TPUG Newsletter

Views and News of Toronto Pet Users Group, Inc.

c/o John Easton, 258 Lake Promenade, Etobicoke, Ontario, M8W 1B3 phone (416) 251-1511

Fall—Winter 2004

From the President -

It gives me great pleasure to announce TPUG's 25th Anniversary. Although TPUG started with the PET computer, TPUG embraced all the computers Commodore manufactured in the years to follow. The membership grew from a handful of people to an estimated 1700 members throughout the years. To this day TPUG still follows the same purpose and ideas that the club was founded on. A source of information on Commodore Computers, to help and guide those new to these machines and TPUG still disapproves of piracy of commercial software.

How was TPUG started?
In 1979 a group of people would meet over at Lyman Duggan's home. Lyman would demo programs and discuss programming techniques on his PET computer. Unfortunately he was given a transfer by his employers because they needed his skills in Florida. Lyman called a few of the computer group together to discuss what to do about their computer nights. As a result of that discussion it was decided that a committee be formed to organize and run their computer nights. The computer nights would be called meetings, the people who attended were called members and the group became to be known as the TORONTO PET USERS GROUP. One of those people in the discussion was a man with charisma, a sense of humour and is loved at both the LUCKY EXPO and the SWRAP EXPO, - **Jim Butterfield**.

To celebrate our 25th Anniversary TPUG will be hosting the **WORLD OF COMMODORE** expo in Toronto, at the Belaire Hotel, 240 Belfield Road. (5 km. north of Dixon Road on the east side of Hwy. 27) The date for the expo is December 3,4,5

2004. The main events take place Saturday from 10:00 AM to 10:00 PM with a 2 hour break for dinner at TUCKER's MARKETPLACE RESTAURANT (tables are being held for us, everyone pays for their own meal). All demos and guest speakers will be presented on Saturday. There are vendors selling Commodore related goods. So come shop, see the demos, listen to the guest speakers and meet and talk to old friends and make new friends while you are at it. For more details visit www.icomm.ca/tpug/woc.

Friday from 4:00 PM come visit TPUG's hospitality suite and check in. Guests arriving on Saturday check in at the ballroom. Sunday morning there will be a round table discussion to get feedback on the expo and a general rap session for the overnight guests. Locals are welcome but this is more about the computer clubs and problems they having, rather then info about the computers.

Attendance fee is $15 Canadian per family. Guestrooms are $99 Canadian and rooms can sleep 4 people (reserve your rooms with the hotel by calling 416-241-8513 and tell them you want the deal for the World of Commodore by TPUG #2078). Tables are available for vendors at $15 Canadian for the first one and $10 for additional tables.

Please pre-register so we known who and how many are coming, especially if you are a vendor or if you require any equipment. Visit TPUG at www.icomm.ca/tpug/woc for more information and to pre-register.

See you there,

Tom Luff

Member Information

Voice Info
We have discontinued our TPUG phone listing - contact members as listed here at home phones.

e-mail :　tpug@icomm.ca

Membership Rates

Canada	$25
USA	US $25
International	US $25

Board of Directors

President	Tom Luff
Vice President	John Easton
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GEOS	Joe Palumbo
C64	Joe Palumbo
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Comal	Ernie Chorny
Plus/4	Ernie Chorny
Vic 20	Ernie Chorny
PET/CBM/SuperPET	John Easton
PET&C64 Education	John Easton

Support

Mail	Tom Luff
Telephone	John Easton
Disk Orders	Librarians
Member Records	Ian McIntosh
Meetings	Tom Luff and Ernie Chorny
Shows	Tom Luff & Ernie Chorny
Webmaster	Ian McIntosh

Newsletter
Editor　John Easton (416) 251-1511
　　　　jeaston@idirect.com

Meeting Schedule

Westside and Amiga West: Third Thursday of the month (except summer) at Alderwood United Church, 44 Delma Drive. Delma Drive is just west of and parallel to Browns Line, south of the Queen Elizabeth Highway, north of Horner Avenue. From the west, exit QEW at Evans Avenue, east on Evans to 2nd stoplight, south on Gair to Delma Drive. From the north or east, follow signs from QEW or Hwy. 427 to Browns Line, exit right to Evans Avenue, turn south on Gair (first stoplight) to Delma.

Contact - Tim Luff (905) 812-5231 e-mail: tomluff@rogers.com
or　　　　Ernie Chorny(905) 279-2730

From your Editor ...

Well … Hi there!

I don't believe this … so long with so few issues of your favourite ;-) newsletter. Dog ate my homework … and if you believe that, well then, do I have a deal for you!

Anyhow, it's a long story. Lost my ancient laser printer (the one with the built-in smarts to handle the Postscript output of my equally ancient DOS-type VENTURA Publisher—anyone with a lead on a newer version - say versions 8 thru 10?) to old age and absence of repair know-how (when the techies at the repair depot just shake their heads in amazement and rather chuckle at your request) it's time for a new tack.

I'd already learned to hate ADOBE for the way it handles files, so turned to a recent version of Microsoft Publisher. Learning to hate that for the same reason plus it sometimes insists on being too helpful by half like what if *I don't want to do things* the way it insists —but let's carry on and count it a learning experience.

Checked to-day with the post office and it seems that we *just might* get away with a 12 page issue and still stay under the weight limit—use lightweight staples and 15 pound paper?

Anyhow, we're talking nostalgia, what with the up-coming **World of Commodore** show scheduled for the traditional first weekend in December— let's carry on with a nostalgic look at our favourite 8-bit technology (with apologies to the AMIGA types—for whom we include a nostalgic re-print from a previous issue.

John—y'r humble Editor

Notice to new owners of SuperPet and CBM 8296 machines

TPUG has copies of the Waterloo LANGUAGE DISKS (3 in 4040 format) as supplied with the Super-Pet on original purchase.

TPUG has the EXECUDESK disk (8050 format) as supplied with the CBM 8296 on original purchase.

These disks are an integral part of the operating systems of the above machines and since Commodore insisted on referring owners of these machines to TPUG for service, we have added these somewhat proprietory (and also virtually unobtainable) disks to our library - all part of the TPUG mandate of service to our members.

We also will attempt to search out copies of original program disks to replace corrupted disks. In this category you will find such programs as VISICALC, WordPro, and PaperClip.

New from Tulip — C64DTV

C64 Direct-to-TV ....
From the Tulip website
www.commodore.net

The C64 Direct-to-TV unit is the natural evolution of the currently huge demand for retro video games and will set a new standard for excellence, with superior sound, graphics and gameplay experiences over the products currently on sale. This entertainment system for videogames is based upon the world famous Commodore 64 home PC, the most famous and well known home computer for videogames and will be brought to the market by Tulip Computers. With a simple and straightforward to use connection to the TV, users of the C64 Direct-to-TV can play 30 popular C64 games. With 30 games pre-installed on the device, the C64 Direct-to-TV product offers significantly more than its competitors. Millions of these games are sold in the past. Included in the device are the classic Games series from Epyx including Summer Games, Winter Games, World Games and the seminal California Games, which arguably created the extreme sports video games genre.

Specifications
- 30 games installed.
- Connected simply to the users TV via RF cables
- Powered by 4 x AAA batteries
- PAL and NTSC compatible.
- 320 x 240 pixel resolution running in full screen mode on TV.
Game download and connected joystick multiplayer functionality not available on this release.

Availability: October 2004— approximate cost, Euro 30
Copyright Commodore International BV 1997 - 2004.

And don't forget the **NEW** ComputerFest. No longer known by that name, but carrying on under the name of **CompuSale**.

Usual location — at the International Centre (you know, up there by the airport) - November 26-28

TPUG will be there!

Tom's World

Robots

I have been fascinated by robots and science fiction since my early youth, but then so have most people. When I was a child, robots were depicted as a machine that looks and acted similar to a human being, but had no emotions. We all likely first learned about robots the same way, through TV and movies.

The term 'Robot ' was born in a play written by Karel Capek, a Czech, in 1921. The play was titled *"R.U.R"* or *"Rossum's Universal Robots"*. The play is about a man who creates a robot, and is killed by his creation. In 1941, the science fiction writer Isaac Asimov wrote the first 3 laws of robotics. Later he added Law Zero.

Law Zero: A robot may not injure humanity, or, through inaction, allow humanity to come to harm.

Law One: A robot may not injure human being, or, through inaction, allow human being to come *to harm.*

Law Two: A robot must obey orders given it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with a higher order law.

Law Three: A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with a higher order law.

What is a Robot? According to the Webster's dictionary the word 'Robot' is described as a noun with three meanings;

1a: a machine that looks like a human being and performs various complex acts (as walking or talking) of a human being.

 b: an efficient insensitive person who functions automatically.

2: a device that automatically performs complicated often repetitive tasks.

3: a mechanism guided by automatic controls.

I find meanings 2 and 3 are rather vague. They seem to imply devices like microwave ovens, VCRs and radio-controlled toys may be refer to as robots. I would not call any of these robots. It is hard to create a definition to cover what a robot is and at the same time exclude the others.

A device which can perform multiple complex and repetitive tasks on its own after it was programmed is what most of us see as a robot. In industry robots for the most part are used to do repetitive work faster, cheaper and sometimes in dangerous conditions than a person could do.

Robots use a computer as their brain. It is the computer that interrupts the inputs from the environment and directs the robot as to what action to take. But it is the program, which instructs the computer to dictate to the robot how to respond to the input from the environment. Robot, computer and program are nothing without each other. The robot is a shell filled with motors, sensors and other components, useless without the other two. The computer with no program would be similar to a brain dead patient (the lights might be on but nobody is home). The robot is like our skin, muscle and bone, without them our brain would be lying on the sidewalk being kicked about and exposed the elements. The program is the soul of our robot. It dictates our responses to the environment and gives the robot its personality. It is more complicated then what I have laid out, but I think you get the picture.

For the rest of the article I will review interfacing to the user port and the joystick ports. These ports are the easiest way of inputting information to the computer from the environment. The user port is bi-directional port, which can be used as an 8-bit input, or as an 8-bit output, or as a combination of both (combined 8 bits total). I will save the discussion of interfacing to the cartridge p ort for another article.

Interfacing to Joystick Ports

The joystick ports are active low input lines. Active low indicates the lines respond to a near zero voltage, such as the power ground (GND) of the computer. The joystick is comprised of 5 switches. Each switch is tied to GND on one side and the other side of the switches is tied to its own line in the computer. The bits 0,1,2,3,4 are tied to the joystick pin numbers 1,2,3,4, and 6 respectfully. GND is pin 8. Use the diagram in figure 1 to try and enter a number between 0 and 31 (32 numbers). Use the following program with figure 1.

Reading the joystick port.

```
100 JV=PEEK(56320)
101 JV=31-(JV AND 31)
102 PRINT JV
```

Set the switches then run the program.

Line 100 puts the value of the joystick port into the variable JV. The joystick port closest to the front of the computer uses the address 56320. The other joystick port uses the address 56321.

Line 101 ANDs the variable JV with the number 31, this eliminates the 3 higher bits that we don't need. This is called masking. The value is a composite number from the time we got it out of the

joystick register's address (56320). Subtracting the composite value from 31 returns a realistic number.

Line 102 prints the variable JV to the screen.

When using both joystick ports it is advisable to label your plugs so you know which plug goes into which port.

Joystick Port Protection

If you are using mechanical switches (metal to metal contacts), then protection is not necessary. Using semiconductors (transistors, SCRs, IC chips, etc) to do the actual switching then there are two things you should do. 1) Do not power external circuits from the computer's power line. The computer's power pins can only handle about 100 milliamps. This designed was to only power one or two low current chips. If you draw too much current or cause a short on these lines the computer could become damaged. Use an external power supply. Tie the computer's GND to the GND of the external power supply. 2) Since the lines are one way only, it would be a good idea to use a diode on each bit line. A switching diode like a 1N914 installed with the anode end of the diode to the computer and the cathode end (marked with a band) attached to the output of the external circuit will act as safety device. It should prevent large current from passing between the computer and the external circuit. THE GROUND OF THE COMPUTER AND THE GROUND OF THE EXTERNAL CIRCUIT MUST BE CONNECTED TOGETHER. See Figure 2

Interfacing to the User Port

The user port allows us 8 bits to use as inputs or outputs or a combination of both. The port uses two addresses to accomplish this. At address 56579, the Data Direction

Register, poking a one in a bit makes that the same bit in address 56577 an output, like wise a zero would make that bit an input. Poking address 56579 with 15 will cause bits 0,1,2,3 in the address56577 to be outputs and bits 4,5,6,7 of address 56577 to be inputs. To create an output, POKE a number into address56577. To read an input, PEEK (56577 AND 240). 240 is our mask to eliminate the unnecessary bits (in our case bits 0,1,2,3).

User Port Protection

For the same reason we protect the user port we need to protect the user port. Input protection can be done as we did for the joystick above. See figure 2. To provide a safer protection an optoisolator is used to totally separate the computer from the external circuit. An optoisolator contains a Light Emitting Diode and a photo diode (or photo- transistor). Light is the only thing transferred between them. One of the two is tied to the computer with a current limiting diode. The other is attached to the external circuit. See figure 3. I have been using an optoisolator numbered '4N32' mainly because I already had them in my home stock.

This should be enough to get you started. If you are new at this you should do more research before tackling these projects or get some one close by who can and will take the time to help you.

ATTEMPT THESE PROJECTS AT YOUR OWN RISK. To the best of my knowledge the information presented here is correct and TPUG and the Author are not responsible for any damage that may result from attempting these projects.
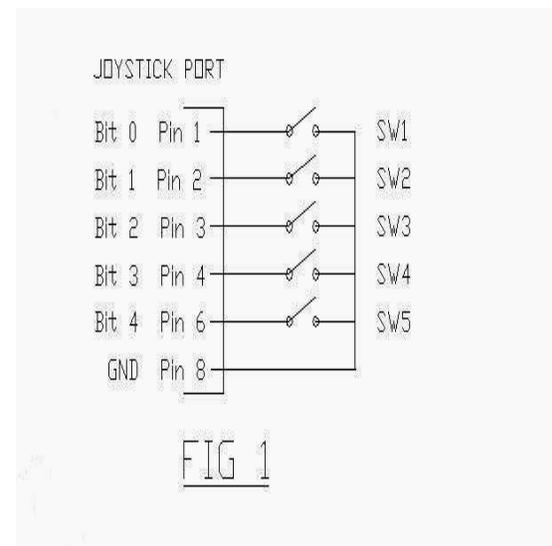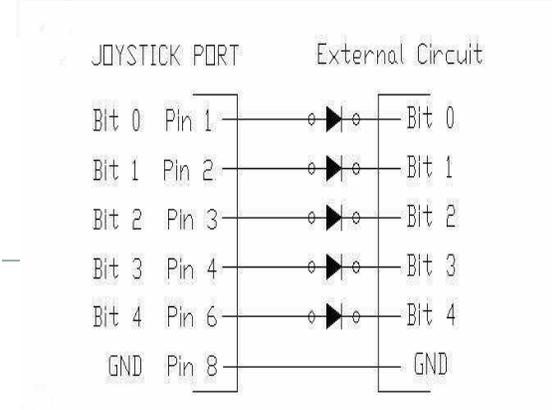
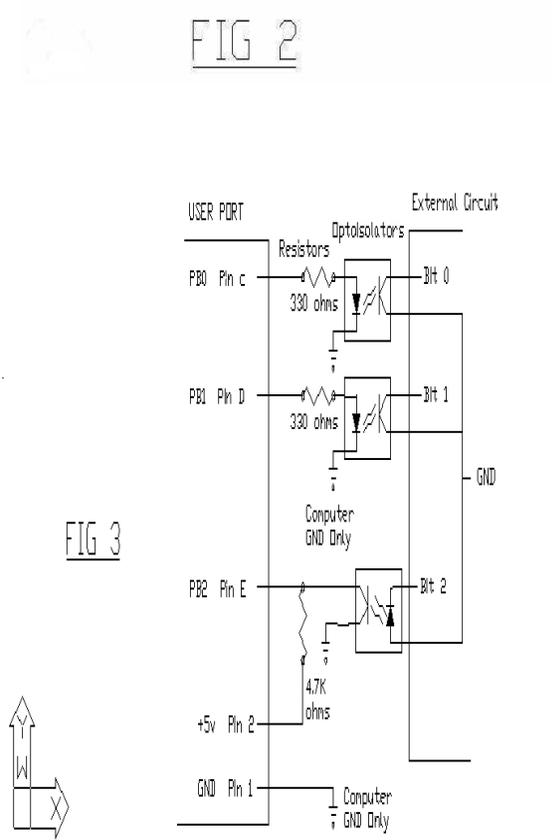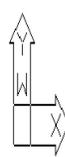*Tom Luff*

FIG 1

FIG 2

FIG 3

Crazy Canadians Commute And Checkout Chicago Commodore Convention

Last October the Fall SWRAP Commodore Expo was held in Chicago. Along with the Spring show, they provide the opportunity for enthusiasts of Commodore to gather, learn and buy. As one of the newer members of TPUG (but a veteran of 64 computing), I thought it would be a great experience to attend one of the shows and see what it's like. What I discovered is that a Commodore expo offers something for all Commodore enthusiasts, whether you like the `classic' or the `cutting edge'.

Usually our resident show expert, Joey Palumbo, goes down to the shows. I decided to hitch a ride with him. There are probably numerous stories about commutes to a Commodore expo and experiences at them, but this is just one from my perspective.

DAY ONE: I arrive at Joey's around 8 o'clock. Greg Nacu is already there and the two of them spent the better part of the previous evening trying out the Stack Light Rifle. The light rifle plugs into the 64 for target practise (on the screen of course!). We decided to take it and demo it in Chicago. We wondered how customs would view this, however (nothing to declare, just a rifle. It's plastic. Honest!).

We get the pickup, and chat as we stuff the back with as much show stuff as can fit. "So, what are you demonstrating in Chicago?" I asked Greg. "A few enhancements for WINGS." he replies, "And, a surprise". This is the first hint of the many surprises that await in Chicago.

We finish loading the pickup, then us three fans of all things Commodore head out on the road. We stop to pick up Joey's dad (another Commodore fan. Cool!) and head to Windsor. After stopping for duty-free Canadian beer for our American friends, we cross the Ambassador bridge to Detroit.

Ahhh, CUSTOMS! Usually we have no trouble in customs if we pick the right line, but the car in front of us is being searched!, by an officer wearing gloves!!!. I try to relax, but I'm thinking about the Light Rifle in the back. Our turn. We pull up to the booth. A young looking guard is sitting on a stool with his arms crossed:

"Where are you headed" he asks.
"Chicago" Joey replies.
"For what purpose?" the guard asks.
"We're on our way to a vintage computer show!".
"Vintage computer. What's that?"
"Well" says Joey, "Have you ever heard of the Commodore 64?"
The guard grins. "Yeah" he says "I've heard of the Commodore 64".

After determining our intent was only to check out the latest upgrades to a 25 year old computer, he waves us through without a search. We pay the toll and clear customs. "Thank God for the Commodore 64" Greg exclaims aloud and with relief. Laughter fills the pickup truck as we head out on the highway to Chicago.

The show was at the Quality Inn & Suites in Lombard, interestingly on route 64, number 645. We took a shortcut on Butterfield road to get there. The usual people were in the lobby staying up well past their bedtime. But who can sleep when there's so much going on? There's Jerry Ellsworth with her Commodore One, Dave Whitmer of the Cincinnati club showing off his acrylic and neon Commodore One tower with neon lights and Commodore drives in it, and Greg's just about to set up his highly-modified SX-64 and demonstrate CONTIKI!

SHOW DAY: The show was in the basement of the building next to the hotel. Basements are usually characterized as dark and dingy, but this was anything but. It was a large meeting room, the perfect size. Large enough to accommodate all of us and small enough to provide a sense of closeness.

People showed up from all over the USA, and even as far away as Australia! We represented the Canadian contingent, along with Lief Bloomquist from Toronto and Robin Harbron from Thunder Bay (if I missed any other Canadians that were at the show but I didn't get a chance to meet you, sorry eh!). Joey set up close to the middle of the room. Lief set up next to Joey and was demonstrating his negative-format BBS, allowing a connection to a C64 BBS from a C64 using Telnet. Dale Sidebottom showed up as well, demonstrating how to set up a C64 to use modern color printers and even burn CD's using a C64. The Cincinnati club set up in the middle of the room occupying several tables with boxes of sellable stuff, a Commodore shoppers paradise! Dave Moorman showed up, demonstrating the Lodestar tower. There was also a "free stuff" table (which quickly spilled over to the floor), great for finding things that are impractical to sell (like parts for a 1541 disk drive or those little write protect tabs for 5.25" disks). By ten o'clock, the room was buzzing with activity.

Jim Butterfield came down from Toronto. He brought a

Commodore pin to be raffled off, and regaled us with stories of the early days of Commodore computing. He talked about one of the earliest computers, the KIM, or Keyboard Input Monitor, and as always, everyone's attention was on him. As he talked, I couldn't help but ponder over his incredible contribution to the world of Commodore computing.

DEMO TIME: Joey set up the Stack Light Rifle and loaded the program. Greg Nacu volunteered to be the "duck hunter" for the demonstration. Less than a minute after the demo started, something was obvious. Either the rifle was malfunctioning or Greg was a bad shot because those ducks weren't dying! Joey reset the game and re-tried. No luck. He eventually pinned the problem to the wire leading into the gun. It was probably frayed inside. Oh well, better luck (or duck) next time.

Shortly after, Greg Nacu demonstrated a new version of WINGS e-mail client, and also showed a demo of what appeared to be stick men performing karate moves that would make Bruce Lee blush! He then uncorked his `surprise', a one minute trailer of the X-Men playing through a media player on the 64! The trailer was stored as individual frames and the media player flashes them on the screen in sequence at about fifteen frames a second, I believe. It was a bit grainy, but who cares? The amazing fact is, the 64 was doing something that the original designers never dreamed it could do! More importantly, the demo showed the future possibilities of the 64. Combined with thundering sound, it was quite a demo.

All in all, there were lots of demo's, lots for sale, lots for free, lots to see, lots to try, lots to learn and lots of fun.

No matter where you are coming from, attending a Commodore expo is all about fun, and half the fun is getting there!

Greg Van Laere
Member TPUG, board of directors

SHOW UPDATE: Canadians in Chicago for SWRAP expo 2004

Yes, the crazy Canadians made another trek down to the SWRAP expo in Chicago. This years contingent consisted of Joey Palumbo (Super Snapshot fame), Tom Luff (TPUG Club President), Leif Bloomquist (VIC-20 guru), Greg Nacu (WINGS guru), and myself, all crammed into an overstuffed Ford Explorer. This year we had no problems with the border guys, just smooth sailing to Chicago.

This year's show was held at the Hilton hotel in Lisle, and was full of fun and surprises. The show was separated into three rooms: the Demo room, the Sales room, and the Hang-Out-And-Chat room (which was a place to relax and chat with fellow Commodore fans). Most people stuck to the "action" rooms however. And there was a lot of action to be seen.

Demos included: Leif Bloomquist, wowing the crowd with the remote control truck powered by his (blue) C64 and a VIC-Rel, Modem Wars over TCP/IP and Jim Brain demonstrating the Virtual IEC Peripheral (a possible X1541 cable replacement), among others.

The show also highlighted some rare Commodore equipment, including: A PET computer (complete with dual disk drive, tape drive and printer, all Commodore, being sold by Cincinnati Commodore Computer Club), a C116, a C264, a C65, and not one, not two, but THREE KIM1 motherboards complete with expansion ports and boards. I inspected these KIM1's closely because they are so rare. One was an original MOS version, another was the Commodore version and the third model was a Commodore version in its own case.

The auction this year included: An in-the-box 1520 plotter, a Koala pad in box, a Suncom Animation Station in box, a musical keyboard for the 64 in box, a t-shirt that read "ask me about old hardware", a music CD by Press Play on Tape, and TPUG's contribution of a Commodore black strap watch.

These shows are tons of fun and informative for fans of Commodore hardware and software, so don't forget to plan for the World of Commodore show in Toronto, Canada December 3-5, 2004 and make your own memories of the "Show Trip". See you there.

Greg Van Laere

Reflections on Computing

A `Computing Editorial' published by Paul Allen Panks on the Internet newsgroup **comp.sys.cbm** *January 18, 2003.*

Dear Friends:

As a long time owner and user of the Commodore 128, I have witnessed the 8-bit computer market from the early days (1982-1985) right on through Commodore's demise and Atari's bankruptcy. Of the once great 8-bit stallions, only Apple remains. But Apple hasn't supported the Apple II line for over ten years now. They have since moved on to better things. Commodore itself, in the waning years, promoted the Amiga over the Commodore 64 as inexpensive upgrade packages. If only Commodore allowed the Commodore 64 users to bring their software and hardware investments with them (minus the horrible C64 Emulators for the Amiga). If only anyone did.

With the rise of modern operating systems such as Windows, Mac and Linux, long time users have witnessed a revival in interest among the general population in their once great computers. Users of the Atari 400/800, Apple II and IIe, Commodore 64/128, Tandy Color Computer, IBM PC/PC Junior, TRS-80 and even the Coleco Adam have witnessed a rebirth of interest in their computers. Thanks in no small part to the Internet, owners and users across the globe can share files, download information, access websites and even go online to eBay to bid for their beloved machines.

What drove the market in its early days remains today the very reason many got into computing in the first place: to share the knowledge of computing with neighbors, friends and family alike. To experience the joy of computing at the apex of technological breakthrough. And to squeeze every ounce of use out of a platform before deciding to move on.

As I have seen with the Commodore 128 and 128D, even success can be a nightmare. As a hard core C128 user, most of my time is spent in C128 mode, tip-tapping away at my latest programming project. But in truth, only a handful of people really explored that side of the machine. Simply put, the Commodore 128 became a Commodore 64 in a strange box. Every game, every application, every utility that was written to that point, was also not written for Commodore

128 mode. Why? Because the Commodore 128 `suffered' from the grand experience of being a Commodore 64 with `extra' computing power thrown in. But 64KB RAM was enough. It was always enough.

Computing has always been an experience of joy and discovery. Who can blame Bill Gates for being a billionaire today? His love and adequate knowledge of computing turned his one man quest into a crusade. Love him or not, Bill Gates carried the flag for computing well into the 21st century. But other pioneers, such as Apple, Atari, Commodore and Tandy, proved that innovating and cutting costs paved the way for more users to come to computing.

And even on our shores, we missed a lot as well. Sir Clive brought the Spectrum to millions of users in the United Kingdom. He remains to this day one of the few computing pioneers given an honorary Knighting by his country. We should all be so lucky to have a Sir Clive in our neighborhood.

But today, on the cusp of a new generation, we are the carriers of technology from shore to shore, and from life to life. It is the undying dedication to computing that has driven so many people, for so long a time. From Creative Computing and the Transactor, to Byte, Compute!'s Gazette, Family Computing and today's magazines, we are carrying a clear but simple message: "Computing for the masses, not the classes." As Jack Tramiel embodied and the 8-bit community showed, computers are an experience for all to enjoy, at minimum cost to a financial budget.

May the future be as bright as the sun above, and may the stars continue to shine for a new generation, for all time.
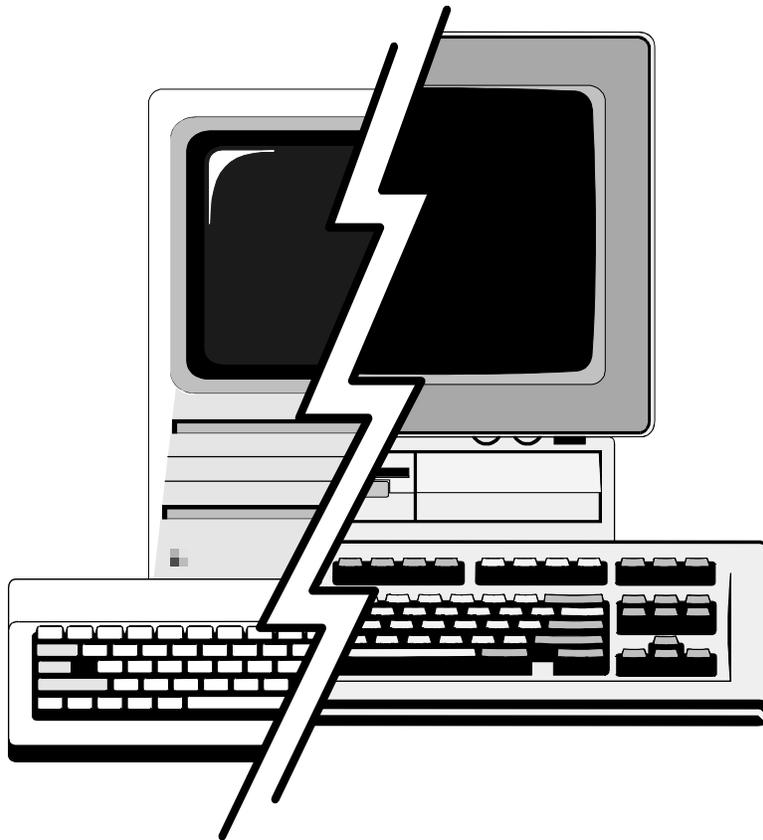
Regards,

Paul Allen Panks
dunric@yahoo.com
`Computer Friend since 1982'

The Amiga—Still a good choice

I was reading a recent issue of "Wired" (yes, yes, I know) for a specific article. The article talked about what they called "retroactivists" -- people who prefer one or more certain computer platforms, supposedly left behind in the rush of Windows upgrades and CPU after CPU. Not surprisingly, the Amiga was generously mentioned, and in a reasonably favorable light, too. The article starts off with a software engineer, who advocates users to find a good, capable, and stable computer operating system and software, learn how to use it well, and stick with it for ten years. While that may be a little extreme, I can understand the sentiment behind it. Especially in the Windos world, there's a climate where constant updates, upgrades, and spending are viewed as necessary, whether it actually is or not. More people are living on the bleeding edge, with all the instability and outlay of cash it entails. It all got me thinking about my own views on the subject.

I am an Amiga user. With the exception of a game console or two and a Palm handheld device, Amigas are the only computers in the house. I'm not so much of a fanatic that I would turn down a Windows box or I-Mac if it were offered to me, but I'm certainly in no hurry to get one. Through experiences with all platforms, I prefer the Amiga, and I'm used to how (and how well) it performs. If there was something I required that the Amiga could not provide, then I would get a different machine, but that need has not sprung up yet -- and I do a lot with my Amigas. I do graphics for screen, print and Internet. I create and edit animation and video on my hard drive. I surf the Internet, I burn my own CD-ROMs, I play a few games, and I publish this newsletter. Your average 666Mhz Pentium user might be

lucky to get that much use out of their machine. I am not someone who stands still in the technology race -- I have upgraded my Amigas with bigger and better CPUs, drives, and the new 3.5 OS. I view it as a more enlightened approach, as it's more a matter of what use I can get out of it, as opposed to just going faster, so that new game can run that tiny bit smoother.

Outsiders often view Amiga users as dinosaurs -- as fanatical throwbacks who refuse to accept the world has left them behind. I don't see it that way. Amiga users have seen how good personal computer technology can be when used well, and they know there's better out there than the likes of Windows. They know there's no excuse for using 100 percent of a computer's RAM, hard drive, and CPU, only because it's available to use. They know crashes, corruption, and recurring re-installation do not have to be a way of life. They know that if their Amiga provides what they need now, it's not necessary to downgrade just to get some extra speed, games, and access to websites that were written with a specific browser in mind.

In the meantime, we sit, and hope against hope that the new Amiga Inc. will strike gold again, and bring us the newest, bestest platform that will make the Windows PCs of today look as clumsy and dated as the IBM PCs did against the Amiga 1000 back in 1985. That may be a little unrealistic in today's environment, but it's all a matter of a little magic. It can potentially be captured again. If it looks like a platform we can keep using for the next ten years, we know we'll really have something, whether the world at large realizes it or not.

Eric W. Schwartz,
AmiTech User Group,
Dayton, OH

Retro SID

The Commodore 64's Sound Interface Device (SID) chip brought synthesizer-quality sound to home computers in 1982. In addition to the technical achievement, the SID was the basis for many creative composers' memorable expressions. Over 15 years later, I still catch myself humming the theme to The Last V8, MULE, or Master of Magic and more, once in a while.

SID music continues to be popular to this day. Many modern producers of electronic music got their start on the Commodore 64, so it's understandable that they would try to work the distinctive SID sound, or the music popularized by C64 games, into their music.

Here is an overview of some of the areas in which SID music is being remembered and even taken to the next level. This is only a small sampling, there are many more examples!

PRESS PLAY ON TAPE

PRESS PLAY ON TAPE is a Commodore 64 revival band from Copenhagen. They exclusively play rock versions of tunes from Commodore 64 games, on real instruments.
www.pressplayontape.com

HVSID

The High Voltage SID Collection is an ambitious collection of every SID tune ever made for the Commodore 64 - Every game, demo and intro. It contains many thousands of SID files, diligently organized by composer, with a total size of over 50 Megabytes. The SID files can be played back on Commodores or PCs with a special player program, Sidplay/2.
www.hvsc.c64.org

HARDSID

The HARDSID is a PCI card that allows PC users to have up to four real SID chips in their computer. The HARDSID can be controlled by MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) and many of the popular music composition packages available for PC such as Cakewalk, Cubase, etc.
www.hardsid.com

8-BIT WEAPON

8 Bit Weapon is a band from California, creating remixes of popular Commodore 64 music. They perform live with several C64s combined with drum machines and laptops.
www.8bitweapon.com

SID REMIXES

Dozens of other musicians have also remixed SID music, turning themes from C64 games into rock, electronica, techno, even heavy metal and classical renditions. These remixes are collected on this website and are freely downloadable in MP3 format.
www.remix.kwed.org

BACK IN TIME LIVE

Back in Time Live is the ultimate Commodore 64 music party, held annually in various cities in Europe. Press Play on Tape have been known to perform there, and many of the original composers of C64 game music themselves occasionally appear as special guests - Ben Daglish, Rob Hubbard, Antony Crowther, Jeff Minter, and Richard Joseph to name a few. It is rumored that the 2004 party was the last one, but hopefully they will be back.
www.backintimelive.com

One final point of SID trivia: Bob Yannes, the audio engineer at MOS Technologies who developed the SID chip, went on to work at Ensoniq (now part of Creative Labs) and continues to develop cutting-edge synthesizer chips and technology.

Leif Bloomquist

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www.icomm.ca/tpug