Down The Road

by*Sara Carlstead*

Down the Road is a regular feature of Crossroads where we highlight the activities of ACM student chapters. This issue's column will feature the ACM chapters at **Clarkson University** (Potsdam, NY) and the **University of Idaho** (Moscow, ID).

C l a r k s o n U n i v e r s i t y

``Ever hear of a course strictly for undergraduates in virtual reality research?'' teases an **article** on the Clarkson chapter's homepage **(http://fire.clarkson.edu/acm/ acm_main.html)**. The writer of the article, Ron Krisko, past president of the ACM chapter and the current Communications Committee chair, goes on to answer himself. ``No? Neither did we, so we just created one.'' The **class** came out of the efforts of the chapter's **Virtual Reality committee**, which was formed in response to the chapter's increasing interest in virtual reality. In addition to their research and sponsoring the VR class, the committee also holds demonstrations for the Clarkson and Potsdam community. While some might think that they are just ``playing around'' with VR, the accomplishments of the committee and class are nothing to sneer at. The VR world generator they are creating, geniSYS, consists of four libraries (sound, graphics,
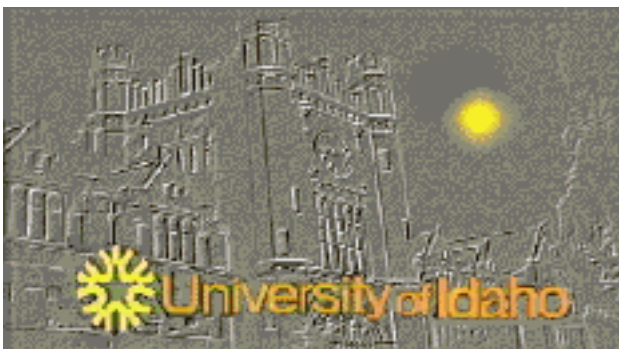
device drivers, and sectors/database) written in C++. The software will be available as freeware to the general public via the group's homepage and BBS. When you consider that most VR systems cost thousands and require expensive equipment, the Clarkson project (did I mention it will run on a PC?) is an attainable and affordable alternative.

Stephen Palm demonstrates Clarkson's VR equipment.

Did I just say **homepage** and **BBS**? Yep, that's right, in addition to maintaining a series of WWW pages, Clarkson is also developing a BBS. After the bugs are worked out, the menu driven BBS will be able to run on any UNIX or AIX based system.

You would think that the folks at Clarkson are busy enough with their VR project and their BBS, yet they still have found time to teach UNIX and DOS help sessions, help out at Clarkson's Math and Computer Science Day, and to provide a useful service to all of us students. Clarkson is sponsoring an **ACM Members' Resume Page** on the WWW. A visit to the page will provide you with instructions for emailing your resume, which will be automatically converted into HTML format.

 University of Idaho

One of the more inspiring lines in the University of Idaho's **chapter's on-line newsletter** is from president **Luke Sheneman**. ``Be active! Work hard! Use your voices and express your opinions.'' The members really seem to do as Luke asks, and as such, are one of the more involved, communicative, and collaborative groups I've seen. One of their largest recent projects was co-sponsoring, along with University of

Idaho's **Laboratory for Applied Logic**; Departments of Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, and English; GTE; and a number of other groups on the UI campus, a lecture series on ``**Cyberspace: The New Frontier**.'' The series introduced the public to some of the different ways to interact with cyberspace: USENET newsgroups, gopher, the WWW, and email; and featured such noted speakers as **John Perry Barlow**, co-founder of the **Electronic Frontier Foundation**. The ACM chapter participated by producing and distributing flyers and posters, as well as setting up the technical demos.

Cyberspace at UI

Another impressive aspect of this chapter is how it works to help the students get what they want. When the students decided that they needed a **Silicon Graphics** Indy Multimedia Workstation, the ACM sponsored petitions, met with representatives from SGI, and hosted a viewing of the SGI promotional video on the Indy. Through their efforts, the purchase was approved. In a related project, they worked to distribute information on Mathematica, in hopes that their Computer Services would purchase a campus-wide site license. That project wasn't as successful, but their efforts are impressive anyway. The chapter also set up a student-faculty meeting so the students could share their ideas and opinions about how the department could be improved.

Like most other chapters, UI's chapter also held programming contests, sponsored UNIX and Emacs help sessions, had guest speakers, and had a table at UI's Engineering Week.

I'm always looking for unique or inspired activities by student chapters. If your chapter is doing anything noteworthy, please drop me a note at *saracarl@rice.edu*.