



THE EDITOR'S GODZILLA

-By Lenard R. Roach

(Commodore writer, programmer, and all around good egg...)

Holy spleen in an outhouse! I've been so busy with getting ready for the Holidays (writing skits for the Assemblies and Nazarenes, working on my first 3-act play, starting to work at Target for Christmas, working extra at the day job, etc.), that I totally brain flatulated on getting the September/October Interface started. Dick and Robert have been totally groovy in sending me reports on meetings and other articles but I haven't even started putting finger to keyboard in relation to having anything posted for my famous "Editor's Godzilla" article. For any first time readers to my piece, this is where I rant and rave about what has been happening here in the Midwest about things both related and unrelated to the Commodore.

Believe it or not, I should be glad that I waited this long to write this article, for at the Roach Center for BASIC Commodore Studies here in beautiful Kansas City, Kansas (AKA, God's Country), for the Center is going through a year long revamp. This was something

long overdue (by about four years!) and so far what had been done has made the place look phenomenal!

On Saturday, November 2nd, my oldest son, RJ, stopped over at the Center with a large cargo van full of furniture (mainly, a new bed and kitchen table) and cleaning supplies, for this day RJ was going to put everything out, scrub the carpets with white vinegar (which hasn't been done in 10 years), and replace my bed and the kitchen table with new ones.

First, the destruction of what will soon be the new Commodore room. An air mattress bed had to be removed, and the carpet shampooed. A lot of Commodore non-essentials needed to come off the walls, but the iMac computer will stay until a MacBook Pro can be acquired and then sell the iMac. Next, out of my room came the glorious Commodore 128 computer and stand and into the new computer room it went. We stripped the Commodore desk of all it's hardware and software so it would be lighter to carry and to give it a deep cleaning -- something that hasn't been done in several years. When transferred, RJ and I reset the desk to its original Commodore glory. It now faces the south wall close to the windows with my file drawers sitting both to the left and to the right of it.

At first, resetting the Commodore into the new computer room was a pain. I don't bend over into small places very well any more, so RJ had to plug all the BUS cables and power cords into the Commodore hardware. When I tried to boot the Commodore much later, it seemed like my 1571, which is drive 8 on my set up, wasn't talking to the

keyboard. I got my fat, lazy butt under the computer stand and found out that the BUS cable was bad and needed replaced, but even after replacing said cable, the computer and drive still were not talking to each other. What did fix the problem finally after several minutes of study was that the 1541 (which is drive 9 in my set up) was also toggled to drive 8, thus creating a test conflict within the Commodore 128. A simple flip of the toggle switch and all drives were talking and ready for disks. I got some stereo speakers wired with the Commodore so I can have maximum sound out of the unit. As some final moves afor my Commodore equipment, I pitched the last of my RUN magazines to the curb, but keeping copies of the issue starring me. I found a (hopefully) fully functional Commodore 128 stored in a closet along with a 1541 drive, but each device is in need of all the necessary power cables, BUS cables, and video cables to make it functional. This unit will be the first of what I hope are many Commodore related materials to be donated to the Assemblies to put into their Sunday School Store. Apparently the Superintendent of Sunday Schools thinks it will be a novel idea to offer such a device to elementary and junior high school kids. I think she's nuts, but hey, where will the next generation of retro-users come from once we all have passed?

After RJ moved the Commodore to its new home, the rest of the day was spent on cleaning, moving, high and low dusting, mopping, scrubbing, polishing, shampooing, and in some cases, restoring the rest of the Center. The old place, filled with objects of a time and era of a life gone by, was replaced with clean, shiny, and well restored material

that gave the Center a whole new look -- a look that complimented both old and new technologies with neither computing device taking lead nor proceeding the other. Each device being used for the function it was designed. Goodbye to the Roach Hotel and it's many problems and quirks, and hello to the Roach Center for BASIC Commodore Studies, but even then, I'm not so sure. Maybe the word "Commodore" should be replaced with "Computer." This is something that I will bat around with all those who on that great Saturday in the fall of 2013 gave an old man lost in past memories a new place to live, work, and relax.

"Okay, you old windbag, what have you done this month on that blessed piece of machinery we call a Commodore?"

As usual, not much. Like I've said in earlier articles, more of my work has to be done on a more modern machine. Commodore is falling away faster and faster off the scope of computing, with only a wave of gratitude from Windows, Mac, and Linux as she settles into the dust. We retros keep pushing along, wondering what to do to keep our units from leaving the field forever. The great Commodore minds of today like Jim Brain and Jeri Ellsworth will never let Commodore die, but always find new or innovative ways to use the Commodore in today's world.

But as for me, I'm batting around an idea for a pinball game in my head that I hope to build using the Pinball Construction Set offered for Commodore. Picture, if you will, flippers in all for corners of the game; bumpers set up to throw the ball quickly into one of six exits; targets and spinners set randomly throughout the

table; and targets set back to back in the center; knock all eight targets down to advance the multiplier. Now, to add to the confusion, the ball does not travel from top to the bottom of the screen, but from bottom to top. You as end user will be playing in a mirrored universe. The working title to this pill of a set up will be "Mirror, Mirror" and I hope to present it to the 2014 CommVEx if we get to go as a new innovation.

Well, I've typed enough for today. Perhaps I will be able to present the newsletter back in its original Commodore format soon, but for now please enjoy this PC created publication.



MONTHLY MEETING NOTES

September 2013 Meeting Notes

-by Dick Estel & Robert Bernardo

It was Amiga Day at the Fresno Commodore User Group's September meeting. Whether it was this fact or just good fortune, we had full attendance of the local members: Robert Bernardo , Roger Van Pelt , Louis Mazzei , Vincent Mazzei, Dick Estel , and Brad Strait , plus Brad's two kids, Katelyn and William.

As soon as Katelyn and William had eaten, Brad set up some Amiga games for them. They came for the quesadillas, but stayed for the games!

Since the last meeting Robert's CommVEx photos have been added to the FCUG website at <http://www.dickestel.com/commvex13.htm>. (How far behind the times is the Windows spell check program when it wants me to change CommVEx to Comdex?)

Louis started the Amiga discussion by explaining how he got a modern PC to format 3.5" disk for Commodore/Amiga. The format program on 21st century PCs will only create a 1.44 Mb disk, while Amiga needs 880K. Louis simply opened the DOS emulator (there's no real MS-DOS anymore) and issued the standard format command with the right number, and the computer complied, just as if it had Windows 98.

Roger had acquired a Magic Voice complete with instructions. It has only a 250 word vocabulary, and he is still experimenting with it and will bring it to a meeting when it is ready for prime time.

Robert mentioned that Computer Station in Long Beach, which is going out of business, has reduced their prices by 75%, although the starting point is still at 1980 levels, so careful shopping is needed to find any real bargains.

Louis reported that he found a supplier in China offering lots of "shiny, new" SID chips at \$6 to \$15. He negotiated the price down to \$2.80 each, and bought all of the 47 chips they said they had. When the package arrived they had thrown in

three extra chips because he was such a good customer. He will be testing the chips over the next few weeks, but reported that some look fake, and some look like the real thing. After testing, he will make some available on eBay and offer others to club members.

He also discussed an e-mail conversation with repairman Ray Carlsen. Ray has some non-working Blue Chip drives and is pretty sure which chip is bad but has no source for them. The company Louis dealt with has them, but Ray felt price they wanted was unreasonable.

Roger told the story of a friend who experienced a small fire that did very little damage but apparently put a great deal of soot into his electronics. He had to have them professionally cleaned, and this experience can serve as a warning to others who run into a problem like this.

Robert brought in a Christmas card he obtained from the collection of a former user. On the outside of this 1986 American Greetings card, the cartoon character Ziggy touts it as being "the world's most advanced Christmas card. It needs no batteries, is completely cordless, never needs winding or recharging, and contains no messy tubes, wires or transmitters." Inside is a 5.25" computer disk which Ziggy instructs you to put "in your little computer." We had only Amigas set up, so we are looking forward some day to see what this Commodore 64 ghost of Christmas past has in store for us.

Once discussion and lunch were over, we got busy looking at a pile of "in the box" Amiga games Robert had brought in, using the Amiga A500 while Brad and the kids kept busy with the A3000.

As usually happens with this group, the interactive adventure games -- Keef the Thief, Dragon Force, Dalek Attack, and the Kristal -- left us baffled, but the true arcade game -- NY Warriors -- proved fun and challenging.

FCUG Meeting Report – October 2013

-by Robert Bernardo & Dick Estel

Back in the 1990s the Fresno Commodore User Group held an annual picnic, usually at the beautiful country home of the late Sandy and Ingrid Dippolett. A few years ago the event became a dinner, and then a lunch, usually at the regular monthly meeting time, but at a different location, with the club providing the dinner.

This year we chose Famous Dave's Barbecue, meeting the second Sunday due to schedule conflicts. Our attendance was less than we had hoped – Robert Bernardo, Louis Mazzei, Vincent Mazzei and Dick Estel. Some members who said they would attend did not show up and shame on them... they missed out on a free lunch.

Vincent was a little sore, having just completed the test for his green belt in karate the day before. He did 400 pushups, 400 sit-ups, a 3.5 mile run, 4 minutes of punch-out/kick out, an hour of floor exercises and 8 katas (floor maneuvers, 4 of them, once slow and once fast). We all congratulate him on his success.

Robert told about his plans for a trip to England next summer, as well as his marathon activities of the weekend – he drove to San Jose for a 7-hour video-editing class, then to Davis for a Warp

11 concert, and then to the lunch in Fresno. And once back home, he had to get to a café with high-speed internet and enter grades for his classes, which were due that night – a fact he only learned late Friday afternoon. He spent an "all-nighter" - 17 hours getting those grades in and no sleep.

Dick was feeling the lingering effects of a cold, which as he pointed out, lingers a lot longer as you get older.

All of us enjoyed our food, got barbecue sauce on our hands, faces and clothing, and left with full, happy stomachs.

In a tradition that has gone on for many years, Robert handed out gift bags with a small, non-computer item to everyone.



BLASTS FROM THE PAST

-by Dick Estel

Recently I had occasion to try and contact several Commodore users that I've known and exchanged email with in the past. Their replies give a hint as to the state of Commodore today.

From Dick to Roger Long: I notice that your list of active Commodore clubs is long out of date, and assume you are probably no longer maintaining it. If you are, Fresno Commodore User Group has a new address.

Roger: I really haven't done anything with the list for many years now, but have plans to move it over to a wiki so that everyone can help keep it up to date.

From Dick to Rob Snyder: Fresno Commodore Group is putting together a new, updated list of active Commodore clubs. As you can imagine, it's a sadly brief list. Is "Meeting C64/128 Users through the Mail" still active? I see that the link I have no longer works. If it is still active, here's what we wrote about it last year so you can let me know anything that's changed (followed by the update Rob provided in 2012).

Rob: Sorry, our MUTTM club closed down after 2012. I asked for a new president and editor and as nobody stepped up I told the members the club was closing as of the end of 2012. The leftover funds were sent to several commodore organizations such as CommodoreFree, CCCC, and the Fresno Commodore User Group (for CommVEx).

The Commodore Computer Club of Toledo, CCCT, of which I was the president, also folded then, as the other longtime member Frank Kaspitzke, passed away.

From Dick to Rolf Miller (of Ventura and Oxnard clubs): Hi Rolf, are you still out there?

Is UCUGA (United Commodore User Groups Association) still active?

Fresno Commodore User Group has put together a new (very short) list of active Commodore Clubs.

Rolf: Yes, I am still here, but my Commodore use has dropped to near zero.

No, UCUGA is not active -- hasn't been for years.

I appreciate the info -- I get requests for info from time to time. And it is good to know you guys are still active.

Roger's List (interesting from a historical point of view): <http://myplace.frontier.com/~longrj2/cpsl/clubs.html>

FCUG's new up to date list: at <http://www.dickestel.com/commactive.htm>



A HISTORY OF AMIGA PART 4: ENTER COMMODORE

(Part four of the series on the history of the Amiga covers Amiga's rescue by

Commodore Business Machines.)

-by Jeremy Reimer

Deus ex machina

Commodore

The company that rescued Amiga in 1984 was the creation of a single man. Born in Poland in 1928 as Idek Tramielski, he was imprisoned in the Nazi work camps after his country was invaded in World War II. Rescued from the camps by the US Army, he married a fellow concentration camp survivor named Helen Goldgrub, and the two immigrated to the United States. Upon arrival, he changed his name to Jack Tramiel.

Jack enlisted in the US Army in 1948 and served in the Equipment Repair Office. He served two tours of duty in Korea, and then left the Army to work at a small typewriter repair company. In 1955, Jack and his wife left for Canada to start their own typewriter manufacturing firm. Jack wanted a military-sounding name for the company, but General and Admiral were already taken, so he settled on Commodore after seeing a car on the street with that name.

The little firm grew quickly, going public in 1962, but it became enveloped in a financial scandal that threatened to consume the company. Jack was a survivor, however, and would not give up. He found a financier named Irving Gould who purchased a large chunk of Commodore and moved it into new directions. Inexpensive Japanese typewriters were eating into Commodore's profits, so the company

got into selling calculators instead. Then cheap calculators from Japan and from US firms like Texas Instruments threatened to take that business away as well. Jack realized that in order to survive the price wars, he needed to control the chips that went into the calculators. In 1976 he bought MOS Technologies, the same company that split off from Motorola to produce the legendary 6502 chip that ended up in the Apple][, various game consoles, and the Atari 400/800 series.

The MOS purchase got Commodore into the computer business, starting with the PET, then the low-cost VIC 20, and finally in 1982 the company released the best-selling personal computer model of all time: the Commodore 64.

The 64 was a huge hit, selling over 22 million machines over its life span and firmly cementing Commodore as one of the major players in the burgeoning personal computer industry. However, things were not all rosy at the company.

Jack was determined not just to compete with other computer companies, but to destroy them. "Business is war," was his motto, and while the price war he initiated did take out some competitors—including getting revenge against TI, which withdrew from the computer business in October 1983—it also strained Commodore's profits. Tramiel often fought with Gould over matters of money: the financier wanted Jack to grow the business without any extra capital, but Jack wanted more cash in order to lower costs and thus wipe out the rest of his competitors. "We sell computers to the masses, not the classes," he once said, reflecting the price difference between a \$199

Commodore 64 and machines from Apple and IBM that cost thousands of dollars.

In the end, as is often the case when battling your financiers, the money people won. Jack Tramiel was forced out of his own company by the board of directors in late 1983.

This ouster would have a huge effect on the fledgling Amiga company because Tramiel did not go quietly.

Jack Tramiel was a study in conflicts and contradictions, like any human being, but more so. His hardheaded management style made him enemies, but also made him steadfast friends—many key employees quit Commodore when he left to join him in his new ventures. His tendency to jump from project to project paid huge dividends when the company moved from the PET to the VIC-20 to the Commodore 64, but that same line of thinking hurt the company when ill-conceived successors such as the Plus/4 failed in the marketplace.

So it should come as no surprise that Tramiel's departure from Commodore both saved and doomed the Amiga at the same time.

Before Tramiel had left, Commodore had already engaged in halfhearted talks to purchase the struggling Amiga, Inc., but nothing had come from them. Atari was developing a new personal computer and game console and wanted access to the Amiga chipset. The initial offer was for \$3 a share and kept getting lower. When it hit 98¢ per share, both sides walked away from the table. It was at this point that Atari "loaned" Amiga

\$500,000 to continue operations for a few more months.

This poisonous deal was put together by none other than Jack Tramiel, who had managed to purchase Atari's computer division after being kicked out of Commodore. Due to the video game crash of 1983, Atari's parent company Warner Communications had been looking to dump the computer and home console video game portions of Atari (they would retain the arcade division, which was still doing well), and Tramiel managed to work out a spectacular deal that gave him ownership of Atari's computer division for no money down.

When Jack left Commodore for Atari, the former company's stock fell while the latter's rose, as public opinion still considered (and rightly so) Jack to have been the driving force that built Commodore's success. A steady flow of engineers followed Tramiel to Atari, which prompted Commodore to sue Atari for theft of trade secrets. (Tramiel, in his inimitable style, would later countersue; both lawsuits were eventually settled out of court.) To compete with Tramiel and regain the engineering talent they had lost, Commodore decided to purchase Amiga wholesale. Keeping the original Amiga team intact saved the computer as Jay Miner and the others had originally envisioned it.

However, it also made Tramiel more determined than ever to get his revenge on Commodore. That revenge would come in the form of the Atari ST—sometimes called the Jackintosh—which was rushed into production to compete against the Amiga. Had Jack never been kicked out of Commodore, the Atari line

of computers might have just faded into oblivion after Warner had dumped the company. The competition between Amiga and Atari would wind up hurting both platforms as they focused their resources on fighting each other rather than making sure they had a place in a world increasingly dominated by the IBM PC.

Still, all that was in the future, and the Amiga team, now a fully-owned subsidiary of Commodore, had but one thing on their minds: finishing the computer.

Finalizing the design

One hugely positive benefit about being owned by a large computer company was that the Amiga team no longer (for the moment, anyway) had to worry about money. The team was moved 10 miles to a spacious, rented facility in Los Gatos, California. They could afford to hire more engineers, and the software development team went from having 10 people sharing a single Sage workstation to everyone having their own SUN on their desk.

The influx of resources made the release of the Amiga computer possible, but it was still a race against time to get the computer finished before the competition took away the market.

While the hardware was mostly done, pending a few adjustments by Jay Miner and his team, the software (as is usually the case in high-tech development) was falling behind schedule. The microkernel, known as Exec, was mostly complete, thanks to the brilliant work by Carl Sassenrath, and the GUI was coming together as well, building on RJ

Mical's solid framework (for a short time, his new Commodore business card read "Director of Intuition").

However, there was a third layer necessary to complete the picture. Exec, like modern microkernels, handled basic memory and task management, but there was still a need for another component to handle mundane tasks such as the file system and other operating system duties.

The CAOS debacle

Originally, that third layer was known as CAOS, which stood for the Commodore Amiga Operating System. Exec programmer Carl Sassenrath wrote up the design spec for CAOS, which had all sorts of neat features such as an advanced file system and resource tracking. The latter was a method of keeping track of such things as file control blocks, I/O blocks, message ports, libraries, memory usage, shared data, and overlays, and freeing them up if a program quit unexpectedly. As the Amiga software engineers were already behind schedule, they had contracted out parts of CAOS development to a third party. Still, as is often the case in software, the development hit some unforeseen roadblocks.

According to Commodore engineer Andy Finkel, the management team "decided that it wouldn't be possible to complete [CAOS] and still launch the Amiga on time, especially since the software guys had already given up weekends at home. And going home. And sleeping."

Lack of time wasn't the only problem.

The third-party development house learned that Amiga, Inc., had been bought out by Commodore, and they suddenly demanded significantly more money than had originally been agreed upon. "Commodore tried to negotiate with them in good faith, but the whole thing fell apart in the end," recalled RJ Mical, who was upset by the whole event. "It was a jerk-butt thing that they did there."

TripOS to the rescue

When the CAOS deal fell apart, the Amiga team suddenly needed a replacement operating system. Relief came in the form of TripOS, written by Dr. Tim King at the University of Cambridge in the 1970s and 80s, and later ported to the PDP-11. Dr. King formed a small company called MetaComCo to quickly rewrite TripOS for the Amiga, where it became known as AmigaDOS.

AmigaDOS handled many of the same tasks as CAOS, but it was an inferior replacement. "Their code was university-quality code," said Mical, "where optimized performance was not important, but where theoretical purity was important." The operating system also lacked resource tracking, which hurt the overall stability of the system. This oversight had repercussions that remain to this day: the very latest PowerPC-compiled version of AmigaOS will still sometimes fail to free up all resources when a program crashes.

Interestingly, TripOS (and thus AmigaOS) was written in the BCPL language, a predecessor to C. Later versions of the operating system would replace this with a combination of C and

Assembler.

With the kernel, OS, and GUI ready, and with last-minute adjustments to the custom chips, all that remained was designing a case for the system, which had been dubbed the Amiga 1000. Jay Miner felt it would be appropriate to have the signature from all 53 Amiga team members—both Amiga, Inc. employees and Commodore engineers who later joined the project—to be preserved on the inside of the computer's case. Both Joe Pillow and Jay's dog Mitchy got to sign the case in their own unique way.

Dave Morse, who was still nominally in charge of Commodore Amiga, added his own idea for the case: a raised "garage" on the bottom that users could slide their keyboards into when not in use.

There was only one potential stumbling block preventing the release of the Amiga 1000: the decision about how much RAM to put in the system. Cost-conscious Commodore wanted to ship with only 256KB. Knowing that the operating system and GUI needed more memory, Jay insisted on shipping with 512KB. The two sides were unable to come to an agreement, so a compromise was reached: the Amiga would ship with 256KB but come with an easily-accessible expansion cage on the front of the case that could accommodate more memory. Jay would later say that he had to "put his job on the line" just to get Commodore to put the expansion port in.

Now that all the pieces were in place, Commodore decided to announce the Amiga to the world. For the first time in the company's history, management

decided to pull out all the stops. The Amiga announcement would be the most lavish and expensive new product showcase in the history of personal computers.

The announcement

Commodore rented the Lincoln Center and hired a full orchestra for the Amiga announcement ceremony, which was videotaped for posterity. All Commodore employees were given tuxedos to wear for the event: RJ Mical one-upped the rest by finding a pair of white gloves to complete his ensemble. The band played a jaunty little number with tubas and xylophones as a brilliant laser display revealed the Amiga name in its new font.

The master of ceremonies was Commodore marketing vice president Bob Truckenbrode, but he soon gave way to the real star of the show: the head of software engineering, Bob Pariseau. With his long hair elegantly tied back in a ponytail, Pariseau directed the demonstration like a maestro conducting a symphony. With each wave of his hand, he would signal his counterpart, sitting at a real Amiga 1000, to demonstrate each new feature.

"At Amiga, the user controls how he uses his time, not the computer," Pariseau said, as his assistant showed the flexibility of the then-new graphical user interface. He then brought up a graphical word processor called TextCraft to show how a GUI could be applied to everyday work: the word processor featured menus, toolbar buttons, and an on-screen ruler for setting margins and tab stops. Pedestrian stuff for 1995, but astounding for a decade earlier!

Then he moved on to showing off the Amiga's graphics capabilities, showing all 4,096 colors at once on the same screen, followed by a close-up photo of a baboon's face in 640 by 400 resolution: an image that many people might remember gazing at in VGA monitor advertisements from the early 1990s.

From static images, he moved on to the Amiga's strong suit: animation. The custom chips included hardware commands to flood fill arbitrary areas: those who remember using flood fill in Photoshop on older computers will remember how slow it was when it had to rely on the CPU. The Amiga's hardware-accelerated version filled up multiple rotating and intersecting triangles with different colors as they spun across the screen, all at a constant 30 frames per second. Another animation demo, Robot City, showed the Amiga's built-in sprite and collision detection features, allowing large animated characters to move over complex backgrounds and interact with each other.

None of the demos were taking over the entire computer to do their magic. Each full-screen demo could be smoothly slid down to reveal other running applications beneath.

The concept of multitasking was virtually unknown for personal computer users in 1985, and Bob went through several examples of how this feature could be used not just for entertainment but for business applications as well. A bar chart and pie chart were built simultaneously from the same numerical data, and the user could quickly switch

from one window to another to see the results in either format.

Moving on from graphics to sound, Bob demonstrated the four-channel synthesized sound hardware by using the keyboard as a virtual piano playing various different sampled instruments. "With all four channels going simultaneously, the 68000 [CPU] is idle," Pariseau commented, something that would not be true for many years in other computers until sampled waveform sound cards became available for PCs. A close-up of the Amiga operator at the keyboard showed his fingers shaking slightly—there was a lot riding on these demos, and the software was brand new and still largely untested. Yet the Amiga performed masterfully in its first time on stage, without crashing once.

The next demonstration was of computer-generated speech: the Amiga spoke in a male voice, a female voice, a fast and a slow voice, and all were pitch-modulated to sound more like a real person; the last voice was spoken in a monotone, "just like a real computer." This line got a good laugh from the audience.

Even back in 1985, the market was already showing signs of standardizing on the IBM PC platform, and Bob acknowledged this fact in his speech. "You know, it's hard," he said, "it's hard to be innovative in an industry that has been dominated by one technology for so long. We at Commodore Amiga knew that to do this [introduce a new platform] we had to be at least an order of magnitude better than anything anyone had ever seen.

"We've done that," he continued, "and

then we decided: why stop there? Why not include that older technology in what we had already done?" Thus was set the stage for the very first IBM PC emulator on the Amiga, called Amiga Transformer. The program was started up, then a PC-DOS installation disk was placed into an attached 5.25 inch floppy drive, and this was replaced with a Lotus 1-2-3 disk. "Standard, vanilla, IBM DOS," Bob said with a sigh, and the crowd laughed again. Compared to the exciting graphics and sound demos of a few minutes earlier, it was a bit of a letdown seeing the industry standard spreadsheet take over the screen.

To lighten the mood, Bob finished off with a replay of the original Boing Ball demo that was first shown at CES only a year earlier. "We've lived our dream," he said, "and seen it come to life. Now it's your turn. What will you do with the Amiga Computer?"

Andy and Debbie

Two unlikely celebrities were then invited on stage to show what creative folks might do with their Amigas. Deborah Harry, the lead singer of Blondie, walked on stage along with counterculture art icon Andy Warhol, who took a quick appreciative glance at her red dress as they sat down. "Are you ready to paint me now?" Debbie asked, her voice slightly nervous.

Andy sat down in front of the Amiga 1000, looking at it like it was some kind of alien technology from another world. "What other computers have you worked with?" asked resident Amiga artist Jack Hager. "I haven't worked on anything," Andy replied truthfully. "I've been waiting for this

one." A nearby video camera was attached to a digitizer, and from this setup a monochrome snapshot of Debbie's face appeared on the Amiga screen, ready for Andy to add a splash of color.

It is a cardinal rule in doing computer demos in public that you never let anyone else take control of the machine, lest they do something off-script that winds up crashing the computer. The paint program (ProPaint) being used was a very early alpha, and the software engineers knew that it had bugs in it. One of the known bugs was that the flood fill algorithm—the paint program didn't use the hardware fills that were demonstrated earlier—would usually crash the program every second time it was used. Yet there was Andy clicking here, there, and everywhere with the flood fill. Somehow, the demo gods were smiling on Amiga that day, and the program didn't crash. "This is kind of pretty," Andy said, admiring his work. "I think I'll keep that."

The show ended with a short video—powered by the Amiga—of a wireframe ballerina, who then turned into a solid-shaded figure, and finally a fully rotoscoped animated image. A real ballerina then came out on stage and danced in sync with her animated counterpart.

Reactions to the show

While the crowd attending the show went away extremely impressed with what they had seen, the reaction from the rest of the world was mixed. Articles about the demo were published in magazines such as Popular Computing, Fortune, Byte, and Compute.

The Fortune article both praised and dismissed the Amiga at the same time: "While initial reviews praised the technical capabilities of the Amiga, a shell-shocked PC industry has learned to resist the seductive glitter of advanced technology for its own sake."

Think about that last line for a few moments. Can any computer user today honestly say that color, animation, multichannel sound, and multitasking are merely seductive glitter that exists only for its own sake? Like Doug Engelbart's revolutionary demonstration of the first mouse-driven graphical user interface back in 1968, many of the ideas shown in the Amiga unveiling were a little too far ahead of their time, at least for some people.

Nevertheless, Commodore had some great buzz leading up to the introduction of the Amiga 1000. The machine had great hardware and software. It had features that no other computer could even hope to emulate. Freelance writer Louis Wallace described it thusly: "To give you an idea of its capabilities, imagine taking all that is good about the Macintosh, combine it with the power of the IBM PC-AT, improve it, and then cut the price by 75 percent." This last part was a bit of an exaggeration, but not by much: the final price of the Amiga 1000 was set at \$1,295 for the 256KB version and \$1,495 for the 512KB one. This compared favorably to the Macintosh, which had only 128KB and sold for \$2,495.

Commodore looked like it had everything going for it. The new Amiga computer was years ahead of the competition, and many people in the

company—including Jay Miner—felt that they had a real chance to significantly impact the industry. Sitting in the crowd during the Amiga's unveiling was Thomas Rattigan, an enthusiastic executive who had come from Pepsi and was being groomed for the position of CEO at Commodore. He had big plans for the Amiga. The original designers had achieved their dream by creating the Amiga from nothing, but now bigger dreams were being imagined for the little computer.

Unbeknownst to him, however, larger forces were at work that would turn these dreams into nightmares.

(Tune in for part 5 of "The History of the Amiga" series, which will cover some of the early blunders made by Commodore after the launch as well as the rise of CEO Thomas Rattigan.)



-by Dick Estel

INTRODUCTION

This is number five of a limited series of articles saluting some of our past members, people who have made a significant contribution to the club. Our more recent members did not have the pleasure of knowing these men and women, many of whom have passed on.

However, they made a lasting impression on the club and the author.

Questions and comments to our web address, info@dickestel.com, are welcome.

ART CONE

The name Art Cone was familiar to me well before I met him as a member of the Commodore club, because for a number of years he was the official spokesman for the Fresno City Fire Department, addressing the press regarding major fires and other matters relating to the department.

Before he took on that administrative task, he was a fire fighter, fire prevention officer, and arson investigator, working for the department for 22 years. But we knew him best as a Commodore user who also edited the Retired Firefighters Association newsletter. As a fellow editor, Art understood the challenges of creating a small organization newsletter, and willingly contributed articles to the Interface over the years.

I didn't get to know Art as well as I did some other members, but at our after-meeting lunches, he told us a couple of interesting stories about his life. He met his wife when they were both dance instructors in the 1930s at the Rainbow Ballroom, a long time dance hall and later concert venue near downtown Fresno .

He also related how his wife's family came to California during the depression, and just moved into a vacant, seemingly-abandoned house in Tulare County .

He was survived by a son who was a commercial airline pilot, and several grandchildren and great grandchildren. Art's wife Frances passed away during his time with the club, and he remarried.

Art was born in Tulare in 1918 and died March 2, 1996 at age 78.