PRINT SCREEN

The Newsletter for the Stanford/Palo Alto PC Users' Group

May 1990 Volumn 8, Number 5

We have a new look.....

A hardware crash (we'd get sued if printing what a popular computer place did to us) finally got resolved. However, the last straw came at five in the morning in the form of the message, "HA HA, if you do that again, we'll erase your hard disk", which was imbedded in the software we were relying on to get out this regime's first Print Screen.

Thus, this month's edition is somewhat unconventional. This might be a good time to consider putting out the newletter entirely via public domain software, thus freeing us from the update tyranny of the biggees who don't provide downward or ASCII compatibility. It would also permit more flexible newsletters, particularly in avoiding having to ruthlessly edit the copy and hazard changing the author's meaning in order to squeeze it into a preset format.

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The Stanford/Palo Alto
PC Users' Group
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stamp

Address

Club Information

Membership Louise Greer Bolitho
322-3850
$25/year fee (Students $10)

MAY-JUNE CALENDAR

May 18 Word SIG	7:30
May 30 Group Meeting	7:30
June 6 Windows Word SIG	7:30
June 11 Planning Meeting	7:30
June 27 Group Meeting	7:30

Next Meeting
Date: Wednesday, June 27
Time: 7:30 p.m.
Place: Polya Hall, Turing Auditorium (Rm. 111)
Stanford University

All members are welcome to attend the monthly planning meeting, where we make decisions on the future of the group. Call Beverly Altman, 329-8252, for the location of the next meeting. Members are encouraged to present some computer related topic during the general meeting but should attend the planning meeting so that it can properly be scheduled.

LAST MONTH (APRIL) MEETING

It came off precisely as announced by the Print Screen. Rick Altman gave excellent demos of the programs on the "Disk of the Month". He also auctioned off all his software (well, almost all). -Probably to pay for the trip to Europe. The gavel was then passed to Don Baird, who seized the opportunity to give recognition to those giving diligent service to the club: Beverly Altman as treasurer, but quietly exercising the other vital portfolios of membership duties such as keeping straight the otherwise tangled dues situation, club mail, and seeing that club services get paid for; Rick and Becky Altman for a fine newsletter; Rick himself for serving his presidency with distinction; Corwin Nichols as VP, who also provides facilities (and is chief sysop) for the club bulletin board; Jared Nedzel as our Student Representative; Les Weil standing ever willing to copy programs from the library to any member requesting them; and Linda Farrell, now accepting the cudgels for getting out the newsletter.

THIS MONTH

The main agenda has been conceived by Jan Altman who will preside over what she calls SPREADSHEET WARS. Three titans, ie: Lotus 1 2 3; Excel; and Quattro will send their champions. Jan chose the weapons each gladiator must use. They have been furnished with a task sheet describing the categories to cover. These are: Formatting a range; Creating a chart; Printing options; Linking documents; Debug/audit features; File management; Database features; Converting between programs.

Seriously, this is to be a demo of capabilities combined with an exhibition of what a user has to do to master them.

They have been requested to bring their own computers, for which Corwin Nichols will provide switching to our presentation screen. We are hoping that pre-arranging the programming in their own computers will minimize "cockpit" problems and permit a cleaner comparison between packages. Unfortunately, questions and answers will have to be rigidly controlled because of the tight agenda. Please do not ask questions until such times are announced. The spreadsheet vendors are our honored guests and have indicated a willingness to adhere to our stipulations. We must try to accord them a reciprocal courtesy.

Becky Altman will give an analysis right after all Q & A sessions are finished. Then a fifteen break is planned.

A drawing will be held afterwards. Only paid members can participate, thus applications for membership will be available at any time from Beverly Altman (who always sits half-way down on the right hand side). Rick needs time to get the new member's names into the software used for the drawing, therefore act early in the evening's proceedings to be eligible for the prizes.

SOMETHINGS NEW

A suggestion box will be placed in the rear plus a box for floppy exchanging (floppies may now be cheap, but one's stock soon gets depleted when the outgo is mainly oneway). Just put your name on them when sent out, and hopefully retrieve them eventually from the box. Also a portable bulletin hardboard will be present for member use in making comments to the general membership, advertising items or services, announcements, etc. Please use the tape provided (no push-pins, please). The board will be folded when transported so that cards, etc. will remain attached until re-transported again to the club meeting. Affix dates, so that the earliest attached can be removed to make room for new ones. Problems (computer) can be posted also. Indicate if you want them read during the evening. We might decide to give them first priority before "random access". This may better insure that your question gets heard (and answered). Decaf placed just outside. The University does not allow food or drink inside, thus please observe their wishes. Last row in rear to be used for placing items for sale (with descriptions, etc. furnished by seller). Space not used for sale items by start of meeting, can be occupied by audience. Request that all bazaar activities cease when the gavel sounds.

Some other matters: When overflow attendance occurs, suggest sitting on side stairs, but singly and against wall. We'll try getting the University safety ruling on this, but this is earthquake country which makes easy exit paramount; Rest rooms are located in building to rear of Polya Hall.

Apropos, a comment on earthquake preparedness is called for. There are just the two exits. These could easily get jammed, even with slight panic. Therefore, be advised that if the expected "great" one occurs with an epicenter within 50 miles, you will have no more then ten seconds after the onset of the acoustic rumble before the seismic "lurch" hits. It's the lurch that will knock you down and wrench the building apart. No time exists for getting outside. It might be best to just get oneself below desk level taking care not to bump heads with your neighbor. It's foolish to say that "we don't mean to scare you", because the more we know, the better. The Cypress section in Oakland got flattened by the lurch about 12 seconds after the 7 quake occurred approx. 60 miles distant. Imagine an 8 quake with ten times the ground movement.

NEXT MONTH (JUNE)

We will take a poll during the May meeting to see how many will be off on summer vacations, etc. for June. If likely lightly attended for June, we will have a correspondingly light agenda.

At this point, Jan Altman has tentatively planned something on windows. We intend to explore oft-hidden resources within our membership to supplement the evening programs. Expect queries by phone on a range of topics to help us to tailor the activities closer to membership preferences. An explicit program, for the meeting after the next but announced in the newsletter before the immediate meeting, and even before the planning meeting, conflicts with the desire to avoid hasty commitments. A compromise is sometimes necessary and thus for June, we'll just say that a tentative program will have Jan's above suggestion; a drawing; disk of the month; mail-call; reports from the sigs; random access; status reports about the bulletin board and disk library (a call will be made for volunteers to get bulletin board files into the disk library); announcing coming computer events with the further idea of forming pools to attend them (this could extend to tours through area computer manufacturing plants); report on efforts to get a club portable computer; a short discussion on what our club policies might be; a five minute poll (to be continued each month until we know what the membership wants); and a surprise demo at the evening's end if enough vote for it after finding out what it is.

NOVICE SIG NOTICE FOR JUNE

The novice sig (special interest group) activity was temporarily suspended until interest perked up again. A meeting is now scheduled for June 13 (Wednesday at 7:30pm) with enough people planning to come for it to be a lively affair. Katie Dunlape is responsible for initiating the meeting, and will act as chairperson with Don Baird as resident advisor. This start-up gathering will take place at Baird's house (3785 Farm Hill Blvd., RC, about 1/2 mile down from stop-lighted intersection to Canada College. Blue & red lights will mark the house. - Call Baird 365-6822 for further directions).

Meetings of this type usually run the gamut so we decided to call the main topic "General Issues". Bring some blank floppies (formatted not necessary). Also bring your problems (computer only). Interminable discussions on problems with big name-brand software are best avoided because they are better treated in sigs specifically organized for them.

Remember that in this business, we are all novices in some ways and the Novice Sig activity might be the best way to accelerate our education through contacts with people with similar problems and interests. Individual attention becomes the rule and you might easily find one or two of the group in your own computer room personally helping to unravel your dilemma.

VIEW POINT - Don Baird

Perhaps the most asked computer question is: "What use is it?" - Lets tackle the question again and see where it takes us. First, we had better limit the answer to personal computers, otherwise we'll be mired in descriptions of ancient navigational artifacts or how Stonehenge works.

Looking at who uses personal computers can give a partial glimpse of the breadth involved; ie: persons of all ages, businesses, institutions, banks, governments, military, teachers, artists, musicians, scientists, engineers, doctors, astronomers, ad infinitum.

An attempt at an application list is similarly all encompassing, ie: letter writing, scientific and engineering solutions, teaching, games, music composing and playing, conventional or custom databases and spread sheets, word processing, desk-top publishing, accounting, taxation, project control, personnel records, calendars, checkbooks, information services via modems, programming, etc. etc. However, even the etceteras don't include some things mysteriously missing.

Perhaps marketing studies indicate the time is not yet right for typical consumers to be connecting their computers to their living world. Even though we have seen the explosive personal computer evolution over just one and one half decades, we have yet to see personal computing power commonly applied to another long list, namely: our health, psychology, comfort, home environment, appliance control, child rearing, optimization, etc. An important aspect to be considered, is that in many cases, the computer has to be left on. Hewlett-Packard solved the sapphire substrate problem about 20 years ago which permits high speed at low power, but kept its technology in-house except for some of its professional calculators (have you wondered why the HP10C seems to run forever on one non-rechargeable battery?). Since only portable computers are forced to use power-saving technology, we might predict a demise of the desk-top in favor of powerful portables.

Taking in order briefly: HEALTH. We should be able to do our own search for the probable causes for our symptoms, even to directly connecting to the computer: our temperature, heart parameters (rate, pressure, and pattern), brain waves, state of tension, and breath analysis. A hypothetical program from EGGHEAD would compare our present bodily conditions with our historical ones and either give us a diagnosis and instant remedy in the form of induced sensations (sound, smells, temperature, drugs) to optimize our well being or just give us a hardcopy to present to the doctor. Of course, the controversy would rival the abortion question, and the liability of vendors for selling bad programs will delay matters, however this computing power is ours if we but demand it;

PSYCHOLOGY. Biofeedback for the public with its boxed instrumentation is an analog approach to telling us where we are at, and gives us some means to change. Laboratories use computers for their

advanced studies, but now we can hope to bring such means into the home via the personal computer. At first it will be trivial, like adjusting the room lighting (coloring and intensity), background sounds (seashore, birds, wind, music, incantations to "relax" and that "everything will be alright"). These can occur interactively with the bodily conditions mentioned under health with which it can be in concert. Eventually, we can type in goals, - like "think", and immediately we become subtlety exposed to conditions free of distractions (no phone or door-bell ringing as pre-selected from a list), along with an environment discovered to best promote thought. Displays will produce such slogans as: "remember when you got an A on the exam in advanced calculus" or "your IQ test says you are a genius".

COMFORT. The Niagra massage and motel waterbed people never dreamed of what's in store. Chairs and beds will truly emulate the support that water gives when not ruined by a membrane. Along with wearing apparel outfitted with devices for applying vibrations plus other stimuli, the computer will optimize well-being to ecstasy, exhilaration, nirvana, sleep, contemplativeness, pain reduction, etc., as pre-selected. Infrared beam control between computer and wearing apparel will exist even when out in the yard. One wonders if the Walkman people realize their part in paving the linkage between humans and the future personal computer. Some people presently approach permanent Walkman attachment, but eventually we all might live within helmets protecting us from smog, ozone depletion, sound pollution, harsh weather, pollen, and then supplying us with all that's pleasant and maybe even nutritious and thirst quenching.

It's evident that battery improvement is key to how feasible these ideas are, and thus some words about it. Our government can't be serious about alternative energy sources when the best efforts so far have produced more efficient batteries, but operate either about 200 degrees below zero, or in the vicinity of boiling water, and use chemicals that are prohibitively expensive, corrosive, and rare. A sincere "Manhatten Project" for batteries is needed.

HOME OR WORK ENVIRONMENT. Much of the forgoing applies here. However, suppose "think" is chosen for our psychological state. Our "surround" desk with its multiscreens (very superior to multiwindows) and multi-keyboard/mice/light pen equipped multiadjustable chair, will present the materials we are supposed to think about, in an environment best for thought. Progress on each task is remembered thus everything is again set up where the task chosen was last left off. Many of the appurtenances, like the telephone answering machine, FAX, combo printer-copier-collator, and even the phone itself, will all be under software control. Speaker-phones will completely replace all handsets. Wall screens instead of wallpaper fit into the scheme with mural-size 3-D presentations of mountain streams with or without movement of water, deer, and the like. Imagine being able to concoct that smell reminding you of the happy times while camping on Lake Namakogan, and then calling it forth in pre-computerized sequence when in need of a mood change.

APPLIANCE CONTROL. Of course the coffee pot comes to mind, along with the cooking range, alarm clock, lawn watering, air-conditioning, security system, window (open, close, lock, shade), door control, vacuuming, dishwashing, clothes washing and drying, radio and TV, pool control (sensing, heating, chlorine and acid treatment). What's new is the computer record-keeping and math capability to optimize for energy saving (hoping it outweighs the capital investment). Homes and buildings will anticipate such computerization by new standards and construction practices. Drawing bath water and clothing oneself may always stay the same, however, we can perhaps expect motorized closets which will present color matched combinations to the fore per daily, weekly, or monthly schedules. The prognostication for washing, drying, ironing, and dry cleaning is left for the reader.

CHILD REARING. This might not have been thought of if this writer hadn't discovered a remarkable tendency for his children to obey a machine. A garage project produced a time control programmer which could handle 12 independent circuits to tenth-second precision over a period of two weeks without repeating. The prototype inevitably was used to program the TV. Not a single whimper was ever heard from the children when the programmer unceremoniously turned the TV off. Computerizing children does not have a good ring to it, but with care perhaps letting the computer remind them of meal times, study times, bed times, etc. nil damage would occur. Already, they are immersed in computer education at school with more or less computer game playing.

OPTIMIZATION. There is nothing obvious in the home that could be called optimization. Close might be the thermostats in various places and the automatic frequency control in the home FM radio. Another is the human body which is perhaps the best example of something that is under the influence of an optimization program. The former can never get better than their references. The human body has limits, but with an undeniable trait to transcend them. The body does (like the Army says) try to be as good as it can be.

The computer can help (or hurt). In servo parlance, it can introduce servo control to cause something to strive towards a maximum (or minimum). A reference is not necessary. If a human is within a servo loop that calls for maximum heart rate, a heart rate will be achieved that is as maximum as the limits allow. Remember, we are maximizing heart rate and not necessarily health. Now, if we call for maximum relaxation, we might achieve a state from which a person might die. Consequently, an optimizing program must be careful to put the limits into the machine. Relaxation is a good example where health is concerned, because under stressful conditions, relaxation is reported to improve memory, response time, security, and general health.

It's easy to see that "the sky's the limit" where optimization is concerned, and just as easy to expect a gamut of pressures to resist its development into the public domain.

The foregoing is just another aspect of computing showing the tip of the iceberg. As the technology advances - and a system board can sit on the head of a pin - there will be plenty of Dr. Frankinsteins to bring another meaning to the word "install", which will then make the computer really personal.

(other viewpoints are invited)

SUBMISSION OF COPY

Existing at present is a policy of minimum editing to contributor copy. This requires that the contributors run their text through a speller and submit it in ASCII (no Word Star attributes and the like) via 360K floppy in a mailer to the editor's address. The floppy should be labelled with the sender's name to be returned at the general meeting by means of a floppy exchange box set up in the rear of the hall. Notices must be received no later than the 12th of each month for entry in the following issue. Articles should be submitted to the editor several days before a planning meeting to permit review by that group.

The publishers of the newsletter are not responsible for content. Profanity, libel, imprudence, glaring inaccuracies, abounding errors, and items considered not of sufficient applicability or interest will be screened. The contributor will be notified if his/her entry is ruled against accompanied with a cursory explanation.

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