News

Newz from the Prez
May of 1992

Unfortunately I have to start this column on a really sour note. After calling the Falcon Heights Community Center, Sherm Erickson informed me that the Community Center's policy was that the parking lot or inside was not to be used for garage sales of any kind. Neither Sherm nor myself were able to come up with an alternate location for the rummage sale, so I'm afraid we will have to regroup and replan it at this month's meeting.

PLEASE DO NOT BRING ANY OF YOUR RUMMAGE SALE ITEMS TO THIS MONTH'S MEETING AS WAS PREVIOUSLY PLANNED.

I am sorry for the way this was handled, I was under the impression that this would not be a problem. Of course, one of Newton's laws is if it is not SUPPOSED TO BE a problem, it WILL BE a problem.

I do wish to say, however, there will still be a hot dog sale at the next meeting. Bring along a few extra dollars and buy a tasty dinner! All proceeds will go toward the Bob Puff event.

In light of all of this, I have no other news for this month. I was very distressed about Falcon Height's policy and was seeking an alternate location, but to no avail. I hope that at the next meeting we can form an alternate plan.

PLEASE COME TO THE NEXT MEETING TO HELP US PLAN THE BOB PUFF EVENT AND THE RUMMAGE SALE!

BEGIN AN ATARI MAGAZINE??

Please, we need your views on this subject. We have been offered this and we need to know if you would like to start one. If you are interested please put your name and address on the blue and white piece of paper if there is still a chance at the next meeting.

BOB PUFF FAN FAIR!!!!!

This will be all the stuff talked about at the last meeting on this subject.

Time to raise money. And guess what.....?

+----------------------------------+
| Dinner at the next meeting |
|to raise money for Bob Puff's|
| visit! |
+----------------------------------+

Eat dinner and help get a big name software writer to the September meeting all at the same time!!!

Money to raise:
1. Travel Money..........$400
2. Motel/Hotel Money.....$100x3
3. Second Hall Charge....$100

Total $800!

Next Meeting May 8th, 1992

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Hopefully things will work out like this:

When: September 11th, 1992
Where: Falcon Heights Community Center
Who: Robert Puff
Cost: $10.00

Wanna lower the ticket price?

Come up with a few interesting ways to Fund Raise. The price WILL go down if we fund raise...The less money we have to use out of the Club, the less we will have to make back, the less the ticket will cost.

So far, we have one idea which will commence at the next meeting, May 8th, 1992 for a HOT DOG SALE (details above!)

One idea that came up is to raise the price of the Bob Puff programs from $3(regular price)to $5. Another idea that came up is, Rummage Sale, which will commence at, no set date so far. Nathan took names of the people who could help out a few hours on May 9th for a possible rummage sale. Another idea is a bake sale. Which every sale with food is always a big hit. So, please, have your dinner at our Diner!

Please give your opinions on our books, all the 'dead' books will be shipped out, or will be taken out of the Paper Librarians hands.

That's it for the minutes this month.

Meeting closed by Nathan Block at
            8:45pm.

Reprinted from ZMAG206
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* USING A PERCOM ON YOUR 8-BIT
  by Andrew C. Diller @1992
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For a very long time I have been satisfied with the Atari 1050 disk drive. But that satisfaction came only from the lack of concrete knowledge about a viable alternative.

Ever since I bought my first Atari computer, an 800xl, seven years ago, I've pretty much stayed with Atari hardware. I bought a 1050, then another and a 1020 and an Atari printer. In fact, the first non-Atari product I purchased for my system was a P:R: connection to allow me to use a fast Epson printer and a fast modem. Dealing with Atari DOS 2.0s was simple enough-though 720 sectors never went very far. I knew about the US Doubler and Happy schemes to speed up and increase the 1050's & 810's, but it always seemed to much of a problem, for the price. When Atari DOS 2.5 came out, finally taking advantage of the dual density 1050, I felt much better. But you still had to flip the disks. Why couldn't I use a standard drive? Like the one's on my friends IBM XT?

They weren't even cutting edge; back then, a 360k drive was the most basic assumption for any system. Using a single density, single sided drive in the '90s is a little too much behind the times. So I decided to inquire about all those rumors I had heard about the other drives for the 8-bit. Those strange 3rd-party drives that I could remember seeing ads for in the back of Antic. The Indus, the Rana, the PERCOM.

What about the XF551? You might say, why don't you just get the 551? It's Atari's official double sided, double density drive. Its the perfect answer. Not really-although I have never used a XF-551, what I have heard about them is not too encouraging. Their hesitation to return to double density is one major point. Besides that, I have never even seen ONE. I live in a very metropolitan area (Washington D.C.) and I never saw one advertised, or saw anyone with one of them in their own system.

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To me on the east coast the XF-551 might as well have been vaporware. Besides, if it took Atari this long to come out with the technology that had been around for so many years, (as I found out) then they didn't even deserve my business.

Other Drives

I began to look for alternative means of disk storage for my 8-bit. What I found was talking to a fellow on my local atari bbs (the best place to find any answer about atari) I asked him about my search for greater density. He told me about his experiences with Percoms, and what was possible with them. Not only that, but he had a number of Percoms that he had collected, and was willing to part with one. We made a trade, and I eagerly went over to his house to pick up and assemble my new drive. The drive itself was old (comparatively speaking) older than my 800x1!

The Percom was this: a single sided, double density, full height drive, housed with a controller card and large transformer in a tan metallic case. The back of the case had two standard Atari SIO plugs, a couple of dip switches and an on/off switch. All I had to do was plug it into my Atari and boot up. But I wasn't interested in the beast of a drive it had in it. I was sick of single sided drives. The most important thing the Percom offered was not the drive, but the controller card. For that card was an interface between the Atari SIO, and ANY standard IBM type disk drive. When this particular drive was manufactured, the full height, single sided drive was top of the line. Today, it was trash.

Assembling My Dream Drive

I had never done any sort of hardware hacks before, but this was as easy as changing drives on my friends IBM. I located two 1/2 height 360k IBM drives. You can get them these days for about $20 or less, second hand. I removed the old Percom drive and shelved it. I got a standard IBM type floppy ribbon. Any one that goes from the controller to the floppies will work- the connections on the Percom are all of the standard type. I then simply spliced the power leads coming out of the transformer, so that I had two leads, then attached standard plugs on

them. Then I mounted the two 1/2 height drives into the original case, where the full height drive had been. I plugged them in and put the case back together. I did have to mess around with the dip switches on the drives themselves, to sort out which drive was 1 and which was 2. That is a simple matter of trial & error.

The EPROMS

The EPROMS in the Percom tell it how configure itself when the power is initially switched on. The EPROMS in this Percom were burned in with the default drive number one as a double density drive, and the second drive as a single density drive. You could probably acquire different EPROMS that were customized for your system, but that might prove a little difficult — besides you might change your system configuration in the future.

So now, I had two DS/DD drives, but the controller thought I had a DD and a SD drive. Normally, with DOS 2.5 I would have been unable to rectify the situation, but not to worry, I also found the next most important addition to my Atari system ---> MyDOS 4.5

Using MYDOS4.5

First, let me say that this is the greatest DOS ever written for the Atari line of computers. Anyone who still uses Dos 2.5 has no real reason to anymore. Even if you only have 1050s, you should still use MyDos. Mr. Puff is a genius (and I haven't even gotten into hard drives yet!! (BobTerm is excellent also)). MyDos will handle all the quirks of my Percom. I easily configured the second drive as a double density drive, using the P command. MyDos also automatically sees the drives as double sided. The drives stay configured properly as long as they are on - so I only have to configure the second drive once, when I initially turn on the equipment. I now had two DS/DD drives, each with 1428 DOUBLE DENSITY sectors. Finally some room to stretch out in - and no flipping the disks! My Percom is the equivalent to eight Atari 810s or eight 1050s (using 2.0s). That's a dramatic increase. But it gets better!

Assuming that the board holds out (it should — no moving parts!) the drive mechs are just IBM 360k's. If one fails, I don't need to hunt down a 1050 mech, I only need to go to the closest computer store and pick up a used 360k drive.

Don't dump your 1050's yet....

I did run into some compatibility problems. Since up until then I had been using the 1050s, all my disks were flippies. Both sides were used, but I had to flip the disk myself. The Percom cannot read the back sides of these disks. It also cannot read a dual density disk formatted by Atari Dos 2.5 for the 1050. It can however adjust itself automatically to the density of the disk you insert, provided that its either single or double density. You can of course, put in any bootable single density disk and boot off of it— all of the self booting games, for instance. But some games must be separated onto the front of single density disks. For example, The HitchHikers Guide to the Galaxy by Infocom. Normally, just put it in your 1050 and boot up. Then flip it and play the game. This will not work on the Percom. You must have side two of the game on the front side of another disk. One easy solution is to keep one 1050 drive as drive number one, but keep it turned off when using the Percoms. Then if you need to play a game, or boot off the flip side of a disk (or boot off a dual density disk) just turn off the Percoms, and turn on the 1050, and voila, you have drive number one.

I have three 1050's, plus the two slaves in the Percom— I use the Percom as drives 1 & 2, the two 1050's as 3 & 4 and keep the third 1050 switched as drive one, and turned off, for booting as I described above.

I also needed the 1050's for transferring all my files on flippies onto DS/DD disks. You can force the Percoms into single density, but the 1050's do it much better, plus they still get 999+ single density sectors using Atari Dos 2.5.

Next: 3.5 inch

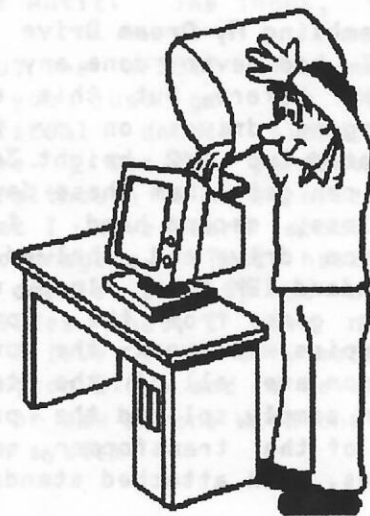As you may have guessed (or known) if the Percom controller will drive 5 1/4 inch 360k drives, it will also drive the high density 5 1/4 drives, plus, the magical 3.5 inch, 720k drive. There is something special about having your Atari store your files onto 3.5 inch disks. It feels as if your 8-bit Atari is right up there with the STs and Macs. Besides, they hold 720k! That means that one 3.5 inch drive is the same as eight 1050's (in single density). Its as easy as just connecting the drive to the ribbon, and getting it some power. The Percom can control up to four drives — of any type. Right now I only have the two 360k drives, the next step is two 3.5 inch drives.

So Get A PERCOM!

There are plenty of good reasons why every Atari user really needs to step up from the 1050's. The best thing is a hard drive, but that will cost you many dead presidents. The next best thing is having some real floppy power, which is achievable with a Percom. I don ȼ know exactly how hard they are to find these days, but there were plenty of them manufactured, and they can only be about as hard to find as an XF-551. So start looking for a Percom today, and bring your Atari 8-bit into the 90's. I know a source that has some Percoms drives. If you are interested in their availability, leave me a message at:

The Thieves Guild BBS
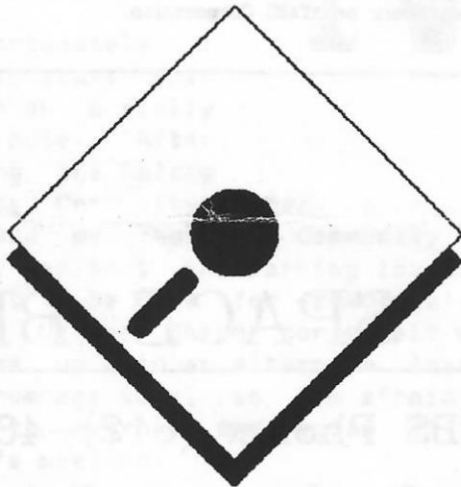(301) 984-8516 and I'll get back to you.

DOM NEWS:

Joe Danko, DOM Librarian, has not submitted any DOM info for this month.

Treasurer Report:

Allan Frink, via Glen Kirschenman, has not submitted a Financial report for publication in the Newsletter for some time now.

Here is the answer to the April Word Search:

Title: CUT

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SHORTCUT	CALCUTTA	UNDERCUT
UPPERCUT	CUTOFFS	EXECUTE
CREWCUT	HAIRCUT	SCUTTLE
CUTICLE	PRECUT	ACUTE

Here is this months installment of Word Search. This month it is We're Leaving.
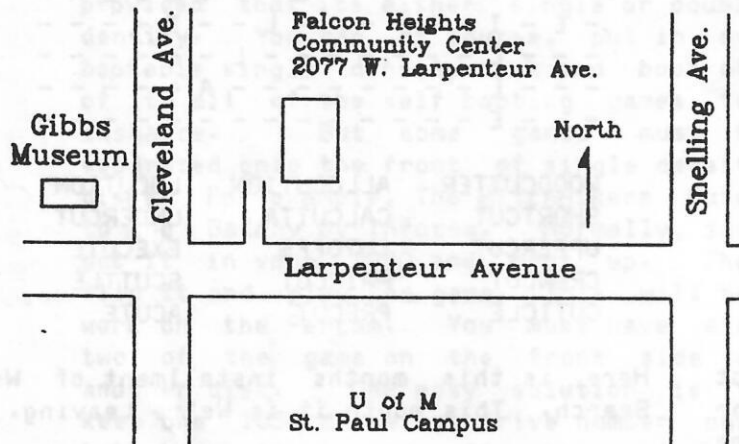
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A D I E U T E K T W B I A H O L A H
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AUF WIEDERSEHEN	BON VOYAGE	TOODLE-OO
HASTA LA VISTA	FAREWELL	AU REVOIR
ARRIVEDERCI	SAYONARA	SO LONG
BYE BYE	ADIEU	CONGE
ALOHA	ADIOS	CIAO

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Saint Paul Atari Computer Enthusiasts (SPACE)
meets on the second Friday of each month at 7:30 PM
in the Falcon Heights Community Center at
2077 West Larpenteur Ave. Doors open at 7:00 PM.

[Map showing Falcon Heights Community Center at 2077 W. Larpenteur Ave., with Gibbs Museum, Cleveland Ave., Snelling Ave., Larpenteur Avenue, U of M St. Paul Campus, and North arrow]

S.P.A.C.E.
P.O. Box 120016
New Brighton, MN 55112

DISCLAIMER

SPACE BBS

BBS Phone: (612)-488-5973

Sysop: Larry Serflaten

Co-sysop: Sherm Erickson

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[Stamp: 29 USA Wood Duck]