The Computer Rag

newsletter of the

YOKOSUKA COMPUTER CLUB

News, Gossip & Innuendo from the Western Pacific
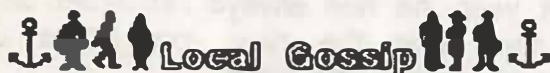
⚓ 👤👤 Local Gossip 👤👤👤 ⚓

February Meetings: will be held on the second Wed., Feb. 12, and the third Tues., Feb. 18, both at 6 p.m., in the General Practice Clinic conference room at the hospital. We are looking for some stunning demonstrations, so if you want to stun someone, feel free. If you need any help, call the newsletter editor at 234-4326.

January Meetings: at the Wed. meeting new Pres. Doug Hermann was introduced and greeted with only mild ridicule. The past two presidents were envious. We still lack a Vice President.

Most of the meeting was devoted to planning the Jan. 11 Computer Workshop, with attention also given to finding a new Club Librarian and discussing how to get more computer equipment and software in at A-33. Good stores in the Kanto were also discussed, and there was also an extended, energetic gripe session about virtually everything, some of it having to do with computers.

Saturday's Computer Workshop was a big hit, with all sessions well attended. Doug and Robin Hermann spoke on word processing, using AppleWorks and MouseWrite as examples (and mentioning WordStar as a powerful, but bad, example), with added commentary by Lawrence Charters. Dave Gibbs talked about spreadsheets, using MultiPlan as an example, with additional commentary by Kathleen Charters. Jay Sikorski talked about telecommunications, hindered slightly by the unexpected refusal of his modem to telecommunicate. (A Macintosh and Radio Shack Model 100 were pressed into service as a substitute for the planned demo.) Lawrence Charters talked about database management, using some of this own data bases and Microsoft File as examples.

From the questions, comments, and heckling, the workshop appeared to hit just the right combination of introductory material and advanced application. Several peope asked for additional workshops. Ideas, anyone?

At the Tuesday meeting (held Jan. 21, not Jan. 14), an attempt was made to dispute the old belief that printers are strictly output devices. Using a Macintosh and an Imagewriter printer, Bob Felt rolled illustrations through the printer and they appeared moments later (well, maybe not quite that fast) on the Mac's screen. Once there, the

Kyoto, JAPAN

Hiroshima, JAPAN

Iwakuni, JAPAN

Tokyo, JAPAN

Yokosuka, JAPAN

Osaka, JAPAN
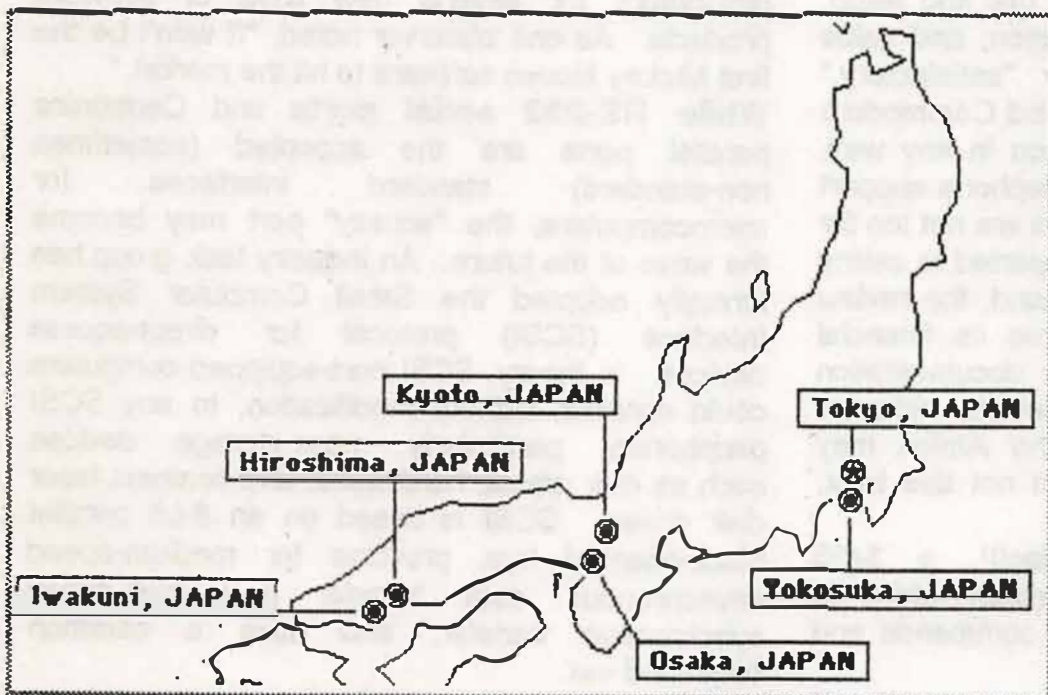
Nippon, Mac-style

Software Concepts, Inc., has a new package out which draws very, very nice maps. Based on satellite data, the package, called Concepts Computerized Atlas, can draw any part of the world, including the North and South poles, from varying "altitudes," and incorporates optional 30° grid lines. It also has a built-in gazetteer which can optionally place cities on the map, and give (out of date) demographic information. The Macintosh version is $69.

illustrations could be edited in almost unlimited numbers of ways. Just the thing for those of us with the artistic abilities of Rambo.

☎️🖥 Non-Local Gossip ✉️ ✏️ 🪐

Ben Lexcen, designer of Australia II, the America's Cup Winner, is using a new package called MacSurf to design racing yachts. If you have a Macintosh and $1950, you can try it, too.

Something to consider, as one computer analyst put it: "You can invent the world's greatest mousetrap but then you have to find somebody that has an uncontrollable urge to murder mice."

Haba Systems is selling Habadisk, a plug-in 10 Mbyte hard disk drive for the Atari 520ST, for $699.95. Anybody got a 520ST?? How?

Tandy has started selling the Model 3000, an IBM PC-AT compatible. A machine with two floppy disk drives is $2599, and with a 20Mbyte hard disk the price is $3599. By comparison, IBM's hard-disk machine is $5,995 — and slower.

Apple has dropped the price of the LaserWriter printer to $5995. This may drop again soon.

Space Coast Systems has a 10 Mbyte hard disk which fits inside an Apple IIe, using one slot, for $1195, and a 20 Mbyte version for $1595. Installation requires removing the IIe power supply, but a new, more powerful power supply is included.

Commodore's Amiga was reviewed in the Dec. 16 **Infoworld**, and given generally poor ratings. Infoworld rated it highly for ease of use and setup, but found performance, documentation, and value "poor," and serviceability merely "satisfactory." Among other things, the review noted Commodore refused to assist with the evaluation in any way, even refusing to reveal Amiga's telephone support number. Since **Infoworld's** offices are not too far from the Amiga factory, the staff resorted to calling the factory direct. On the other hand, the review stated that, if Commodore survives its financial difficulties, provides the necessary documentation and support, and repairs the severe software problems which currently exist, the Amiga may well emerge as one of the best, if not the best, computers on the market.

Datalogica has released dMacIII, a $495 database package for the Macintosh which is compatible with dBASE II and III commands and files.

Steve Wozniak, creator of the Apple I and II and co-founder of Apple Computer Corp., has started buying Apple stock again and stepped up his consulting for Apple. Though he left the company early last year, he has always remained on the payroll, and finds the new, post-Steve Jobs management more to his liking.

Tandy has given the Tandy 1000, an IBM PC compatible, the ability to use Apple II educational software, thanks to a $375 emulator board called Trackstar that allows the machine to read and run Apple disks.

Rising Star, of Epson Valdocs fame, has announced RSI Graphs, RSI Spreadsheet, RSI Mail, RSI Draw, RSI Paint, RSI Scheduler and RSI Music for the Atari 520ST. Most of these items aren't ready yet, but any day now . . .

General Electric has purchased RCA for $6.28 billion, which will make it overnight one of the largest computer firms. In addition to General Electric's own printer, terminal and peripherals products, the purchase adds RCA's magnetic media business, several computer component and peripherals factories, and the National Broadcasting Company. This, in turn, is significant as NBC has been testing videotext technology (transmission of computer information over television channels to specially-equipped TV and computer equipment).

Walt Disney is negotiating with several software distributors for several new lines of software products. As one observer noted, "It won't be the first Mickey Mouse software to hit the market."

While RS-232 serial ports and Centronics parallel ports are the accepted (sometimes non-standard) standard interfaces for microcomputers, the "scuzzy" port may become the wave of the future. An industry task group has formally adopted the Small Computer System Interface (SCSI) protocol for direct-access devices. In theory, SCSI port-equipped computers could connect, without modification, to any SCSI peripherals, particularly mass-storage devices such as disk drives, hard disks, and compact laser disk drives. SCSI is based on an 8-bit parallel block-oriented bus, provides for medium-speed asynchronous data transfer and high-speed synchronous transfer, and uses a common command set.

What does all this mean? Among other things,

SCSI-equipped computers can talk to any other SCSI device, which means that Apple II machines could use SCSI disk drives to read information stored by IBM, Commodore, Atari, Tandy, etc. machines, since the SCSI drive doesn't pay any attention to how the drive is formatted — only how the information is transferred. If SCSI catches on, all peripheral prices should fall since it will not be necessary to create "custom" versions for specific brands. (Apple's Macintosh Plus is one of the first machines to include this as standard equipment.)

DOCTORS, a medical diagnosis system developed in Yokosuka at Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp.'s Electronics Communications Laboratory, is now being tested at selected hospitals. A computerized "expert" system written in LISP, DOCTORS can make a medical diagnosis based on a set of symptoms typed in to terminals linked over phone lines to the Laboratory's DEC VAX superminicomputer. At present, DOCTORS can diagnose headaches, stomach disorders and dizziness, and physicians at Kanto Teishin Hospital are currently building additional databases to cover pediatrics, internal medicine and neurology. NTT expects the system to be available commercially sometime in 1987, at which time they may make it available for home use through phone links from home computers.

What is RS-232? In theory, this is a "standard" protocol for sending serial data, but in practice it isn't very standard. Most RS-232 ports use a 25-pin D-shaped connector (called a DB-25), available in both male and female versions. IBM uses a 9-pin connector, and some vendors use a round DIN plug. RS-232 devices also come in DTE (Data Terminal Equipment) versions (usually computers) and DCE (Data Communications Equipment) versions (usually printers and modems). Officially, the 25 pins are assigned as follows:

1 FG—frame ground
2 TD—transmitted data (to DCE)
3 RD—received data (to DTE)
4 RTS—request to send (to DCE)
5 CTS—clear to send (to DTE)
6 DSR—data set ready (to DTE)
7 SG—signal ground
8 DCD—data carrier detect (to DTE)
9 reserved
10 reserved
11 unassigned
12 (S)DCD—secondary carrier detect (to DTE)
13 (S)CTS—secondary clear to send (to DTE)
14 (S)TD—secondary transmitted data (to DCE)
15 TC—transmitted clock (to DTE)
16 (S)RD—secondary received data (to DTE)
17 RC—receiver clock (to DTE)
18 unassigned
19 (S)RTS—secondary request to send (to DCE)
20 DTR—data terminal ready (to DCE)
21 SQ—signal quality detect (to DTE)
22 RI—ring detect (to DTE)
23 data rate select (to DCE)
24 (TC)—transmit clock (to DCE)
25 unassigned

Most of these assignments were designed for teletype equipment, and have little value for computer equipment. Most computers, in fact, can use RS-232 cables having as few as three wires connected — but manufacturers don't agree on which three.

If none of this makes sense, and you are having troubles with your RS-232 devices, consider buying a Smart Cable from IQ Technologies, 1181 NE First St., Suite 308, Bellevue, WA 98005. The Smart Cable, priced around $80, analyzes signals sent to it and switches them around as needed.

Heathkit is now offering two emulator packages which allow Heath/Zenith Z-110 and Z-120 machines to run, unmodified, IBM PC software, priced at $599 and $699. Both packages also allow the machines to continue normal Z-110/120 operations.

Heathkit is also offering a $249.95 kit which allows Z-110/120 machines with half-height drives to operate at 8 MHz instead of the usual 5 MHz. If you have a Zenith in your office space and would like a catalog of goodies, write to Heathkit, Heath Company, Benton Harbor, MI 49022.

For those getting tired of having their machines constantly surpassed by new, improved models, take note: DEC's PDP-11 series minicomputer is now in its 15th year, with over 500,000 machines installed around the world. DEC even offers a PDP-11 desktop machine if "minicomputer" sounds too large for you.

Thesys Memory Products has introduced the Thesys Fastcard Plus, an 8 Mbyte memory board for IBM PC-AT computers, priced at $800. Thesys also is selling Fastdrive, a 16 Mbyte "hard disk"

composed of RAM memory chips, for $1600. The Fastdrive has an access time of 10 microseconds — about 100 times faster than a hard disk.

In a never-ending quest for standardization, the U.S. Navy is pushing DIF (document interchange format). Using DIF, documents prepared on one brand of word processor using one brand of computer could be read in, without modification, on another brand of word processor running on a different brand of computer. DIF would not only allow conversion of the document, but would even translate such subtleties as: is the text justified? is it underscored? and where are the margins? When the standard is finished, it is very likely the Navy will insist all microcomputer purchases, both hardware and software, be able to support DIF.

Just 18% — Reference Technology, Inc., is now preparing to sell its Clasix CD-ROM drive for the IBM PC for $1595. As a way of prompting sales, they are including a little software with the drive — 4,000 public domain programs, all contained on a 550 Mbyte CD-ROM disk. The programs are contained in 8,600 files, taken from the first 390 disks of the PC-SIG library, but fill just one-sixth of the disk. Almost makes you want to go out and get a PC just to use the drive . . .

Another reason to buy a PC — Prentice-Hall is now selling Catspaw, Inc's SNOBOL4+, for $95.

This is the only version of SNOBOL available for a microcomputer, and the price is unbeatable. As for why you would want SNOBOL — your newsletter editor once wrote an entire word processor in just 7 lines of SNOBOL code. It is a **very** powerful, **very** strange language.

Naval Ocean Systems Center, San Diego, has awarded a $796,000 contract to SoftTech Inc. to develop Version 2 of the Common Ada Programming Environment Interface Set (CAIS). After this work is completed, the CAIS will be adopted as a military standard . In short, we will soon have a common programming interface for all the Ada programs we aren't writing.