Busywork: programmers' programs and routines

By John Lombardi

All Applesoft programmers have to invent routines to center lines, accept input, check dates and perform a host of housekeeping activities for the various programs they write.

If you are organized, you do it once, save the program fragment or routine and use it again and again in subsequent projects. If you are like me, you forget what you did, you change your mind about how to do it or you reinvent the wheel for each programming project.

Busywork provides a coherent set of Applesoft routines for building many useful programs.

FEATURES: The Busywork package contains 24 routines, a standardized-greeting program, main-menu program and system-parameter program. There is also a comprehensive demonstration that illustrates the various routines.

You can use all these in a variety of ways. You can load the whole Busywork package, modify the variables to fit your needs and build the application program inside the structure of Busywork. If some of the routines are unnecessary, simply delete them.

Some of the features of this package include inpute routines, dollar formatting, program headings, identification of master and data disks, menu routines, escape, return to main menu, center print, screen hold, printer heading, valid date and date inputs, system setups, printer on line, initialize file, main menu and error handling.

PERFORMANCE: As the demonstration program shows, these routines do what they say they do. None of them uses esoteric programming tricks that could make them unsuitable for general utility programming. At the same time, because they use lots of string manipulation, they can contribute to rapid garbage collection in programs that have lots of string operations of their own.
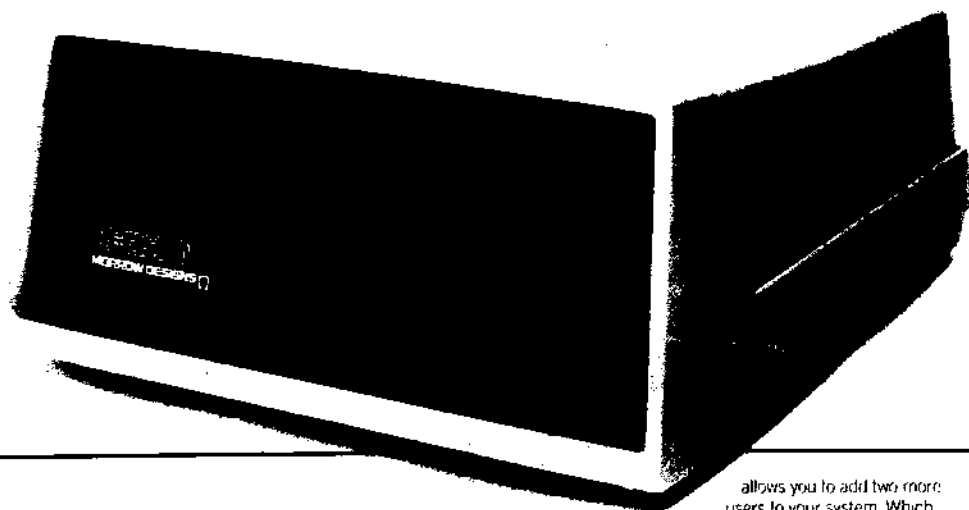
None of these routines is hard to understand. All are listed in the documentation. Every one does what the instructions say it will do. So if you need these routines and don't want to write your own, they are a good deal.

Most programmers who know enough about Applesoft to use the routines effectively, however, are likely to have their own tool kit of routines or to find these routines not exactly what they want. Actually, there may be more use for this tool kit as an aid to teaching people how to solve common programming tasks in Applesoft, rather than as a cookbook for pro-

grammers.

Many of the solutions are interesting and helpful, demonstrating how to solve inadequacies in Applesoft or accomplish common input, error checking, screen management and similar housekeeping tasks.

EASE OF USE: Many similar routines have been published in hobbyist magazines and exist in public-domain disk libraries, but this collection, because it is integrated and consistent, may prove easier to use.

No one should expect to approach this package without a substantial understanding of Apples, files, programming and Applesoft. These routines can't be simply turned on and off, they have to be set up, values established and parameters passed in and out. Al-

though the instructions are clear and complete, they will make heavy reading for the novice.

At the same time, those who study and understand these routines will have gained an important insight into effective and creative Applesoft programming.

The routines are for standard Apples, and don't take into account complexities introduced by 80-column boards and similar accessories, although they do accommodate two drives. Most of the routines seem best adapted to simple business or accounting applications, with a heavy emphasis on dates, numbers and screen formatting.

ERROR HANDLING: One of the routines in this collection is for error han-

dling, and the Busywork demo shows off some of its abilities. Given the nature of this set of utility routines, it is easy to make lots of errors using them. You must install them in your program properly or they won't work. The authors are quite explicit and clear about what has to be done, and for the most part, the instructions are complete.

DOCUMENTATION: The documentation included with the disk is good and complete, if not elegant. Complete listings of routines and programs, accompanied by descriptions of routines and their functions, make this a well-documented package.

It is not, however, a tutorial for Applesoft. If you don't have a firm control over this variant of BASIC, you will

have trouble getting all these routines to work as they should.

SUPPORT: Busywork is unprotected. You should copy it before it is used and keep the original as a backup. If you mess up all your copies of the disk, you can get another one from the company for $10. All manufacturers should provide programs this way.

SUMMARY: In short, the routines work. They do useful and necessary things, but you probably have your own similar routines already worked out. Even so, you might enjoy seeing how someone else solved these common programming tasks, and after you look at these solutions, you probably will want to adopt some of the techniques for your own work. ∎

Gertrude's
eight and up, should have no trouble in reading the on-screen documentation.

Instead of the usual plastic self-seal bag, the packaging for these two programs is a sturdy, cardboard folder in which you can keep the diskette and the manual—a smart idea for software that is meant for use by children.

SUPPORT: Original purchasers can obtain backup copies from The Learning Company by sending in the backup-disk certificate that accompanies the software. The backup copy costs $12.

In addition, The Learning Company offers a 90-day limited warranty on defective diskettes if you return the diskette to the company or to an authorized dealer along with a dated proof of purchase.

SUMMARY: Gertrude's Secrets and Gertrude's Puzzles are software for children that cause them to learn about directionality, right and left, up and down. Playing these games helps them to discover rules of orderly sequence, find consistent patterns and think in new and different ways. Parents wishing to buy innovative, creative software that can teach as well as entertain their young children will be hard pressed to find any better. ∎