OTTAWA IBM P.C. USERS' GROUP NEWSLETTER

May 12th, 1985 - Issue 85(3)

E X E C U T I V E

Position	Name	Res. Phone	Bus. Phone
President	Harry Gross	733-7989	N/A
Past-President	Mike Luckham	832-3829	592-6500 x2034
Treasurer/Membership	Anne Moxley	592-4933	230-9096
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Assistant Libr. #1	Michel Lemire	568-8429	993-5033
Assistant Libr. #2	Chris Taylor	737-3310	995-4987
Editor	Gord Hopkins	828-3834	726-3590
Secretary	Eric Clyde	749-2387	993-3291
Meeting Facilities	Stu Moxley	592-4933	N/A

MEETING DATES

NEXT MEETING DATES ARE: Wednesday, May 29th & June 26th at 8:00 p.m.

MEETING LOCATION IS: NRC AUDITORIUM, 100 Sussex Drive
(Gothic Building opposite Ottawa City Hall - Parking in Rear)

As usual, I am having great difficulty in finding material for the newsletter. Take a few minutes and share your knowledge about some aspect of computers or programming, your experience with some software package, or your computer humour. I have a modem just waiting to capture your thoughts as fast as you can key them to the screen. I will also accept submissions in hard-copy form which can be sent to:

Gordon Hopkins
17-D Forester Crescent
Nepean, Ontario K2H 8Y1

SOFTWARE SIDE OF THE NEWS

We've added four (4) new specialty disks to the library containing:

EXPERT SYSTEM OF STEEL
SPREADSHEET OF STEEL
DATABASE OF STEEL

All but the database are in compiled BASIC and the database is in a form suitable for compiling. Also, a new alphabetic listing of all files contained in the library is now on DISK-00 under the filename FILES.TXT.

HINDSIGHT

Report on the PC Users' Group Meeting, March 28th, 1985
By Eric Clyde

This was the night for membership renewals for 1985/86, and also disk subscriptions. For that night only, the subscription included Disk 00, which offers text descriptions of all files in the club diskettes.

The speaker was Marty Habicht, who discussed the steps involved in setting up a billing system, showing the codes used in dBASE II and dBASE III. The most important first step is, of course, a user requirements study. Precautions necessary were also described.

Report on the PC Users' Group Meeting, April 24th, 1985
By Eric Clyde

Chris Taylor reported that a number of disks, ordered by members several months before, had still not been claimed. Some of these are on the members' own diskettes. The ordered disks are identified only by initials, making it difficult to contact the requester. He cannot hold these orders indefinitely. If they are not claimed in a month or so, he will sell them to anyone who asks for them.

John Nash, the speaker of the evening, gave an amusing brief history of his personal involvement with an incredible number of computers -- main-frame, minis and micros. He then discussed one of his major interests, the effects of rounding errors on both scientific and financial computations. His recommendations? Don't believe the answer just because a computer/minicomputer/microcomputer tells you so. Check it using ball-park estimates.

NEWS: DRI Announces Prices for 'GEM' Multifacet Series
by Jim Leeke

Digital Research Inc. has announced prices and schedules for the first software packages of its Graphics Environment Manager (GEM) operating-system extension.

The packages' relatively low prices - from $49.95 to $249 - are meant to give potential users a no-risk way to be able to see what GEM is all about.

The first application, GEM Desktop, is similar to the Apple Macintosh Desktop, replacing commands with folders, documents, disks, and trash icons. Users operate programs by using a mouse to select the appropriate icon for the task. It comes with six accessory programs, including a calculator and clock. The package was available April 15th in the US at $49.95.

Other offerings include the following:

GEM Draw	Graphics Editor for logos, charts, etc.
GEM Graph	Presentation-oriented graphs and symbols
GEM Wordchart	Text-only presentation quality charts
GEM Write	Word processor similar to Volkwriter
GEM Paint	An on-screen graphics design tool

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SUBMITTED ARTICLES

West Coast Computer Faire Report
by Gary Finley

The Faire is an interesting experience for a Canadian computer user, the faster pace of developments near Silicon Valley means that what one sees there is really a glimpse of the future of our local situation. For example, take RAM memory prices. I will quote US dollar prices, but even when the appropriate 150% conversion for currency exchange and taxes has been done, the results are still astounding. Sets of 9 64k RAM chips were going for $11, and sets of 9 256k chips were only $55!! These parts are currently 23 (Canadian) dollars EACH at INTEK, on a wholesale, university-discount bulk purchase (more than 300 pieces in one order). I was amazed to see them that low so soon. By buying up 512k worth for my up-comming PC clone, I saved enough (compared to the current Canadian price) to pay for the cost of my plane ticket to SF. Floppy disk drives were also somewhat cheaper than here, Shugart and Teac 1/2-height drives were around $90. Cheaper full-height drives could be had for as low as $49. The one that really got to me was a hard disk drive. Now mind you, this was an older model full-height 5" drive of only 5 Meg capacity, but still and all, seeing a hard disk on sale for $99 was a bit of a shock.

New products on display included a new line from the resurected Osborne Corp., including their version of the little IBM compatible machine decended from (but no longer identical to) the Morrow Pivot. This is an 8 lb. machine about the size and shape of a shoe box (sitting on ones edge) which uses an LCD screen. Speaking of LCD screens, Apple was showing theirs for the IIc, and in the omnidirectional auditorium-style lighting of the Moscone Center convention hall, both the Apple and Osborne screens were nearly completely illegible.

Kaypro was alive and well, with no less than 3 new computers on display. They have a new and smaller version of their popular Z80/CPM machine which is roughly the size of an Apple with a built-in screen. They were also showing their model 16, which is just about identical in size to the old Kaypro 2, 4 and 10 series. The Kaypro 16 is an IBM compatible portable which includes a couple of disk drives and a 9" green display screen. I saw it running the Sub Logic Flight Simulator, which is often regarded as a demonstration of a high degree of IBM compatibilty. Finally, the Kaypro 286 was making its debut at the Faire. This is of course Kaypro's equivelant of the IBM AT, only less expensive than IBM's version. Since I know very little about the AT myself, I didn't try to question them closely about the 286's AT compatibility, but I have heard that Kaypro have become convinced of the necessity of strong IBM compatiblity in the current state of the marketplace.

One reasonable compromise to this legibilty-portability problem was demonstrated by the Sweedish Ericcson firm. They are the ones who make the strange looking PC clone with the screen on a hinged arm so you can adjust the viewing angle all over the place. Ericcson has a portable which uses a plasma type flat panel display which is as small as an LCD panel, but which gives a high contrast bright orange sharp image. This display technology is ideal for portables in all respects with the exception of power consumption. The Ericcson portable's screen chews up 30 WATTS of power making that dandy image, an impossible drain for a battery pack to handle. Although the machine is very small (about the size of an Apple IIc) it cannot be used as a battery-powered portable because of power consumption. You have to plug it in to use it.

I had expected to see quite a few Mac products at this show, but they were still pretty thin on the ground. I did see a couple of neat games which used the Mac's graphics to advantage, and a FEW peripheral products were in evidence, but aside from an external RAM disk box (which wasn't working yet) these were mainly confined to the 'mouse pads' and 'security stands' that one sees advertised in Macworld. I did see a coulple of the video digitizers running, and heard Smoothtalker speaking, both of which were interesting.

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Turbo Pascal 2.0 on IBM-PC
by Norris Weimer

Turbo Pascal 2.0 is incredible: it's good, it's small, it loads fast, it runs fast, it's simple. However, here are a few comments on it anyway:

COMPILING

When compiling, it goes to the first error it finds, then it puts you in the editor so that you can fix it. This is quite nice, but there are two times when it gets in the way. One is that it always compiles starting at the begining, so if there are a number of small errors (missing semicolons, etc.), it would be faster to get the whole list and fix them all at once. The other problem is that occasionally it would be handy to temporarily ignore an error at the beginning of the program while you work at the end of the program.

WINDOWS

There is a mistake in the documentation for GoToXY. The parameters are column and row, in that order. Turbo's windows on the PC are basic, but useable. A window is nothing more than a temporary redefinition of the screen size and location. So you

get to use a local coordinate system, and you can use the window just as you would the screen (e.g., ClrScr to erase the window). Only one window (or screen) is defined at any time. Windows are not actually distinct. If you write on the screen, then define a window on top of what you have written, the screen doesn't change in any way.

Windows defined to be one-line high don't work; the definition is ignored, although there is no error message and no mention of this limitation in the documentation. You can get around this by defining them two lines high and not using the second line. Window definitions can overlap, and as long as you are careful about not touching the second line, the information from the overlapping window is not disturbed.

I tried defining a window on line 26 to see if there was an error message; there wasn't. Windows scroll up if the last line is written to, just as the screen as a whole does. So a one-line window would not be useful anyway.

You can't mix text and graphics windows due to hardware (but you can have text in a graphics screen). WhereX and WhereY functions are not available in graphics mode, since there is no graphics cursor.

STRINGS

There is a pre-defined function to convert a character to upper case. It would have been better if it worked on strings.

You can assign to a string in a column beyond its current length, without producing an error message, but the assignment is ignored. The documentation doesn't mention it.

It would be nice to have a more complete library of string functions available. For example, trim trailing blanks and trim leading blanks functions.

PC-DOS INTERFACE

The BIOS command allows you to access to the DOS interupt functions, but somehow that's not enough, these functions are too low level. It would be nice to have something like the Macintosh Mini-Finder, or even a simple way to just list the directory. Building these from the low-level routines is quite a bit of work. You can't really fault Turbo for not having these things, since it's so specific to one machine, but SOMEBODY should!

It needs a function to determine whether a file name is valid. If you ask a user for a file name then try to use it, your program will crash if it isn't valid. Checking it isn't so simple.

The manual gives a sample program for checking whether a file exists, but it crashes if you give it an invalid drive specification.

It needs support for writing to diskettes. If you try to write to a diskette which is full, your program crashes AND the directory of that diskette then indicates that the file has 0 bytes. Perhaps because the program never called the Close procedure? There must be some way to protect against this.

I had a problem with Turbo Pascal itself once: I was looking for a file. I used Turbo's Dir command, and it wasn't on one diskette, so I switched to another diskette, and used Dir again. Turbo listed the same files. I thought that was strange, but imagine what I thought when I later discovered that Turbo wrote the directory from the first diskette onto the second! Whenever you edit a file, Turbo keeps the old version as a backup. Of course these are also lost when you ruin the directory. I'm not sure what I did and I haven't tried to do it again; no one else seems to have had problems with this. My penance was having to use the PC-DOS Chkdsk program and its documentation. Turbo wrecked my disk, and chkdsk fixed it for me, but chkdsk is the program I dislike!

OTHER

I still think range checking should default to ON.

Turbo doesn't initiallize memory, so if you don't do it yourself, you can run a program twice in a row and the second program will start with the values from the first run.

When using the Include directive in PC-DOS, you need to put a blank after the file name.

The documentation doesn't explain how to use cursor control keys and function keys, but it is possible. It's almost the same as in Basic. See the IBM Basic manual, page G-6 "extended codes". If you read(Kbd,key) and key=#27 then do another read(Kbd,key) to get the second byte that goes with the ONE keypress. In Basic the first byte would have been #00. Not all the key combinations are defined, e.g. <control>-<cursor-up>. Note that the keys labeled cursor control don't move the cursor unless your program recognizes them and moves the cursor when they are pressed.

Borland has a Compuserve SIG where they give technical support, bug fixes, and encourage exchange of hints, software, etc. To get there, type "GO BOR" from any Compuserve prompt.

And Now - Computers to Jog By - Article from the April 11 Edmonton Journal
by Douglas Wiens

At last, jogging shoes with a built-in computer - perfect for yuppies. "This is the most exciting developement in running-shoe technology ever," Paul Oparowski, product manager for Puma U.S.A, said Wednesday. The idea is that after going for a jog, the runner can plug the shoe into a home computer and find out how many calories were burned up and how many kilometres were covered. A pair of the high-technology shoes will cost $200, which includes software and a cable to connect the shoe to a computer. The company said its shoe is compatible with computers made by Apple and by Commodore, but will not work with IBM machines. A spokesman for Puma said, "This is for the yuppies. It gives free rein to the success-oriented baby boomers who can't stand to be doing just one thing at a time."

Increasingly, U.S. retailers are tailoring their products to meet the demands of the so-called yuppies, or Young Urban Professionals.

The new device is called the RS Computer Shoe and should be sold in stores by early 1986.

LATE NEWS FLASH >>>>>>

For May, we have arranged for a presentation about the Cullinet Gateway. This software product provides an integrated set of applications, including mainframe communication, database management, some editing facilities, etc. At the June meeting our club members will share their expertise by discussing the finer points of DOS. Mike Luckham will introduce you to the use of pipes, filters, and I/O redirection. Mike Schupan will show you how batch files can greatly simplify your life and yours truly will comment on some of the new features provided by DOS 3.0 and 3.1. DOS is quite a powerful beast once you learn how to tame it so plan on making it out to this meeting for sure. The more sophisticated users in the crowd can keep the speakers on their toes.

That's all for now!!!
HAPPY COMPUTING

Gordon Hopkins
Editor

P.S. - A copy of the proposed, new Consititution and By-Laws is included below for your perusal. These amendments will be voted on at the May meeting. Most amendments are to accommodate the increased size of the club and executive.

Constitution and By-laws of the Ottawa IBM-PC Users' Group

Preamble: We the members of the Ottawa IBM-PC Users' Group do organize for mutual learning and enrichment.

CONSTITUTION:

ARTICLE I: Name

Section 1 - We shall be known as the Ottawa IBM-PC Users' Group.

ARTICLE II: Membership

Section 1 - Membership is open to all individuals

Section II- Membership in this club by any one member of a household shall include all members of that household

ARTICLE III: Officers

Section 1 - The officers of the IBM-PC Users' Group shall consist of the Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, Software Librarian, Publicity Officer, Newsletter Editor, and Past Chairperson.

ARTICLE IV : Duties of Officers

Section 1 - Chairperson shall
1.1 preside at meetings
1.2 arrange speakers for meetings or other such occasions
1.3 perform other duties as the office may require .

Section 2 - Treasurer shall
2.1 keep an accurate account of all financial transactions of the organization
2.2 perform the duties of the chairperson, in the absence of that officer
2.3 be responsible for the membership
2.4 shall report regularly on the financial status of the club to the Executive

Section 3 - Secretary shall
3.1 keep the minutes of all meetings
3.2 maintain an up to date roster of members
3.3 maintain the club's correspondence

Section 4 - Software Librarian shall
4.1 make available club software to all club members
4.2 accept software from the membership, providing the software is in the public domain

Section 5 - Publicity Officer shall
5.1 inform the media of the location and time of club meetings
5.2 handle publicity, including relationships with computer stores, etc.
5.3 maintain relationships with other clubs

Section 6 - Newsletter Editor shall
6.1 be responsible for publication and distribution of the club newsletter

Section 7 - Past Chairperson shall
7.1 be Chairperson of the Nominating Committee

ARTICLE V: Meetings

Section 1 - Regular meetings will be held on the last Wednesday of each month, except in the months of December and July.

Section 2 - Executive meetings shall be at the call of the Chairperson and shall have a quorum of 5

ARTICLE VI: Amendments

Section 1 - This constitution and by-laws may be amended by a majority vote of those present and voting at any regular meeting, provided a quorum is present.

Section 2 - All members shall be notified by mail of any proposed amendments.

THE BY-LAWS:

ARTICLE I: Membership

Section 1 - The membership year shall be from April until March

Section 2 - Dues shall be $20.00 per year.

Section 3 - Guests may attend regular meetings. Most club services will not be available to guests.

ARTICLE II: Quorum

Section 1 - A quorum shall consist of one quarter (1/4) of the paid membership.

ARTICLE III: Election of officers

Section 1 - The offices of Chairperson, Treasurer, Secretary, Software Librarian, Publicity Officer, and Newsletter Editor shall be filled by election at the regular meeting in November, to assume office effective with the January meeting.

Section 2 - Nominations for officers shall be made at the regular meetings in September and October. Nominations will be received from the floor, or by mail, prior to the meeting.

Section 3 - A returning officer shall be appointed by the Executive prior to the election.

Section 4 - The Executive shall fill any vacancies by appointment

ARTICLE IV: Funds

Section 1 - Funds shall be properly accounted for.

Section 2 - Administrative costs shall be paid directly from the pooled funds on the authority of the Treasurer

Section 3 - The remaining funds shall be used to benefit the club

Section 4 - The outgoing Treasurer shall deliver a financial statement at the January meeting

ARTICLE V: Provisions

Section 1 - The Executive shall decide on the acquisition and disposal of club assets

ARTICLE VI: Year

Section 1 - The year of the organization shall be the calendar year.