![MARCH – Mid-Atlantic Retro Computing Hobbyists]

MARCH Newsletter: January 2025

Hello all! Apologies for the delay in getting this edition of the MARCH newsletter out, but we've been all-hands-on-desk lately with some very exciting projects at Infoage! What projects, you might ask?

Museum 3.5

Written by Thomas Gilinsky

A hastily made map of the Infoage Campus to try and help make the building numbers make sense

For those not in the know, the MARCH (formerly VCF (formerly MARCH)) Museum at Infoage has had three major incarnations - Museum 1.0 was in the series of rooms in the Marconi Hotel lobby (now occupied by the 9/11 memorial museum), 2.0 was in 9032 (the L-shaped building capped off by the big exhibit hall at one end and the Radio Technology Museum at the other), and 3.0 has been in 9010A (formerly Camp Evans' Accounts Receivable office) since 2015. While we have finally secured 6500 square feet of space in 9010B, the space is in need of extensive renovation work - interior, heating, electrical, etc. - before we can even think about moving to Museum 4.0! In light of this halting problem, we've decided to spruce up the current museum with some pretty extensive changes, both to freshen things up a bit, and to try out some new ideas to see how well they'd work in the upcoming museum 4.0. Thus, Museum 3.5 was born!

But first - what needed changing, exactly?

The previous layout of Museum 3.0 consisted of a closed loop - visitors would enter a doorway, walk down one aisle containing most of our larger systems (presented in chronological order from the 1930s to the 1970s), turn around to be faced by the '80s bedroom exhibit, and then find themselves turning again down another aisle containing exclusively microcomputers (ranging from the '70s to the late '90s), before finishing off in front of the Cray before walking through the 1930's again in order to exit through the same doors.

To call this layout compromised would be an understatement.

Aside from the obvious crowd-handling challenge of having everyone enter and exit through the same doorway, the previous arrangement also resulted in a lot of cramped, uncomfortable positions for certain machines - for instance, a crowd of people trying to watch a demo of the UNIVAC 1219 - arguably the crown jewel of our museum - would wind up packed like sardines in the shallow space in front of it, while the operators had to squeeze and shimmy their way between the onlookers and the machine in order to run it.

The arrangement of the microcomputers was also less than ideal - in an effort to cram as many machines as possible into our limited museum space, each micro exhibit would contain two machines - one on a flat table-top, and the other on a slanted "top rack" above it. While this was done in an earnest attempt to maximize the amount of machines a visitor could have access to in our limited space, we found that it had the opposite effect - the double-stacked exhibits were overwhelming, cramped, and awkward to use, which resulted in fewer people spending significant time using the machines than we'd have hoped. Perhaps less would be more.

To fix all of these problems several large, sweeping changes were made. We were already experimenting with removing the "top racks" - the line up of our "history of the GUI" machines,

from the Xerox Star to the SGI Indigo2, was the first to receive this treatment, and the result was undeniably better. We were toying with ideas to fix some of our other problems, when the curator of the neighboring Military Technology Museum suggested that we rework our museum into a Serpentine layout - both to permit us to use only one door for ingress and another for egress, but also to prevent visitors from feeling overwhelmed or distracted by the sheer number of things visible at any one time by breaking up their line of sight with a pseudo-maze of walls.

I got to work drafting up a new layout, and after much back and forth with Doug and the other Docents, the plan was finally approved and went into motion!

First, all the exhibits along the west wall were pulled away to permit repainting - and some much-needed dusting!

Work began on Friday, January 24th, and on the first day Doug Crawford and I set to work pulling exhibits away from the walls so we could finally finish painting the walls in the museum - a project we had begun just before VCF East of last year, but which we had never gotten around to finishing. No time like the present!

Doug admiring our handiwork.

In no time at all, we had the wall painted in lovely Loch Blue (Sherwin Williams paint color #6502, of course!), and the time had come to begin moving the exhibits into their new spaces. Some machines required a little.. *extra persuasion* (in particular, a certain Cray EL98 belonging to Dave McGuire), and to that end we enlisted the help of August Culbert to get the thing rolling - August graciously got down on his hands and knees and lubricated the Cray's tired casters, and soon enough it was rolled into position.

Supercomputer, meet Workstation! And a Supercomputing workstation, for good measure.

Friday wrapped up with the walls painted and several machines moved roughly into place - Saturday saw us really ramping things up.

Minicomputers Galore! From right to left - DEC PDP-8, Wang 4000, HP 1000

Wes looking accomplished in front of the PC's new home - to the right, a MicroVAX II & C64

Welcome to organized Chaos!

You know you want to…

Saturday gave way to Sunday, and the most intensive schlep until then - the moving of the UNIVAC. The hulking behemoth was, thankfully, set down on pallets, but special care and attention still had to be paid to make sure the machine was set up correctly once we had it moved to its new spot on the floor - and that we didn't crush anything (or much less anyone) in the process.

Above, Bill Dromgoole performs cable de-management
Below, Nick Fiore posing with the pallet jack before we realized that the I/O console and the Dongle had to be strapped together to stop them from tipping over when lifted

Wes and Andrew Mattera on Ratchet Strap duty

The museum rearrangement is currently ongoing, with the 'Grand Reopening' scheduled for February 12th as of this writing, though few things are set in stone! Regardless, we are eager to see and hear what you all think the next time you pay us a visit, and we hope that those attending East will like what we've done with the place!

If you are interested in helping with the MARCH Museum, either via docenting or some other volunteer work, contact douglas.crawford@vcfed.org or thomas.gilinsky@vcfed.org.

January Workshop

Written by Jeff Salzman

The first Workshop of 2025 was held on January 11-12. It was held in two locations, the CDL building, along with the 9032A building. Previous attendees of the VCF East event will recognize the latter space as the lower exhibit hall, with the cement floor and glass windows all around.


As Club Manager for MARCH, it was my duty to make sure the Workshop was going well for attendees. I was able to talk with a few of the attendees from both halves of the Workshop. Most of the 9032A people preferred where they were. The CDL attendees enjoyed having the extra working space that has, in the recent past, been getting more and more thronged as our Workshop attendance has been increasing. Some of the 9032A attendees came to visit CDL for a short time, mostly to see where everybody else was.

I stayed in the CDL building almost the entire weekend, except after a soft close of CDL by 8PM on Saturday, when I went over to 9032A for a few hours. The CDL attendees left of their own accord by that time and there was no reason to keep CDL open for the evening.

During the two days of the Workshop, I spent time helping Emilio work on his IBM 5120, especially its disk drive that wouldn't operate. There turned out to be a LOT of gunk and goo in the head load solenoid. The IBM 5120 as a whole needed a good cleaning, but for the most part, Emilio did a fine job at disassembling and cleaning the entire system. You can see in the following pictures all the dust that accumulated over the years (decades?) in the 5120 before

Emilio acquired it. You can also see the black goo that was in the head load solenoid. This stuff might have worked OK back when a previous owner lubricated it, but now it was like tar. Many q-tips were sacrificed to clean that goo from every component in the solenoid, including the plunger. Solenoids like this are meant to be run dry. They should never be lubricated.
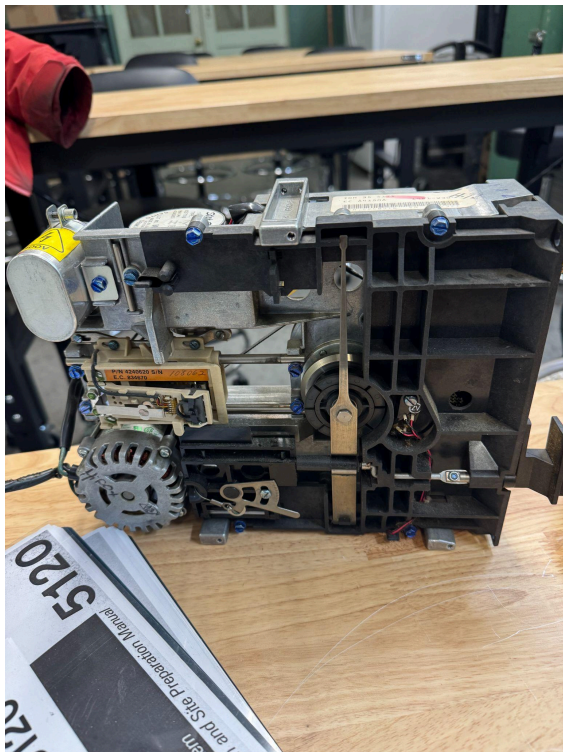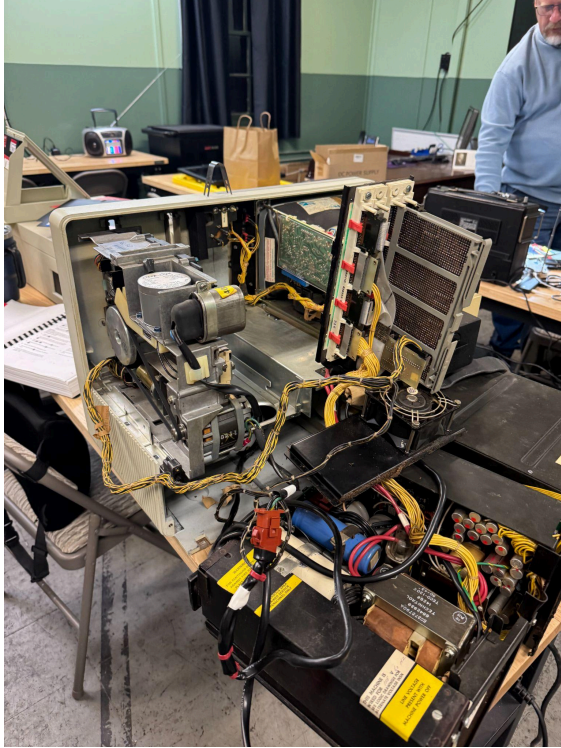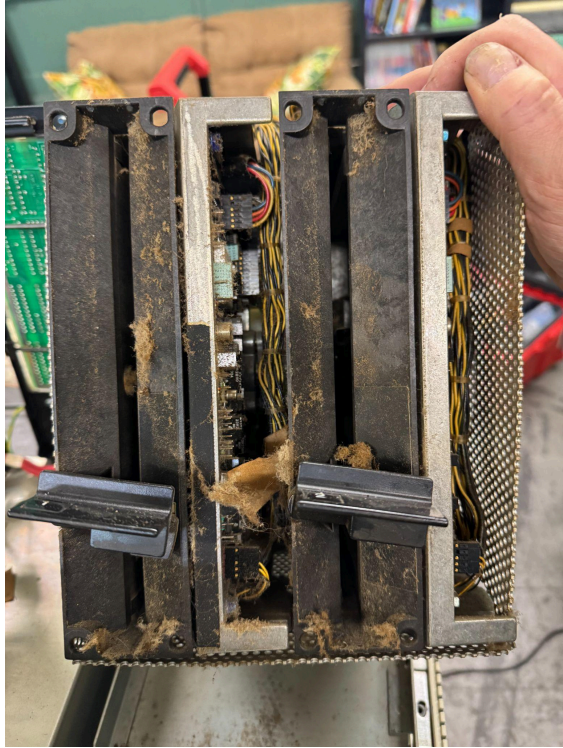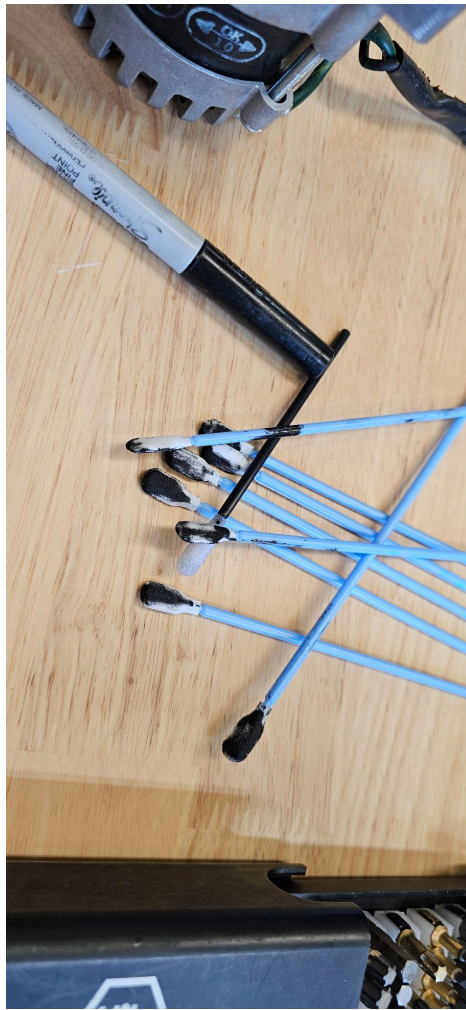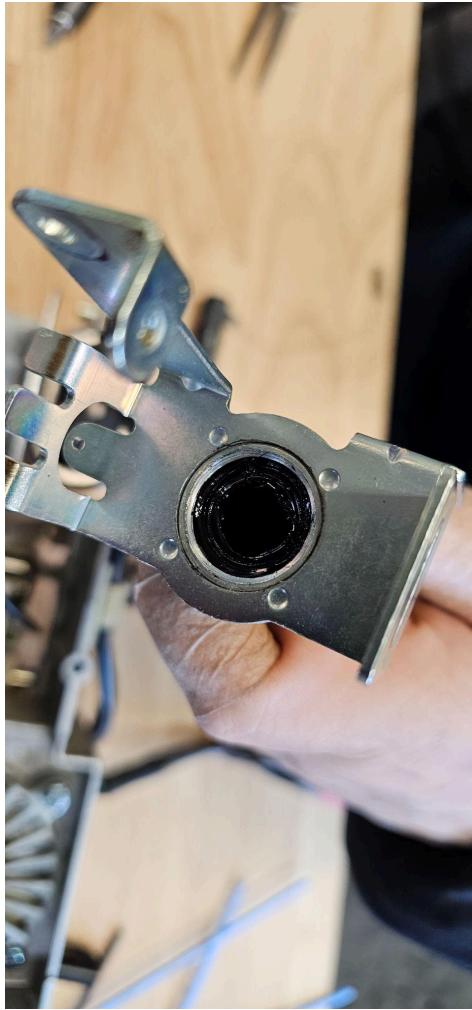
Over in 9032A, there were a LOT of repair projects going on involving SGI Onyx systems, one of which was recently acquired by MARCH, test equipment repairs and alignments, an array of vintage computers, and of course, one of our regular CRT experts doing some TV repairs.

Speaking of the latter, I brought a USB-powered transmitter device I recently acquired that takes NTSC/PAL AV input, or HDMI input, and broadcasts the video and sound on low-power RF which can be received on older analog TV sets. This gadget was a hit! Even our resident CRT/TV expert couldn't believe how clean a signal it was producing, compared to an off-the-shelf, direct antenna plug-in, RF converter he was using. We hooked up his Nintendo 64, and it was broadcasting a super-clean signal to a TV he was working on, and that TV didn't even have an antenna on it. To test the range of this new transmitter, we set a TV about 40 feet away with a longwire antenna on it. We got a fairly decent image and sound once we oriented the antenna just right. It doesn't transmit far, but it is small, convenient, and portable enough to keep in a repair kit for just such a need. I did a video on it on my YouTube channel:

https://youtu.be/1HmS8kCGtC8

Hope to see you all at the February Workshop!

Respectfully,
Jeff Salzman

Sorry to leave off so early, but…

While I would have liked to include even more details of what's been going on at MARCH lately - particularly regarding the progress of the warehouse, broadway, any of the other manager reports, etc. - I'm already running late on getting this month's Newsletter out the door! I would really like for this to be the last edition thrown together with a simple word processor (January's was done in ClarisWorks, this month it was done in the most painful word processor known to man - *Google Docs*), as a newsletter befitting of this organization should really be made with something more… *Refined.* Perhaps FrameMaker, or QuarkXpress, or Publisher '97, or IRIS Showcase, or…

Well, even if it has to be a .txt file, at least it's a newsletter!

Yours truly,
-Thomas Gilinsky
Chairman of the MARCH Committee & Collections Manager