1992 Exhibition Receives Largest Grant Yet

William H. Gates, III, Chairman and Co-founder of Microsoft Corporation, has spurred development of the Museum's next major exhibition with a $250,000 grant. The 3,600 sq. ft., $1 million exhibition will show the remarkable capacity of the personal computer. Originally known as the Computer Discovery Center, the exhibit, a joint project with The Boston Computer Society (BCS), will open June 13, 1992.

With a working title of "Tools & Toys: Explore the Personal Computer," the exhibition will be rich in hands-on experience for people of all ages and backgrounds. Over 30 interactive stations will offer visitors many applications on a variety of computer systems.

"It's very exciting to see that thousands of people will have the opportunity to explore creatively what the PC can do," said Gates. "With the Tools & Toys exhibit, computer novices will experience firsthand what an incredibly powerful tool the PC can be for education, improved productivity and entertainment."

Although 75 million personal computers are in use throughout the world, "few people have used this tool to its potential," says Jonathan Rotenberg, founder and chairman of the BCS, the world's largest personal computer user group. "If they did, they would be more effective in their work and learning."

While a major goal of Tools & Toys is to build the novice's confidence, it will appeal to experienced users interested in expanding their repertoires. Distinctive environments will offer settings for different applications. One setting, called "Hear It, See It," explores multimedia. Visitors can merge text, sound, graphics and moving images to create their own presentations.

Another interactive environment will let visitors try computer systems used by people with special needs, including text recognition and voice activated systems. In "Playing Games," innovative education and entertainment software will be available—from simulations that let people build a city to games of strategy and adventure.

“Getting Information” shows visitors how to add their comments to on-line forums, get the latest information from worldwide news agencies or search for facts in a CD-ROM encyclopedia. The “Writing” and “Adding It Up” settings provide up-to-date advances in word processing and spreadsheets.

The last environment introduces people to the “Basics,” including operating systems, utilities, and viruses. A forum will help visitors understand the rights and responsibilities of computer users—including the issues of privacy and piracy.

Many of the interactives will become part of the Exhibit Kits Program, a national project that distributes the Museum's exhibits around the world.

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In June, there were two important additions to the Museum. We opened a major new exhibition, “PEOPLE AND COMPUTERS: Milestones of a Revolution.” We also welcomed five industry leaders to the Museum’s Board of Directors.

The new Directors are: Samuel O. Albert, President, Sam Albert Associates; James E. Clark, Vice President, High Performance and Fault Tolerant Systems, AT&T Computer Systems; James A. Lawrence, Chairman, LEK Consulting, Inc.; Dr. Suhas Patil, Chairman of the Board and Executive Vice President, Products and Technology, Cirrus Logic, Inc., and Charles A. Zraket, Scholar-in-Residence, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, and Trustee, past President and CEO of the MITRE Corporation.

Meanwhile, early response to the new exhibition has been very positive. Visitors have been observed dancing to the period music in the time tunnels that precede each milestone! Visitor interviews reveal that over 40 percent like the interactive videos best. By touching screens located throughout the exhibition, people select videos from different eras to get a feel for the people and technologies behind each milestone. They can also sample the portraits of computers in the popular culture of the time. Visitors are particularly interested in how Hollywood and the media have depicted computers over the years.

Visitors say they like the other hands-on elements of the exhibition too. At the “Tell Your Own Tale” station, for example, they can compare their own humorous computer story with those of other visitors.

In addition, visitors are struck by the old computers and realistic re-creations of past computing environments. One father and daughter were so engaged by the mannequin computer operator in the IBM System/360 installation they pretended to be mannequins themselves, fooling several visitors! Interestingly, people are spending 20 minutes of an average two-hour visit in the new exhibition. It is gratifying that they are willing to give that much time to “history”!

I hope you will visit PEOPLE AND COMPUTERS soon!

Dr. Oliver Strimpel
Executive Director

Photograph: Greg Stielau, Fay Felo

Two of the exhibition’s major sponsors officially open PEOPLE AND COMPUTERS. From the left: F. Grant Saviers, Vice President, PC & System Peripherals, Digital Equipment Corporation, and Terry Lautenbach, IBM Senior Vice President, International Business Machines Corporation.

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Other individuals and corporations supporting this exhibition include: Steve Wozniak, Apple Computer, Inc., Raytheon Company, Cabot Corporation Foundation, Arthur Nelson, Steve Stadler and others.

The Museum has convened a distinguished panel of advisors to help guide the content including: Richard P. Case, IBM Director of Technical Strategy Development, International Business Machines Corporation; Gardner C. Hendrie, Sigma Partners; Tracy Licklider, President, the BCS; Ike Nasi, Director, Eastern Research, Apple Computer, Inc.; Ed Belove, former Vice President, Research and Development, Lotus Development Corporation; James Starkey, former founder and CEO of Interbase Software Corporation.