

BAUDY BITS... COLUMN OF ONLINE NEWS ... COLUMN OF ONLINE NEWS

AN ONLINE USERS GROUP has just been formed in Wellington, New Zealand, as more and more people there fall under the spell of onlining. The chairperson is Lesley Hughes (Central Library, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, PO Box 2298, Wellington, NZ). She will be very happy to act as a channel for information about developments in online use and education. We wish them every success and many fruitful meetings.

STAR — a new online microcomputer data entry and retrieval system developed by Cuadra Associates, was recently demonstrated for the first time in the United States. STAR (System to Automate Records) provides users with a standalone system for generating, maintaining, and searching in-house, private files of library holdings, legal materials, technical reports, memos, customer records, mailing lists, and other types of textual records. The full-screen interface uses 'menus' and fill-in-the-blank screens that

make it suitable for use by both experienced and novice or infrequent users.

According to CA's President, the noted Carlos Cuadra, STAR is unique in offering in a small, standalone system nearly all of the basic features that online users associate with the major commercial online retrieval services. These features include full Boolean logic, use of nested parentheses for complex queries, truncated term searching, use of controlled vocabulary, as well as free text searching, index displays, flexible online and offline print formats, and sorting of output.

STAR will be made available to customers at selected test sites beginning in January 1981, and additional features will be added on the basis of their feedback.

People wanting further information can contact me, or write direct to Cuadra Associates, Inc, 1523 Sixth St, Suite 12, Santa Monica, CA 90401.

Data Courier has recently completed a survey on online training needs in the US. 800 completed surveys have been tallied, and some early results have been reported.

Asked to choose between instructor-led training sessions; purchase of file-specific videocassettes with companion workbooks; two-week lease of same; or purchase of file-specific audiocassettes and workbooks, just over 50 percent indicated that instructor-led training sessions were the **only** training methods meeting their needs. Of respondents checking more than one training option, over 79 percent chose instructor-led sessions, with audiocassette purchases as the second most popular choice, videocassette lease the third choice, and videocassette purchase the least preferred option.

Despite the preference for instructor-led training sessions, many respondents cited the need for alternative training methods, particularly where training opportunities are limited by locale and small concentration of searchers — Australia was among the cited examples.

Data Courier makes the point that many respondents find audiocassette and videocassette training an intriguing idea, but that there seem to be few A/V aids geared to online training, and they have seen none which incorporate the specific techniques they see as necessary for in-depth illustration and instruction of specific files. They note that instructor-led sessions are valued for interaction with knowledgeable trainers and for communication with colleagues. When asked to rank preferences for (1) Online vendor subject sessions and (2) file-specific sessions conducted by the database producers, 50 percent opted for database producer sessions, 30 percent preferred vendor sessions, and 20 percent felt that both were equally necessary.

Overall, comments revealed that online user groups are being increasingly looked to as training resources with many users urging producers to arrange sessions through these groups. Newsletters are important information tools, and updates of both vendor and producer user manuals are a concern. Additionally, several types of sessions seem to be in demand, such as system specific database sessions, search strategy sessions, joint producer-vendor sessions, and joint sessions conducted by two or more producers of related files. (Can't see that happening here, or anywhere else, given the rivalry that exists between file producers!)

Throughout, online users repeatedly stressed the need for competent, well-informed instructors to lead the training sessions; workbooks to reduce note-taking; hands-on time at terminals; and a variety in the search examples and hints used for instruction.

The Queensland Branch of the Australian Computer Society will be holding its Annual Branch Conference in conjunction with the ANZAAS Organisation from May 11 to 15 1981, at the University of Queensland. This is the first year that the Computer Society has been permitted a trial section with ANZAAS.

The Computer Society is actively seeking assistance from organisations to do the following:

- Mount public displays and to this end they have already contacted manufacturers of computer equipment and suppliers of services;
- Provide speakers both local and overseas;
- Provide papers for discussion, provide group leaders for discussions, provide facilities for demonstrations of equipment and services.

They are particularly interested in the library scene, as it has changed so significantly in recent years. They are seeking assistance in explaining computerised information retrieval, and are looking for speakers and/or papers on the subject. Those interested should contact John Heim, Computer Centre, Metropolitan Permanent Building Society, GPO Box 2198, Brisbane 4001.

Contributions to this column should be sent to Katie Blake, PO Box J36, Brickfield Hill, NSW 2000, (02) 26 6344.

CAREERS DISPLAY

THE NORTH Queensland Regional Group of the LAA has produced a careers display package designed to be used at careers markets or in library displays. It covers the main activities of librarians and library technicians in any library.

The package consists of four colour photographs, a separate caption for each photograph, headlines and a master copy of a pamphlet.

The photographs have been carefully chosen to represent aspects of librarianship rather than particular libraries. The location of each photograph, noted at the foot of the caption, may be cut off for use outside North Queensland.

The package is available for sale or loan. Rates are: Sale (Full set) \$180 postage paid; Partial set (captions and freight extra) \$30 per colour photograph, \$10 per b/w photograph. Loan: \$10 plus postage both ways (approx \$10). Enquiries to Neil Renison, Library Resources Centre, Townsville CAE, PO Box 117, Aitkenvale, Qld 4814.



Colin Thiele retires



AUTHOR Colin Thiele retired at the end of 1980 from his post as Director of the Wattle Park Teachers College, SA. He is to concentrate on full-time writing.

At a farewell held by the SA School Libraries Branch, Mr Thiele was presented with a hand-embroidered patchwork quilt depicting scenes from 20 of his books. It was made by children from more than 550 schools.

Sales of Colin Thiele's published books, even excluding the two best sellers *Storm Boy* and *Blue Fin*, exceed one million.

Picture shows Colin Thiele with two of his fans admiring the quilt. Photograph: The Advertiser.