20 Years of the Amiga

It's hard to believe, but July 2005 marks the twentieth anniversary of the introduction of the Amiga to the world. Twenty years is a very long time for a computer to be around, and it would be incredible for any consumer electronics to hang around that long. I have written articles for the fifth, tenth and fifteenth anniversary for the Amiga, and each time I wondered if it would be around for another anniversary. Once it passed the tenth, it seemed to be a yearly wonder of whether it would survive or fade away. The last five years certainly have been even more of that. While we have had some news to make us scratch our heads and wonder, we have had too much silence that makes us wonder what is going on. In this case no news may be good news, as we certainly do not need any more bad news.

The worst news of the last five years is that the Amiga has once again changed hands. This probably has created more silence on what is going on than any other event that I can remember. The new owner seems to have clamped down on any news about what is going on. A few little announcements here and there, but nothing to get excited about. The only other news that can come close to being as bad, is that AmigaOS 4.0 still is not out, and we have been told enough times of its impending release to make any announcement about it coming out almost worthless as a news item. As I was in the process of preparing this article the announcement of a new pre-release came out. It is to be the final pre-release before the real thing comes out.

The good news of the past five years, is that the AmigaONE has arrived. Not just one version, but three different versions. With the release of the AmigaONE, there has been a steady flow of beta versions of the new AmigaOS to keep things somewhat interesting for those that own one. There is also the promise of lots of software for the AmigaONE, but they are forced to wait for the the release of AmigaOS 4.0. From what I have seen of the AmigaONE and the beta OS, it appears to be a match made in heaven. The PowerPC is a very efficient processor, and the AmigaOS really takes advantage of it. For those of us waiting for the OS to be released before making a move to the new hardware it really is tough to keep waiting. In the past five years PC hardware has made some rather impressive advances, and thanks to some rather clever emulation software, fans of the Amiga can take advantage of the PC hardware advances. Using even less than state of the art PC hardware can yield some rather amazing Amiga performance numbers. I watched a test using a processor that was top of the line two years ago give Amiga performance equal to fifty Amiga 4000's running 25 Mhz 68040. The fastest 68060 will equal about eight Amiga 4000's.

Speaking of these emulators, take a look at Amiga Forever 6.0. While its emulation is great, take a look at the video of the Amiga coming out event that Commodore held in 1985. Still looks incredible, even today! CPU development has reached a level of development that has brought it face to face with an old enemy — heat. Packing more and more transistors into smaller and smaller areas has caused the heat problem to be a barrier to overcome for current processor designs. To overcome the problem and

to keep things moving, 64 bit processors, multiple processors and multi-core processors are the rage. It would be nice to see the Amiga get to use some of these developments as they come out, but as it stands it will be tough just to get to see the Amiga use the G5 PowerPC. Something needs to happen, and soon, for the Amiga or it will never catch up, if it can at all.

Even with all of these disadvantages, the Amiga still can keep me happy. I can cruise the Internet with its less-than-perfect browser without worrying about virus infections or spyware attacks and get to do everything I want to do every day. There are few things that do not work that I wish did, but for the most part, I keep surfing along. I consider this an advantage that is tough to give up. I really like the software I use on a regular basis on the Amiga, especially PageStream. I had to use what is considered the top-of-the-line PC desktop publishing software for a few months, and found it to be as archaic to use as imaginable. Things that I thought were simple to do in PageStream, such as text resizing, were a real pain in this piece of software. On the other hand, I am jealous that a PC owner can buy whatever piece of hardware there is out there, such as printer and be able to use it right away. How long has it been since there was an update of printer drivers for the Amiga? You would need to buy a used or an out of date printer to match up to the latest drivers available for the Amiga. Will any of this change? Maybe! Will the Amiga be around for its twenty-fifth anniversary? Maybe! Will I be here to write a twenty-fifth anniversary article? I sure hope so.

As I was wrapping up this article, a new bit of news hit the computer world that I thought should be part of this article. Apple announced they were

moving from the PowerPC to the Intel processor. Immediately the Amiga community wondered how this might change things for the Amiga. It is unknown, and predicting such things is futile. Hopefully it will eliminate the PowerPC shortage that always seemed to occur with the top of the line PowerPC chips. I always heard that they were hard to get because Apple was buying them all up. Some are thinking it will kill the PowerPC. Do not worry about that! The PowerPC is a big seller in the embedded market and in servers. It won't hurt IBM, as they will be busy making PowerPC chips for the huge imbedded market and they will be making processors for the X-Box 360 and Playstation 3. Just imagine being in that situation! IBM already makes a version of the PowerPC for the current Nintendo console. You may remember the last time that Apple switched processors, the effect on the Amiga market was not terrible, but there was an effect. The 68060 announced in 1991 took a lot longer to show up than it should have, and even a little longer after that to be readily available. Apple never used the 68060, as Commodore never used it. The Amiga did get to use the processor in the form of aftermarket accelerators. The price was never very reasonable due to the small market for them. Where would the 68000 series processor be if Apple had stayed with it? This is the sort of thing that the Amiga market could face again. Long development times for new PowerPC chips. With the switch to Intel processors, there will be a lot of cheap used PowerPC Macs out there. If we could just get AmigaOS 4.0 to run on those! Although I have never been a big fan of the Macintosh, Apple's innovations with the PowerPC have at least kept my interest enough to pay attention to their line and even get excited by some of their models. Will that happen with their switch to Intel processors? We will see.

AmigaMCCC News

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July Calendar

July 25 — Amiga By-The-Loop Chapter
        7:00 pm — Grand Prairie Public Library
        901 Conover Drive, Grand Prairie

July 25 — MCCC Board of Director's Meeting
        Approx. 9:30 pm — Location TBD

August 27 — Newsletter Deadline — 7:00 am

Note: There will be no August Newsletter. Watch the club website for information on the August meeting date.

Another bit of news that may be of interest to Amiga history buffs, if only for the small part in played in the history of the Amiga. The Transmeta Corporation has announced the end of the Crusoe chip. This chip got linked to the Amiga when it appeared that the future of the Amiga would be tied to this chip. It appears that this was all propaganda just to give the Amiga community something to talk about. Perhaps they were just gauging our reaction, or trying to influence investors. We may never know.

I've always celebrated July 23 as the Amiga's birthday, so when that day rolls around, take a moment and think about how amazing it is that something like this could hang around for 20 years, and it is still going.

… Johnny C. Kitchens