

The 1980 West Coast Computer Faire: A Watershed Year for Personal Computing

Photo 1: Studying a Computhink Minimax small-business computer system at the Matthews Computer Connection booth.

Photo 2: The West Coast show in high gear.

Photo 3: Artist Saul Bernstein (creator of the Einstein image for the Apple II) of Thousand Oaks, California, created this image of Sally Ann Londer using a digitizing pad.

Photo 4: The CompuServe booth. CompuServe's MicroNet is a computer time-sharing and software-distribution service similar to The Source.

Photo 5: Cromemco's new SDI Super Dazzler high-resolution color graphics system.

Photo 6: Here's a Japanese Kana character-set generator for your TRS-80 from Ron Johnson, Racet Computes, 702 Palm-dale, Orange CA 92665. Price: \$150.

Photo 7: No, this computer was not left out in the sun. It's the work of Elaine Pura, of Computer Service Systems Network. This "malleable main-frame" is actually a soft sculpture of CSSN's System 1000, a computer system featuring a Winchester hard-disk system and tape backup in one package, shown in photo 8.

Photo 8: CSSN's System 1000 in real life.

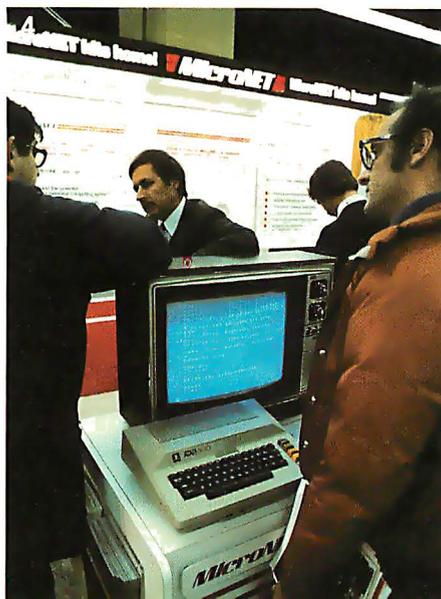
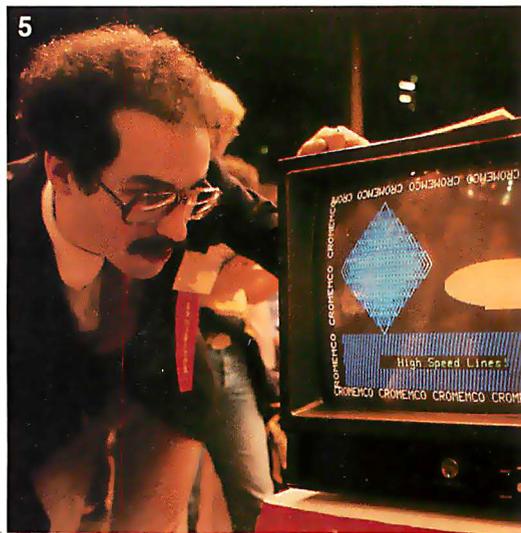
Photo 9: Studying hardware at the Heath Company booth.

Photo 10: Shopping for floppy disks.

Photo 11: The Computer Faire attracted a good number of handicapped people who use personal computers in their everyday lives. BYTE author Mark Dahmke is at left.

Photo 12: Ithaca Intersystems' new Z8000 processor board gets a close inspection from show-goers.

Photo 13: Sally Ann Londer sits for her computerized portrait.



CP/M programs running on your Apple computer? How about a Japanese character set for your TRS-80 — or maybe a \$298 pocket computer from Sharp that runs Tiny BASIC?

These are no fantasies because the future was definitely on view at this year's West Coast Computer Faire, and a record audience of about 20,000 people jammed San Francisco's Civic Center last March to get a good look at it. What they saw was encouraging to hobbyists,

business people, and computer scientists alike. The industry is rapidly maturing, and products only dreamed of a short time ago are now being offered matter-of-factly for sale.

As expected, one of the hottest areas of growth on view at the show was the small business computer, but the Faire proved that this is not the only area of growth by far: MicroNet and The Source both exhibited their telecommunication-based information services for personal computers. New, highly sophisticated computer games were on display from Atari and Apple (to name only two). Software is growing in several directions at once, and Pascal made a strong

showing. However, new BASIC compilers were also in evidence, and the FORTH language is gathering momentum. (The August 1980 BYTE's theme will be FORTH.)

Another trend is the multi-user computer system. Micromation's Multi-user Z System Computer offers separate memory and a separate processor for each user. The system also features the CP/M operating system and a Shugart SA4000 Winchester hard-disk drive. With the Nestar Clusterbus system, anyone can connect as many as 64 Apple IIs together in a resource-sharing network.

The Japan Microcomputer Club rented booth space at the Faire to promote their organization of Japanese microcomputer enthusiasts, now 3000 strong. Industry watchers will definitely want to keep in touch with this organization. Their address is: Japan Microcomputer Club, c/o Japan Electronic Industry Development Association, 3-5-8, Shibakoen, Minato-ku, Tokyo 105, Japan.

Microsoft announced the Z80 Softcard, a plug-in processor card for the

Apple II computer that enables users to run software written for Z80-based computers. Included with the package is the CP/M operating system and Microsoft's Disk BASIC. The Softcard, which costs \$349, allows the user to select either the Apple's 6502 processor or the Z80 processor using

a keyboard command. Both processors cannot run at the same time. Products like the Softcard point the way to CP/M's emergence as a de facto industry standard.

On the educational front, sad to say, there was little evidence of growth in the industry. Most of the "educational" programs I saw were trivial drill-and-practice exercises. (See the BYTE Education Forum in this issue.) Perhaps matters will improve in the coming year. There is some interesting work going on now at Texas Instruments in the area of secondary-school use of personal computers.

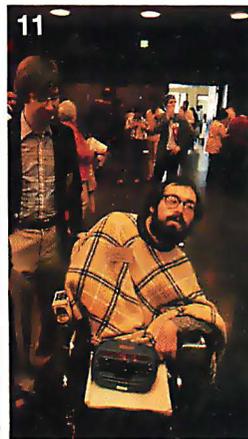


Photo 14: Digitized images of attendees at the Faire generated by Digital Graphics Systems' CAT-100 color image system, which consists of two S-100 boards. It can capture an image in 1/60 of a second and store it in its on-board 32 K-byte memory.

Photo 15: Two young chess players take turns vying with a computerized chess-playing unit made by Chafitz.

Photo 16: Micro Matrix's \$19.95 light pen for the TRS-80.

Photo 17: Mychess, the winner of the computer chess tournament at the Faire, was written by Dave Kittinger, proprietor

of Computer Services, 2431 Lyvona Ln, Anchorage AK 99502. The program is available on either 5-inch or 8-inch floppy disk for the TRS-80, North Star CP/M, or Cromemco CDOS for \$50.

Photo 18: Book business was brisk at BITS Inc.

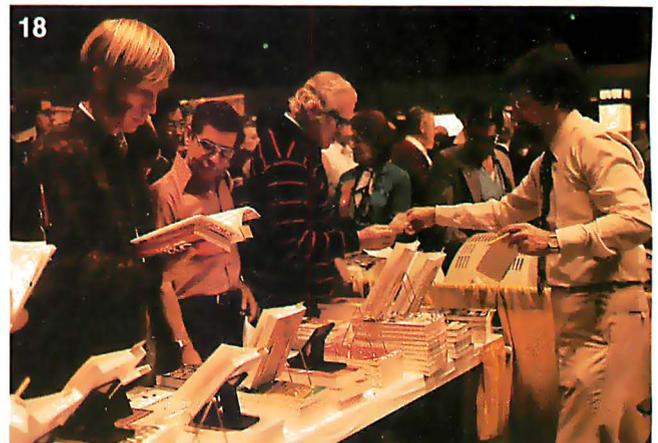
Photo 19: Playing games on an Atari 800.

Photo 20: The easy way to program — with a giant TV screen.

Photo 21: Sharp's new PC-1210 pocket

computer, price: \$298. The main processor unit, which can run Tiny BASIC programs up to 400 bytes long, is shown being plugged into the cassette interface. A new version, the PC-1211, is due out next month; it will have a capacity of 1424 bytes of user memory.

Photo 22: Ten colors in Apple II high-resolution mode? You can get them with Synergistic Software's Higher Text package, which lets you design your own character set, mix text and graphics, and change the shape of letters.



Probably the most important trend at the show was that the software industry is beginning to catch up with the hardware industry. A new sophistication is very apparent, and we'll be seeing many new developments in the areas of word processors, music systems (like Syntauri Ltd's alphaSyntauri Apple II-based synthesizer on view at the show), adventure games (watch for our special issue on Adventure and its offspring coming up in BYTE), high-resolution color graphics, and ultra-small personal computers.

We're looking forward to a very exciting time in personal computing in the new few months, and we hope the pictures in this photo essay will convey some of that excitement. ■

