

EDITORIAL COMMENTS

Watching the events in the Middle East is really fascinating for me. Russian ships sailing along with US warships, and Iraq making friends with Iran (after an eight year war), demonstrate how rapidly alignments can shift in the world today. This re-aligning happens in almost every area today, including business relationships, and that may be what is happening in the dealings between Computer Support and Altos.

Computer Support has been heavily involved with Altos since its inception, but not always as a part of the Altos team. There have been times when people from both companies have been downright antagonistic toward the other. As we move into the computer World of the Nineties, there are changes going on that may cause a re-thinking of positions on both sides. I am hopeful that these shifts will be very positive in the months ahead.

We have long expressed the desire to develop a relationship with Altos that was substantially more open and productive than the past relationship has been. While we have been a competitive factor in some areas, we went to great lengths to compete fairly, and in almost everything we attempted we made it easier, or more profitable, for a dealer to sell Altos hardware. I would also state that we have made a concerted effort to comply with any agreement between the two companies right down to the last detail.

With the recent changes at Altos, there is an awakening to the needs of resellers, and a willingness to consider all of the potential resources the company may have to provide for those needs. We are currently discussing a closer working relationship that would enable Computer Support to become an integral part of Altos' support efforts. While it is in the preliminary stages as I write this, I am my usual optimistic self in my belief that it will come to pass.

If you accept that support is going to be the great divider between those companies that survive, and those that do not, I think this new working arrangement will be a real strength in Altos' portfolio of support programs. CSSC has developed an exceptional support capability when you consider that there has been no incentive other than it was a marketing tool to move our add-on products. The exchange parts program has grown substantially, and with assistance from the Altos factory, we can do a much better job.

We will keep you posted, but remember that you read it here first. There is change in the works, and you haven't seen anything yet! There will be distribution changes, product changes, and support changes, and every change is going to present you with the opportunity to provide a more complete and professional service to your clients. This may, in fact, turn out to be the most exciting year in the UNIX market's lifetime. ■

TECHNOTES: The Dynamic Duo - Altos and Informix

by Brian Keairns

Altos had provided Informix from its startup. In fact, Altos had a substantial investment in Informix during the early 80's. The first Altos I ever worked with was running an Informix database, and the Altos I use now is a "full boat" 2000 that uses Informix supporting 40 users.

The Informix system we have at Computer Support has been growing and changing for the last five years. I wouldn't have guessed that such a powerful system could be easy to comprehend.

I am not a C programmer, but without formal training in programming, I have picked up quite a bit of knowledge about Informix SQL. SQL programming is, in some ways, one of the best ways to start out in programming. I'd made attempts in the past to learn a programming language and found I didn't have the patience. Writing a program took too long. But with SQL this isn't the case. I can set up an inventory of products using the default forms in an hour or two. Of course, you don't have a powerful application using just defaults, but it's a start. You can use the menu system to modify the forms and reports that are generated.

The first step is to use an editor, such as **vi**, to customize your screen. At this point, you must have some intuition as to the flow of the work and how the information is going to be related. A little trial and error can't hurt, and Informix does a good job of reporting errors.

Knowledge of a few programming basics is helpful; an understanding of **vi**, data types and definition of screens and tables. Information flow experience is also helpful.

In most environments in which Informix is used, having an entry-level programmer creating, modifying and personalizing user reports and forms can help create a very responsive and powerful computing environment. Making changes to a database should require some type of approval process, and backups should be performed before extensive changes are attempted!

In some cases, it would pay for a computer literate employee to learn to do forms and reports. Taking the time to learn about Informix lets you fix things you don't like and create or change others as your business changes. The example I like is the record store owner who was pleased with the application we set up for him. But he didn't want to complain that the report he sent to his suppliers used "compact disk" instead of "disc". His suppliers ridiculed him regularly because he didn't sell "floppies", too. The owner finally took time to learn the process of editing and compiling and no longer had to live with that small annoyance.

Informix is really no more complicated than a spreadsheet. When I pointed this out to the record dealer, he pointed out that he was in the record business, not the computer business. But by learning to use Informix, he has been able to create forms and reports for the special order business that the store has built. He created a new table and a new form to enter and query information. Then he created a couple of reports to output information he considered important. While his programming isn't a work of art, it has supported his business through a doubling of gross profits!

Altos and Informix have been producing cost effective database solutions for years. My only source of wondering is why anyone has bought anything else for small business solutions? I think that even though UNIX and Informix may be initially more complex than single-user, flat-file databases, they are exponentially more powerful and useful. Powerful and cost effective solutions can be provided for customers that can't be matched on any other platform. ■

*Editorial Note: This article was first printed in **Altos World**. We have taken the liberty of condensing it. Thanks, Brian. How's Seattle?*

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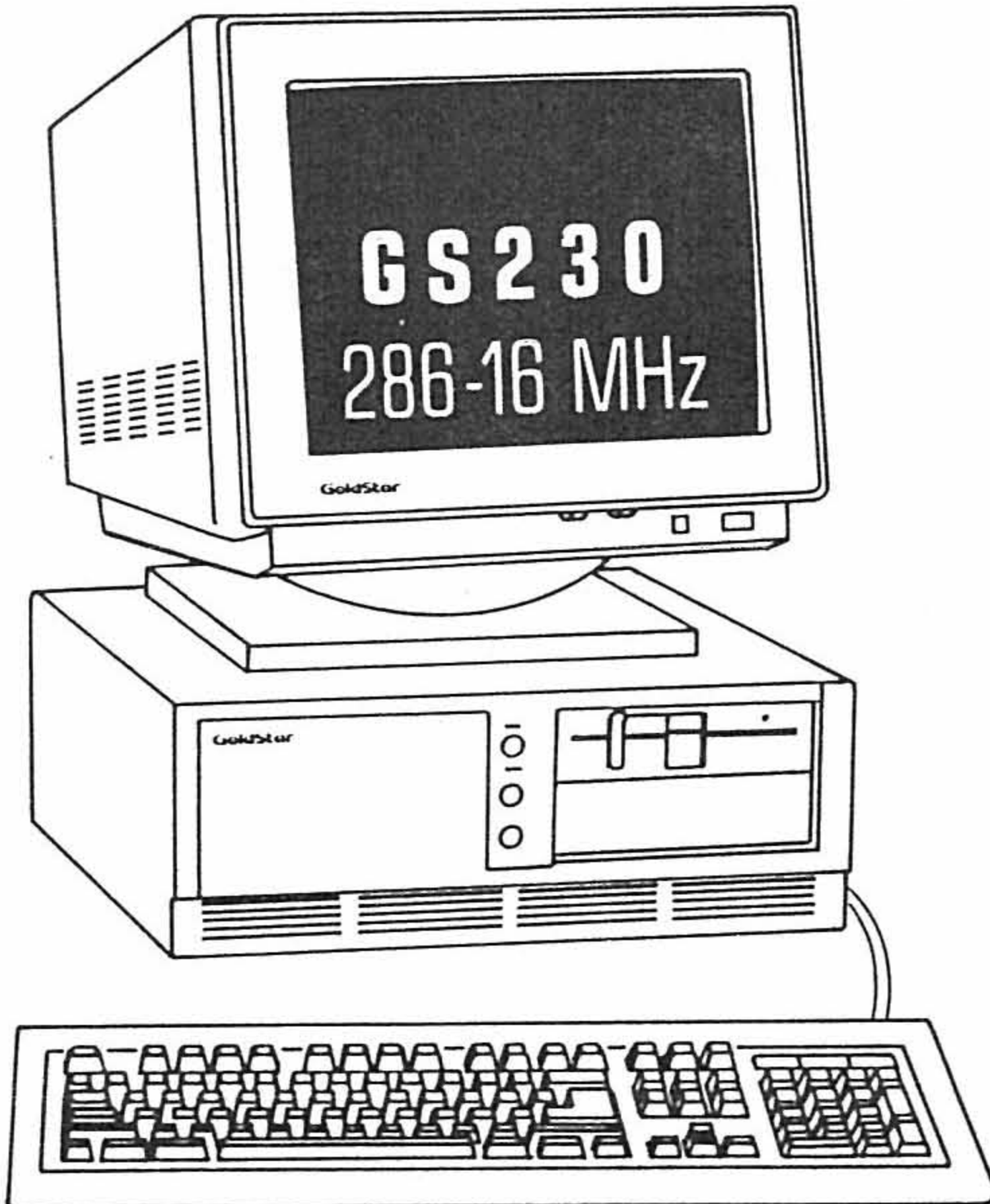
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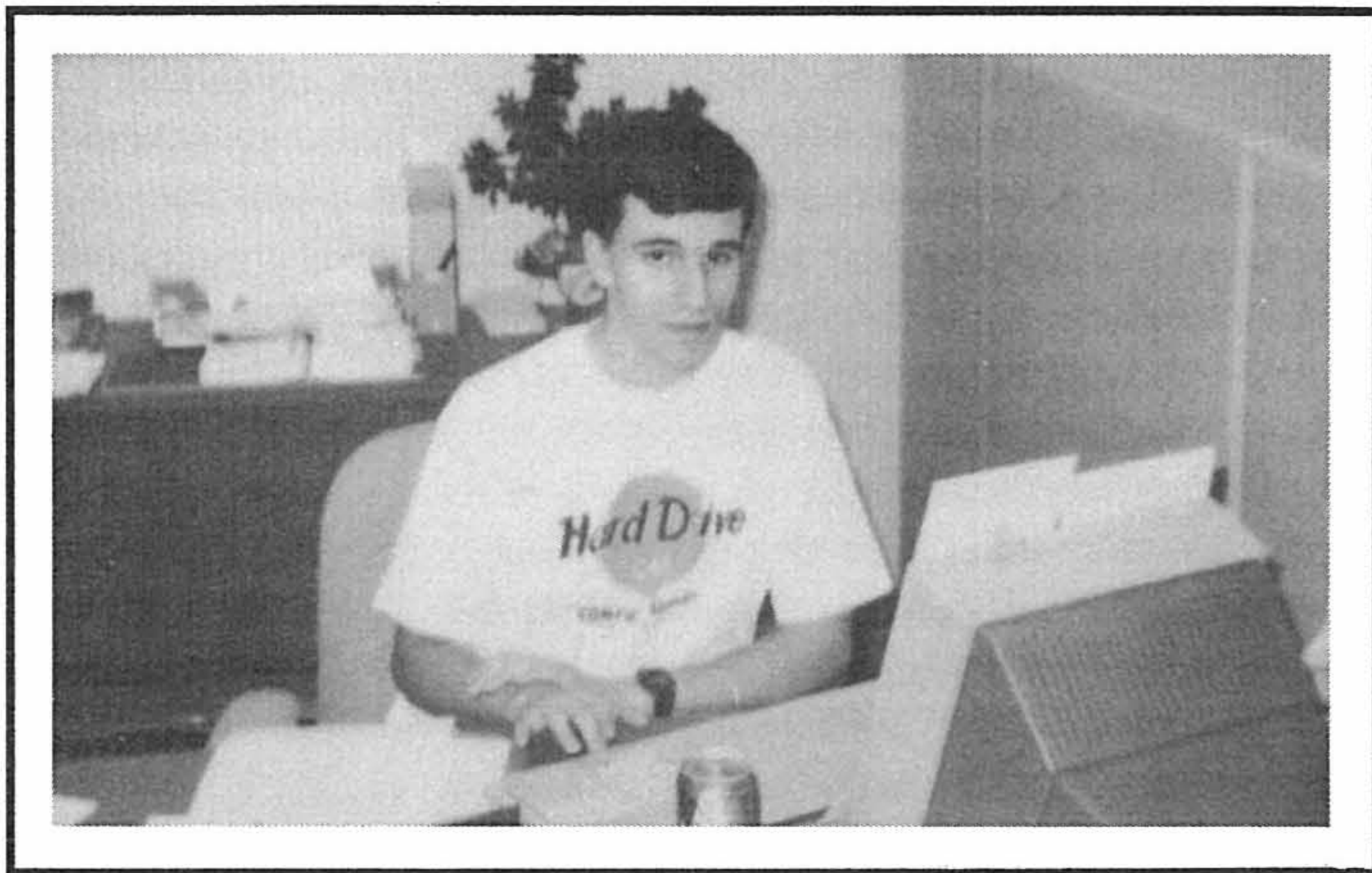


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James Hodgins, CSSC summer intern, wearing his "Hard Drive Cafe" t-shirt.



CSSC SPOTLIGHT

James Hodgins, CSSC summer intern, will begin his Senior year at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio this September. He is majoring in Math and Computer Science with a minor in Engineering. The results of his major summer work will be available very soon; a complete, revised price list for EVERYTHING!

An education is very important in today's world, and that is why I am paying \$40,000 to receive a piece of paper that says I have one. In case you are wondering; I am a college student. Because education alone is not enough, I sought to gain necessary experience as an intern at Computer Support.

I was very pleased to receive a position where I could gain the practical experience that cannot be obtained in an academic environment. School has taught me a great deal; but one summer internship has taught me how little I know. Having someone ask you a question and not having a clue as to what they are talking about is somewhat of a humbling experience. But soon the terminology I had barely heard became familiar and routine. SCSI, ESDI, IDE and ST506 were new terms to me, and now I know the difference between them and the implication the interface type has in a computer system.

Not merely my vocabulary is enhanced, but the level at which I can work on the systems has changed. Schools rarely let students do system administration activities. Here, as an intern, I have been exposed to administration tasks in UNIX. I have learned things about transferring files between systems that I didn't think were possible. For example, I transferred complexly formatted documents in Microsoft Word and graphic from a PC to a UNIX system and back, using **doscopy**.

I feel that my experience with systems and software was good before, and has been broadened, but my experience with hardware was merely theory. The practical, hands-on hardware experience was weak if even present. Not only are schools a bit shy about letting the student handle system administration, but they get unusually upset if you take apart their equipment. I have now put together computers, taken apart old equipment for testing, and had other various hands-on experience. Working with the insides of computers was new to me, and I found it fascinating. I can now identify most computer boards by sight! Seeing the inner workings of the computer has shed new light on what I already knew! I have seen how hard disks access information and how the heads park, along with what chips and jumpers effect the setup and other processes. Computers without cases now seem perfectly normal.

In addition to my hardware experience growing by leaps and bounds, I have gained experience from just working in the business environment. A great deal of this experience is hard to give examples of, but it is definitely important in my overall experience.

I have told you a great deal about my experience in regards to learning, but that is only part of my experience. Computer Support has a unique and positive approach to running a business that makes for a friendly and comfortable atmosphere. Of course, that is, as they say, "another story", so I'll see you next issue!

To be continued ...

(Don't you just hate articles that end like that?)

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