

FC=UG

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

July/August 2011



by Lenard R. Roach

(Part One of Two)

JULY 21st

We had everything we needed packed and sitting in the living room of the Roach Hotel ready for transport to sunny Las Vegas, but we needed to pick up the car for the trip. Gabe and I drove to Overland Park where the rental company had our car ready for us, but we ran into our first snag. It would appear that the rental place only took credit cards for their down payment and all we had was a debit card. In order for them to take the debit card we had to have proof of residency by showing a recent paycheck stub and a utility bill, along with proof of insurance for our cars. We had to go back to Kansas City and get the necessary papers so we could get the rental. This put us about an hour behind schedule, but it was well worth it since we were given a 2009 Dodge Charger for the trip and we are fans of Dodge back at the Hotel.

I took the Charger while Gabe drove the Mini to my job, where Gabe was groovy enough to place his brother, who works there with me, in charge of taking care of the Mini until we get back into town. RJ gladly accepted the Mini and after a quick lunch with the team at work, we headed back to the Hotel to pack up the Charger for the long haul to Las Vegas.

Packing was a breeze since we had everything in square containers like luggage and Commodore computers, and it was a simple game of Tetris to put everything in the trunk of the car. Some equipment was placed in the back seat like software and my medicines. That is one thing I hate about getting older -- taking a pharmacy full of drugs everyday just to make it through a day. I know that if I miss a month of prescription pick up, my pharmacist sends me a get well card in the mail. At least I am missed.

We drove over to 78th and Riverview where Gabe's mom was living and let her drive the Dodge since she had always wanted to test drive a Charger. She took it onto the highway and opened it up to 90 mph on the on ramp from I-435 south to I-70 east, which the car did in a very short amount of time, like five seconds. We took her home and said our goodbyes, then hit I-70 west for the long haul down the highway to Las Vegas.

We set up a rule that when the tank got to half empty we would shop around for the best deal at the next stop. Out of the twelve stops we made for gas the highest we spent for gas was \$3.69 a

gallon, but that was only one stop. The cheapest we found was in Utah where it was \$3.39 a gallon. There was nothing really exciting that happened on the way here. We went through the Rockies and the Utah desert at night so we didn't get to see anything and western Kansas was nothing but flatland.

JULY 22nd

We were still on the road with the calendar flipped to July 22nd. We listened on Sirius Radio to mostly dance mix while Gabe drove but when it came my turn to drive we listened to the comedy channels. The road into Colorado and Utah was twisted as I tried my best at night to stay on the road through the mountains. I was a little irked that we missed the Rockies during the day shift because these mountains are so breathtakingly beautiful that a driver really needs to take a few photos of them as a souvenir. We never saw sunlight again until about 7:00 am when we were going south on I-15 heading into Las Vegas.

We hit the Las Vegas city limits about 9:30 am on Friday and went right to the convention hall at the Vegas Club Hotel in hopes that someone would be there to let us set up, but alas, we were a day early to the convention and nobody was there for us to get in. We opted then to go to the El Cortez and get settled in but alas, the maids did not have our room ready so we went into the Cortez Lounge and had some breakfast. After this we went back to the hotel desk and found our room was ready so we

hauled our luggage up to the second floor to room 2217. When we unlocked the door, I was shocked. I ordered two beds and a decently sized room but we got a single bed into what appeared to be a closet with a toilet. Gabe was cool enough to go downstairs and find out what happened and it appears that I made an error on our reservations on the Internet and got this room instead. This means that one of us will be sleeping on the floor while one got the bed. This didn't bother either of us since we slept on the floor at the

house anyway. At the Roach Hotel, the temperatures have been so hot that the only room getting cooled by our little 5,000 BTU air conditioner was the living room, so we piled ourselves in there for a comfortable sleep.

Gabe was rested enough in the car during the night hours that he went ahead on to California to pick up Hatchi, one of our team that was going to help me during the convention, while I slept in. Gabe went on while I set up the CPAP machine and quickly settled in and passed out for the rest of the day and the night.

JULY 23

I woke up to my cell phone chirping its familiar ring as I laid there, not believing that I slept the whole day and night in Las Vegas. The hotel believes in keeping the rooms extra cold so sleeping was great and since I am built like a polar bear I enjoyed the coolness. I grabbed my cell phone to shut off the ringer and saw I had one voice message. I tried to wipe the sleep from my eyes and listen to the message. "I've been arrested in California," I thought it said, but I couldn't be sure. I fumbled the best that I could to replay the message, but instead I erased it. I got up and paced the floor wondering what to do. The first thing would be to locate which jail Gabe was in, but when I called the California Highway Patrol their offices were closed until 9:00 am. I paced the floor some more, then called the local 911 and asked if they could patch me into the 911 line for California like they can in Kansas, but no such luck. I paced the floor again. One of my kids in Kansas texted me and asked how I was doing so I told them about Gabe. She thought I was joking. I called her and told her what I thought I heard and she listened. I got off the phone so she could call my son, her husband, in Kansas City, and tell him. He told Gabe's mom, and everything went nuts in Kansas City while I paced the floor in Las Vegas. All I could do till 9:00 was pray, so I did. I shot a few unnecessary swear words to

heaven asking God what is happening. Not too long after this Gabe and Hatchi came through the room door. I screamed and cried asking him what happened. He told me he was never arrested but the message said that he was going to take his time in California so he would not get arrested. I got onto the text and told everyone that I made a serious booboo and panicked the whole family for nothing. I got some hateful texts back but I didn't care. I was happy to have Gabriel back with me.

I left the El Cortez at 10:30 am to look around for the car in the parking garage. Before Gabe went to sleep I forgot to ask him where he parked the car. I walked around the parking garage twice before I found the Charger. The good news is that the El Cortez was on the west end of the Fremont Street Experience while the Las Vegas Club Hotel where the convention was, on the east end, but with all the Commodore equipment I had to haul, I decided to drive around the block to the Las Vegas Club and get into the garage (\$5 parking fee) and unload from there. But before I embarked all of the Commodore equipment I wanted to make sure the convention was open, so I got onto the parking garage elevator and went to the Left Field room of the third floor and sure enough, the convention was just getting under way. I stopped in and introduced myself and Robert Bernardo, president of the Fresno Commodore Users Group, greeted me. Dick Estel was also on hand and he took my \$10 entrance fee, but he also was interested in what I had done for Commodore over the last several years, and also he wanted to see my book. My table was next to the far wall from the door. I went back downstairs with a rolling cart and unloaded the car, then back upstairs to the convention and began set up. I was seated next to a gentleman on the left who was working with a new Amiga that has great Internet capabilities, and to my right was a gentleman who made an accelerator for the Amiga that allowed it to store information on

a small 4GB flash card instead of its bulky hard drive.

Robert introduced the CommVEx to its attendees and we milled around at the other stations looking at what people brought for demonstration. At 1:30 the first demo went on as a young man demoed how to use BASIC programming for the Commodore on a Windows based computer that also got rid of the annoying line numbering deal so a user could go right through and program great things. This program would be handy when the time the C64x comes out and a user would like to put new programs on it. Users are starting to think ahead.

Next was me at 2:30. Since nobody was scheduled to speak at 3:30 I got to speak all I wanted to for the next two hours so I covered everything I was showing from my book to all the programs I want to show, five in all. I loaded and talked about each program as to what they did and how they matter to the Commodore universe. People asked the most questions about the book and how it came about. The big point of my lecture was, "If you're not having fun doing what you do, then stop it. Enjoy. Do something you like." To check out my lecture, please contact the Fresno Commodore Users Group and ask for the DVD of my talk. Rumor has it that the entire convention will be broadcast on YouTube or similar Internet sites.

Gabe and Hatchi walked in about the time my lecture was done and told me about their oversleeping. Gabe really wanted to see my talk and missed it entirely, but he has promised to watch it once it came to the house on DVD. They looked around for a minute. Instead of allowing them to leave, and since there was a break in the activity at ComVEx, we went down to the lounge and had something to eat. We all settled on cheeseburgers since they were the cheapest thing on the menu at 9.99 each. As we ate Hatchi shared some videos he downloaded off the internet that Gabe and I have seen before, but they were the videos that you don't mind watching again and again due to their humor.

After lunch the boys and I went separate ways. They checked out the Fremont Street Experience and I went back to the convention where another attendee was demonstrating on the big screen a program that allowed the Commodore to get onto the internet. He was working on a new game to upload to the server that played like Stratego. This proved to be interesting since everything is headed for the Internet these days and the Commodore might as well follow the trend. This may increase Commodore usage throughout if the Commodore truly can do Internet things.

By the time this was over, the day's demonstrations were complete and the convention was breaking up for dinner. After this a person could either come back and play with the machines and talk or go to the hotel. I opted to go to the hotel. By now it was a little past 5:30 pm, so I texted Gabe and told him I was going back to hotel. The boys had already walked back to the hotel so all I had to do was meet them there. After this we stayed in the room and played Xbox and I sat down on the laptop to begin another segment of our adventure in Las Vegas. After dinner we all went to bed and slept till Sunday.



July 2011

-by Dick Estel & Robert Barnardo

July's meeting saw full attendance as far as our nearby members are concerned - Robert Bernardo, Roger Van Felt, Brad Strait, and Dick Estel.

We had a brief discussion of CommVEx; Robert will be heading to Las Vegas Tuesday, and everything is as ready as possible.

Robert gave a report on his recent trip to England and the

continent, including visits to the Lincoln Amiga Group and the Amiga North Thames club in England, the offices of AmigaKit.com in Wales, the Dienstagstreiff Commodore Club meeting in Germany, and the Netherlands Commodore Show.

Strictly as a tourist, he also went to Spain (where he was accosted by criminals!). +Editors Note: Surely Robert will provide us the juicy details in a Travels with Bernardo article in the near future!!

From England, Robert brought home a PET 8296-D, a rare model with a sleek, rounded look. It still needs some work to get the monitor going. The monitor and keyboard can be easily removed from the main unit for easier transportation.

August 2011

-by Dick Estel & Robert Bernardo

Once again we had the full complement of four local members for August: Robert Bernardo, Roger Van Felt, Brad Strait, and Dick Estel.

Robert gave a short report on CommVEx, which was a success financially and in all other ways. We made enough to pay more than half of next year's room rent. Robert tried to get CommVEx back to the Plaza Hotel, but other organizations have already reserved those conference rooms, so we will again be at the Las Vegas Club Hotel. Mark your calendars now: July 28 & 29, 2012.

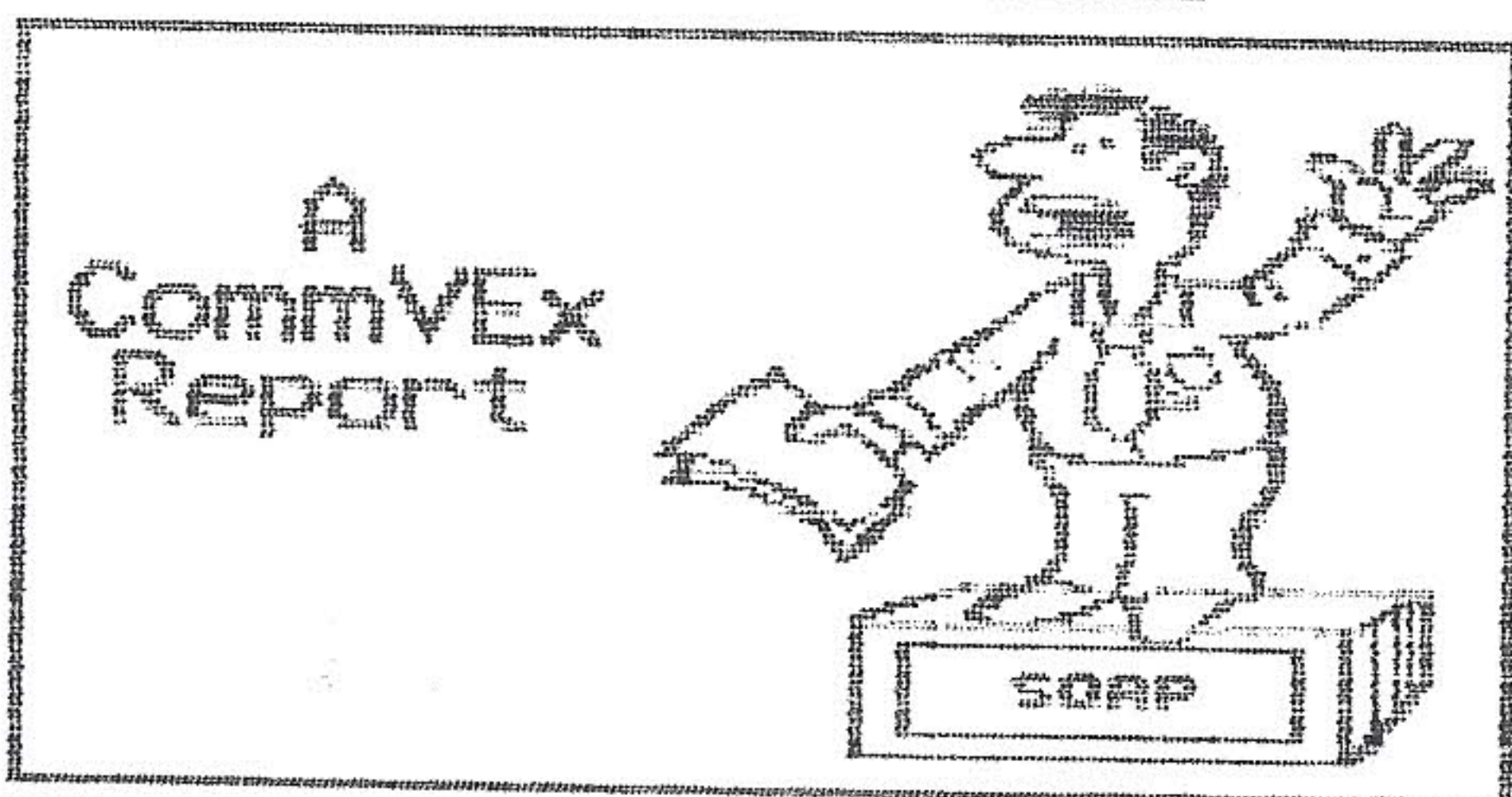
We also looked at some stuff that Robert shipped home from Europe, not having room to carry them in his luggage. This included a set of dental business programs for the PET and a PAL-version Amiga CD32.

We took a look at the Multiple Classic Computer (MCC-216), which provides emulation for Atari, Amiga and C64 games. The device uses an ordinary PC monitor and keyboard (the latter required for Commodore and Amiga games that use keyboard input).

Robert also showed the CommodoreOne (brainchild of Jeri Ellsworth) installed in a PC case. We didn't have all the hardware

needed to make it work, so we did not get to try it out. Robert also gave a partial demonstration on digital sound for the Commodore. Robert's new product, the SUX 6400 sound digitizer, sold out the first assembly run, so we could only look at the Digimaster 64 software. The Commodore elves are busy assembling another batch of the SUX 6400.

Robert reported on the Citadel Bulletin Board System (BBS) in the Turlock area, about 90 minutes north of Fresno. This may be the only dial-up BBS in California. An on-line listing at <http://cbbsoutpost.servebbs.com/> has 18 active boards; only one of them is dial-up, which is the Citadel BBS at 209 845-2641.



-by Dick Estel

It was the best CommVEx ever; it was the worst CommVEx ever.

But before I get to that, a brief preface. This report will focus on the backstage and off stage aspects of the event, and the human interaction. For those interested in classic computers, the demonstrations presented, and the more technical aspects of the event, you can visit the 2011 Las Vegas Commodore Expo page. You can read about the beginnings of this event and previous shows by clicking on the various Las Vegas Expo links at the bottom of this page. For additional photos of previous events, go to the 2010 page and click on the links at the bottom for the desired year.

On July 22, 2011, I set off for Las Vegas for the 7th annual Commodore Las Vegas Expo. The weather has been unusually cool in the Fresno area this summer, but Las Vegas temperatures were

predicted to be above 100. No worries - we spend most of our time indoors anyway.

After the usual trip south to Bakersfield on CA 99 and east on CA 58, with a lunch stop in Tehachapi, I arrived at the hotel a little after 4. There is a 20 million dollar renovation going on at our usual location, the Plaza, so we were across the street at the Las Vegas Club Hotel.

After getting checked in at the inefficient registration desk, and resolving a parking misunderstanding, I met up with Vegas Expo founder and director Robert Bernardo, and his right hand man Larry Anderson (I am his left hand man). They had already brought in the equipment that is provided by the local Commodore club, and were well on the way to getting things set up.

The usual group of four or five early birds were there, some setting up equipment for demonstrations, or products for sale, and some just getting an early start playing with their favorite toys, vintage Commodore and Amiga computers.

Even before finding Robert and Larry, I had said hello in the halls to Greg Alekel and a couple of other guys from Portland, who were in the room by the time we got there. We were soon joined by Yul Haasmann, a Las Vegas resident who has been a regular at CommVEx from the start. Once we got things mostly ready for the show the next day, we left Larry to guard the room while Robert, Yul and I went to dinner at the Golden Gate Casino, where I had an above average club sandwich. Yul moved to Las Vegas from Maine, so we discussed the shock of such a major climate change.

Yul also demonstrated his gambling method, which is to put into a slot machine no more than a one dollar bill. If he wins, he cashes out and walks away; if he loses, he walks away, having lost only a dollar. (By the way, every Vegas resident I've talked to who gambles has a secret method, not for winning big, but to avoid losing big.)

Although the hard-core Commodore enthusiasts tend to hang around the meeting room fairly late, I was hoping to get to bed at a reasonable hour to rest up from my 8-hour, 400-mile journey. Sadly, this was not to be. The Club hotel is located on Fremont Street, which has become an open air entertainment venue. This includes a screen that is stretched above the street for a full city block, on which movies or any other images can be projected. Down on the sidewalk there are a couple of outdoor stages, and one of them had a very loud rock band playing every night. The music did not stop till 2 a.m., and I was unable to sleep. This experience was repeated Saturday and Sunday night, although the noise ended at 1 a.m. Sunday. Even so, I went three days without enough sleep, and was only able to sneak in a very brief nap a couple of times during the day.

I had booked the hotel through hotels.com, and I was happy with the price, the ease of booking, and even the hotel itself in general. However, when I received an Email asking me to rate my experience, I let it be known that because of the loud music, this was my first and last time to stay at this particular hotel. So that explains "the worst."

The next morning Robert had the room opened at 8 a.m., and I arrived around 9 to help finish setting up. During this time I had the pleasure of meeting for the first time Lenard Roach, who is the editor of our club newsletter (Fresno Commodore User Group). It might seem strange that I attend virtually every meeting and had not met the newsletter editor, but it's easily explained by the fact that he lives in Kansas City KS. He attended CommVEx a couple of years ago when I was absent, so I was glad to finally meet him. Lenard has also produced a book compiling some of his best writings about the Commodore, Run/Stop - Restore, available at Amazon.

We had a good talk about writing, and he also showed me his updated version of a checkbook program that I believe he wrote about 15 or 20 years ago. It needed

a few tweaks, especially the Y2K issue, since the original program only accepted a two digit year, and when it saw 00, it just stopped working. I asked if he had to make a lot of changes; however, it was not the number of changes, but the need to carefully review every line of code for any date references that needed to be changed.

It was also fun to again see Jeff Krantz and his son Connor, Las Vegas residents and regulars. I first met them in 2000 when Connor was seven, so he's now 12, and we've sort of watched him grow up, at least one day a year. He and Jeff are both enthusiastic Commodore users, and usually try to win a new item of hardware that they don't already have. Connor is also our official ticket puller each year, and even at the jaded age of 12, has not lost his eagerness to help out with this task.

This barely scratches the surface of reporting on the various people I enjoyed talking with, but any attempt to list everyone will fall short due to the difficulty of digging out memories from my sleep-deprived mind. So I'll just say that with 22 people in attendance, I'd happily have dinner with all or any of them any time.

Once the show got under way, it was the usual mix of demonstrations, looking at stuff, informal discussions, and door prize and raffle drawings. Entrance in the door prize drawing is automatic with the entry fee, and although I say I don't need or want anything, I won a few prizes. For the door prizes, one choice was a sheet of customized stamps picturing Jeri Ellsworth, a well-known hardware developer in the Commodore world, and I figured stamps are equally good no matter whose picture they show.

I no longer own a Commodore computer, so despite being a member of a user group, I am what one fellow club member described as "a user in name only." Still, I enjoy seeing what new developments are taking place for this supposedly obsolete machine, and I especially enjoy meeting and talking with the wide variety of people who gather

for this event. Thinking maybe I should have a Commodore, I also entered the raffle for one of the "big" prizes, an SX64 Commodore, which was an early "portable," or more accurately, a "luggable." I also tried for this prize last year, and met defeat with a mixture of disappointment and relief both times.

The next day I took a different approach to the raffle, putting my ticket in for an IBM PC that one of our attendees had donated, and this time I won. Of course, I don't have a place to put a second PC, but surely it will come in handy somehow.

At the end of Saturday's activities, a large group of us went to dinner at the Main Street Station, which has become our traditional Saturday buffet dinner location. This is a typical casino buffet, with various food choices (Mexican, oriental, American), and a large and very tempting dessert section. This is usually my downfall, and I had a piece of carrot cake plus some ice cream.

Although Sunday's program is similar to Saturday's, there is a looseness and maybe a bit of goofiness that creeps in and makes it even more fun (how else can you explain this picture?). By Sunday afternoon everyone has had too much Vegas and not enough sleep; everyone has become a little more comfortable with everyone else, and it takes on the atmosphere of a bunch of friends discussing a common interest, rather than a formal show.

Sunday night's dinner involved eight of us going to the California Hotel dining room, a sit down restaurant, where I had a fantastic fried chicken dinner (although their salad bar is about the lamest such facility I've ever seen, with very limited selection). The conversation ranged far and wide, including a discussion of "handedness" (left vs. right).

Issues covered included whether you can brush your teeth with either hand (some said no, some said yes, one said "I'm ambidextrous"), and the long-standing custom of cutting meat with the right hand, then switching the fork from left to

right to take a bite (works better for lefties).

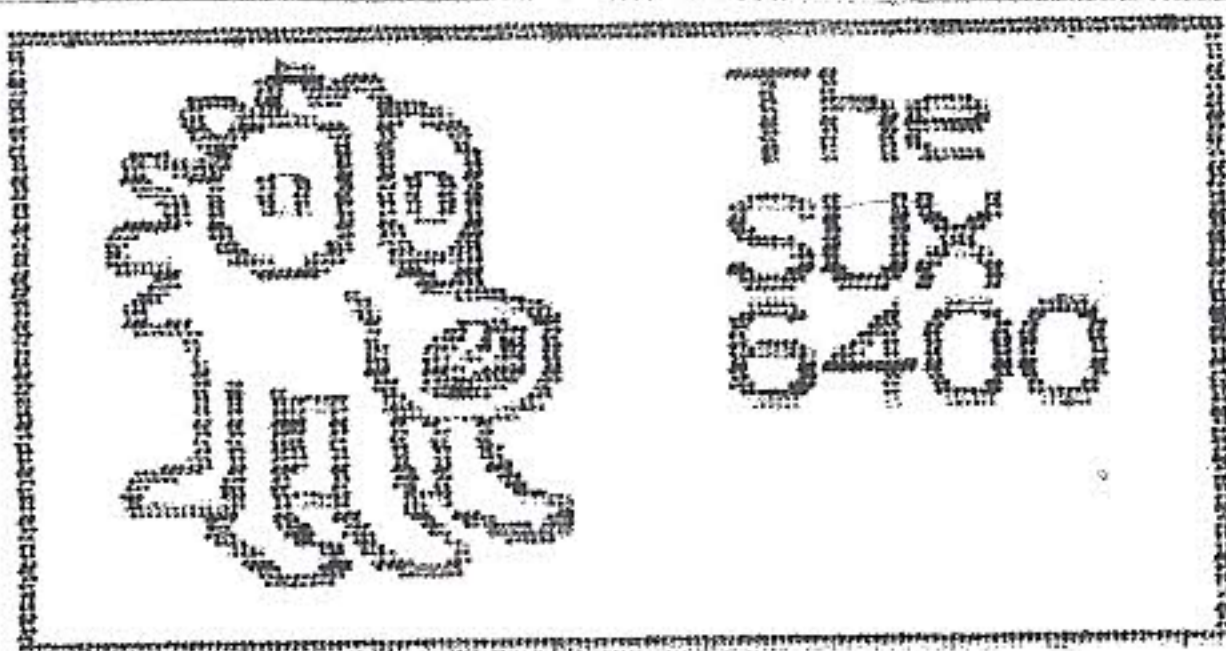
We also talked about gambling and the odds of winning and losing, including one man's attempts to convince his young grandson that putting quarters in a claw machine is just gambling for kids, with odds of winning no better than a casino.

When we left the restaurant we somehow got separated into two groups, and I have not yet found out what the first group did. The rest of us were heading toward Fremont street, planning to catch up with the others, but got distracted by a presentation of 80s rock hits featuring about ten attractive young people in tight outfits singing and dancing. Although it was way too loud, I recognized most of the songs and enjoyed several of them. After that it was off to my hotel room, to read until the music stopped and I could get to sleep.

So - why the best? Meeting Lenard for the first time, watching Connor grow, the non-Commodore dinner conversation (nothing wrong with the Commodore part either), finding out what people I met at earlier shows are up to today, and not losing more than \$21 in the slot machines.

The next day (Monday), I got started home about 9:30, but took nine hours including a lunch stop in Barstow and a traffic jam in Bakersfield. Robert and the Andersons had to return equipment to the Las Vegas club, so didn't leave for a few more hours. Their destination was Stockton, which they reached about 10:45 p.m.

There's always a bit of concern planning the coming year's event...will we get enough people to cover the costs? Some money comes from sales of Commodore hardware and software during the year, but the biggest source of financing is admission and the raffle. Fortunately this year's event income was enough to cover remaining costs, and provide around half of next year's funding, so CommVEx 2012, number eight, will be back next July, and back at the Plaza, where perhaps I'll be able to get some sleep at night.



-by Robert Bernardo

On July 24, 2011, at the Commodore Vegas Expo v7, the Sound Ultimate Xpander 6400 (SUX 6400) and its Digimaster 64 software made their premiere. Developed after hours and hours of work, the SUX 6400 is a new audio digitizer cartridge produced by the Fresno Commodore User Group and PDXCUG.org. From Chris Brenner of Autumn Technologies, Digimaster 64 is a re-release of his audio-digitizing and editing program.

The SUX 6400 with Digimaster 64 make up the most sophisticated audio digitizing hardware and software ever made for the Commodore 64 and the Commodore 128 (in C64 mode). With the SUX 6400 and Digimaster 64, you can capture audio into the Commodore and play back the recording - all in 8-bit sound quality. You can use the recording in your own programs. Full documentation is included.

The SUX 6400 / Digimaster 64 package has the following:

1. the SUX 6400 audio digitizer
2. a "flippy", two-sided disk with Digimaster 64 software
3. the Digimaster CD disc
4. a quick-start sheet of instructions

Below is Chris Brenner's original description of Digimaster 64.

Digimaster is a unique software product which allows you to process digital audio on your Commodore 64.

This advanced software utilizes a fully graphical interface with pull-down menus. Incorporated into its operation are

many powerful features, such as Cut, Copy, and Paste, which makes editing sound as easy as editing text in a word processor. Using an optional audio digitizer (like the Sound Ultimate Xpander 6400), live sound can be grabbed into the computer, edited, and then saved to disk. There is even a utility included which will convert Amiga sound samples, giving you access to a vast library of sounds.

Probably the most impressive feature of this software is its ability to replay sounds in true eight-bit digital audio on your Commodore 64 without the need for extra hardware. This is made possible by a revolutionary method of controlling the sound chip inside the Commodore 64. The result is crystal clear audio reproduction.

Digimaster Features:

Fully graphical interface

Many powerful editing functions

Ability to replay sounds in true eight-bit digital audio without the need for extra hardware

Included software which allows replaying sounds from your own programs

Requirements:

Commodore 64 computer

Commodore 1541 or compatible disk drive

Joystick or mouse (mouse highly recommended)

Photos of the SUX 6400 and its production can be found throughout <http://retro-link.blogspot.com>

The SUX 6400 / Digimaster 64 package is priced at \$22 without a cartridge case or \$25 with a case. Within the U.S., shipping is via U.S. Priority Mail flat rate for \$5.20. For other countries, shipping rates are to be determined. Send a check or money order to the:

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502 Whitney Lane

Visalia, California 93277-1940

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Payment by PayPal is
available; send an e-mail for more
information on that payment option.