

FC=UG

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

September/October 2011



-by Lenard R. Roach

(Part Two of Two)

JULY 24th

Sleep was rough. We got up at 2:00 am and I watched the boys play games on the Xbox until 4:00 am when we fell asleep again and didn't wake till 8:00 am. We cleaned up and then went down for breakfast. The boys had cheeseburgers while I had two helpings of biscuits and gravy. We drove over to the CommVEx and I got back onto my C64 that I set up while Gabe and Hatchi went to look for souvenirs down the Strip and Fremont Street. The first speaker at 11:30 am to talk was my left neighbor and his station looked like he was ready to launch the space shuttle and he had some improvements to Amiga 4.1 OS that went way over my head.

Someone was nice enough to go to Little Caesar's Pizza and buy five pizzas that we all enjoyed. Next speaker was Robert who demoed

a radio plane flight simulator, which lacked serious graphics but the control was pretty good. The biggest fun was crashing the plane into the ground and letting the computer assess the damage.

Two kids about 16 walked in that everyone mistook for Gabe and Hatchi. They were recent runaways, I gathered, and were trolling the hotels for food. They ate some pizza, looked around, then left. When everybody asked me if these were my boys, I told them no but nobody had the heart to kick them out, so we let them stay.

The next demo I missed because not too long after the urchins left that Gabe and Hatchi walked in. I told them about the kids and how the pizza was eaten up so as the next demo on Easy Flash was starting, I left the convention and took the boys down to the Ticono's Lounge for some lunch. I had nothing to eat since I already ate pizza but Gabe and Hatchi ate cheeseburgers with red peppers. I would hate to be their colons later on.

I got back in time for Robert's demo on the SUX 6400 sound interface device. This handy little gizmo allowed you to record off of another media music or sound and allows you to replay them over the Commodore 64s SID chip. The sample they used sounded just like the real thing but at they noted it does play a little quiet. I was wondering myself how something like the wedding march would be played on the device, but with it only

recording about five seconds of sound, it would not do well.

Next was a demo on a device that had several Commodore, Amiga, and Atari 2600 games loaded into it and it acted very much like a Commodore 1541 drive, but with the software already installed. It was groovy to me to see that the demonstrator had a couple of games he wrote loaded into the device by the device creators so he demoed his games coming from the device. I think that it is really neat, albeit illegal, to have your work so recognized by others that they decide to hack it and install it into something they are working on. I know that the things I do are more of a practical nature so they won't find themselves loaded into another device. My hat is off to Larry Anderson and his work on the Tron Light Cycles and Light Cycles II games. Good job.

I got a message that the boys were going to prowl the Fremont Street Experience, then go get the car. This was my cue to dismantle my Commodore station and get it ready for departure. I did forget to mention that we won several raffle prizes like tape measures, a screwdriver set, a couple of bottles of wine, a stack of DVDs, and a Commodore T-shirt. While I was waiting for the car I got to sit in on a more detailed work on Easy Flash as the programmers got into more detail on how it worked. I'm sorry to say that the gentlemen who made the presentation may have been talking way over the heads of many of the attendees, me included. I tried to follow but it was just too much tech for me. This is when I found out that I was a novice amongst a set of advanced gamers and programmers and therefore my stuff did stink, a little.

Before departure Robert went around to several people and asked them to say, "This sucks" into the camera as he went about making a commercial for his new SUV 6400 to be placed on YouTube. He asked me to do something so I turned my hat backwards and put on my best gravely redneck voice and told him his device sucked. It was fun and it would be great to see if I made the cut and find myself on YouTube.

Gabe and Hatchi came upstairs and helped me wheel my entire Commodore setup down the elevator and into the awaiting Dodge Charger. We had checked out of the El Cortez earlier that morning and left the room in a wreck that said, "Men were here." Despite all the efforts of Gabe, he could not find a theatre in the vicinity so we could see Captain America, so we decided to head for California and drop off Hatchi and start the long trek back to Kansas City. The GPS told us to take I-15 to California but the moment we reached the Nevada/California border, we ran into a traffic jam. As we went further into California it would break up for about a mile or two, then jam up again. 64 miles into California we discovered that there was a Agricultural Checkpoint that needed to be passed through by all, but it was late at night and traffic was backed up like a Kansas City rush hour on I-435 in the morning. Once through we started on towards our destination at a faster rate of speed.

JULY 26th

I slept most of the way so I didn't see much, and besides, it was night and there was nothing to see. We made it to Hatchi's home at 3:15 in the morning, where we said our goodbyes, and headed off back the way we came, but I was stubborn when it came to making the I-15/I-40 split and decided to disobey the GPS and take I-40 home through the southern United States. The GPS wanted us to take I-15 back through the earlier mess and go home through Las Vegas. I wasn't in the mood for that so I went I-40. This little booboo cost us about six hours extra traveling time since it would have been quicker to go home the way we came.

There was nothing to report on the way home since most of the time I was driving was at night. We did go down some spooky, lonely piece of highway in New Mexico that twisted and turned unexpectedly for about two miles before dumping us off onto US 54 heading for Texas. I learned quickly to listen to the GPS and decided that, after Gabe

programmed her for the shortest route with no toll booths to cross, we travelled US 54 all the way through Texas, Oklahoma, and finally into Liberal, Kansas where we hopped onto K-61 and went to Salina. It was sun up by then and Gabe took over and he drove us the rest of the way into Kansas City and finally home to the Roach Hotel on Corona Avenue.

Gabe slept most of the way through the night so he was ready to go for the day. He called mom and went to spend the day with her while I took a nap. I woke up about 3:00 in the afternoon, unpacked the Charger, and got it ready for return to the rental shop on Wednesday. I took a shower, ate a couple of sandwiches, and started working again on the report of the trip.

Much thanks to the people who without their help this trip would not have been possible; to my son Robert and his wife Erica for checking on the cats and cleaning my yard and gutters while we were gone. My thanks also to Alana and her beau Pat for picking up any missing elements at the house due to my inability to think of what could be done. Thanks also to work for letting me have the time off during a busy time of the season so I could go to CommVEx and try and make something of myself. My thanks to FCUG and the 5Cs for having the CommVEx so I could see what was new and fun for Commodore. Finally, thanks to Gabe who really would have wanted to do something better with this time than be stuck in a car for a week with his dad and go to Vegas. Without all of you this trip would not have been possible.

Will I be there next year? As Charlie Chan says in most of his movies, "Is possible," but if I do go I won't take so much Commodore gear. Also, the attendees did express to see other works I have done in writing so I might take them along and show what I have been doing outside of the Commodore genre. My next attempt will be to go to the World Of Commodore expo in Toronto during December. Whether this happens or not, I don't know. We'll see.

Monthly Meeting Report

- by Dick Estel



September 2011

-by Dick Estel & Robert Bernardo

Brad Strait and his kids were sharing a cold, but Robert Bernardo, Roger Van Pelt, and Dick Estel were present and stayed for an extra-long meeting (about two hours past the normal time). But everything needed for demos was on hand and everything worked, and we looked at a lot of Commodore stuff.

Early this month both Robert and Dick received an e-mail from Judith Ranheim, the widow of John Ranheim. They operated Jason Ranheim Company in Auburn, California, a well-known computer products company of the 1980's and 1990's, and she was offering to give us the remaining stock and equipment. As she put it, "There are hundreds of computer items; computers, other hardware, software, manuals, games, books and assorted cords, power supplies, etc. Most all of the items are Commodore or Atari or related items." Robert has made arrangements to pick the items and also showed us some photos she had sent of the equipment available.

Robert reported that Commodore engineer Bill Herd would like to make a virtual visit by Skype to our November meeting. We will research Internet speeds at various possible meeting locations (the usual meeting place is probably too noisy for a project of this type).

Also in November developer Michael Hill hopes to attend and demo PetDisk. This product plugs into the cassette port of a PET computer, with a second piece of hardware plugged into the IEEE port. This replaces the cassette drive and disk drive and allows saving files to a SD card.

We also learned that the Citadel Bulletin Board System (BBS)

in the Turlock area, probably the only dial-up BBS in California, is now down.

The annual club dinner (successor of the former club picnic) will be held at the regular meeting time, Sunday, October 16, 11 a.m., at a restaurant to be determined. Dick will coordinate the planning via e-mail.

Upcoming Commodore and/or computer-related shows include SC3 Arcade Party in southern California and the Vintage Computer Festival Midwest/Emergency Chicagoland Commodore Expo. No one in the club is able to attend either of these events. However, the Amiwest Show 2011 is coming to Sacramento on October 22-23, and Robert will be able to attend that one.

Robert demonstrated several Amiga CD32 games that were part of a huge box of mostly software that he brought back from England, paid for as "extra luggage" on the plane. Equipment demos included an upgraded Amiga A2000 with added memory and demos and games. This free upgrade was done by Duncan MacDougall of The Other Group of Amigoids in San Jose.

Next were a couple of commercial C128 games, new within the last few years, Space Pirates and Starship Battles, from MicroDesigns of Manassas, Virginia.

Dick forgot to mention but will now write that we have created a webpage to display a number of Loadstar magazine covers that were given to us by former editor Fender Tucker. The address is

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

October 2011

-by Dick Estel & Robert Bernardo

Back in the day when the club had 30 or more members attending meetings, we had an annual picnic at the home of one of our members. As membership declined, this event became a dinner at a restaurant, paid for by the club.

Although we've usually held these events in the evening, our regular meeting time worked out best for everyone, so on October 16 we gathered at Tahoe Joe's, an

excellent steak house. In addition to our four regulars (Robert Bernardo, Roger Van Felt, Brad Strait and Dick Estel), we were joined by Doug Cunningham, who was a long-time member and one of the club's technical experts for many years.

Although this gathering is supposed to be "more socializing, less Commodore," the day started with everyone gathered around Robert's gigantic Crown Vic (as always, stuffed full of Commodore and Amiga stuff) to look over and put in a claim for some of the equipment, software and other items donated to the club by Judith Ranheim, widow of John Ranheim and co-owner of Jason Ranheim Company.

Brad and Roger each went away with an armload of stuff, including a rare but interesting acoustic modem. Dick, after vowing to own no more Commodore computers, snuck off with an SX-64.

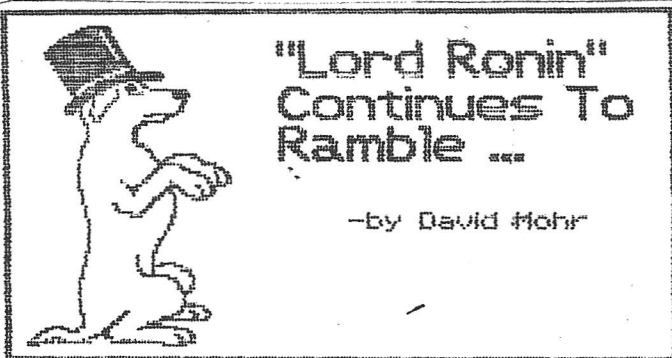
Inside the restaurant, while waiting for our food, we looked over several bags of chips, boards, and equipment for burning and erasing chips. There are numerous chips that might have something on them or might just be available for burning.

Since Doug's technical expertise extends to PCs, Dick picked his brain for a little help with some work he's been doing on the PC he won in Las Vegas during this year's CommVEx, and Doug shared some of his Commodore knowledge also.

We had a great lunch, good conversation, and enjoyed getting together with one of our "alumni."

A NEW FEATURE HAS
BEEN ADDED TO THE PAGES
OF THE INTERFAE.

JUST TURN THE PAGE



"Lord Ronin" Continues To Ramble ...

—by David Mohr

—by David "Lord Ronin" Mohr

(Dave Mohr of the Anything Commodore Users Group of Astoria, Oregon passed away 2 years ago. As chancellor of his club, he was a prolific writer, so much so that he had many unpublished articles. Below is one of his articles, the first of many we will be publishing. Though his club is no more, his words are still wise.)

Once upon a time. There were these things called Personal Computers. There were many types of them. New, pretty, and a bit scary. People that bought them, needed more information about their Personal Computer. Such a new and powerful thing. They banded together, users in a group. The birth of the Users Group.

OK, there is another story. That says users groups formed out of copy parties and hackers. I like the first one better <BG>

But today, where are the user groups? Mine has existed in one form or another since 1978ce. Started as a PET group, skipped through the Vic-20. Hung out a lot as a C=64 group. Not a lot for the 128. Added the Amiga PC line. A couple years back, we the new members, opened up the group to emulator users. What happened to the other platform user groups in this area of mine? What about other C= groups in the country?

Based on phone calls, irc chats, exchanges with other groups. The story goes something like this. After the first CBM bankruptcy sale. Many users went to the heretic. Out of fear or group pressure. Hmm, must have played too much Lemmings <G> Several groups

are now just social gatherings. Well that is good. Because the groups for other platforms that folded, well they don't meet at all. From what I have learned. At least the C= groups still meet and discuss things. Be it or not all C= related.

Here in Clatsop County, Oregon. I was present at the end of the last IBM user group. Well in truth the day after. At that time I was the C= files SysOp and Door Game SysOp for a Spitfire BBS. Not a C= BBS. Was at my Nam friend's home. Helping him with a C= emulator. Teaching him the keyboard. While also showing him how I could edit the door games on a C=. When a guy pops by. He has three large cardboard boxes of disks. 5 1/4 as well as 3 1/2. These were the library of the last IBM user group in the county. As I recall, they had absorbed two other groups that folded. Now at that time, I had joined the local C= group. Just made an officer. This being around 1995/96ce. I had to ask why he had just said the group had folded and was giving the disks to my friend for his BBS files.

The answer confused me at the time. Years later I understood what he meant. His answer was that the members can't talk to each other anymore. Some members bought all the new gizmos and updates. Others were happy with what they had. Not only couldn't they communicate with their computers at the meetings. The tone and colour of the meaning of the words used, had shifted slightly. That part may not make much sense to many of the readers. An example is the word 'Disk'. 15 years ago. That word to me meant a record for my turntable. Now it means a 1541 disk. One of my newer members thinks of a 3 1/2 disk for his old iBuM. While younger people think of a CD or DVD for either their computer, music player or console game system. End result is that his group gave up and disbanded. There was no longer the ease of working with each other and the computers.

My group has a constitution. We also have the impression seal from CBM. Citing us as an

authorised group. Registration number 447. First part of the constitution <I believe this to be a form from CBM> states that we are a support group. Geared for software for the furthering of the education of the C=. Sort of paraphrased, we are a group that is to learn and help others with the C=.

What makes the C= different from other computers? Simple, we are backwards compatible. Example:

I run a SCPU with 16mb, HD with 4.3GB, FD-2000, CD Rom Commander, Post Script printing and more with my C= setup. One member just has Jiffy Dos in his 128. Recently he scored up a FD-2000. Despite my upgrades, we can still talk verbally and with our machines. He makes things in GeoWrite and GeoPaint. Works fine on my Wheels system. My Wheels created files, work on his Geos, and that is from the free DL <cmdrkey.com> I play a game on my souped up system. All the others in the group can play the game as well. Even the ones I collected that were fixed to run on the SCPU. I write stories in EdStar II on my system. The others can read them on their more stock systems. That is the difference between our system and the others. My Amiga members have a problem with different versions of Rom chips and Workbenches. At the least there are degraders. So those with the newer upgrades. Can use the older programmes. Sadly that isn't reversible.

We have books, magazines, thousands of disks, a BBS, newsletter, monthly disks for members, input from Inet newsgroups and mail lists, a place to meet daily and play with the set up C= units. OK with the exception of the place, where members can come 7 days a week to use the machines. That is pretty much the same stuff that other users groups have/had. In fact I set up our BBS, because I had read and been told that most C= U.G.s had a BBS for at least their members. When I joined the local group here, we didn't have a BBS, or hardcopy library at that time. Not much of a software library either.

What we did have, when I joined this group in 1993ce. Was a group of old timers. Who had moved from the Vic into the Amiga. A few of them still played with the C=64.

In order to illustrate the use and the need of a User Group. I'll have to expose mine to the public. For years my group was a copy party club. About the only claim to fame, is the that the author of Fast Hack 'Em was a member. They would meet and swap/copy/pass around software. That is why we have a high number, for our authorisation. Group waited that long, before deciding to be a bit more legit. When I joined, they were doing meetings in round robin fashion. Trust me, when I say that I didn't know what a user group was supposed to be, or do when I joined the club.

My personal belief is that a usersgroup should offer support and help to the members AND prospective members. Not tell them how great the C= is, and then try to interest the prospective member in the Amiga line. Which is what happened to me. In short the A.C.U.G. #447 was a lamer group. One that in 93 had just about reached a social club level. The spark had almost gone out. I joined in December of 93. One of my sons joined in January 94 <Lord Alberonn>. I stuck with the C= and he moved into the Amiga line, as well as the C=.

Inspired, that is a nice term to use for my feelings. Zealot, fanatical and others would be more to the truth. <VBG> They did have monthly disks for C= users. Cost a whole quarter of a dollar. Amiga disks were 50 cents. I and my son didn't know anything about the computers at that time. A point that I make here, because of new people joining or trying to form users groups today. Back to that a ways down this monograph.

There wasn't a hardcopy library. That was fine. We didn't know that there should be a hardcopy library. Blissful in our ignorance. Nor was there the aforementioned BBS. We didn't know of the term at that time. So that

wasn't a missed part. What did catch us shortly after joining? A few things just didn't jibe right. Meetings were, to us, a touch chaotic. Not the first club or group either of us had joined. We marked it down to the way a computer group operates. Did notice that people would also join, come to one meeting and never be seen again.

The attempt to move me into the Amiga was a hint that something wasn't comfortable. I was told that if I used the Amiga for a week. I'd never go back to the C=. Got

a A500, with Work Bench 1.3. Tried it for two weeks. Mostly making it talk and playing Dungeon Master. Sold it and stayed with the C=. Was told that I needed to upgrade it to at least 2.04 or something like that. Hmm, cost started to be a barrier. The other clue was as the CBM bankruptcy happened. My rapid rise in the group. C= deputy librarian. Of a list of disks that didn't exist. C=128 librarian, as the only 128 user. I sort of scammed my way into having all the 128 disks. Mainly LoadStar Quarterlies. Then taking over the C= section. At the same time being made editor in 94. In around 95, the president. Lord Alberonn became the Amiga Librarian, and another member of our game group. An Amiga user, became the treasurer on his first night.

OK the A.C.U.G. at that time was not the best of groups. Those members did fulfill the needs of their interests at that time. But turned off people to the group. Many of those have spoken with me over the years.

SUPPORT: that is the main thing that people want in a users group. This includes help in understanding different aspects of their computer. You may know about SYS04738 for the reset, or POKE53280,X to make the border colour change. In a users group. This information should be there for the new member. Either in the heads of the members, or in some hardcopy form. That the new member can study. I learned those commands from playing with some Basic

programmes. Not from members of the old users group.

Today, my members know that if they ask me a question. I'll either have the answer <not too likely> or can turn them onto a source with the answer. There was no one in the old group that would help me in learning Basic. That isn't the case today. Support also means the member can gain assistance in hardware and software problems. Example: Recently one of my article submissions, failed. A problem with the disk. Screen said '23, READ ERROR, 24, 01'. Frell I'm thinking that I have to write another article. Our groups new member, a long timer in the C=. Suggested that since it was text. I could try a Maverick file copy. Good chance that it would fix the problem. Did the attempt and saved the article. That sort of support is in a users group. Minor fixes to the drives of users. Cleaning the keyboard, from those failing or sticky keys. Sharing tips and knowledge. That is a support thing in a users group.

Can you re-ink a ribbon for your printer? Well I can't either. Picked up a motorised re-inking stand. Don't know how to use it. Ah, but there is a guy <Chris Fite> who I met through C= contacts. Who sells ribbon re-inkers with ink and the instructions. Turned people onto him for that project. That is support in a users group. There is more for examples. However you understand what I mean.

LEARNING: There is at this time over 20 years of things for the Commodore. Magazines, books, disks, files, hardware and more. Does anyone really know all about each part? There is also so many directions that one can go in their use of the C=. I honestly thought it would just save me quarters at the arcade. Play games was the only use that I saw for it when I first obtained a used C= setup. These days, I spend most of my C= time in writing and in my BBS work. Haven't really played a game, outside of testing them for the board. In, well months. Trying to also grasp Basic. Meet with others on IRC with my C=. Then back to writing things

for the user group, game group, shop and for other publications. 'Game Machine' the C= has been called. Not bloody likely!

Others in the group are just interested in fixing files and disks. One member enjoys making old games work with trainers, and converting PAL to NTSC. After the game or file is fixed. He loses interest in the file. Another is learning Geos/Wheels. He doesn't know why at the moment. But for him that is where his interest lays, and collecting C= items. My deputy librarian. He likes to play the Role Playing Games. Such as Ultima, Secret of the Silver Blades and others. Plus he enjoys the BES and is also learning to use GeoPaint to re-create game material for C= use. Taking information out of dice RPGs and converting that to the GeoPaint format. Others want to learn about the digital work in video. Using the Computer Eyes. Or the Handy Scanner for doing small images. Our newest additive is the Covox Voice Master. Members are a bit intimidated about that one right now. More powerful than they expected. <G> Just so many directions that one can look into in the C= system. We are teaching each other about our interests. That is why at the monthly meeting. We have the demos of our interests.

Summation so far of a users group. Simply is a bunch of people that are sharing their interest and love for the C=.

But there is a new twist to the game plan today. New members to the group. Sure they aren't beating down the doors to join. On the other hand they are out there and need help. Guy finds in the closet the C= system of say his father. Picks it up in a yard sale, rummage sale, estate sale, 2nd hand store, thrift shop etc. There are two types that do this. First is the one that is wanting to regain what he once had. I hear many stories on the inet. About how much people miss the C= system and dislike the heretic system. Yet feel trapped with the heretic. 'Hi I'm new to this list. Found you by accident. After reading many messages. I am taking out my

Commodore and using it again.' See that message every few weeks on mail lists.

The other type of guy. Just picks up the cheap system for something to experiment with, or a retro feeling. I get them in my little shop. Asking questions. In fact I have two high school students that are starting to use the C=. Learning that it is more powerful and friendly than they thought. Eventually they will join the users group.

Those readers that are in an existing user group. Should consider what they can offer this new and returning breed of users. I call the new users 2nd generation users. Missed all the big days in the 80s. But that is fine. They can afford the items today. <G> They need help and that is where the user group comes in to play. Even if you are not actively using the C=. You can help the beginner who doesn't know what the system can do. Even if it is just stories about all the fun times you had with your C=. That shows the new user that the system is fun and he can do things with it. Hey, I've had to show people how to load a disk. They had a used disk drive and some disks. But no instructions on how to load a programme. In fact, one girl was going to sell me her system. Till I showed her how to load a programme and showed her what was on her disks. Plus a few demos in my collection. All she could do was use a cart. She kept her system and joined the group for a couple of years. Seems that books don't always go along with computer systems.

Many of the readers are not in a users group. They are either old users or those just now trying to learn about the system. They have no resources to draw upon for information. I mean books, mags, file collections and people to ask questions. Well that is what they think, that they are alone.

Not true, in fact if there are two of you in the area or in communication. Got a user group there! Share your information and wants. If you have internet access. There are many lists that can give

you help. A good one is homestead. This is through vcsweb.com. Go there and you will find a large C= section. Another is a beginners list. Run by beginners. I know it is our list. .
acug0447@yahoo.com No heavy techy stuff on that list. Just general C= and Amiga things. If you can access newsgroups, comp.sys.cbm is a big one with many subjects for and about the C=. alt.c-04 is another and a slow one is comp.binaries.cbm. That one is also just for uuencoded files. FIDO net is still around and there are three C= echos there, being for the Geos, 128 and C= users. Been quiet lately. Several C= related web sites have their own forums. One that lists many new things is the one at cmdrkey.com. Where Maurice +Randall has his forum and the things for Geos and the HD etc for the C=.

If you feel the need to join a group. Just to keep in regular touch with C= users. Many of the existing groups do take Long Distance members. Mine does and a quarter of my membership lives out of my local area. One is even in Canada.

However there is another

group. One that deserves an article by itself. Meeting C=04/128 Users Through The Mail. A.K.A. MTTM, a group that was formed around 1980ce. Just for those that didn't have a users group in their area. This group sends out a 20 page newsletter every two months. Twice a year there is a list of all the members and their C= and mundane interests. I've met a couple RFGers that way. Contact tannerlj@yahoo.com for more information and a sample copy of the newsletter. BTW: The membership is not limited to the States. FWIW: I know the group as a member and an officer.

Time to wrap this up. Had to be light and jump around a lot to show the points. Could have given each one a full article to present the case and explain it, and myself better. Bottom line here is that there are people that use the C=, in different forms, needs, desires etc. The user group is there to support the interests of the members and prospective members. Groups can be a couple hundred. Or just two that share their interests and advancements. Remember that we the users and groups. Outlasted the company. Just like our computer.