

Wednesday's

Editorials, Columns & Letters

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Paper 'n Ink... change...

By Lynn Brisendine

It was a news brief, really brief, about the gaming company Atari filing for bankruptcy protection. The company is facing debts which have become too much for their business model in today's reality.

For some readers of this item, that company may not be so easily recalled. Perhaps it would be simpler to say it is the manufacturer of Pong, which was the first game I saw played on a television screen.

It was mesmerizing. The idea that you could use a system to interact with your tv. And while it seemed so technical at the time, in today's wired and wireless world, the memory recalls such an uncomplicated game. The game consisted of a dot on a basically blank screen which was batted from one side to the other, being blocked and rebounded by a small vertical bar manipulated with a handheld control.

Some kids could play the game for hours. I never really dealt with it that much. My, then, future brothers-in-law enjoyed it. I have to admit that after a couple of minutes it got to be monotonous and, for me, lost its appeal.

Atari stepped out and advanced their inventory of electronic games. They had home versions and also had some high-tech machines that were found in video parlors all over the country. One of their main stays a decade after Pong was Asteroids. It was a more complex venue which had a lot of kids of that age becoming experts at blowing up those blips coming in from all angles at different speeds.

Competition came on with a vengeance and other games like Pacman and so many others began to overtake the original and suddenly lackluster bouncing dots striking movable paddle bars.

It was over 40 years ago when Pong was all the rage. So many changes. So many gadgets and entertainment options have come, captured the nation and faded away, seemingly, just as suddenly as they appeared.

Eight track tapes were amazing. The sound they produced using stereo speakers, usually one on each side of an appliance or hidden in the dashboard and doors of automobiles.

The first taped auto system I saw was in my senior year in High School. At a class reunion years later, I talked to the guy who was lucky enough to have such a luxury in 1965. I reminded him I sat in his car one evening and enjoyed his eight track, its sound was great, compared to the one or two speaker AM radios most of us had at the time.

He laughed and said it wasn't an eight track but it had four tracks.

Going forward to 1974, I bought a brand new Ford with a cassette tape player. I had them take it

out and replace it with the tried and true eight track player. They looked at me like I had lost my mind. I was thinking of the limited collection of eight tracks I owned.

It didn't take long until I realized I had made a big mistake. The smaller tapes were everywhere and eight tracks began to disappear from music stores.

Those smaller tapes, of course, soon gave way to the CD. These plastic discs could hold a lot of information and the sound they delivered, coupled with new speakers including a sub woofer, seemed like magic.

Computer chips have made all of the above obsolete and the devices they use are, in some instances, the size of a postage stamp.

In today's world you can receive music via an internet connection over several electronic devices. These over-the-internet sound delivery systems offer any and every kind of music nearly anyone would wish.

Change has been ongoing in so many areas of our lives. Internet services see users spending hours a day updating information and sharing it with a wireless world.

Televisions are also an evolving technology which offers so much more. These appliances also offer connectivity with a wireless internet signal and the options amaze. The history of television for the most part has mirrored a baby boomer's life.

Grade school for those of us born just after WWII saw a burgeoning of black and white sets. First they had a round tube only inches around. Then a new format was introduced with a diagonal screen 21" across.

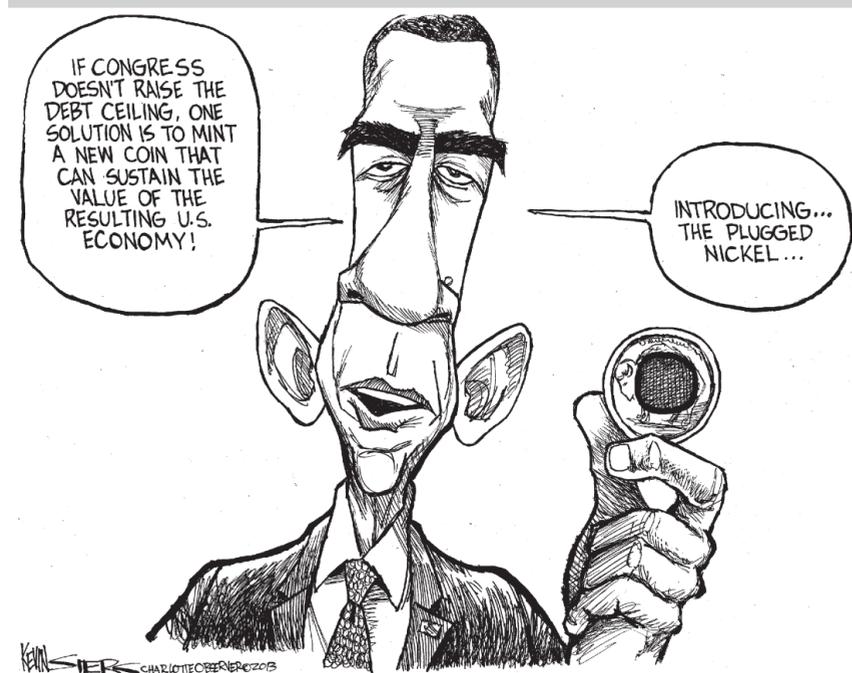
By Junior High, most families had color sets. I can close my eyes and see in my mind the first time I saw a color television set. I was visiting my aunt and uncle. We were watching Dinah Shore's variety show. Ms. Shore was riding a roller coaster and each car had a large bunch of different colored balloons. The coaster hit the top and sailed down the slope. While the image of the balloons also made the trip, the individual colors remained at the top, and then slowly dropped down to resolve with the image several seconds later.

Today we take for granted High Definition pictures that offer amazing clarity and every color imaginable perfectly coordinated.

And in a world where size matters, the screens have transitioned from that 21" to 80", 90" and in some venues over 100" inches diagonally.

Some of these changes happened over the last half century, but a lot of them have taken place in the last few years.

Change is inevitable and I am sure technologies are ahead which will make much of what we enjoy today as obsolete as we consider Pong.



State Capital Highlights

Compiled by Ed Sterling, Texas Press Association

Dewhurst names Senate panel chairs...

AUSTIN — Key to getting the 83rd session of the Texas Legislature in gear, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, president of the Texas Senate, on Jan. 17 made public his choices for committee chairs and members of each committee. Senate bills can now be assigned to committees and public hearings set.

Sen. Tommy Williams, R-The Woodlands, returns as chair of the body's powerful Finance Committee, whose primary task is to craft the state budget for 2014-2015.

Also named as committee chairs were senators: Kevin Eltife, R-Tyler, Administration; Craig Estes, R-Wichita Falls, Agriculture, Rural Affairs and Homeland Security; John Carona, R-Dallas, Business and Commerce; John Whitmire (dean of the Senate), Criminal Justice; Bob Deuell, R-Greenville, Economic Development; Dan Patrick, R-Houston, Education; Judith Zaffirini, D-Laredo, Government Organization; and Jane Nelson, R-Lewisville, Health and Human Services.

And, Kel Seliger, R-Amarillo, Higher Education; Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa, D-McAllen, Intergovernmental Relations; Royce West, D-Dallas, Jurisprudence; Troy Fraser, R-Marble Falls, Natural Resources; Glen Hegar, R-Katy, Nominations; Rodney Ellis, D-Houston, Open Government; Robert Duncan, R-Lubbock, State Affairs; Robert Nichols, R-Jacksonville, Transportation; and Letitia Van de Putte (Senate president pro tempore), D-San Antonio, Veterans Affairs and Military Installations.

Speaker Joe Straus has not yet named House committee chairs and members. In the 2011 session, Straus named them on Feb. 9. In 2009 — his

first term as speaker — Straus announced his committee appointments on Feb. 12.

As of the end of the second week of the session (Jan. 18), 748 bills and resolutions had been filed by House members, while Senate members had filed 201 over the same period. To give some idea of what lies ahead in that regard, in the last 140-day regular session, 7,003 House and 3,312 Senate bills and resolutions were filed.

The bill-filing deadline is March 8, the 60th day of the current session. The deadline applies to bills and joint resolutions (proposed constitutional amendments) other than local bills, emergency appropriations and bills that have been declared "emergency" by the governor.

Many gun bills are filed

More than a dozen state lawmakers have filed legislation pertaining to firearms, as reported by many journals.

The bills deal with who, what, when, where and how a handgun can be carried, licensing procedures, permit fees, renewals and more.

One of the bills, SB 182 by Sen. Brian Birdwell, R-Waco, sets forth conditions under which a concealed handgun license holder may "carry" on land and buildings owned or leased by an institution of higher education.

In other news, a rally at the state Capitol on Jan. 19 against President Obama's recent gun control proposals drew several hundred people.

Year ends with job gains

December was the fourth straight month that the unemployment rate in Texas has declined, the Texas Workforce Commission reported on Jan. 18.

Texas' unemployment rate fell to 6.1 percent in December, down from 6.2 percent in No-

vember and from 7.4 percent a year ago, the agency's Chairman Andres Alcantar said. Also, private sector employers in Texas added 257,400 jobs since December 2011 for an annual growth rate of 2.9 percent.

"In December, we saw annual growth in 10 major industries, for an overall annual growth of 2.5 percent in Texas," Alcantar said. "With those positive strides and 11,800 private sector jobs added in the past month, 2012 was a strong year for Texas and my hope is that the Texas economy will build on that success in 2013."

Tom Pauken, the agency's commissioner representing employers, said, "Texas is leading the way in helping to make the United States energy independent. Our robust energy sector not only is creating good paying jobs for many Texans in that industry but also is spurring job growth in many other industries."

Travis letter to head home

William Barret Travis's "Victory or Death" letter written on Feb. 24, 1836 will be returned to the Alamo on Feb. 22 for a grand celebration at Alamo Plaza.

This will be the first time the letter -- which resides at the the Texas State Library and Archives in Austin -- has been at the Alamo since it left with a courier on horseback under the cover of darkness during the famous 13-day siege in 1836, Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson said Jan. 16. Visitors will be asked to be silent and respectful when viewing the document "from a safe distance" and no flash photography will be allowed.

Alamo visitors will be able to view the letter Feb. 23 through March 7.



Thinking in Type...

By Brian Brisendine

If you haven't had your television on since mid-December or peaked at a billboard, you might not be aware that it's tax season once again.

It seems that four out of every five commercials these days is for this tax service or that. And that fifth commercial is for a guy with a really good suit and really bad hair telling you how he can get you out of owing the government anything at all.

A few years ago, I decided to forego the services of a tax professional and give it a go at dealing with Uncle Sam myself.

What could go wrong? It's only my family's financial security and I breezed through college algebra with a C+.

So I gathered all of the necessary documents and sat down at the home computer ready to show the government just who is the master of my checkbook.

I first carefully researched and selected a service (the first one that popped up after a Google search) to help me through the process.

I picked the program (I'll call it "Furbo Fax") and entered my credit card number, which didn't bode well -- thirty seconds in and I'm already in the red.

It turns out the program uses algorithms and formulas, conveniently automating the process of reminding you how little money you make.

Furbo Fax even gave me a little animated helper that would walk across the screen and point at blanks on the report and ask questions or give suggestions in the form of a comic strip bubble.

His name was Furbo Fred. First things first, Furbo Fax imported my return from the previous year.

Fred ran over to that side of the screen and pointed, eyes wide and stifling a chuckle.

"Seriously? For a family of five?" his comic bubble snorted. My relationship with Fred was off to a rocky start. It wouldn't improve.

After helping me fill in the proper blanks with the proper figures, Fred started asking questions about my tax situation.

Really weird questions for every possible tax situation. "Are you legally blind?" he asked.

I wondered how a legally blind person might read Fred's question, but then decided on the truth instead.

"Only when trying to match socks in the morning."

Fred was not amused. He looked over last year's return and shot back, "Last year you reported income from the Brownfield News. Were they glibble enough to keep you on for another year without noticing that when you work after hours, the paper clip supply all but disappears?"

Fred's kind of a jerk.

He also has an entertaining way of popping up with a question seemingly out of nowhere: "Any Canadian retirement plans?"

"No thanks, Fred. Too cold. And French."

Next he asked "Do you wish to claim a credit for alcohol used as fuel?"

Hmm, I thought. Define "fuel."

Fred then asked me if I had my own business, and if so, "Did you take an 'active role' in your business?"

Management frequently questions how 'active' my role in the business is, so I asked Fred for more information.

"If you were actively involved in the operation of your business, you are considered to be playing an 'active role.'"

At this point, I took a break to take an active role in using alcohol as "fuel."

Fred changed tactics

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