The Computer Rag

newsletter of the Yokosuka Computer Club

News, Gossip & Innuendo from the Western Pacific

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Editor: USNH Box 65-1561, FPO Seattle, WA 98765

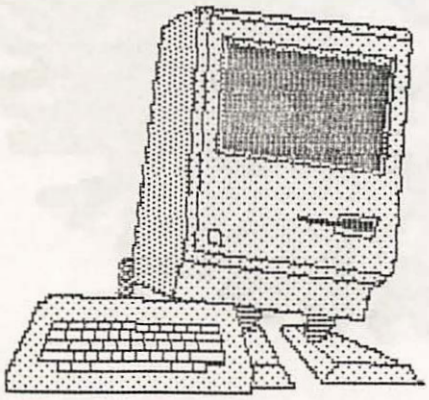
or Box 65-1561, 1 Honcho, Yokosuka-shi, Kanagawa 238

Local gossip

April Meetings: will be held on the second (2nd, No. 2, II) Wed., April 9, and the third (3rd, No. 3, III) Tues., April 15, both at 6 p.m. in the General Practice Clinic conference room at the hospital. Both sessions should have one or more demonstrations of the Zenith Z-100 series microcomputers. As these are the same machines the Air Force and Navy have declared as their "standards," you'll be sorry if you don't come . . .

March Meetings: at the Wednesday meeting, there was a review of the COMDEX in Japan '86 show (read on for a recap) and a discussion of the new Macintosh Plus. As reported in last month's issue, the Mac Plus looks like a great machine, but software incompatibilities may force current users to hold off thinking about getting their machines upgraded.

The Tuesday meeting featured a demonstration of ConcertWare Plus on a 512K Macintosh. ConcertWare Plus uses the Mac's four voice synthesizer to easily create very complex musical pieces. While no extra hardware is required (the package does work on a 128K Mac), longer pieces can be written and played on a Fat Mac with an external drive, and the music sounds much better when piped through a good quality external speaker or, better yet, through a stereo system. As the Mac has one sound port, the music is monophonic.



Though not demonstrated, ConcertWare Plus really shines when MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) adapters are plugged into the back, and the music is played through something like a Yamaha DX-7 keyboard synthesizer. ConcertWare Plus includes an "instrument maker" editor, allowing virtually unlimited design of different waveforms, and other companies offer software "patch librarians" which can make incredible sounds with a synthesizer.

Using something like the DX-7, you can play on the keyboard and have the Mac automatically write the notes on the screen, or you can have the Mac play one part while you play another, or you can have the Mac play the synthesizer all on its own, or you can daisy-chain several instruments together and have the Mac put on its own unassisted concert.

There are about a dozen similar programs for the Mac, and at least one such program for the Atari 520ST (which comes with MIDI ports as standard equipment). [If the Club is interested, the editor is willing to put on another performance, using a synthesizer, provided he first receives just a few hundred dollars in donations for equipment.]

Gary Shrout then demonstrated his "all color" Apple IIc system, featuring a crisp RGB color monitor and an Imagewriter II printer with

color ribbon. Several people were impressed with the amount of room the IIc needed – though Apple calls it a "compact" system, it managed to fill up an entire conference table without too much trouble. These same unkind souls also noticed AppleWorks looked very black and white for a "color" system, though they grudgingly admitted the new desk accessory packages designed for AppleWorks looked pretty slick.

Shrout ignored several kind offers to take the ImageWriter II off his hands. After demonstrating the machine in basic black and white (no big deal – except that it is about twice as fast as most other machines in its price range), he loaded a "Sticky Bear" disk [yes, a "Sticky Bear" disk – he claims to be looking for something more sophisticated . . .] and dumped a couple color screens to the printer – which printed very clearly in color. Shrout then ignored even more kind offers to take the printer off his hands. Some of us offered an across the board trade of a standard, professional-looking

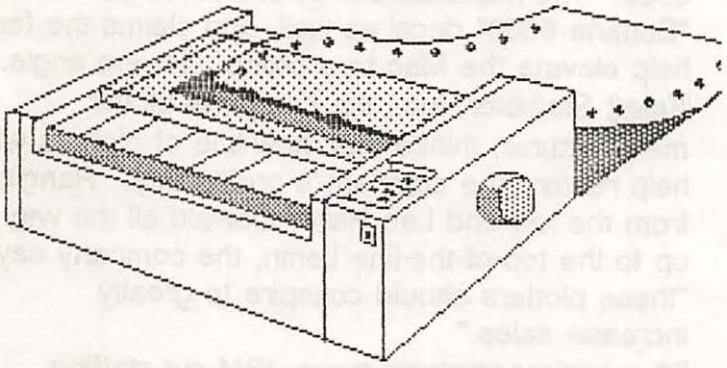
Chiyonofuji??

Several people wondered what sumo Yokozuna [grand champion] Chiyonofuji was doing in last month's newsletter, and a couple also wondered what happened to the rest of him, and several more had no idea what the illustration was supposed to be.

Well, sports fans, Chiyonofuji is currently the only active yokozuna in sumo, winner of four tournaments last year and one this year. He has yet to lose a tournament in the new Tokyo stadium.

As to why he is in the newsletter -- well, you see, this fellow Daimon Kinoshita is making modern prints of sumo stars, using old Edo-period techniques. Not many people will want to pay ¥18,000 for a real print but, thanks to a Thunderscan and a post card copy . . .

ImageWriter I (see illustration), noting it looked much more respectable than the silly, swept-back, high-tech doorstop-looking ImageWriter II, but would he listen?



Semi-local gossip

COMDEX in Japan '86, held in Tokyo March 3-6, was a major disappointment. Steve Jobs was scheduled to deliver a keynote address, but in a hasty news conference before the show opened announced he was returning to the U.S. to attend a sick parent. As Steve is an orphan, several members of the press were puzzled.

Last year's show attracted all the big Japanese companies, plus Apple, IBM, AT&T, DEC, Wang, and many other foreign firms. All the exhibits filled five crowded halls, and over 40,000 visitors dropped in. This year, not a single major American firm attended, and most large Japanese companies stayed away as well. Show officials claim 20,000 visitors came by, but the two halls in use seemed deserted.

Just the same, the show was interesting. Several new laser printers were shown, including a new one from TEC that supports full-page graphics and is, as the salesman put it, "very free and cheap." TEC, and almost everyone else, also had a full-page scanner on display; feed it a sheet of graphics and, after a minute or two of humming, the graphics will appear on the computer screen, with remarkably little distortion.

Easily the most popular machine at the show was NEC's 9801 series. Of the American computers, only two kinds were to be found, anywhere: the IBM PC series, and the Apple Macintosh. There were no Commodores, no Ataris, no Tandys (except a couple Tandy 100 and 200 laptops), no Compaqs, no Zeniths, no Apple IIs – nothing. [Actually, there was a Sperry PC, but it was being used to demonstrate how slow the Sperry is compared to other machines.]

If the NEC 9801 was the most popular, the IBM PC was the most imitated. Several Korean, Taiwanese, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japanese and unidentified companies had PC, XT, and AT clones. One Taiwanese company, in addition to selling PC AT clones, also offered "electronic musical brightness testers." If you have any electronic music that needs to have its brightness tested, this company will fix you up with one of five pastel-colored models.

Tokyo police are investigating reports NTT's CAPTAIN videotex system is being used for prostitution. Japanese innovation strikes again!

Stranger than truth

Zenith has won a $27 million contract to supply the IRS with up to 18,000 Z-171 microcomputers, each equipped with windowing and integrated software packages. The Z-171, developed by Morrow Designs, features a backlighted LCD display and two 5.25 inch disk drives, and runs standard IBM PC software.

Morrow Designs, which until recently manufactured the Z-171 for Zenith, has filed for Chap. 11. Since Zenith now has a license to build the Z-171 on its own, and since it pays no royalties on the machine, Morrow didn't get anything out of the contract but publicity. Unfortunately, publicity doesn't overcome a $7 million deficit.

Zenith has also won a contract, potentially worth up to $500 million, to supply Z-248 machines to the Department of Defense. There are mixed reports as to whether the Navy is involved in the contract; Zenith and the Pentagon say the contract involves the Air Force, Navy, Army and Marine Corps, but some officials claim the Navy intends to sail off on its own. The Z-248, which can run the same software as the IBM PC AT, will be supplied with at least half a megabyte of memory, Microsoft Windows and SuperCalc 3. With the optional Xenix operating system, a single Z-248 can be used by up to six people at one time, which makes the rumored contract price of $1700 each a major breakthrough.

Central Point Software has received preliminary approval from the Customs Service to sell the Laser 128 in the U.S. The next time you write off for an update of Copy II Plus, order a backup Apple at the same time!

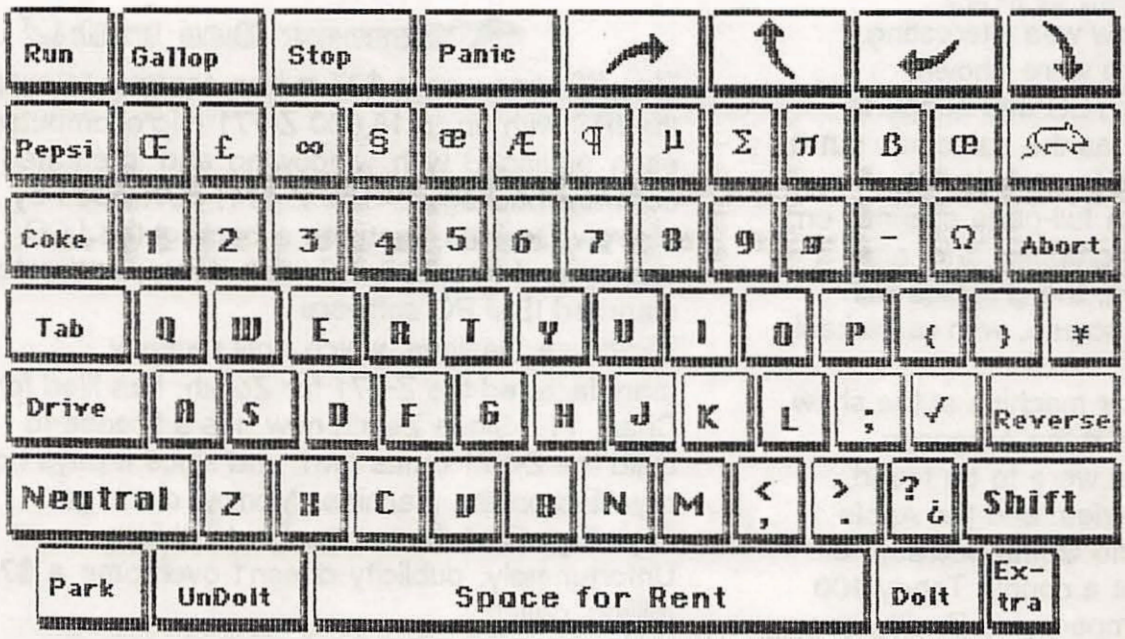
Government Computer News, which covers exactly what you think it covers, recently ran an article on how the Navy uses a Texas Instruments computer aboard the carrier USS Saratoga. The TI 990/12A helps plan and evaluate missions for the EA-6B Prowler, but under a photograph of a Prowler there appeared this caption: "A TI minicomputer aboard the carrier Prowler saves hours of flight planning for pilots of Navy F-14 fighters."

Yet more Banana 6000 news: Mac owners can now purchase, for just $25, a pair of feet to put under their Macs to make them look like the 6000. The manufacturer throws in a free "Banana 6000" decal as well, and claims the feet help elevate the Mac to a proper viewing angle.

Fast Scribbler, Inc., the computer plotter manufacturer, thinks their new line of plotters will help restore the company's profitability. Ranging from the low-end Lee Harvy Oswald all the way up to the top-of-the-line Lenin, the company says "these plotters should conspire to greatly increase sales."

In a brilliant strategic move, IBM cut staffing 108% -- firing 12% of its total work force and 96% of the staff at arch-rival AT&T. No AT&T officials were available for comment, but observers report Ma Bell was "taken completely by surprise."

Apple is apparently going to take its menu interface system on the Mac one more step. Fed up with complaints, mostly from non-users, about the small 9 in. screen, Apple will soon have a menu option which allows you to change screen size as easily as you change fonts. Just drag down the "Screen" menu, and click on 9, 12, 14, 19, or 25 inch. Preliminary reports indicate clicking on any size other than 9 inch does tend to damage the case as the video tube expands outward, and there is at least one report of a user crushed in their corporate cubby hole when they clicked on the 25 inch option. The injured worker normally uses an IBM PC, and described the injury as "no worse than when my tie gets caught in the PC disk drive."



Secret keyboard revealed: shown for the first time, this is the keyboard layout for the joint IBM-Commodore clone of the Macintosh, known only as "Herbicide," or "Herb" for short.