

DataCAD Boston Users Group

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A Committee of the Boston Society of Architects

April 2004 DBUG Meeting

Host: DATACADLLC

Meeting Notes

April 24, 2004

The Regional Users Group meeting in Avon, Connecticut on April 23, 2004 was more lightly attended than expected but the 40 or so who did make it were richly rewarded with good eats, good fun, good nostalgia, and good presentations all around. If the evening's program was heavily weighted toward DataCAD's history, it is no wonder, because a major focus of the evening was to celebrate Principle Author of DataCAD David A. Giesselman's 20th anniversary of work with the product. His time spanned some 11 major versions, 3 companies, and 6 regime changes, give or take a reorganization or two. In an era where CAD programs and companies tend to record their history in months and years, it is remarkable that Dave in particular and DataCAD in general can be proud of multiple decades of fine work.

Along with a fascinating 25-foot long, jam-packed collection of memorabilia going back to 1984 (*for more, see reprint from Cheap Tricks attached*), attendees were treated to a fun-filled roast of Dave's years at DataCAD including some hilarious (and only slightly-doctored) photos. One favorite was a collection of "Davisms," such as "It works on my box" (to avoid bug-fix duty), "My life is melting away before my very eyes" (used to describe the time wasted while waiting for the computer), "User BPI" (Below Par Intelligence) used to identify problems due to the technically challenged, and "Push a button!" used to prod someone who balks while trying to demonstrate a bug. Denizens of the DBUG forum will also recall fondly Dave's signature e-mail footers, such as "I speak for no one; I type" and, of course, the immortal "All programmers are playwrights and all computers are lousy actors."

As a token of DBUG's esteem, Dave received DBUG's highest honor and designation, *Doctorate of DBUG*, with this citation: *"For exemplary Achievement & Service to this community, this brethren, this band of CAD sojourners for the past 20 years, 1984-2004 to David A. Giesselman, D-DBUG."*

Another impressive presentation was that DATACAD CEO & President Mark Madura was able to run old DataCAD DOS versions 1.2c (640 x 350, EGA Resolution!), 3, 4, and 5 all on a modern WinXP laptop with the help of the Microsoft's *Virtual PC* program. As rudimentary as it was, we could still see in those early versions the principles of a clean interface and user-friendly operation, which live on in the DataCAD 11 of today.

Lest you get the wrong idea, the evening's program was not all nostalgic but indeed included a lot of forward-thinking

announcements. Chief among them was a demonstration of a custom database and keynoting feature that will allow symbol attributes to tie into any (and even multiple) comma-delimited external database(s). Not only can such a feature be a godsend to any firm which uses keynoting (i.e. common job-based text notes tied into an alphanumeric tagging system) on a wide-spread basis, but it may also lead to developing interactive door, window and finish schedules.

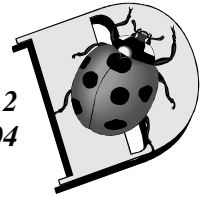
Another major announcement was that DATACAD will be releasing a new version of DCAL (DCAL for Delphi) that will provide exported functions for nearly all of DataCAD's features. While that statement may rate the "DBUG Salute" (done with a wave of the hand in one motion "over your head") for most of us, the upshot may mean an influx of new 3rd party utilities and accessories which can harness nearly the full extent of the DataCAD engine. Current DCAL programmers creating macros for DataCAD complain that the current limitations are like trying to build a house with no power tools.

In addition, Mark ran through a dozen or so lesser-known features of DataCAD 11, which included such items as text retaining its alignment (e.g. centered) even after editing, setting layers so they remembered their own custom z settings (e.g. 1st floor vs. 2nd floor), and GoTo Views which remember their own unique plot scale.

Other announcements that evening were that 1) a new DataCAD 11 Manual should be available in a few weeks. (Every single page of the old manual had to be updated for this tome!) A free download of the PDF version will be available and a hardcopy version will also be available from <www.ondemandmanuals.com> for something around \$50; 2) DataCAD 11 LT is nearing completion in a few weeks with its maximum file size upped to 15 MB, support for custom line types raised to 256 line types, and with no limit on custom hatch types; and 3) new compatibility with AutoCAD will include the ability to directly read SHX fonts as well as to load any embedded AutoCAD line types from any DWG file directly to your DataCAD line type folder (a possible enhancement for both DataCAD and DataCAD LT).

All in all, it was a fun trip down memory lane on this late April evening with some nice new signposts that the road before us appears to be open, free flowing, and made for pleasant memories in store for all.

-- Meeting Notes by Evan H. Shu, FAIA
For Mike Smith's Notes, see back



1. DataCAD 11 Manual: the FREE PDF version should be available in a few weeks. A hardcopy version will then also be available from www.ondemandmanuals.com.
 2. Becky Stevens' quote of the night (from an old magazine article about DataCAD): "DataCAD: a gourmet meal at a Happy Meal price."
 3. Continue to look for Evan Shu's articles featuring DataCAD at www.ArchitectureWeek.com.
 4. Mark used the "Microsoft Virtual PC" software to create a fully functioning DOS PC on his Windows XP machine. That way he could take us on a trip down memory lane, showing us fully functioning DOS DataCAD versions 2 through 8! Pictures at: <http://members.bellatlantic.net/~vze2sgzx/avon/avon.htm>.
 5. DCAL for Delphi: although not very "juicy" to the average DataCAD user, the ability to create DataCAD macros through a modern programming application and graphical interface should have positive repercussions for all of us.
 - a. What it could mean to us laypeople: the programs will be compiled as Windows .DLL files. You will be able to run them just like the current .DCX macros, but now programmers can give you modern Windows dialog boxes, drop-down menus, check boxes, etc. And best of all, now 95% of the DataCAD program will be accessible to programmers, opening up *huge* possibilities for more powerful and better integrated macros. For instance, right now DCAL (DataCAD's macro programming language) cannot access Windows functions such as True Type Fonts, and it can't create fills, or even closed polylines. All of this, and thousands of other previously unavailable options, will now be available to programmers.
- And just as AutoCAD has become a basic CAD engine on which third party developers can "overlay" specialty applications like structural engineering, survey data, or terrain mapping, DataCAD could now also be an attractively priced CAD engine for third party developers that have nothing to do with the construction industry. If this can help DataCAD LLC's bottom line, then this is good for all of us.
- b. For programmers: I am a complete novice at Pascal/Delphi, so don't ask me to elaborate, but here is what programmers can expect: 95% of the functions in

DataCAD will be available to programmers; macros will be compiled as .DLL's that communicate with DataCAD; DCAD LLC's "first pass" will be to provide "Header Files" for DCAL/Delphi (I don't know what they are, so don't ask!); programmers will need to learn to deal with "State Machines" (again, I don't know what they are, so don't ask!); after Delphi there may be the opportunity to translate to C++ and other modern languages, though *not* Java.

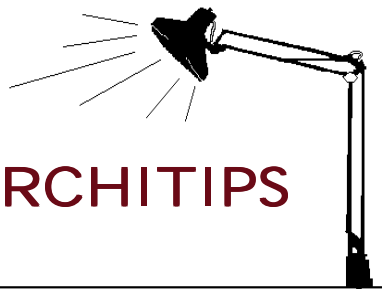
c. DataCAD LLC will selectively update macros that make sense, such as AEC_MODL, Roofit, etc. You can see a sample of the new dialog boxes being roughed out for windows in the AEC_MODL macro at

<http://members.bellatlantic.net/~vze2sgzx/avon/avon.htm>.

6. Custom Database & Keynoting: those of you who use extensive keynoting on your drawings, DataCAD 11 will soon have more tools to automate the process. It involves your symbols being able to access and apply the data in a comma separated database outside of DataCAD, where you can select the data via a drop-down menu from within your symbol. You can then create custom forms that can be printed out or placed in your drawings. Any symbol can access any database information from any number of databases; you are not limited to accessing only one comma separated database file per symbol. This will all eventually lead to developing interactive door, window and finish schedules.

7. DataCAD 11 LT: DataCAD had hoped to preview the program tonight, but unfortunately they didn't feel it would be ready for prime time for another few weeks. But we did find out that there will be access to more of DataCAD's standard features than there was in the v.10 LT version. For one thing, the file size limit will be upped from 8mb to 15mb. An unlimited number of hatch patterns will be supported, and 256 linetypes will be available. Things that will *not* be in LT version include: XREFs (you can view them if created in v.11, but you can't create them in LT); hyperlinks; command line alias, spell check, contour search, TIN modeler, Ruled Surfaces, 3D Knife, Section Tool, Multi-Scale Plotting, direct PDF export, batch plotting, and file compression (though it will read files compressed by v.11).[And no, *ALT-Set All*.]

8. ACAD compatibility things which may be coming soon to v.11: the ability to directly read .SHX files and fonts directly; the ability to load all the ACAD linetypes in the .DWG file, directly into DataCAD.



ARCHITIPS

Antiques Road Show: 20 Years of DataCAD History

At the regional Users Group Meeting in Avon, Connecticut last month, a fascinating table display was created of artifacts from the 20+ year history of DataCAD. Not only was it a fascinating record of DataCAD history, it was a fascinating record of CAD and computer history as well. Witness and recall (for some of you) items such as the following.

- *DataCAD 2.0* issued in 1985 and *DataCAD 3.1a* issued in 1987 on 5 1/4" floppies. *DataCAD 4/5/6* on both 5 1/4" floppies and 3 1/2" diskettes. *DataCAD 7* from 1996 makes it on a CD at last.
- A 1987 invoice for *DataCAD 3.1a* for \$2,995.00 as part of an overall CAD system totalling \$17,577.46. Imagine the power of this 17 grand system with its HP Vectra System with 640K RAM, 8 Mhz processor, 20 Mb hard drive, and DOS 3!
- A 1986 issue of *Perspectives Newsletter*, a 1987 issue of *WindowIn on DataCAD*, a 1989 issue of *3-D World* for the CADKEY/DataCAD User, a 1992 issue of *DPA News*, a 1992 issue of *Reference Point*, a 1995 issue of *Key Solutions* — and yes, the very first issue of *Cheap Tricks*, December 1990, which highlighted the very first published cheap trick of photocopying a plan on a transparency and taping it to the screen for tracing!

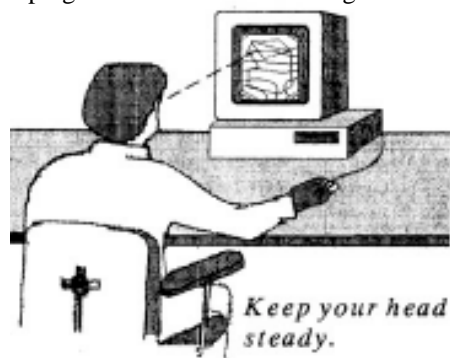


Figure 9: 25' of DataCAD memorabilia from 1984 to 2004.



- The *DEBUG* (DataCAD Boston Users Group) formation invitation letter of November 13, 1987 printed with an Apple II Dot-matrix printer, and *DEBUG*'s first meeting sign-up sheet (amazingly, half the attendees are still active!)
- The Agenda from the first National DataCAD Users Group Meeting on June 25, 1987 at AIA Headquarters in Washington DC.
- The 1988 copy of the *RADIUS* (Raleigh Area DataCAD Information and User Support) Office Standards Manual.
- A January 17, 1990 *DEBUG* meeting attendance form at Chisholm Washington Architects in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which records the first appearance of noneother than *Mark Madura*, then of A.A. Nunes, Inc — Who is this new guy?! [He went on, of course, to become President and CEO of DATACAD.]
- From 1991, an early (then called) *Cheapware* listing featuring the *Wiggle Linetype* (R3), authored by Mark Madura. (He's already tinkering with the program!)
- From November 1994's *Remodeling Magazine*, DataCAD 5 is reviewed as "Five Star CAD: DataCAD is a Gourmet Dinner at a Happy Meal Price." *Still true today!*



Add to that list a host of assorted mugs, buttons, manuals, videos, color cubes, plaques and photos, and you may be able to picture the wonderful rainbow assortment of twenty years of DataCAD history that

was on display. We can only hope that the next 20 years is just as colorful.<



Figure 10: Graphics from the very first *Cheap Tricks*, Dec 90, along with DataCAD buttons and manuals/diskettes from early versions of DataCAD.

