

FC=UG

"Taking Commodore Computing Into The Twenty First Century And Beyond ..."

January/February 2012



-by Lenard R. Roach

With all the things that a Commodore can do (with a little tweaking and a few attachments), one needs to ask: Why go anywhere else?

The answer to that can be found in your back pocket. That's right! It's the cost of all those attachments.

I heard an interesting term on my favorite financial show one day: Overpriced. This not only means paying too much, but also can mean making something out by way of additions, not worth the money, like a house or a computer or even a car.

Upgrading and additions can be fine and on some cases even beneficial, but when those additions bring the price of the object up beyond the average going price, then that object has become overpriced and will be difficult, if not impossible, to sell. I know of a former Commodore club member who bought a SuperCPU when it first came out for \$1200.00, but when he got out of Commodore, he wanted to recoup his money by trying to sell

his Commodore for \$1200.00, but nobody in the computer arena was going to buy a Commodore for that price. As far as I know this individual is still sitting on his machine, and still will not lower his price on his Commodore with a SuperCPU.

This is one of my worries I have with the present Commodore movement. Yes, our machine is tops and shway pimpin', but all the cool attachments that we have for it is making the computer way overpriced and nobody will be interested in buying it from us when we are ready to sell. If we continue to pimp out our machines with cooler and cooler gadgets, which is great by the way, then we are going to have to reap the crop of a machine that will not sell and when we are gone from this world our heirs will not know what to do with it and throw our investment in the junk pile.

This is why I stand, if somewhat alone, in the camp of working with a stock unit, with none of the bells and whistles that can make the computer better, stronger, and more fun at parties. Most of it is due to the costs of making it a more compatible unit, but the feat of having all my twenty five plus years of work destroyed by unknowing family members who, at my demise, don't know how to access my Commodore files without flipping this switch and attaching that peripheral. I want to make things easy for my kin when I die.

One of my instructions at my death is to sell as many of my computer items on Ebay as the family can. The family should get

about \$50 from all the Commodore hardware and software I own. I don't see how anyone can get \$2,000 or \$3,000 out of such a unit. Maybe I underestimate the power of the Internet, and maybe I'm being too practical. For all I know some in Commodore have already sold their modern attachments for double or triple the value, but in my portion of the country, these items don't fare a good value.

I hope I'm not blowing smoke on somebody's Commodore aspirations, but I just wanted to bring this opinion to the forefront and see if anyone else is having problems selling off their Commodore items. To speak for the other side, I know someone in Missouri who has built at least three different Commodore systems and sold them all on the Internet for a profit. He got tired of doing that and now uses a Commodore emulator for all of his 6-bit needs.

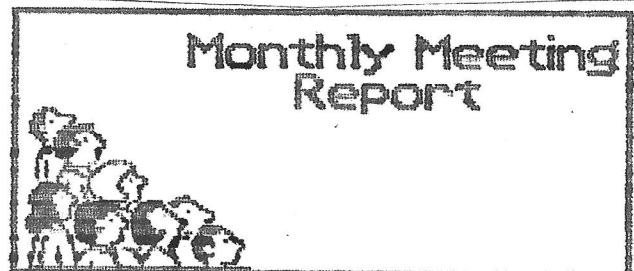
I see there is good and bad in this entire Commodore business. The only question remaining is: How will your Commodore future pan out? Where will your machine be fifty years from now? Will it be in the trash heap at the local landfill, or will it be converted to cash to help pay for your final expenses, or better yet, leave your family a financial legacy?

"Hey buddy, you're getting pretty morbid talking about death in a Commodore newsletter. What's that all about?"

Writing this segment of this article I think of our dearly departed friend David Mohr. He left a big Commodore legacy for many of us to follow, but what about the hardware and software he left behind? How did his family deal with the remaining Commodore equipment? I have no insight on that since I was not privy to be on the inside of getting his affairs in order, but from what very little I know his collection was gathered and dispersed. When you think of Commodore greats like Lord Ronin and his passing, one begins to think of one's own mortality. I myself am pushing the big five-oh and if there is any truth to what

Moses said in the Bible that the span of a man is "threescore and ten" years, then I have approximately twenty years to get my poodoo together. I have to get my financial mess cleaned up, my final arrangements taken care of, and make sure that my final wishes concerning my personal stuff is planned out for others to follow. None of us Commodore users would like to see decades of Commodore collecting go into the trash, so the best thing is to plan ahead where it should go.

But for now and the next twenty or so years, let's have some fun with our Commodores, constantly showing the computer world time and time again that yeah, a Commodore can do that, too. Nothing can thrill a user more than seeing his favorite machine, despite its age and "limitations," play catch up with the younger computers. Commodore is the computer that refuses to roll over and die like so many machines after it has done. But while we make our Commodores out to be bigger and better, let's not lose sight of what the unit used to be and, once on a while, go back to the basics (pardon the pun) of Commodore computing.



January 2012 Meeting Notes

-by Dick Estel & Robert Bernardo

We started the year with full attendance by our regulars - Brad, Roger, Robert and Dick.

Dick presented the annual financial report. Our income is limited, but so are our expenses. We took in \$116 during the year in sales, dues, and a donation, and spent a little under \$140, for a slight decrease in total assets. Major expenses were a \$50 donation to St. Jude's Hospital and the annual club dinner.

Robert and Dick reported on an

e-mail they had received from a lady who wanted to sell a bunch of equipment. Her asking prices dampened our interest considerably -- \$500 for disk drives, \$100 per software/peripherals, and \$1000 or \$2000 for the CPUs and monitors. These were still sealed in boxes -- never used... but still. Robert politely informed her that we are selling C64s for \$5 to \$10.

A new CMD hard drive clone, the Rear Admiral ThunderDrive (called a "replica" by the seller, Mytec Electronics) is available on Ebay for \$600. Back in the day, a CMD hard drive was \$539 for 1 gig of storage. The ThunderDrive is sold with 4 gigs of storage space, the maximum that HD-DOS can recognize. CMD HD-DOS is still used in the ThunderDrive.

The Vintage Computer Festival East will be held in May in New Jersey, and Robert will attend for the first time in several years. He will also attend the SC3 gaming party in Los Angeles this spring.

Some time ago Robert made a video of Roger demonstrating the HamText cartridge. This video was on Blip.TV and has now also been posted on YouTube (search for VIC 20 HamText demo).

Robert showed us a bunch of recently-acquired Commodore instruction manuals, including such rarities as the manuals for the HPP-1361 bi-directional printer and a CBM expansion memory board.

Robert brought in William Shatner's new book, "Shatner Rules", and pointed out that Shatner wrote a brief mention of his 1961 work endorsing the VIC-20.

The film crew that has been following Robert from time to time over the past three years is ready to finish up their project. They want to do some filming soon at home and at the school where Robert teaches.

A man and his young son, waiting for their pizza, stopped to look at our equipment, so Robert fired up the Multiple Classic Computer 216 gaming machine, and the youngster played antique Commodore and Amiga games for a while. The father had owned a C64 long ago (and might still have it

put away somewhere). Always recruiting, Robert invited them to our next meeting and gave them copies of the newsletter.

We finished up with some hardware activities, including opening up and running a newly-acquired CMD RAMLink and opening up a 1541 clone, the FSD-1 disk drive.

February 2012 Meeting Notes

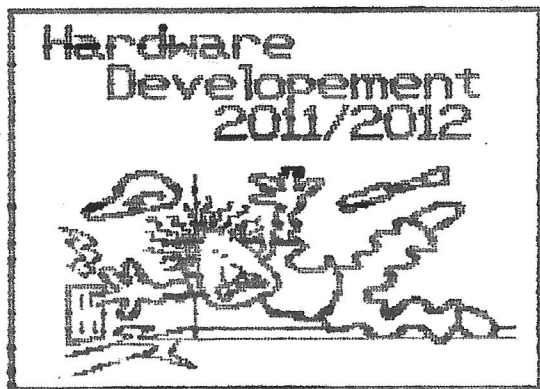
On Feb. 19 I arrived to the FUG meeting 15 minutes late. I was coming from Stockton 2 hours away, but I had not compensated for the extra time to cross Fresno and get to the Panera Bread Restaurant in Clovis. Because our usual meeting place at the Pizza Pit Restaurant was filled with a racing crowd, we had to divert to Panera Bread for this month.

Though I was late, nobody from the club was there. The restaurant was crowded, even at that time in the morning. I staked out a spot in the corner, a spot that had electrical connections and a shelf for the computer monitor. Then I waited 15 minutes. Still nobody showed up. I made a phone call to Roger; he had things to do with his brother. With no phone number for Brad, I e-mailed him. Dick was occupied in another part of the state. It looked as if the President's Day weekend was not going to be a good one for the meeting.

The restaurant became really packed now. There were no extra tables to be had, except for outside seating. Just in case any visitor were to visit, I stayed for the entire meeting time. I ordered my usual chicken noodle soup and baguette, and because it was my birthday, Panera gave me a free pastry; I got the pecan sticky bun.

I kept myself occupied by using the laptop computer, answering e-mail and cruising through the Commodore and Amiga forums on the Internet. At 1:45, I decided it was time to go. Everything that I had planned on the meeting agenda would have to wait until the March meeting.

The restaurant was a bit less crowded now. As I jumped into the car, I thought for a brief second about visiting the gaming stores and antique shops in the area, just in case they had any vintage Commodore goods. However, I decided against that, thinking that I should return back home in Visalia early and take a nap.



-By Robert Bernardo

At the end of the old year or at the beginning of the new year, I usually write an article summing up what I perceive to be the Commodore highlights of the past year and predict what will be the Commodore trends in the upcoming year. Well, this time I'm going to change the format a bit. I'm concentrating on the C= homebrew hardware developments of the past year and in the upcoming year, and as hardware developer myself, I'm commenting on them from that viewpoint.

First, a bit of background. How did I get into hardware development for the Commodore? Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, I never gave a thought about creating any bit of hardware. I bought what was available and moaned when the hardware became unavailable. I thought of hardware developers as being on a different plane, i.e., they thought differently and they knew more technically than I. I was merely an end user and I was happy as an end user.

However, the seeds of change were planted in 2000. I attended the Chicago Commodore Expo and met hardware hacker, Jeri Ellsworth, who explained to me her 24-bit

video board for the C64. There it was, a homebrew prototype, hand-soldered and hand-wired. There she was behind it, not some big, impersonal organization. A few years later the 24-bit video board became the CommodoreOne board. A few years after that, she showed me the prototype for the C64 DTV 30-games-in-one joystick. There she was behind it, and though she had the backing of the big Mammoth Toys company, it was still very much a homebrew product. I thought that if she could create such items - I attended other various computer shows, parties, and meetings, whether they were the Vintage Computer Festival, Classic Gaming Expo, the Emergency Chicagoland Commodore Convention, the Netherlands Commodore Show, MoesCon, the Cincinnati Commodore Computer Club Expo, the Monastery Party, the Amiwest Show, the Belgian Amiga Club meeting, the SC3 Arcade Party, CommVEx, or even the Atari Party. In all of them I noticed the homebrew hardware and software coming from the developers. By 2009 I was ready to jump into hardware development for Commodore computers. Though I had very bad soldering skills and analyzed boards very crudely, I could garner the help of others more skilled than I in the creation of niche products. Would these products be profitable? Would they sell? To the first question, maybe not or very little. To the second question, maybe not or very slowly. I really didn't know, but I had to try. At least, I would have the satisfaction of making a very small historical mark in the hardware development for Commodore computers, and in the process, some users would enjoy what I had produced.

The process began with the project I code-named, Mr. T. I cannot give specifics on it, because it is still hanging onto life, stuck in trying to get off the ground. First, Jeri Ellsworth had it for a year and a half, then the engineers at the Portland Commodore User Group (PDXCUG.org) had it for half a year, then I

tried to recruit CBM engineer Bill Herd who turned it down for not being practical, and then it went to an engineer from the Southern California Commodore and Amiga Network (SCCAN) who ran up against a wall in analyzing it. Thinking that the project was dead in the water, I began to think that Bill was right. However, after meeting another Silicon Valley engineer at Amiga engineer R.J. Nicale's dinner party in March, I regained hope that that engineer will be able to successfully analyze it and so start the ball rolling on a prototype.

The Mr. T project was and is very complex and ambitious. A few months after the beginning of the Mr. T project, I embarked on a smaller-scale project. It was the start of the Sound Ultimate Xpander 6400 audio digitizer board for the Commodore 64 and 128. First, Jeri Ellsworth was appraised of it. Then I got advice from an engineer in SCCAN. Finally, with the help of the engineers at PDXCUG.org, a few SUX 6400 prototypes were made. After studying the feasibility of such a device, I gave the go-ahead, and production began in May, 2011, with distribution beginning at the July 2011 CommVEx. Sales were o.k., considering the limited advertising I've done on it.

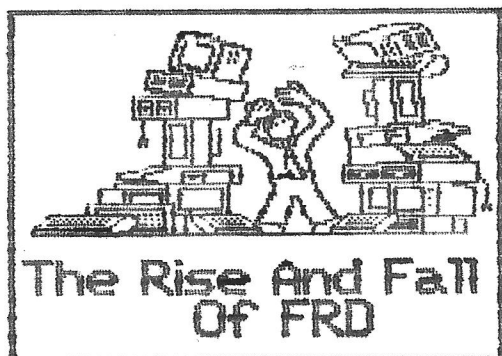
Which comes round to the topic of homebrew hardware development for the Commodore and Amiga. How inspiring it is to see such goods still being created for our classic systems! In January, 2011, there was the Amiga 1000 IDE/RAM adapter, a CompactFlash card drive built and distributed by Tom Thul. A new SID card was produced in Hungary for the Plus/4 and then diagnostic carts were released for that computer, too. Then in late 2011, Mike Hill brought out PETdisk, a SD card drive for PET computers. Also during that time, the Commodore Flyer was released, a SD card drive with network capabilities. The C128 Video DAC board was released which converts the 80-column RGB signal of the C128 to VGA. The Rear Admiral Thunderdrive, a CMD hard drive clone, was released in November. The release of the SUX

6400 hardware and its accompanying Digimaster 64 software spurred Digimaster 128 software development in 2011 and its release in January, 2012.

The hardware development trend continues for 2012. FCUG member Charles Gutman speaks of producing the Fotios Multicart (30 games) for the C64. A new multicart/ram expander for the VIC-20 is in prototype stage. An engineer in SCCAN speaks about producing a 1541/1571 specialized board which defeats disk copy protection. Mike Hill is planning a diagnostic board for PET computers. PDXCUG.org engineers are planning a new hardware release to be presented at this year's CommVEx. I, too, am planning to re-release a hardware board for the C128 just in time for CommVEx. In fact, I hope to have the PCB board built and the components bought in

April with assembly of the hardware in May and June.

The reaction to such devices? I can only speak from my experience. At the Netherlands Commodore Show in June, 2011, Gideon Zweijtzter of 1541 Ultimate fame and I spoke of hardware matters as I showed him a SUX 6400 prototype. The same thing happened as I spoke to Matthew Leaman when I visited him at his business, AmigaKit, in Cardiff, Wales. I was now a hardware developer. I was brought to their level I was now their equal and they were only too happy to give me business advice. In fact, Matthew offered to market the SUX 6400 in Europe. At CommVEx 2011, the crowd seemed happy and excited that the new SUX 6400 was released. At the Amiwest Show 2011 with my display of the SUX 6400, one Amigan came up to me and happily remarked that he couldn't believe that such hardware was still being built for classic Commodores. I conclude that with continuing homebrew development, Commodore and Amiga computers will never really die. They will live on!



the rise and fall of FRD software

a cautionary tale of how a company name can come out of nowhere (where it should have stayed)

and a report on how I won fame and made back my expenses in the Commodore industry

-by Dick Hatel

It all started when I realized there were too many GROS fonts to keep track of (or those coming late to the Commodore world, GROS was a disk-based, graphic operating system for the Commodore, which included word processing, desktop publishing and other applications).

The original GROS program came with six fonts, and later you could buy a disk with another 20 or so. Then someone developed a font editor which allowed people to create their own fonts. These were distributed in various ways - free downloads on Quantum-Link (predecessor to AOL), and often via disk from the creator.

I decided to make a sample printout of all the GROS fonts I had, so that it would be easier to select fonts for my various writing and publishing projects. For each font, I showed all letters, upper and lower case, and all additional characters. The finished product was about 15 pages, and I quickly realized it could be of help to others.

I posted a message on the GROS boards on Q-Link, offering copies of the printout for a nominal fee (enough to cover paper and postage), and had a good response (maybe five to ten requests).

I continued to buy disks and download all new fonts from Q-Link, and it was not long till I needed to print a supplement to the original document. Somewhere around this time I bestowed the name Font Resource Directory (FRD) on the project, later adding an introduction and table of contents, which listed fonts both alphabetically and numerically (each GROS font is assigned an ID number which the program uses when the font is designated).

The first section of this project got up to 66 pages, but it was a long way from done. From time to time I would offer another batch of pages as a supplement, eventually promoting them with a direct mail notice to past customers. In addition to the supplements, I added some articles on fonts by myself and others, including technical information on font numbers and how GROS uses fonts.

When I finally stopped compiling the directory, it consisted of 500 pages of fonts, alphabetical and numeric indices that ran to 22 pages each, and over 20 pages of miscellaneous font-related information.

You may have noticed that I did NOT say fame and fortune at the start of this article. I kept the prices low enough that it would not be a great burden for someone to buy the entire directory, yet still cover my expenses of copying and shipping. Over the several years the directory was available, I probably sold sections to over 200 people, and complete or nearly complete packages to somewhere between 75 and 100.

Yes, I wrote and sold a book that consisted of nothing but the alphabet over and over for more than 500 pages.

Somewhere along the way I became aware that people were offering disks of public domain programs, art and other Commodore related software. You are not supposed to sell PD material, but it is legitimate to charge a fee for copying and materials (disks, sleeves and labels). I started

putting together some disks of fonts and offered them for sale.

Since the FRD name was known in the GEOS community, I called my business FRD Software, although if I had it to do over, it would be Estel Enterprises (a generic name that lets you carry on any kind of business you want). FRD Software eventually offered disks of GEOS and other Commodore graphics, including hundreds of scanned images that I made using the Commodore HandyScanner.

A catalog I created included thumbnail graphics of my own scans, with text settings for the various fonts and other graphics. I didn't keep track of sales, but I shipped several hundred disks to the US and a half dozen other countries.

Eventually, as Commodore use declined, so did interest in my

products. At the same time I started doing more and more on a Windows machine, and further work on this project seemed pointless.

But even though FRD Software has joined many other Commodore companies in the dustbins of history, much of the software is still available somewhere. A lot of the fonts and graphics, especially Doodle and Koala, came from Q-Link, and that material is around somewhere.

I gave permission to Bruce Thomas in Canada to include all my disks on a CD-ROM that he produced, The geoSpecific Collection. Its available at <http://members.shaw.ca/cue64/CD.htm> 1. (Check out what else Bruce is up to at [http://members.shaw.ca/cue64/.](http://members.shaw.ca/cue64/))