



MCCC NEWS



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Amiga Anniversary and Tinkering with Pi

Some updates are available in the Amiga sphere. ISO image files of the Amiga OS 4.1 "final edition" are available for download (restricted to paying customers only, presumably so buyers don't have to rely on discs). The MorphOS team has just released version 3.8 of their operating system, adding support for the Sam-460 system boards by ACube. The supported number of Radeon video cards has increased as well, and the ability to drive 4K resolution displays has been added, along with a bunch of other under-the-hood tweaks and improvements.

Finally, the Kickstarter campaign has borne fruit, and there will be an Amiga 30th Anniversary event in the USA, held on July 25th and 26th at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View California. Several exhibitors are promised, along with a display of the history of the Amiga from original machines to recent derived hardware and operating systems, possibly even including some rare prototype items unseen by the public. If I could, I would be there in a heartbeat. I miss the days when I could travel relatively consequence-free. Hopefully lots of pictures will come out of the event. For anyone looking for info or tickets, go to <http://www.amiga30.com>.

It seems I'm always tinkering with one system or another any more, from MorphOS machines to various Linux-based boxes. Most recently I have been working with the tiny Raspberry Pi computer. I never really planned to get one in the first place, but when AmiTech member-at-large Jim Lawrence offered one for sale, it seemed a convenient opportunity to try out something new, and getting the working

part of a new system in hand for \$37 was tough to resist. For a while, I didn't even have a purpose in mind for the Pi (actually Pi 2 model B), but eventually settled on the idea of setting it up as a media player and (retro) game console for my room, hopefully for as little money as possible. The Raspberry Pi is shipped as a bare board, so a case of some kind was required. Many have built cases out of Lego bricks, so I tried to do as well, as my stash of Lego stuff would result in a free (or at least paid for long ago) case. Despite my efforts, I caved in and bought a plastic case, as the Lego case was rather bulky and awkward, especially when compared to a plastic case molded barely larger than the circuit board itself. I also got a wi-fi adapter which plugs into a USB port, along with necessary cables, power supplies, and micro SD cards. For software and operating system, I went with NOOBS, which streamlines the process of installing one or more operating systems to the Pi SD card. It covers a lot, but does not directly include "RetroPie," an OS and interface for several game console and computer emulators. With a little research, I was able to splice RetroPie into the NOOBS installation.

As of about a month ago, I was able to demonstrate the Pi at the last meeting, which did not go so well. First off, it's worth mentioning that while the Raspberry Pi is a tiny system, it still needs to be wired to power, monitor, and whatever control devices you wish to use, leading to a potential inconvenient tangle of cables and supporting hardware. In some ways it's worse than a "normal" computer system, as that has the mass to anchor all the wires and stuff. The media center software, called "OpenEL-EC," was frequently unstable and refused to boot more often than not. It turned out the power supply I got was a little weak for the Pi, leading to a little display indicator popping up on screen whenever the voltage dipped. It seems the problem may be the wireless dongle sucking too much power, but I got a beefier power supply, along with other hardware to go to my ultimate goal of a Raspberry media and gaming center. I have a little ways to go yet, but I am close

to my final Raspberry goal, though my goal of keeping it as cheap as possible may have fallen to the side. I'll bring it to the meeting, and I can promise better than the mix of "doesn't work" and "kinda works" that I had at the last meeting. The not-completely final tally goes as follows:

- Raspberry Pi 2 mainboard: \$37
- Various micro-SD cards \$30
- Power supply \$7
- HDMI cable \$6
- USB Wi-Fi adapter \$10
- Black plastic case \$8
- Better power supply \$18
- 1 TB external USB hard drive \$65
- 22 inch HDTV \$170
- USB power cable with switch \$6
- Wireless mini keyboard/trackpad \$15
- Total: \$342

I'm still working on getting an ideal game controller for this setup, but that won't add a lot to the total. I can only hope that all this effort won't result in something I will ultimately ignore like other projects I ended up sinking a lot of time and money into.

...Eric Schwartz
from the AmiTech Gazette, May 2015

Dumb "Smart" Gadgets

I believe I have identified the one thing in tech that is incontrovertibly in a bubble. To know whether a product or startup is in this category—which I'm confident will see a shakeout leaving few standing—just look for this phrase in their marketing materials: "The world's first smart..."

The world's first smart socks. The world's first smart toothbrush. The world's first smart plate, cup, fork, cutting board, stove knob, jump rope, shoes, shirt, aquarium, frying pan. The world's first smart detector of the gas that we pass.

All of the devices I just named are real, even the last one, which is currently a fully functional prototype whose inventor is seeking funding on Kickstarter. Called CH4 (the chemical formula for methane), it clips onto your back pocket and connects to an app that correlates how often you pass gas with what you eat. I thought it was a parody, but its creator, Rodrigo Narciso, a recent graduate of New York University's Interactive Telecommunications Program, insists he is completely in earnest.

Indeed, being earnest seems to be a requirement for committing your career to making an everyday object "smart." Take the team behind Vessyl, the world's first smart drinking cup, the promotional video for which is so over the top in its talk of changing the world that it was satirized by comedian Stephen Colbert.

Nic Barnes, head of marketing at Vessyl, said that the product's appearance on "The Colbert Report" led to a bump in sales and inspired many to defend the product.

Pour a beer into Vessyl, and an LED display on the side lights up. "Beer," it pulses, reassuringly, in case there were any doubt. Vessyl's selling point is that, by tracking everything you drink, it can tell you exactly how many liquid calories you consume in a day, as well as how much caffeine. It can also determine your level of hydration.

"I know of no sentient being above the age of 4 who has any problem knowing when they're thirsty—it's just not an issue that needs to be addressed," says Todd Lemon, a creative director at an advertising firm in Nashville who, along with his friend Tom Cullen, a comedy writer in Los Angeles, has created the Internet's definitive chronicle of the current "revolution" in smart gadgets.

The tagline for their site, "We put a chip in it," perfectly describes the impulse that has overtaken so many entrepreneurs and hard-

ware startups: "It was just a dumb thing. Then we put a chip in it. Now it's a smart thing."

Many of the objects on the site seemed so ridiculous that I had to find out what their creators were thinking. Rahul Baxi, creator of SmartyPans, which has received an undisclosed round of seed financing, says the idea for a smart frying pan came from his inability to cook. Being an engineer, Mr. Baxi decided that given the choice between taking cooking classes and launching a startup to create a pan that would tell him how to cook through an app, the latter was more expeditious.

Humberto Evans, founder of Pantelligent, also is making a smart pan. (A general rule of connected-object startups is that where there is one, there are many.) Mr. Evans's pan is further along—he is already at the manufacturing stage—and does one thing that is genuinely useful. It can tell you the precise temperature of the pan. But rather than providing a readout in, say, the handle of the pan, Pantelligent's pan can only tell you through your smartphone, to which it connects wirelessly.

"I think Pantelligent has the capability to be way more than a product," says Mr. Evans. "What we're really taking is the knowledge of how people know how to cook and delivering it through a pan. You have to put the chip in it for a reason."

Of all the startups I talked to, Mr. Evans made the best case for his smart gadget, which can do things like tell you how long to cook your salmon based on its thickness. But I also found the logic of nearly all of these startups—that their first connected object was just the start of something bigger, an entire "ecosystem" of connected objects—to be informed more by their ambition than the needs of the consumer.

Anthony Ortiz, the man behind the world's first smart plate, insists that plates are just

the beginning. What about fans of soup? I asked him. "If you're going to make soup, that's not what we do," says Mr. Ortiz. "That would be something that goes in a bowl... The bowl is something that could be on the strategic horizon for us."

No one I talked to seemed to fully appreciate the additional complexity they might be introducing into their users' lives. Do I really want to check a bar-graph infested dashboard of my weekly eating activity, which is a "feature" of the world's first smart fork? And what about the fact that every smart object I add to my life means one more device to keep charged?

One thing smart objects are definitely good for is surveillance of their users. Samy Liechti, founder of sock subscription service Blacksocks, and also the man behind the world's first smart socks, told me his line of Internet-connected socks had changed the way he segments and markets to his customers. "If we do market research, we have to ask people what they do," says Mr. Liechti. But now, "we know exactly what they do, and that's a huge difference."

I have little doubt that there is a market for these objects. Vessyl, for example, already has more than a million dollars' worth of pre-orders from 155 countries, says Mr. Barnes. But I have serious doubts about how loyal those customers and investors will be once these products are delivered. How many gadgets of any sort live up to promises made in their promotional videos?

That said, I don't think the eventual failure of the majority of these startups portends anything for the rest of the tech industry, other than the freeing up of talented engineers who have experience making things like trackers for when you break wind.

...Christopher Mims
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
<http://on.wsj.com/1ELEqmU>

June Calendar

June 1 - Amiga-By-The-Loop Chapter
7:00 PM - Main Grand Prairie Library
901 Conover Drive, Grand Prairie

June 1 - Board of Director's Meeting
Approximately 9:00 PM - Location TBD

June 29 - Newsletter Deadline - 8:00 AM

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