

Searching for the Roots of FCUG

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By Dick Estel

In December 2019, following a discussion between Interface Editor Lenard Roach, President Robert Bernardo, and myself regarding the beginnings of the Fresno Commodore User Group, I searched on line for the name Chuck Yruegui. His name appears as the creator/editor of our very first newsletter, then titled Tips, Pokes, Peeks and Jokes.

I knew nothing about him other than his name on the newsletter, but fortunately he was active in business, and several listings came up, including a phone number (it was also fortunate that he was not named “John Smith”).

Chuck was very happy to answer my questions, and a little surprised that the club was still in existence 38 years later. Mr. Yruegui (pronounced roo-LEE-ghee) and two other gentlemen started the organization about October 1981. He could not recall the exact date, nor the last names of his fellow founders. They were Doug, a psychiatrist, and Kurt, a skillful programmer who operated a small computer business, Pacific Micro, on Blackstone Avenue in Fresno. Chuck said that Kurt wrote a data base and a word processor for Commodore which were sold commercially.

UPDATE: At the April 23 meeting, we had an unexpected and very special guest. In the early days of Commodore, Kurt Madden operated a computer store in Fresno, did extensive programming work, and was one of the founders of the Fresno Commodore User Group. He had done an on-line search and found our website, but assumed it was just something “left over” and that the club no longer existed.

He decided to visit our meeting place, and to his delight and surprise, there we were. We were equally delighted to meet him and learn more about the club’s beginnings

He had a store, Micro Pacific Computer Center, in the Fig Garden Village Shopping Center, where he sold software by the ton, ran a factory-authorized Commodore repair center, and attended the big computer shows of the day, Consumer Electronic Show and Comdex.

Under the name Mirage Concepts, his company developed a Commodore word processor that was a big seller. He also produced a number of other software products. Eventually, the company went out of business and Kurt moved on to other projects.

(A Doug Waugh is mentioned in one of the early newsletters - # 6 page 5. Doug Gaither authored a review in the February 1984 issue page 3. Later newsletters mention Micro Pacific in Fig Garden Village, which could have been the correct name of the business (*it was*).)

Chuck worked for Guarantee Savings, a major banking institution in Fresno at the time. If your memories go back to the 1980s, you may recall a tall building downtown with a rotating “G” on top. The business was eventually bought by a larger company, and over the years absorbed into various other banks. What still exists of Guarantee is now under the Citibank name.

Yrlegui was a commercial real estate appraiser, and began working on software that became the first multi-user program that could support the appraisal process from start to finish. He worked on a Televideo machine, which ran on TurboDOS.

His professional obligations soon left him with no time to devote to Commodore, and he left the club after a little over a year. That first newsletter carries the name “Commodore 64 User Group.” There were soon two groups, and it’s not clear which one grew from Yrlegui’s organization. One club was 64UM; the other the Fresno Commodore User Group.

In August of 1985 the two clubs merged, taking the name Fresno Commodore User Group/64UM, but Chuck was not around to take part in this change. We sometimes have had to explain the “forum” reference, and we usually just call it by the FCUG designation.

I believe I may have patronized Pacific Micro a few times. When I first bought my Commodore, there was a store that allowed you to rent programs for a small fee to try them out, applying the rental cost to the purchase price if you decided to keep it. Probably, but not for sure, this was Pacific Micro. *(There was a store that rented programs, but it was not Kurt’s business.)*

I also tried to reach a couple of other early members. Deb Christiansen was the BBS SYSOP when I joined in 1988. Her phone rang and an answering machine asked for a message, but she did not call back.

Calls to another long-time member, Bill Gilbert, produced a “no longer in service” message.

No doubt many of the people in the club when I joined are still alive, but I have no way to contact them, and for the most part they came in a few years after the merger.

That first newsletter has no date; the first dated issue of the newsletter is December 1983, but it has no volume # or issue #. Because of this we first assumed the date of the first newsletter to be February 1983, based on the count back of ten numbered issues prior to the one from December 1983. However, I believe that something mentioned in one of the earliest newsletters made it seem that the date was more likely November 1981. There is no way to tell if newsletters are missing, but it seems likely (our collection does not include all ten of the numbered issues). At least, Chuck pretty much confirmed the 1981 start date, meaning the organization is celebrating its 40th anniversary.

