



PANDEMONIUM

By Dennis Thorp

Unfortunately, the above title refers not only to this article, but to the kind of year most of us have been having, at least to this point in time. Speaking for myself, when things settle down from utter chaos to mere pandemonium, I will be extremely grateful. Having started a new job in March, I find myself not only trying to make the normal kinds of adjustments, but also trying to do ten years of equipment maintenance in a few short months. Two mechanics have been working full time since mid-April, but every time I think I see the light at the end of the tunnel, it turns out to be an oncoming train. We had a nasty bout with leafspot in mid-May and I played telephone tag with a couple of you, trying to find a shoulder to cry on. But school is finally out and I now have a full crew, so things should start to settle down, now.

In my last column, I wrote about "TURFBYTE" and the "TURFGRASS INFORMATION FILE" and promised you more information on those services. Unfortunately my computer has been gathering a lot of dust the past two months, as I tended to more pressing requirements, and I have not had the opportunity to tie-in. But I did take a few minutes one day last week to call Duane Patton, "voice-to-voice" and talked to him about his service. I also received a 13 page newsletter from the TURFBYTE people that completely explains how to use the service. A copy has been forwarded to your faithful editor. The main use for TURFBYTE right now, according to Duane, is to encourage dialog between Superintendents. It is a good way to "talk" to Bill Roberts in Michigan, Oscar Miles at Butler National in Illinois or Jim Moore of the USGA Green Section in Waco, Texas. Sorry about the name dropping, guys, but I couldn't help myself. According to Duane, the spreadsheet templates and other files that you will be able to download are not available yet, but will be soon. Maybe I'll send him a few blank disks. The big news from Lawrence, KS is that TURFBYTE

is now available around the clock. Call 913-842-0618 from 7:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. and 913-842-0592 after 4:00. They are trying to get GCSAA to officially back the program and maybe get it on "Compuserve". Then most of you would have a local access number of an "800" number that you could use to call TURFBYTE. For now, we will have to pay the AT&T long distance charges from our location to Duane's computer. An example given is the \$8.50 per hour off-peak rate from Louisville to Lawrence. Their main problem at the present time is in trying to get more people to try the system. For the majority of you that do not have computers or modems, this does pose a slight problem. However, make a few phone calls to your local computer store, explain that you are thinking about buying a system and ask for a demonstration. Offer to pay for the telephone call. You might get hooked on telecommunications. Be creative, guys and gals. Have a little fun with this.

I'm going to plagiarize a few paragraphs on file transfer from Dale Gadd right now as it is as clear an explanation that I ever read. "File Transfers Made Easy" or "I understand PPM per Acre Foot. Surely, I can Learn Protocols!" I didn't even know that Acre Feet could have PPM and surely there is a chemical to prevent it.

One of the bonuses of telecommunicating is the ability to transfer entire programs or files from one computer to the other. Thus, a bulletin board system (BBS) such as Turfbyte can become the central point for superintendents to share information and programs.

Copyright laws prevent the sharing of commercial software. But, there are many excellent public domain or "shareware" programs that many of you may find valuable to the operation of your computer and the way in which your computer is used in your profession.

For example, Lotus 1-2-3 is a commercial program and cannot be distrib-

uted by a BBS. However, templates, essentially a spreadsheet setup, can be distributed. This means that if you have developed a 1-2-3 spreadsheet for a particular purpose like tracking chemical usage and inventory, with computation formulas and cell labels all set up, you can legally share that template with other owners of the Lotus 1-2-3 program.

You could post that spreadsheet template on Turfbyte and another superintendent who has not yet developed a spreadsheet for chemical usage and inventory could "download" your template and use his 1-2-3 program to operate it — and, voila, he has an instant chemical inventory system. All he has to do is plug in his information and does not have to develop the spreadsheet from the beginning.

In this way all of us can share our best work to help others in their jobs. And, instead of all of us reinventing the wheel, we can take advantage of each other's ideas, add our own and the combination will be more powerful than each by itself. Synergy works with ideas as well as chemicals.

Thanks, Dale. I'm sure he is using 1-2-3 as an example and not an endorsement. One of my next purchases may be one of the new spreadsheet challengers, either from Borland or Microsoft. They have improved functions, faster operations, more features and greater ease of use. Plus, they are much cheaper.

Lotus 1-2-3 is the target for programmers and even whole companies because it was the first electronic spreadsheet designed to take maximum advantage of DOS and the IBM 8088 hardware standard. VISICALC was the first popular electronic spreadsheet. It appeared ten years ago and set the microcomputer world on fire. Yet today, relatively few people even recognize the name. Lotus 1-2-3 has become what Kleenex is to tissues, Xerox is to copy machines and crayons are to waxy color markers — in most users' minds it is synonymous with personal

computer spreadsheet. For them, no other brand exists.

Lotus 1-2-3 does more than automate complex spreadsheet calculations. It also converts numerical data into charts and graphs and contains database functions. These and other capabilities — notably the inclusion of “macros,” a kind of programming language that allows 1-2-3 users to customize the program for all kinds of specialized applications — were so helpful that they compelled many people and companies to go out and buy a personal computer, just so they could run this program.

But Lotus has faced challenges from the very beginning, mainly from so-called “clones,” inexpensive programs that mirror 1-2-3 capabilities. Clones have the virtue of being cheap — costing from \$50 to \$150 in contrast to the \$500 price tag for each copy of Lotus 1-2-3. And they’re usually not copy-protected. (Many otherwise enthusiastic users consider Lotus’ insistence on copy protection annoying and decidedly unfriendly.) Copy protection systems can cause unexpected problems with a hard disk. The market for clones is limited because business users are often wary of off-brands.

Recently several companies introduced not clones but Lotus 1-2-3 alternatives, programs that “push the inside of the envelope,” to borrow Tom Wolfe’s famous phrase. These products are attracting serious attention from product reviewers and end users. In addition, most have the capability of “reading” Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheets, so it is not necessary to reenter all the data one may have accumulated over time.

I read an article that TGIF was ready to go on-line and interested people should call to get the specifics. When I did, a sweet voiced lady named Tricia informed me that August 1 was now their target date and the fee schedule would go into effect then. I had her run a search on a topic that interested me anyway, while it is still free. And, since my next deadline is August 1, I should have the tie-in details for those who are interested by then. Besides, I want to talk to Tricia again.

Now I’m going to ask for some help from the readers of *The Grass Roots*. In order to take the subjects of my articles in the direction most needed by the readers, I need some feedback. Since it is physically impossible for me to work one-on-one with all of you, I’ll

try to answer the most asked questions here, although I’m sure I will be working individually with as many as I can this fall and winter. Write to me at Rt. 2, Box 559E, West Salem, WI 54699.

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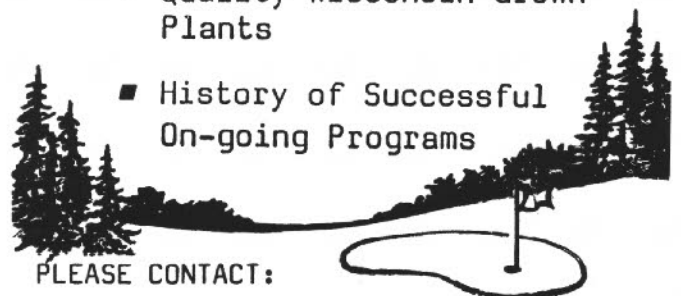
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