

Festival to bring technology a little closer to campus

By **GLENN O'NEAL**
Staff Writer

Computer literacy is rapidly becoming essential for surviving in today's learning institutions. To help students and faculty keep up with the latest technology, the University is

holding its annual CompuFest computer fair Sept. 29 to Oct. 1 at the Carolina Union.

CompuFest will feature seminars, vendor presentations, quick-start classes and special interest groups. Kenneth Hardy, CompuFest plan-

ning committee chairman and director of the social science statistics laboratory of the Institute for Research in Social Science, said this year's fair has two major goals. One is to generate interest while sharing computing information. "And two, (is) to give the campus community a glimpse of the latest in computer technology," he added.

Not only is CompuFest a place where ideas are shared, it is an indicator of major future trends, he said. Desk-top computing and networking are two major trends that Hardy said he foresees. Networking is featured in this year's keynote address — "Computer Networks and the Scholarly Community."

IBM, Apple, SAS, Microsoft and Hewlett-Packard are some of the

companies that will be demonstrating and selling their products.

Carole Page, a member of the CompuFest planning committee and outreach coordinator of the Microcomputing Support Center, said students should be encouraged that personal computers are coming down in price and are more powerful. She said the original Apple Macintosh was considerably more expensive than the latest models.

Hardy said organizers expect the fair to be a bigger success than CompuFest '87 because both campus and vendor interest are up. Last year, the fair attracted about 3,000 people to the Carolina Union.

In 1986, when Hardy became director of CompuFest, formally

called CompuFair, he said it faced a slow start. Now, people on campus are showing a genuine interest in CompuFest, he said. Publicity about the fair is also going out to the Chapel Hill and Carrboro school systems.

Judith Hallman, manager of informational services, and Don Mitchell, associate director of academic computing, co-founded the first CompuFair in 1984 in celebration of the 25th anniversary of computing on UNC's campus. The University received its first computer in August 1959, Hallman said.

The goal of the first CompuFair was to show the campus community the state of the art in computing, laying the groundwork for the ones to follow, she said.

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New system generates 3-D images

By **JOHN BAKHT**
Staff Writer

The bizarre image on the cover of this section is just a flashy display of what two UNC computer science professors' powerful graphics system can do.

The image, called a fractal, is nothing more than a mathematical function that produces an infinitely jagged geometric object. The machine that generates the image, which inventors and professors Henry Fuchs and John Poulton have named Pixel-Planes, is one of the world's fastest image-generating computers.

Pixel-Planes creates high-resolution 3-D graphics that the user can manipulate and magnify.

The machine views complex building designs and lets the user "walk through." For example, a Pixel-

Planes user looking at a design of a house can see doors opening ahead and go through them.

The machine also provides 3-D medical imaging and generates molecular models.

Pixel-Planes is most useful for researchers to visualize their information, showing medical researchers detailed representations of a diseased organ.

In layman's terms, there is a tiny computer inside every dot, or pixel, on the screen, and there are 250,000 dots in the system, Fuchs said. Pixels work independently, but an efficient, tree-like pixel hierarchy speeds up the process so they work together.

How Pixel-Planes and machines of its type will affect science is still unclear. "The jury is not yet in on how successful it will be," Fuchs said.

"We are exploring new ideas that probably won't be used in someone's medical lab for five or 10 years," said Greg Turk, a graduate student in computer science working on Pixel-Planes.

But the Pixel-Planes team is not waiting. Fuchs, his associates and a crew of graduate students are developing Pixel-Planes V, which will generate 1 million polygons per second, as compared to the present 35,000.

"We're very enthusiastic about the future of the project," Turk said. When it is completed in fall 1989, it will be the fastest computer of its kind. It will show the building with more defined furnishings, the lung with greater realism and the molecule with a little more twist.

Computer illiterates: Go shopping

By **ELLEN THORNTON**
Staff Writer

I am illiterate — computer illiterate, that is.

Those of you who have walked bravely into a computer lab with a knowledgeable smile, only to discover an hour later that your disk isn't working because the disk drive doors are still open, know what I'm talking about.

Now that I know how to shut the disk drive doors, I realize that being able to use a computer can be a very handy skill, and I would even like to have my own computer.

But, given my limited computer knowledge, how could I ever go about choosing a computer?

It's really not that hard if you use the resources on campus. The best place to start is the Microcomputer User Service in the Undergraduate Library. There you will find purchasing consultants who will discuss buying options with you free of

charge.

Before making an appointment, you should decide why you need the computer and what you want the computer to do, says purchasing consultant Steve Gaddy.

"There is no such thing as the right choice in buying a computer," Gaddy said. "It's a matter of personal style and taste. It's valid to buy a computer because you like the feel of the keyboard — you have to get something you will enjoy."

After you have determined your reasons for wanting the computer, whether they be word processing, accounting or even playing music on the keyboard, you should consider what features your computer should have to meet those needs, said Jeff Simpson, a sales consultant at the Computer Gallery. For instance, you may require your computer to have speed, memory or color.

Then, Simpson said, you can begin to consider different systems and their reliability. For word processing, you can look at IBM clones, but for more delicate operations you must consider systems with higher capabilities.

Finally, you need to consider your budget. For the college market, Simpson said, systems run from less than \$1,000 to \$13,000, depending on the features desired.

However, you should check into the computers offered in the Ram Shop, the computer section of Student Stores, before buying anywhere else.

Gaddy said the Ram Shop offers students good deals on IBM, Macin-

tosh and Zenith computers and software packages because corporations sell to universities at discounts to encourage the college student market. For example, MS Word retails at \$300, while the Ram Shop sells it for \$49.95.

"There is really no reason to go beyond the choices offered in the Ram Shop," Gaddy said. "You have to pay more for a brand name computer, but with the discount, you can afford to do that."

Don't worry about choosing between a Macintosh and an IBM. Gaddy said both systems have similar capabilities. The systems are also becoming compatible — the new Macintosh model, the Mac 2X, has a drive that allows it to read some IBM disks. Also, IBM is developing features that look very similar to those of the Macintosh.

Again, Gaddy said, the choice between the Macintosh and the IBM is a matter of personal preference. The IBM is good for statistics, while the Macintosh is stronger in graphics. But many people find the Macintosh easier to use.

There is also no reason to worry if you decide to buy an IBM clone. Paul Vasiloff, account representative for PC Mart, said the clones are 99 percent compatible with IBM. There are only a few programs that will not run on the clones, but these are not standard programs, he said. The clones are good for word processing and cost much less.

So stop floundering around in the computer lab and look into learning on your own computer.

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