

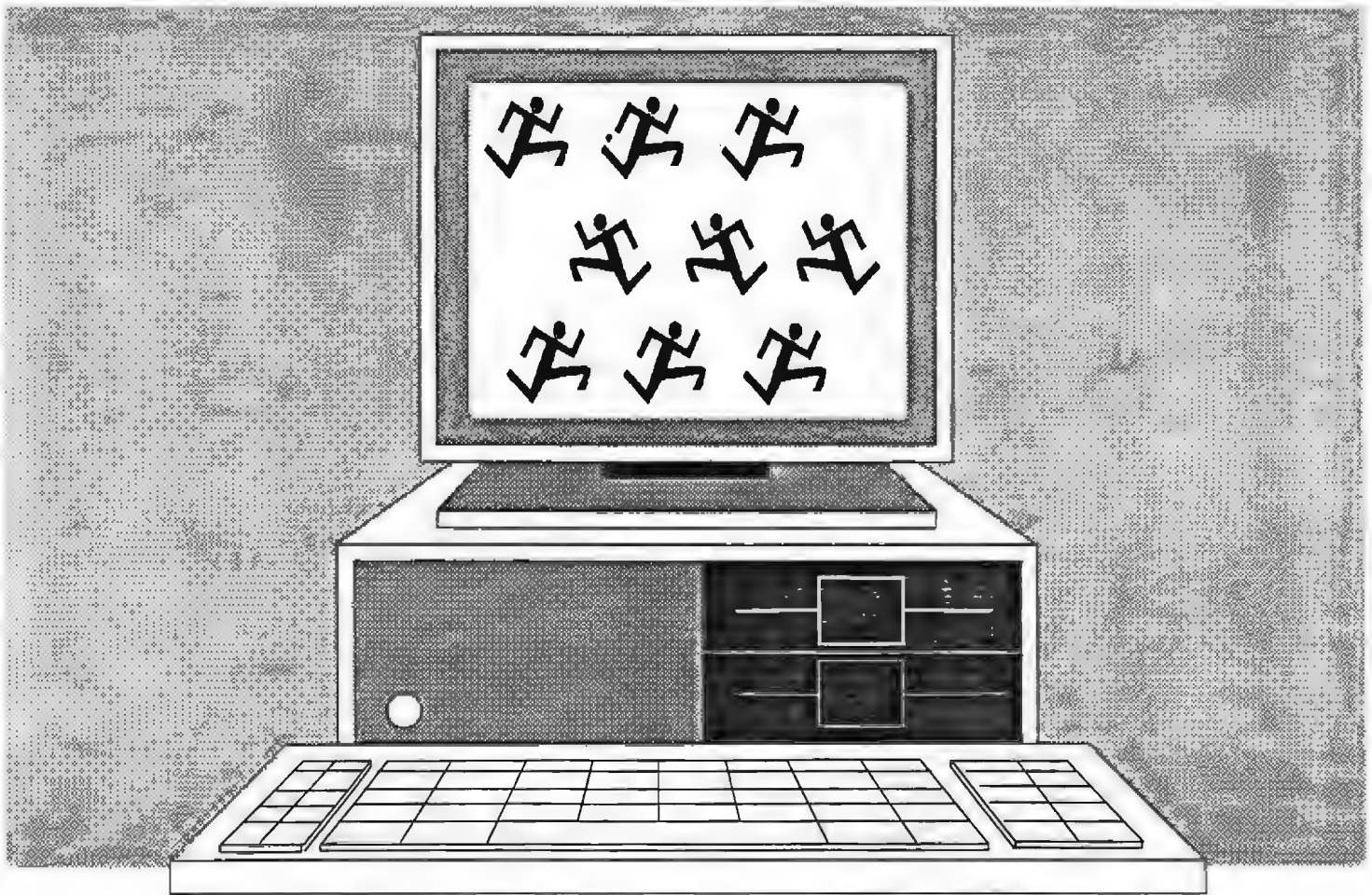


PRinT SCreen

*The Newsletter for the Stanford/
Palo Alto PC User's Group*

November 1987

Volume 5, Number 11



*The Crazy,
Chaotic
World of*

COMDEX

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Club News

New meeting place

We have been fortunate over the last four years to have access to a PC and a projection screen in Turing Auditorium. Unfortunately, starting in January, this room is reserved for classes Monday through Thursday evenings. Though we will have no problem getting another auditorium on campus for our meetings, we will not have the wonderful equipment we have become accustomed to. If anyone knows of any location in the area that has a PC with projection equipment that we can meet at, let us know. The January PRinT SScreen will have details about our new location.

October Meeting

Even the non-programmers in the group enjoyed the Borland presentation on the new Turbo Pascal 4.0. Believe it or not, this programming language borders on flashy: fancy color graphics, windows, pull-down menus, and a speedy compiler. The program sells for \$99; the upgrade is \$39 plus \$5 shipping.

The audience tried to squeeze as much information as possible from the Borland representatives about the company's not-yet-released products, Quatro and Sidekick Plus. Quatro is billed as the "next generation spreadsheet" with presentation-quality graphics. It will sell for about \$200. Sidekick Plus will have beefed-up modules, including background communications. It will be customizable to the extent that you can make the program look like anything you want. That's all he would say about it.

The presentation ended with a drawing for various Borland products.

Library additions

The following files have been added to the SPAUG library. All files are in sub-directory format.

FILENAME	DESCRIPTION	Disk#
THEME2S	Cross indexes music	11C
BOYAN	Communication pkg. ver.2D	00D
TRACKER	Business tracking system demo	11E
AUTOMENU	Program builder & files handler	11B
SEEKEASY	Flexible match info retrieval; searches for character or partial character strings	11D

Membership renewals

For the two months preceding the expiration of your membership you will find a renewal envelope enclosed in your newsletter. Use this envelope to promptly send in your \$25 check (\$10 for students) so that you won't miss an issue of the monthly newsletter. A current membership card will then be sent to you in the next PrtSc.

Goodie Coupons

Remember, the "Goodie Coupon" attached to your membership card is presently good for one free disk: the library catalog, Disk of the Month, or a blank disk. Trade in your coupon for a disk at a future meeting.

November Calendar

November 25	Group Meeting	8:00
November 30	MS Word SIG	7:30
December 8	Novice SIG	7:00
January 13	Planning Meeting	8:00
January 27	Group Meeting	8:00

All members are welcome to attend the monthly planning meeting, where we make decisions on the future of the group. Call Corwin Nichols, 494-8640 or 324-9114, for location of the next meeting.

Next Meeting

Date:	Wednesday, November 25
Time:	8:00 p.m.
Place:	Polya Hall, Turing Auditorium (Rm. 111) Stanford University

A representative from Intel will be demonstrating several new products which extend the lives of our PCs and XTs. The Above Board is a memory expansion card and the Inboard 386 is an 80386-based add-in board that increases the performance of PCs and XTs by up to 10 times. Intel's new 4.0 memory specification will also be discussed.

The Answer Man

Paths, Batch Files And All That Jazz

QUESTION: *I understand how the PATH statement works and I know how to use batch files, but no matter what I do I can't seem to keep my hard disk organized. I never seem to know where to put things and consequently my directories are always cluttered. What can I do?*

ANSWER: Got a few spare years – I'll be happy to tell you. Hard disk management stands as one of the great bug-a-boos (how do you spell that?) with computers. One important reason for that is that there is no one universally-accepted method of structuring a hard disk. Therefore, what follows is one man's opinion of *one of the right ways* to set up a hard disk.

You should follow two golden rules:

1) The root directory should have only three files: COMMAND, CONFIG, AUTOEXEC. (The only exception to this is if a certain piece of software insists that one of its files be on the root.) Also, the entire directory structure should be visible on one screen and able to be displayed with one DIR (that means a limit of 17 or 18 top-level directories with all others being one level below.)

2) All batch files be in a single directory. We'll call it C:\BAT.

You'll no doubt have many other directories, but the essential ones for good disk management are:

DOS (all the files that come with your version of DOS)

UTIL (all other utility programs that you use regularly)

BAT (all your batch files)

Place those three directories in your PATH statement, but be frugal with the rest of the statement. You don't want a huge PATH statement, because it will slow down your access times and also because it will become too easy to cheat – just throw a file in any of those PATHed directories and forget about it. This example assumes a PATH statement as simple as

```
C:\BAT;C:\UTIL;C:\DOS;C:\
```

The rest of your hard disk management should be handled via batch files.

Life's A Batch

Most people underestimate the value of batch files in a well-organized system. Those who use them regularly probably save hundreds of keystrokes *daily*.

For the purposes of disk management, all of the programs you run can be categorized one of two ways: 1) Programs that can be called from distant subdirectories; and 2) Programs that can only be loaded inside the subdirectories in which they reside.

All regularly-used programs that fall into the second category should have batch files written for them. Anyone who types

```
CD\LOTUS
```

```
123
```

every time he/she wants to run 123 is asking for early arthritis. Therefore, Rule of Thumb No. 1:

Create a batch file for any program that requires a CD command.

Remember, you create this batch file in the BAT directory, which is included in the PATH statement. That way, you will be able to start 1-2-3 and all other programs like it, with a single command.

Now what about programs that fall into the first category – programs that can be called from any subdirectory in the system? You could include those subdirectories in the PATH statement, but where do you draw the line? Soon, you'd have a dozen or so directories listed and you'd be back at the mercy of chaos. The alternative, once again, is a batch file.

Let's say that you use Microsoft Word, a word processor that can be called from a subdirectory other than its own. For the sake of the example, let's also say that you installed Word into a subdirectory two levels below the root, the path to it being

```
\MICROSOFT\WORD
```

That means that in order to call it, you would have to type "`\MICROSOFT\WORD\WORD.`" No way – too many keystrokes! Instead, simply create a batch file, called WORD.BAT, with only that command in it. It's okay to have a batch file that contains only one command – in this case, it would be saving you 16 keystrokes.

To review, we have talked about setting up three directories – DOS, UTIL and BAT – and placing all system, utility and batch files in them respectively. Those three directories comprise the PATH statement. All other frequently-run programs should have batch files written for them and placed in the BAT directory. That way, they are always accessible from any DOS prompt.

This is a simple structure, and that's important. If it's simple, you can visualize it. Many users disregard this factor – or don't even think about it in the first place – but being able to *see* your directory structure is an important step toward understanding it and mastering it. (This is another important reason to limit your root directory to one screen.)

As a first step, create a BAT subdirectory and place every batch file in it. Include BAT in your PATH and get in the habit of writing all subsequent batch files there. When I first tried this, I would always forget to write my batch files in C:\BAT, so I wrote a batch file for writing batch files. I call it CREATE.BAT and it looks like this:

```
COPY CON \BAT%1.BAT
```

With this batch file, all you type is the first name of the batch file you want to make and CREATE.BAT automatically adds the extension and assures that it gets placed in the BAT directory.

QUESTION: *What if I want something simpler?*

ANSWER: Buy a PC with two floppies and no hard disk. ❖

Send your questions to: The Answer Man, 25200 Carlos Bee Blvd., No. 428, Hayward, CA 94542.

The View from the Top

COMDEX: Chaos In Vegas

by Corwin Nichols, SPAUG President

This month I reveal to you the TRUTH about COMDEX. COMDEX is touted as *the* computer show and I agree. I've been to every fall COMDEX except one, and they have always been large and well attended. It is where lots of new products are debuted and extravagant parties are thrown. This year was the largest in history with nearly 2000 exhibits spread out over 7 sites. I barely saw the whole thing and I was there three days. On Tuesday evening one of the computer rags sponsored a party featuring the Temptations and Little Richard.

Las Vegas is usually good for some unusual thrill as well. This year featured the Thursday downpour and subsequent flood. It was OK, but no comparison to my stay in the MGM hotel the year of the fire. These minor disasters are actually a relief to someone weary of the crassness of the casinos. I liken Las Vegas in the desert to a chancre on the face of the Mona Lisa. However, there is probably no other city in the US that could hold in excess of 100,000 extra people for a week, so there COMDEX must stay. But, I digress...

As large as this show was, I saw fewer really new products and more vaporware than ever before. If you removed all of the displays that were exactly the same as the year before, and removed all of the IBM PC clone makers, you would be left with a show about one-half as big. A lot of companies were selling the same products as a year ago, but new and improved: slightly faster, smaller, or cheaper. Some of the stuff was so new that it didn't real-

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ly exist...not until at least first or second quarter of 88, that is (if ever). Intel 80386 based clones were everywhere. Prices for these machines were about the same as '286 machines about a year ago.

Now before you think that perhaps I have been to one too many COMDEX shows, let me say that I did find several interesting new (and available) products. My personal favorite are the 8 mm video cassette tape backup units. You all know about the regular VHS



video cassettes. The 8 mm VC is a shrunken version of that. These small VCs allow for smaller and lighter video camcorders and players. I'm sure they will be common in a few years. Each 8 mm cassette is actually a little smaller than a regular audio cassette. And now, several companies are making hard disk backup devices using these small cassettes. The best part is that each cassette can hold over 2 gigabytes! That's the equivalent to 100 20 MB hard discs. Being new, they are a little pricey at about \$3300 each.

Next, I found a couple of companies selling CD-ROM players that not only work with CD-ROM disks, but also play standard audio CDs as well. I think these will be great items to put on the corporate shopping list. It's a sneaky way to have the company buy you a stereo. Alas, for those without access to open corporate purchase orders, Santa will have to be very generous or you will have to be very good. These players list for about \$800.

Finally I found what looks to be a very nice LAN (local area network) setup. A small company in Tucson called ArtiSoft is selling a high-speed netbios compatible LAN adapter for \$200. This is the first LAN card I've seen which has an on-board co-processor which directly supports netbios and costs less than \$500. They claim it will run IBM's PC network programs, Novell's Netware, and all application programs which use netbios calls. They also claim that it's about twice as fast as the IBM token-ring. If all this is true, then it's truly an outstanding bargain. I've ordered a system and I'll let you know how it goes.

Last, but not least, is the product of our own ex-president, Jim Caldwell. He was busy marketing a Chinese language word processor running on an IBM PC. Truly an unusual and well done product. That's the sort of thing I really like to find at COMDEX.

To sum it all up: COMDEX is no longer as exciting as it once was, but it's still interesting. Definitely worth a look next time around. And a bit of advice for those considering attending next year's show: Make your hotel reservations now. ❖

Caching in on A Little Miracle

by Rick Altman

Can your system be improved by a \$50 utility program that is loaded once and then forgotten about? A program that is as easy to use as typing its name?

ANSWER: Yes, if the program is a disk cache.

At long last, disk caching software is beginning to get its just recognition as a powerful, efficient and perhaps indispensable part of a computer system. Hopefully by the end of this column, you'll understand how a disk cache operates, but even if you don't, go buy one and throw it into your AUTOEXEC anyway – it can only help your system, especially if you have any memory above 640K to play with.

What is a Disk Cache??

Do you know how a RAM disk is created? The VDISK.SYS driver steals a bit of your system RAM and turns it into a fake disk drive. Then you are free to copy or create any files you want to in that RAM disk. A RAM disk is much faster than a physical disk drive because there are no moving parts, just electronics.

But a RAM disk has no brains – it only contains that information which you place there. A disk cache operates on a similar technique to the RAM disk, except it is smarter. Once you load a disk cache into memory, it watches your every move, waiting for you to issue a command that requires your hard disk to be read. When that happens, the data on the hard disk is not only passed on to the application that you're running, but also sent to the cache. The next time that you need to retrieve any of that information, the disk cache supplies it, not the hard disk.

Example: First, load the disk cache program into memory. Let's assume you use a word processor, like Microsoft Word, WordStar or PFS:Write, that has several tag-along files – overlays, spelling checkers, print spoolers, etc. Now you want to spell-check a word, so you issue the command and the program goes out to the disk and hunts for the dictionary. The hard disk light goes on and you hear the familiar, although hardly elegant, sound of your hard disk being read. Five to seven seconds later, you are informed that weird is spelled "weird" and not "wierd". But behind the scenes, the disk cache program has loaded that dictionary into its cache. Now you want to check another word so you issue the command.

But this time, silence. And no hard disk light. And no five to seven second wait – maybe one and a half seconds instead. The disk cache intercepted your command and read the dictionary information in the cache instead of going out to the hard disk. This saves you time, reduces wear and tear of your hard disk, and gives you a generally smoother, cleaner operation of your system.

From this example, you can see how the cache operates: the first time you make a disk call, the cache does not save you time, because the data is not there yet. But every subsequent time, the cache begins to play. Programs that call the same data repeatedly benefit the most from a cache.

Just like with a RAM disk, you can determine how large you want the cache to be. Obviously, the larger the cache, the better,

***A disk cache is like a RAM disk,
only smarter — quietly and
invisibly, they save you lots of
time and cut way down on hard
disk wear and tear.***

because then it will retain more information (otherwise, as the cache runs out of room, it will begin to discard the oldest data to make room for fresh data). But you have to face the usual tradeoff: the more RAM you devote to the cache, the less you have to run programs.

The best of both worlds is if you have any memory in your system above the 640K mark. A good cache program will let you assign all of that extended or expanded memory to the cache, keeping conventional memory free for your programs.

So what are the good cache programs? There are literally dozens of them, and many are merely clones of each other. Of those tested, Flash, Lightning and Vcache, all three of them performed as promised, but depending upon your needs, one might fill your bill better than another. For instance, Lightning may be the friendliest and the fastest of the four, but it supports only expanded memory, not the more common extended memory that comes with most ATs. And curiously, Lightning always steals a bit of conventional RAM for its cache, even if you specify that the cache should use only expanded memory.

Meanwhile, Flash is probably the most feature-laden of the lot. With Flash, you can give priority to certain programs to assure that they will always be in the cache. You can also save the contents of the cache out to disk and reload all of it later. But Flash also needs the most elbow room in order to do its tricks, consuming almost 20k of memory just to load the program. If you fill your 640 right up to its gills, Flash may not be the answer.

From here, Vcache looks like the best bet. It costs only \$50, supports both extended and expanded memory and has the smallest overhead of all those tested, a shade under 30k of RAM. To install it, you copy it to your utilities subdirectory; to run it, you type its name and the desired size of the cache.

— See next page

PRTSC Potpourri

PC/TaxCut

Best Program's PC/TaxCut has been completely rewritten for the 1987 season. A new feature, called "Quick-Tax" instantly recalculates the tax owed or refund due and displays the new tax on the screen every time a number changes in PC/TaxCut. In addition, a true 1040 facsimile can be printed on IBM or Epson dot-matrix printers. You can also display and review every form on the screen, before you print. And the best news: the program's price has actually dropped 20% to \$75. Best Programs is located in Arlington, Virginia (703) 820-9300.

Jobs

Looking for a job? Want to hire a programmer? Call a San Rafael bulletin board, 453-9989. The board is open 7 days a week from 9 pm to 5:30 am.

Also, Activision is looking for a Product Support Representative to provide technical telephone support. Candidates for this position must have familiarity with creativity and productivity software for the Apple II GS, Macintosh, and MS-DOS systems. Contact Wayne Herriford, in Human Resources.

Reminder

Just a reminder: As we have done in past years, we will not have a group meeting in December.

Classifieds

Okidata Microline 92 printer with Plug & Play chip for IBM PC operation, accessory tractor feed, users manual, parallel interface. Condition: like new. Asking \$280 or best offer. Turley Angle, 369-1981.

Diskoveries: Disk Caching Software

- From previous page

The one significant feature that it lacks is the ability to assign a high priority status to a particular program so that it always stays in the cache. If that capability is important, then you should go with Flash.

Regardless of the one you choose, a disk cache is a jewel of a program that never gets in the way, never makes a lot of noise, but will pay enormous dividends to anyone concerned with operating faster and getting extra mileage out of a hard disk. ❖

Vcache

Golden Bow Systems
(619) 298-9349
\$49.95

Flash

Software Masters
(317) 253-8088
\$69.95

Lightning

Personal Computer Support Group
(214) 351-0564
\$49.95 copy protected; \$89.95 not protected

News From the SIGS

The Novice SIG:

From Basics to BASIC

REPORT for meeting held 11/10/87. Discussions really ran the gamut this time partly because a genuine novice attended who had just purchased a second hand IBM AT with everything, including an Intel above-board, 100+ Mbyte hard-disk, two sizes of high density floppy drives, and a modem. Fortunately, this time, the planned agenda was to have no agenda, which allowed everyone to participate in helping someone who had the whole works, but didn't know what to do with it.

We finished with some comments about high level languages followed by an exposure to BASIC. This seemed appropriate after hearing "flip" answers given to someone inquiring, at the last general meeting, about what Turbo Pascal is used for. Also, this prompts an agenda item for next time - A short discourse on all levels of computer languages, starting with binary notation and Boolean algebra, and then to microprocessor CPUs where the language concept begins. We will cite comparisons between the instruction codes of the more common microprocessors and of the 800+ high level languages.

Next Novice SIG group meeting: Tuesday 12/8/87, 3785 Farm Hill Blvd. Redwood City. Watch for blue light. Call Don Baird 415 365-6822 for information. Meeting time is 7 to 11pm. This will be the last meeting held by this writer, who is grateful for the opportunity to have helped those PC users most needing it, the novices.

Microsoft Word SIG

Pamela Biallis, National Account Executive for Microsoft Word, demonstrated Word 4.0 at the November 2nd meeting. Of particular interest were the style sheet shortcuts, file management by keyword searching, and automatic box drawing around text. In a previous session an excellent presentation on style sheets was given by Ralph Muraca who also distributed copies of his detailed styles. A schedule of future subjects to be discussed was prepared at the November 16th meeting. This list will be available from SIG leader Jeanie Treichel.

The group meets every other Monday at 7:30 p.m. The upcoming meetings are November 30 and December 14th. For details on the meetings call Jeanie Treichel at home (851-0100) or work (326-7438). ❖

The Resource Page

Club Officers

President	Corwin Nichols	494-8640
Vice President	Kathy Carroll	325-0824
Treasurer/ASSU Rep	Mark Woodward	493-9150

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Financial Manager	Beverly Altman	329-8252
Newsletter Editor	Becky Bridges	326-8605
Speakers' Bureau	Jim Wampler	323-7365

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Public Domain Software	Les Weil	321-5541
Soft Copy	Ralph Muraca	365-1659
	Turley Angle	369-1981

Software

Desktop Publishing	Rick Altman	581-7563
EZ Business Systems	Larry Mehl	326-6037
Framework	Jim Caldwell	692-7181
Lotus 1-2-3	Bruce Codding	367-8642
	Arthur Naman	408-879-9900
Microsoft Word	Jeanie Treichel	851-0100
Q & A	Elaine Meyer	325-8057
Rbase System V	Jack Kahoun	349-4696
	Tony Pabon	408-866-4815
	Larry Mehl	326-6037
Symphony	Sally See	941-1378
WordStar	Rick Altman	581-7563

Languages/Operating Systems

BASIC	Ralph Muraca	365-1659
C	Corwin Nichols	494-2043
DOS 3.x	Rick Altman	581-7563
Fortran, Pascal	John Watson	325-7632

Hardware

Hard Disks	Jim Caldwell	692-7181
Toshiba Printers	Paul Berry	494-2043
Epson Printers	Jim Caldwell	692-7181
Panasonic Printers	Van Maulis	966-1306
XT/AT Compatible Systems	Van Maulis	966-1306

Club Information

Mailing Address P.O. Box 3738
Stanford, CA 94305

Membership Louise Greer Bolitho
322-3850
\$25/year fee (\$10 for students)

Bulletin Board 723-7995

Newsletter Becky Bridges
326-8605
P.O. Box 982
Palo Alto CA 94302

Advertising

If you are interested in advertising in *PRinT SCreen* send camera-ready art or copy to P.O. Box 3738 Stanford CA 94302 before the 8th of the month. All ads are payable by check in advance. Rates per issue are:

Full Page (8 1/2 x 11)	\$45
Half Page (7 1/2 x 4 1/2)	\$30
Quarter Page (4 1/2 x 3 1/2)	\$15

Classified ads are free to paying members.

**The Stanford / Palo Alto
User's Group for the PC**

P.O. Box 3738, Stanford, CA 94305

