

January 2003

BLUE SKY RANGERS REUNION



Standing (l to r): Bob Newstadt, Dale Lynn, Bill Fisher, Stephen Roney, David Warhol, Mark Kennedy, Ray Roux. Seated: John Sohl, Michelle Mock, Keith Robinson

A dozen of the original Intellivision game developers returned to Hawthorne, California on Saturday, January 18, to commemorate the 19th anniversary of the close of **Mattel Electronics**.

Programmers **John Sohl** (*Astrosmash*), **Stephen Roney** and **Bill Fisher** (*B-17*

Bomber, *Space Spartans*), **David Warhol** (*Mind Strike*, *Thunder Castle*), **Mark Kennedy** (*Kool-Aid Man*, *Centipede*), **Bob Newstadt** (*Pinball*), **Keith Robinson** (*TRON Solar Sailer*), and **Michelle Mock**, who worked on the unreleased *Off the Wall*, were joined by graphic artist **Joe King** (*Hover Force*), game testers **Traci Roux** and **Dale Lynn**, and systems engineer **Ray Roux**. Programmer **David Akers** (*Star Strike* for the **Atari 2600**) called from San Jose, where fog had grounded his flight to Southern California.

The annual reunion was held at **Jino's Pizza**, a regular lunch spot for the programmers during their Mattel days. Mattel itself moved out of Hawthorne years ago for nearby El Segundo, its six-story headquarters torn down and replaced by a Ford dealership.

As usual, talk turned to war stories about **Mattel**. **Mark Kennedy** shared one story. Mark was one of several programmers hired away from **Mattel** by **Atari** in 1983 to program **Intellivision** games. Mattel sued, alleging that the programmers had special knowledge of the operating system that amounted to Atari receiving "trade secrets." In programming his first Intellivision cartridge for Atari, **Centipede**, Mark was careful not to use any features of the Intellivision operating system. But knowing that Mattel would have programmers (and lawyers) going over his disassembled code with a fine tooth comb, he left text messages encoded throughout his program just for them, along the lines of "What are you looking in here for?" and "Why are you disassembling this cartridge? That isn't nice!"



Although programmer **Ray Kaestner** (*BurgerTime*) couldn't attend, **Keith Robinson** passed along some trivia that Ray had told him a few weeks earlier: Mattel instruction writer **Robert Sabaroff**, who did the booklet for the Intellivision version of *BurgerTime*, had written an episode of the original *Star Trek* TV series ("The

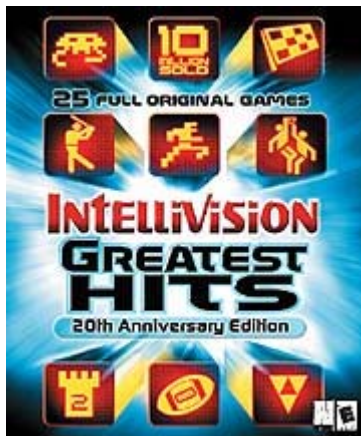


Immunity Syndrome") as well as episodes for other '60s series. Several years after **Mattel Electronics** closed, he returned to writing for television with two episodes of **Star Trek: The Next Generation** ("Conspiracy" and "Home Soil").

In turning to more recent games, **Bill Fisher, President of Quicksilver Software**, had to answer the question: "Where's **MOO3?**" Quicksilver is developing the hotly anticipated PC/Mac game **Masters of Orion 3** (aka **MOO3**) for publisher **Infogrames**. In our [October Intellivision Newsletter](#), the game was announced as having a November 26th release date. Bill had to admit the game still wasn't finished. But despite coming in Number Five on the [Wired News Top Ten Vaporware Titles for 2002](#), Bill assured everyone the game would be out soon and be worth the wait. (The game was completed the following Friday and is now in production.)

While the reunion commemorates the closing of **Mattel Electronics** in 1984, that was not, of course, the end of **Intellivision**. **INTV Corp.** continued to market new games developed by the **Blue Sky Rangers** through 1990. And **Intellivision Productions, Inc.** is bringing the games to new platforms today.

INTELLIVISION TO HIT STORE SHELVES



Two PC/Mac collections of Intellivision games are about to appear on store shelves.

Intellivision Greatest Hits, containing 10 games, is scheduled to sell for \$9.99.

Intellivision Greatest Hits - 20th Anniversary Edition contains 25 games and is scheduled to retail for \$19.99.

These are the first PC/Mac collections of Intellivision games to be available through retail stores.

Intellivision Lives!, with over 50 games, has been available on the Web since 1998.

"We hope a lot of Intellivision fans who haven't found us on the web will spot us on the store shelf," says **Intellivision Productions President Keith Robinson**.

A collection for **PlayStation** appeared in stores from 1999 until 2001: **Intellivision Classics**, now out of print. "We learned an important lesson from **Intellivision Classics**," says Robinson. "Just about everyone complained because so many of the games on that collection required two players - especially the sports titles. That frustrated a lot of people. So this time we decided to include only games for one player or that have a one-player option." Although that meant using the later **Super Pro** versions of the sports games instead of the original versions and leaving off some two-player favorites like **Sea Battle** and **Triple Action**, Robinson says, "These collections are a great introduction to the Intellivision system, or a great re-introduction for the Intellivision fan returning after twenty years."

The two-player games, including the original sports titles, will still be available on

Intellivision Lives!, which will remain for sale exclusively through the Web.

Intellivision Greatest Hits includes **Astrosmash**, **Night Stalker**, **Shark! Shark!**, **Snafu**, **Space Armada**, **Skiing**, **Motocross**, **Super Pro Wrestling**, **Super Pro Football**, and **Poker & Blackjack**.

Intellivision Greatest Hits - 20th Anniversary Edition includes **Astrosmash**, **Star Strike**, **Space Armada**, **Space Spartans**, **Night Stalker**, **Buzz Bombers**, **Thin Ice**, **Vectron**, **Snafu**, **Pinball**, **Shark! Shark!**, **World Championship Baseball**, **Super Pro Football**, **Slam Dunk: Super Pro Basketball**, **Stadium Mud Buggies**, **Chip Shot: Super Pro Golf**, **Poker & Blackjack**, **Reversi**, **Backgammon**, **Thunder Castle**, **Tower of Doom**, **Sub Hunt**, **Hover Force**, **B-17 Bomber**, and **Utopia**. The **20th Anniversary Edition** also includes video clips of classic **Intellivision** TV commercials and interviews with the original game programmers.

Both collections run on **Windows 98/Me/2000/XP** and on **Mac OS 8/9/X** (runs in Classic Mode on Mac OS X).

INTELLIVISION LORE FROM THE FILES OF THE BLUE SKY RANGERS:



THE LAST LIVING CELL IN A DEAD HUMAN BODY

The **Blue Sky Rangers** meet every year on or near January 20 to commemorate the day the last programmers were laid off from **Mattel Electronics**.

Actually, although development of Intellivision games at Mattel Electronics ceased that day, two programmers received a stay of execution: **Mike Minkoff** (**Snafu**) and **Mike Breen** (**Buzz Bombers**). Mattel hoped to sell the **Intellivision** rights and games to another company, so everything - documentation, completed games, work in progress - had to be inventoried and archived. The two Mikes were chosen for the task.

While everyone else went home for the last time on Friday, January 20, 1984, Mike & Mike reported for work the following Monday. The windowless building that had been home to approximately 300 employees now housed 10. The second floor - **Intellivision** and **M Network** development - had just the two Mikes.



Mike Minkoff

Mike Minkoff recalls that after the years of constant game development, arguments, and programmer "antics," the first thing that struck him was that "it certainly was quiet." He felt like he was "working in a graveyard, picking through the offices of departed programmers."

A former programmer who came by to visit Mike a week or so later couldn't help thinking of an episode of the classic **Dick Van Dyke Show**. Working late one night, alone in a New York City skyscraper, Dick Van Dyke starts obsessing on the phrase: "I'm like the last living cell in a dead

human body."

But Mike doesn't recall become obsessed or depressed. He was told he could take off as much time as he needed to interview for a new job, so he pretty much made his own schedule.

In addition to the quiet, Mike Breen found another advantage of working in the empty building: one of the few Blue Sky Rangers who smoked, Mike had always left the building when he craved a cigarette out of consideration for the other programmers (this was before anti-smoking laws). Now, he could light up on the job whenever he felt like it.



Mike Breen



Terry Valeski

In February, Mattel sold the Intellivision rights to a new company headed by **Terry Valeski**, the former senior VP of marketing for Mattel Electronics.

By the end of March 1984, Mike & Mike had backed up all of the game files from the various development systems onto 8-inch floppy discs, and had filed and cataloged all of the documentation. The discs and the documentation were turned over to Valeski. Their task completed, Mike Minkoff and Mike Breen were laid off on March 30, 1984, finally joining the other Blue Sky Rangers.

But one thing Mike Minkoff **hadn't** done was clean out his own office. He got permission to hang on to his Mattel badge a bit longer and to retain access to the building. Mike let a few weeks slip by, but finally, upon landing a new job, he returned and packed up his old Intellivision office. On a day in early May 1984, Mike carried his remaining personal items downstairs, turned in his badge, and unceremoniously walked out of the building - the last Intellivision programmer to leave Mattel.

ASK THE BLUE SKY RANGERS!

Heiko Rickerts from **Hamburg, Germany** writes:



Got a question for the Blue Sky Rangers? Sure, I have!

I was playing **Bump 'n' Jump** for Intellivision nearly 20 years. But at one point there is no way to come over: Second year, fall to winter. Quite at the end of the stage there is a very long jump to make. Anyway you do is wrong. If you try catch the island - you will fail, because the island is never on the same place and the same size. If you try to make the whole jump you will fail as well...

Is there any chance to get further than fall second year?

Dale Lynn, game tester for **Bump 'N' Jump**, replies:



You do need to catch the island - it can be done! You have to stay flexible as, yes, the island changes size and location.

Next, you have to jump as soon as you hit the island (use the island as a spring board). You can not stay on the island for more than a



Dale Lynn

split second!!! This will get you to the next level.

[Got a question for the Blue Sky Rangers? Write us here >](#)

THE INTELLIVISION TRIVIA CONTEST!

Eighteen of you entered last month's trivia contest. The question:

One of the former **Intellivision** programmers designed most of the game boxes and catalogs for **INTV Corp.** For the cover photo of the 1987 and 1989 Christmas catalogs, he even played Santa Claus. What Blue Sky Ranger is behind the beard?

Fourteen of you had the correct answer: **Keith Robinson (TRON Solar Sailer).**



Outtake from 1987 INTV Christmas Catalog photo session. Left to right, Art Director/Santa Keith Robinson, Assistant Art Director Joe King, Photographer Adam Yurman, Set Decorator Caroline Cummings Davis.

From the 14 correct answers, the random number generator at <http://www.random.org/> selected **Dave Jong** as the winner of an **Intellivision coffee mug**.

Congratulations, Dave! And thanks to all of you for playing!

Now try **this** question:

Mike Minkoff and Mike Breen were the last two Intellivision programmers employed by Mattel in Hawthorne, California. Who were the first two?

[Submit your answer >](#)

(If you have trouble following the above link, or if submitting your answer fails, type the URL <http://www.intellivisionlives.com/contest.shtml> into your browser and try again.)

We'll pick a random winner from all complete, correct entries received before NOON PST, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5. The winner will receive an official **Intellivision Coffee Mug** - just like we use here in the office for serving up steamin' hot java!

GOOD LUCK!

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