

FC=UG

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

March/April 2012



-by Lenard K. Koach

One of the things I get to do when I edit the newsletter is read carefully what was written both by myself and by other contributors. For example, last issue of the paper dealt mainly with Vick's past success and Robert's present success when it came to selling Commodore material. This made me think of what I have been trying to do both in the past and right now in the same genre.

Back in 1992, as part of the celebration for the birth of my youngest son, I took a gamble and submitted one of the programs I wrote to RUN magazine, not really expecting them to take me seriously. I've submitted things to magazines in the past and those works were sent back to me with the form rejection letter that always accompanied it. And yet, when I got that acceptance letter with the "work for hire" contract I about derecated my drawers. It was exciting to finally see what it was like to be a published author, and cooler yet, to be a published Commodore author! My then wife

knew I have been working hard on the program and made sure the kids were out of the computer room while I worked. Now it was time to play a joke on her, so when the contract came in, I took it with me to her job, and entered the front door with a look of disappointment on my face. She saw me looking down while, without saying a word, handed her the envelope. She gave me her loving condolences as she opened the packet and glanced at the letter. When she read the "Congratulations, Mr. Koach!" opening line, she hit me with the envelope and called me a kidder. We both screamed as unprofessionally as possible as we instantly celebrated my first success. Alana's boss let her have lunch early as we hit the local Pizza Hut to have our first "business meeting" to look over the contract and make sure it was something we wanted to sign while we munched on a large supreme. I must have drove the KUN magazine's receptionist nuts with all the phone calls to their Arizona office I made asking question after question over the contract and how progress was going on the article, but she was patient and politely answered my inquiries. They even called me once when they had difficulties making the program work on one of the shop printers at their headquarters. Come to find out later they were using a non-traditional Commodore compatible printer that didn't understand some of the PRINT# commands that were familiar with Commodore brand printers, so they had to switch printers.

In a couple of months, after all of the "bugs" got worked out enough for RUN to put the program in print, a copy of the November/December issue along with a \$15w check came in the mail. I got a seven word blurb on the front cover and I got to occupy page 22 of the magazine. It was a crowning achievement for me and the family and we took all the spare money we had and bought up as many issues as possible, then gave them to family and friends, some I even autographed. Come to think of it, I am still looking for copies of that issue. Do you have one? If so, send it on. It would be great to replenish my supply of that issue.

Sorry. I digress. One of the reasons I think God is his great wisdom kept me from being published was he knew I would get a big head, and to prove his point, he let me get published and true to form, I got this idea that my excrement didn't stink. After RUN magazine closed it's doors I pursued "Commodore World" and, though they were interested in my programs, they were not willing to pay me for the program upgrades I wrote for the program I wrote for RUN. I fought them tooth and nail, but they were completely within their legal rights and I couldn't budge them. When "Commodore World" closed down, there was no where else to go, but my point is that if I would have taken my head out of my anus, I would have been more widely known in the Commodore universe than what I am now.

Is all lost? I do not believe so. Even though the market for Commodore in 2012 is incredibly thin, there is still some outlets available; one must know where to look, and with the gift of the Internet to the world, the Commodore market has expanded world wide. We can sit in our living rooms and order a copy of my book, "Run/Stop-Restore: 10th Anniversary Edition" for example from a far away country from our favorite website. A person can shop my website, lenardroach.com, for Commodore or other material, and never have to step into a store. There are great clubs like FCUG and

the CCCCC where we can still get ahold of Commodore information, material, and assistance. There are great publications like "Commodore Free" that is still out there doing it's best to present the world with the latest news and other information about the Commodore line of computers, but most of us, myself included, would prefer to be Commodore consumers instead of Commodore contributors. Sadly, a lot of good ideas stay good ideas because most of those dreaming up these ideas lack the confidence to bring these ideas to the light of reality. Some people can't stand the voice of rejection or criticism, like myself for example, and we keep our creations in a drawer or in a box in the attic or garage. Let me take this moment to plead with you to take that program or article out of the drawer or pull that prototype peripheral out of the attic and once again begin working on it. Take it from a coward, if you focus on all the people who applaud your work and raise the longest finger of your hand to your critics, you will enter a realm of unmitigated joy, for I can tell you from experience, that nothing will feel better and spur you on to achieve bigger and greater accomplishments. If you can't take my word for it, then re-read last month's articles written by both Robert and Dick. Robert had found a new fellowship with the hardware developers of Commodore, and Dick found a quick form of income with his collection of Geos fonts. To borrow a Christian turn of phrase, "though millions have come, there's still room for one."

Now you may be saying, "Gee, Pops, you sure talk a big game and you have some great examples, but your own work in Commodore or recent have flatulated a big one. How do you view that?" My answer: I keep on going. I keep sitting down at my Commodore and stare at the blinking cursor on home screen and keep coming up with new code; I sit down at my word processor and, starting with page one, word one, crank out another piece ready to be accepted or rejected by the Commodore universe and the world at

large; I keep on keeping on, never to give up and never to surrender. But I would like to advise this before I close this article: I made the mistake of being like a two by four and only focusing my energies on one plane - Commodore, instead of being more like the tree the two by four came from and branch out into different venues with my talents. Did you know that I once wrote a finance article that made print? Yeah me, mister In-Debt wrote an article on how to stay out of debt. Also, some of my latest writing success has been in Christian comedy and not so much in Commodore anymore. Will I quit Commodore? No, but I will be cutting back on what I do in Commodore and focusing more on writing for other genres. If the spirit hits me again, like it does from time to time, to write more code, then I will make more presentations at more conventions with the new program. I only pray that there is still one or two more programs left in me. Sometimes there's nothing like a thrill of writing a piece of code and alpha testing it to watch it work flawlessly for the first time.

Total Checks OUT \$50.00

Checking Balance \$1,592.40

Cash IN

Starting Balance 1/1/11 \$120.69

Dues \$24.00

Raffle

VCR & DVD Sales

Other Sales 8.00

Donations \$20.00

Total Cash IN \$172.69

Cash Out

Raffle

Transfer to checking

Dues

Misc sales

Club dinner 86.38

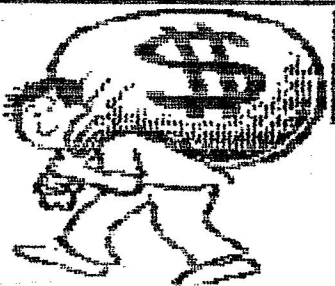
Other 2.82

Total Cash Out 89.20

Cash Balance 83.49

Total Assets 1,675.89

Treasury Report



2011

Checking IN

Starting Balance 1/1/11 1,582.40

Donations to FCUG

Donations for CommVEx

Dues 60.00

VCR & DVD Sales

Other Sales

Transfer from cash

Total Checks IN 1,642.40

Checking OUT

CommVEx

Dinner/Picnic

Newsletter

Postage

Charitable donations 50.00

Motel for guests

Monthly Meeting Report



March Meeting Notes

-by Dick Estel & Robert Bernardo

Stormy skies greeted the members of the Fresno Commodore User group when we left our homes to go to the March meeting, but it was warm and pleasant inside the Pizza Pit. Attendees were Robert Bernardo, Roger Van Pelt, and Dick Estel.

Roger reported on what he called a "homemade, prototype geocable," which he made from copper wire, cardboard, and other odds and ends that he had on hand. It worked well in a test with a Hewlett-Packard inkjet printer.

Our bank has recently imposed a \$12 per month charge on our checking account, which probably exceeds our income, so we voted to close that account and open one at

Educational Employees Credit Union.

Everything is on schedule for Commvix, despite the fact that once again Robert is having to deal with a new person in the contact position at the hotel. The hotel lost but finally found the signed contract and proof of deposit.

Robert had two large boxes of "stuff," Amiga-related, which he picked up from a user from Tehachapi. An Amiga 1000 and monitor were among the hardware items. Robert also had a bunch of hardware that came from a Commodore computer repair shop that closed down in San Rafael. This treasure included an EPROM burner and various diagnostic equipment. We tried out one item that checks the status of all chips and internal circuits, and has a expansion port cartridge, a user port interface cartridge, and an octopus of cables that plug into all the ports in the 064/120 except the keyboard connector (which used a separate item).

A while back Robert had acquired a device that connects the Commodore 1200 RGB port to a VGA monitor and displays the signal in full 60-column color. Although the manufacturer sold 30 of them from a posting on a single internet forum, he is no longer making them, so Robert is looking into manufacturing another batch. Ideally, they will be ready in time for Commvix.

Koger took home a box of ham radio-related disks that Robert had acquired, along with a manual that teaches the basics of ham radio.

We looked or tried to look at several programs. Laser Dreams, which controls a laser being fired within a room, was beyond our capability or did not work (what was needed was another commercially-sold interface and a laser, this equipment last priced at \$900 to \$1,000), but we had better luck with the Einstein Memory Trainer, a program none of us had heard of before. It purports to teach you how to remember names, faces, phone and other numbers, etc.. Like a lot of programs from the early days of home computing, the information presented could have been put into a book which a

user could probably work through faster than using the program, but it was still an interesting concept. The first lesson teaches you how to associate names with faces, the 064 showing a name with a hi-res drawn face and then later asking you that name when the face appears again.

As we began to load up the equipment, the storm blew up again, and we were dodging raindrops during the loading process. This storm eventually brought snow down to the 1,000 foot level in some areas and left about four feet at a nearby ski resort at 7,000 feet. No one complains, because it's been a very dry winter and the moisture is badly needed.

April 2012 Meeting Notes

-by Dick Estel & Robert Bernardo

In contrast to the weather during last month's meeting (cool and rainy), we had temperatures close to 90 for our April meeting. We had full attendance of our four local regulars, Robert Bernardo, Koger Van Felt, Brad Strait, and Dick Estel. And we were happy to welcome a brand new member from Farmersville, Louie Mazzei, who joined during the meeting.

Dick brought in the library print-out, which has been sitting unused in the bottom of a drawer, as well as two volumes of early newsletters for members to look through. He also showed the members a book called, "Computer Wimp - 100 things I Wish I Had Known Before I Bought My First Computer", by John Bear. Despite its 1963 publishing date, the book still has great entertainment value, although much of the advice is out of date. There's a full review of this book at <http://www.dickestel.com/articles/htm#wimp>

Robert reported that Commodore pioneer Jack Tramiel died April 6 at age 63. Jack was the driving force behind Commodore's policy of building computers "for the masses, not the classes," and was one of those most responsible for computers becoming a common home device. His empire began as a simple typewriter repair shop,

Commodore Portable typewriter, in 1953. The 2012 Commodore Vegas Expo will be dedicated to Jack Tramiel.

A nice obituary can be found at <http://news.cnet.com/0301-1079/03-57411407-235/commodore-rounder-jack-tramiel-dies-at-63/>

Dick reported that our checking account has been transferred to the Educational Employees Credit Union, with Dick's and Robert's names on the account.

Robert had previously taken Dick's sticky SA-04 keyboard, plus two incomplete, non-working SA-04s, to repairman Kay Carlsen in Washington. Today he brought back one complete, working SA-04, Dick's keyboard, and an extra keyboard, which we might be willing to sell if someone needs it.

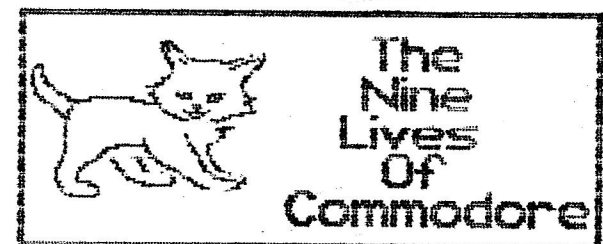
Last month Roger had told us about creating a "homemade, prototype geocable," which he made from copper wire, cardboard, and other odds and ends that he had on hand. It worked well in a test with a Hewlett-Packard 9400 inkjet printer. We got to see the device, as well as a much more sophisticated, cardboard-free version Roger put together. Photos are on the PCUG web site.

<http://www.dickestel.com/pcug.htm>
Roger had looked through a box of ham radio-related disks that Robert gave him last month, so we took a look at a few of the programs. Without a radio set-up, we could not do very much with them, though we did hear Morse code tones coming out of one program when we entered alphabetic characters into it.

Robert brought in his PBI 0250-B, which we opened up to check on the replacement chip that Mike Haberezny had installed. The chip, actually an H8K0M, replaced one of two PLAs that was in the PBI. Mike had done other repairs to the PBI, too, in order to get it in working condition - the internal 0250B drive did not work, and so, the inverter was desoldered and replaced; the power supply came back to life after exercising the switch a few times; and the keyboard was taken apart and all contacts cleaned. Now Robert is looking for good programs to run on the PBI.

Robert showed how he does .b04 conversions with the use of a 0250B card drive, the b04it program, and the club's 0250 and 1571 drive. Because he was using the 004 version of b04it, he had to first make sure the 1571 drive was in 004 mode first. Also the target 5 1/4" disk had to be formatted first. Then he ran b04it from the 0250B, and using a .b04 of Digimaster 120 as an example, he dearchived the program onto the floppy disk. Afterwards, he ran Digimaster 120 from the floppy disk.

When we arrived, we found a change of ownership notice in the front window, so at the end of the meeting we introduced ourselves to Joey, the new owner, to make sure we could continue having our meetings at the Pizza Pit. He was very friendly and accommodating, and looks like he will make a good owner for this long-time pizza stop. After the meeting, as Robert drove through city streets to get back on the freeway, he noticed a familiar man on a large motorcycle following behind his car. It was Stan, the former owner of the Pizza Pit, and on the back of his motorcycle was an attractive brunette. As Stan zoomed away, Robert waved to him. Enjoy your retirement, Stan!



-by Dick Estel

(Introduction: Going through some old copies of the Interlace, I ran across this article, which first appeared in 2000. Since it stopped at nine lives, it seemed like time to bring the information up to date.)

You'll find this does not cover all nine of the lives mentioned in the title--because Commodore has not yet reached its final life.

First Commodore was a "low cost" home computer, priced around \$500, well below the thousand or

more required for a Radio Shack or Apple product about the same time.

Next the price dropped substantially, with the bottom retail store price in the neighborhood of \$150 to \$200 for the C-64. During this incarnation, over ten million C-64's were sold worldwide. At the same time the disrespect that Commodore has suffered ever since began, with the epithet of the day being "game machine." Part of this was due to the fact that Commodore was in fact the best game machine around. IBM had crude graphics and no sound other than a pitiful "beep."

Then came the decline of Commodore the company, which stayed away from the pattern of innovation, advancement, and obsolescence marking the rest of the PC world. In its final years the company gave birth to another excellent, non-compatible machine, the Amiga. With the demise of the company, Commodore entered the "orphan" phase.

But there were plenty of "foster parents" willing to continue to care for their machines. User groups became the primary method of support.

Soon Windows arose as the primary force in the PC world (borrowing liberally from Apple who had borrowed from Xerox). At this time Commodore became "obsolete."

This seems to have been the status for the last five or six years, even as unsung heroes labored to drag the Commodore into the 21st century with RAM expansion, hard drives and processor speed-up hardware like the Super CPU.

Around 2000 the Commodore seemed to have entered a new life era. Possible names for this period include "venerated classic," "historic curio," and "tool or unrepentant Neanderthal." This phase was marked by a strange interest in these "archaic" machines by the popular mass media. In the summer of 1999 a positive and respectful article appeared in the New York Times. At the 1999 Vintage Computer Show in Santa Clara, our club president, Robert Bernardo, made contact with people from several publications. Out of

this came an article in Wired magazine, which usually has its compass pointed unwaveringly to the future. Wired interviewed Robert, programmer Maurice Randall and others, and conducted a photo session with Robert in January, 2000. (Read Robert's report on this event at <http://www.dickesteil.com/articles/wired%20visit.txt>; my comments on the situation at <http://www.dickesteil.com/articles/wired.txt>; and the original Wired article at

The magazine, Shift, which is kind of a Wireless for the Great White North, published an article on the Vintage Computer Show and featured Robert's photo in the table of contents as well as the article, along with a half dozen other pictures from the show.

I myself received a call from the Fresno Bee (our local newspaper) to ask about "people who use old computers." This culminated in an article in the Bee's "Neighbors" section, which was sort of an attempt to print a quirky small town newspaper for various regions of our metropolis. The article featured a photo of an Amiga (Commodore's "other" brand) and its proud owner, along with comments from Amiga users, a bribe nod to Atari, and my own comments on the state of Commodore.

Now, looking back from 2012, we can see at least two more lives. The first is what I call the era of reluctant parting. Users found they needed something more modern than the Commodore to accomplish what they wanted to do, but they still had high regard for the old C64 or 128 sitting in the closet. What better way to move on than to sell it to someone else so it would continue to serve? Many of these people got in touch with our organization, and their usual question was, how much can I get for my C64? or Are you interested in buying my equipment.

Having invested up to a thousand dollars or more in a computer, two or three drives, a monitor, and a printer, they were a

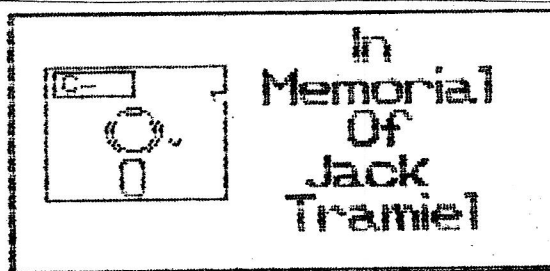
bit sad but not too surprised when we told them that Commodores were selling for \$30 to \$40, drives around the same, and monitors for up to \$100 or so. We also had to tell them that we were not interested in buying their equipment, but we were able to offer suggestions such as listing on Ebay or a Commodore discussion group.

This was a fairly short era and led immediately to the situation we still in today the era of getting rid of Commodore stuff no matter how. The people we hear from now have not touched their equipment for several years, and their expectations are low. We explain that you can buy a C64 or drive for \$5; dot matrix printers are door stops, and only a monitor has any real value. These conversations usually conclude with the caller asking, well, if I give you my stuff, can you pick it up? Of course, we can and do; and we have even had people drive some distance to get the stuff to us. This is the main reason our president, Robert Bernardo, has a house in Stockton full of Commodore equipment, a couple of rooms full of stuff in his home in Visalia, and a fair size storage unit stacked floor to ceiling with everything from early Pets to the various Amiga models that were Commodores last successful products.

Overlapping this divestment era is the time period I call the eternal final fire. During this indefinite period of time, diehard Commodore enthusiasts have and will continue to find ways to keep their machines going, while software and hardware developers keep coming up with ideas to bring the 8-bit world into the 21st century (hey, that would make a clever slogan!)

It's been observed before that the Commodore will survive as long as some one wants to use it and there is someone who can fix it. And there are still enough units out there (not just in Robert's storage) that even without repairs, you can usually find a working model for a few dollars. I used to assume that I would outlive the Fresno Commodore User Group, as I

have already outlived many other groups. This may still happen, but I'm not sure I will outlive the Commodore.



-by Robert Bernardo

The evening was over, and Jack was leaving, but as he left, several people were asking him for his autograph. Heck! I wasn't expecting that. I scrambled to the other side of the Computer History Museum, to the table where I had set up a Commodore 64 display in honor of the 25th Anniversary of the Commodore 64. I disconnected the brown C64 off that set-up and rushed back to where Jack was. He was walking out, surrounded by friends and fans.

I rushed up to him, "Mr. Tramiel, could you sign my C64?" He graciously smiled at me, took my pen, and autographed the top of the Commodore.

"Thank you, Mr. Tramiel." He and his retinue then continued walking out the door with me watching as they left.

Later, CBM engineer Bill Herd, who also had attended the event, sent me an e-mail remarking, It was a special night very rare. History had been made. Jack Tramiel, the leader of Commodore Business Machines, had made a rare appearance and had spoken at length about Commodore. The auditorium had been packed with his family members, former employees, industry leaders, news people, and fans like me, all there to honor Jack Tramiel and Commodore. There was much love and respect shown to the man standing ovations plenty of laughter and smiles everybody on the edge of their seats to hear his words.

And I thought that there would be another such celebration for Jack and Commodore. After that December night in 2007, I regularly

checked the Computer History Museum's website to see if they would have another Commodore night, another appearance of Jack. Nothing. Every year in the planning of the Commodore Vegas Expo, I would create the guest list, and our treasurer, Dick Estel, one time flew the idea about inviting Jack. How could I, a measly person, do such a thing, invite such a legendary character? Dick said it wouldn't hurt to try. I never tried.

With the release of Brian Bagnall's expanded edition, Commodore: A Company on the Edge, in 2011, I was anticipating the 20th anniversary of the 64 in 2012. I was hoping that Jack would make an appearance again and speak about Commodore, and we would honor his accomplishments. We would laugh and smile and listen to his words again.

On Monday evening, April 9, I was on Commodore business; I was at Duncan MacDougall's house in Santa Clara in order to pick up a repaired Amiga 5000 computer. I waited in my car awhile, and finally he showed up. He opened up his garage workshop, and as he dug out the 5000, he said, "You know about Jack Tramiel dying?" Jack had died the day before.

I was shocked. I was dumbfounded. Forget about any repaired machine. Duncan said, "I thought he'd always be around." And I agreed I thought that Jack would always be around, in the background, watching over his Commodore creations and his fans.

Duncan went on to talk about the repairs he had made to the 5000 and about other hardware matters, but Jack's death weighed heavily on me. I couldn't get over it. I left Santa Clara for the long drive back to the valley, and I was thinking about Jack. For the next 5 days, I thought about Jack, and I read all the news and talk about his passing. Whereas others were very vocal, I didn't say much on-line. I suppose it was my own form of mourning his death.

Whether as a hobby or in my work or in my social life, Commodore had been a significant

part of my life for nearly 30 years. Hence, Jack had been a part of my life for nearly 30 years.

At the end of mourning comes acceptance. I've decided that Jack should be honored. The Commodore Vegas Expo 2012 will be devoted to his memory. My video of him at the 20th anniversary of the Commodore 64 will be shown, Larry Anderson is planning a Jack Tramiel-labeled wine bottle, and photos of Jack will be distributed to each attendee. The 20th anniversary of the 64 will be a celebration of Jack, a man who developed computers that affected my life, that affected the lives of millions of others, that affected the development of all future computers. Jack Tramiel, a man who changed the world.

Dick Estel's

FONT Resource Directory

