reminded all members of the free access they have on TIBBS. Louis Guion moved that permanent guest membership on TIBBS be changed from \$25/year to \$25/year or \$7/quarter to encourage new members for the bulletin board. The rate of \$20/year remains in effect for club members to have full access as does the "five free sign-ons" deal remain in effect for visitors trying out our TIBBS. Louis Guion explained the plans for the club library.

The club split into two groups for the main program. One group discussed freeware and held demonstrations while the other group held a question and answer session and laid plans to begin learning to program in BASIC language. It is planned that this separation into "novice" and "advanced" programs will continue as it was very well received.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45, an unusually early hour. It is planned that future meetings will begin promptly at 7:00 P.M. and the whole group plans to adjourn early and proceed to Crystal's Pizza on Airport Freeway where individual questions can be addressed, information can be swapped, friendships made, and pizza consumed. If you mention that you are with the computer group, drinks are free.

USE THE TIBBS: Louis Guion

This User's Group supports a 24-hour TI-99/4A bulletin board. As a part of the June meeting the SysOp's of TIBBS will be showing you how it works. What? Lost already? SysOp stands for Sys(tem) Op(erator) and TIBBS stands for Ralph Fowler's copyrighted bulletin board system known properly as T(exas) I(nstruments) B(ulletin) B(oard) S(ystem).

Our TIBBS can be utilized by anyone with a computer and a working MODEM (That stands for MOdulator, DEModulator) operating at 300 baud. It does not have to be a TI-99/4A computer to get on and enjoy TIBBS. To control the access and support the system, the club has imposed certain fees for use of our bulletin board.

CLASS	ACCESS	COST
CLUB MEMBER	Limited Access	Free
TIBBS MEMBER	Full Access	\$20/year if a member of this club
TIBBS MEMBER	Full Access	\$25/year or \$7/3 mos. if not club member
GUEST MEMBER	Full Access	Free, during 5 trial sign-ons

Now what does this mean? Well, it means that since a bulletin board is costly to run, the users must support it. Further, it means that full access allows a user to read all the files, download free programs which are constantly changed so that something of interest and value is always present, and it allows the user to upload or "give" programs to the TIBBS system for inclusion in future offerings in the download section. Limited access does not allow the use of up/download facilities, but all other parts of the system are available for use.

Now, for the whole point of this article! All members of this club are entitled to the free limited access on TIBBS. You obviously have a computer. If you have a modem, I urge you to call TIBBS at the local Dallas number 353-0502. That's area code 214 for those of you in foreign cities (Ennis?). It is a lot of fun to read the messages. You may find that shopping tips steer you to a piece of hardware or software that you have been looking for. There are disk drive discussions and tips on software uses. One of our "bigger" members even "lays down the law" from time-to-time which some say is the highest price you have to pay to use TIBBS. Well, there you have it. A free service to you club members just for the dialing of a phone number. Please try TIBBS! You may find it addictive -- I have!

On another note, it seems that the club's Disk Manager 2 module has become lost, while the system was being shifted around. If you discover that you have two of these modules, for some unexplained reason, please contact Bob Viering. Since the system is now being used for the TIBBS bulletin board, and it is located at his place of employment, he is in dire need of it.

For those members on the Executive Board, the next meeting will be Saturday, August 3, at 1:00 pm. Due to unforeseen conflicts, the meeting will have to be held at my house this month, which is fine because I didn't want to constantly impose on Louis all the time. Mark it on your calendar.

Congratulations to Kelly Randall for winning the GRAPHX program in June's raffle. The items listed below will be offered during the July raffle, from which the winner may choose one item.

- > Return to Pirate's Island (module)
- > Teach Yourself Basic (cassette)
- > MULTIPLAN spreadsheet program

Remember, the software raffle is available for a \$1 donation, and you may enter as many times as you wish. The disk drive raffle will continue this month, and hopefully we will have enough entries to hold the drawing this time. This raffle is \$5 for each entry. The drawing will be held if there are 30 entries, and we have 21 so far.

We will try to get the meeting started at 7:00 pm sharp, so plan on arriving in time. Hope to see everyone there.

Multiplan and other Amazing Inventions: Robert Lee Hoffpauer

Three and a half years ago when I bought my 99/4A, I had no idea what I wanted to do with it, but I knew I wanted to find out as much about computing as I could. I bought a book about BASIC, hooked up my tape recorder and quickly decided I had to have a disk drive. It took me four months to expand my system (F-Box, 32-K, Disk), but I still wasn't satisfied. Within another month I had sent off for TI-Writer, Extended BASIC, and Microsoft Multiplan. At that time Multiplan cost about \$100, but I had read about it in the computer magazines, and just had to have it! Well, I have finally had an opportunity to put Multiplan to work -- after three years.

I am taking a senior level course in business policy and strategy, and while most of the work in the course is case analysis -- thirty to forty pages of narrative and financial statements, where you have to identify the problem(s) and provide the solutions -- twenty percent of my grade will come from my participation in the Executive Game. The Executive Game is a computerized simulation of an industry, where my class is divided up into a number of teams, each team composed of four to five students. Each team is a firm competing in the industry, each firm has one product (we don't know what it is or what the industry is) and at the beginning of the game all firms are equal and their products are identical.

Each firm was given, at the start, an accountant's columnar worksheet with the first column filled in to represent the results of the most recent calendar quarter of business. This column gave us about fifty items of data -- listing economic indices for inflation, economic activity, and seasonal economic activity within this industry; operating information like the price of the product, market potential, sales volume, and plant capacity; income and expense figures; and asset and owners' (stockholders') equity for our firm. One week in real time would be one quarter (three months) in the game. Each 'quarter' we would receive the results of the previous quarter's operations and make a series of eight decisions for the following quarter. We had to buy a textbook (of course, or how would the bookstore be able to make their one hundred per cent mark-up?) but the book gave only very general descriptions of the relationships between the decisions that we would make and the results that would follow. Except, that in the back it gave a FORTRAN listing of a mainframe version of the program. They shouldn't have done that. I have no experience with FORTRAN, however, with my knowledge of BASIC (which is similar in some respects) and some good guesses, I was able to extract quite a lot of valuable information about how the game actually worked.

Now comes the use for Multiplan. Multiplan is a highly successful, widely used, commercial spreadsheet program -- a forerunner of Lotus 1-2-3. I set up a spreadsheet model without any values in it. Each quarter my model would have a column of captions telling what each row of figures was, and three columns for data. The first column was to represent

the previous quarter's actual results. The second column would have formulas that would compute all the line items for the forecast quarter, based on the previous quarter figures, three guesses about what the other firms' decisions would be this quarter, and the eight decisions we had to make. These would be entered by hand. The third column was for entry of the actual results of the forecast quarter when they were received, so that we could compare our forecasts with the results and adjust our formulas if needed.

Just like the accountant's columnar pad, you can have as many entries on a row as you have columns, or as many entries in a column as you have rows. Each entry is called a cell, and a cell can contain text for titles, or a number, or a formula to give the cell a number based on the value of some other cell. For instance, on my spreadsheet, labor expense is based on labor cost per unit times the number of units produced; likewise, labor cost per unit is based on other factors, some from the previous quarter and some from the current quarter. Using the spreadsheet I have the ability to make a complete forecast in not three hours, but three minutes. I can see what would happen if I raise my price 2%, or if I ran my plant at overtime to produce extra units of product. Now, while I don't know with any certainty what the results of my decisions will be because they depend on what the other teams do, I can make several guesses about what the other teams will do, a high guess, a low guess, and an average guess, and I then know what my results will be if one of my guesses is right, or close to right. So, for each scenario laid out, I can then make a series of scenarios for the period to follow, and when I find out what my actual results are, I know in what direction my next set of decisions should go.

Of course, I'm just playing a game; but, in the real world there are countless situations that lend themselves to spreadsheet analysis -- personal budgets, business budgets and other forecasts, some people analyse investments, some even keep name and address lists in a spreadsheet although there are easier ways to do that. Multiplan for the TI 99/4A is the same Multiplan that runs on the IBM-PC. It does the same things, the same way. The only difference is that the spreadsheets are not as large since we don't have as large a memory on our machine, but there is more than one way to skin a cat. Almost any spreadsheet can be broken down into smaller parts. Since Multiplan allows you to 'link' data in one spreadsheet to data in another, so that when you change an entry in one spreadsheet you effectively change the data in the other spreadsheet, you can build a series of spreadsheets to model virtually any financial situation, and many non-financial applications as well. If you think that you might have a use for it someday, now is the time to add Multiplan to your software collection, while the price is one fifth of what I paid for it three years ago.

Oh yes, how is my team doing, playing our game and using the Multiplan spreadsheet? Very well, thank you. After three quarters, we have been the volume leader in all three periods, and the profit leader for the last two.

Getting Down To Basics: Robert Lee Hoffbauer

Programming is a process that is much the same whether you are using Basic, Pascal, Cobol, or Assembly Language. There are methods that work well in whatever language you are using, and methods that don't! This article will attempt to outline an approach that should produce better results, and produce them quicker than if no method is followed. Following a method takes discipline -- self-discipline -- and this is the hardest part, but it can save endless hours of frustration that any time results in the abandoning of a programming project. Don't give up, and don't get mad -- get over, and win!

The easiest thing for a programmer to do is to sit right down and start hacking out code. This works OK for small projects of ten to thirty lines of code, but as the size and complexity of the project increases, the ability to handle it in your head decreases geometrically. An experienced programmer may be able to juggle some in his (or her) head than an inexperienced one, but the computer will eventually reach a limit. So don't waste your time and effort on hit and miss programming -- attack your programming project with a battle plan.

First, take a pencil or pen, and a piece of paper, and write a description of what you are going to try to accomplish. If you can't write it out in words, you probably can't write it out in code.

Next, think IPOP! IPOP stands for InPut/OutPut. Still using your pencil and paper, list in two columns the inputs your program will require, and the outputs you want it to produce. This will include under inputs any information the user will have to enter, as well as any files of data that the program may need to read; and under outputs it will include not only printouts, and data files, but the prompts and menus that will tell the user what to do, when. Remember that the screen display is an output, too.