MIAMI COUNTY AREA 99/4A HOME COMPUTER USER'S GROUP

(Indiana's First Recognized 99/4A User's Group)

P 0 BOX 1194

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PERU, IN. 46970

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ARE YOU STILL A MEMBER?

This is another reminder for those of you that have not renewed their membership. If your membership expires in January you are now not a member unless you have sent in your dues for this year. You can not vote at meetings and you will not be allowed to use the library. It is the Group's policy to keep you on the mailing list for a three month grace period. This means that next month's newsletter will be your last contact with us unless you renew. Please do not let this opportunity slip by!

AT THE LAST MEETING

We finally were able to have our February meeting. As you will remember, the snow canceled things until the 27th. It was worth the wait, however.

The prime topic for discussion was, will we or will we not have programming classes again. I am happy to say that the answer was yes, but we are going to do it differently this time. We took a hard look at our membership and decided that we would include a portion of each meeting to working out a program as a group. Each session will build on the work done at the last and we hope to be able to someday have a working program that everyone understands.

This approach will take us away from the usual format of going through a list of program commands without anyone having any idea of how to use them. Instead we will take the opposite approach, we will first decide what we want to do and then look for a way to do it. I should also mention that nobody will have to bring their equipment to these sessions, all work will be done on the Group's console. It sounds like this could be very interesting for all, without being a burden an anyone. March 12th will be our first session and it will start out with deciding what we want to program and starting on a flow chart. Hope to see you there!

After the business meeting Jeff Bowen loaded in his Typing Tutor program to show us his progress on this project. If you have not seen this one you are missing some of the best computer graphics that you will find anywhere. We should all encourage Jeff to see this project through to it's completion.

PRODUCT REVIEW

This is one product review that I am reluctant to write. I am the proud owner of a spelling checking program that I use with TI Writer to produce these articles. My reluctance to review this product lies not with the quality of the product, I just know if ever anyone spotted a spelling error in my text (usually not too hard) it will be in this article.

The "99/4 AUTO SPELL-CHECK" by DRAGONSLAYER AMERICAN SOFTWARE COMPANY (Thomas W. Kirk) is a two disk program(s) that can be used to compare the words in a text file with the contents of it's 20,000 dictionary. This product also allowes you to create any number of your own 2000 word dictionaries. This last feature makes this product better every time that it is used. There is no copy protection on the diskettes and you are encouraged to back them up for your own use. There is a serial number on the diskettes that would be required for any warranty claims etc.

This product is designed to be used with the utility option on TI Writer but it will work with Editor/Assembler or any other word processor that creates Display/Variable 80 files. To use it with TI Writer you first create your document with the editor and then select Utility to load the Spell Checker. Next you are prompted to load your text file (23K max.). The program then sorts the words in your text into memory and then asks you to load the first dictionary. The words in your text are then compared to those in the dictionary and any that are not recognized are stored in a stack. You are then asked to load the second dictionary and the process repeats. Next you are asked to load your own dictionaries one at a time until you are finished.

After all the dictionaries have been loaded the program displayes each unrecognized word on the screen one at a time and gives you several options to choose from. The options include: disregard, add the word to your dictionary, correct the spelling (you do it from the keyboard), view the word in context, and step back or forward to the previous or next word and take no action. When all this is complete the program (at your option) will go through your text and make the corrections even if the number of letters in the corrected word(s) differ from those in the word(s) being corrected. This last feature is different from what you get with some other spelling checkers for other brands of computers. Finally the program asks you to load the disk with your dictionary and it adds new words to it.

This program is not particulary hard to use but I must admit that it is a bit slow in execution. The swapping of disks into and out of the drive is not particulary fun either, but that problem will be reduced as soon as my new disk controller card gets here. This is a ideal setup for two DSDD disk drives (now I have an excuse to get some more equipment).

At just under \$50 this is not an inexpensive piece of software but it probably is more useful than some of the other things that we play with on our computers. I might add that this appears to be the only product of it's kind for TI Writer so you either buy this one or none at all. If I had it to do over again I would buy it again, I just would not wait so long.

CALL DELAY

When writing a program there are several types of operations that are repeated throughout the program. The subprogram feature of Extended Basic is one solution to the problem of repeated typing of the same instructions. In the next few issues of this newsletter I will try to include a few of my favorite subprograms that can be used to make your programs a little easier to punch in. These subprograms can be saved in your own library and later merged into one of your programs as it is needed.

This month we will look at a simple delay loop. Delay loops are simple routines that allow the program to delay it's execution for a predetermined length of time, usually to give you time to read the screen etc. They are usually used several times in a program so they are a natural choice for a subprogram. Try typing in this to see how it works.

2500 SUB DELAY(COUNT) :: FOR DELAY = 1 TO COUNT :: NEXT DELAY :: SUBEND

Notice that the line number is large enough that it will fall at the end of your program. Subprograms must fall at the end of the main program! Any time you want a delay in your program you would type in a line similar to the following:

150 CALL DELAY(125)

This will give you a 125 count delay. If later in the program you want a 350 count delay simply type in:

310 CALL DELAY(350)

Get the idea? Take the time to look through the Extended Basic instruction book until you become familiar with subprograms, I think that you will find them useful. Next month we will look at another one.

MEETINGS

Just a reminder, this Group meets on the second Tuesday of every month at the NIPSCO building on US 24 at the west edge of Peru. Meetings start at 7:00 in the evening and end when they are over. Remember the next meeting will be on Tuesday March 12th. Hope you will join us.

BAD DISKETTE IN THE LIBRARY

Our club librarian tells me that we have a diskette in our library that he is unable to recover any programs from. I tried this disk on my equipment with the same results. There are three programs that will have to be replaced if we wish to keep our library complete. Does anyone out there have the following programs: NIM, SPACEWAR, or TICTACTOE? If so please see Tom and make arrangements to let him recopy these programs.

TI'S BETTER IDEA

My place of employment finally took the big step! We are the new owners of a CAD system (I think that means Computer Aided Design of something similar). Now I get to draw our engineering drawings on a computer instead of on a drafting board.

Now keep in mind that this is no toy. You can't even begin to compare our TI's to this wonder machine, or so I have been told. I have no computer experience except with the TI so you can understand my surprise when I discovered one major feature on this new machine that is far inferior to our \$59 toys.

When you store files on disk with the TI they are put on the disk at the first available sector with the next file going right at the end of the last. So far both machines are alike. On the TI, however, if you remove a file and later add another, the new file goes where the previous one had been. If this new file is bigger than the available space, it is simply fractured and the remaining part goes to the next available free space. With this setup you always have all the sectors on the disk available for use.

Things are different in the land of big business, however. It did not take the boss long to discover that we were not getting very many drawings on the diskettes. A quick trip into the Management section gave us the answer. Unlike the TI, this system will leave holes in the disk space when a file is removed and later resaved. Soon we would have a disk to the point that it would not accept any more storage and the printout of it's contents would show that there were still 198 'blocks' unused (aprox. 500 blocks on a disk). To get any more on the disk you have to select an option called pack. Fack does just what it says, it shoves all the files together eliminating any holes between files. This whole process takes up to 15 minutes to complete.

It makes you wonder if the little TI computer is as bad as some people like to tell us. The next time someone tries to tell you that you should upgrade to another machine, you might want to consider things like this to see if the new machine is any better. I, for one, am satisfied with what I have.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

These things are hard enough to write without having to do them every two weeks. I have a personal goal of wanting the newsletter to go out every month between meetings, and since the February meeting was late in the month, it's time to write another 'Corner'. The keyboard is still warm from the last version.

I really don't have much to say this month so I think that I will just ramble on about whatever comes to mind and see what happens. I better make it quick, however, because it is now 11:26 PM and I have to be at work tomorrow.

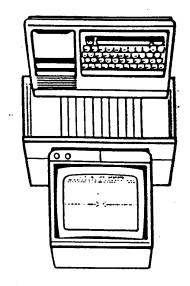
Hope you noticed the article about our decision concerning the programming classes. I am excited at the idea of seeing all of us working together on a project like this. I hope that it works out so everyone gets maximum enjoyment from this project.

Also please note the article about the monthly programming hints that will be published in this newsletter. If you have any favorite routines that you would like to share please let me know and we will get them included in this newsletter.

Some of our members are now upgrading their equipment or have done so not long ago. Why not write a little product review to let us know what you think of your new items. I'm sure that the others in the group would be interested in your comments. This is not limited to hardware reviews either, software and book reviews are welcome also.

As I said before, it's getting late so I will draw this to an end. Hope to see you Tuesday.

Dave



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