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THE ALL NEW
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THE GRUNT PRESS

THE EDITOR'S SAY

Hello. My name is Edmond Hum.

The big story about NABU these days is not about the people who live on the OTHER side of Bank Street, Tom Wheeler's entry into the ranks of NABU U.S., or even Gordon Gow's explanation of the new marketing strategy. No, folks, the big news at NABU is this: who is the Soapbox Staff and why are they continuing their silliness?

Surely everyone in NABU knows that it's The Grunt Press that gives an outlet for the lowly grunts at this place -- there's no need to surreptitiously scribble graffitti on walls. Not when you can put your stuff for all to see in glorious black and yellow. Besides, thanks to a very reliable source, we know who the Soapbox Staff is -- namely a fellow with very short hair who works up in Finance on the second floor.

Eric Mesdag had said he had two hints about the perpetrator. One, whoever it was putting up the daily signs had to do it very late at night so that no one would catch him. And two, the guy had to have connections with both NABU and CI.

Some people had thought it was Amelia Giamberardino in SACS because she puts up nice little sayings on the wall where she works ("Your health is your most precious asset."). It might even have been Ed Myers trying desperately to resurrect the Jokes and Riddles application (anyone remember "Daily Smile"?).

But no, it was someone up on the second floor at Baxter Centre. We couldn't even blame Engineering for this one.

Dave Allan, who is working on contract in Applications Development, put up a sign in the area -- "This bulletin board has been declared a "Soapbox"-free zone". It was promptly responded to by the Soapbox Staff, who put up a rebuttal saying that there was a ratio of thirty to one in favour of the Soapbox.

We beg to differ. At least The Grunt Press has the authorization of management (a good thing too these days).

P.S. It was Dave Allan who scribbled on one of the Soapbox sheets of paper this message -- "The soapbox has no sense of humour. Signed, a one in thirty."

* * * * * NEWS FLASH! * * * * *

A boy was born to Andrea McGrath on Thursday, April 26, the same day that sel 2 was down for most of the day. Brent Taylor, weighing in at 8 pounds, 1 ounce, was born at 2:27, just before sel 2 went back up. Anna Soininen dutifully recorded these two events in her datebook. Laurie Shusterman, by the way, won the Baby Boomer Lottery by correctly predicting Boy McGrath's birthday. Congratulations to all.

CONFIRM OR DENY

- * Just call Les Perley the "Mr. Do" fanatic. He spent six hours late one night playing the "Dig Dug"-like video game until the wee hours of the morning. In fact, he didn't go home until after four a.m. "I like this game", he was heard to have said. (And get this -- Leo Binkowski was there with him that night as well -- but that's another story).
- * Where have all the coffee-cup holders gone? Anna Dupont from the "Delivery Systems" group was searching all over the place last Tuesday trying to find one. We suggest this solution: double up on the white plastic cones and use two of them stacked on top of each other. One cone is too hot to hold with tea or coffee; two is just warm enough to hold.
- * When April showers hit Ottawa, Leo Binkowski has more reason than most to wish the sun would break out more often. He gets wet in the rain when he comes to work on his motorcycle in a very embarrassing spot -- namely, his crotch. We think the manufacturers of Leo's rain suit were playing a very cruel joke when they forgot to seal up with silicone that particular area where all the rain seems to go.
- * Jamie Edwards won \$46 in the Baby Boomer Lottery when Cathy Sabourin had a baby boy on Monday, April 23. Jamie had thought he would win with Andrea McGrath -- he predicted Andrea would have her baby last Saturday when he checked up on her Biorhythms -- her physical cycle hit a critical point on April 21. But he lost on that bet, and Jamie was heard to say on Tuesday that at the time Andrea "was still plugged up."
- * Thursday, April 19 was John Shortt's second anniversary with NABU. The surprising thing is that he had not taken a full-fledged vacation until this week (except, he says, a few days here and there). And what with all the hours and hours of overtime John has put in, he can afford to take a longer vacation than most. (If one accumulates many hours in overtime, you aren't paid for it, you just take some time off, right Les?).
- * If you happen to walk by Steve Seal's cubicle on the way to the stairs to the second floor, you may notice he has a couple of fans whirring away. Apparently it's self-defence on Steve's part against the non-smokers in the area. The particular brand that he smokes can be very odious...
- * Tuesday was a special day for the girls working on the second floor. They all received a corsage from their boss, J. P. Gratton...
- * Is everything you read in this column true? Absolutely.

IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE: NABU'S FUTURE GAME PLAN?

By Terry Newcombe

"READY. FIRE. AIM." Could that paraphrase possibly become NABU's internal operating catch phrase? Should everyone in the corporation, from senior executive to lowly programmer, produce something -- anything -- first, and then ask questions later?

It's quite possible. That's one of the eight attributes of a successful company described in the book, "In Search Of Excellence", by Peters and Waterman. It's a study of exactly what makes America's best-run companies the best. And I just happen to have noticed it turning up on more and more managers' desks in the building lately. In fact (gasp!), both John Shortt and Les Perley have copies of their own, so look out, Content. What are we in for?

Well, relax. We're in for greater consideration for the individual in the company (yes, that's you). We're in for clarity of operation -- less paper, more direct action, specific tasks. And we're in for greater freedom to do things as we see them.

For instance, the "READY. FIRE. AIM." approach from Texas Instruments. The point here is not to plan something down to the last detail, but rather to plan the basics and then immediately produce a prototype -- a first sketch, a framework game program, or whatever. THEN modify it, adapt it, rework it, etc. Get people's reactions on it before it's too rigid. And if it stinks, so what? Throw it out and start again. It's far better to try ten quick ideas and have a seventy percent failure record than slowly plan out two ideas and have a fifty percent failure record -- you've got three successes versus one. The point is to be action-oriented -- don't just talk, do.

"Yeah, sure, but does that apply to video games?", you might ask. It just so happens that this is Activision's entire approach to video game design. "Good ideas don't count. We've got to see something." (Incidentally, this doesn't mean Leo Binkowski's disdain of pseudo-code is the right way to go -- some amount of forethought on paper is still only common sense).

Another attribute of a corporation that excels is closer management-employee relations. Les Perley, for instance, is clearly following -- successfully too -- Hewlett-Packard's MBWA, Management By Walking About. I guess Keith Soley reads a different book. Now if only Gordon Gow or John Kelly occasionally peered over your terminal to ask how things were going -- I know that would make me feel a little more like 'belonging' to the NABU family.

more...

EXCELLENCE -- continued

Have you heard of the Hawthorne Effect? Back in the 1930's, a management consultant said, "Aha! I know how to improve productivity in your factory. Turn the lights up and make it seem fresher and cleaner." So he did, and what do you know, productivity actually went up. However, in the course of his next improvement, he turned the lights back down and -- what do you know! Productivity went up again! It seems the workers were so happy that management was concerned about them by changing something -- anything -- that they worked harder.

And no, folks, the office re-shuffling in Applications Development was not an attempt to produce the Hawthorne Effect.

**SYSTEMS ANALYST RETURNS TO NABU
(OR, WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THEATER GUIDE AND LOAN ARRANGER?)**

By Jane Fordham

It's nice to be back!

During my (annual) six months holiday, I refinished a bunch of furniture, read stories to my little brats (two of NABU's advertising children) and took up my first career as a wife and mother.

It's a great job, but unfortunately the pay is terrible. The ol' man kicked me out into the working world again ("Hey woman! We got no money in the bank!") and I went to a brief but BORING contract with a crown corporation that shall remain nameless (unless someone asks). And now I'm back with NABU.

I have noticed a few changes in the place since my last contract here -- most notable is a complete change of management at all levels between me and John Kelly.

I've also noted a positive change in atmosphere and approach that comes from knowing where one is supposed to be going (I actually had a signed contract prior to starting work!). Some things haven't changed though -- Andrea McGrath is still pregnant at the time of writing.

I would also like to thank Les Perley and Keith Soley for the party two Fridays ago to welcome back all the old contractors -- Brian Fleming, Dave Allen, John Allen and myself.

Ta-ta!

FROM THE REALMS OF THE
"DELIVERY SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT"
GROUP

By Anna Dupont

There are now ten of us working under Tony Walker's direction, in what is referred to as the "Delivery Systems" group. The group is made up of three categories of NABUites:

- old Head End Systems faithfuls like Tony, Tom Chafe and Glenn Thomson,
- recent internal recruits (myself, Steve Seal and Barrie Ellis),
- new hires (Dave Duggan, Lalitha Tella, Mike Keast, Michael Hurka, Raymond Vilbikaitis).

We are organized into two project teams:

- NCS Development,
- DBS Development (Avin Chitnis insists on calling this group the NBS Development group).

Briefly, NCS means Network Control Systems, which will be replacing the current Applications Preparation System (APS). The implementation of the NCS will speed up the application development process by providing user-friendly facilities for the collection, tracking and distribution of applications intended for the broadcast cycle.

NCS will also provide a streamlined operational environment, since remote Data Broadcast Systems (DBS's) will be "fed" and monitored through a single NCS (The Network Operations room will never be the same again without all the terminals, modems and assorted wiring).

The DBS Development activities are centred on the setting up of the Satellite DBS, and on upgrading several of the current facilities, for example:

- Cycle Management, to provide dynamic cycle update, as well as multiple cycles, and expanded cycle size,
- Tier Management, to include improved tier data entry, and mass update facility.

Depending on needs, priorities and resources, agreed to with Marketing, work will also proceed on enhanced messaging, local data, real time feeds, etc.

more...

DELIVERY SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT GROUP - continued

The NCS group is now developing a detailed User Requirements document. To this end we have interviewed many of the prospective users of the system. You will be interested to know that the vast majority are in Marketing, and what is even more interesting is that their job titles are:

- Product Managers
- Affiliate Relations (?)
- Applications Developers
- O.A. Analysts
- SACS Librarians
- MSS Developers
- Production Co-ordinators
- Network Operations
- etc., etc.

You will have more of an appreciation of how delicate our job is, when you consider that we have had to represent Chris Wallace's requirements in a Data Flow Diagram ...?

In a future copy of The Grunt Press, Barrie Ellis will update you on the progress of the DBS projects.

TECHNICAL WRITERS ARE PEOPLE TOO

By Susan Taylor

Anyone who has ever had to produce technical documentation should appreciate the following excerpt from an article entitled "Creative Thinking Aids Documentation Focus" that can be found in Software News (March 1984). Nothing could better describe and simultaneously exemplify the lot which often befalls the beleaguered technical writer:

One of the comments we heard frequently from documentation writers was that they had no support from management to do their jobs.

They were handed unrealistic time schedules, which they had not helped to develop. They were not given adequate equipment, secretarial support, or production capabilities. Generally, their salaries were lower than other professionals in the company. In other words, morale was low, which means [sic] turnover will be high and quality control, [incorrect punctuation] non-existent [sic].

One has to wonder, of course, if more time, equipment or support would have made any difference!

THE OFFICIAL "UNOFFICIAL I HATE COMPUTERS BOOK" QUIZ

This quiz was found in an advertisement in the Sunday New York Times many weeks ago for a book by Rich Tennant and John Barry, The Unofficial I Hate Computers Book, published by Hayden Book Company.

1. Who invented the computer?
 - a) Mr. Chips
 - b) E.T.
 - c) The Marquis de Sade

2. What are microchips?
 - a) What a herd of micros leave on the prairie
 - b) What you eat with microdip
 - c) The reason you had to take all those computer literacy courses

3. What is a floppy disk?
 - a) A painful lower-back condition
 - b) An album that didn't sell
 - c) A great frisbee

4. What is the first thing you associate with computers?
 - a) Bill Cosby commercials
 - b) Eyestrain, headaches
 - c) Annoying beeps
 - d) Three tons of printout where once there was a three page report
 - e) All of the above

5. What is FORTRAN?
 - a) Between three and five tran
 - b) How two computers get excited before interface
 - c) Ridiculous

6. What is Pascal?
 - a) A leafy vegetable
 - b) A foot fungus
 - c) A city in southern France
 - d) None of the above

7. When you need consulting help in deciding what to do with your computer, what organization do you think of?
 - a) IBM
 - b) FBI
 - c) PLO

8. What is the most important computer peripheral?
 - a) Bill Cosby
 - b) Someone to operate the computer for you
 - c) Aspirin
 - d) The Unofficial I Hate Computers Book

BE-SE-BALL... BEEN VELLY, VELLY GOOD... TO ME!

By Eric Mesdag

Summer is approaching, and once again it's time to get people out to play 3 pitch softball. Last year, an informal league of HI TECH companies was formed. The purpose was to get people out and have some fun playing baseball. The teams are mixed, which means girls and boys and even grunts can play. Each team supplies their own pitcher, which makes batting a lot easier. The games start at 6:00 p.m. and are 7 innings long. A mercy rule of allowing only 10 batters during a teams at bat avoids the problem of being in the field for hours trying to make 3 outs.

A lot of interest has been shown here at NABU, and I am looking into the possibility of setting up two teams. Also, it has been suggested that a short INFORMAL seminar could be given for those people who would like to play, but don't know, or have forgotten some of the basic rules of baseball (i.e., the rule about a runner being able to overrun first base when trying to beat a force out play at first, but not being able to overrun second or third base). If enough people are interested, I will try to set this up. If anyone wants to play, but hasn't put their name down on one of the lists, let me know and I will add your name.

I have held a meeting with representatives from the other companies. Although not everyone showed up, we could determine that there will be between 7 and 11 teams, depending mainly on available diamonds. I do know that there will be 3 diamonds which we can use for sure, thanks to the Systemhouse people. We are checking for other diamonds now, and will know for sure where we stand in the next two weeks. Once the diamonds and the number of teams are nailed down, a schedule will be drawn up and hopefully games will start the middle of May.

P.S. I am looking for a press agent to write these articles.

SACS

By Amelia Giamberardino

On April 18th, Software Engineering had a little "get-together" at Richmond Road. The purpose: to have other NABUites both in Software and Hardware Engineering see and hear a little bit about the various & myriad tasks of some of the members in Software Engineering. SACS Senior Librarian Kathleen Pickard was asked to talk about SACS (Software Asset Control System). She gave a very informative and eyeopening talk ("Oh! So that's what you do!!").

more...

SACS - continued

I, being the new member of this dynamic duo, am finding that no two days are ever alike. Lookout for mid-month! God forbid you should try to relax. Someone will be right behind you giving plenty of reason not to or asking about something or other --- and this is not all from Kathleen either!

All in all I am enjoying being part of SACS where we're always learning something and always striving for perfection. Perhaps someday we'll get there

THE Q.A. REPORT

By Al McKillen

Now that we in Q.A. have a "few" spare moments, I would like to inform you folks out there in NABU-LAND why we are so paranoid about the 15th of every month. The fifteenth is, of course, the time when a new roll-out is put up on Sel 3. On the 14th of every month we receive about a dozen applications for testing and, well, you can figure out the results.

Actually, things went quite well and most of the applications made it through our relentless testing. I personally recommend AQUATTACK even though the hang glider scene is a little tricky. DIG DUG, a classic game, is also very good. BASIC I'm sure is a welcome application and should boost sales, because like myself, many people would like a chance to do some programing themselves.

Now for something of greater importance. Q.A. has another member in the S.W.A.T. team, HELEN VILMANSSEN. She will become one of our fearless leaders who guide us in the challenge of doing Q.A. at all hours and on weekends.

One last thing. Andrea McGrath has left Q.A., for reasons that are obvious (something to do with gaining a lot of weight in nine months). We will all miss her presence here in Q.A...

WE WELCOME KAREN SHAW

Karen Shaw, 21, once played an arcade video game ("Space Zap") with her boyfriend so well, she developed swollen arms and had to put them in hot water because she couldn't move them. Karen used to play video games all the time, like "Pac-Man", "Centipede", and "Space Invaders", and says she has wasted a lot of quarters in her time. It seems fitting that she's now the full-time secretary for Applications Development and Q.A.

more...

KAREN SHAW - continued

She just graduated from Algonquin College's Executive Secretarial Training Program last week, and had worked in all sorts of clerical and secretarial positions with the Canadian Bank Note Company over the last five years.

"This I like", says Karen. "This is a lot different from the more structured atmosphere and more older crowd at the Canadian Bank Note Company. Here you can work independently and use your brain. People like to know what you have to say."

Karen loves to play the piano, and lists as her hobbies cake decorating, art, writing, reading and craftwork. She's also had tonsillitis for about a week, and had to go to the doctor on her first day of work (?).

Welcome aboard, Karen.

MORE TUMMY TEASERS...

By Kunthi Paikera

Due to popular request, here's the recipe for the dessert dish that I had brought to Andrea's shower. It is best made at least one day ahead of time.

SPEYER'S NO-FAIL DESSERT

Graham Wafers

- 1 - 6 oz. pkg instant vanilla pudding, prepared as per directions
- 500 ml whipping cream, whipped
- icing sugar
- milk
- 1/2 sq. baker's chocolate, melted

Place graham wafers close together on bottom of 9" x 13" pan. Spread half of the vanilla pudding over the wafers. Spread on half of the whipped cream. Repeat with another layer of graham wafers followed by the remaining amounts of vanilla pudding and whipped cream. Top with a final layer of graham wafers. Ice with a thin layer of white icing (icing sugar and milk blended together). For decoration, drizzle melted chocolate in thin vertical lines and then draw a knife horizontally through these lines - as for Napoleans. Refrigerate for a couple of hours. Cut into pieces and serve.

SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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