

FUTURE ACCESS

GAYS TAKE A BYTE OUT
OF TOMORROW WITH

COMPUTER NETWORKING

BY RAY O'LOUGHIN

The electric letters on the video screen read "Type M for menu." I did. A list of codes and instructions began crawling up the tube, and like Alice, I was through the little door into the wonderland of the microcomputer with its magical CRTs, smart modems, dumb terminals, RAM and ROM, 48K and 64K memory, and mad hackers, as computer junkies call themselves.

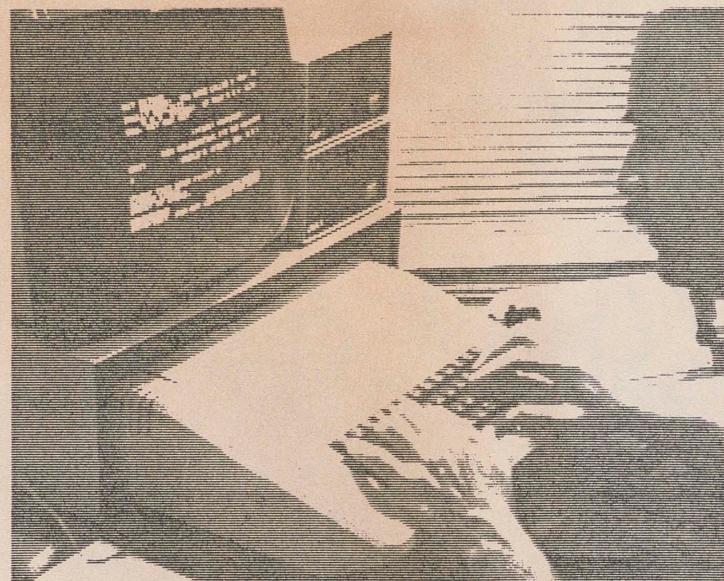
"Your choice," said the machine, awaiting further instructions from me. I selected one of the files on the menu. The disk drive buzzed for a second or two and then printed out a question about constitutional rights plus a lengthy answer by an attorney. Who was asking and who was answering was unknown,

Ray O'Loughlin is a frequent contributor to THE ADVOCATE.

but there was the whole discussion for all to read.

Marketing experts expect \$2.8 billion worth of microcomputers to be sold by over 1,400 retailers in the United States this year alone. Two years ago that figure stood at a scant \$860 million; by 1985 it should soar to \$9 billion a year. But that's only the beginning. Although at present it is estimated that only 3%-5% of the population own micros, whether for business or home use, by the end of this century the figure is expected to multiply exponentially to near 90%, with home use accounting for 57% of the market, according to one consultant. The gay community appears to be leading the way. A recent survey of ADVO-CATE readers showed that 21% of them already owned a personal computer, at least four times the national rate.

Reorganizing the world of work is currently the most common association with microcomputers. Alvin Toffler, in



PHOTOS/MARK CHESTER

his book *The Third Wave*, writes of the microcomputer ushering in the "electronic cottage," with people becoming what he calls "prosumers," producer-consumers. But according to Jonathan Llewellyn, San Francisco software developer, the personal computer will also reorganize the world of play. "Right now, about 90% of micro use is in business applications, and most of that is just to improve existing methods and structures. Within 20 years, this will be laughable, with people literally creating whole new fantasy worlds on their personal computers," which will be programmed "so that you can enter into

your own soap opera, if you want, or fight your own space wars, making up the plot as you go." Home movies of the future may look more like *Tron* than like the old scenes of "baby at the beach."

That's all a ways off, however. What can you do now with the little bundle of microcircuits you just brought home?

- Games, those invidious video games, account for most home computer usage. As with any radically new technology, the first popular use is as a toy, much as the first automobiles were regarded as extravagant nonsense before they became

cisco estimates that a sale means a three-year relationship with a customer.

You may not want to deal with a retailer at all. In that case you can talk to a computer consultant who will design a system for you personally. Or, since you've designed your own system already, you can deal directly with the OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) for most components and brands. Research them carefully to make sure their products have been debugged and that support services are available. Whatever you buy and wherever you buy it, shop around first.

What is it that you'll need for a system? There are five basic components to any computer system (six if you want to join a network).

- 1) **Keyboard:** Usually this is an ordinary alphanumeric typewriter keyboard (perhaps with a few special keys for certain commands) to get data into the computer.

- 2) **Processor with display:** The actual computer is the least visible component. Most commercial systems tuck the CPU (Central Processing Unit) in somewhere with the CRT/VDT (Cathode Ray Tube /Video Display Terminal), which is television without television and gives you readable information.

- 3) **Memory and disk drives:** One form of memory, called ROM for "read only memory," is built into the CPU; the other, RAM for "random access memory," is for you to program and load into the CPU. RAM capacity is measured in thousands of bytes. A byte can be thought of as a letter or number. Each byte is in turn composed of eight bits,

which are electronic signals not terribly relevant to the consumer. The disk (floppy disk or hard) stores your data, which the drive retrieves for the computer to use. You'll need at least one disk drive, maybe two.

- 4) **Printer:** Only if you want output in copy form. Depending on the quality of copy you want, the printer alone can cost more than the computer. A matrix printer puts characters together by combining tiny dots to give you letters that look like computer print-outs. A daisy wheel printer will give fine quality characters and is more expensive. Expect to pay \$700-\$1,000 for a decent printer.

- 5) **Software:** The program. Without it you got nothin'. Most dealers include some with the purchase of a system. Prices can range from \$14.95 for a game to several thousands of dollars for a specialized program. Any retailer carries the common ones, and there are even stores that deal exclusively in software. Rumor has it that certain big bookstore chains are also looking to market software soon.

- 6) **Modem:** Stands for modulator/demodulator, which translates computer signals to phone signals and back again so that one computer can "talk" to another. The basic unit usable on any phone connection sells for \$149; a "smart modem" that is programmable to place and receive calls is available for \$249.

Could I see something in a 16-bit CPU chip, please? Buying a computer is like buying a car, except that in computers you have real options. Here is what some sample systems cost.

TYPE 'G:N' TO IMMEDIATELY LOG OFF! CALL THESE..

S.E. NOTCHMAKER \$10
S.F. ADVENTURE'S ERECTION
N. HOLLYWOOD CARS
THE FAKE INSTITUTE
THE NOTCHMAKER (TRS)
<<Z-MEDIA BERKELEY>>
<<HOMESTEAD GROUNDS>>
DIAL-A-MESSAGE SYSTEM
DIAL YOUR FRIEND (MIXED)

GOING ON LINE: A BUYER'S GUIDE

The secret is language. Language to talk to your computer, language for computers to talk to one another and language so you can talk to the salesperson. Here's how.

Before you write any checks to a computer boutique for hardware and software, get some "bookware." Many good books on personal computers are available, but two of the best are *Your First Computer* by Rodny Zaks (Sybex, 1980, \$8.95) and *An Introduction to Microcomputers Volume 0—The Beginner's Book* by Alan Osborne (Osborne-McGraw Hill, 1982, \$12.50). Browse through the various general-interest magazines, such as *InfoWorld* and *Microcomputing*, as well as the user mags—there's one for every major manufacturer, e.g., Apple, Radio

Shack, IBM. Get acquainted with what's out there, which is a lot, and decide what you want your computer to do for you. Then approach your neighborhood retailer fully armed.

You'll want to deal with a store that carries many lines and a good range of products. Packages may be good for sales, but they may or may not meet your needs. Why pay for a word-processing package when all you really want is a color CRT that makes lots of beeps when you play games? Don't be oversold.

You'll want a dealer who expects to see you after the sale in order to give you the support services you will need, whether it be answering questions on how to use the machine or assisting in the repair/replacement of faulty equipment. Chuck Kinch of Computerland in San Fran-

the dominant mode of transportation.

- Put all your friends on file by ZIP code, by birthdate or by sexual proclivity. Press a key and find out who you know in Omaha who is into jockstraps and has a big day coming up. Get a software package called PFS (Personal Filing System) and put everything on tape, from bank accounts to quiche recipes.
- You want to write letters? Of course not! So write one that can be adapted

A recent survey of ADVOCATE readers showed that 21% of them already owned a personal computer, at least four times the national rate.

and personally addressed to each correspondent through the magic of word processing.

• Not only did you buy the computer, let's say, but stock in the company as well, and dividends just quadrupled. What to do with the extra dollars before the IRS computers find them? It's called financial modeling. You put in data on prospective investments, and the computer gives you back a portfolio of possible gains and losses. Modify one variable, and the whole scenario is recalculated.

• Blur the formerly sacred distinction between home and work by turning your home computer into a business. Do business forecasts. Open a dating service. With experience in programming, you can become a free-lance software writer. Peter Tannen in San Francisco aims to sell small businesses his custom programs, such as one he's written to allow publishers to handle complicated

accounts of royalty payments.

All that involves one computer by itself. When you connect computer to computer, easily done over phone lines, you enter an entirely different world called networking.

"Networking means many things," explains Dean Gengle, a San Francisco computer consultant and co-founder of CommuniTree, a networking and soft-

ware company. "It can mean two people exchanging business cards or establishing a personal support group. For computer users there is a more rigorous definition. A computer network is a human group linked directly by electronic communication."

The key to setting up a network, according to self-described techno-freak Steve Schuchet, is "a self-identified affinity group" from which the network can "create a sense of community that did not exist before."

Called networks, conference trees and community bulletin board systems (CBBS), there are hundreds across the country, ranging from mammoth, general-interest networks like The Source to local, special-interest bulletin boards for Apple owners and for programmers in certain languages.

San Francisco's Kinky Kumper bills itself as the original gay-oriented bulletin board. After you dial in, the first thing

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 40)

VA 22102.

Compuserve Informative Service: \$9 entry fee with varying hourly rates for use. 5000 Arlington Blvd., Columbus, OH 43220.

Electronic Information Exchange System (EIES): an experimental computerized conferencing system. No entry fee but \$75 per month with \$5 per hour of use. 323 High St., Newark, NJ 07102.

PLATO IV: charges not available. For information contact: Dr. Donald Betzer, Computer-based Education Research Laboratory, University of Illinois, Urbana, IL 61801.

COMMUNITY BULLETIN BOARD SYSTEMS (CBBS)

Directories are available from retailers and user mags, or write: People's Computer Co., Box E, Menlo Park, CA 94025.

Gay BBS: Below is a partial listing. They commonly exchange information, so each one may list others. The phone numbers are for modem access only; don't ring them up expecting to chat.

Los Angeles area: Dial Your Match (213) 842-3322
?????? (213) 394-5950

Miami, Fla., area: Green Machine (305) 965-4388
(7 p.m.-5 a.m.
EST only)

Newark, N.J.: Communiqué 80 (201) 992-4847
Philadelphia: Ask Aunt Dru (215) 855-1809

St. Louis: Midwest Underground (314) 227-4312

San Francisco Bay Area: Kinky Kumper (415) 647-9524
MicroSmut (415) 469-8111
Lambda (415) 658-2919
CBBS/HMS (415) 845-2079

—Ray O'Loughlin

FINALLY A COMPUTER CENTER THAT SPEAKS YOUR LANGUAGE

Computers and Programs for Business and Home

Featuring the ABS Software System® Including IMS: Information Management

Call for information
(213) 827-8621
4086 Del Rey Avenue
Marina del Rey, CA 90291



We need a few good arms!

Have you ever had hepatitis?
Have you ever been in contact with hepatitis?



Now, you can make it pay, as much as \$650 extra each month. And, at the same time, you'll be helping to contribute to the health and welfare of other Gay men.

HOW?

Your blood plasma contains various amounts of anti-bodies or antigens which are used in research and the production of a new Vaccine against hepatitis. A simple hour and a half procedure, whereby we extract your valuable plasma, is all it takes to not only put money in your pocket, but help other Gay men as well.

SO, DO YOUR SHARE!

TRIMAR HOLLYWOOD, INC.
6565 Sunset Blvd., Suite 414
Hollywood, California 90028
(213) 463-5126
In SAN DIEGO, call Trimar Biologics
(714) 226-1733
in SACRAMENTO call
(916) 441-3700



Tucked away from downtown, the comfort and hospitality of a gracious 1878 Victorian mansion await you. San Francisco's most unique and reasonable bed and breakfast inn provides you with fresh breakfast in the parlors, a hot tub, sundeck, and a most congenial staff eager to make your visit to San Francisco a memorable one. Please write or telephone for our brochure. Major credit cards accepted.

The Inn San Francisco
943 South Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco 94110
Reservations: 415/641-0188

OFFICIAL T-SHIRT

WHITE CREW NECK SHIRT
WITH DREAMBOY ON FRONT.
FULL COLOR ILLUSTRATION
ON BACK.
ONLY \$8.95 EACH. PLUS \$1.00
SHIPPING AND HANDLING.
SEND CHECK OR MONEY
ORDER TO:
GOOD MEN PRODUCTIONS
SUITE 1052
153 E. 43rd Street NY, NY 10017

QUANTITY SMALL MED LARGE

NAME _____

STREET _____

CITY _____ STATE/ZIP _____

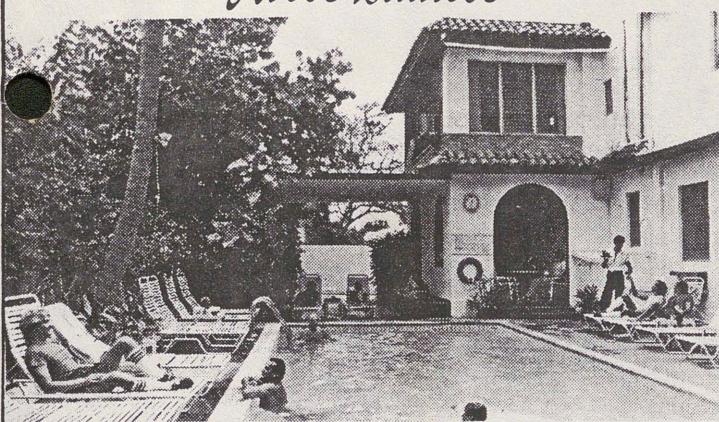


through most retailers; charges \$100 one-time-only entry fee with varying hourly rates for use. Telecomputing Corp. of America, 1616 Anderson Rd., McLean,

NETWORKS

The Source: membership available

Arcos Blancos



For the best vacation you've ever had, come to exciting San Juan, Puerto Rico

Stay at **Arcos Blancos**, the island's finest, where the action is!

- All rooms with air conditioning, overhead ceiling fan and private bath!
- Swimming pool, tropical gardens, restful sunning areas!
- 103 feet from renowned Condado Beach!
- Oasis Bar—for superb Caribbean drinks!
- Walking distance to leading shops, restaurants, discos, hotels and casinos!
- Breakfast and lunch served in our garden restaurant!

Summer Rates 1982

April 19 - November 24

Singles from \$32 Doubles from \$40

One week package including a one day trip to St. Thomas from \$182.50 per person (double occupancy)

(Rates include Complete Continental Breakfast and Lunch)

New York/Newark Airfare to San Juan from \$89.00 until June 24, 1982

For further details and reservations, write or call

10 Carrion Court, San Juan, P.R. 00911

Telephone: (809) 723-6343 / 723-9825 (Direct dial from U.S.)

There are other guest houses in San Juan, but there's only one Arcos Blancos

you read is a warning that what follows is explicitly gay sexual material. Those not interested are invited to type "G" for goodby. Antigay messages are strictly screened out by the sysop (system operator), but otherwise everybody, gay or straight, male or female, is welcome to use it. And straights do use it.

Most messages are crudely sexual, some inviting contact, others designed merely to electronically spark your prurient interests. But, says Schochet, that is misleading, for "other information is dispensed as well, such as health tips and announcements of organization meetings." Last July, he points out, when fire devastated a huge block of Folsom Street, leaving a number of people homeless and penniless, the gay boards (there are at least four in the Bay Area) helped organize relief for the victims.

"The boards are what the users make them," he adds. "They're freeform, and for many a spectator sport," since more call in to read than to leave messages.

For others, communication via computer can mean finding people they would otherwise never be able to reach. "People can get together," says Llewellyn, "regardless of distance, and without ever meeting, by conveying some specific need they're looking to fill."

A case in point is Bill Karnoscak of Chicago, who has established a relation-

months for gay news to get from one section of the country to another, since we rely on third-class bulk-rate mail to do it."

The new service will connect all GPA members who have the hardware and the phone hookups to a central computer in New York City, where news stories and features will be stored for access. Greg Springer, who lives in central Illinois and is a free-lance writer, looks for the GPA network to "provide a much needed immediacy to gay news" and to give people like himself "direct access to publications across the country as an open market for their writing." He's just purchased his own microcomputer for this purpose and in order to produce a newsletter for married gay men.

Reception of the GPA service has been positive, says Di Sabato, even attracting some attention in the straight media. It is, however, not without its critics. Some papers see their focus as strictly local with no need for extensive or instant national coverage. Others caution against papers rushing out to buy hardware without having carefully determined what specific equipment they will need and what use it will have beyond the wire service connection. (See p. 27 for more on the GPA and the controversy surrounding the proposed computer system.)

Certainly the GPA wire service repre-

"The personal computer . . . could be used to focus access, which would serve to decrease the total amount of information received while raising the amount of desired information," says software developer Jonathan Llewellyn.

ship with a man in Iowa through using the PLATO System developed by the University of Illinois at its Urbana-Champaign campus. Primarily used for instructional purposes at the university, PLATO is a highly sophisticated system that features what are called notes files on a variety of topics, including one for "gaynotes." It is not used for sexual contacts.

"I'd say it's friendly dialogue," commented Karnoscak, "Gaynotes is a group forum of 80 to 100 people; maybe three fourths of those are gay. Usually there are several discussions going on at the same time about various gay issues, such as health or coming out." Access to PLATO is controlled by password sign-ons in order to protect users from harassment from those who might want to use it just to find out who is gay. Currently, Karnoscak is the director for "gaynotes," but soon he'll be moving to Texas as a result of his electronic courtship.

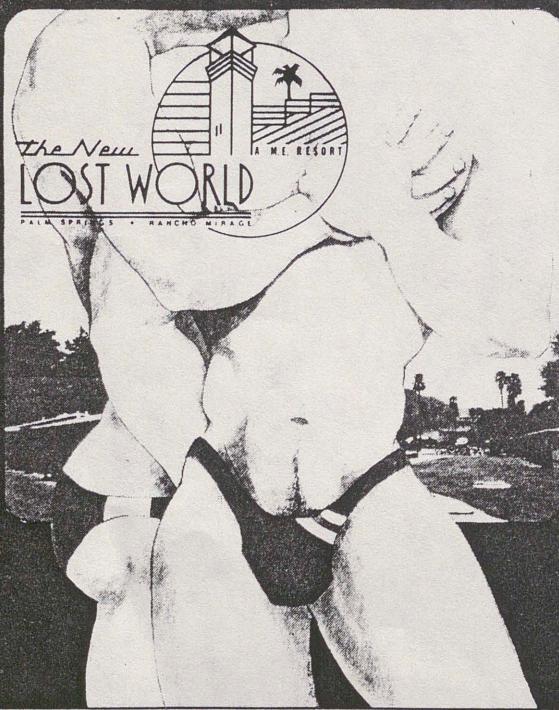
By early autumn, the Gay Press Association (GPA) expects to be operating the most extensive gay computer network yet proposed. "Last year Jerry Falwell announced a campaign to defeat the sex-law reform bill for Washington, D.C., and he had that bill defeated before many in the gay community even knew about it." The reason, says Joe Di Sabato of New York, chief organizer of the GPA wire service, is that it presently takes "two weeks to two

sents the most ambitious computerized community building so far attempted by gays. Still, the benefits to be had from electronic communication remain largely in the realm of the potential. "No one has yet taken existing software and hardware and used them in a constructive way for the community," states Gengle, who believes local, decentralized networks will be the most beneficial as well as the most feasible.

"A group like Bay Area Physicians for Human Rights [BAPHR—a San Francisco-based organization for gay and lesbian health professionals] would be ideal for such a network," he says. Medical information could be exchanged, referrals made and specialized help identified instantaneously. "But it may be that networks will occur first in areas with less freedom than San Francisco, in areas where visibility and access are more of a problem."

The advantages of instant networks to political pressure groups are obvious. "Within an hour," says Llewellyn, "word could be gotten out across the country through a tree system in which one computer is programmed to dial up other computers, then those machines contacting other machines, to give out information on, say, proposed legislation. People could be completely informed on issues in a very short time."

Does this mean that we'll be deluged with electronic junk-mail? "Actually, no," says Llewellyn. "The personal com-



"IF YOU THINK PALM SPRINGS IS HOT" . . . YOU'RE RIGHT!

NOW! IN PALM SPRINGS! The "ULTIMATE RESORT"

RESERVATIONS: (714) 346-6177

20 ACRES OF FUN, 5 Tennis Courts, Volley Ball Court, Hand Ball Court, Basketball Court, 4 Sparkling Pools, Sauna & Jacuzzi, Game Room, 9 Hole Pitch & Putt Golf Course, Far 3, Cruise Bar, Restaurant, Dance Bar, and Bunkhouse...
43900 JOSHUA RD. (at Magnolia Falls Dr.) PALM SPRINGS — RANCHO MIRAGE

puter would not simply increase the flow of information. It could be used to focus access, which would serve to decrease the total amount of information received by raising the amount of desired information."

Some people recently got a taste of what computer contacts can do when *InfoWorld*, a leading newsmagazine in the field, ran an editorial protesting the use of the CBBS for sexual purposes. Under the title "Deviates Deluge Bulletin Boards," blame for the entire electro-porn phenomenon was placed on, of course, San Francisco gays. Gengle promptly put out a lengthy rebuttal on his own network, CommuniTree, and urged others also to protest. It worked, and *InfoWorld* subsequently backed off in print, saying that it did not mean to scapegoat gay users.

"There are some negative aspects to consider too," says Llewellyn. "If anyone in the audience can also be a publisher, you have some danger of rumors and lies spreading fast, setting off hot reactions and being harder to stop." In other media there are controls, such as editors, he points out, but presently on computers controls are few and of questionable effectiveness. "The bulletin boards aren't really important, they're just another form of porn. But problems like unsigned accusations against individuals or public announcements to create mass hysteria—like a terrorist group saying it's going to set off a nuclear bomb—these problems will have to be dealt with soon."

"We have to outflank them before it comes socially dislocating," says Gengle, referring especially to the politically sophisticated uses of technology by the New Right with its penchant for broadcasting lurid falsehoods. "The cables may be cluttered with a lot of off-the-wall chatter now," he adds, "but that will change as we pull out the collective intelligence of gay computer users."

Setting up a gay support system/network could easily be done, according to those familiar with such systems. After the initial purchase of hardware, which is becoming less expensive, operating costs for a bulletin board type of network are virtually nothing, since they rely on regular telephone connections and are usually single-user systems (i.e., only one person can call in at a time). Such a network could easily be run out of anyone's home computer and would require no extensive modification.

Welcome to the info-revolution! It used to be said that knowledge was power, but now even philosophers concede we don't know what knowledge is, so we go for the bottom-line concept of information. The data, just the data, Ma'am. In such a world, information is a resource. And that means, information is power. The more you can control, the faster you can get it; the faster you can get it out and use it, the more power will come to you. It's all pretty loose right now, with most home computer communication being, in Llewellyn's words, "like CB radio chatter, contentless conversation." But as community energy flows into the vacuum indicated by the enormous potential that is now within our grasp, that will change. The wizards and hackers and trolls will recede back into mythology as we all become info-freaks.

Welcome to tomorrow!