He keeps in touch

Robert Jaquiss: More than a punster

By CAROL KOVAL

The sign on the door says "Caution: Incorrigible Punster, Do Not Incorrige."

But Robert Jaquiss (Computer Science Center, Systems Support Group) is more than a punster. He is a software engineer, inventor, musician and computer buff. And it's sometimes easy to forget that Robert Jaquiss is blind.

People see him frequently in the hallways of Building 50's fourth floor. He works in the Computer Center as a software engineer, and he loves his job.

"I have a real feel for my job," he says. "You see I have to keep in touch with things and sometimes I raise a lot of cane when I wander around."

After talking with him briefly it becomes obvious that he has a lot of "pun" at work—thus the title of Incorrigible Punster. "You shouldn't incorrige me to begin having pun," he warns.

Robert was born in Nebraska and moved to Oregon when he was about three. He has been blind since birth but that has never stopped him. His parents didn't believe he should become an "inmate" in a school for the blind so he has always attended regular schools.
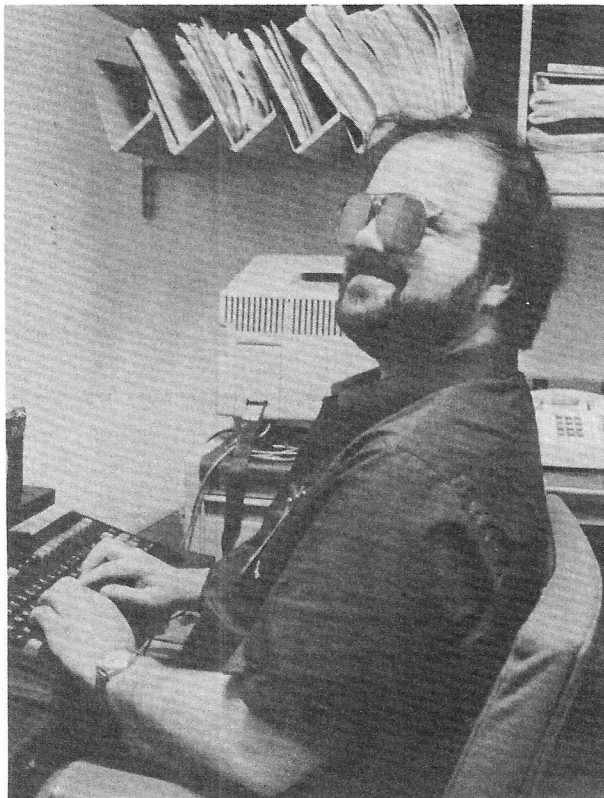
He graduated from Silverton Union High School with honors and went to Western Oregon State College (formerly Oregon College of Education) before transferring to Oregon State University.

His love for computers began when he was in high school. An "early bird" class in computer programming was offered before school began each morning. Robert said he wasn't doing anything at that time anyway so he signed up. He learned how to flip the switches and push the buttons to make the computer read tapes and then he learned machine languages. His Christmas present that year was a trip to the high school where his father taught. Robert got to spend half the day playing with the computer.

"I decided I wanted to major in computers in college so I just kept working on it," he said. "It took me a little bit longer to go through college than some of my sighted friends—it takes a little longer to study when you're blind."

All of his textbooks had to be read out loud to him. "You have to develop a memory and memorize it the first time because there just isn't time to go back and cram for exams."

Robert didn't have a braille printer to help him do his computer programming like the one he uses at Tek. He did all of his own card punching (he's a "touch" typist and has been known to type 60 cards in a row without a mistake), then he submitted the deck of cards and got a printout, and then a reader read it out loud to him.

Finding readers wasn't much of a problem. "There were lots of student wives looking to earn a few extra dollars," he said. "I would hire them and lots of times they'd show up, child in hand. While they read I would entertain the child—in fact I even learned to change diapers—and I never stuck the kid or myself with a pin—that would hurt!

Robert graduated from OSU in June 1976, with a degree in computer science and minors in music and business administration.

He was recruited by Tek while attending OSU and went to work in the Computer Center in July of that year. "I wanted a month or so to relax after school before I started working," he said.

His first job assignment was to implement a language called TESLA onto the 8085 and Z80 microprocessors.

In 1979 he moved to "the other part" of the Computer Center. Since then his job has been more or less to analyze what happens on the computers within the center. "Everytime a command is given to the computers it's recorded on a file," Robert explained. "It's my job to break the files up into pieces so that everything that happens on a particular day is in one place. Then the information is used by the accounting system to send out the bills for people's computer usage.

"I also keep a record of the different kinds of commands used and their frequency of use. I wouldn't call myself an auditor, but there are aspects of that which get in there. Every week I send out reports of what's being used and how often. Those reports are used when people need to decide priorities about what gets fixed or improved or thrown away."

Robert also keeps information on how many jobs are run on the computers each day, or how many lines were run on a particular line printer in any given time period. Most of those figures are used for trend analysis.

"One way or the other when people get reports about what the Cybers are doing, I probably had a hand in that report somewhere along the line," he said.

Robert couldn't do his job without the braille printer he has in his office. It can print out just about any program or retrieve and print any information from the computer that he might need. "Then I can read things and find out what's happening. I couldn't do my job very effectively without it."

Robert has high praise for his management chain and feels he has a lot of support. "Tek has provided me a lot of opportunities and they have been as supportive as a company could be," he said. "Tek bought the braille printer for me to use. I couldn't possibly work for a small company because the value of their entire assets in computers might not even be worth as much as this braille printer. A good braille printer costs about $15,600.

"Tek is trying to keep up with the technology that I need to do my job. Not all companies would do that."

When he isn't punning around or raising cane at Tek, Robert is involved in many things. He's an inventor and is president of the Washington County Chapter of Inventor's Workshop National Education Foundation, a group dedicated to helping inventors get their inventions off the ground.

"People can bring their ideas to us and we can tell them where to go for prototype help, or patents," he said. The group has a strict code of ethics and is very much in favor of the small inventor and the small start-up company.

However, he warned, they won't help people steal patents. If someone *invents something at Tektronix, they* should deal with Tektronix' patent people.

Robert is also active in his church choir and in the choir at Pacific University in Forest Grove. He is an avid collector of antique musical instruments, mostly woodwinds, bells, and some ethnic "stuff".

He learned to play the bagpipes last summer. "I don't know what my neighbors thought—I never asked them," he said with a grin.

Robert says he wants to stay at Tektronix because the company has a bright future and he wants to be a part of it.

"We're going to have to be very competitive and speed up our product introductions," he said. "That's going to require the use of more computers and computerized tools and we're going to have to concentrate on sharing some of the common resources between groups and divisions."

As Tek steps into the future, Robert will be right there—raising cane, punning around, writing programs, and doing all he can to keep in touch with his job—and Tek's future.□

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