

# BOARDWATCH

## MAGAZINE

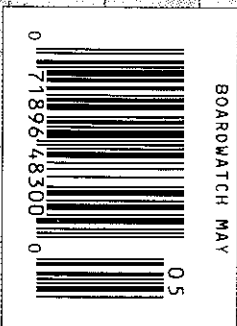
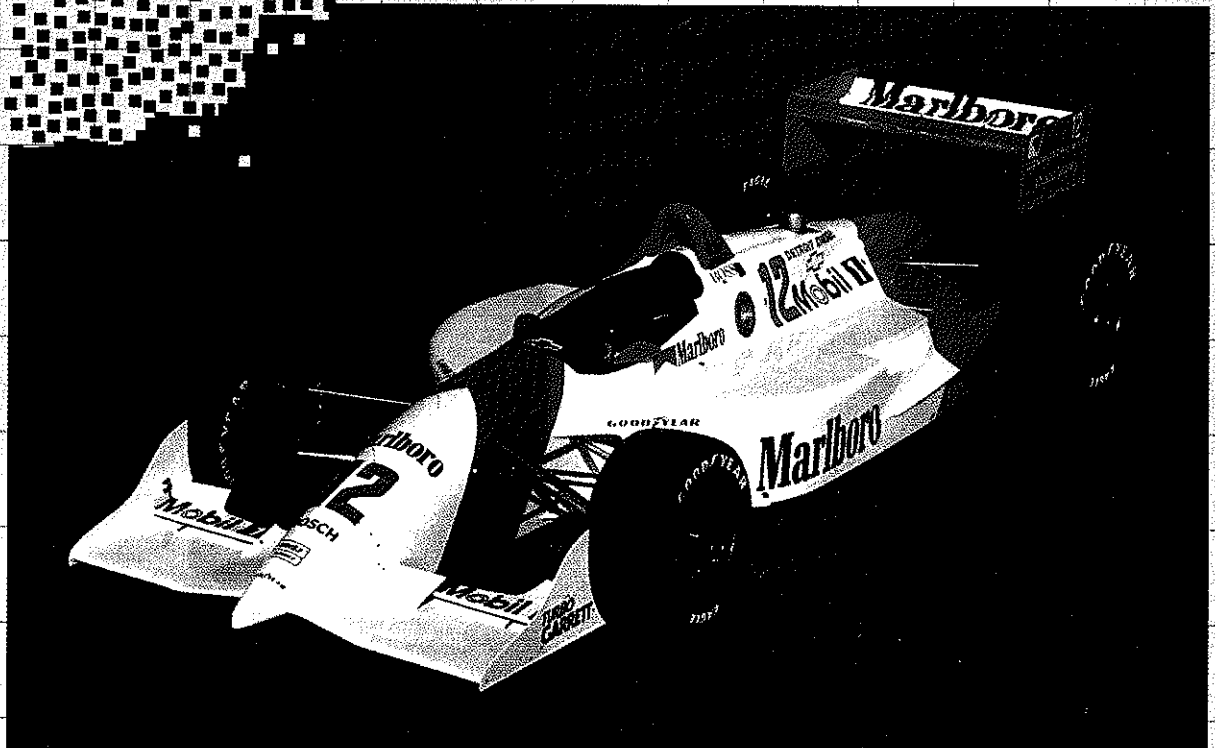
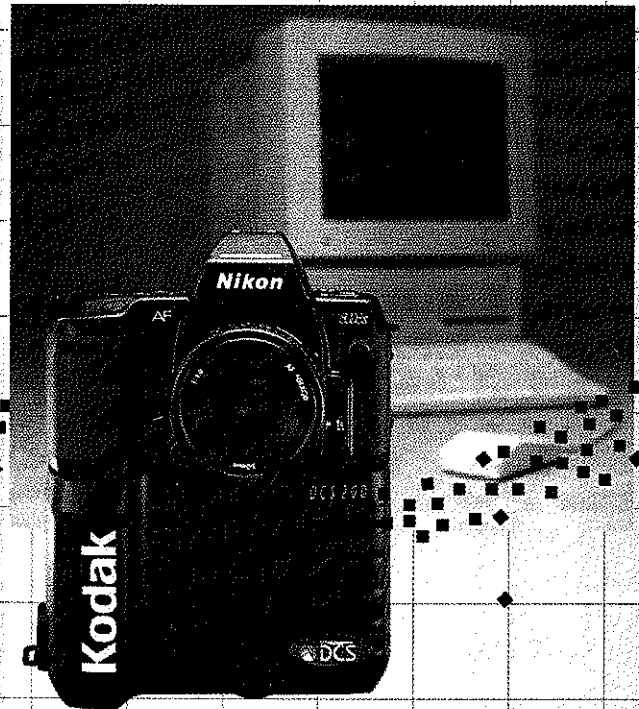
Guide to Online Information Services and Electronic Bulletin Boards

### Digital Imaging

Getting the Shot Online  
with the  
Marlboro Racing News BBS

SFNet - World's First  
Coin Operated  
Bulletin Board

FEDERAL  
REGISTER  
ONLINE  
Full Text  
Available  
by Internet



Luckily for us all, the government lost. But why didn't the government just admit it made a big mistake in raiding Steve Jackson Games, and go back to chasing its "hacker" playmates? Why was it so important for the government to try and justify its grossly improper and entirely mistaken intrusion into Steve Jackson Games' business?

Some might guess the government was craftily playing devil's advocate, trying to help create protective case law for BBS' by raising anti-civil-rights positions just so they would be refuted decisively by the judge. Such a possibility is highly unlikely. Going into the trial there was a very real chance Judge Sparks could have found the government's raid entirely justified, and left Steve Jackson Games without a remedy. We must assume the government lawyers meant what they said when they argued that the PPA and ECPA did not protect BBS', and that even if they do, a raid violating those laws will not be improper if the agents had no idea that BBS' have special legal protections. There's a

serious attitude problem on the part of the people employed by our government to protect us. Hopefully, the lawyers for our U.S. government will carefully read and learn from the judge's opinion in the case they just lost against Steve Jackson Games, and properly instruct their field agents and magistrates about the rights of those who run BBS' and those who use them.

*[Lance Rose is an attorney practicing high-tech, computer and intellectual property law in Montclair New Jersey, and is available on the Internet at [elrose@well.sf.ca.us](mailto:elrose@well.sf.ca.us) and on CompuServe at 72230,2044. He works with shareware publishers, software authors, system operators, technology buyers, interactive media developers, on-line database services and others in the high technology area. He is also author of the book SYSLAW, a legal guide for bulletin board system operators, available from PC Information Group (800)321-8285. - Editor]*

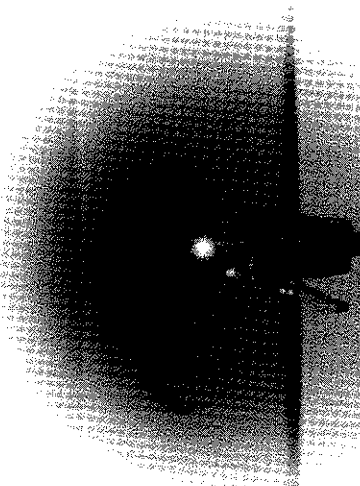
## DIRECT DIAL

### SFNET - COIN OPERATED BULLETIN BOARD INVADES COFFEE HOUSE CULTURE

After a career as a produce distributor, general contractor, and real estate salesman, Wayne Gregori had yet to find his place in the world. He did dabble in computer consulting, and so encountered the world of bulletin boards. In 1990, he started an interesting, but unprofitable BBS called the Compact Disk Exchange in San Francisco. The system allowed callers to swap and trade Compact Audio Discs and did gain some popularity. But the procedures to transfer funds and discs were awkward, and the system evolved to become lots of work and little cash flow.

In the summer of 1991, Gregori hit on a different approach to make operating a bulletin board profitable. He designed and built a coin-operated terminal and placed it in a San Francisco coffee house. Today, he operates SFnet, a 30 line

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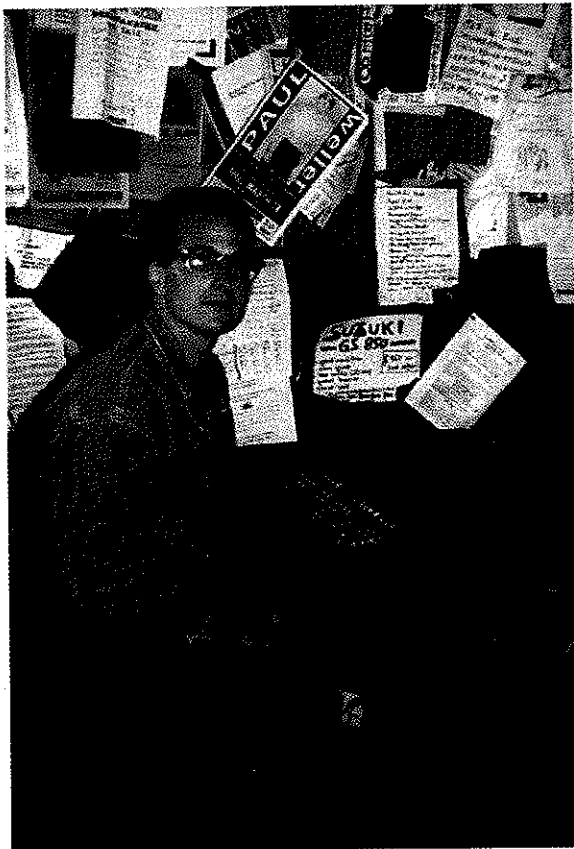
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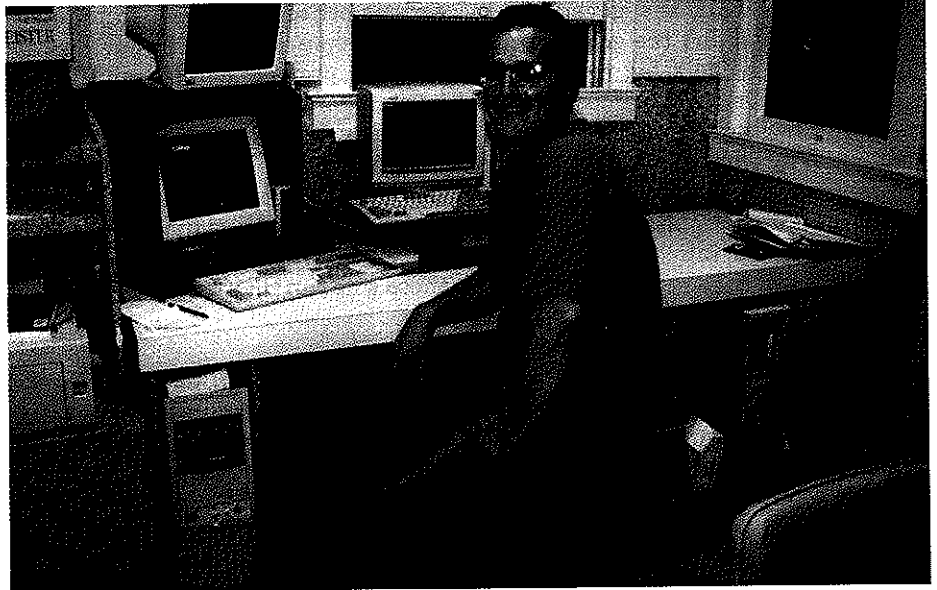
TBBS system offering a mix of features to callers in the San Francisco area, including patrons of some 18 coffee houses.

San Francisco features dozens of coffee houses offering pastries, gingerbread, cappuccino, coffee, and latte of industrial strength. Patrons use the coffee houses to meet, relax, and often just to read a book and have a cup of coffee. The culture vaguely resembles the coffee house culture of the late 'sixties, with poetry, occasional musical performances on a small scale, and a general underground feel. Today's culture includes "slackers" - young people who have basically avoided the rigors of school and work, working just enough to survive on the edge of society, and hanging out.

Gregori designed a reasonably vandal-proof terminal table constructed largely of plywood painted with Zolotone - a fibrous paint mixture used to coat the interior of automobile



**Wayne Gregori with RJ-11 Table at The Club - a San Francisco Coffee House**



**SFNet - BBS in a Kitchen**

trunks. The table serves admirably as a coffee house table, but features a monochrome monitor shining directly up through a glass inset set in the center of the table. An ordinary PC keyboard, covered with a "keyboard condom" plastic shield is mounted on the edge of the table. A coin box allows coffee house habitués to swap quarters for time.

The terminal, which Gregori has termed an "RJ11 Table", consists of a power supply, a very smallish XT motherboard with two serial ports, a 3.5-inch floppy drive, the monochrome monitor, and a modem. The coin box is connected to one serial port while a modem is connected to the other. A specially written terminal program monitors the coin box and keeps the time meter internally, while allowing users to connect to the SFNet BBS. The device resembles nothing so much as the old PAC-MAN tables that became common in bars and night clubs in the mid-eighties.

Users can view an information file about SFNet, a

help file on how to use it, and by putting in a couple of quarters, logon to the BBS without any technical knowledge or even the telephone number. Additional time can be purchased in quarter increments essentially the equivalent of about \$3 per hour.

The system automatically dials the SFnet BBS and each table has its own dedicated port on the BBS. After an incident where hackers wardialed to determine the telephone numbers of these ports, Gregori, and his programming assistant Dave Lahti, modified the proprietary terminal software so that it did a little handshake between the table and the BBS before allowing access.

The system features a number of message conferences covering politics, social issues, and so forth, an Internet mail function, and some interactive games like Chat Chess and Chat Poker. Indeed, the multiline chat function seems to be the most popular activity among the coffee house crowd - though many do maintain personal mail boxes on the system. With the Internet mail function, people who do not even own a computer can receive and send e-mail world wide - for the price of a quarter - from a local coffee house.

And there are plenty to choose from. Gregori has persuaded some 18 coffee



**SFNet - Coin Operated BBS**

houses in the area to feature his table. Basically, they get a free piece of furniture perfectly suitable for knoshing on a bran muffin with double latte, along with 10 to 15% of the monthly haul of quarters. According to Gregori, some of the less active sites generate as little as \$150 per month, while the better spots generate as much as \$600 monthly. Gregori supplies the telephone line necessary to connect the table.

Since we have a bit of a weakness for coffee anyway, we visited several of these clubs during a recent visit to San Francisco. We found the coffee a bit strong for our tastes, but the RJ11 tables in more or less constant use. Curiously, one of the main features of all of these coffee houses is a conventional cork bulletin board on the wall - plastered with layers of notices for roommates wanted, places to rent wanted, various music and poetry festivals and events. One of the side effects of the RJ11 tables is that at any given time in the evening, as many as 18 people in coffee houses are actually talking to each other via this multiline chat network. They can be as anonymous, or as intimate as they wish. And if they do decide they want to meet, they can usually travel over to the other coffee house to consummate the face-to-face portion of the meeting.

The BBS itself is located in a very pleasant house on Noe street in San

Francisco where Gregori lives with his wife, Jill, and two sons Ben, age two, and Devin, age four. The BBS is actually in their kitchen. And this has to be one of the neatest BBS installations we've seen. Two monitors and keyboards occupy a counter at one end of the kitchen. The PC and all the modems are held in a rollout box Gregori designed that has RJ-11 jacks, serial port connectors, power supplies, etc. all on a unified rack mounted on wheels. The unit sits under the counter, but slides out easily for main-

tenance.

The system uses eSoft's TBBS software, and the entire rack is filled with US Robotics Sportster 2400 bps modems. File downloading doesn't seem to be a big draw on the system, with most of the usage given to mail conferences, Internet mail, and chat. Gregori does have one dedicated V.32bis port for those using offline QWK mail readers. Table manufacture occurs in a room over the garage.

Aside from the 18 lines for the RJ11 Tables, the system does sport an additional 12 lines for a regular clientele of people dialing from home. They access the system at a modest \$7 per month. The primary access number is (415)824-8747 but there are local access numbers in South San Francisco, Sausalito, Burlingame, San Leandro, and Oakland.

SFNet is innovative in several ways, but most notably in that it brings the activity and culture of bulletin boards to a group that wouldn't ordinarily encounter it. With coffee as high as \$4 a cup, the 50 cents needed to access the system doesn't seem too high a price to pay. Coffee house patrons are drawn to the activity of the BBS callers, and BBS callers likewise seem attracted to a BBS with users scat-



**An Early Model Terminal at Muddy Waters Coffee House**

## SFNET COFFEE HOUSE LOCATIONS

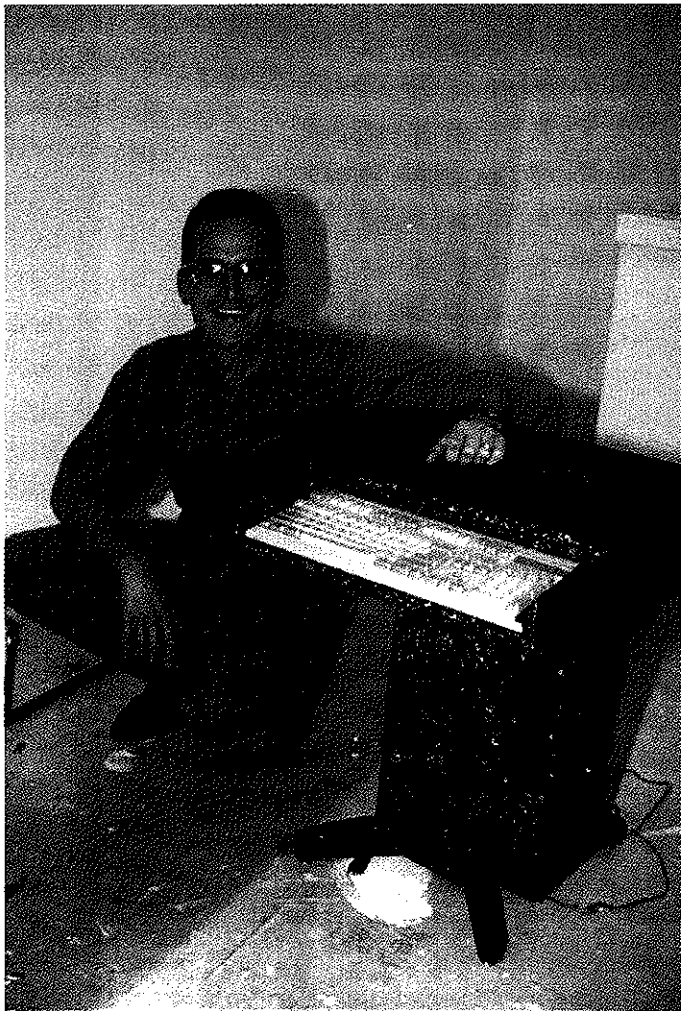
Brain Wash	1122 Folsom St., San Francisco	(415)861-3663
Horseshoe Cafe	566 Haight St., San Francisco	(415)626-8852
Ground Zero	783 Haight St., San Francisco	(415)861-1985
Club Coffee	920 Valencia St. San Francisco	(415)821-7112
The Coffee Zone	1409 Haight St. San Francisco	(415)863-2443
Muddy Waters	521 Valencia St. San Francisco	(415)863-8006
Jammin Java	701 Cole St. San Francisco	(415)668-5282
Jammin Java	9th & Judah. San Francisco	(415)566-5282
Laundry Cafe	570 Green St. San Francisco	(415)989-6745
Caffe Roma	526 Columbus Ave. San Francisco	(415)296-7662
Monday Blu's	3821 18th St. San Francisco	(415)255-7556
Cafe Nefeli	1854 Euclid St. Berkeley	(510)841-6374
Cafe Milano	2522 Bancroft Way Berkeley	(510)644-3100
Espresso Roma	College / Ashby Berkeley	(510)644-3773
Coffee Source	2404 Telegraph Berkeley	(510)644-3045
Central Park Books	32 E. Fourth St. San Mateo	(415)579-4900
Royal Ground	Corner 4th/B St. S. Rafael	(415)455-0107
Mama's Royal Cafe	387 Miller Ave. Mill Valley	(415)388-3261

tered among San Francisco's coffee houses. They do seem to be two distinctly different groups.

Gregori also plans on extending the concept to other cities. He views it as a community building project and this

summer he intends to manufacture the RJ11 tables and sell them to BBS operators around the country at about \$2600 each. We here from BBS operators with this type of concept continually, but all seem stymied by the lack of availability of a rugged, coin operated terminal.

It would seem there finally is one. SFNET, PO Box 460693, San Francisco, CA 94146; (415)695-9824 voice.



*Is that Buddy Holly with an RJ-11 Table*

## INTERNET

### SECOND ANNUAL EFF PIONEER AWARDS

The Electronic Frontier Foundation presented its second annual Pioneer Awards in a March 10 ceremony at the Computer's Freedom and Privacy Conference at the San Francisco Marriott Hotel in Burlingame, California.

The five recipients were judged to have made significant and influential contributions to the field of computer-based communications. The judging panel consisted of Jim Warren, pioneer award recipient from 1992 and founder of the Computers, Freedom, and Privacy Conference, Steve Cisler of Apple Computer, Esther Dyson, editor of Release 1.0, and Bob Metcalfe, Editor of Infoworld.

Award recipients included:

#### PAUL BARAN

Paul Baran was the original inventor of the concept of packet switching, a technology of fundamental importance to data networks and eventually led to the TCP/IP network protocol used by the Internet. Baran also founded several communications companies including Telebit, Packet Technologies, Equatorial Communications, Metricom, InterFax, and Com21.

#### DR. VINTON CERF

Dr. Vinton Cerf led the research project which developed the TCP/IP protocol suite, the open system interconnection protocol used today by schools, government, corporations, and individuals to communicate over the Internet. Dr. Cerf also participated in development of ARPANET host protocols, Internet management, and network security programs for DARPA. He led development of the MCI Mail service. He is currently vice president of the Corporation for National Research Initiatives, and he founded the Internet Society.