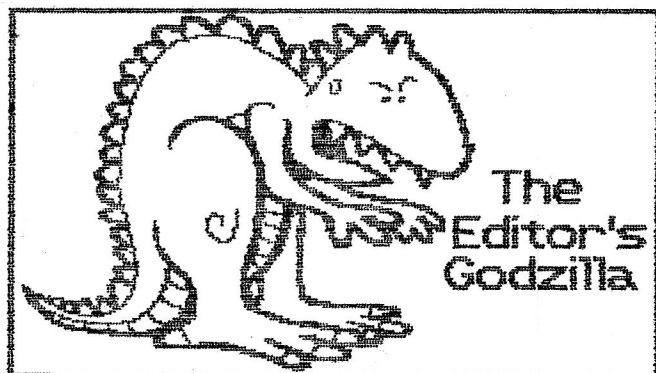


# FC=UG

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

July/August 2012



-by Lenard R. Roach

I walked into hell when I got home from CommVEx, but before I get into that, let me get into CommVEx itself...

Nobody believed that my 97 Pokeball colored Neon would make the trip to Las Vegas, let alone make it home. Many predicted I would be stranded on some lone Arizona highway with no help and no hope. As we left for CommVEx, I also had my doubts as those negative comments worked on my faith in my old car, but too many people gave up a lot to come with me to Vegas, so I pushed all that negativity behind me and six people in two cars headed out to the Commodore convention on Thursday, July 26th.

Gabriel, my wise and mechanically inclined son, set it up so that we would stop every two to four hours for bathroom, food, fuel, oil (if needed), and let the engines cool. Sometimes we also slept as the constant driving took a toll on all of those who drove. My plan of "one drives for eight hours" while the others slept fell apart immediately as we tried to

play catch up on past events. I haven't seen Tim and Anne for years and we had so much to talk about; before I knew it, we were deep into Colorado and night was falling. The only trouble we had was in Utah as the Neon got a nail in the tire and we had to boogie to the closest town and get it patched, but we made it into Las Vegas at 6:00 pm Friday just in time for set up, dinner at the local golden arches, and bed.

I won't get into too much detail about CommVEx itself since Dick Estel did a superb job in his article; all I will say is that the convention gets better and better each year. This was the best convention so far and my guests in the Neon definitely want to come back next year. I had the best sales I've ever had at a convention but since I am putting my Commodore work into a "hobby" platform, I don't think I will be able to top this year's sales record. I will still be writing, but I will focus on more profitable markets.

Leaving Las Vegas, we decided to take the I-40 southern route while Gabriel's team went home back through the Rockies. This is what we should have done since the GPS took us off I-40 in Albuquerque and onto US-54 to Larned, KS. The bad bridges and potholes on this route through both the Texas and Oklahoma panhandles started to tear up the Neon's suspension and the right front tire, but the complete damage would not be revealed until the Neon got home and Gabe could examine it more thoroughly. Yes, the Neon made the trip to and from Las Vegas, much to the surprise of everyone who doubted her ability,

but upon looking at her after the trip, she suffered from a torn up right tie rod end and the steel belts in the right front tire shredded from the inside. Thanks to Gabe's skill as a mechanic, it only cost \$34 for the part and we had a spare tire in the garage that fit the rim of the Neon.

Now that was the best news...

Since sales were so good at CommVEx, I had to take orders for those who wanted my books and software. It was going to be simple: Next payday I was going to make the order and ship the following week.

Then the joblessness set in...

Like a cyclone, we were informed to close our at 10 pm the Friday after my return from CommVEx instead of midnight like usual. As time progressed, the store I worked at began to be cut back on hours and supplies, getting to a point where we quickly ran out of our major selling items and within a week the store was a ghost town. I was placed in a "part time" mode until further notice.

To make matters worse, I forgot to calculate a bill coming in on automatic draft that came at the end of July during CommVEx so the monies I figured for the trip was cut in half. I didn't understand what was going on. I thought I had everything planned out to the penny, but this auto draft and my partial employment status was not well figured. I was always told to be prepared for such emergencies because these evils are bound to come upon a person. I thought I was doing good, but I wasn't prepared for such a major hiccup in my life. Two months before CommVEx I lost my day job and was advised to cancel the trip, but to keep my word to my guests and to not lose out on any possible sales at the convention, I went anyway figuring I could recoup any losses from work; now work has failed me. This whole "no work" scenario reminds me of the 80s when we were a struggling couple fresh off our honeymoon when the economy collapsed and I was a man without a job and a baby on the way.

Please don't take this as a "woe is me" crying article. This is just what I came home to after CommVEx. The Roach Hotel is at general alert as we try to scramble and begin the long road to recovery. I guess the American economic collapse has finally hit home, but rather than ask for a government bailout, we are going to get back to work as soon as possible.

What are we doing for our Commodore customers: Right now I have reached into my personal book collection and found two copies of my book to mail off to my two prepaying customers - one hardbound and one softbound. I will mailing those off at the end of the first full week of September. My two software customers I can work up disks and get them mailed off at about the same time.

As for money I am working on my days off (which are a lot since I now weekends only at evening job) and thankfully I may have found something. I trained for a week but they still have yet to call me into active duty. Gabe says to cut them loose but I'm going to wait and see if I get called; if nothing in a week then I walk.

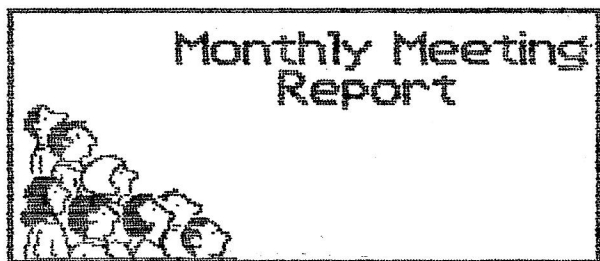
Okay, back to Commodore: What's next for it at the Roach Hotel? Well, in my Commodore closet located in the old computer room there are three Commodore game construction sets: Shoot 'em up, pinball, and adventure - I may even have a racing construction set. I may try and break these out and see if I can try and build something to have for my Commodore friends.

Writing: I will be focusing more on getting a product that will make a massive sale and get me out of the rat race of working day and night for "the man". I don't mind it, but I'm a year shy from fifty and I need to start thinking about finding another form of income since the media still says there will be no Medicare or Social Security by the time I reach 65.

CommVEx 2013: I am committed to go at this time and I will be saving up for such an event. In

fact, I would like to go to the Emergency Chicagoland Commodore convention in September 2013, but I have Christmas and about a dozen birthdays and anniversaries to cover between now and July 2013; I also will not be taking the Neon, but I will be working in getting the big 2004 Chevy Express road worthy and using it to go to Las Vegas, but where will I park such a beast? There were not many maxi vans in Vegas when I was there.

I will leave everything else (which isn't much) for the next issue. Please feel free to peruse the rest of the newsletter and enjoy the rest of the Commodore information. Be sure to check out the various websites presenting this year's CommVEx on the Internet.



#### FCUG Meeting Report - July 2012

-by Dick Estel & Robert Bernardo

We had a good turnout for the July meeting, with Robert, Roger, Louie and Dick in attendance, while Brad was out-of-town.

Robert handed out newsletter for January-February, March-April, and May-June, bringing us up-to-date for the first time in quite a while. Although our editor has bemoaned falling behind, we have nothing but the greatest appreciation for his efforts, especially having to do everything "long-distance."

With CommVEx v8.0 just weeks away, the hotel has been pitching knuckleballs and nasty sliders to Robert. First, they asked him to approve a move to the Plaza Hotel, but in a different room, one whose features are completely unknown to us. Then they said they would have to charge extra because we were setting up a large number of computers.

Robert stood tall at the plate and fought off both pitches, and CommVex remains at the Las Vegas Club. He also explained the low power requirement of our machines, so they withdrew their threat to charge extra for "excessive" electrical use.

Goodies and prizes at the event will include T-shirts or posters with the Jackbusters graphic that was worn by Commodore engineers back in the day; see <http://www.dickestel.com/images/expo1048.jpg> (Unfortunately, those t-shirts/posters weren't ready by CommVEx time.) We'll also have the annual specially-label wine - this year a Jack Daniels-style label will honor the late Jack Tramiel.

Also at CommVEx a brand new C64 game and three hardware prototypes will be introduced. And a special guest will be Jim Drew, creator of one of the first copy programs that could back up protected disks.

Our demos included Drew's program, Gemini 2.0, a copying program from 1984, and CCI Submarine Warfare from 1981. The program, by Clockwork Computers,

had a version which ran on the PET and a version for the C64; we had the C64 version.

Robert brought in a pair of Haitex 3D glasses for the Amiga, originally released in 1988, which he bought on eBay for a large sum (over \$100). Although the Space Spuds game and various still pictures we had to look at was fairly simple, the 3-D effect was reasonably good as long as you sat directly in front of the middle of the screen.

Finally we looked at an old-school graphic demo, complete with scrolling greetings, and Media Player 128. Regrettably this program, downloaded from the Internet, did not include the actual media files that were supposed to come with it - they have to be downloaded separately. Look for this one again at a future meeting.

We also discussed finding a new meeting place. Although the food and service are as great as ever, the new owner did some

remodeling that covered up the outlet that we normally use. This required us to string an extension cord across the floor, creating a serious safety issue. We have also grown weary of the loud jukebox, loud TV, and loud patrons at the liquor store next door.

Before the meeting Dick had scouted three possible locations a pizza parlor in Clovis (the best tables to use were right next to the game machines); El Bajio, a place we've met before, but which closed down over a year ago (still closed), and Bobby Salazars Mexican restaurant, which seemed ideal.

After the meeting we all headed to Salazars, just up the street from our present location, to look it over. We were immediately impressed with the fact that the air conditioning works. The room that is available is larger than we need, but is almost never in use Sunday mornings, so they were happy to schedule it for us. There are speakers from the restaurants muzak system, but they can be turned off, and curtains partially cover the door. In short, it's a major step up, and we will give it a try in August, and make

#### FCUG Meeting Report August 2012

-by Robert Bernardo & Dick Estel

As we moved to a new location, we had almost 100% local attendance, plus a guest. The Valley regulars included Roger Van Pelt, Robert Bernardo, Dick Estel, Louis Mazzei, and his son Vincent, our newest member. Joining us from the Netherlands was Daniel Strang.

Daniel is a former U.S. citizen who now lives and works in the Netherlands, where he teaches music. He brought an SX-64 and a Windows laptop, and showed us some of the programs he has written or uses in his work. Daniel discussed a project he's been working on for some time, a musical keyboard, which includes eight SID chips in an old organ keyboard. Eventually he plans to write software for it so that it can become a

synthesizer. The keyboard is run by a Commodore 64 from the cartridge port.

He also showed a program that he wrote to display altered character sets which are used by music programs. These sets are altered so that they can depict musical notes. Each note consists of several of the altered characters. Daniels program can find these sets in the program code and display them so that you can see the actual notes. They can also be edited and resaved.

Finally, he displayed a program that composes music according to the rules of three part harmony, and which is used by students in music conservatories to prepare their assignments. While a graduate student in Colorado, Daniel started to write a program which demonstrates the process. It displays the results as it searches for solutions according to the rules but using the random function so that each song is different.

Meanwhile, Vincent played with drawing programs on the Amiga 3000 which was borrowed from Richard Hough of Tulare.

Robert reported on plans for next year's CommVEx. We have reserved the same location, the Left Field Room at the Las Vegas Club Hotel, July 27 and 28, 2013. The cost has gone up about \$200.

Robert will attend the AmiWest show in Sacramento in October. This event will be at a new location due to scheduling conflicts.

Our new meeting location proved to be everything we had hoped - cool, quiet and roomy. It looked a bit like a mini-CommVEx, with six systems set up and plenty of tables available. One of the systems was Robert's CommodoreOne in a tower. On bootup, this version allows you a choice of several different platforms. The tower has a nice hole where there should be a disk drive, and Robert swears a 1541-II will go in there soon.





-by Andrew Fisher, Retro Gamer Magazine

(Andrew Fisher, writer for Retro Gamer magazine, recently conducted an e-mail interview with Robert Bernardo for a future Retro Gamer article. What follows are the unedited Fisher questions and Bernardo answers.)

> When did you first get a Commodore 64?

I have my receipt some place in the house. I think it was August 4, 1983. I did not get it in 1982, because the price was too high. Back in those days, I only had a salary of about \$500 a month, and \$125 of that went to rent for my apartment. When the C64 price went to \$199.95, not including California tax, I went to the big electronics dealer in Stockton, Federated Electronics, and bought it there, because there was also a deal that you would get the Cassette Bonus Pack or Disk Bonus Pack with the purchase. They had run out of the packs, and I would have to come back when they would be restocked. I came back months later when the packs had been restocked, and I had to argue with the employees that I was owed a bonus pack, but I finally did receive it.

I was very excited to get the C64. I read and reread the manual that came with it and typed in all the BASIC programs that came in that book. Unfortunately, I did not have a way to save any of those programs. A Commodore Datasette would cost \$40, and a Commodore 1541 disk drive would be too

expensive, especially after having spent money on the C64 itself.

It was not until September that I bought a datasette but not the CBM one; it was an aftermarket datasette which sold at \$30. I used that datasette until 1985 when I then got into disk drives.

> Why do you think it was so popular?

It was a combination of its relatively low price, its competent and even superior abilities, and its widespread support by hardware and software producers, not to mention the support by millions of users and hundreds of user groups. It was a "perfect storm" of circumstances that shot Commodore well ahead of any of the other home computers of the era.

> What were your favourite moments using a C64?

My favorite moments were when I discovered a new use for the C64 or when I became proficient in using a new or even veteran program. My first peripheral to buy after the datasette was a daisywheel typewriter/printer. I didn't want the 1525 printer with its awful print quality. I wanted letter quality, and at a local catalog store, I bought a Royal Alpha typewriter, which I still have. It had a parallel port, and I mail-ordered for the optional parallel printer cable with type-in program for the C64. After I typed in that program and ran it, I was able to use my first word processor, Totl. Text 2.0, which I loaded from cassette. What a wonder to use a word processor instead of a typewriter!

Another favorite moment was the first time to use a disk drive with the Commodore. My first disk drive was not a separate 1541 or 1571 but the internal 1541 in a SX-64 transportable computer. The programs loaded and saved so fast, in comparison to a tape drive.

Another moment... playing a good strategy game, like Strike

Fleet Simulator from Electronic Arts. When the alarm sounded that a missile was fired at my ship, I would jump. The game was intense, and I played many hours on it.

As mentioned above, if I found new use for the C64, that would be a favorite moment. One use was to have the C64 capture images through a video digitizer. I used the Video Byte II, which I thought was the best video digitizer cartridge, because its software was relatively fast in scanning an image, and then I could print out the image in black-and-white or in 4 colors with appropriate printer. My students at school and I had a lot of fun capturing and printing out images.

> What did you feel when Commodore went bankrupt?

Though I was sad, I was not heartbroken. Commodore Business Machines never really supported the users that well. When the Amiga computer came out in 1985, many users were worried about CBM's commitment to its 8-bit computer line. At the 1986 World of Commodore Show at the Disneyland Hotel in Anaheim (Los Angeles area), California, I went up to the CBM booth there and asked one of the representatives whether the Commodore 128 would continued to be produced. In other words, would the Amiga kill off the top of the Commodore 8-bit line? In a huffy tone of voice, the CBM representative said that the C128 would continue to be produced, that CBM support for the machine would not end. Of course, we know that CBM did end the C128 a few years later.

CBM went bankrupt in 1994. The last C64 was produced in 1992. Without CBM, the home of the C64 was gone -- the engineers were dispersed, the facilities closed as evidenced in CBM engineer Dave Haynie's video, "Deathbed Vigil". What was a vitally alive company in the late 1970's and then in the 1980's was now no more. It was sad that there would be no more developments coming out of this company.

> What would you change about the machine?

I had high hopes for the production of the C65, the proposed successor to the C64. I remember excitedly talking to my friends about it and showing them magazines that reported on it. I loved the improvements it would have over the C64 - faster processor, more memory, stereo SIDs, more screen colors, more screen resolutions, and built-in disk drive. And it would have backwards compatibility with the C64. I would have bought one. Alas, it was never meant to be. When the Grapevine Group in New York state started advertising that they had C65s for sale, I called them up but was told that they sold out. Little did I know at the time that those were C65 prototypes.

> You have travelled extensively to support the C64, what was your favourite event or meeting?

Though I am partial to the Commodore Vegas Expo, I find that traveling to Europe to find Commodore is always exciting. Currently, my favorite show to attend is the Netherlands Commodore Show, which is held every two months. It has a good mix of users, and there is always lots of new things to learn there, new friends to make, and old friends to see again, plus plenty of hardware and software to see, try, and buy.

In the 1980's, my favorite events were the World of Commodore Shows in California. Held in either the Los Angeles area or the San Francisco area, thousands and thousands would attend those shows when the C64 was at the height of its popularity. It was a bit overwhelming to be among all those people and all those hundreds of vendors, but I loved it.

A bit more recently, another favorite past event was the Monastery Party 2005. I went to the Czech Republic for that and found a group of dedicated Czech

and Polish coders who welcomed me into their midst. It was held in a former monastery, and we camped out in the building while playing and coding Commodore. Then in 2008 I went to the island of Rhodes in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea in order to attend Amigathering IX. There I found dedicated Greek users who were deep into C64 and Amiga, and once again I was welcomed into their midst. And the old town of Rhodes... what a party place at night! The narrow streets were crowded late at night and early into morning with people going to clubs, bars, restaurants, and discos.

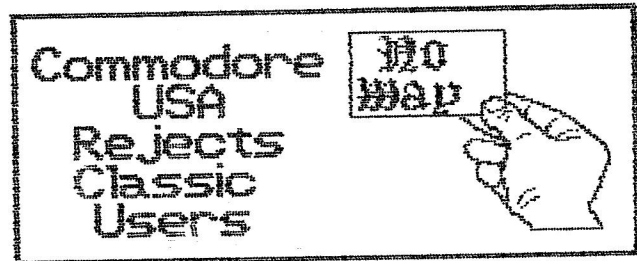
> Are you happy that there is still so much interest worldwide in the C64?

I'm happy that I can find current users, potential users, and former users of the C64. For current users, I try to lead them to available resources. For potential users, I try to show that the C64 qualities that made it such a great home computer back in the day are still useful in this day and age. For former users, I urge them to get back into C64dom by hauling their machines out of the closet or by at least using C64 emulators.

I'm happy that people are still producing hardware and software for the C64. In fact, ordinary people are incredulous that new hardware and software, homebrew items, are being produced for a 30-year old machine. Last year I became a hardware producer for the C64; I came out with the Sound Ultimate Xpander 6400 - the SUX 6400 - an audio digitizer board. I brought that board to the Amiwest Show 2011 and set it out on a table. An Amiga computer user looked at it and asked for details. I gave him all the information on how it was developed and how it was supposed to be used with the sound sampler program, Digimaster. He was quite amazed that such a thing would be developed in this day and age for a Commodore 8-bit computer. I'm sure he would be even more amazed at such things like the 1541

Ultimate SD-card drive.

With such activity, the C64 won't die. In our Fresno Commodore User Group newsletter, the motto says, "Taking 8-bits into the 21st Century". I guess that is my mission to take the C64 onward into the 21st century.



-by Robert Bernardo

Back in February, I received an e-mail of inquiry from Leo Nigro, Chief Technology Officer of Commodore USA, the new company which now owns the Commodore and Amiga trademarks. It was quite a surprise to receive such a message, because for the last 2 CommVExes, I asked CommodoreUSA to support our show but received no response from them.

Here is the message from Leo: "We are thinking of having a large presence at the Convex 2012 show in Las Vegas. Are you the show organizer? We may even consider some sort of sponsorship.

Would you kindly provide us with the relevant show information. I am also wondering what kind of attendance numbers you get?"

Let me analyze that e-mail. First, he makes no mention of my previous attempts to contact the company. Interesting. Then he goes on to say that his company wants to have a major presence at CommVEx. Great news. Then he says that his company might even sponsor CommVEx. Fantastic news. He asks for CommVEx information. No problem. However, the end of the e-mail message is not encouraging. He asks for the number of attendees at our show.

Here is my response to him: Thank you for contacting us. For the last couple of years, we have wanted a Commodore USA presence at our show.

> Are you the show organizer?

Yes, I am.

> We may even consider some sort of sponsorship.

That is very kind and would be much appreciated.

> Would you kindly provide us with the relevant show information?

You can find information about the show at:

<http://www.portcommodore.com/commve>  
x

and at the forum at:

<http://www.commodore.ca/forum/viewforum.php?f=6&sid=94dbfa46a50c2be76720d1d15f071c0e>

> I am also wondering what kind of attendance numbers you get?

We are always looking for ways to grow the show. Currently, we seem to be the only Commodore/Amiga show left in the United States. (The Amiwest Show set later in the year is Amiga only.) Attendance at CommVEx has reached as high as 54 attendees, and presently we are averaging 25-35 attendees each year, which is roughly half the attendance of the Amiwest Show. We make up for the attendance numbers by posting videos of all the CommVEx presentations we have at Blip.tv and at YouTube.com. CommVEx presentations cover software and hardware, whether classic or newly-released. We advertise CommVEx and our posted videos on almost all the Commodore and Amiga mailing lists, forums, newsgroups, and news sites.

I expected a prompt reply. Well, maybe that was asking too much. I waited a week. The week turned into a month. After that I gave up on any kind of support from CommodoreUSA.

In April this message thread opened up at <http://www.amiga.org>, the title of the thread being, Amiga.org Exclusive Interview with the CEO of CommodoreUSA, questions

to be answered by Barry Altman, CEO of CommodoreUSA. Ah, this was my chance to have a response from CommodoreUSA in regards to CommVEx.

Here was the question I posed at Amiga.org:

What is your company doing to support the Commodore and Amiga scene? For example, on March 7, I received an e-mail from Leo Nigro, Chief Technology Officer of Commodore USA, who sent an inquiry of your company's involvement in the Commodore Vegas Expo. I immediately sent a reply, saying that we are open to what you have to offer. To this date, I have not had any further response from your company.

A small question. A question which did not insult the company and bore no malice but one that required an answer.

Several days later, Barry posted his answers to pertinent questions placed at that thread. Some of his responses answered several questions at the same time. In regards, to CommVEx, he couched his answer in general terms, not mentioning CommVEx at all. In fact, my specific question above was rewritten into a general question:

Do you have any plans to attend any Amiga shows to demo your products?

And here was his answer:

"Unfortunately, no. I was actually excited to do that, until I discovered the attendance at various Commodore and Amiga shows was rather poor, making it hard to justify the expense. We would rather create our own Commodore show in more easily accessible and populated regions, or perhaps as an adjunct to a major computing show."

What was my reaction? Extreme disappointment, not just for CommVEx but for any other Commodore/Amiga show. There are no bigger Commodore/Amiga shows in the United States. In Canada, there is the World of Commodore Show in Toronto with its 80-120 attendees, but that won't be enough for



Altman. He states that they would rather create their own show. Well, on the scale they want, that would take serious money. In a more easily accessible and populated region? What is more accessible than Las Vegas where CommVEx is held? He wants his show to be an adjunct to a major computing show. That only leaves the January Consumer Electronics Show in \*Las Vegas\*, a show which has thousands of attendees. If that is what he wants, then why didnt CUSA go to CES in 2010, 2011, or 2012?

To see the complete Altman interview, go to

<http://www.discreetfx.com/CECommodoreUSAInterview.pdf>

There you have it. Dont expect any support from CommodoreUSA. The company doesnt care about us classic users. As CBM engineer Bill Herd skeptically told me at the May Vintage Computer Festival East, they are shooting themselves in the foot. Who else would buy their expensive systems other than Commodore users?



-forwarded by John Easton, TPUG

Well, you might have thought that you knew how the Internet started, but here's the TRUE story ....

In ancient Israel, it came to pass that a trader by the name of Abraham Com did take unto himself a young wife by the name of Dot.

And Dot Com was a comely woman, broad of shoulder and long of leg. Indeed, she was often called Amazon Dot Com. And she said unto Abraham, her husband: "Why dost thou travel so far from town

to town with thy goods when thou canst trade without ever leaving thy tent?"

And Abraham did look at her - as though she were several saddle bags short of a camel load - but simply said: "How, dear?"

And Dot replied: "I will place drums in all the towns and drums in between to send messages saying what you have for sale, and they will reply telling you who hath the best price. And the sale can be made on the drums and delivery made by Uriah's Pony Stable (UPS)."

Abraham thought long and decided he would let Dot have her way with the drums. And the drums rang out and were an immediate success. Abraham sold all the goods he had at the top price, without ever having to move from his tent. To prevent neighbouring countries from overhearing what the drums were saying, Dot devised a system that only she and the drummers knew. It was called Must Send Drum Over Sound (MSDOS), and she also developed a language to transmit ideas and pictures - Hebrew To The People (HTTP). But this success did arouse envy. A man named Maccabiah did secrete himself inside Abraham's drum and began to siphon off some of Abraham's business. But he was soon discovered, arrested and prosecuted - for insider trading.

And the young men did take to Dot Com's trading as doth the greedy horsefly take to camel dung. They were called Nomadic

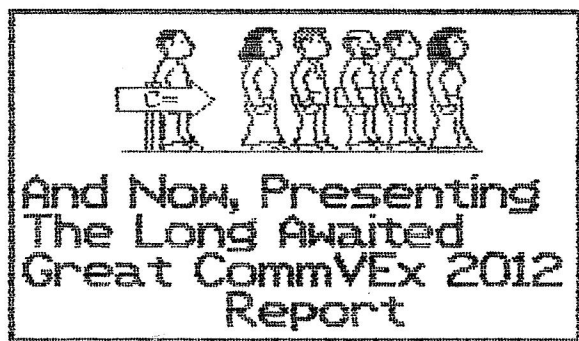
Ecclesiastical Rich Dominican Sybarites, or NERDS. And lo, the land was so feverish with joy at the new riches and the deafening sound of drums that no one noticed that the real riches were going to that enterprising drum dealer, Brother William of Gates, who bought off every drum maker in the land. And indeed did insist on drums to be made that would work only with Brother Gates' drumheads and drumsticks.

And Dot did say: "Oh, Abraham, what we have started is being taken over by others."

And Abraham looked out over the Bay of Ezekiel, or eBay as it

came to be known. He said: "We need a name that reflects what we are."

And Dot replied: "Young Ambitious Hebrew Owner Operators." "YAHOO", said Abraham. And because it was Dot's idea, they named it YAHOO Dot Com. Abraham's cousin, Joshua, being the young Gregarious Energetic Educated Kid (GEEK) that he was, soon started using Dot's drums to locate things around the countryside. It soon became known as God's Own Official Guide to Locating Everything (GOOGLE). And that is how it all began. So now you know.



-by Dick Estel

Another July, another trip to Las Vegas for CommVEx, our annual show devoted to Commodore brand computers. People who have not kept track of what has happened in the world of Commodore the last 15 years often express amazement that anyone still uses them. Meanwhile, Commodore enthusiasts continue to create new software and hardware for these machines, making them do things the original designers never dreamed possible.

For example, on Saturday, we watched a Commodore PET 4032 from 1980 display a video film, using the machine's built-in character set. This is the equivalent of printing out a bunch of letters on paper in the shape of a Christmas tree, but animated. Viewed from about ten feet away, the quality was similar to a security video. Mike Hill, the presenter and creator of this program, was two years old when the PET was first introduced.

As always, the event was held in the latter part of July, the

28th and 29th. Last year the Plaza Hotel, site of CommVEx 2 through 6, was closed for remodeling, but we had intended to return this year. However, all meeting rooms were booked a year in advance, so we again scheduled the event for the Las Vegas Club Hotel, across Main Street and under the same ownership.

The room costs a little over \$800. We finance the event partly with sales of hardware and software through the year, but this only brings in about \$100, so we rely on admission (\$10 for the two days) and sales of raffle tickets (\$10 for one; \$20 for three) to cover most of the expense.

CommVEx founder/director Robert Bernardo arrived in Las Vegas on Tuesday to start getting things ready. Since we can't get into the meeting room until Friday, this mostly consisted of arranging to pick up equipment from Al Jackson, president of the Commodore Computer Club of Clark County

(commonly called 5C's). Leaving California, Robert's Ford Crown Victoria is already jammed full of Commodore stuff from floorboards to roof, so the ability to borrow equipment locally has been an important benefit.

I had not planned to attend this year, but Robert's usual right-hand man, Larry Anderson, had a serious illness in his family and could not make it, so I became the new right-hand man by default. I booked my rooms and accepted the fact that I would be driving from the 100+ degree heat of Fresno, with humidity at 20 to 40%, to the 100+ degree heat of Las Vegas, with 4 to 10% humidity. Since we spend all our time inside, and only go outdoors to walk the short distance to another hotel to eat, the weather is not really a big deal. Ultimately, as long as you could be in the shade, it was more comfortable outside than it has ever been (at least as far as I can remember).

Instead of leaving as soon as I was up and dressed and stopping for brunch in Tehachapi, I took the

time to eat a good breakfast, and made the 400-mile drive stopping only at rest stops. This allowed me to arrive early enough Friday afternoon to avoid most of the traffic slowdown that plagues the city at the start of weekends. I got checked in, brought in my luggage, and peeked into the meeting room. No one was around, but the presence of several Commodore monitors told me that Robert was not far away, and walking back to my room I met him, along with another early arrival.

After a quick lunch I started helping Robert empty his overstuffed Crown Vic. Bringing in the equipment means loading it onto carts, pushing or pulling them to the parking garage elevator, going down to the first floor, pushing them up a ramp to the hotel elevator, riding up to the 3rd floor, and transporting them to the meeting room, about 50 feet from the "lifts."

By this time, a number of people had arrived and were setting up equipment for displays and demonstrations. These were mostly regular attendees who like to get together for a pre-CommVEx gathering, and stretch the event to all hours of the night. Although not everything was ready, Robert finally reached a point where he was ready to go to dinner. Everyone else had already eaten, but by this time I was ready for some dessert, so I joined him at the Golden Gate Casino for a sundae, while he had a chicken dinner.

We then returned to the meeting room, but I soon left to try to get some sleep, hoping that I would not be kept awake by the loud music blasting from Fremont Street, as I had experienced last year. Fortunately, I was in the North Tower of the hotel, a block away from the wild night life, and did not hear any sounds from the street. (I did have to call security Saturday night, due to a dog barking in the next room - something I have never experienced in a hotel and never expected to.)

The event officially started at 11 a.m. Saturday, but Robert had arranged for the room to be opened

at 8 a.m. I arrived around 9 and set up my laptop and other things needed for my duties as collector of admission fees, seller of raffle tickets, and this year, seller of software for a Commodore dealer who had given Robert two boxes of programs to sell. We had a number of major raffle prizes, and I set up a box for each item, so that attendees could put their tickets in the container for the item they wanted to win. I also had a spreadsheet already created on the laptop that lets me keep track of receipts and maintains a list of names for door prize drawings.

By the time 11 a.m. arrived we had a dozen people in the room, portending a successful event. As the day went on, most of the regulars arrived, as well as quite a few first-time visitors. Raffle sales were not as good as previous years, but attendance was the highest since the first event, which was free, so we covered our expenses and will have enough for more than half of next year's room cost. The only unknown is where we will be - rumors were that the Las Vegas Club will be shut down for remodeling (badly needed), and we don't know what our actual costs will be.

Throughout the day there were demonstrations and presentations about every hour, and drawings for door prizes and the big raffle prizes (see below). In a tradition going back about four years, door prizes included several bottles of wine with custom labels. This year they mimicked the Jack Daniel's label in a tribute to the late Jack Tramiel, founder of Commodore Business Machines.

At the end of the Saturday events, we made our usual trip to Main Street Station, which seems to have the best buffet in downtown Las Vegas. I didn't keep track of who all went, but it was a group of people who have been at most of the expos I've attended, so we all know each other to a certain extent. We ended up in two separate groups of about six each, and had a great dinner with the usual far-ranging topics of conversation.

The demos, raffles, and Commodore discussions continued the next day, which was highlighted by the first ever game competition for cash prizes. First up was the C64Anabalt game, which requires the player to control a man jumping from building to building via joystick. Missing your jump sends you to you death as you smash into the wall, and there are other obstacles to be jumped, some of which are also fatal if you hit them. Once you die, the program reports how many meters you ran.

Although some of the contestants practiced beforehand, the winner was a dark horse, Tim Waite of Orange County, CA, who achieved a score of 2713, thanks to natural dexterity and the clever idea of holding the joystick in his right hand, since the only action required was quick button-pushing. Since he didn't have to worry about operating the lever, he reasoned that he would have faster reaction time on the button with the right hand. With everyone being judged on the best of three tries, Tim also ran up the second highest score at 1419 meters.

Other contestants and their high score were: Steve Davison 1337, Greg Alekel 1107, Connor Krantz 1019, Jim Drew 969, AJ Windholz 933, Vincent Mazzei 865, Jeff Krantz 792, and Yul Haasmann 648.

With near-record attendance, lots of equipment to look at, and lots of demos, we were fortunate to have been given a double room, since the meeting room next to us was not in use.

The demonstrations, not necessarily in order, were:

A filmed opening greeting from R.J. Mical, one of the lead developers of the Amiga computer, who finished his brief message with an invitation to join him in his hot tub, where he was then sitting.

Video interview with the late Jack Tramiel. (shown after hours), taken at the 25th anniversary of the Commodore 64 in 2007 at the Computer History Museum and never before seen.

Lenard Roach ( FCUG newsletter editor from Kansas City) briefly talked about his book, Run-Stop Restore, and showed several of his programs, including TEA (an envelope addresser), Checkmate and Check it Out, check-writing and check book management programs; and Money Manager (written by Rex Day and updated by Lenard for Y2K compatibility). He also advised us that the original edition of Run-Stop Restore is available as a PDF download at [www.lenardroach.com](http://www.lenardroach.com).

Mike Hill: Digitized video on the PET (uses pet characters to re-create video from any source).

Bruce Gottlieb who has been a professional game developer and software engineer for over 17 years, showed and discussed Unknown Realm, a game hes been developing on and off for 20 years. He started out doing it for the C64, then the Amiga, then the PC, then finally came back to C64 with lots of experience, making it easier to finish the project. Bruce got his game development start at age 11 on a TRS-80.

Robert Bernardo gave a demonstration of the CBM C64 Diagnostic Cartridge, the C128 Diagnostic Cartridge, and their wiring harness; a new product, an RGB to VGA adapter for the C128, and showed how he uploads and downloads to and from the Internet with a Commodore and a dial-up shell account from his service provider.

Greg Alekel brought the crowd up to date on the latest developments with the Commodore Server (<http://www.commodoreserver.com/>), as well as the Comet+ Commodore Ethernet modem, now with flash memory and disk drive access, and the ability to work with old PCs or Apples that have the RS232 serial port.

Roger Van Pelt : (Via video) Demonstrated printing in color with GEOS & GoDot on an HP Deskjet printer.

Cameron Kaiser showed the



latest aspects of his game, Aptitude.

Jim Drew, creator of more than 60 commercial products for Commodore and Amiga computers in the 1980's and 1990's and CBM educational/support representative for Oregon from 1983 to 1985, told stories of those days. He also introduced his new product, SuperCard Pro, and talked about work he has done for movie producer James Cameron and also for the US Military.

Steve Davison had two presentations, "EasyDisk for EasyFlash", his EasyDisk C64 driver that allows you to load and save files on the EasyFlash cartridge; and "PETSCII Animator", his ML-coded program which allows you to easily do GIF-like animated scenes with PETSCII characters on the C64.

As usual, there were some fun and interesting happenings that weren't on the schedule. Connor Krantz of Las Vegas first attended when he was seven, and has become a sort of unofficial mascot of the event. At age 13, he's recently started playing guitar, and spent Saturday at a rock concert, but came on Sunday and did his usual fine job of drawing raffle tickets, as well as winning a prize or two himself.

It's inevitable that some raffle prizes will draw more interest than others. There was lots of competition for the SX64 and the 1581 drive, while other items had only two or three people trying for them. And a couple did not get any interest - or at least not at first. One empty drawing box was for the VIC-20 computer in near mint condition. Sensing an opportunity, ten-year old Vincent Mazzei pulled out \$10 of his own money, bought a single ticket, and dropped it into the empty VIC 20 raffle box. Since we were sticklers for protocol, we then called on Connor to draw the winning ticket, which not surprisingly was Vincent.

Other prizes and the winners were: DC Digital TV (Hi Def for the Amiga) - Phil Groven; remote joysticks for any 9-pin input, including Commodore, Amiga, and

Atari Connor Krantz; Comet 64 Commodore Modem - Jeff Krantz ; SX-64 Executive Computer - Eric Pratt; MMC Replay Cartridge - Louis Mazzei ; 1764 RAM expander - Tim Waite; 1581 Drive - Eric Pratt.

The event ended with a one-on-one competition for a \$10 prize between Connor and Vincent, playing the Activision game "Decathlon." The various events require an ever-changing combination of joystick and button pushing, including the grueling 1500-meter run, an over-long event that threatens to leave the player with carpal tunnel from constant joystick operation. Connor ended up the winner by a slight margin and made everyone there proud by splitting his winnings with Vincent.

When the official program ended it was time for the dreaded tear-down and load-out. It was two hours or more of hard work to get all of Roberts stuff loaded into his car, and we immediately realized there was no room for the Las Vegas club's equipment. The Portland Three, Greg Alekel , Rik Magers and Steve Davison, agreed to take these items back to their owner in their rental car before heading to the airport the next morning.

Once the room was empty of all equipment, there were six of us ready to go out for the Sunday night final dinner - the Portland Three, Tim Waite, Robert Bernardo , and Dick Estel . We walked across to the re-modeled Plaza, and checked a couple of restaurants, choosing the Hash House a Go Go. This proved to be a good choice, and we all recommend this location. A couple of the guys ordered breakfast, which consisted of one pancake - but what a pancake! As Greg texted his wife, it's "as big as the spare tire on your Mazda." Indeed, these pancakes were well over a foot in diameter, and were accompanied by eggs, fruit and other goodies. I had a sandwich that included a huge piece of chicken on inch-thick bread, with layers of cheese, tomatoes, and onions. All the other dinners were

equally huge, and most of us left carrying take-out boxes.

Finally, we'd like to send out special thanks to the following: Tim Waite for providing a dedicated label printer to make name tags; the Portland Three for help with transporting equipment, Al Jackson for lending the equipment, John Hill for fetching Coke and coffee to keep Robert and me awake after being up way too late, Louis Mazzei for being the new left-hand man, Lenard Roach for guarding the room Saturday night while Robert was out to dinner; Connor, AJ, and Vincent for their ticket-drawing services, Larry Anderson for providing additional equipment, Paul

Armstrong for the coin bank he gave us last year along with a sign that says "donate your change to CommVEx" (the bank has a display that shows the denomination of the coin as it is deposited, and the total amount), everyone who dropped change in the jar, Jeff Krantz, who rescued Robert and me from starvation and collapse Sunday by bringing in pizza, and everyone who helped make this one of the most successful Commodore Vegas Expos ever.

(This article and accompanying photos are on line at <http://www.dickestel.com/commvex12.htm>)