



North Texas PC Users Group

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- o p e n -

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Deadline:

All material for publication in North Texas PC NEWS (articles and ads) must be received by the NEWS staff no later than the 15th of the month.

Articles:

Please do not right-justify, indent or otherwise code the copy. If column alignment is critical, send along a hard copy, or written instructions. Article submission is preferred by modem (817/275-4109 or Startext 51563), or disk in ASCII format, unjustified. If you send a disk, please include a printed copy of the article to assure accuracy. Double spaced, typewritten copy is acceptable but **must be received a week before the deadline.**

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DEADLINE

Copy deadline for December PC NEWS:
Saturday, November 15th.

Future Meeting Dates

December Meeting - 2nd Saturday (13th)
January Meeting - 1st Saturday (3rd)
February Meeting - 2nd Saturday (14th)

**North Texas Personal Computer
Users Group, Inc.**
P.O. Box 780086, Dallas, TX 75378-0066

Board of Directors

Jim Graham, Chairman Jim Hoisington
Dick Barr John Pribyl
Jim Janeway

The North Texas PC Users Group is a non-profit, independent group, not associated with IBM Corporation. Membership is open to owners and others interested in exchanging ideas, information, hardware, predictions, and other items related to IBM Personal and compatible computers. To join the Group, complete the application blank printed elsewhere in this issue, and send it with \$24 membership dues to address shown below. A subscription to the newsletter is included with each membership.

The Group meets once each month, usually on the second Saturday. See cover for date, time and place of the next User Group meeting.

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Payment of dues, address changes, and inquiries about membership should be directed to:

NTPCUG Membership Chairman
135 Skyline Drive
Plano, Texas 75074

Check newsletter mailing label for your membership renewal date. No separate renewal notice will be sent.

Attacking Software Evaluation
(With apologies to Bulwer-Lytton)

by Reagan Andrews

It was a dark and stormy night <<Well, actually, it was a beautiful, sunny Saturday morning at Infomart>> when a shadowy, rather sinister figure <<Stuart Yarus>> emerged silently from the rain and fog <<approached obliquely while I was buried in conversation at the North Texas PC User Group booth>> and furtively placed a mysterious package in my hands <<asked if I would "do him a small favor" and "look" at the software package he handed me.>>

Vanishing as quickly and silently as he had come <<"You'll have to give me about a 1000 - 2000 words in a week" Stuart half shouted, half explained over his shoulder as he lugged bundles of 'Texas Computer Market' to set out at the monthly Texas Computer Council meeting>> the menacing figure escaped stealthily into the darkening fog.

My eyes dropped to the dark package secreted into my hands and I involuntarily choked.

"Not another damned DOS Shell!" I yelled in futility at Stuart's receding form. "I've suffered through 'Top View,' 'Windows,' 'Still River Shell,' 'GASP!' and '1-Dir'! Enough! Is there no end!"

All to no avail. And to nobody in particular, since Stuart had quickly scuttled around a column out of sight. My wife, Connie, gently murmured she thought this was "some sort of compliment." Grumbling blackly, I assured her that being sideswiped by Stuart and hustled into reviewing some DOS Shell was no "compliment."

Stuart's ploy raises an important issue: How should one review a new software package? Answer was simpler than I thought it would be. Very carefully -- just as if I were about to buy it.

I'd follow exactly the same strategy any PC user should employ in attacking evaluation of

software for personal or business use on their own personal computer.

Before purchasing any software, the potential user should decide that it will meet some current real need and he or she will be able to use the features advertised. Current needs are purchase needs. Buying for some "future" use is usually not advisable as software capabilities and prices change rapidly. Trend has been for the former to increase while latter (prices) drop dramatically over short periods.

Determining ability of the PC user to utilize the software effectively sounds simple enough. But, description of the software in advertising and on its jacket or cover probably overstates its capabilities, overestimates the user's skill level or ability to exercise its potential, or seriously underestimates difficulty of use. Sometimes, all three.

Reading NTPCUG Newsletter reviews, magazine reviews and talking with other users who have the software may help clear some of the "fog" in the product's advertising. [Don't forget StarText reviews- Ed.]

If possible, arrange for an extended "trial" of the software. Give at least one week, preferably two, to using the package before final purchase decision is made. Even demo packages, often available at reduced cost for most major software, may be quite misleading. This is usually a function of the restricted operations featured by most demos which won't allow using the package with typical file sizes or at full capabilities. Friends may have the software and allow trial use of a full-scale version that will be much more helpful in making a final purchase decision.

First steps should be precautionary. Carefully read the documentation. All of it. Read it again. Then, determine that it will run on a machine configured exactly as that you will be using. If the package needs a hard disk and 512K of user RAM on a computer with EGA card and monitor, it won't run properly, if at all, on a single-floppy, 256K machine equipped with a monochrome card and monitor. Are there differences you can see between capa-

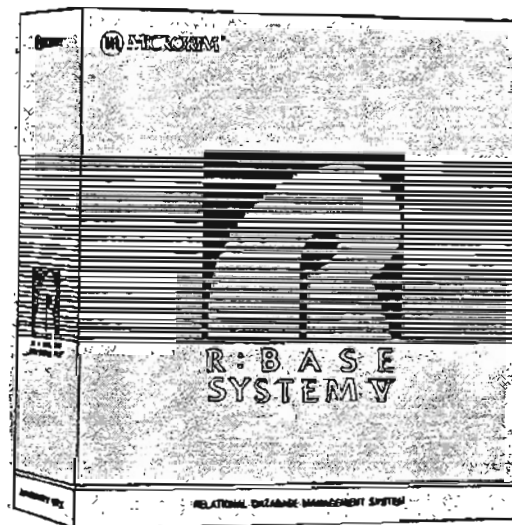
(continued on page 3)

COMING IN NOVEMBER

**WAYNE ERICKSON
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD AND FOUNDER
OF**

MICRORIM, INC.

TO TALK ABOUT AND DEMONSTRATE



DOOR PRIZES TO BE AWARDED

November

Charles Kroboth, Program Chairman

9:00 AM, Auditorium



PERSONAL COMPUTER SUPPORT GROUP

Michael Stanford, R&D Director and Senior Partner of Personal Computer Support Group (PCGS), will be discussing their new Speed-Up board, the Breakthrough:286. The board can increase your PC speed by 7.8 times and is compatible with software running on an AT. The company also markets a software package called LIGHTNING.

10:00 AM - Auditorium



Wayne Erickson, Chairman and Founder of Microrim, will be presenting their new relational database, System V. Mr. Erickson is 39 years old and was the principal architect for RIM, the mainframe database system used on NASA's space shuttle project.

DOOR PRIZES: 9:00 AM LIGHTNING - 10:00 AM RBASE SYSTEM V

Attacking... (continued)

bilities promised in advertising or on the package jacket, and those described or explained functionally by the documentation?

Assuming your computer is suitably equipped, read further for installation instructions. Does the software rewrite or otherwise alter your existing AUTOEXEC.BAT and/or CONFIG.SYS files? It's a good idea to backup both, "just in case," even if the documentation claims to leave this area alone. It's also a good idea to read any .BAT files on the software installation disk[s] to get some idea exactly what will be happening during the process.

By now, you should be keeping notes on the suggested installation procedure and the corresponding results. In case of errors, crashes, etc., a well-maintained notebook will be invaluable, particularly if you call the publisher for support or help. Follow installation instructions to the letter. If this part of the documentation isn't accurate, there may be other problems as well, and success or failure

here may give some clues as to what you can expect from the rest of the package. Assuming the installation process hasn't rapidly zipped out and erased or over-written Track 0 on your hard disk (sufficient justification to quit and write a scathing review, or a really nasty letter to the editors of every computer magazine you can find), begin working the program.

If the publisher provides a tutorial, begin "learning" the software with this as a guide. Continue taking notes. This is important in terms of your impressions and emerging feelings about the software. Ask yourself if the tutorial is helpful, or more vague and ambiguous than the documentation. That is, does it help or confuse you, the new user.

Think about the package as you might a brand new car. Look carefully for blemishes and flaws. Are you comfortable "at the controls"? Do commands seem to come naturally after brief use, and is the package "intuitive" in terms of command sequence. Try some of the advanced features that attracted you to the software in the first place. Do they work

as advertised? Could you perform the same tasks or functions just as easily, or even easier and faster, using DOS utilities or software you already own?

Problems and crashes are very important. Does the software allow a graceful way out of errors or unintended commands? Are you left in the program after error, or are you "kicked-out" to DOS with a resultant loss of data? Were you forced to "warm" re-boot, i.e., give the computer a "three-finger salute" via Ctrl-Alt-Del to recover from the error? Or, worse yet, did you have to power-down to recover? Either of the last two will cause loss of data and/or work in memory as well as being inconvenient.

This should be considered a serious flaw in most cases, and usually indicates a need to search for alternative software. Although now less problem than previously, copy protection schemes used by some software publishers can create their own problems you should consider before purchase. Some of these schemes effectively defeat normal hard-disk backup procedures used by DOS. Others may write "hidden" files to the disk that create disk "housekeeping" difficulties. Some even prevent lawfully-purchased software from running on certain computer configurations, or under subsequent versions of DOS.

Programmers jokingly refer to "bugs" as "undocumented features." Copy protection schemes are usually undocumented and sometimes in the same category. All problems you experience related to copy protection should be documented in your notebook for later discussion with the vendor or software publisher.

You'll probably want to integrate the new software with other software you routinely use. If the software produces data files, can they be "exported" or transferred with minimal difficulty into your existing software programs for use? At a minimum, ASCII file conversion should be available with word processors and database managers, and one of the "standard" data formats, such as DIF, SYLK, etc., with spreadsheets.

Can data files from your other software be "imported" into the software you are testing

without significant or extensive multiple conversion operations? Are these transfers and conversions possible without "leaving" the new program? Along the same line, can you access and use DOS functions without exiting the program?

Negative answers to these questions point to relative problems in compatibility, both with software you already own, and that you may be considering for later purchase. In this area, don't take a salesperson's word for "easy interchange" of data.

Read the documentation again, then try it yourself -- on copies of real files, or "dummy" files created for this purpose. Never use important data files that aren't backed-up for any sort of testing! Continue to use the software for at least one week -- preferably several hours per day -- in your routine usage style. Go back to your notebook and compare your present impressions and feelings to your initial notes on these areas. If the software still seems clumsy or "strange" in terms of its keyboard feel, or if you find you are still referring to the manual or "Help" files for routine operations, it's probably a significant limitation inherent to the software.

Be fair, though.

Some very good software has a very long learning curve and may require much intensive use before anyone really uses it easily and well. Big, "integrated" packages such as Framework, Paradox and Lotus 1-2-3 fall into this category as do some database management programs, spreadsheets and almost all powerful word processors.

However, if you don't feel any better about the software after a week, it well could be an indication that you may never feel comfortable with it.

There's a very good chance this software will join other idle "dust-catchers" sitting on the shelf, and you may be better off trying an alternative package. There will probably be several just as feature-packed and powerful as the package you have been trying/reviewing, at least one of which may be a better fit.

Reagan



**WIN A FREE TRIP
TO THE 1987 FALL COMDEX
IN LAS VEGAS!!**

If you write an article that is published in the Newsletter and your article is selected as the best one published during the period of the contest, you will win an expense-paid trip to Comdex.

The Contest Rules are as follows:

1. All dues-paying members are eligible to win.
2. Articles must be submitted between December 1, 1986 and May 1, 1987, and must be published in the Newsletter before the entries are judged.
3. The articles must carry the name of a single individual as author, must be original, and must not have been previously copyrighted.
4. Articles will be approved for publication by the Newsletter editor, with the assistance of the Board of Directors. Their decisions are final. Articles received within the time limits of the rules but not selected for publication within these rules will not be eligible to win, but may be published in a later issue of the Newsletter.
5. Articles may be on any subject that is of interest to PC users.
6. No minimum size of articles. Lengthy articles (over 5-6 pages) may be "serialized" by the editor, appearing in successive issues of the Newsletter. Each part of a serial article will be considered a separate article in the contest.
7. The editor may judiciously edit articles, and they will be judged as published.
8. A ballot will be published in the Newsletter at the end of the contest, listing all of the entries published. All recipients of the ballot, including other Users Groups, are eligible to vote. The author of the article receiving the most votes will be declared the winner. In case of a tie, the winner will be selected by a drawing to be held at the main meeting. The winner need not be present.
9. The prize will include airplane, taxi, and hotel costs for the COMDEX Meeting. Approximate value \$600.
10. If a conflict arises regarding interpretation of contest rules, decision of the Board of Directors will be final.

On Complexity

No.3 in a Series

by Jim Hoisington

I bought one of the very first IBM PC's ever sold in Dallas. I had to argue with the salesperson for an hour before she would sell me the additional 16K to bring my machine up to 64K. It seems that the salespeople had been told that 48K of memory would be sufficient for all but a few users. Today, I rarely find a system with less than 256K and 512K is becoming very common. Consider what this increase in memory has done to the complexity of our software.

Back when the PC was announced, most of the software was that you could buy was converted from the 8 bit CPM machines. These machines had a natural upper memory limit of 64K just like the PC has a upper natural memory limit of 1 megabyte. There were bank switching schemes to exceed the limit, but most software was designed to exist within the limit.

When I began programming, computers didn't have memory as we know it today. Instead, they had accumulators. The accumulators held the result of a series of additions and subtractions. Occasionally we would print out that contents of the accumulator, clear it (to zero), and begin "accumulating" again. It doesn't sound like much but we ran the accounting and inventory systems for a large aerospace company with it.

As long I've been programming, I've always been up against a memory limitation. By being sufficiently clever, we could always find a way to solve the programming problem in spite of the limitation. But, at some point, it isn't worth the cost of the programming effort to solve the problem. So that solution waits for the next generation of computer which always seems to have more memory. (More about this next month.)

The software that we inherited from the 8 bit microcomputers had a limitation on its complexity due to the 64k memory limitation. And, the advent of the 16 bit machines like the IBM PC temporarily removed that limitation.

Consider the difference in complexity between Visicalc and Lotus 1-2-3. The former came out of the 8 bit world. It was easy to learn, in part, because there wasn't that much to learn. Lotus, on the other hand, has many more features which can only be mastered over a much longer period of time.

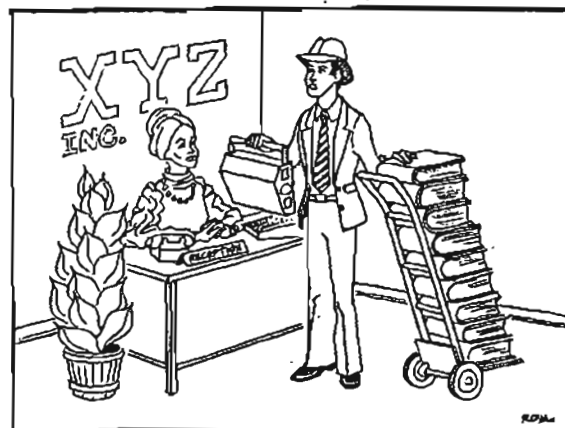
Some of the software now coming on the market for the PC is every bit as complex as mainframe computer software. And that brings me to one of the reasons that I wanted to start writing on this topic.

There are a lot of people out there who don't realize that our "personal computers" have gotten increasingly complex. They still approach them as "trivial".

Over the last 25 years, people in the information processing industry have developed techniques and methodologies to deal with "non-trivial" problem solution. I am finding an increasing number of "non-trivial" problems being solved on PC's. The capability is there. However, a failure to understand the level of complexity of the problem and apply appropriate techniques to the solution leads to failure.

Don't let the cost of the hardware mislead you as to the value of problem that you are solving. Evaluate the level of complexity of the problem and its value to you (or your company) and apply the appropriate techniques.

Jim



MY NEW LAPTOP COMPUTER, MS. PHIPPS...
INCREDIBLY POWERFUL, AND SO CONVENIENT!
THESE? OH, THESE ARE SOME OF THE USER'S MANUALS.....

NERD ON THE STREET

NEWS FLASH: IBM has told dealers to fill their orders for the PC (8088) before December 31, because the supply will dry up 01/01/87. Clone competition and price erosion have obviously contributed to this decision.

NEWS FLASH II: IBM recently authorized Electronic Data Systems to sell computers at the C-level. We're not talking about selling PC's at the beach, but selling them at IBM's best discount level. EDS has responded by opening two retail stores in Dallas and Sterling Heights, Michigan. This is also significant in that IBM has had a new store authorization moratorium in effect since May 31, 1986.

386 NEWS: Look for new '386 machines from TeleVideo, Wyse, and Convergent Technologies. Although initial reviews of Compaq's Deskpro 386 are good, the company may shoot itself in the foot by not being able to supply its retail channel. During a six week period in September and October major dealers were only receiving 20% to 40% of their initial orders. Smaller, independent dealers were receiving little to none. Compaq representatives say the problem will be resolved by the end of the year.

IBM is maneuvering for a broadside on 386 clones by inking a deal with Intel. Rumor has it Intel has been given the proprietary design tools and cell library on IBM-customized versions of Intel processor technology. Chip development begins with cell library functions and these chips will be used for keyboards, graphics, and controller functions. The technology is being called ASIC (Application Specific Integrated Circuits) and will make chips simpler and cheaper to manufacture. ASIC will also use fewer chips, thus reducing component and inventory costs. Intel has committed millions of dollars to convert a Santa Clara, California plant for manufacturing and once on the market, clone makers could be busy for up to 12 months trying to legally duplicate the design. In case you didn't know, IBM owns 20% of Intel.

THAT'S INCREDIBLE: Knowledgeware, Inc. and Tarkenton Software, Inc. have merged and will develop software tools for information systems development. Fran Tarkenton has been named chairman and CEO.

Harvard Business School did an extensive study of laptop computers and rated them based on performance, price and service. All Business School students will be required to purchase the computer that rates highest. Before I tell you the results, it should be noted that a similar study several years ago resulted in all the students having to purchase the now-defunct IBM PC Portable. And the winner is: IBM Convertible. It makes me wonder what sort of business judgement Harvard is imparting to its students.

FINANCIAL NEWS: Micropro International has announced a \$342,000 loss for its fourth quarter ending August 31. That's three cents a share compared to earnings of 10 cents last year at this time. Microsoft Corporation posted \$66 million in sales for its first quarter in 1987. That's an 87% increase over the same period last year.

Western Digital, maker of chips and hard disk controllers, acquired Paradise Systems on October 1. Paradise is a graphics board manufacturer and plans several new products in 1987. Board maker, Tecmar, is now a part of Rexion, Inc. and plans new products for announcement at Comdex. Tecmar will receive 261,829 shares of Rexion stock and \$314,194 in cash to get them out of their current financial problems.

Intelligent Systems Corp. plans to sell all its divisions thus allowing the company to take advantage of long-term capital gains allowed under current tax laws. The divisions being sold include Princeton Graphics Systems (monitors), Quadram (who's party at Comdex-Spring consisted of several thousand people



and Barbara Mandrell), and Datavue. They also own controlling interest in Video-7.

Need a new waveform analyzer or a like-new pulse function generator? Computer Memories, Inc. (whose major stock holder happens to be INTEL Corp.) has closed shop and will be auctioning \$14 million in hard-disk manufacturing tools. The company currently has \$30 million in the bank and plans to begin a new venture after the sale.

According to the San Jose Business Journal, the company in Silicon Valley with the largest cash reserve is Hewlett-Packard. When asked about the \$1.3 BILLION sitting in the bank, HP Treasurer, George Newman said, "It's the worst asset we have. During times of slow growth we accumulate cash."

PRODUCT NEWS: DAC Software, Inc. of Dallas, is acquiring marketing rights to Practicorp's Practibase database program and will sell it as Dac-Easy Base for \$49.95. The program is a relational database with a programming language compatible with Dbase II (too bad). Practicorp used to market the product at \$99.95. Version 3.1 of Microsoft's Word is out and includes the Word Finder thesaurus, expanded laser support, and automatic line- and column-numbering. The update fee is only \$375.00 (ouch!).

Human Access Language (HAL) is finally on the market and is selling for \$150. HAL is a memory-resident program that lets users execute English-like 1-2-3 commands and undo them if they make a mistake. It also allows you to link 1-2-3 worksheets and create an audit trail. 300K is tied up when 1-2-3, HAL, and PC-DOS (2.0) are loaded.

PCWrite, Version 2.7 is out and includes a memory-resident spelling checker with 50,000 words.

DCC NEWS: Some of the things the DCC almost passed at the last Council meeting included moving our December meeting to the first Saturday even though it meant fewer rooms for IBM and Apple. Also, under the DCC charter, user groups are allowed free tables in the basement to conduct user group business such as Disk of the Month sales. As IBM and Apple are the only groups using several tables, our Council thought it appropriate to try and charge us. Both these issues were

voted down, but only by 1 vote. I personally would not like to see my favorite SIG moved to 5 o'clock because the Timex User Group or SCOPE want to move our meeting date.

SURVEY SAYS: A recent survey in the Bureau of Labor Statistics new Occupational Outlook Handbook states that jobs for computer programmers and systems analysts will increase 70% by 1996. Additionally, jobs in computer repair will increase 56% and those for computer operators by 45%. One thing not covered in the survey is the increase in qualified applicants to fill those new positions.

XR4Ti: Ford's Lincoln-Mercury-Merkur Division is mailing to all interested drivers "Disk Drive Test Drive" free of charge. The program is supposed to give you a feel for driving the Merkur XR4Ti in the comfort of home. Besides simulating the drive it will display engine performance numbers, aerodynamic engineering features and suspension component information on demand. You can even pick your options and print out a sample window sticker. Call 800-437-3696.

CHARMING QUARKS: A new parallel processing computer has been developed by scientists at the Dept. of Energy's Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory. It currently has 53 processors but will eventually contain 140 working simultaneously. Smashing atoms produces enormous amounts of data and the three experiments currently running would have taken 1 year of computing time on a Cyber 175 supercomputer. The Fermilab computer runs the same data in two minutes and cost them \$500,000. A bit less than Cyber's \$3.5 million price tag.

Nnnnn

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Software Report

by Dick Gall

FILE MINDER - The File Storage Management System

FILE MINDER is a \$69.95 file management system that doubles as a programmer's tool due to its several unique features. First and foremost, it is a utility program for locating and managing files and the information in them. Take the case of the typical hard disk user after just a few months: running the CHKDSK (check disk) command reveals a nightmare such as -

```
21309440 bytes total disk space
 284672 bytes in 6 hidden files
 186368 bytes in 87 directories
19513344 bytes in 1398 user files
```

Floppy-based users can create a similar haystack with a collection of only about 60 diskettes. FILE MINDER helps get you back in control with:

- DIRECTORY MAP DISPLAYS

in horizontal tree format. Use the cursor keys to navigate to any subdirectory and display its contents. Map lines are drawn with extended ASCII characters. A simple map looks something like:

```
C: -- BLEVEL1 --- | - BLEVEL2 ----- ALEVEL3
      |             | - ALEVEL2
      | - ALEVEL1 ----- ALEVEL2
      | - CLEVEL1
      | - FM<L>
```

- DIRECTORY REPLAY.

FILE MINDER maintains a list of the ten last disks and directories accessed. Just point to return to any of them. Or use a previous entry as a template to speed access to a new directory with the unique response editor.

- ASCII FILE DISPLAY

Standard data files are displayed by selecting



them. Locate text with the convenient search function.

- LIST, READ, AND CREATE LIBRARY FILES

which are collections of individual files. Create libraries of tagged files and significantly reduce file space with the built-in standard squeeze function (BBS SYSOPS and users take note!). FILE MINDER lists library file contents and displays file and program contents even within the library file.

- HEXADECIMAL/ASCII

display of file and program contents in dump format, including search function.

- TAGGING

Select groups of files for automatic processing by pointer, name, attribute, contents, or name list. Squeeze, unsqueeze, archive, log, view, library, copy and rename files. Change file attributes with the set and clear commands.

- PRIVILEGED MODE

for listing system and hidden files. Read WordStar document files as text.

- HELP WINDOWS

keyed to the current selection or operation in process.

FILE MINDER is produced by Finch Incorporated, 136 East Street, PO Box 56, Frederick MD 21701-0056, phone 800-345-3544. A Users' Group members discount of 20 percent

is available (price \$55.95) when 5 or more copies are ordered. Requires an IBM PC, XT, AT or 100 per cent compatible, 196K memory, PC-DOS 2.0 or later.

LIGHTWAVE UTILITIES & "EASY" AI

LIGHTWAVE has released Version 2.0 of their expert system shell ESIE, the Expert System Inference Engine. ESIE processes a knowledge base (KB) generated as a set of information and rules in a standard ASCII text file. Six sample KBs are supplied as examples, and the TRACE mode shows the analysis process at each step in interactive session.

The original version was covered in the Dec. 1985 issue of PCN. Algorithm improvements in version 2.0 have increased execution speed. Unlimited space is now available for text in the knowledge base, up to the KB maximum of 12,000 characters. Typeahead is supported for user responses, and KB file error detection and file reading speed are improved.

A major improvement is the capability for limited numerical comparisons, so that both IF and AND parts of rules may specify math operators <, >, and =. ESIE may now be configured for different monitors, and different colors can be assigned for each of: background, question text, user response text, toplevel text, result and trace text, and error text. Program capacity has been increased in several areas. Introductory text can now be provided to explain the KB, and terminating text can be used to explain the conclusion more fully.

The distribution diskette contains the following informational files, which provide ample background and guidance such that any PC user who can follow written instructions - regardless of programming background - should be able to use ESIE successfully.

FILE NAME	SIZE (BYTES)
MANUAL	61626
TUTOR	60767
NOVICE	13665
HISTORY	26033
FINAL.USE	11159

HISTORY traces the development of the use of computers in artificial intelligence, and FINAL.USE contains instructions on the operation of ESIE itself for end users. ESIE will run on most PC-DOS/MS-DOS PCs with 128K of memory. For the PCjr, 256K of memory is required.

ESIE continues to be distributed as SHAREWARE. A contribution of \$145 is suggested, for which one receives the version 2.0 distribution diskette and the next version (when released), professionally bound and printed copies of the manuals, access to the ESIE help line, and a copy of PC-Write, a text editor [/word processor] usable for making ESIE knowledge bases.

LIGHTWAVE UTILITIES is a new offering. Release 1.0 contains:

WHERE	searches for a file by name (wild-cards accepted)
LS	sorted, columned list of files in a directory.
DR	LS plus file sizes (drives A & B only).
BASIC	programs on screen attributes, screen characters, active memory, BIOS ROM chip date, BASIC ROM chip date, dynamic keyboard status bits display, and percent change calculations.

\$20 is the suggested contribution for the LIGHTWAVE UTILITIES, including a copy of the next release. LIGHTWAVE is operated by Mr. Edward Reasor. The address is P.O. Box 290539, Tampa, FL 33617. Phone: 813-988-5033.

CRUISE CONTROL

This is a 5K RAM-resident program that improves the performance of the cursor keys on IBM PCs and compatibles - among several other useful functions.

At \$29.95, it's a special blessing to all those Framework users who were shocked that Ashton-Tate did not improve the performance of the cursor in the word processor in the conversion to Framework II. This was our first test of CRUISE CONTROL, and it was a full success. The run-on



cursor is firmly captured as soon as the cursor key is released and all cursor operations are faster. The same effect is advertised for 1-2-3, dbase III Plus, and Word, and cursor speed can even be adjusted. CRUISE has available four control strategies, ensuring effectiveness with many major software packages.

CC's CHRONOMETER inserts the system date or time upon command at the cursor location in an application program. The DIMMER SWITCH dims the display screen under keyboard control, and

AUTO-DIMMER automatically protects the screen by dimming it after a programmable 1-60 minute delay.

CRUISE CONTROL works on the PC, XT, AT, and 100% compatibles running DOS 2.0 or higher. It's available from Revolution Software Inc., 715 Route 10 East, Randolph, New Jersey 07869. Phone 201-366-4445.

Dick

▲

Two Shareware Reviews by A. Gil Carrick

FAMILY Tree, Etc., Version 1.25
by Pine Cone Software
P.O.Box 1163
Columbus, Indiana 47202-1163

A user-supported program designed to help you keep track of your family tree. Suggested contribution \$35.

FT-README is the author's original README file. It should be enough to get you started.

This system documentation contains numerous spelling and grammatical errors and does not inspire confidence. It does not explain anything about genealogy. The programs are all absolute files, so you do not need BASIC, and the performance is fairly good, but if you find any errors, you can not fix them easily. The system does not contain a sample data base, so you will be on your own to figure it out. It supports only 999 persons and appears to have rather restricted data fields.

The system is menu driven but is not very consistent in its use of function keys and options.

For other genealogy packages, see "Genealogy on Display", PD volume 32, and "Family History", DOM00???

Requires: At least one diskette drive, an 80 col. monitor, 128K ram, DOS 2.0 or above on a PC, XT, or AT and DOS 2.1 for PCjr. Printer (w/132 print positions) suggested.

FAMILY HISTORY
by Phillip E. Brown
834 Bahama Drive
Tallahassee, Fla. 32301

A user-supported program designed to help you keep track of your family tree. Suggested contribution \$35. FH-README is the author's original README file. It should be enough to get you started.

This system is cleanly documented and will teach you a lot about genealogy. The report formats are not all "standard" genealogy formats and wording. The programs are interpreted BASIC, so plan on compiling them or waiting on the system a lot. The system contains a sample data base and will support 10,000 individuals & 32,000 families, etc. It has 'setup' functions for different printers & displays & 'install control' files for different type systems.

The system is menu driven and is fairly consistent in its use of function keys and options. If you run the system from scratch, don't forget to check the .BAT files to see the required options on the BASIC interpreter execution, otherwise you will not be able to use any of the output options.

For other genealogy packages, see "Genealogy on Display", PD volume 32, and "Family Tree, Etc", DOM00???. Requires: At least one diskette drive, an 80 col. monitor, 128K ram, BASIC, GWBASIC, or PCjr cartridge BASIC; DOS 2.0 or above on a PC, XT, or AT and DOS 2.1 for PCjr. Printer (w/132 print positions) suggested.

Gil

▲

Mail-merge, PC-Write and your PC

by John Keohane

One of the most popular uses for a personal computer is to do mail-merge. The word-processor I use for mail-merge is that great word-processor, PC-Write version 2.5. Here we'll first describe what mail-merge is, and then how to use it.

Assume you want to write a letter to many people, and you wish to personalize it. For example, an annual Christmas letter, instead of going to "Dear Friends" might go to Dear Barbara, Bill, Jantje, Pieter or whomever; or in soliciting business for computer consulting, you might personalize the same basic letter to multiple people. If you wanted to do this automatically, you would be a prime candidate for doing mail-merge on a computer.

There are two basic elements in mail-merge. One is a file of variable data, perhaps containing a record for each of Barbara, Bill, Jantje and Pieter. The other element is a special fixed file. The fixed file will mostly contain the straight boilerplate that you want to send to everyone, but will allow for the variable file data to merge with the mainly constant data, so that the first letter might start with "Dear Barbara," whereas the next one starts with "Dear Bill". There will actually be two parts created in the word-processor to this straight, mainly boilerplate letter.

The first part will describe each and every field of the variable file that is to be read in. That descriptive part is called the "input template". It will contain variables such as {name} and {address} and {salutation}. At the end of the input template we'll put a special indicator (in my word processor it is two paired braces {} matched right against each other). That indicates the end of the template, and the beginning to the second part of our letter. (Before the end of template indicator, when using SDF format of fixed length fields, I have found it necessary to set up a dummy two-position field).

The second part of the letter will contain boilerplate phrasing, such as "I really appreciate seeing you in October." along with indications where variable information is to go, with such phrases as "Dear {salutation}:". It is the second part, as

adjusted by variable information, which will leave our office in letter form.

One of the most efficient ways to contain, and create the variable file is to have records in a database system, such as Dbase III or Rbase 5000. With such a database system, one can easily create a file for input to mailmerge. Under dbase III one opens a dbase file with the "use" command, then performs a copy, to create a non-dbase file for use with mail-merge. The non-dbase file may either have variable length fields, in other words be DELIMITED, (or ended) by commas, or quotes, or whatever, or it may have fixed length fields (this second format is SDF) with a greater number of blank spaces to pad the short names like "John Adams" from those used to pad the longer names such as "George Washington". In a word-processor, such as PC-Write 2.5, one creates both an input template and a letter. The input template must describe the kind of variable data coming in. The template description will be different for fields delimited by commas, than for what it will be for fixed length fields. If your word-processor supports mail-merge, the manual for it will describe what kind of variable data your word-processor supports, whether fixed length or delimited.

My word-processor supports both kinds, and my data base system supports both kinds. It is absolutely essential that your input template accurately describe the kind of variable data you intend to input so that you can successfully conduct mail-merge. (Note: after describing the last field in my input data, I have found I have to describe a 2 byte dummy field, after the last field for each record, in order for my mailmerge to work right). After providing the input template, you then create the letter or other document, with indications as to where various variable data is to appear. You don't have to use each variable data field in the body of the document, but you must describe each and every field in the input template. You may use some fields repeatedly at different places in the body of the document, but you only describe each field once in the input template.

Having created a file of variable data, with either fixed or variable length fields, and having created a document in your word-processor, with an input template preceding the body of the document, ►

THE CAPRICIOUS CURSOR

by Lynda Handlogen

One day Mrs. Cursor decided she was going to have some fun. So she set out to 'GET' Mr. Operator.

Slinking along the characters that morning she decided it would be fun to quietly erase, one-by-one, as many characters as she could while Mr. O wasn't looking. After a line of characters, Mr. O looked up and groaned as he flung Mrs. Cursor to the front of the line so he could begin re-entering what she'd erased. This is especially fun because Mrs. Cursor gets a thrilling experience when she gets to move fast.

"Moving fast, that's an idea!" thought she. So she swiftly flew to the front of the file while Mr. O was in the middle of a blink. He blinked again. "Darn it," he exclaimed (that's not the four letter word he really used), as he began to help Mrs. Cursor slide along line by line to her previous position. "Sliding is fun," thought Mrs. Cursor, "but I prefer to jump from screen to screen.

So she flew, flew, flew to the end of the file. "Wee, this is more fun than I thought I could ever have," she laughed. Mr. O gave her a stare that was beginning to look very tense. As he clamped his right hand into a fist and pointed his index finger downward, he began to pound the keyboard

Mail-merge... (continued)

you are now ready to go into your word-processor to perform mail-merge. It's a simple matter of pushing a few keys to complete the mail-merge, providing an output file, which we can later print, to send the same basic letter to Barbara, Bill, Jantje, and Pieter. At one of my client's I put my variable data to an SDF file from dBASEIII, then ran it into PC-Write 2.5 for mail-merge, resulting in individualized letters to all five thousand of his potential customers.

John

■

causing Mrs. Cursor to be flung screen by screen with a swiftness of motion she thought she could never experience. "How thrilling, how wonderful, how marvelous," thought she. So she did it again - to the front to the end. And again, to the front to the end. And each time he flung her screen to screen, the thrill was more exuberant than before.

But Mr. O didn't seem to feel quite so exuberant. He stood up, stomped one foot and marched off as he mumbled something sarcastic. "This is just fine," thought Mrs. Cursor. "Now I'll have time to come up with something new!"

"Something new hmmm! Ah yes, I know a wonderful little game. This will really get Mr. O," thought she.

After a short break, Mr. O came back with a more relaxed expression. He calmly sat down at his computer and serenely looked up when, all of a sudden, his eyes popped out - way out! Mrs. Cursor was no longer Mrs. 'dainty, little, blinking' Cursor; she was 'BIG, FAT, FLASHY' Mrs. Cursor.

Mr. O couldn't believe his eyes. He shook his head and looked again and pounded the keyboard and stomped his foot, and still, Mrs. Cursor didn't return to her dainty, little self.

So he stood up, and instead of stomping one foot, he stomped both feet by jumping up and down. "That's it!" he screamed as he flipped the switch to end her charade.

And Mrs. Cursor spent a restful night after a busy day.

Meanwhile, Mr. O was unable to sleep that night. He remembered that dainty little flutter and was unable to forget her slinking through the characters and jumping from screen to screen and puzzled over how she went from thin to fat. And for a moment he wondered, was it his fault? Could he have pressed the keys that caused her to behave so mysteriously? No! Not possible! It's that capricious cursor out there in Computer Land conspiring against me! I know it! And tomorrow I'll get her!!!

Lynda

■



Disk of the Month

By Tim O'Neil

November 1986 DOM

PC-Type

By Jim Button

In another of our continuing series of offerings of Buttonware shareware products, this month's disk is the powerful personal word processor called PC-Type. Included on the disk is a demonstration version of the program that permits creating documents of up to 200 lines, plus an extensive tutorial program that will have you productive on the tool quickly.

You can register the software with the North Texas PC User Group at a saving. It will only cost you \$41.97. PC-Type is a personal word processor. It works great with PC-Style, the September DOM by Dwight Neal.

New PD files and upgrades:

CHASIMA
QMODEM 2.3
PC-KEY
LIBRARY
JR. MUSIC MACHINE
ORAGAMI-GAME
DIRECTORY SCANNER.

The new index will be out in December. The new beginner Library will be out in December. Please, if you have any software to share or a new version let us know so that we can get it to other members. If you are a sig leader and let us know ahead of time that you are going to review a program, we will have extra copies on hand.

I want you to know how hard some people work so that you can enjoy all the benefits of belonging to the NTPCUG. First my group: Howard Hamilton, Kathrine Crawford, Marilyn Holbrook, Dwight Neal and all the group of

people who sell behind the Disk Of Month table. Want to see them smile? Next time you buy some software say thanks for all their hard work. No one is paid--They all work free each month for you, our club members.

The next group is:

- your President Jim Graham,
- President-Elect Jim Hoisington,
- the man who brings us interesting programs each month, Charles Kroboth, Program Chairman,
- the man who makes sure we have money to run, Joe Brophy, Treasurer,
- our Secretary who works hard to record our business meetings, Laura Murphey,
- Membership Director, Bob Russell, keeping up with all your moves,
- a guy that works his you-know-what off, Stuart Yarus,
- to John Pribyl who works so hard to give you one of the best newsletters in the business,
- to Phil Chamberlain who makes sure your sig groups all have leaders... and rooms,
- to the other members of the Board of Directors, Dick Barr and Jim Janeway,
- to the Sig leaders who work so hard to help you learn more about your particular area of interest,
- to all the nice people that write articles for the newsletter,

... a big THANK YOU!

Our group has come a long way and has been guided by great leadership. A THANKS from a member can really go a long way.

Tim O'Neil
Disk of Month Chairman



PSSSSST!

We still need
a few good
volunteers!

Disk of the Month Disclaimer

DISCLAIMER: The North Texas PC Users Group copies these programs as a service to the club and the members of the club. We try to test all the programs, but we DO NOT WARRANT THE PROGRAMS IN ANY WAY. YOU MUST DECIDE IF A PROGRAM IS SUITABLE FOR YOUR SYSTEM AND USE. If you ask, we will tell you what we know about any program, but the final decision to buy and/or use these programs is totally yours. We will gladly and without question exchange an unreadable diskette for one of the same program.

EXCHANGE: All members of the club are encouraged to contribute copies of public domain programs to the club library. For each new diskette of software contributed, you may select any diskette in the club library in exchange. The contributions will be reviewed before credit is issued at the next meeting.

MAIL ORDERS: At prevailing prices plus \$1.00 for mailer and postage. Mail your order to Tim O'Neil, Box 398, Bedford, TX 76021.

PRICE: Members: \$2.00 per diskette (if the program is on two diskettes the price is \$4.00). Non-members: \$3.00 each diskette.

CATALOG DISKETTES: Currently this is a two volume set priced at \$4.00. This has all of the readme files from each diskette in the club library.

MEDIA: DSDD 5 1/4" Formated as 9 sector data diskettes. Public domain software only, standard full disclaimers.

AVAILABILTY: We will do our best to have all past diskettes at each meeting. DOM sales will begin at the DOM counter around 9:00, and continue until 2:00 PM.

IBM EXCHANGE NEWSLETTER: The EXCHANGE for the current month will be available at the auditorium AFTER the main meeting, at no charge to paid up members of the NTPCUO.

SWAP  SHOP

Four lines free each month to members; 5th through 10th lines at 15 cents per word. Larger ads at commercial space rates. Send check to the Editor for words exceeding the four-line limit. Free ads are on a space-available basis. Mail ads to the Editor.

We need an aggressive type to pound the bushes for advertisers for North Texas PC NEWS. Lots of prestige, but no pay. This is your chance to provide a significant contribution to the Club. Contact the Editor.

FOR SALE: Microsoft Word (3.0). Includes all documentation - even the registration card. \$240.00. Tim at 214/788-7100 ext 7557 (w), 214/492-5098 (h).

WANTED: JUKI 6100 PRINTER SHOULD BE IN GOOD CONDITION. CALL: (214) 986-5331

A & S Computer Services - P.O. Box 299, Rowlett, TX 75088. Consulting * Word Processing * Programming - Call (214)475-4539 or Startext M C 174190

Editor's Notes

I'm happy to announce we now have an illustrator on the staff of North Texas PC NEWS. Russ McArthur, a talented architect in his own right, volunteered to help. (Check out the cartoons on pages 6 and 9.) Glad to have you working with us Russ.

You'd better sharpen up your old word processors and start writing for the latest and greatest contest which starts like right now. The club is sponsoring a "best article published in the newsletter" contest with a prize to the author. Deadline is only six months away, don't wait until the last minute. Enter early! Enter as many times as you want. No limit. If you're at a loss as to what to write about, take a look at the newsletter survey published

in October PCN. All subjects except one (Time Management) were checked on the wish list. But don't feel limited to those subjects, the main requirement is that the articles interest our members. See contest rules on page 5.

If you would like to be more active in the Group, why not run for one of the Officer/Board of Director positions that are up for grabs in the coming election. January is the month, but you've got to let the nomination committee know soon so they can get the slate finalized. Contact Jim Holsington if you're interested.

And by the way, deadline for December issue of NT PC NEWS is November 15th, don't miss it!



Special Interest Program Reports

General Special Interest Group (SIG) News

A reminder that any SIG news items for this newsletter must be received by noon of the 14th of the month, -- regardless of the date of the next meeting.

ASSEMBLY LANGUAGE

After a one-month "vacation", this SIG will continue under its new leader, John Cole.

ASTRONOMY (Tentative)

Arlin Collins, who has been leading the Science and Engineering SIG, will organize an Astronomy SIG if there is sufficient interest to support it. The initial get-together will be in November.

BUYER/BUILDER

The first meeting of this SIG had some very spirited discussion about its future. The SIG will focus on hardware, offering a free exchange of advice and experience for those wanting to (1) BUY a good pre-assembled clone, (2) BUILD their own clone, or (3) add boards and peripherals to their IBM or clone computer (hence the new SIG name). People with experience in any of these areas are strongly encouraged to attend, to begin forming "expert groups" within which people can learn from each other and help those of us who are interested. The SIG might also become a focal point for group hardware purchases.

For those people thinking of buying ANY hardware, the following opinions were offered at the first meeting:

Buy only from authorized dealers. Thoroughly test the ACTUAL computer or peripheral that you will be buying, not just the floor model (all hardware is not created equal). Ask for references of satisfied customers.

If the vendor balks on any of these, you may be in for trouble later on.

Charles Plumeau will be presenting a program on clones at the November meeting.

Richard H. Browne

C LANGUAGE

In the October session, we generated a list of future program subjects. Those topics of particular interest to most of the group were listed and prioritized. We now have about eight or nine subjects on the agenda and four of them have volunteers to present them.

The first of these -- program structure, module partitioning, data hiding, and program design -- will be the subjects of the November meeting.

Sid Nolte

GENEALOGY

In recent meetings, the FAMILY HISTORY program by Virgil Lowrie was reviewed. It is for

the IBM and compatibles. The program disk and manual are available from Gold Trade Press, PO Box 50346, Denton TX 76206.

In October, there was much discussion regarding the best computer program. FAMILY ROOTS is the most popular in terms of the number of people who use it. FAMILY TREE, PERSONAL ANCESTRAL FILE, and GENEALOGY ON DISPLAY are also used. The last is a public domain program, available from one of the vendors.

Judge Linebaugh discussed use of a Tandy Model 100 Portable in genealogy research. It's great to take to the library or records office, for example.

In November, Lucille Boykin of the Dallas Public Library will present a program on methods in genealogy research. She has vast experience in the field.

SCIENCE and ENGINEERING

Sam Leven will assume the leadership of this SIG in November.

TURBO PASCAL

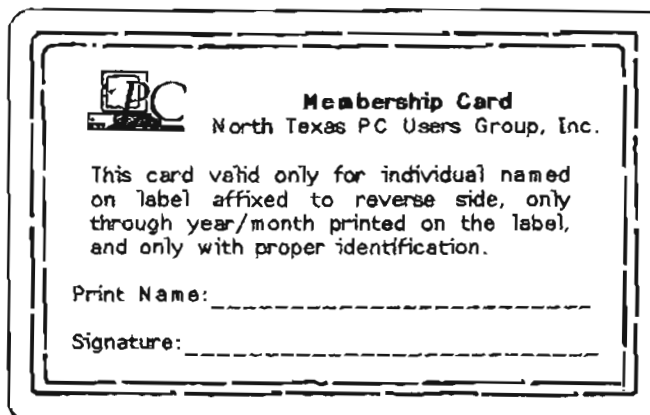
In November, we'll look at a number of routines to help the programmer make his programs run more smoothly. How to use DOS's Environment, how to make a program work differentiate between different types of printers, and how to use DOS's "PRINT" spooler, for example.

Phil Chamberlain

MEMBERSHIP CARD

This is your membership card in North Texas PC Users Group. You will need it for identification at Disk of the Month sales, group purchases and other activities. This card is valid only for you, the person named on label on reverse side. It is valid through expiration date shown on the label.

When trimmed, the card will fit the holders previously furnished for Infomart cards which are no longer required. Wear your membership card instead. Additional holders will be available at a nominal charge.



Trim card to wallet size.

(Thanks to Madison PC Users' Group for this idea. Ed.)

Room Assignments

Saturday, 15 November 1986



Check room numbers in lobby at INFOMART

Special Presentations:



9:00 - Auditorium
A new Speed-Up board for the PC will be shown by Personal Computer Support Group (PCSG).

9:00 - 9:55	Room
Science/Engineering	_____
DOS	_____
Genealogy (w/Apple)	_____
Graphics	_____
Buyers Guide	_____

9:30 - 9:55	Room
Orientation	_____

MAIN MEETING: 10:00 - 11:00

Microrim's new relational database, System V

11:30 - 11:55	Room
Orientation	_____

12:00 - 12:55	Room
Assembly Language	_____
APL	_____
C Language	_____
Turbo Pascal	_____

12:30 - 1:55	Room
Invest - N-Squared	_____

1:00 - 1:55	Room
Artificial Intelligence	_____
Business Applications	_____
Communications	_____
Databases	_____
Lotus	_____
Dataflex	_____

2:00 - 2:55	Room
Advanced Programmers	_____
Integrated Software Framework	_____
Basic Applications	_____

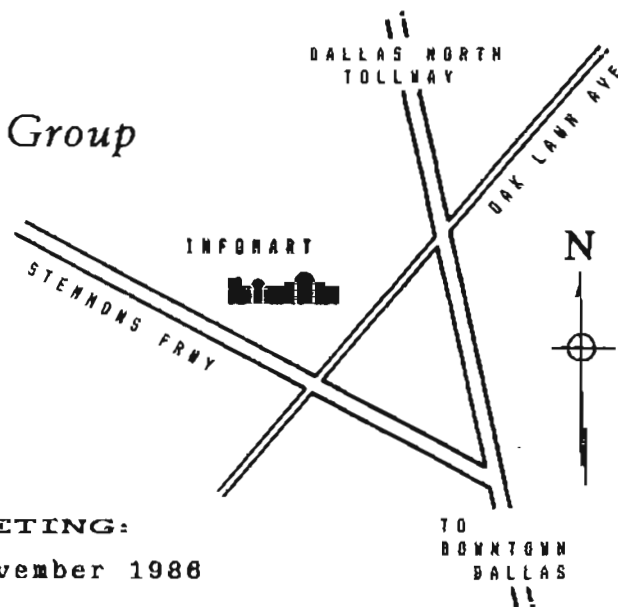


North Texas PC NEWS

2025 Rockcreek Drive, Arlington, Texas 76010



North Texas PC Users Group



NEXT MEETING:
15 November 1988