August 1994

Uplink

A newsletter for the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting

Uplink update

Our schedule at NICAR is becoming ever busier, with seminars scheduled this fall in Canada, California, Pennsylvania, Florida, Connecticut, Wisconsin, and Oregon. We also plan to add a seminar to our on-campus program in November or December. We will post a note on our listserv, NICAR-L, as soon as the dates are set.

In addition, the size of our database library increases weekly. We are slicing and dicing data for news organizations across the country. We can convert 9-track tapes into diskettes or CD-ROM for easier use and we can deal with those difficult tape cartridges that are landing on our desks more often.

As always, please give us a call if you have suggestions for *Uplink* articles, data acquisition, or anything else in the realm of computer-assisted reporting.

And don't forget to be in Silicon Valley Oct. 6-9 for the CAR Trek conference.

Inside

Canadian FOI structure threatens CAR

Fighting for data access

By Bill Doskoch
The (Regina, SK) Leader-Post

Ah, America! A magical land where the roads are paved with 9-track tapes, where all government information is available at the snap of a reporter's finger.

At least that's the way most Canadian reporters see it, especially relative to their condition. Unfortunately, it's an attitude that could halt the advancement of computer-assisted reporting (CAR) in your friendly neighbor to the north before it ever really gets rolling.

Interest is building in Canada. The CAR Network of the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ) now has 73 members and is hosting a major professional development session on Aug. 27, using trainers from NICAR.

But most Canadian reporters despair of ever having the same access to records as their American counterparts, and so they aren't even trying.

That's not quite true. The Montreal Gazette won a two-year court battle in 1992 to win access to five years worth of court records stored on computer tape.

However, the paper is a branch of Southam, Canada's biggest (in terms of circulation) newspaper chain.

Southam owns a company called InfoMart, which is a business online information service. When it heard about the tapes, it asked for them, ostensibly to develop some type of information product with them.

That's the last the newsroom ever saw of them - and so away went the dream of setting up a major database on Quebec's courts.

It should be noted that Quebec has the best freedom-of-information law in the country, and so the victory might be tough to duplicate elsewhere.

In my home province of Saskatchewan (perched over North Dakota and Montana), provincial FOI legislation doesn't specify one can have access to government records in computer format - instead, it specifies the government may supply paper transcripts.

If anyone knows of a decision where the court said the government should honor requests for electronic records, please let me know about it.

On the other hand, I have been making requests for certain types of information already made public on paper - the public accounts, which list amounts of money paid to individuals by government; workers' compensation injury summaries by occupation - in electronic format, and while the bureaucrats have been cautious ("why would you want it that way?"), they've also said it should be possible.

Cost has been a big barrier in some

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Coming Events

August 14-19, 1994
NICAR Seminar
Columbia, Missouri

October 6-9, 1994
CAR Trek Conference
Silicon Valley, California

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A newsletter for the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting

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NICAR is a joint effort of Investigative Reporters and Editors and the University of Missouri School of Journalism with the mission of bringing the journalism industry into the 21st Century. NICAR services include hands-on newsroom training seminars in computer-assisted reporting, special academic and advanced training at Missouri, data analysis and advice.
NICAR is supported by a grant from The Freedom Forum intended to help the institute deliver its services nationwide to news organizations and associations.

Transfer and data at reasonable prices

Data services at NICAR

NICAR is now offering inexpensive data transfer for journalists and news organizations.

The Institute can transfer data to and from "floppy" diskettes, 9-track tapes, 3480/3490 cartridge tapes, Trakker 120 and 250 mb backup tapes, compact disks, and some 1.3 gb magneto-optical disks (as well as some 650 mb MO disks).

NICAR also offers a number of government databases including:

— Federal Elections Commission contributions data

— Federal Aviation Administration data

— Home Mortgage Disclosure Act records

— General Services Administration federal procurement data

— Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms gun dealer records

— National Bridge Inventory System data

Call the Institute for an up-to-date list of prices and available data.

The Institute also has FAA service difficulty reports from 1988 to 1994 on compact disk for $125. The disk includes the airmen directory. Call NICAR at (314) 882-0684 for more information.

Data access

Continued from page two

ways. One reporter for the Ottawa Citizen asked for the tax assessment records for a particular municipal region and was told the information would cost $1,500.

That's about the same cost as a Statistics Canada CD-ROM containing information from the 1991 census just for Saskatchewan. A national set? $7,500.

To give some comparison to the U.S. situation, here's an example given by Peter Calamai — editorial page editor of the Ottawa Citizen and a principal in the Open Government Campaign — during a January 29 speech to journalists:

Purchasing a CD-ROM with about 450 megabytes of information from the U.S. Bureau of the Census would cost $99 U.S. Comparable data from Statistics Canada would cost $320,000 U.S.

That's because there are policies in place in the United States that allow the government only to charge the cost of transferring the information.

Calamai said the government here looks upon its information as a tradeable commodity from which a profit can be made or costs recovered. The federal government, and some provincial ones, are licensing the distribution of their information through private companies.

In Ontario, journalists have applied for government records under that province's FOI legislation, only to be told that they can purchase that information from licensed vendors. Currently, the fight here is seen as a political one, not a legal one; hence the Open Government Campaign.

There is some hope on the horizon. New FOI acts were passed in British Columbia and Alberta recently, each more liberal than any of their predecessors.

In a speech to journalists at the CAJ's annual convention in April, Marcel Masse' said the government recognizes the importance of making the phrase "open government" meaningful. Masse is the federal minister of intergovernmental affairs and minister responsible for public service renewal in the new Liberal government (the old Liberals introduced the country's first Access to Information legislation in 1983).

But ominously, he also talked of "how to balance the costs in providing information to special audiences with fiscal fairness to all taxpayers." He didn't say whether news organizations were a "special audience."

So there is a fight to be fought before Canadians join their American colleagues at the highest levels of CAR. Here's hoping that fight actually takes place, and that news organizations don't concede victory to governments in the battle for access to public information, fearing they will never win.

Bill Doskoch is a health and environment reporter with The Leader-Post in Regina, SK. He edits the newsletter for the CAJ's CAR Network and has written a 76-page primer on CAR.

CAR Trek: Oct. 6 - 9, 1994

Panels set for fall conference

By Jennifer LaFleur
NICAR Training Director

Pick out your favorite pocket protector and plan to head west this fall when IRE, NICAR, and the San Jose Mercury News present CAR Trek: Computer-Assisted Reporting in the 90s, Oct. 6 - 9 in Silicon Valley, Calif.

The schedule is shaping up for what should be the largest gathering of computer-assisted reporters ever. More than 110 experts in computer-assisted reporting will share their experience and provide practical tips for doing CAR. In addition, 500 attendees will be able to take three hands-on training courses — so register early to ensure a spot.

Here are some of presentations planned for CAR Trek 1994:

— Introduction to Computer-Assisted Reporting

— The Power of Computer-Assisted Reporting: Examples of what others have done

— What you need: Software and hardware

— Introduction to spreadsheets: Using them quickly on the beat

— Introduction to relational database programs: How to matchmake

— Introduction to the online world

— How to get the most out of your searches

— Linking to your library

— Introduction to the Internet

— Number crunching for journalists

— CAR on a shoestring: It doesn't have to be expensive to do CAR

— Old fashioned shoeleather: How to get out from behind that computer

— Beat reporting and CAR

— Turning online information into stories

— One project—soup to nuts: The planning and execution of a CAR project

— Telling the story: Writing a compelling story from numbers is no easy task.

— Data and the law

— California access

— California government online

— Cyber-law: It's a brave new on-line world, but can you reprint information from the Net?

— Government Databases

— CAR Trek - The Next Generation: The CAR pioneers take a look into the future

— Surgical strikes with medical databases

— Workplace safety and databases

— Inequality: Gender and racial disparity

— Welfare and housing information

— Exposing immigration abuses

— Databases for business reporting

— Crime in the community: Using data to go deeper

— Using CAR for education probes

— Covering the environment with CAR

— CAR for feature stories

— The Census

— Campaign contributions

— Federal election financing

— Bad data: How to spot data that might be filled with errors and what to do about it

— CAR and Macs: See how Macintosh computers can be used for projects

— Mapping with Atlas GIS and MapInfo

— CAR and graphics

— Statistical analysis with SPSS and SAS

— Nine-Track and cartridge technology

— Organizing notes and files: Several computer applications for organizing and tracking information.

— Advanced programming

— Advanced statistics

— From Hieroglyphics to data: Techniques for taking data on paper or in ASCII format and putting it into a database manager, using scanners and/or special software applications

— CAR for broadcast

— Preach, pitch and pray: Selling the benefits of CAR to the bosses and persuading them to buy the equipment you'll need

— News of the future: Where is the news business headed?

— Look who's talking: This session looks at who's typing away at the other end of the line, where the information may reveal far less than what's really out there

— Surfing the Internet

— Point and shoot: Here's how you can set up easy-access databases without knowing the ins and outs of software

— How to set up CAR training

— Keeping your data all shaped up

— Building databases

— CD-ROMs

Special sessions

- **Tour of Mercury Center, the San Jose Mercury News' online, phone, and fax service**
- **Demonstration Room: Ongoing demonstrations of the latest technology including a session on the wireless/portable office**
- **Special editor and publisher program: How to bring CAR into your newsroom**
- **Super-session on ethics**
- **Hands-on training in spreadsheets, database management programs, statistical analysis software, mapping, online databases, the Internet, nine-track technology, and building databases**

For more information about this conference, call IRE/NICAR at (314) 882-2042

The state of CAR at a small newspaper

The CAR lot: Munster, Ind.

By Carol Napolitano
The (Munster, Ind.) Times

This is a story of inspiration and frustration.

It is about living every day in a world of archaic laws and petty bureaucrats, distracted bosses, and tightening purse strings.

It is about courting governments, educating editors, and changing the way people think.

Welcome to the world of computer-assisted reporting. It isn't easy to ease your way into CAR, especially if you are a small or mid-sized newspaper.

The Times is one of those. Our circulation dances around the 70,000 mark. But, unlike many newspapers our size, we are luckier than some because our publisher and many of our editors have vision.

But that vision often is obscured by financial realities and deadline pressures. And that, unfortunately, is the way things are just about everywhere.

Few papers give their reporters a year to analyze data, or spend $30,000 routinely to keypunch information. Yet, sometimes, it seems those are the only stories we hear about CAR programs. And we ask ourselves, "Gee, why can't it be so wonderful at my paper?"

Well, I'm here to share some CAR stories that aren't so wonderful. But, I hope they will be inspirational to reporters who struggle each day to get a CAR program off the ground.

The county data board's attorney actually suggested they might give us electronic records if we promised not disclose any of this public information to the public. That's true, I swear. There were witnesses.

Those pesky data requests

The Times has the misfortune of covering Lake County, Indiana, where corruption and secrecy are a way of life in government and too many bureaucrats think we should be eternally grateful for the mere fact that they show up for work.

A lot of records here are not computerized at all. And for the ones that are, county officials have hired a private agency, Cenifax, to oversee them.

We've been pestering the county for almost 18 months now to get records — any records — in any electronic format. Officials' responses have ranged from ignoring us to contacting their private attorneys, viewing our requests as some kind of personal legal threat.

Our paper even sat down with the county Data Board at one of its public meetings to ask for some kind of policy or procedure for acquiring electronic records.

The board's attorney actually suggested they might give us electronic records if we promised not disclose any of this public information to the public. That's true, I swear. There were witnesses.

When the meeting was over, the Data Board added one more insult. It refused to give us written minutes or a copy of the tape recording they made of that public meeting.

In March, when Rebecca Buckman of the Indianapolis Star did a story about access to electronic records, she asked the head of Cenifax why his agency and county officials were so uncooperative.

His answer: "The reason for that is because the files would be obsolete in a matter of days...and therefore any statistical abstractions drawn from the data" would be outdated.

"Paper gets obsolete too," he said. But with computer tapes "you can manipulate (data) in any manner you see fit, therefore deriving any statistics that you want..."

Gee, I don't remember any law that allows government to withhold public records because they are worried someone out there might misconstrue them.

Speaking of the law

Speaking of the law, Indiana's public records access law dates back to 1200 B.C., I think.

For instance, death records are private! The state figures revealing someone's death certificate is violating their medical privacy. How can a dead person have privacy?

In fact, to get death records you have to convince the state registrar that there is a "direct tangible and legitimate public interest" at stake, according to the law.

So, when Lake County became embroiled in vote fraud scandal, we figured we had a good case to get a copy of some death records. Already we had uncovered cases of "dead" people voting and things were getting so hot the county prosecutor got in on the act.

Here's what the state registrar said, in response to our request:

"Clearly, you have no direct interest in the

matter recorded on the death certificates. In addition, I do not believe that your request shows an extraordinary case that is a direct tangible and legitimate public interest."

In addition to public officials who don't consider election fraud to be of public interest, we must contend with a state law that gives those same officials the choice as to whether to provide us with electronic data or paper data.

You can pretty much guess what option they take.

Recently, the Hoosier State Press Association, working with journalists from around the state, drafted a new records access law that would require government to give people records in the format they requested, if they had the ability to produce that format.

The law also would have required agencies to charge people no more than the direct cost of reprogramming computers to produce the public record.

The bill never got out of committee.

Battles and luxuries on the homefront

When we're not fighting government, we're fighting technology and time.

The Times cannot afford the luxury of letting me work on CAR projects full time. It can't afford to hire a computer whiz.

And our own technical people have to keep 18 papers in our chain running. They just don't have the time for me or my program.

So, being just a reporter who kind of stumbled into computers, I grope my way through the world of CAR blindly, but with hope.

I absorb manuals that often leave me asking more questions than they answer. I get on the computer and learn by making mistake after mistake.

I swallow my pride and mutter endless apologies each time I find myself calling that elite group of CAR geniuses that you often hear speaking at conferences.

But, after 18 months of talking to editors and pleading my cases, I am lucky to have acquired a good variety of CAR tools — We have dBase for Unix on all terminals; FoxPro on our Macs and on my laptop; Quattro Pro for Windows on my laptop and Lotus on a few Macs. My paper has not been stingy when it comes to buying software.

But, like most other papers out there, I don't get a lot of time to work with my techno-toys. Deadline pressures demand I spend a lot of my time writing daily and weekend stories.

It's hard to convince an editor to give you a few weeks to diddle around with the census data or just let you sit there and learn the software they've bought you.

Often, you hear CAR gurus say the way they got more time was to produce some quick hitting stories. That works, if you live in a county or state where you can get data for quick hitters — like marriage licenses for a story on the most popular day to get married, or property records for a story on who owns the most land or who has the most expensive homes in towns.

But in this state and this county, those kinds of records either aren't computerized, or aren't public, or government just won't give them to you electronically. So these popular quick hits often aren't an option for us here.

One small step for CAR, one giant step for the Times

As a result, most of the dozen or so stories we have done in the past year have come from homemade databases.

We created a database on gun permits to do a story about what kind of people are carrying guns. We conducted polls on hot local issues, like riverboat gambling, and used our CAR software to analyze results.

We compiled a database of all murders in Gary, Indiana, which had the highest per capita murder rate in the nation at the time, and used it to write a week-long series on homicide in that city.

We gave students in the area a geography test, entered their scores into a database, and wrote a story about geography knowledge.

And most recently, we used surveys filled out by police departments to take a look at our law enforcement resources and whether they were adequate to combat crime in the area.

We did invest in one database — the census on CD-ROM and got a great little quick hit story out of that. We used the data to find heavily Irish neighborhoods to spruce up our St. Patrick's Day story.

So, even without the cooperation of government and without endless financial resources and without the unwavering editorial support I'd love to have, we have managed to breath life into a CAR program here.

And, recently, we got our first electronic records from Lake County, thanks to one county official who still understands that public officials are there for the public.

See? There are miracles.

In this business there always will be people who want to know why you can't produce that Pulitzer-quality CAR series in a few days; who don't understand why it can take weeks, or even months, to make data usable.

Need a kicker

Choosing the right computer

By Drew Sullivan
NICAR Staff

Judging from the number of calls NICAR has been getting on computer hardware, news organizations have begun putting more money into CAR programs.

There are several special requirements needed for a good computer system to do this kind of work. Here are some things to consider.

Basic Computer System
486-33 MHz system
430 megabyte hard drive
VL-local bus
8 mb RAM
Approx. cost: $2,200

High-End System
Pentium 90 MHz system
2 gigabyte hard drive
PCI bus
16 mb RAM
Approx. cost: $4,400

Prices include monitor, keyboard, videocard, tower case, mouse

If you have any questions or if you've discovered something you would like to share with other journalists, call Drew Sullivan at (314)882-0684 or better yet, e-mail me at C621897@mizzoul.missouri.edu.

Go for processor speed

The faster the processor, the faster programs are going to run. But if you're going to cut corners, this is a good place to do so. That's because in CAR, there is more concern about storage and data transfer speeds than about the CPU (central processing unit). Much of the time wasted is spent going to peripherals (such as the hard drive or a nine track machine) and reading the data.

Still, a fast CPU is a wonderful thing. If you can afford them, there are a number of crunchers out there that can smoke. At a minimum, I would suggest a full 486 machine (not an SX) with speed of at least 33 Mhz. Currently, 50, 66, 90 and 100 Mhz machines are on the market in the 486 variety.

Pentium machines are a step up. The Pentium is the next generation CPU chip after the 486 chip. Prices for Pentiums are falling very quickly so they make a lot of sense. If you opt for the 486, get one that is easily upgraded to a Pentium.

The future lies in the Power PC. It is a jet engine compared to the Pentium's propeller. It will be cheaper, better and faster within a year. Not a lot of software written for the chip takes advantage of its speed yet. Keep a close eye on them.

How many megs of RAM?

Easy answer here. Get a minimum of 16 mb of Random Access Memory (RAM). Not enough RAM will slow your system down. Think of it as desk space. If you don't have enough desk space to work on, you'll have to keep swapping files in an out of your storage area. Plenty of RAM lets you lay it all out and not make wasteful trips. Make sure your RAM is expandable to a reasonable amount (about 128 mb).

Shopping for disks

For a discussion of peripheral storage systems, see the two previous issues of *Uplink*.

Make sure you have enough hard disk space. It's usually the first thing you run out of. Programs are getting big (OS/2 takes up 80 mb of disk space), and you'll need a big work space for your databases. If you can afford it, don't buy less than 1 gigabyte (a gigabyte is equal to 1,000 mb). Better to buy a 2 or 2.4 gb drive. It'll be worth it in the long run.

If you go an Integrated Drive Electronics (IDE) system, you're stuck with only two drives and a maximum partition of 528 mb each. The alternative is a Small Computer System Interface (SCSI) controller. SCSI can handle up to seven peripherals (compared to four for IDE). It also can handle any size drive on the market.

SCSI controllers are more expensive and a little more complicated to set up. They're also much faster. Fast and wide SCSI hard drives can handle up to 40 mb/sec compared to 5 mb/sec for IDEs. But look for the enhanced IDE drives coming out in the near future. The new standard will support up to 8.4 gb drive partitions.

Take the local bus

A bus is an electronic transportation system on your motherboard that allows you to transfer data at higher rates. I strongly suggest getting a computer with a high-speed local bus.

If you buy a PC at Sears, it's going to have the old-fashioned Industry Standard Architecture (ISA) buses, which have a 16-bit processor and a 8 MHz speed.

In 1988, Extended-ISA (EISA) came along. It had a 32-bit processor but still operated at 8 MHz. Now VESA Local (VL) and Peripheral Component Interconnect (PCI) buses operate up to 32 bits and 64 bits with speeds up to 66 MHz. While IDE can transfer data at 8 mb/sec, the new buses can move data at 140 mb/sec with bursts up to 320 mb/sec.

The faster access allows you to get the maximum speed out of your peripherals. But be careful. These buses can create some potential compatibility problems if you don't spec out your system carefully.

Tackling database disk-hogging

By Chris Feola
Waterbury Republican-American

Computer hardware tends to run a couple of generations ahead of software. This is sort of natural for programmers; there's not a lot of sense in writing a program for equipment that doesn't exist.

It can be a royal pain for users, though, when your screaming high-tech machine won't work because your software was designed for the latest and greatest hardware — of 1988.

A case in point: many database management programs have notorious problems with free disk space.

The problem lies in the need for large stretches of open disk space for temporary tables. Although this article deals with the problem in Paradox, the theories apply to FoxPro, Access, and other database management programs as well.

As a rule of thumb, Paradox needs free disk space equal to three times the size of the tables you want to use. If you want to sort a 30 megabyte table, for example, you need 120 megabytes of disk space: 30 for the table, and 90 for the temporary tables.

The temporary tables are built by Paradox as it reformats a table. It's the digital equivalent of running off 10 copies of a 50-page report on a copier, then spreading everything out on a table to assemble 10 sets of reports with the pages in the right order.

Knowing that database management programs tend to be disk pigs, I keep a 550-megabyte drive empty for database work.

So imagine my surprise one day when Paradox gave me an "Out of disk space" error message while rekeying a 12-megabyte table.

As you can guess, I was somewhat puzzled. Even if Paradox needed open disk space equal to 10 times the table, I was still good to go with 550 megabytes of free space.

Being geniuses, we did what we always do: We tried it again, on the always-popular theory that computers are odd and will sometimes not work for no particular reason.

No go. We got the same message: "Out of disk space."

We still needed the table sorted, however, so we thought we'd try a different tack. Instead of rekeying the table (keys are fields used to automatically sort a database table), we decided to try manually sorting the table with the SORT command.

This proved unsuccessful, but provided a solution. The sort failed, producing an "Out of disk space" error message. However, unlike the error messages that came up while trying to rekey the table using the table restructure command, the SORT error message offered the name of the offending table: C:TEMP$$$AF123.TMP.

Now we were getting somewhere. Paradox, in its infinite wisdom, was trying to shoehorn its temporary tables into my jammed C: drive, rather than my wide-open I: drive.

This is a throwback to the early days of DOS and PCs. A decade ago, you could plunk down several hundred dollars and get an enormous 10-megabyte hard drive.

DOS was built to treat the drive as a single object — after all, who could need more than one drive or partition?

But as far back as DOS 3.3 — around 1988 — DOS started to provide the ability to handle multiple partitions for large drives. And when your system gets up into the gigabyte range, dividing your drives up into partitions is a basic rule of disk management.

Many large systems are now using a separate partition for the operating system — an arrangement I favor. Modern system design reserves drive letters A: and B: for floppy drives; C: is usually the boot partition on the hard drive.

Setting up a separate C: partition has lots of advantages. This arrangement makes it easy to switch operating systems, for one; a switch I make about once a month it seems lately.

My setup uses a 150-megabyte C: drive. My work drive for Paradox is the empty 550 megabyte I: drive. But instead of working on I:, Paradox was putting the temp files on C:.

Paradox is putting its temp files on C: because that is where the system pointer is set. But the system pointer is supposed to be for system files, rather than program files. WordPerfect, for example, lets you set the pointer for that programs temp and backup files; if you don't set anything, the program defaults to its home directory.

Once we knew what Paradox was up to, the problem was easy to solve. We reset the system pointer to the I: drive, and Paradox cranked happily away.

Tips for conquering the disk problem

- **Set up a temp directory. Pick a drive with lots of open space and make sure you don't let it fill up. Make a temp directory using the Make Directory command.**
- **"MD TEMP" will make a directory called "TEMP."**
- **Set the system pointer to your new temp directory by putting the following line in your temp directory: "SET TEMP= C:TEMP". That line points to the TEMP directory on the C drive; obviously, substitute the correct drive and directory.**
- **Periodically clean out your temp directory. There are lots of ill-behaved programs that don't clean up their temp files. You can run out of disk space real quick — and for no reason — if you have a program leaving around large temp files.**
- **Never clean out your directory when windows is running!! If you shell out to a DOS prompt and erase temp files while Windows is running, you will crash your system and lose data from any programs that are running. Always exit to DOS and exit all programs before cleaning out the temp directory.**

Begging for records in Pennsylvania

How to negotiate for campaign data

By Bob Warner
Philadelphia Daily News

Facing a record field of 12 candidates for Pennsylvania governor, and wanting to get their campaign contributions into an electronic database, we tried a new tack: begging. We asked all the candidates to give us their campaign finance reports on diskette instead of on paper.

We thought this was a pretty creative way to deal with our data entry budget, roughly $12.95 for the year. But creatively speaking, it was nothing compared to the answer we got from the candidates and their handlers.

Four told us it was technically impossible. (The simple response: it isn't. If they can get their computers to spit out reports for the state election bureau, they can create an electronic copy of the file for you and your newspaper).

Two of them told us they couldn't give us the diskettes because they used proprietary software. (Tell them you don't want the software, just the data).

Half of them told us we were asking them to do our work for us. (Not exactly. They'd already done the work, by using the computers for their campaigns. If they were still using paper and pencil for their internal record keeping, as two fringe candidates were, we certainly didn't expect them to create computer files for us).

The bottom line: After several months of persistent phone calls, not-so-gentle prodding and a few arguments, eight of the 10 major candidates provided their contributions on diskette.

It helped that, on the Republican side, the race was so close that no one wanted to take any unnecessary shots from the media; eventually, all the GOP candidates gave us their stuff electronically.

On the Democratic side, Lt. Gov. Mark Singel had a solid lead all the way. We got nothing from Singel before the May 10 primary. Later, with the fall campaign looking close, he decided to send us a diskette.

The data came to us in various formats. We converted it to Paradox, generally using the conversion tools provided by Paradox and Quattro Pro. Our only significant conversion problems involved changing text files into data files; for that we used Monarch software, first brought to our attention (through Appliance) by Tom Boyer of the Norfolk Virginian-Pilot and Ledger-Star.

So far, we've used our database:

- to identify 170 individuals, law firms, lobbyists, and other special interests giving $1,000 or more to multiple candidates;

- to describe how one candidate used connections at the Philadelphia Parking Authority to secure nearly $100,000 in campaign donations from authority contractors and employees;

- to keep track of cumulative contributions, making it easier to identify the candidates' top backers.

And whatever stories we produce during the fall campaign will become even more valuable after the next governor takes office.

Bits, Bytes and Barks

CAR story wins regional SPJ award — Reporter Devin Smith and The Olympian recently won an award from the regional Society of Professional Journalists for a database story on restaurant inspections. The article took first place for consumer reporting in the under 50,000 circulation category.

Illinois offers county justice system profiles — The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) has recently completed profiles of the criminal justice system for each of Illinois' 102 counties. Sal Perri, research analyst with ICJIA, said the reports contain analyses of drug and violent crime data for each Illinois county, comparing trends experienced over the past decade across counties with similar population characteristics. For more information about the reports, contact the Authority's Information Center at (312) 793-8550 or send an e-mail message to Perri at 73244.2726@compuserve.com.

Congressional Quarterly Gopher now up — Congressional Quarterly has announced the opening of its new gopher, which will allow users on the Net to explore current and archival CQ documents. Files now accessible via the Net include:

—Lead stories of the current CQ Weekly Report, as well as an archive of past stories.
—A weekly news brief from the CQ Researcher.
—Status of appropriations bills and other major legislation.
—Results from key 1993-1994 roll call votes.
—Updates on congressional and gubernatorial elections.
—Information on members of Congress, including committee and caucus rosters, leadership positions, room numbers, and telephone numbers.

To access the gopher, connect to gopher.cqalert.com. For more information on the CQ gopher, contact Melissa Henderson at (800)432-2250, ext. 578, or e-mail her at mhenderson@cqalert.com.