## Appendix 11: Portrait of one super group

[What follows is the remembrances of Dave Wakely, former president of the Chicago TI User Group. Dave has been active in this phenomenal group almost since its inception and shares some candid observation about the group, its members and the TI community as a whole. The author sincerely appreciates Mr. Wakely's candor and obvious knowledge and fondness for the subject matter — The Chicago TI User Group.]

Dave Wakely, a clinical psychologist at Chicago's West Side Veterans Administration Hospital, purchased a TI from Computerland in January, 1981, and, soon after, began receiving newsletters from Texas Instruments. In one of the TI newsletters, there was a list of just-organized TI user groups, including the address of Jerry Strauss, the original president of the Chicago group. Strauss, a real-estate attorney, had formed the group in the early fall of 1980 and was one of the very first to contact TI about starting a user group. Wakely attended his first meeting in September of 1981 and marveled at the first demonstration of the new Extended Basic module given by Sam Pincus. Pincus, who works for a Chicago firm active in commodity exchange, was described by Wakely as the "brains" of the group and was an active contributor to Gary Kaplan's *99'er Magazine*.

The user group's membership had increased to 80 members or so in February, 1982, and Wakely and Strauss decided it was time to start a formal newsletter. About the same time, the group had a demonstration from TI representatives of the new Logo and Editor/Assembler software. Dave recalls that the "membership rolls exploded" when TI cut the price of the 99/4A and started the rebates in late 1982, increasing to 180 or so by the end of 1982. With increased numbers came problems. Wakely recalls: "A local Chicago electronics store, Elec-Tek, began national advertising of TI hardware and software at discount prices and they had a stack of our flyers about the group on the counter in the store. My phone started ringing at all hours from TI users from all over the country. We couldn't meet at member's homes any more, as there were too many of us. Luckily, the assistant director of programming at Triton State Junior College was a TI enthusiast, and he obtained the large meeting room that we have been using ever since. During early 1983, our membership grew so fast that I had to drop the new members listing from the newsletter, because it grew too large.

The group decided that an "all TI" bulletin board would be a good idea. Pincus programmed the software in Basic using some Assembly Language links and the hardware included a Hayes Smartmodem. According to Wakely, the system went into testing in February/March, 1983. The group contacted the phone company to try and get a easy-to- remember number (for example, 848-7377 was tried as the mnemonic would be "TI USERS") but "all the good numbers were taken." The group ended up with 848-3669 and made up the memorable "TI Users FONe eXchange" or TI-UFONX. The system was officially online on Memorial Day, 1983. Then, Wakely recalls, a gentleman called from Georgia who had "a million questions about the hardware and software of the system." Ralph Fowler, the Georgia caller, stated that "his system was still in development and testing, but that he expected it to be up soon." The debate still rages about who was the first TI bulletin board system. Fowler advertises that his TIBBS was the first; many Chicago old-timers would argue the point. One point Chicago refuses to argue: the Chicago user group system was the VERY first to have true Terminal Emulator II program transfers (written by

Bill Hoffman). They are also proud of the fact that the popular *Computer Phone Book* by Mike Cane listed the Chicago TI-UFONX as the first TI bulletin board and gave it a very favorable review; Fowler's TIBBS was not listed. (They also giggle a bit when they mention that Atlanta's TI User Group runs a TI-UFONX system — not a TIBBS). The BBS's first systems operator, Larry McMahon, bought another make of computer and the system was moved in December, 1984, and is run now in Niles, IL, by Irwin "Butch" Goldstein. The system has now logged over 32,000 calls and 6,200 messages. The bulletin board software has been immensely improved to now run off four double-sided double-density drives and features 20 to 25 downloadable programs. John Behnke has modified the software of late and plans include an upgrade to 1200 baud transmissions and Xmodem protocol transfers.

By mid-1983, the Chicago user group had nearly 300 members, with half attending the monthly meetings regularly. Then Wakely says, the group had an brainstorm. I will let Dave tell the story from here:

"Having lots of cash handy and virtually no bills, we decided to hold a 'TI Faire' where we would invite vendors to come and set up booths and sell TI hardware and software, and to simultaneously hold various classes on programming the machine. We combed the pages of *99'er* for the addresses of vendors and got commitments from 14. The only other such gathering of which we were aware had been *99'er*'s show in San Francisco the previous year. We did not want to try and compete with them, so Sam [Pincus] called Gary Kaplan and he told us they would not be doing another show, but agreed to come out and be our guest speaker, to talk about the bright future of the 99/4A and the rumors of a new, powerful machine from Lubbock.

"At our October meeting that year, with the TI Faire plans finalized, we hosted Ed Weist, the Texas Instruments User Groups Coordinator, and his traveling software show. He wowed us with the FORTi music board and TI Forth, and assured us that all was well. Then came October 28th. [Wakely agrees with the uncanny ability of TI owners to remember 'where they were when ...'; Wakely heard the announcement on the car radio while on the way to his wedding reception.] All heck broke loose in Chicago, just like everywhere else TI owners congregate. For about 3 days it was impossible to get onto our board due to TI owners seeking info about the pullout and what it meant. Despite the news, something funny happened.

"By coincidence, our Faire was held just two weeks after 'the announcement'. We did a little local publicity, but were totally unprepared for the nearly 1,000 people who showed up. Some vendors ran out of software in one hour. We also signed up 45 new members to the group and everyone wanted information. Almost everyone. Gary Kaplan did not show up. No explanation. A few weeks later he called Sam Pincus in a panic, asking him to write an article on the Apple. The rest, as they say, is publishing history (or is it infamy?)."

The group flourished in 1984. Wakely recalls: "There appeared to be more new products in early '84 than in all of '83; we had no trouble finding demos to run at our group meetings." The group ran a group programming contest in Basic, Extended Basic, and Assembly Language and gave away $300 in prizes and getting about 60 new programs for our library, which, now contains over 1500 programs. With the continued interest the group decided to make the Faire an annual event. The second Faire (1984 — theme

"Still Goin' Strong!) drew over 1500 people and featured 21 vendors. Don Bynum, former head of Texas Instruments Home Computer Division, was the guest speaker and demonstrated the fabled, but never sold, 99/8 computer. As a service to other user groups who could not attend the Faire, The sponsoring group videotaped Bynum's excellent presentation and made the tape available to others. The group signed up 85 new members this time. Pincus had replaced Wakely as the group's president and the newsletter grew under the editorship of Carole Goldstein (yes, she is the wife of the BBS's sysop). The group has many dues-paying members across the country who belong just to get the newsletter. The group puts out 10 issues a year (averaging 30 pages per issue) with a combined Super Summer Issue, which was a mammoth 64 pages in 1985.

Currently, the Chicago TI User Group has 410 members. They already have 22 vendors signed up for the 3rd Annual TI Faire (to be held November 2, 1985), with 7 additional vendors "promising checks." The group somehow got Texas Instruments to hand over the mailing labels for some 35,000 registered TI owners and the group has mailed to most of them the Faire announcement. The hotels in the Chicago area are reporting an increase in reservations for the weekend of the Faire. Wakely has "no idea whether we will get 1,500 or 5,500," but it already is a success.

There you have the profile of just one of the 99/4A "Super Groups." The Chicago TI User Group has been a bellwether group since its inception and has lived up to its tradition with the 3rd Annual TI Faire of 1985 its latest accomplishment. If tradition holds for this incredible group, it will be a another marvelous accomplishment to add to their already-long list.

[Membership in the Chicago Area TI User Group are $15 per year for first year; $12 per year thereafter. Contact the group at PO Box 578341, Chicago, IL. 60657]