

# SPACE

NEWSLETTER November, 1995

## News from the Interim President Nov.

By Mike Fitzpatrick

Please Remember that November is the Elections for permanent Club Officers.

There is a need to have some volunteers organize the annual Christmas Party.

As the inventory of club assets progresses, it's about 1/2 way, the club needs to decide what should be done with the extras and duplicate items. Lest we forget Kudos to our Mr. Lietner and Mrs. Fitzpatrick plus all the extra helping hands.

## BBS News

We've had an interesting month with the BBS.

Some items need to be refreshed for the users and general membership.

1. The BBS is not the property of the club. The club's hardware is inventoried in the storage locker. The software, table, and UPS are with the Sysop. There are those who have forgotten that the BBS was piggybacked to another system to save the club about \$100 in phone charges when it was moved early this year.

2. The SPACE portion of the BBS is for the primary use of SPACE members and secondly for all interested people who are interested in Atari Computers.

3. There has been a ruggy war now apparently over where drastic measures had to be taken to diffuse the issue. Some users took umbrage to that. There seems to be threats being sent in e-mail; that will have to stop. As of the posting of this in the Newsletter I will start monitoring e-mail and delete any threatening posts.

## Ghost Files:

There have been concerns about being informed that there are F-mail messages when in fact there are none or less that what is displayed. Traced that down to botched or incomplete uploads where the file has 0 (zero) bytes in it and may not be displayed. Went through and cleaned out the file mail sub directory the weekend of 27-29 October. If you have a problem with ghost files please let the Sysop know in e-mail; Thanks.

## Treasurer's Report by Greg Leitner

Two members in the back of the room discussing the ST. Three members around the demo table practicing the programs on the current disk of the month. Younger members and older members' young children standing in the lobby engrossed in the game play of the new Jaguar CD system. Other members with computer hardware mechanical malfunctions describing their problems to Rich Mier in hopes of finding a cure for their machines.

All of this is what a typical Atari monthly meeting is all about and well it should be. This is where we can get the answers or help on anything about Atari, whether it's an 8-bit, 16-bit, older generation game system or a new game system.

We probably spend more time talking Atari on this night of the month than the rest of the month put together.

So I guess what I am leading up to is the fact that the Club is what every Atari owner needs to keep the fire burning. I know there are times when I really don't feel like going to the meeting, but after arriving I don't want the evening to end. The Atari may be dead in most people's minds, but we make it come alive every second Friday of every month.

Now on to the reason why I write this report each month. In October we had a good month for receipts. With the ice cream social and two membership renewals along with DOM sales we took in \$104.25. Our expenses included the third quarter room rental, the monthly expenses for the BBS and the newsletter which all totaled \$134.94. Our balance at month ending 10/31/95 is \$460.00, and with the room rental paid until December we have a good chance of building our balance to greater heights. All we need is to have all of our members show up, especially now that summer is over and we all have extra time on our hands (HA HA).

Don't forget that November is election month and it's very important that every member is heard and counted. I hope we have the best turnout so far this year.

## HEY! LET'S PLAN THE SPACE 13TH ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARTY!

Well, it is getting to be that time of the year, snow and cold, and the upcoming Christmas Holidays. Which means it is time to think about the upcoming Space Christmas Party that will be held on December 8, 1995.

Every year the Space Christmas Party is a fun time for all the club members. And once in a while we have some surprise visits from former club members. The food is always good. The Atari trivia contests are fun too. The door prizes are great to win too. There is always a lot of Atari talk. It is also a time to look back at past club years and remember the fun times.

At the November Space Club meeting that will be held on Nov. 10, besides elections of officers, there will be discussion of the upcoming Christmas Party. Volunteers will be needed on the Christmas Party Committee to make sure the Space Christmas Party will be a success like in past years.

The Christmas Party will probably be potluck. Members will be asked to bring their favorite potluck item. I hope to see Ray Wafer's famous potato salad, Al Nobles' Special K- bars, Bill Cotter's famous meatballs, plus other food items. There will be a sign-up sheet at November meeting.

So show up for the November meeting to help plan a FUN Space Christmas Party for 1995. And if you see former Space club members, tell them to come to the Christmas Party in December.

Well, see you all at Space meeting in November.

Mike Weist

## Secretary's Report By Mike Fitzpatrick

The minutes of the October 1995 meeting are:

Meeting opened at 7:30pm.

Minutes of the September Meeting and the Treasurer's Report as found in the Newsletter were approved.

Members were reminded of the November Elections.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:40pm.

|| "From a saved backup...."  
||| By: Ron Whittam  
/|\ GENie: EXPLORER.4

#### //// Swap Meet and Trade

In this column I hope to foster communication and support for 8-bit and ST computer owners . . . presenting a positive and directive approach. This will help to strengthen the users group base and encourage the executive element.

==If you have a question you would like to see answered, or a topic you would like to see covered; send me an Email!==

Seems that the Internet is continuing to get the media coverage. Using the word "Internet" seems to be a way to get people to read your article, magazine, or view your broadcast. Whatever magazine you pick up or news broadcast you view, the Internet seems to get some billing. All this hype is putting computers into the public eye more and more. Recently our local paper started a "CyberLife" section that focuses on news and information about the computer industry and our daily lives. I was pleasantly surprised to see an Atari Mega ST featured a few weeks ago in this same paper's Sunday edition. Front page of the second section was a picture of a child and his teacher working on an Atari Mega ST.

Recently the Computer Clearance Center in Boise sponsored a Swap Meet where all types of computers and electronic parts were bought and sold by computer owners. Local user groups also attended and had display booths. The Atari Boise User Group (ABUG) had a table. On display was an Atari 800, an Atari ST, and an Atari TT. The Idaho PC User Group (IPCUG) was in the next booth. I struck up a conversation with one of the people at that booth. He turned out to be one of the IPCUG's officers. We talked about computers in general, the Internet, and finally about Atari computers. He was rather surprised that programmers were still writing programs that ran on the Atari ST. We walked over to the Atari TT and he was shown all the built-in ports. He was impressed to see Pagestream displaying the cover of the Home Computer News (ABUG's monthly newsletter) with the finished copy side by side. I think the fact that Paula (a mod player) was playing in the background (multitasking) also made an impression. He will have quite a different point of view the next time someone mentions Atari.

Swap meets are a great place for user groups. Both the people who show and the people who browse are always computer people. As a user group, ABUG wanted to make a good impression on the local computer community. For very little money, ABUG printed up some business cards with the ABUG name, meeting and membership info, their Web page, and the local BBS supporting Atari owners. They had back copies of their newsletter, TOAD catalogs, information on MagiC-Mac and GEMulator, running demos on the TT, ST, and 8-bit computers, hardware for sale, and members of the group manning the booth throughout the day.

A major advantage to presenting the user group at this kind of event is the people are browsing. People dropped by who had only heard of (and played) Atari Games. They were surprised to see business applications running on a multitasking system with VGA resolution. Many were interested in the technology. Some thought Atari had copied OS/2 Warp and Windows 95 and didn't believe that this 32-bit system was five years old. The ABUG members took the time to demonstrate software and explain the hardware. Many had never knew the Atari Computers even existed. It was an enlightening experience. It was fun.

Another advantage to being participants in the show was interaction between others who were participating. Networking with other local computer people can be very beneficial. I talked with computer consultants, Internet providers, and other user group officers. After talking to the officers of another user group we came up with an idea to go to the local paper and see if they would do a User Group News column in the new CyberLife section that comes out each Monday. The idea is that each group would take a turn in rotation and submit a short "news and happenings" column about their particular user group. No one person would be burdened with a weekly article and all groups could participate and get recognition every month or so. I drafted a letter and emailed it to the paper's editor. (Only time will tell).

The swap meet is not as large as a trade show and few, if any, commercial vendors or retailers show up. It has some particular advantages. It doesn't cost much to attend because they are usually free. It doesn't take much to organize because they are usually just a large "yard sale" in a parking lot. Set up tables, run some electrical cords, send out flyers to local computer stores and user groups, and that's about it. Locations can be about anywhere. You can get a large driveway or the parking lot of a business that isn't using it on a Saturday. Often other user groups will pitch in and help with the set-up and organization. It takes some effort, but it is well worth it. You can sell programs you have gotten tired of using. Old hardware components, even broken ones, can be sold or traded for things you want. It seems that nothing is obsolete and someone somewhere wants what you think is no longer needed. A swap meet makes that sort of commerce possible. (The ABUG sold an Atari 800 8-bit system).

Swap meets are great. Some of AEO readers are in small Atari user groups with a limited number of members. Getting together with other user groups and local retailers for a swap meet would be good. Most of us can't get to the computer shows where Atari Computers are featured. A swap meet is a way to make your own contribution to spreading the news about Atari computers... and helping other Atari Computer owners in your own community at the same time.

+-----+  
Speak up!

If you are supporting the Atari platform,  
send me a brief bio and how you can be contacted.

+-----+  
Until next time. . .

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Ron Whittam is the President of the Atari Boise Users Group and a Customer Support Specialist for a small software firm in Boise, Idaho. He can be contacted on GENie Mail (EXPLORER.4), on the Internet at <whittam@primenet.com>, or on ApC BBS (208-362-1790). And see the web page at  
"http://www.primenet.com/~whittam/atari.html"

The above article was reprinted from ATARI Explorer  
Online, Volume 4, Issue 7, September 15, 1995



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+-----+
|          Larry's          |
|        ACTION! TUTORIAL   |
+-----+
#15      A BIT OF DIGRESSION

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Now that you have fully scrutinized the nifty routines I included in last month's issue, you may have noticed that ShowCard was a function, yet used as a procedure. This is completely acceptable. When used this way, the value returned is ignored. You can use the ShowCard function to find out the value of the card. Aces thru Tens count as their pip value, while face cards count as ten. If need be, the card itself can be used to determine suit, in the same manner as ShowCard.

You might also wonder why the routines that were just a few lines long, were not simply written into the Main procedure. One reason is that Action! was designed to make use of RE-USEABLE code. Any task that may be needed repeatedly should be in its own routine. There is a limit to how many routines you can have, namely 1024 bytes for global variable and routine names. The smaller names you use, the more of them you can use. I have written several large programs and have yet to run out of room for the names. I usually end up pressed for memory to hold all the needed code. A second reason is that it makes for more readable code. A different programmer may want to make use of your code. By keeping routines small, focused, and well documented, other programmers may be better able to reuse your code. It is much easier to read when there are few global variables, and each routine uses only the variables it needs to do its task.

You may think Echo was a small routine, believe me, it isn't. Translated to ML (Machine Language) it grows dramatically. You can benefit from substituting your own optimized ML code for the tasks that are repeated often. To show you how much difference there can be, I have supplied an optimized ML version of the AscToInt function. This function is used several times in one EchoS call. Each byte of code we save counts as one cycle for each letter in a string of characters. This savings will result in increased response time.

Load the old AscToInt routine into your Editor, compile it, and while still in the Monitor type; ? AscToInt <RETURN> Record the left most number to paper. Now type; \* AscToInt <RETURN> and get ready to stop the listing using the <CNTRL><1> key combination. Stop the list when you see a diamond after the equals sign, this

is the RETURN byte. Record the leftmost number here and subtract the first number from it. I find it to be 48 bytes long, whereas, this new function does the same thing in only 27 bytes. That works out to about 21 EXTRA cycles needed in the code written by Action!

Assuming a 19 byte string, on only a half of a line of text, 400 cycles can be saved using the new routine. Print just three lines of text and you can expect to gain over 2000 cycles!

```

BYTE FUNC AscToInt=(BYTE a)
[$85 $E0      ;STA $E0      Save Accu.
$29 $80      ;AND #80      Mask out
$85 $E1      ;STA $E1      inverse bit
$45 $E0      ;EOR $E0      Gone!
$C9 $20      ;CMP $20      a<32
$B0 4        ;BCS +4 >+    Jump if false
$09 $40      ;ORA $40      add 64
$90 6        ;BCC +6 >-|--+ Jump to RTS
$C9 $60      ;CMP $60 <+ |  a<96
$B0 2        ;BCS +2 >---|--+Jump if false
$E9 $1F      ;SBC $1F      | subtract 32
$05 $E1      ;ORA $E1<---+--+add Inv bit
$85 $A0      ;STA $A0      Still in Accu.
$60]         ;RTS

```

I listed it in this form for those of you trying to optimize your own code. You can compare the two routines, which operate in much the same fashion. One bit of razzle-dazzle, you may notice I didn't clear or set the carry flag, even though I performed branches that depend upon it. The CMP instruction affects the carry, if operand >= accumulator, carry is set. Also 'SBC \$1F' supposes it needed a borrow (Carry is clear) so it takes one away also. The total subtracted from the accumulator is 32 (\$20).

Zero page memory, used because of its high access speed, is not hard to find. Making efficient use of it is another matter. Action! uses \$A0-\$A1 to store returned values from functions, and, \$A3-\$AF to Store parameters. I use \$E0-\$EF.

Next month, flowcharts!

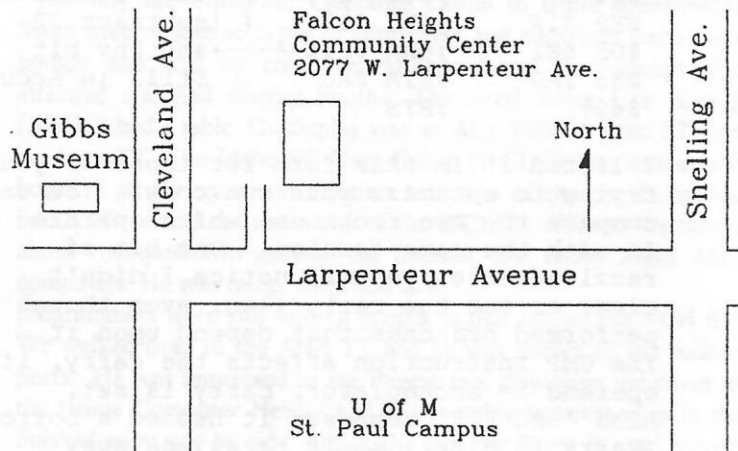
# CLUB OFFICIALS

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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.

# DISCLAIMER

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Supporting:

ATARI 8-Bit Computers

ATARI ST Computers

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