

Technology fair a mixed bag

by Firdaus Bhatena

Computer enthusiasts and interested onlookers were treated to something special last week. The McInnes room in the SUB was filled with all forms of electronic gadgetry energized to amuse people of all trades and professions. Many corporate giants were present, from Apple to Epson to Packard Bell and Toshiba. Businesses and computer societies in Nova Scotia related to the computer industry were also present to inform the public of their existence.

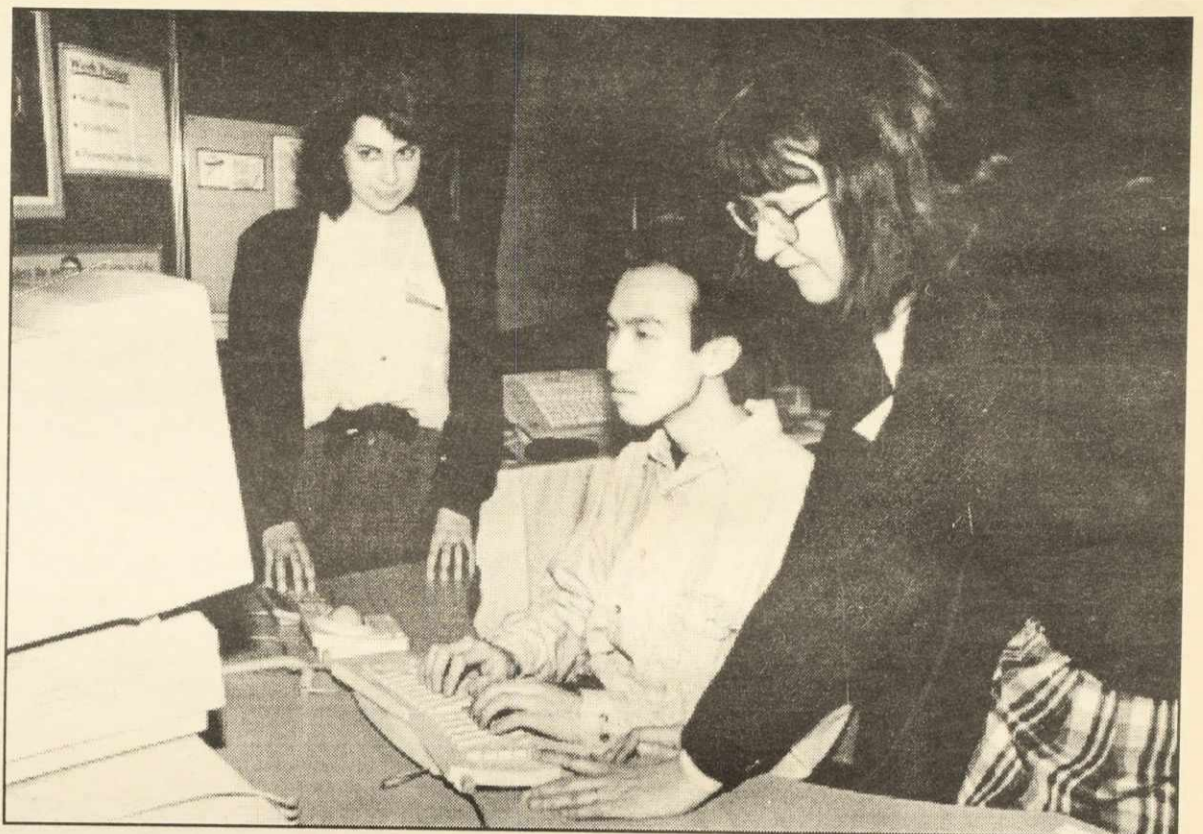
As we approached the entrance, computers running on the new Pentium microprocessor were on display. These computers were running video games at real time. This is one new advancement with Intel's chip. It is extremely fast. Intel corrected the problems that previously plagued the chip so now it is time to tell if it will be profitable. Several Pentium computers with the processor were running video and audio processes which on conventional machines would have been slow.

The McInnes room was decoratively dressed in exhibition style, filled with students, onlookers, professors and representatives. Monitors of all brands and size illuminated the tables in combinations of red, green and blue. Onstage was a mini-lecture area where the public was instructed in the use of computer software packages. A brief explanation of WordPerfect, MS-DOS and COREL draw was also given.

Dalhousie University facilities, from Medical services to Library services, set up several exhibits. The computing science department relocated some of their fancy workstations from the Chase Building to the show. These terminals were occupied by computing science students the few times I walked by so I could not see what was so special about them.

Medical services were demonstrating a new software package which aids new students in examining patients. Developed, designed and programmed by a Canadian, the package allows the examiner to go through step-by-step diagnostics, then presents a possible problem or problems. Medical services also provide much to students, ranging from scanning prints to desktop publishing and from graphic design to advertising. There is a price for these services, of course, which is certainly not competitive.

The Scotia Community Occupational Therapy Centre (SCOTC) was displaying an ideal work environment to the public. Jacqueline Halsall described her entire display designed to reduce muscle strain and other work-related injuries. It consisted of a desk, chair, monitor stand and keyboard all retailing for about \$4,400. Equipment such as this will be in all the offices in the future, we hope. SCOTC also provides intervention for increasing functional independence for the physically, cognitively and psycho-socially challenged.



Mary Lloyd and Carmel O'Keefe demonstrate ergonomic workstations to Ken Kam.

PHOTO: LISA WAMBOLDT

In addition, the Halifax Personal Computing Society was present. This group provides information to help people better utilize their microcomputer. In operation for about 10 years it currently has a membership of about 60.

Now to mention a little about the corporate giants that were present. IBM was displaying its new line of portable and affordable computers. They redesigned their laptops with a button, resembling a pencil eraser located in the centre of the keyboard, which replaces a mouse. The representatives claim this design will reduce overall time, increasing productivity and efficiency.

One of the two IBM representatives was an aggressive salesperson ready to support and promote all of his over-priced products. He presented the products in a superior

manner and referred to his competitors' items as third-class. The other representative was appropriately dressed and was pleased to be informed by us that the computer beside him was not a Power PC.

Across from the IBM booth were other corporate giants like Toshiba, Packard Bell and Epson. Their display was made up of portable, unique and relatively inexpensive laptops, similar to IBMs. Who has the better product? Ask an authorized dealer.

Apple computers, located in a hidden corner of the McInnes room, displayed the Quadra 660s and the Newton, a handy pocket diary. The Newton is a hand-held notebook programmed to decipher handwriting. Several of us gave it a consumer's test, the results of which were quite amusing.

Instead of typing in an appoint-

ment in your hand-held organizer you can write it on your Newton organizer. Newton also comes with an alarm clock and a handy calculator but the word recognition feature helps sell this unit.

With the pen provided I etched the word, "Hi," on the screen. It replied appropriately. Then I wrote my name, which it saw as, "I cause." Orange decoded as, "O ran," and, "spell this," became, "spelt is." The Apple representative claims the Newton will improve over time, but over time this product would become obsolete.

The Quadra 660s are elegantly designed computers each equipped with a 14-inch colour monitor, two speakers and a microphone. With the ability to reply to voice com-

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