FUJI FACTS

The Editor's Column

Fuji Facts Newsletter Survey Results
by Warren Lieuallen

Well, as promised, the results are in, and here they are! I'd like to thank everyone who returned their survey; the response was heart-warming and encouraging. To those who didn't bother with it, eternal flatulence and perineal pruritus to you and your descendents!

From a total of 47 surveys mailed, I received 17, which is 36% (a pretty good response for this sort of thing, I'm told. Here is a re-cap of the questions, and their responses. Where questions were left blank, or answered ambiguously (selecting multiple, mutually exclusive choices for example), the results are based on the total answers received (ranged from 13-17). By the way, I didn't vote myself (I know what I like).

1. Professional printing = 12.5%   Photocopying = 87.5%

Pretty overwhelming. However, would you have voted differently if you had known that photocopying is not substantially less expensive? I was very displeased with the quality of last month's issue, and it was only $10 cheaper (and I had to fight with the manager to get that price). I'm now trying a different photocopying "printer" and a revised (cheaper) format, so...

2. Booklet = 6.7%   Single Sheets = 93.3%

Although I've received a number of comments, and it's my personal favorite, the standard 8.5" by 11" size seems the overwhelming favorite. However, the smaller "booklet" format has the distinct advantage of costing half as much (since I can fit two pages on one sheet), so for this issue at least, economy has won out again.

3. Double column = 42.9%   Single column = 57.1%

No real clear-cut preference here. More on this later.

4. Dot matrix = 68.8%
   Daisy-wheel = 6.2%
   Laser printer = 25%

I was amazed! Am I the only one hopelessly in love with laser printers? I want one so bad, I don't sleep right at night anymore! The clear large letters, the flexibility of point sizes and spacing, not to mention the speed and quietness....

Okay, if you guys are happy with the SG-10, so am I. As most people did request some kind of boldface or NLQ. I'm now using Daisy Dot II (with my own custom font, I might add). As Daisy Dot can only do double columns with difficulty, I've also chosen to return to the simpler, single column format.

5. ACEC material only = 30.8%   Reprints = 69.2%

This is the question that really got me thinking. I've always been tyrannical in my desire to have Fuji Facts be an ACEC-only newsletter. Why? Don't ask me, 'cause I don't know! It seems in my fervor to make Fuji Facts a truly first-rate, better than all the rest newsletter, I somewhere along the line forgot just what this newsletter is really supposed to be--a newsletter! The primary purpose of Fuji Facts is to provide ACEC members with interesting, useful and up-to-date news and information about Atari computers. The actual style and physical appearance should be of secondary importance. I'm afraid I've been paying too much attention to how the newsletter looks, and not enough to what it contains. Well, no more! In the future, I'm planning on concentrating on the content of Fuji Facts. I'll do my very best to find and print articles that will help you to get the most out of your system (of course, you need to periodically remind me of what you want out of your system!).

6. Pick-up = 50%   Mail = 37.8%   Mail for fee = 12.5%

I'm undecided about this one. Do the newsletters remind you to come to the meetings? Do they arrive in good condition? The response to our pre-meeting flyers was so good, but after more than a year now, I don't see the increased meeting attendance this was designed to cause. I think I'll end up distributing newsletters at the meetings, with absentees' newsletters mailed out later (at third class rates rather than first).

7. Monthly = 67.5%   Fewer = 37.5%

Monthly it is!

8. Raise dues = 46.7%   Newsletter fee = 13.3%   No increase = 40%

This will have to be discussed at the officers' meetings. If you'd like to have more input, come to those meetings.

9. Skip issues = 30.8%   Small issue = 38.4%   "Filler" material = 30.8%

With my new improved content attitude, I think this problem's solved itself. I'll publish as much good material as I can find, regardless of source. If I still can't fill up a full issue, it'll just be a bit smaller that month.

10. Comments: Luckily, these were mostly positive. Several requests for more programming, and more technical information were received. Others asked for more art-work, and simply more variety. Monthly meeting minutes were also mentioned by several members (turn to the inside back cover).

Well, there you have it. I know this discussion took up more space than it's worth, but I thought I'd lay all my cards on the table, and let you know what's happening with your newsletter. I hope you'll notice and appreciate the changes in the coming months. Please, any suggestions or advice is always welcome.

"So let it be written; so let it be done"

Is it time to update your address book? Do you want a phone directory that's easy to add or make changes to? Want to catalog your record albums or video tapes? Do you need records of team players, school supplies or anything else? Maybe you should consider using a database program. Syn-File+ and Data Perfect are popular among Atari eight-bit users. However, if your needs are simple then perhaps you should look at some of the public domain programs which are available.

Database programs are all structured the same. You must first design the database to fit your needs. Each individual RECORD (a collection of information about one item) is made up of a number of FIELDS, which are the individual pieces of information you want the database to organize. In setting up a database, you'll be asked for the field names (these can be called things such as Name, Address, Title, Price, etc.). Then you must estimate the maximum length of the fields. You will also be asked how you would like the records sorted (ascending or descending). After you've properly formatted this "template", the program will help you enter all the information into the records, field by field. When you are finished, you can then view the records, or send them to the printer. A search feature will allow you to view or print only selected records, according to your criterion (perhaps you only want the records for the 513 area code, or the tapes labelled "Jazz").

I have three database programs that are in the public domain: Analog's DataBase, Antic's dataBASE and TopShelf. In this article, I will try to help you decide which one is best for you.

Analog's DataBase works similarly to Syn-File. It's fast and I like the way it prints the records. It will print down the page all the fields, or across the page (to save paper) the fields you choose (you'll then have to be sure that they will fit on an 80 column print-out). However, DataBase is not nearly as sophisticated as Syn-File. It doesn't print records found in a search (it will only show them on the screen). It doesn't allow math functions, and you can't change the name of a field once you've entered it into the database. If you are considering trying a database program however, I would recommend starting out with this one, due to its simplicity.

TopShelf is written in BASIC, therefore it is is not as fast as the others. It's not as easy to work with as Analog's DataBase, but it has more features (isn't that always the way?! — Ed.). It will print records found in a search. This feature alone could make the program worth more to you. It can also do math functions. A math function might look like this: 1+2*3-4. This entry means Field 1 plus Field 2 times Field 3 minus Field 4. You can also change the names you've assigned to the fields with TopShelf. Unfortunately, I could not get the program to print a record by typing Control-P as the magazine instructed. However, after using the Find command, I could save the searched files as a text file, which I could then edit and print with a word processor.

Antic's dataBASE works much like Analog's DataBase, but its achromatic screen isn't much to look at. Since it can only print across the page, you'll want to print only the fields that will fit into 80 columns. However, it will print all the records, or just those found in a search. It will also let you change the names of the fields.

In conclusion, you can see that all these programs are powerful, but limited. Updating can be done easily with any of them. Which one to try first depends on what features you need in a database.

My parents are asking me for an update on their list of grandchildren (which includes ages and birthdays). However, I now have to decide how to include great-grandchildren on the list!

Here's where to look for the database programs I've discussed:

Analog DataBase by Barry Kolbe and Bryon Schappel — Analog #47 (Oct. 1986) [there is a bug in the original type-in program] or ACEC DOM #49A2 (docs not included)

Antic dataBASE by Carl Evans — Antic Super Disk Bonus, Aug. 1987 or ACEC DOM #60A2 (docs not included)

TopShelf by Lester Block — Antic Jan. 1988

Sargon III Review
by Michael Steve

Anyone who gets to know me away from the computer keyboard will soon fin out that I am a chess nut. No, I do not play very well, but I like just about everything about the game. If I were any good at programming, I'd figure out ways to interest people of all ages in playing, or problem solving, and maybe organize games on the bulletin boards. But for now, that is just a goal, and I look at chess-playing software.

I was introduced to computer chess at Battelle Institute over twelve years ago. A friend in the laser lab had a tough program he could load and run during the lunch break. It was quite a good program, and lunch hours went by very quickly without my ever feeling like I was ahead in the game. The program was Sargon, written by Dan and Kathe Spracklen. I tried some others like Fidelity Chess Challenger, Boris and even a home-made program that one of the staff members brought to a club meeting. But, none had the power and features of Sargon.

Later, when the family got the Atari 2600 system, I picked up the chess cartridge. It was slow, and awful in the endgame. Then I got a "real" computer and disk drive, and eventually Sargon II. I spent a lot of time in levels three and four, but what bothered me was the inability to save a game and pick up the play later. Inputting a position did not always have satisfactory results, and more than once the computer did not accept my move (frustrating when I was about to deliver a checkmate) or would strike back with a phantom piece! But in the normal playing mode it did well, and I enjoyed it, ignoring the lack of features I truly desired.

I picked up Sargon III and it nearly blew my socks off! This was exactly what I had convinced myself I wanted. The program disk loads and

prompts you to change playing field, piece and even background colors. Then it gives a board set-up. Press ESCAPE and there is a score sheet (text screen. You play white (or Control-S to switch to black). By typing a shift and number **key** from 1 to 9, you can set the level of play, where 1 is the lowest, with an **average** response taking 5 seconds. Level 4 takes a minute, level 8 takes 10 minutes and level 9 has no limit. Obviously, you probably won't **play level 9** too often, but it is good for trying to solve a problem (like mate in two) or analyze a complicated position overnight (or longer!). Fortunately, if you get tired of waiting for the computer to respond to your move, a Control-T will force it to terminate the search and play its best shot at the moment. But wait, I haven't even started the game yet.

To start the game, just press START. The moves can be made via joystick or by typing in the algebraic notation in long form. The move appears on the score sheet (for example, D2-D4) and on the screen. Illegal moves are not accepted. Take back moves by entering Control-B, switch sides with your computer with a Control-S (try doing this when playing with your friends--Heh!), see the board from the other side with Control-I (very handy for planning surprises). Control-R is a feature that allows you to replay the game from move 1 by responding with carriage returns. If you decide you want to pick up active play at a certain point, Control-X is the command. You can toggle back and forth from board to score sheet, and even invert the board in this mode. Control-F cancels the replay and puts you at the last position of play. To list the moves, type Control-P, and to print out the board positions, type Control-M. In either case, a prompt appears: "Printer On?" Y means yes; any other key aborts. Control-G saves the game to disk; type a filename of 1 to 14 characters and your game will appear in the directory with a prefix of G. Of course, Control-L and the filename is used to load the game. There is also an analysis mode, Control-A, which allows you to set up the board any way you want (as long as it is a legal position). Used with Control-C to change the color, this can be an especially helpful learning aid.

Not bad, but that's only a third of the package. A second disk contains an opening library (more than 60,000 positions). This speeds up Sargon's response time in the early going, and banks the unused time for the later stages. In case the going gets tough. A third disk contains 107 games from past historic encounters (two played by the current world champion), and several problems from various stages of the game to serve as a tutorial.

All in all, a fantastic package. I am sure that it will entertain anyone who plays casually, and will instruct anyone who wants serious competition. I've made my move. Anyone care to let me know how Chessmaster 2000 compares in features? I have a friend who was unable to get it to run on his ST, so he took it back. How about Colossus Chess 3.0 from England? Maybe we can have them play a match against each other....

Sargon III, Atari version is by Lynn and Alex Ford, and is copyright 1985 by Hayden Software.
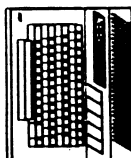
Learning to Program in Atari BASIC

Part I of a continuing series from ZMag (via ACEC BBS)
Getting Started in Atari BASIC (c) 1986 by Jackson Beebe
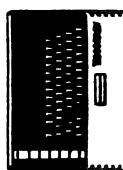
This lesson is placed in the Public Domain. Individuals, users' groups and BBS's may reprint, copy or distribute it, as long as this notice remains intact with the lesson.

NEXT LESSON'S CONTENTS:
Line numbers
REM statement
PRINT statement
Multiple statements on a line
NEW command
Line editing
RUN command
SAVEing a program
Directory
LOADing a program

But first, an introduction. This series assumes no prior knowledge of BASIC, or programming. Each lesson will end with sample programs. Writing the sample programs is STRONGLY recommended, as the main learning in BASIC takes place during the writing of programs. ATARI BASIC is the BASIC used in these lessons.

WHAT'S NEEDED:
You need an 8-bit Atari computer, with ATARI BASIC (cartridge with 400/800 or built-in with 800XL/130XE), and preferably a disk drive (required with 400/800 is a definite plus, as it gives you the ability to print out the lessons, and make printouts of your program. This is handy in the development and debugging of your programs.

One of the handiest of all things to keep beside your computer, is the ANALOG Computing POCKET REFERENCE CARD, an 8 1/2 by 28-inch folded 16 page collection of BASIC commands, PEEKS, POKES, keyboard values, graphics, error codes, etc. They sell it for $7.35, which is a bit pricey, but worth it.

BOOTING UP IN BASIC:
If you have a 400/800, turn everything off. Install the cartridge. Turn on the disk drive. Install a disk with DOS. Adjust the paper to the top of the page, and turn on the printer. Then, turn on the computer.

For an 800XL/130XE, you don't need to install a cartridge, as BASIC is built in. When you see the READY prompt, you are in BASIC. You are now ready to write a BASIC program in the Random Access Memory (RAM) of your computer.

Turning on a computer with BASIC, and no disk, takes you right to BASIC, as shown by the READY prompt, but you can't save your programs without a disk drive or cassette recorder.

You can boot up right to the DOS menu, by removing the BASIC cartridge in a 400/800, or switching BASIC out of the system by holding down the OPTION key while turning on your 800XL/130XE. Hold down OPTION until you see printing on the screen.

There are three versions of BASIC in Atari eight-bits: A, B, and C. A and B each have problems, for example version B's adding an extra 16 bytes each time you save a file, over and over, or it becomes fatal lockup. Version C is version... and behaves perfectly. It is available as a cartridge from:

Atari Customer Relations
1196 Borregos Avenue
Sunnyvale, CA 94086

The price is $15.00 + $2.50 postage; well worth it.

To find which BASIC you have, type:

PRINT PEEK(43234)

If you get a 162 you have version A; 96 means version B, and 2 means version C of the Atari BASIC language.

Those of you familiar with your computers, or who already know another programming language, are already part way there!

BASIC stands for Beginners All Purpose Symbolic Instruction Code, and was formulated in 1963 by John Kemeny and Thomas Kurtz at Darthmouth College. BASIC is closely related to FORTRAN, having similar features. If you know FORTRAN, you nearly know BASIC.

BASIC is a HIGH-level language, so called because it operates "high" up, away from the machine. You can issue complex commands such as PRINT, without having to worry about how many bytes you will need, or clearing space out in RAM for print, etc. These are concerns in LOW level languages, such as machine language, or assembler language. A lot of housekeeping has been done for us in BASIC, and we can concentrate on using the language, without having to understand how the machine actually works internally.

The price paid, is that BASIC runs much slower than that most other languages, mainly because the software that makes addressing the machine so convenient, takes up time.

A prime reason for learning BASIC is that it's a very flexible, easy to learn language that you already own. Many different kinds of programs can be written in BASIC, and with just a little effort, you'll be able to make the computer do exactly what you'd like it to do!

I found these BASIC tutorials running in ZMag (a weekly electronic Atari newsletter distributed on private bulletin board systems, such as the ACEC BBS (471-8859)). So far there are nine segments in the series. The more I read, the more impressed I became. Since members want more programming articles, and lots of folks have brand new systems (including the XE game system with built-in BASIC), I thought this series would be perfect! Watch for them every month in Full Facts. If you have any questions, bring them along to our meetings, and remember that you can get specialized help at our SIG meetings, too. - Ed.

The Ten Best PD Programs for the Eight-bit Atari

by Jerry Cross

reprinted from Michigan Atari Magazine, 9/87

Over the past two years, I have looked at hundreds of public domain programs. Some were just fantastic, and others were not worth the disk space. But there are a number of programs that really stand out. These are the programs that should have been made into commercial offerings, but the author, in a brief fit of generosity, made them public domain (PD) instead.

1. TextPro by Mike Collins and Ronnie Riche (ACEC DOM 53A1). TextPro is clearly the most complete PD word processor. It has all the usuals, plus has added powerful macro commands, RS232 support, additional commands and allowed the use of several different DOSes. In addition, the complete package includes detailed documentation, help screens and several useful macro file examples. To date this program fulfills all my word processing needs *(With my Daisy Dot II system (used to publish this month's issue), I also use TextPro, as it can be used from a RAMdisk. I have to agree, it includes all the commands and features you'll need for all but the most specialized tasks. — Ed.)*

2. Express! by Keith Ledbetter (ACEC DOMs 49A2, 46A2, 41A1). *Actually, and one of the best! — Ed.). Express! is probably one of the most* powerful, feature packed terminal programs for the eight-bit Atari systems. There are currently three versions (1030/XM301, MPP and 850-based. Recent upgrades now feature separate text windows, R-Time cartridge support, CRC-Xmodem downloading and lots more! All the commands are well thought-out, and clearly organized. People have discarded commercial software in favor of one of these fantastic programs!

3. PBS Chess. This program features excellent graphics and gives you a fair competitor. Granted, this is not for very advanced chess players, but it will give you a good game; an excellent program for new players *(then, move up to Sargon III, as reviewed in this issue — Ed.).*

4. First Aid Tutorial. This is a sound and graphics demo/tutorial that teaches kids CPR. With the help of an adult to answer questions, this program is an excellent way to instruct children in the art of giving life-supporting first aid in the event of an emergency. This program was originally a commercial program, but was released into the public domain; the graphics are outstanding!

5. Turbo BASIC and Turbo BASIC Compiler by Frank Ostrowski (ACEC DOM 51). This program comes all the way from Germany. It is a complete package that includes the Turbo BASIC Interpreted language and a compiler to produce "pseudo" machine code, run-time package, sample programs and complete documentation (full) *By the way, there are now English versions of both the compiler and run-time package, translated by a certain Warren Lieuallen of ACEC fame! — Ed. Programs written in Turbo BASIC (which can run normal Atari BASIC programs) run significantly faster. In addition, the extra commands give you more access to graphics and time functions. A must have for any established or would-be programmers.*

6. Action! PD Run-Time package. This program is just now making an impact in the Atari community. Many older Atari users purchased the Action! programming

language from OSS, but until now were virtually unable to share their programs with anyone else (without a run-time package, the programs **require** the Action! cartridge). But now, the Action! program can be combined with parts of the PD run-time disk to produce completely stand-alone, machine language programs! This should open up a whole new flood of PD programming!

7. LaserType (ACEC DOM 34A1). This program is an educational game. The object is to shoot down falling letters before they touch the ground. By typing each letter on the keyboard, you activate a laser which shoots away the attacking letters. Sounds pretty boring, doesn't it? Well, add some great music background, nice graphics and several difficulty levels and you have a great typing practice program! Let's face it, if you want to learn to type quickly and accurately, the only way is to practice. At least now it's not so boring.

8. CES Demo. This may not be your idea of a must-have program, but every time I see this graphics demo I'm amazed. This program was shown a few years ago at the Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago, where Atari used it to "draw" people into their booth (it worked).

9. Dandy. Okay, this is for you game players. This is a multi-level maze game. The idea is to search each level for a key that will open a door to th next level. But you must fight your way through a variety of monster. You will need a quick joystick hand, and a lot of practice for this one!

10. SidePrint and Koala pictures. One of the first things I did when I purchased a printer was try out some picture dumps. With a little creativity, you can make great signs, posters, greeting cards or whatever. But I, like a lot of other people can't even draw a straight line! So, I began collecting Koala picture files. These are pictures drawn with a joystick or graphics tablet. There are many commercial programs that use these pictures, and I have a lot of fun printing them in every size and shape. Sideprint is one of the better picture dump programs available in PD (I personally would vote for KolDump (ACEC DOM 36A2) and BillBoard (ACEC DOM 64A2) — Ed.).

One more program that I want to add, but that doesn't quite make the "Top Ten" is SpeedCalc (ACEC DOM 50A1). This is a spreadsheet program published by Compute! magazine. Let's face it, if you are looking for a computer to do spreadsheets, the eight-bit Atari falls a bit short of the mark. You simply do not have the memory, and the 40 column display makes it extremely difficult to produce a good spreadsheet. But, if you don't mind these limitations, SpeedCalc offers some impressive power in a PD program; it's got most of the features you'll need, and it's fast.

Other "honorable mentions" that I'd like to add are: Matt-Edit (ACEC DOM 53B2), an Atari-graphics text processor; CopyMate XE (a one-pass disk copying program); the AMSplay "keyboard" music file player (ACEC DOM 44A2); the graphics stories by Clinton Parker (ACEC DOMs 59A2 63A2); FontMaster (ACEC DOM 56A1); and the Antic and Analog databases (ACEC DOMs 60A2 and 49A2).

Okay, now it's your turn. I just know you are complaining about all of your favorites that I left off the list. So, send in a list of your own. We'll be glad to make you into a PD critic!

March Meeting Minutes
by Warren Lieuallen

The March meeting, which took place on the 14th, had a surprisingly good turn-out, considering the inhospitable Ohio "Spring" weather! Although total membership is down, it's nice to see so many familiar faces at the meetings! I can't emphasize strongly enough that (as far as I'm concerned) one of the biggest advantages to belonging to a users' group like ACEC is the assistance available at the meetings. If you don't come to the meetings, you're really missing out!

The meeting was called to order just after 7:35 by yours truly, as our President was one of the unfortunate few unable to attend. Vice President Beck was busy setting up his ST, and preparing for the disk sales (Disk Librarian Murphy being out of town). Once the initial hubbub died down, and after a brief introduction, a discussion of Fuji Facts followed.

This discussion was particularly important to me, as it reminded me of just what this newsletter is supposed to be—a newsletter! For a further discussion, please refer to the discussion of the newsletter survey elsewhere in this issue.

We also shifted into a discussion of ways to boost membership. A number of suggestions were made. The best and most memorable included: a "flashy" flyer describing ACEC, with a membership application on the back; a free introductory disk for all new members; advertisements on local public and cable TV and radio stations; special publicity in high schools (especially DeSales) and at OSU. All of these suggestions are worthy of pursuing; the only problem is that we'll need someone to pursue them! If you'd be willing to donate 15 minutes of your time, please contact one of the officers.

Our main demonstration then began. As announced, the Publishing Partner demo had to be postponed, due to Larry Mendel's unavailability. So, Dave Beck led us through a quick tour of Easy Draw, another desktop publishing program for the ST. He showed us just how easy it is to design a full page of text and graphics, as during our discussions, he had already gotten half-way through a nice ACEC flyer.

An intermission to allow disk sales came next. This month's DOM contained the new Daisy Dot II near letter quality printing system (see last month's Fuji Facts for a review). Unfortunately, it was later discovered that the main Daisy Dot II program was inadvertently left off of the disk! The program is available on the ACEC BBS (471-8859) as Daisy11, or just bring your disk to the next meeting for an exchange.

The meeting then closed out with our Question and Answer session, which wasn't as brisk as usual. If anyone's successfully printed a file at 8 lines per inch with PaperClip, please come forward!

It was decided that next month, being April, we should have another of our famous Annual ACEC Flea Markets. So, dust off all those unused pieces of hardware and software, pack them up, and bring lots of cash! As in years past, you'll find lots of incredible bargains on all sorts of hard to find Atari items. Come early, bid high! This meeting will begin at 7:30, on April 11th (same Bat-time, same Bat-channel...).

MCL '87

An official users' group,
the Atari Computer
Enthusiasts of Columbus
meets on the SECOND
MONDAY of each month.
The meetings are held at
7:15 p.m., at De Sales
High School on Karl Road.
Meetings are open to the
public, and consist of
demonstrations and short
tutorials of products for
the Atari Home Computer
systems. Dues for ACEC
are $12.00 per year, and
include a subscription to
Fuji Facts, and more!