OTTAWA PC NEWS

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Review of the August meeting

Corel demo doesn't do justice

by Jackson Hibler

From a purple sky, a bi-plane banks into a dive. It's really quite stunning and it was created with CorelDRAW. Serge Duguay, a designer with the National Aviation Museum, won an award for this poster called "Artflight 92". You may have seen it around town.

Obviously, Corel can carry a good design through from the routine to the transcendant. But how is it done? This was the kind of insight I was looking for when I went to the CorelDRAW 3.0 presentation. I didn't get it.

Thrown mouse pads a step up

Instead I was treated to a hackneyed rehash of the old "throw candy to the audience" routine, first seen a couple of years ago when WordPerfect breezed through Ottawa. This time it was mouse pads — a step up, I guess — but somehow demeaning, both to us — as if we were an audience of shallow fools — and to the presenters.

Brenda knows her stuff

You could tell by the way Brenda Collins handled the program, she knows CorelDRAW well. The trouble seemed to be that she was constrained to follow Corel's totally inappropriate (for us) script. Many users at the meeting were experienced Corel users looking for the hints, traps and tricks that a skilled user like Brenda could give us. But instead we were treated to an introductory sketch-through designed to impress the uninitiated, and which caused many of us to nod off! That wasn't the way it was supposed to go. Corel was told what we expected, and they promised to deliver. I guess they didn't bother to tell Brenda.

I went away disappointed, and started looking for answers elsewhere. I spoke to Serge Duguay seeking insights into the new CorelDRAW from a pro. I was not disappointed this time.

Here is a designer who knows CorelDRAW 3.0, its strengths, its quirks. He knows how to get the most out of it...to "push the envelope", as he puts it. And indeed, he does push it. A short while ago one of his multilayered designs sent a local print service bureau (film house) into funk. They couldn't output the design to film...said they thought it might be a version conflict between versions 2.0 and 3.0.

Reduce complexity to ease printer problems

"It wasn't Corel," Serge explained, "it's the technology." Up to legal page size, Serge suggests you output to a laser printer for proofing. Postscript printing can be overwhelmed, however, when doing large, highly complex designs. "You can reduce complexity by converting your fonts to objects after the design is finalized," he advises. But you must still examine the proof carefully for resulting artifacts or misalignments.

Going to film

So what happens when you have to go to film? Most service bureaus can take page-scale to film quite well. When a design gets beyond the physical limits of a letter or legal page, however, many service bureaus cannot handle the dimensional demands. "That one was 11 inches long by 25 and a half inches wide. When you get beyond 20 inches you have to go a specialized film house."

When you get into full-colour film in these sizes, you are talking about big money. You want to know where your problems may occur, and

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INSIDE

Corel demo *continued from page 1*

where they won't. Listening to Serge opened my eyes.

CorelTrace: too many nodes

Serge had some advice for using CorelTrace, too. He doesn't! Serge finds that Trace is not precise enough. If he creates his design on paper, scans it in and has Corel Trace convert it to bezier curves, "it adds too many nodes, many of them in the wrong places." Serge always draws on screen by making short segments or simple polygons that he then joins together with the "combine" function and converts to curves. "That way the nodes are where I want them and I can manipulate them as I want...when I want."

I learned more in a 15-minute telephone conversation with Serge Duguay than I did in an hour from Corel. I wish I could have talked to him for an hour. I wish he could have talked to all of us for an hour!

Market penetration is not all

I think Corel had better stop worrying about market penetration to new users and realize that supplying and serving their quite considerable user base is where the future is. Upgrading support applets like Corel Trace, and helping already experienced users learn new tricks and techniques is the best way to advance an already strong product. Great designs sell the tools! There is a lot of design talent using your product, Corel. Nurture it!

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At the movies

Hackers get a new image

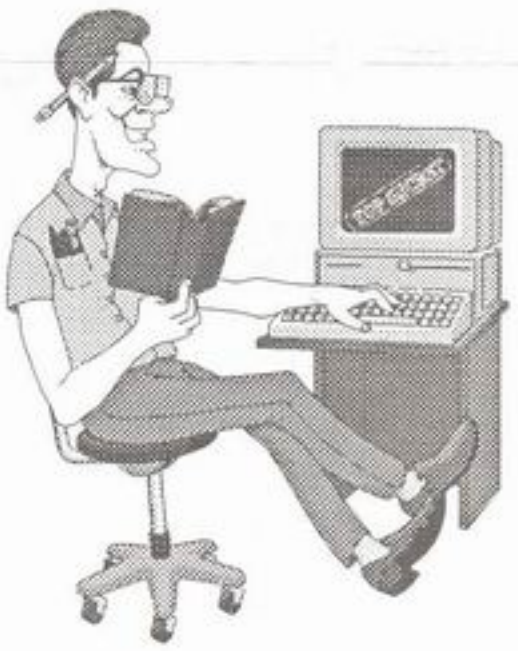
by Lynda Simons

Not once in the recently released movie *Sneakers* does Robert Redford's character put a pencil behind his ear or, come to that, pick up a book. He doesn't actually sit at a computer keyboard much either.

This is odd because he is supposed to be this brilliant computer hacker who can break into any system. In fact he makes a legitimate living breaking into people's systems to test them. (What? Did you think Robert Redford would play a bad guy?)

This must surely require hours of mind-breaking work basking in the glow of a computer monitor. Not apparently for this hacker. Maybe he gets Dan Akroyd (who after all does play a character named Mother) to do the pallor-inducing work. Still, even if attractively tanned (and, as the years pass, wearing rather well I might add), Robert Redford can always look reasonably intelligent, and it's not as if they don't show him thinking at all: he does play Scrabble and do anagrams. So what if the details may not be entirely convincing? We should still be grateful for the wonderful new image it gives to the computer literate (which, by the way, Robert Redford freely admits he himself is not.)

Hacker Release 2.0 (Robert Redford look and feel)



Hacker Release 1.0 (industry standard)

Plus ça change...

I saw an early Saturday evening performance and noticed when I got home that, coincidentally, the second "Saturday Night at the Movies" movie was an old Robert Redford movie, so watched it as well.

Guess what? He was doing exactly the same thing! Except that instead of stealing a computer chip for the U.S. government, he was stealing a diamond for a middle eastern government. His timing has improved and he has a better supporting cast in *Sneakers*, but essentially it's the same movie. The principal difference is explained to us towards the end of *Sneakers* by Ben Kingsley's character who tells us that power now lies in information not weapons (or precious jewels, I guess). Of course we (at OPCUG) all know that.

Despite all this, it's a good movie. Just don't expect, as I did, that its being about computers has much relevance and you won't be disappointed.

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Borland presents Quattro for Windows at next meeting

by Julie Dustin & Susan Phillips

At our next general meeting, September 29th, we will get to see Borland Corporation's latest offerings. Steve Finner, their Ottawa-based systems engineer, will present ObjectVision and QuattroPro for Windows, and a sneak preview of Paradox for Windows.

The new product ObjectVision is a Windows-based form generator. The Windows versions of their popular spreadsheet Quattro Pro, and relational database Paradox have been eagerly awaited.

History

California-based Borland was founded by Philippe Kahn, a former mathematician, in the early 1980s to market his language Turbo Pascal, now in version 6.0 and a Windows version. The range of Borland products has grown to include other languages such as C++, databases such as Paradox and a spreadsheet (Quattro). Acquisition of Ashton Tate in 1991 gave them dBase IV, which they have refined and enhanced. A Windows version is in the works.

Object-oriented technology

Borland's pioneering efforts with object-oriented technology began more than three years ago. The latest product is ObjectVision, an object-oriented generator for data entry applications, which allows easy and direct access to dBase and Paradox. ObjectVision has been described as an innovative development tool for Windows that combines aspects of a form design program, a spreadsheet, a database, and a hypermedia authoring system. Reviews suggest that ObjectVision is "highly optimized for its chosen task" but that there may be limitations in its data re-indexing, resorting and printing capabilities.

Borland's object-oriented technology was also used in developing Quattro Pro for Windows. Quattro Pro 3.01 reportedly does eveything Lotus 1,2,3 can do and more. Finner states, "Object-oriented technology was the basis for both these products. In fact, the code for Quattro Pro has been rewritten totally".

Awards

Finner goes on to note that "Borland has won over 40 spreadsheet awards for Quattro as well as a recent PC Magazine Editors' Choice award for their C++ language compiler. In addition, the recently-released Paradox 4.0 has been tested by National Standards Test Laboratory which showed it as the fastest PC relational database on the market over a number of database products including Fox and DataEase". Paradox has always been one of the fastest relational databases. It will be interesting to see if it maintains its speed in the Windows enviroment.

Prize

It will also be interesting to see who wins the Borland give-away, WinDOs, Quattro Pro for Windows and Quattro Pro 4.0 for DOS bundled together. See you there.

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Calendar *(subject to change)*

General Meeting Location: Sir Robert Borden HS
131 Greenbank Road

General Meeting Time: 7:30 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Date and Time	Topic and Location (if not SRB)
Tuesday, September 29	General meeting: Borland: QuattroPro for Windows, Object Vision, & sneak preview of Paradox for Windows (see article this page)
Wednesday, September 30 10 a.m. - 6 p.m	Ottawa Business & Government Computer Show, Civic Centre
Thursday, October 1 10 a.m. - 6 p.m	Ottawa Business & Government Computer Show, Civic Centre
Sunday, October 4 11 a.m. - 4 p.m.	Ontario Computer Fair Nepean Sportsplex, 1701 Woodroffe
Wednesday, October 8 7:00 p.m.	Fox SIG in the Jean Talon Conf. Room, StatsCan, Tunneys Past.
Tuesday, October 27	General meeting: FrameMaker, Gold Disk, Windows Phone

Which Draw package to use?

by Mark Edwards

I have tried a great variety of graphics packages, and until recently I have not been satisfied. There are two kinds of graphics programs: PAINT and DRAW programs, PAINT programs being pixel-based and DRAW programs being vector-based. Both have their disadvantages.

Painting with pixels

Pixel graphics in programs such as PC Paint draw an image on the screen by turning on or off the pixels that create the pattern of square dots making up your picture. The images generated by pixel paint programs are not really scalable. If you blow up the image, the pixels get multiplied, and at some point you will see ragged edges.

Drawing with vector graphics

Vector Graphics programs such as CorelDRAW and Micrografx draw on the basis of defining the lines of your drawing by the start and end points, width, etc. If you scale these drawings up or down they retain their precision. Therefore, if you want great scalable drawings, use a vector draw program. However, these programs are very powerful and subsequently very complex and hard to learn.

I have used CorelDRAW (version 2 without on-line help), and found it rather hard to use. I have heard from friends that version 3 is better, but with all those additional features, I fear creeping featurism with the addition of charting, photo retouching and slide show capabilities. Also using the True Type fonts from the CD-ROM can slow down Ventura to a crawl. So I've gone back to the K.I.S.S. principle.

Satisfied at last

I have discovered that vector-based graphics programs don't have to be difficult to use. I recently acquired Micrografx Draw, a scaled-down version of Micrografx Designer, that offers all I want, together with a simple user interface. It has 57 fonts, handles blends and colour gradients, can slant and rotate symbols, reshape and slant objects, curve text and do anything else I need. It has a large library of clip art that can be modified, and will import and export in most graphics formats. Micrografx Draw is compatible with Adobe Type Manager, Ventura Publisher and Aldus PageMaker.

Piece o' cake

As an example of its ease of use, I loaded it up after dinner last week, and before bath time (6:30 for the kids) I had produced business cards for my son's Detective Agency (he's six). This involved fairly simple operations like retrieving clip art, scaling it, adding text, combining objects, duplicating them and then printing the finished card. All without touching the manual or the on-line help.

As you can see, the result isn't bad, and the best news of all is the price ($129). So do you really need photo retouching?

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Coming soon to a PC near you: a MOVIE-making challenge

For a hint, look at the shareware Windows utility MOVIE.ZIP on the PUB. Details on how to use this program and on the contest will come in next month's issue of the newsletter. Start warming up those movie-making muscles: there's recognition and material reward in it!

Screen column and row settings and the BIOS Data Area

by Robert Parkinson

When developing a program recently, Robert Parkinson discovered a couple of interesting anomalies to do with screen column and row settings. Making the program set the screen back to the column and row settings it found when it started is, of course, considerate programming. Doing it is not, however, entirely straightforward. In this article, Robert explains how to read the BIOS Data Area to find the current row and column settings and how to use the available row-setting utilities effectively.

This article is not, however, just for programmers. Anyone who has had problems using screen row-setting utilities in VGA on an analog monitor will find Robert's discoveries most interesting.

With the advent of the EGA or VGA adapter and the accompanying myriad of small utilities changing the number of screen columns and rows became easier. Eighty is still the most common choice for columns; however, many users like to change the number of rows from the DOS default of 25 to 43 or 50 or, my preference, 28 rows. This is all fine, but many programs assume a 25x80 screen and, when they exit, automatically set the DOS screen back to those values.

DOS 5.0 improvements

DOS, up until version 5.0, simply assumed that you would always use 80x25 and made no provision for other values. In fact, many DOS programs like ANSI.SYS, MORE.COM or even the CLS internal command were "hard-wired" to 25 rows. With DOS 5.0, came the "MODE CON" command with which you can select 25, 43 or 50 rows (if ANSI.SYS is loaded) but no other values. Other, non-

DOS, row-setting utilities allow you a much wider selection and do not require ANSI.SYS to be loaded, as they directly call the ROM BIOS interrupt 10h functions.

BIOS Data Area

So how can a program determine the actual number of rows and columns in use? The answer lies in the BIOS Data Area, in low memory. The ROM BIOS keeps a current record of a number of important items in this area, including the number of

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rows and columns in use. The number of columns can be found at memory offset address 0000:044Ah and the number of rows at 0000:0484h. The byte value at those locations is, of course, in hexidecimal.

Use DEBUG to read settings

Using the DOS DEBUG program, you can examine that area on your own system. When you get DEBUG's hyphen prompt, enter "D 0:44A L1" and DEBUG will return the single hex byte at that location, the number of columns. Now enter "D 0:484 L1" and DEBUG will return the number of rows.

Anomaly in readings

Are these values correct if you simply convert them to decimal? The value returned for columns is correct, once converted from hex to decimal. However, the actual number of rows in use is 1 more than the returned value. For example,if the returned value for the rows is 18h (24 decimal), you must add 1 to determine the actual number of rows, in this case 25. Don't ask me why the two values are different in format.

This technique of reading the BIOS Data Area appears to be valid for all display adapter types from MDA through Super VGA, assuming that your ROM BIOS is "IBM compatible", as most are.

Programmers should, ideally, obtain and store these values before their program actually does anything that would alter the screen display and then, immediately before exiting to DOS, restore the screen to the user's preset preferences.

Using row-setting utilities with different monitors

If you are using a VGA or Super VGA adapter and you try to set the screen rows using a non-VGA-specific utility, you may find that you don't get exactly the number of rows you asked for. There will be no variation if you set your VGA card to emulate EGA, but why would you? Also this VGA-mode variation applies only for values that lie below or above 25 rows; a 25-row screen-setting utility will always work correctly, as this is the adapter's built-in default.

The determining factor is the type of monitor:

- If you are using a DIGITAL monitor with your VGA card, a non-VGA-specific utility like "43.COM" (and there are dozens like it that purport to set rows from 12 to 60) will set

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the called-for number of rows (e.g., 43).

- If you are using an ANALOG monitor, the result of using these utilities will often be quite different from your intent. For example, a non-VGA-specific 43.COM will set 50 rows instead, a 35.COM will set 40 rows and a 50.COM will set 57 rows.

Work-around

The BIOS Data Area will, however, always tell you the actual number of screen rows in use, regardless of your monitor type or the number of rows that your utility program thinks that it is setting. Your only recourse, if you are using an analog monitor with your VGA card, is to try the utility, check the number of rows reported in the BIOS Data Area at offset 0000:0484h and, if there is a variance, just rename the utility to reflect the actual number of rows produced (e.g., rename 43.COM to 50.COM).

There are a few VGA-specific utilities that will set the number of rows correctly on an analog monitor. These will generally be referred to as "for VGA" in the filename or in the documentation.

Switching back and forth

Even having checked and/or renamed your row-setting utilities, you may discover another video "oddity". Try switching from 25 rows to a higher value, say 50. Check the BIOS Data Area and note the value, which should be 32h. Now switch to another value, other than 25. Again check the BIOS Data Area and note the value. It may well not be what you expected, even after all your initial work.

Why? Well, these row-setting utilities tend to be very simplistic in their design. They assume that you will call them when you are in a 25-line mode and that you will return to that default 25-line mode. Hence they do virtually no checking of the existing video values.

To be absolutely certain that you will end up with the number of rows that you desire, you should always call a row-switching utility, other than when calling for the default 25 rows, while you are actually in the 25-row mode.

More on the BIOS Data Area

For those who would like to find out more about the BIOS Data Area, an excellent article entitled "Exploring the ROM BIOS" appeared on page 417 of the June 25,1991 issue of PC Magazine (Vol 10 #12). You might also like to try BIOSDATA.EXE which was in the December 25, 1990 issue of PC Magazine (Vol 9 #22) and which is available on the PUB in VOL9N22.ZIP. This utility displays your entire BIOS Data Area on the screen, allowing you to compare your system's values with the table in the June 25, 1991 article. The two specific byte locations that I have used here appear in the BIOSDATA.EXE display.

I have uploaded to "The PUB" an extract/amplification of the BIOS Data Area material in a text file called BIOSDATA.ZIP.

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SIG news

SIGs offer great opportunity for members to get involved

The SIGs will all be meeting again at the September 29th meeting at their new time of 9:00 p.m. Room numbers will be announced at the meeting.

We now have four SIGs: the Fox SIG, the DTP (desktop publishing) SIG, the Windows SIG and Beginners' Corner.

The Fox SIG

The Fox SIG, coming to us fully-formed as it were, is quite large and has major meetings at different times from the OPCUG. It's next major meeting is on October 8th (listed in the calendar). At the September 29th meeting, however, Andrew McNeill, SIG coordinator, will be holding a meeting for Fox SIG members interested in being part of the SIG Organizing Committee. This is a great opportunity to be part of the top level of a thriving and interesting group. Don't miss it.

The DTP SIG

DTP SIG attendees can look forward to a presentation on service bureaux. Julie Dustin, SIG coordinator, will also be looking to form a SIG Organizing Committee. The

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Check your expiry date

Please check your mailing label if you are unsure of the date your membership expires. Expired memberships and ones which will expire this month or next are marked in a colour.

Because of the summer break we have made the cutoff date this month June, so even if your subscription expired in July you will have received a newsletter. Next month we will return to our usual policy of one month's grace.

To renew your membership, fill out the form on the back of the newsletter and send it in with the fee or see Paul Green at the next meeting.

Note: Please don't send cheques without a form. Remeber that the executive officers are all volunteers. When the mail comes in the cheque gets sent to the treasurer and the form to the membership chairman. If you don't fill in a form then someone in the executive has to. Thank you for your cooperation.

Making your computer suit your needs, part 5: DOSKEY

by Eric Clyde

If you own DOS 5.0 and especially if you work from the DOS prompt, rather than some sort of shell such as the DOS shell which comes with DOS 5.0, you might like to use DOSKEY. DOSKEY is a utility which makes typing commands at the DOS prompt much easier.

Editing DOS commands

The most important feature of DOSKEY is its editing power. DOSKEY enables you to recall previously typed commands and edit them. In effect, by running DOSKEY, you put the DOS command line into "edit mode" so that you can use the left arrow key to move the cursor back through the letters of the command to make changes without erasing as you go. You can also use the Insert key to toggle between typeover and insert mode.

Macros

DOSKEY also provides a simple macro facility. You can type several commands on one line to create command macros. These are like one-line batch files, consisting of DOS commands held in memory, and thus available for instant use. To create a macro, type `doskey` followed by a macro name such as "wda" followed by an equal sign followed by the series of commands you want to execute when you type `wda`. For example:

```
doskey wda=dir/w a:
```

Loading DOSKEY

To load DOSKEY type doskey at the command prompt. You can also include the loading command in your AUTOEXEC.BAT file.

Changing the DOSKEY buffer size

The size of the DOSKEY default buffer (space allocated in memory to store the commands as you issue them) is 512 bytes, which holds about 35 commands. As the memory space for DOSKEY commands is used up, the oldest commands are removed to make room for new ones. If 512 bytes are insufficient, you can change the buffer size by typing:

```
doskey /bufsize=1000
```

where you would substitute the size you want for the 1000. You can clear the list of stored commands by typing ALT+F7.

Using DOSKEY

To see what DOSKEY does, type a series of DOS commands, e.g.

```
chkdsk
dir /w
mem
```

The F7 key

Now use the function key, F7, to get a numbered listing of previously used commands, e.g.

1: chkdsk
2: dir /w
3: mem

If there is more than one screenful of commands, DOSKEY pauses after each screen, and you can advance by pressing any key except PAUSE.

Editing a command

Use the Up arrow key to display the last command. You can then reuse it as is, or revise it. To view commands higher up in the list, keep pressing the Up arrow key.

If you have mistyped a lengthy command such as

```
qkzip -f b:wp.bak c:\wp5\doc\*.*
```

instead of

```
pkzip -f b:wp.bak c:\wp51\doc\*.*
```

('qkzip' instead of 'pkzip', and '\wp5' instead of 'wp51'), here's how to make the changes. Use the Up arrow key to see the command on the screen again; hit the Home key to get to the beginning of the command; overtype the 'q' with a 'p'; move the cursor to the '\' after the '5'; hit the Insert key and type '1'; press the End key and then press Enter to execute the corrected command.

The F8 key

The F8 key retrieves specific commands in a list, searching by the beginning letters of a previously issued command. F8 goes to the most recent occurrence of that command; if you press F8 again, it goes to second last occurrence, and so forth. Assuming all of the commands shown above have actually been issued pressing F8 and then the letter 'd' would repeat the last command issued starting with 'd', that is, **dir /w**.

The F9 key

The F9 key allows you to go directly to a previously issued command by using the line number obtained from the list displayed by using F7. It is most useful when you have had a long DOS session and want to reuse a command issued some time ago. So, using the example given under 'F7 key' above, press F9 followed by the number 1 and **chkdsk** will display on the screen.

I encourage you to experiment with the features of DOSKEY — I guarantee that it will be time well spent.

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Eric Clyde holds beginners' sessions at the same time as the SIGs at 9.00 p.m. after the main presentation. The location will be announced at the meeting.

Eric is always happy to answer questions arising from his articles. You can reach him at 749-2387.

Ottawa PC News

Ottawa PC News is the newsletter of the Ottawa PC Users' Group (OPCUG), and is published monthly except in July and December.

Deadline
Deadline for submissions is the last day of the month prior to publication.

Mailing Address
3 Thatcher St.
Nepean, Ontario K2G 1S6
Telephone Answering Machine 723-1329
PUB (Bulletin Board) N, 8, 1 228-0665
PUB, for MNP5/V.42 228-8550

Chairman
Harald Freise 828-3411

Past Chairman
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BBS Sysop
Chris Taylor 723-1329

Hardware/Software Broker
Terry Mahoney 225-2630
Fax 226-2615

Beginners' Corner
Eric Clyde 749-2387

Newsletter Editor
Lynda Simons (h) 739-9318
(o) 526-0542

Assistant Editors
Julie Dustin 228-0724
Susan Phillips 725-2935

Newsletter Mail Coordinator
Herb Kelland 733-4259

Group Meetings
OPCUG meets monthly except in July and December. Check the answering machine, the PUB and the newsletter for the date and place of each meeting. Meeting times are 7:30 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Membership fees
$25 per year

Disk-of-the-Month
$25 for 5.25 ins. diskettes and $35 per year for 3.5 ins. (for 10 diskettes)

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SIG news *continued from page 6*

last DTP meeting was well-attended and Julie looks forward to welcoming everyone back after the summer break.

The Windows SIG

At the second meeting of the Windows SIG, Frederic Dahm, SIG coordinator, will present an overview of Visual Basic as a programming and prototyping tool. This overview is aimed at both the novice and the advanced programmer with a view to seeing how Windows works behind the scenes and to pave the way for creative exchange of ideas and open discussions.

Why programming?

Frederic has chosen a programming approach to Windows because when you learn to program in a specific environment, you discover how things really work behind the scenes.

Windows/NT info

Frederic will also be bringing in a corporate backgrounder on Windows/NT and hand-outs for the VB presentation.

Please let him know if you are going to attend so he can prepare the right amount of material.

You can leave him a message on the PUB or, if you don't use the PUB, you can leave a message on the club's answering machine, 723-1329.

Frederic is looking forward to hearing how everyone feels about his chosen direction for the Windows SIG and welcomes alternative suggestions.

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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

Membership #
(if you are renewing)

First name *Last name (please use caps.)*

Address *Apt. #*

City *Province* *Postal Code* *Country*

( ) *Home phone #* ( ) *Business phone #* ( ) *Fax #*

I use the following hardware: ☐ XT ☐ AT-286 ☐ 386 ☐ 486
(Check those that apply.) ☐ 300 baud modem ☐ 1200 baud modem
☐ VGA ☐ EGA ☐ Herc. ☐ 2400 baud modem ☐ 9600 baud modem

I would like to help in the following club activities:
(Check those that apply.)
☐ Programming instruction
☐ Hardware techniques
☐ Newsletter input
☐ Software library
☐ Promotion/Publicity
☐ Bulletin Board
☐ Other .....

I use the following software:

MEMBERSHIP FEE $ 25.00

Disk of the month subscription _____
($25/yr. for 5.25" or $35/yr for 3.5" 10 disks per year) _____

Cheque ☐ *Cash* ☐ TOTAL $ _____

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