The Interface

"Taking 8-Bits Into The 21st Century"

Volume 43 Number 5

July/August 2025

Let The Summer Begin!

Summer begins with Commodore computers

In This Issue:

Newsletter of the Fresno Commodore User Group – Fresno, California
www.dickestel.com/fcug.htm

THE EDITOR'S GODZILLA

- by Lenard R. Roach

5 PROGRAMS 10 YEARS LATER

I began using a Commodore computer in 1987 for word processing stories and skits. Between 1987 and 1992, I started to understand and use simple BASIC commands from magazines like Run and Compute Gazette. Though simple in structure, over time I learned enough BASIC to code a few programs that started to make some impact in my local Commodore sphere of influence. My local computer club at the time, the Commodore Users Group of Kansas City, was surprisingly blown away with the idea that someone in the group was coding Commodore programs. A few members wanted to do some coding on their own and constantly were asking questions about different BASIC commands and programming structure. I was the big man on campus when it came to Commodore and BASIC programming in the Kansas City Metro area.

Between 1992 and 2015, I worked from time to time on the Commodore, mainly typing in programs from magazines until I gained enough knowledge to eventually come up with four programs that assisted me with the weekly bills. The program, "Money Manager With EZ Budget" by Rex Day was my inspiration. I will not go into details of the four programs again since I have done that several times in various Commodore publications. However, I would like to focus mainly on how these programs have held up over the years.

MONEY MANAGER WITH EZ BUDGET -

This program was first introduced in Run magazine in 1989, and as a person who spends money like I was a member of Congress, I definitely needed a way to manage what came in and what went out. This program worked well for those needs for over a decade and a half. Of course, when the calendar flipped from 1999 to 2000, the program needed that certain tweak to help transition into the 21st century. I was either lucky or blessed to know how to make those changes. As more modern ways of money management came around, "Money Manager With EZ Budget" began the sad journey of fading into obscurity. I have put this program away in my collection of Commodore programs. Instead, I adapted to using either online software or cellphone apps to take care of my budgeting needs.

CHECK IT OUT! -

"Check It Out" was my breakthrough program that landed me into my fifteen minutes of Commodore fame in Run magazine. People knew now who I was and were aware of my skills in BASIC programming. The program and I were on top of the heap, but there is only one way to go from such a rocky mountain high, and that's down.

"Check It Out" worked great for a while and made the personal problem of writing checks a breeze, but as time marched into the 21st century, the need for personal checks writing started to fade as online paying with credit and debit cards became the norm. I myself use an online bank for all my financial needs. With this, the need for "Check It Out" became obscure. "Check It Out" found its final resting place in my 5.25" disk file.

CHECK FILE MAKER -

It was only logical that, with the death of "Check It Out," "Check File Maker" would follow immediately. "Check File Maker" cannot live without "Check It Out." The only reason why I coded "Check File Maker" was to make another attempt to get in Run magazine. Unfortunately, Run had already closed its door after the release of "Check It Out."

Even though "Check File Maker" never got a chance for national publication, it still proved to be a helpful aid in speeding up the check-writing process. "Check File Maker" joined "Check It Out" in my 5.25" file box of forgotten programs.

T.E.A and T.E.A 4 2 -

"The Envelope Addressor" got to see it's debut to fame in an issue of Loadstar disk-zine when Dave Moorman was the editor-in-chief. Mr. Moorman took extra time in his personal introduction of the work to state that, even though he usually encrypted his disk-zines to deter copying, he left "T.E.A's" source code open, because he was impressed with the structure of the program and hoped that future contributors would follow such an example. I was both touched and humbled by his comments. However, a member of the Commodore Users Group of Kansas City, who was a mail carrier by day, had to wet on

my charcoal by complaining that on the printing on the envelope, there was no need of a "C/O:" line. To answer this gremlin, I rewrote the program to not only eliminate this line, but while I was in the source code, I decided to add a few extra features to make the program more user friendly. Thus "T.E.A. 4 2" came into being.

As the 21st century was under way, the need for personal envelope printing was fading as email was mainstream and online bill pay became the norm.

"T.E.A" and "T.E.A 4 2" work great when it comes to printing card envelopes for holidays, like Christmas as well as special days like birthdays and anniversaries. I now use "T.E.A 4 2" as an address book more than an envelope printing application. This Commodore program is still an active part of my software collection.

THE LEDGER -

"The Ledger" was based on my ex-wife's twelve-column ledger method of tracking payments and balances for the family However, when the calendar flipped over to a new month, it was up to me to transpose all the previous information from last month onto a new page in the ledger. There had to be a better way. Out of that act of frustration, "The Ledger" was written.

"The Ledger" is the one and only program of the five programs that is still in full personal use. "The Ledger" grants me the satisfaction of watching each debt grow smaller and smaller as I continuously and faithfully pay on each bill until the computer shows a zero balance due. The program works best on debts that do not flux in payments, like hospital bills and car payments.

As described above, the two out of the five programs I was blessed to write on a Commodore are still in use while the remaining three programs were put away in a 5.25" file box. It is almost like the inhabitants of The Island Of Misfit Toys as seen in the movie "Santa Claus Is Coming To Town" However, though those toys found homes and children to play with them, these poor programs have less of a chance to ever see the light of day again. The programs had their glowing moment in the Commodore spotlight; now the time has come for them to retire. I can bask in the memories of what they once were.

- by Robert Bernardo & Dick Estel

July 2025

For our July 20 meeting we had the largest turnout in months – all of the currently active local members including a rare visit from young Michael Calkin, now 15 and ready to start high school next month. Slightly older members present were Robert Bernardo, Bruce Nieman, Dave Smith, Roger Van Pelt, and Dick Estel.

In February Dick had brought in a Nikon Coolpix camera which had malfunctioned so that the lens cover only opened halfway on a diagonal. A camera shop had said it could not be repaired. Various possible options were discussed, including using pliers to rip out the offending lens cover. This month Dick again brought the camera, having tried that not-so-gentle option. The camera now opens all the way, allowing normal photos, although the lens is half uncovered when the cover is "closed."

Much of the other discussion centered around a company which has bought rights to use the iconic Commodore logo from its Dutch owners. Commodore.net is now offering what it calls "the first real Commodore computer in over 30 years." The product offered, the Commodore 64 Ultimate, is much the same as the Ultimate 64 that Robert has been bringing to meetings since January 2019. Although Robert had put his U64 in an ordinary breadbox C64 case painted black, if you looked around the back and right side of the computer, you would see dual USB ports, Ethernet port, HDMI port, missing RF jack and channel switch, and spacing gaps where there should be plates covering the holes. Happy with his U64, Robert does not plan to buy the new C64. (Members were skeptical that he could resist.)

The new C64 Ultimate comes in a standard Commodore style case, with options for a transparent case with colored LED lights inside. Prices range from $299 to $499. Pre-orders have reached over 10,000. The company also offers lots of other Commodore goodies, including T-shirts, hoodies, hats, and mouse pads.

During his recent trip to Seattle for the Pacific Commodore Expo, Robert made a side trip to visit Ray Carlsen, who is now able to take on more repair business. Robert challenged him with a flat C128 that former FCUG repairman Doug Cunningham could not repair, a European C128D that needed a North American internal power supply, and an SX-64 that needed a keyboard cable and a fix for the RAM. For the keyboard cable, Ray used a ribbon cable which used standard 25-pin connectors, not looking at all like the original keyboard cable. However, Robert reported that a user from Texas is making 3D-printed versions of the original cable housings. Ray plans to experiment with this.

On August 1 and 2 Robert will be at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, filming about nine hours of the Amiga 40th anniversary at the Vintage Computer Festival, including talks by Commodore and Amiga engineers.

After all the discussion, Robert got into the nitty-gritty of the hardware presentations. First up was the Amiga 3000 from Cinemaware game programmer, Tom McWilliams. A

few months ago Tom had given the computer to Robert so that it could be repaired. It was in a sorry state – dirty inside and out, no keyboard, no mouse, loose sound card rattling inside the case, no cover plates in the back, accelerator card with a failed 68040 CPU due to a failed CPU fan, and motherboard damage due to an old, leaking NiCad clock battery. After Tom had handed over the A3000, Robert powered it up, and the hard drive did not spin up (no flickering hard drive light) and the monitor screen was black.

Robert brought the computer to Duncan MacDougall, leader of the Retro Equipment Lovers International Computer Society in San Jose and the go-to guy for Amiga repairs. Duncan disassembled the computer, snipped out the offending battery, washed the motherboard, replaced the Kickstart 2.04 tower with Kickstart 3.1 chips that didn't need the tower, archived the original 40 meg Quantum hard drive, replaced the 40 meg drive with a 4 gig drive, installed OS 3.1 along with Duncan's mix of WHDLoad games, demos, and apps; added the old hard drive archive as a folder on the desktop, added more Fast RAM from the original 4 megs up to the maximum 16 megs, replaced the CPU with a working CPU and added a CPU heatsink and fan, reattached the sound card, and added back plates and rubber feet. Robert provided an Amiga 2000 keyboard (which could be used on the A3000).

Now the repaired computer was to be returned to owner Tom in a few weeks. Using one of his AmigaKit mice, Robert was giving the club one last public showing of it. Not familiar with the computer, Robert was not able to run any of the sound files that Tom had created for his games (where was the Sound Studio icon?). He was able to open up some Dpaint files and show the background patterns Tom had created. Also Robert opened up a few word-processing files, and the club was able to read some letters addressed to Leonard Tramiel (formerly at Commodore but who was working at Atari at that time!).

After the A3000 presentation, Robert tried to show the newest version of Triangular microOS for the C128 in 40-column mode. He had failed to show it at PaCommEx, thinking that it was due to the SD2IEC's he was using. This time he used Roger's SD2IEC, but the program failed to run from that device, too. The program continued to show an error in line 100, and though Roger and Robert looked at the BASIC and compared the lines with an earlier version that had run, they were not able to solve the error. Robert will have to report this to the programmer.

For the last presentation Robert connected the Miracle Piano Teaching Keyboard to the club C128 via a TeensyROM 64/128 cartridge and a Mio MIDI-to-USB cable. (A wide C128 with a wide musical keyboard… That took up lots of space on tables!) Built to be used with the Amiga via its serial port, the Miracle Piano also had MIDI ports which meant it could be connected to a C64/128. The TeensyROM had 3 MIDI programs stored in its non-volatile memory, MIDI2SID, Cynthcart 2.0, and Studio 64. Robert and Roger went through each program, each program giving different musical results. MIDI4SID was the simplest to use; you'd press keys on the Miracle Piano and the program would show the notes you played, e.g. C#., though you also change the sound parameters, like

Attack, Decay, Sustain, and Release. Cynthcart was more flexible but more complicated, too. Robert and Roger would have to refer to the printed instructions on what Commodore keys changed the sounds coming out of the Miracle Piano. With its thicker printed instructions, Studio 64 was the most complicated but probably the most powerful. If you didn't want to get into all the buttons and sliders in the program, then you could use its over dozen instrument profiles, like that for SuperSaw, BeeOrgan, and GoldenBass.

Computer History Museum https://computerhistory.org/
Commodore Net https://www.commodore.net/
Carlsen Electronics https://www.portcommodore.com/rcarlsen/
PaCommEx https://portcommodore.com/dokuwiki/doku.php?id=pacommex:start

August 2025

INFO ON FCUG AND SCCAN

[Robert Bernardo received this e-mail inquiry a few months ago. The inquiry is published here with Robert's responses.]

Hello from the Toronto PET Users Group (TPUG) here in Canada! I'm trying to get in touch with Commodore user groups around the world.

We're putting together a publication for this year's World of Commodore in December, and I'd love to include a feature on the groups that are still active. The thing I value most in a user group is the sense of community, and I think that's just as important globally as it is locally.

Would you be willing to put together a few words about how your group is doing in 2025 so I can add it to my write-up? Nothing too fancy—I'm thinking something in the neighbourhood of 150-200 words. I'd also like to include the URL of your website.

I look forward to hearing what you've been up to. :)
--
Dr. Myles L. Skinner
Editor-in-Chief, TPUG Magazine

Fresno Commodore User Group

Making it the oldest, active club in the United States, the Fresno Commodore User Group began life as two separate groups, the Fresno Commodore User Group and the 64UM. The 64UM was founded in 1981, and Fresno Commodore's founding date was unknown.

In 1985, the two groups merged to become the Fresno Commodore User Group (FCUG).

From 1988 to the late 1990's, FCUG produced a 5.25" disk-of-the-month (or two or three per month) which were full of public domain and shareware programs primarily for the Commodore 64, these disks being archived in the club disk library. Also from those days until now, FCUG has had a newsletter. First called, "Tips, Pokes, Peeks, and Jokes," the newsletter eventually became "The Interface," which is currently distributed to members in paper or .PDF form.

Primarily, a Commodore 64/128 club, FCUG now encompasses all other Commodore Business Machine 8-bit computers. With the demise of the Amiga Group Enthusiasts (AGE) of Fresno in 2005, there was no support for Amiga computers until a few years later when FCUG took up the Amiga banner, welcoming all classic and next generation Amigas.

In the early days, there were 1 or 2 meetings per month for the members and a board meeting for the directors. Meetings were held at the Adult Education classrooms of Fresno Unified School District. As the years passed, the meeting location moved to the Fresno Public Library, then to the Manchester Mall, and then to various restaurant meeting rooms.

These days, there is one monthly meeting, generally on the third Sunday of month, at the Panera Bread Restaurant, 3590 W. Shaw Ave., in Fresno. Each meeting goes through a semi-formal structure with a call for old business, new business, troubleshooting, and presentations on old/new software and hardware. Membership is $12 a year.

Through the years, FCUG has sponsored/supported various events – the 2005-2019 Commodore Vegas Expo (CommVEx), the 2019-2025 Commodore Los Angeles Super Show (CLASS), the Los Angeles Maker Faire, the Bay Area Maker Faire, the Rocklin Maker Faire, the Classic Gaming Expo (CGE), and the Vintage Computer Festival West,

http://www.dickestel.com/fcug.htm

Southern California Commodore & Amiga Network

The Southern California Commodore and Amiga Network (SCCAN) was founded in September, 2005, after individuals gathered the previous month to discuss a lack of Commodore/Amiga clubs in the Los Angeles area. That first meeting was held in the garage of a member's home in the Santa Clarita area (northern metro Los Angeles). For several years, the bi-monthly SCCAN meetings were held in that garage or at the house of another member. Due to scheduling problems, it became difficult to hold regular meetings at those houses, and SCCAN meetings were moved 26 miles south to the Panera Bread Restaurant, 19662 Nordhoff Street, in Northridge (San Fernando Valley).

SCCAN is the only Commodore/Amiga club in southern California. Members hail from the Los Angeles area, but visitors have come as far as San Diego and Las Vegas. SCCAN includes all classic Commodore 8-bit and PC's, classic Amiga computers, and next generation Amigas and emulator boxes. The members tend to emphasize Amiga computers. Each bi-monthly meeting, usually on the second Saturday of the month, covers general discussion and presentations on old and new software/hardware. Membership is free.

Since 2019, SCCAN has been the co-sponsor of the Commodore Los Angeles Super Show (CLASS) held in Burbank. Also members of SCCAN have exhibited at the Los Angeles Maker Faire and at the Vintage Computer Festival SoCal.

http://www.portcommodore.com/sccan

40 YEARS AGO, A COMPUTER GAME PIONEERED A SUB-GENRE

Before *Street Fighter*, Commodore gave us *The Way of the Exploding Fist.*

- by Ryan Britt

Fairfax Media Archives/Fairfax Media Archives/Getty Images

In 1985, the idea of mashing buttons next to your friend while two digital characters pummeled each other wasn't exactly commonplace. While 1976's arcade game *Heavyweight Champ* and 1984's *Karate Champ* came first, the idea of a fighting game being something you could do at home was truly pioneered in the summer of 1985 by a home computer game called *The Way of the Exploding Fist*. If that title is meant to sound

like a Bruce Lee movie you just never got around to seeing, that's totally the intention.

Released for the Commodore 64 and other platforms in late June 1985, by July and August the game was a bestseller, especially in the United Kingdom. But why was *Exploding Fist* so fantastic? Well, if you could afford two joysticks to hook up to your computer, you could recreate a karate battle, just one year after *Karate Kid* hit theaters. Two years later when *Street Fighter* hit arcades, *Exploding Fist* would fade from the cultural memory, but again in terms of something gamers could experience at home, it was groundbreaking.

One of the most interesting things about *The Way of the Exploding Fist* isn't just the fact that it took arcade game play to a home computer, but that the music created a kind of immersive feeling. Neil Brennan's score might seem over-the-top today, but the idea that a martial arts game would even attempt to emulate the sonic experience of a martial arts film was, again, something that was relatively new.

Exploding Fist also featured different backdrops throughout the game, as players moved through various levels. This was an early example of a kind of reward for gamers. Essentially, getting to different stages in the game meant you could see more of the world, even if it was just brightly colored backdrops inspired by *Karate Champ*. Previously, the designer of this game, Gregg Barnett, had converted a *Hobbit* game to work with the Commodore 64 computer, and some of the rolling hills and backdrops, though obviously meant to replicate Japanese locales, also very much have a bit of a fantastical, Middle-earth feeling.

The colorful characters of *Street Fighter* and *Mortal Kombat* were still several years away, and so, looking back on *Exploding Fist* feels quaint now, simply because the fighters that the player selects don't have over-the-top personalities. For the time, the mechanics of the game and the novelty of playing it at home were what made it stand out.

Would fighting games have progressed without *Way of the Exploding Fist*? Certainly. This game was groundbreaking for all the reasons mentioned, but it is possible to imagine an alternate reality where a different game became the true breakout in terms of fighting games you could play at home. But what's nice about the timeline we do live in is that *Exploding Fist* has a kind of quiet dignity to it.

Way of the Exploding Fist. **Beam Software**

It's not particularly bombastic or showy with its game play, and the moves of the fighters feel appropriately elegant for the type of martial arts game its trying to be. It's not that the game holds up to modern standards. It doesn't. But you can see why its fairly simple approach was so addictive back in the day.

Because back when games like *Karate Champ* required you to put another coin in the arcade, the triumph of *Exploding Fist* was that you could keep fighting, and keep getting better, for as long as you wanted.

ON THE COVER

I've been doing overkill with all the superhero images over the last several months and was humbly asked to refrain from any more superhero images. I do apologize for this inconvenience.

Since it is the hot months of the year, what better image could there be to feature than the famous Commodore game, Summer Games II. During the summer, be sure to sit down at your Commodore and play this great game again.

Club Officers

Officers and Keypersons

President …..... Robert Bernardo
Vice-president ..... Roger Van Pelt
Secretary/Treasurer …..... Dick Estel
The Interface Editor …..... Lenard Roach Librarian …..... Roger Van Pelt
Club equipment …..... Roger Van Pelt
Meeting place reservation …..... Dick Estel

-The Small Print-

The Fresno Commodore User Group is a club whose members share an interest in Commodore 8-bit and Amiga computers. Our mailing address is 185 W. Pilgrim Lane, Clovis, CA 93612. We meet monthly in the meeting room of Panera Bread, 3590 West Shaw, Fresno, CA. The meetings generally include demonstrations, discussion, and individual help.

Dues are $12 for 12 months. New members receive a "New Member Disk" containing a number of useful Commodore 8-bit utilities. Members receive a subscription to The Interface newsletter, access to the public domain

disk library, technical assistance, and reduced prices on selected software/hardware.

Permission to reproduce content of The Interface is granted provided credit is given to the source, and when identified, the author. Club members are encouraged to submit articles, tips, or ideas for articles.

Disclaimer The club, its officers, members, and authors are not responsible for the accuracy of the contents of The Interface or the results of actions based on its contents.

Our disk library contains over 3,000 public domain programs for the C64 and C128. Members are entitled to copies of these disks at no cost if a blank disk is provided. We do not deal with pirated, copyrighted, violent, or obscene programs. Please call our attention to any programs found in our library which may violate these standards.