Southwest Ninety-Niners August 1991

The Cactus Patch
602-298-6277

P.O. Box 17831, Tucson
Arizona (602) 747-5046

SOUTHWEST NINETY-NINERS
TI USER GROUP TUCSON AZ

Announcing:

Members Meet: Thursday Aug. 8th at Devon Gables, 6150 E. Grant. Rambo will be demonstrated. Ed McCullough

Geneve Users: Tuesday Aug. 13. at David Ormand's

Exec Meeting: Aug. 12, at Perkins Restaurant. Crossroads Festival Shopping Cen. Grant & Swan. All SW99ers are invited.

Graphics Workshop: All interested call 299-2092

General users: Tuesday, Aug 20. Mathis' home 5941 E 26th - 747-5046. 7:30pm -

Advanced Languages: Tuesday Aug. 27 at Rod Stallard's home - 7575 E Logan Dr - 745-6071.

TI-Base Workshop: Tuesday Sept. 3, at Tom Wills'
6925 E Kingston Dr
886-2460.

Membership Report:

EDITOR IS

ON VACATION

Disk Of The Month

By Ida McCargar

DOM's are available FREE to SW99ers attending the membership meeting. Members may buy DOM's for $1. Non-members should send $2 for each DOM requested. Cassettes can be made for those who use them.

APFELKOBOL This is from a disk of German games which will be in the library as soon as Richard Baron gets them translated. I think you can figure out how to play this without a translation --how to win is something else!

ARCTURUS This is a game of space warfare. You will need a SSSD disk to unark it, as it unarks to 356 sectors.

BUG, NINJA, and **SWAN** are pictures to be viewed with almost any of the programs from previous DOM's. Try MAX-RLE to start.

LAZER is a little sound program to play with. Read the text file SOUNDEXP for suggestions.

RLE/FILES lists all the files of RLE pics on GENIE, and RLE/PICS is an alphabetical listing of the titles of all the pictures in those files. I think we have most of them in our library--if interested, ask the librarian.

SUMMER

AN OPEN LETTER

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The following was received by the Lima Ohio User Group in early February 1991 directly from the author Alexander Hulpke. Alexander is the author of a popular TI version of TETRIS, as well as XHI, YAPP, and X80. He requests that this article be given the widest possible publication and consideration in the TI community.) Hunger for Memory. A Programmers Suggestion, by Alexander Hulpke Most of us are using the TI for 6, or even more years (I bought mine in 1982, and I was surely not the first one to buy one!). In these "ancient" times, computer technology was much less ahead that today. This included of course the TI. I don't want to give a lecture about the pro's and con's of the design, TI did, but to emphasize on one point: Memory. In the early 1980's memory was incredibly expensive. Just for curiosity, I looked in a computer magazine of 1980; a TMS 4116 RAM (1 Bit x 16k), 200ns was priced 14.10 DM, approx. (counting the $ for 2DM) 7$, today a 41256 (1 Bit x 256k), 100ns - 16 times the memory, twice as fast - is priced 4 DM, quite SOME change. So no one cared about the access of large amounts of memory. TI designed the 99/4A for 32k RAM (which is the standard RAM we're using!), and the card was almost unpayable, about 440 DM. Thus no one even dared to ask for more memory. Times have changed. Today on most systems 512k is standard, also a lot of TI users have upgraded, BUT there is no possibility for accessing this memory without extensive knowledge of the specific hardware. We have lots of different expansion cards, Myarc, CorComp, Foundation, Atronic, Mechatronics etc., etc. Not everyone has such a card, but also the RAMdisks are very common: Horizon, Quest etc. Finally there are large GRAM devices, up to 512k. On the other hand, the TI still has 32k memory. For some applications it's enough, but for lots other its just a joke. Just for example take my YAPP paint program for the 9938. An interlaced 80Res screen is 100k, where could you place it, for example for OOPSing? (There's some room left in the 64k Extension, but not enough to back up a screen!) The standard GIF Format requires 96k just for the expansion/compression table, not counting any variables or code! We have excellent utilities, for example Funnelweb, but the size of documents they can operate on is ridiculous. (MyWord is a bit better in size, but also not the best.) Our community - or at least the programmers in our community - are wasting time, efforts and perhaps money, just to squeeze programs in the 32k memory. 8K, a supercart gives 8k additional memory, and may be regarded standard, but this does not help much. The lack of memory not only creates problems to squeeze assembly code (and - for example - the YAPP code has been squeezed several times, resulting not always in better readable or better executing code!), it also prevents the use of better development tools. On the Geneve, we have hopefully a full 'C' compiler in the near future, but I see no chance to get the compiled programs running on the TI, even, if there were a

library. There's no room. People developed ways to work around it, modularizing programs is most probably the best known, but it's very time consuming, creating also lots of overhead to set up loading paths etc. The TI market is not big enough to make a living from programming. I'm writing programs for fun and/or because I need them. I don't want to spend time, writing routines to swap memory from disk, waste time on dull memory savers, just because, the TI has not enough memory for today's more elaborate programs, more probably I'll write it for the my Geneve, where I have the memory. The most disturbing point about it is: People HAVE the memory - see above! What we need is a way - a standard way and not the manufacturers delight of hardware dependent coding - to access memory, without having to include large management routines in your program. I have the following suggestions, they're just preliminary, and I just want to bring them into discussion. I'd appreciate any proliferations of them, also any suggestions. There should be someone with assembler knowledge to be a final "referee" to decide the interface. If no one else wants to do it, I'll do, but probably it will be better someone in the USA, who could participate in discussions on Delphi, Compuserve or similar: The most standardized way to interface hardware dependent software is the DSR. Thus the memory management code should be in the DSR (and nearly all memory extension cards have one, the memory management code just had to be added). This would also allow, to "misuse" the RAMdisks as RAM extensions. The calling program should call it ONCE via DSRLNK and afterwards via an abbreviated routine: SBO, BL @@SAVENT, SBZ. The interfacing protocol should be as simple as possible: The Memory management routine (abbreviated: MMR) is called as an Subprogram (DSRLNK^10), the name is simple, perhaps >FF, >99 or >4A, parameter passing (except the 2-Byte PAB) is done in the CPU PAD RAM, probably even in GPLWS. Every RAM device includes a specific routine with this interface, software uses this protocol, future extensions must be standardized. This kind of routine could also be added to the Geneve, who has yet a strong mapping routine, but it's not usable from TI-mode (and I'm talking only about this mode, just for compatibility). I may offer to write this routine for the Geneve, if no one else with better system knowledge will do. The additional memory must be mapped, since there is no room left. I'd suggest a mapping area of 8K (which is the TI's block size, and also most easily implementable on the Geneve), at >2000 or >A000 (so no extra hardware is needed. Also this is on the "edge" of the memory area, leaving one block free. >E000 collides with the On-Chip RAM of the 9995). The routine will provide memory at this area, either by mapping pages, or by copying (with previous restoring of the current contents if previous page was called by 3, see below) the data into this area (what a RAMdisk will do), thus it must be a area, where always RAM is. I think, the following

routines are essential. The routine number to execute will be passed as a perometer to the MMr. 0: Obtain number of memory pages free. These pages will be numbered 0..n, and are called via this number! Page number 0 will be a backup of the "standard" contents of the mapping area. 1. "Open" MMr (This means the pages are used and not available as RAM disk or similar!). Also the current data in the mapping area is set as page #0, as if it were called by "3" (so data will be restored when a new page is mapped in!). 2: Get page #n. 3: Handle page #n. This is different to 2 in the way, that modifications will be copied back. 2 just allows to look at a page, and is faster, when the NEXT page is called, because a page, called with 2 is not written back. 4: Copy memory blocks (this will be needed perhaps very often, thus it should be provided by the MMR also, why should everyone program it new!). 5: "Close MMR. This will map page 0 again at the mapping area, not to confuse systems, that will really "map" as the Geneve, and not just "copy". Also memory is given free for other use as RAMdisk. This is just a rough sketch of the routines. Exact conventions must be established. As stated above, I'd be glad for any comments. My address is:

Alexander Hulpke
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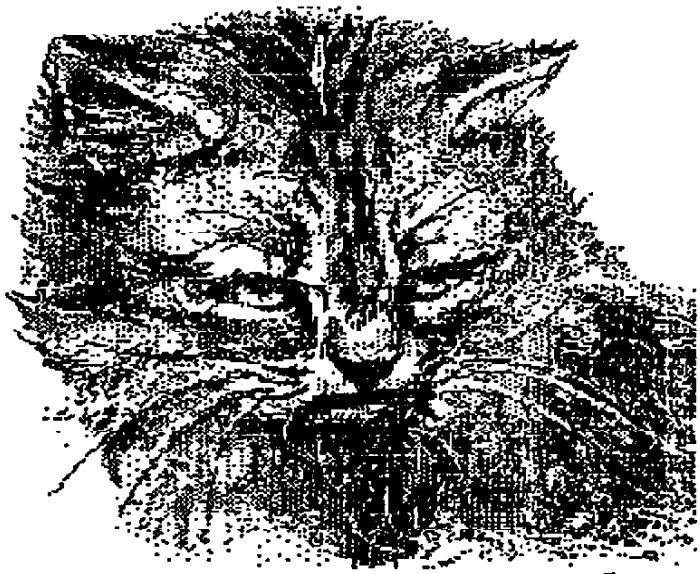
West Germany

I'm sure, such a routine will help lots of authors, perhaps eventually lead to more complex software. Perhaps we could also standardize the access of other, not TI-planned hardware, as clock, mouse, enhanced Keyboard.

Alexander Hulpke

Reprinted from July 80M

Alexander



TOM'S OBSERVATIONS
by Tom Wills

Well, this past month has been a busy month, so this months Observations may get a bit wordy.

A Goodbye To A SW99UG Member

In case you are not aware of it, Pat Craig will be leaving us. He plans on returning to his home back in Ohio. Pat has been a member of the SW99UG since starting attendance at the University Of Arizona. Pat, during his tenure with our group has brought something refreshing to the TI community, and that is a youthful fervor for the TI.

Pat has also come up with an exciting way to videotape demonstrations at both UG meetings and especially at Fest West. We have all seen Pat trying to perfect this technique, and with great success.

Pat, you will be missed, but we all wish you the best in all your future endeavors. As a way of saying "Good Luck", I would like all SW99UG members to join Pat and myself at Carl's Jr. after the meeting.

Cactus Patch Update

Thanks to the generosity of several SW99UG members, and the sale of a now unused piece of Cactus Patch equipment, another $75 has been added to the Cactus Patch upgrade fund. At this rate, all the Cactus Patch equipment may make itself into the user group's list of assets before too much longer.

At the present moment, Cactus Patch has had a total of just over 7360 callers and just over 10200 messages left in the message base. There is still just over 16,610,000 bytes of upload file space available. There are about 100 users presently logged onto the Patch. Of those about 75 are TI and Geneve users, which includes 29 SW99UG members. About half of the SW99UG members are active. Remember, any user group member, or TI'er for that matter, is invited to log onto Cactus Patch.

I would like to repeat information about the life of a message that has been left in the message base. A new message will cycle off the message base in about 4 months time. The message base holds about 400 messages at any one time. If a message is posted to Cactus Patch, oh let's say on August 1st, it will remain in the base until about September 1st. The amount of activity and length of messages left will cause this time period to vary a little. I would advise calling at least once every 3 weeks just to check you mailbox. If you actually wish to read thru all the posted messages, better do it at least once a week. For those of you who have a modem, but have not yet called Cactus Patch, give us a call and join in on our conversations.

I have had some questions asked regarding uploads. One of these questions I feel needs some discussion here in this article is about the placement of new uploaded files on Cactus Patch. There seems to be confusion about where a newly uploaded file ends up. Let's say a user uploads a file to the UTILITIES library. After all is said and done, he/she checks the library and can't find their new upload. "What's happened to my upload?" they ask. Actually, the answer is very simple. All uploads go to the Cactus Patch >NEWFILES< library, no matter in which library the upload is initiated. There is no way around this, unless I give you a Sysop status, and guess what...?

Every now and then, actually when the spirit moves me, the files will get moved to the appropriate library. Generally I try to do this about once a month or so.

Which brings up another subject. I would appreciate any ideas for a better name for the new uploads library than >NEWFILES<. I chose this so as to have it appear first in the list of the libraries. Whatever ideas you may have will be appreciated, but please remember it must appear first in the list (alphabetically) and reflect the intent of the library.

I have been experimenting with a new Xmodem routine for Cactus Patch, and Paradigm BBS software, to make the transfers work properly. At present the new Xmodem routine works, but the baud detect doesn't. After the first caller, no one else can logon. I will continue to work on this. If, and when, I get this little bug fixed, Cactus Patch will have to be taken offline for an extended period of time so that I can download each and every file and reupload them. This won't be happening real quick, but I want all PBBS callers to be aware of this change which will be happening hopefully soon.

I have also added a new feature for the users who upload files. For every file you upload, you will get an additional 2 minutes of online time. Doesn't sound like much, but if you upload 5 files, that is an additional 10 minutes. And if you had 60 minutes of authorized time before, you would now have 70 minutes. See, it does add up. And it encourages persons to upload the newest of programs.

IBM/Apple Connection

As many people are aware, Apple and IBM have decided to go together on a joint venture. There has been much to be said pro and con. I do not plan on taking sides on the advisability of this action. Except to say that it goes to show that by investing in a Big Blue machine or clone can get really expen$ive! They keep changing their software just so you have to buy from them. And usually the newest operating software is not compatible with the previous versions.

I don't care how much IBM'ers like to brag about their machine, it is too rich for my blood. But then, maybe that's all they can do, is brag about it. After all, with the cost of their software, hardware, all those mods and

extra cards they must purchase (to do just about anything), how can they possibly have any money or time left to actually enjoy that expen$ive toy. And with the operating software constantly changing, it gets harder and harder to decide what will run on which version of whatever operating software.

Also, this is going to have a big impact on MicroSoft and Intel. Apple and IBM have decided to engineer their own operating software. And to buy their chips from Motorola instead of Intel. And if you don't think this won't have an impact on IBM'ers, I have a bridge in Brooklyn I'd like sell you.

I guess what I am saying here is that no matter how old our faithful TI gets, it is still a reliable machine which keeps getting better. At least we don't have to constantly on the lookout for our operating software to change. Although it would be nice if Myarc, or Paul Charlton, would complete the "H" version of the MDOS.

Printer Problems

In the past six weeks or so, Jack Mathis and I have learned a great deal about RS232 cards and printers. We didn't want to learn this, and it wasn't of choice. It all started when my RS232 card went bonkers. All it wanted to print was garbage. The serial port worked fine. It was just the paralell port that was bad.

However, things from the Cactus Patch system worked just fine. Well, it must be the RS232. So off to Lubbock with it. In the meantime the Mathis boys were kind enough to loan me their RS232 so I could do all the things I need a RS232 for, and believe it, I really use that card.

Soon I got my RS232 back from TI Cares. It worked fine. So back to the Mathis boys went their card. Shortly after this point in time the printouts from Cactus Patch started working goofy. Followed by by my new RS232 card in my system. Strange!

When I related this to Jack, he let me know that the boys RS232 card didn't work either! Now this was getting crazy! Four RS232 cards used in different systems going bad. What the heck was going on? After some quick brainstorming it was realized that the only thing in common was my SG-10 printer.

At this point in time, I took the printer and hooked it up to BJ's computer. It worked fine. This was getting more confusing. Next stop was to a PC repair store. The gentleman hooked the printer up to his computer and started testing the printer. It only took him 5 minutes to determine that the main logic board in the SG-10 printer had gone back. He determined that it was causing a power feedback to go back thru the data line from the printer. This in effect after a period of time would cause some chip(s) to go bad on the RS232.

We still don't have an exact answer, but we are working on it. As of this writing, David Ormand has one of the bad cards and is trying to determine what is bad. Hopefully I/we can have a complete answer to this mystery by next months newsletter.

But in the meantime I want to make you aware that a bad printer can actually cause an RS232 card to go bad. Oh yes, my SG-10 was almost 8 years old and had never had to be repaired for any reason during the time I owned it.

Buyer Beware

Two stories here. The first part has to do with the purchase of a new printer to replace my old SG-10. The best price I found was $134.95 by Lyco Computer which was advertised in the then most current issue of Computer Shopper. As it has been a reliable company, I ordered my new printer, using a personal check. In about a week I got a letter from Lyco telling me that the price had gone up $14 and I would have to send them the difference. I called Lyco the next day and was informed that they would NOT honor their advertised price. Lots of excuses why not.

I decided to cancel my order and get the NX-1001 I wanted locally for just a few dollars more. Before running over to BizMart and buying their printer for $160, I called around to a few local computer stores. I found out on my 3rd call that I could get the very same NX-1001 from CompuAdd for $119.97 plus shipping and tax (total of $133.10)! I ordered it and now have it and it works fine.

I still have not received my money back from Lyco. My check cleared my bank a month ago. I called them again, and now they decided it would be okay to refund my money! The moral here is that you may be better off using your credit card as that way you have an avenue of recourse against the dealer. With a cleared check, it it between you and the dealer. I'm just glad Lyco is a reliable company. But, I may think twice before making another major purchase from Lyco.

The next company of concern appears to be ESD. A number of TI'ers sent in money in advance to help ESD with getting some "up front" cash to develope a new Hard Disk controller for the TI. One of our members, Ed McCullough, has done this. He send ESD his money one year ago. He has heard very little, and nothing since March.

The latest word (note, this is via the grapevine, and not official from ESD) is that ESD will be changing their design (again). This time to be onboard a 40 megabyte hard drive No selecting what you want. And if you have already purchased a hard disk, you may be out up to several hundred dollars!

Again, this is a case where dealing with a vendor thru a credit card may have been the best way to do things. Like I said earlier, with a credit card you at least some some recourse.

Unfortunately the TI community has been plagued by this type of vendor. Even Myarc has not been immune to this type of dealings. A couple of the first such vendors were Home Computer Magazine (I took a loss of about $60 on this one) and Ryte Data. A friend of mine lost several hundred dollars here. Again, we did our dealings via personal checks.

It was starting to appear like Asgard was going to be in this "elite" group, but much to Chris Bobbit's credit, he has taken in a partner and is trying to get things back on track. "Good Luck Chris!"

TI Accelerator

The big news is the new TI Accelerator being offered by Oasis Pensive Abacutors and Bud Mills. If you want some information on this new product, you might want to leave a question to Don O'Neil, the developer, on Cactus Patch. Don is a fairly regular caller. As I have just received my MICROpendium yesterday, I am not going to say too much on the subject, except to say this looks like the biggest breakthru for the TI community yet, and that is including the Geneve and Myarc HFDCC. More on this in next months observations!

FEED FORTH

by Leonard Taffs

In response to the request for articles for the SW99er Newsletter I would have requests from readers of the newsletter: what would be helpful to you? What is the most interesting information that you have found in the newsletters of the past? I subscribe to MICROpendium and as you know (if you are one of those that find that publication a source of the wealth of information that I do) they have a 'Feedback' Column. I would like to see that in our newsletter as a regular feature. Perhaps it was tried in the past and no one participated in it.

Well, this is 'Feed-Forth' (not the language 'FORTH'!) as I have no question yet to elicit feedback. I mentioned MICROpendium. I recently sent in for both the 2-Disk Index (offered by MICROpendium) and the 5-disk version mentioned not long ago of Bill Gaskill's index. Anyone who has acquired several years' back issues of this excellent publication know what a jungle of articles and programs and news items one is faced with. Disk indices of both these sets are provided and I am extremely grateful for all the hard work that went into preparing them.

For my needs I wanted a faster way to access the data of these disks and by trial and error created programs that could read this data and select individual items without waiting for the program to read all the data as slowly as the provided programs worked. Once I had the program (Extended Basic) to do this then I added Selective Save program lines that would create a DV/80 file I have started with the Gaskill index data, which is in DF80 format (DF/80 format stands for 'Display/Fixed'). I noticed that by using DF80 format one could save almost twice as much disk space for data than if the original data had been saved in Display/Variable (DV80) format. This means taking up more disk space for the files I have created--a cost well worth it to me in the convenience of category files. Now I can search for a program by using a simple and quick file-reading program (don't have to bother loading FUNNELWEB or TI-Writer, BA-Writer etc.) and very quickly locate any such item as 'Calc' (for any program using these letters). Waiting for this search to be completed by other programs can make me lose interest because of having to wait so long.

I have touched on one of the many projects I have been involved with and wonder if there is any interest out there on this 'Feed-Forth' venture...

I feel the leadership of our Tucson TI group is outstanding--but there are many out there who do not come to meetings that might appreciate this kind of newsletter-sharing of information. Is it almost 4 years ago (!) I dared to start a column in this newsletter called the 'Tape Corner'? There never was any feedback on those articles (not even negative!) so I figured I'd do other things. I still use some of that material today. I believe one of those Tape Corner articles was about a simple Search program (reading your own created data material). That program is something I have used ever since but have by now--these years later--added much more options in addition. Jack Mathis helped me (and I'll never forget his generosity of time and enthusiasm!) with a Sort (Alphabetizing) program. That simple 5 option program was expanded from a Tape Program (it still can be used with tape) now is a 'giant' (to me) with all sorts of options such as Selective Sorting, Selective Saving of portions or selected lines. It can Save or Delete (again selected items) or Merge other data (cannot merge if using Tape version unfortunately) or other sorts--to the capacity of your Memory (you are warned if about to exceed this so you will not lose the whole she-bang.) The original Save used Internal/Fixed 192 format but I recently added the option of saving as DV80 format (extremely useful if you want to use Jim Peterson's 'SORT/EXP' program for example--the fastest sort I know.) The original sort program was very slow. 'Bout 2 years ago I adapted 'Quicksort' (from an ancient '99er Magazine'.) This took some doing because I did not understand programming well enough to know why I couldn't simply swap the program. I quickly learned that understanding 'sort' programs is not the easiest explained in any of the books I could find. Anyway, the name I gave to this program (started back in 'Tape Corner' days) was 'Bamba'. It is one of the most extremely useful programs I have. I'll write more about this program next time. (If you can't wait (!) my phone number is 602-795-4148, or you can write (4124 E. First St.,Tucson,Az. 85711. Sorry, I've been chicken about going on Cactus Patch (BBS) but one of these days I'll get up the courage. I would consider myself an 'intermediate-level' programmer (I do not have Assembly Language knowledge yet) so if I can help any one, leave a message on my service if I'm not home.

I ♥ MY
TI-99/4A

Treasurer's Report: the monthly newsletter disbursements.

We have a balance of $887.23 before 7/25 Larry Newman