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Hundreds of font-style combinations from your Tandy DMP printer

Gaining Control Over Your DMP With *PrintChief*

by Greg Shultz

Being an avid computer user, I am always on the lookout for new and interesting programs that will outperform and outspeed the software I presently have on my Tandy 1000 TL. Of course 90 percent of the time, I am only dreaming about making a purchase since these programs' prices are usually beyond my resources. But who knows — the \$25 I spent on *Lotto Magic* may someday pay off, and I will know exactly what new software I want to buy. (Naturally, if I won the lottery, these software purchases would be preceded by the purchase of a 33-MHz, 386 Tandy 4033 LX computer — but that's another dream.)

One afternoon, dreaming about new software, I was browsing through the 1991 *Radio Shack Software Buyer's Guide* when, from a sea of \$249.95 and \$129.95 price tags, a modest \$29.95 figure jumped out at me. So did the description: a 50K, memory-resident printer-control program that allows a simple selec-

Greg Shultz, who shares a house with his wife, Robin, and their cat, Coco, enjoys working on his computer, reading, bicycling, taking long drives in the country, and watching old movies.

tion menu for full use of Tandy DMP printer capabilities, with more than 200 font-style combinations available from most word processors, spreadsheets, and label- and other text-producing programs.

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Gaining Control Over Your DMP With PrintChief*
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By Greg Shultz*
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Greg Shultz lives in Louisville Kentucky with his
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[ PrintChief ]
*
<~ Codes: IBM Tandy
[~] Reset to Normal
[A] Babyface (Microfont)
[B] Bold
[C] Condensed
[D] Double Strike
[E] Form Feed
[F] Line Feed
*
[G] Near Ltr Quality
[H] Proportional STD
[I] Skip Page Break
[J] Twelve c.p.i.
[K] Underline
[L] Wide (Elongated)
[M] Superscript
[N] Subscript
[O] 1/6" Line spacing
[P] 7/72" Line spacing
[Q] 1/8" Line spacing
Command, [F10], or ESC
```

"More than 200 fonts for \$29.95!" I gasped. Immediately I was reminded of my grandfather's wise words: *If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is — save your money.* Over my shoulder I saw my DMP-130 sitting on the table in the corner, gathering dust. "I can't pass up a powerful yet affordable program such as this," I rationalized. Pushing

Grandfather's wisdom out of mind, I decided to make a purchase.

Returning home from my local Radio Shack, I dusted off the DMP-130, unwrapped the *PrintChief* package, and began to explore its capabilities. Now that I've had time to play with it, the best description I can come up with for *PrintChief* is that of a companion program, because it worked with all the software with which I tested it. However, as the manual states, *PrintChief* is described as a printer-control program — and that is what it actually is. *PrintChief* works as an interface between software applications and the Tandy DMP-107, -130, -130A, -132, -133, -134, -430 or -440 printer.

The DMP

As it comes from the factory, your DMP printer is already capable of all the feats of which *PrintChief* boasts. However, getting the DMP to perform them can be a real pain. The DMP-130's manual contains a table listing all the character styles or fonts of which the printer is capable — and then follows this table with as many different BASIC routines. These three- to 10-line routines are used to send codes to the printer to activate each of the fonts. You can imagine the problems that can crop up, what with having to invoke BASIC and running the routines each time you want to change fonts.

Furthermore, if you have ever attempted to change the DIP switches on the back of the 130 to go from IBM to Tandy mode, you

The PrintChief Himself

You might wonder what prompts people to enter the software business and create a program that becomes as successful as *PrintChief*. In the words of this program's creator, Ray Smyth, "That's the rest of the story!"

"I'm just a good ol' country feller who came up with a good idea," Smyth will tell anyone inquiring about his *PrintChief* program. Behind that good idea is a story that began in 1987.

When Smyth decided to buy his first computer, like many new users he wanted to go with a trusted name in the computer business and so selected the Tandy 1000 SX. Of course he also bought a printer — the DMP-103A. Little did he know that the latter purchase would transform him from a mild-mannered Florida gentleman looking for a new hobby into the software magnate behind Arrowhead Productions, Inc., dealing on a daily basis with an international computer manufacturing giant like Tandy.

rescue. Why settle for standard fare when so much more is available? With a simple menu that pops up on the right-hand portion of your screen, *PrintChief* offers you all the fonts listed in the DMP manual, plus a great many more. What could be easier?

Memory-Resident or Not

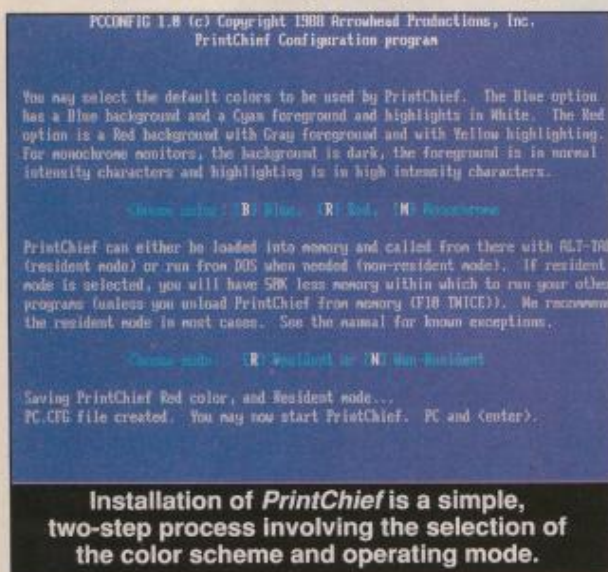
Installing *PrintChief* on your computer is simply a matter of copying the two files on the master disk to your hard drive or onto a working floppy disk and running the PCCONFIG.EXE program. This uncomplicated program, as shown in Figure 1, lets you select one of three color combinations for the menu and then choose how the program is to be run. *PrintChief* can be configured to run in memory-resident or non-resident mode.

While *PrintChief* really shines when it is configured for memory-resident operation, where it can pop up over the application currently running, applications such as *DeskMate* make running it in non-resident mode necessary. Using *PrintChief* with *DeskMate* is discussed later in this article.

Running in memory-resident mode, *PrintChief* occupies a mere 58,000 bytes. Pressing ALT-TAB pops up the easy-to-use menu right over *WordPerfect* or dozens of other application programs. Pressing ESC returns you to your work; pressing F10 twice

removes *PrintChief* from memory.

PrintChief, a very intelligent TSR, knows enough to avoid leaving a black hole in memory. (A *black hole* is created when a



know the problems involved in unplugging the printer and pulling out the paper to even gain access to the switches.

So, like many other DMP owners, I had settled for the DMP-130's standard fare and let it go at that. After all, it did print my documents satisfactorily.

This is where *PrintChief* comes to the

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memory-resident program is removed from memory while another program is running on top of it. That chunk of memory the TSR occupied becomes unusable until the machine is rebooted.) Trying to remove

Actually, Smyth considers himself more a Radio Shack customer than a software mogul. Even so, a look at his background proves he's no babe in the woods when it comes to business — he's just a modest guy. For 11 years Smyth held a management position at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, and for the last 14 years he has been involved in real estate and land development. In addition he is an active member of the Space Coast PC Users Group, especially the Tandy SIG, and also teaches classes on using Tandy computers.

As many of us did, Ray Smyth started out with a few manuals and a lot of questions. Once he had his system set up the way he wanted and started feeling comfortable using it, he began to take a great interest in his little printer and its capabilities. As he

read the printer manual, he soon discovered that with the BASIC language many things were possible with this printer.

"Back three years ago, I read my DMP-130A manual and saw all the different fonts and great things the scoundrel could do. But how to do them was something else," Smyth said.

With the persistence acquired after many years of working in real estate, Smyth sat down at his computer determined to make the DMP-130A perform. With the printer manual on the desk and the GW-BASIC interpreter's OK prompt staring him straight in the eye, he began to explore the special codes needed to induce the printer to do all the magical things the manual promised. While the small success he was able to achieve made him happy, however, Smyth

couldn't help but wonder, "Who wants to do this every time you need to write a simple letter?" So he settled for the near-letter-quality mode from the printer's control panel and went about his business.

Sometime later Smyth noticed that with a new ribbon installed, his DMP-130A in NLQ mode was smudging some of the characters. Remembering his small triumphs with BASIC printer codes, he thought it might be a simple matter to cure the smudging problem by widening the spaces between the characters. Once again the printer manual came out and he tested his BASIC codes, but this time any success at all eluded him.

"Well, that's when all the wheels came off," Smyth said. "I could not figure out how to do it. After retrieving my printer from the dumpster a couple of times, I sat

PrintChief from memory while *WordPerfect* was running over it resulted in only a beep and a return to the menu. I had to unload *WordPerfect* before I could unload *PrintChief*.

I then set up *PrintChief* to run in non-resident mode simply by rerunning the configuration program, selecting the appropriate setting, and restarting the program. Pressing F10 twice unloads *PrintChief* in this configuration as well.

PrintChief can be configured on the fly by adding parameters to the start-up command. For example, PC B N starts *PrintChief* with the blue color selection in non-resident mode. To start the program with the same color selection in resident mode, simply type PC B.

Before you can run *PrintChief* in either mode, the DMP printer must be connected, online and ready to accept commands. If it is not, *PrintChief* prompts you with a reminder and then pauses until either the printer is placed online or ESC is pressed to abort the program.

Control at Last

Once *PrintChief* was up and running, I was amazed at my new power over my now-obedient DMP. As I experimented with all the features I now commanded, my awakening printer spewed out fonts and style variations just as I told it to do.

A look at the *PrintChief* menu shows some of the possibilities. By pressing ENTER, you can switch between Tandy and IBM modes. The menu lists babyface, bold, condensed, double-strike, italic, near-letter quality, wide, super- and subscript styles. You can command the DMP to perform a

line feed or form feed, to skip a page break, or to underline. Many of these menu selections can be merged as well, for such style



combinations as near-letter quality, bold italics at 12 characters per inch. Again *PrintChief* shows its intelligence in disallowing the combination of conflicting codes. To the above combination condensed style cannot be added, for example, since it conflicts with both the bold and 12-cpi selections.

If you want to start over with a fresh set of selections, just press R for Reset and you

have a clean slate. However, it is important to remember that exiting the program does not clear the printer codes. The last set of codes issued before termination remains in the printer until it is turned off and then back on again. After that, your printer is returned to its standard settings.

How It Works

When you select a font from the menu, *PrintChief* sends to the printer the necessary commands to configure it for printing in the selected font. Then when you run an application program, create a document, and send it to the printer, the font codes are already there waiting — and *voilà!* Out comes the document printed in italics or the dozens of other fonts made possible by *PrintChief's* ability to mix and match styles.

Compatibility Or What?

I was able to use *PrintChief* with all the programs on my computer. It worked perfectly with *WordPerfect*. It performed impeccably with *Quattro* and 1-2-3 as I was able to use the smaller fonts to print large spreadsheets. It worked completely with *PC-Outline*, and it functioned smoothly with DOS in copying ASCII files to LPT1. Furthermore, *PrintChief* cultivated working relationships with *The Norton Editor*, *DeskMate*, *The Norton Utilities*, *The Computer Glossary* and *QuickBASIC 4.5*. From what I have seen, I am positive that *PrintChief* will function with just about any software application that uses a printer.

Other Features

On the flip side of the *PrintChief* menu, accessible by pressing F10 once, you can

down and wrote a three-page letter to Tandy's CEO, challenging him to find one person — just one — from any 10 people in the streets of Fort Worth who could understand his stinking old printer manual."

Smyth continued to steam over the malfunctioning printer and its convoluted manual until a few days later, when his phone rang with an inquiry from Tandy's Director of Customer Service about the printer's problems. He offered to help by authorizing an exchange of the printer or even a refund of Smyth's money.

"No man could ask for more than that," Smyth said. "But, as I told him, the store had already exchanged my printer once and that hadn't been the cure. I didn't want my money back because everything on my desk was Tandy-brand, and it's not my style to

own a mismatched set of equipment."

It was suggested that Smyth take his printer to the repair facility in Orlando. The Director of Customer Service said he would call the facility, speak with the shop manager, and make sure that Smyth got personal attention.

Smyth took the advice. Looking on as the repairman worked on his DMP-130A, Smyth was amazed to see the very characters he had spent days struggling to achieve with his manual and the BASIC codes come effortlessly from his printer at the press of a few keystrokes. The repairman explained that what Smyth was witnessing was a little test program he had developed to verify that a printer was functioning correctly after being worked on. After intense interrogation by Smyth, the repairman decided that

the best way to get rid of this "man of a thousand questions" was to give him a copy of the little program.

Smyth left the Radio Shack repair facility with much more than he expected. He now had a program that would let him get a bold font from his printer simply by typing the command BOLDON and then typing BOLDOFF to return to the regular font. The little program also gave him italics and a couple of other fonts as well.

"I came home tickled that in a crude way I could change two or three of the printer font styles, and using bold did cure my smudging problem," Smyth said.

This handful of font styles contented Smyth for a while, but his appetite was only whetted. Soon he began to think that if someone could write a program that ob-

run the demonstration program to see firsthand exactly what you can expect to receive from the printer control program. (See figures 2a and 2b.)

Not found on the menu but described in the manual is a one-line word processor attached to *PrintChief*. Pressing F3 brings up an 80-column window at the top of the screen. You type your one-liner, press ENTER to save it, and return to the menu. There you make font selections and press F4 to print the one-liner with a line feed or F5 to print it without the line feed. You can continue to change the fonts and press either F4 or F5 over and over again to test different style combinations.

The DeskMate Connection

PrintChief works just as effortlessly with the *DeskMate* GUI as any of the other programs with which I tested it. The only difference was in the operation mode.

The manual explains that owners of *DeskMate II* will be able to use *PrintChief* in memory-resident mode without any special setup. Owners of *Personal DeskMate 2* and *DeskMate 3*, however, cannot use *PrintChief* in memory-resident mode and are instructed to turn to the manual's appendices for instructions on installing the program. I tested the program with *DeskMate 3.3*.

To install *PrintChief* under *DeskMate 3.3*, the manual instructed me to use the setup program and select ASCII as the printer type. This allows use of both the Tandy and IBM modes from within *PrintChief* with the exception of the Bold and Underline features. In order to use these, I had to install an IBM driver, where-

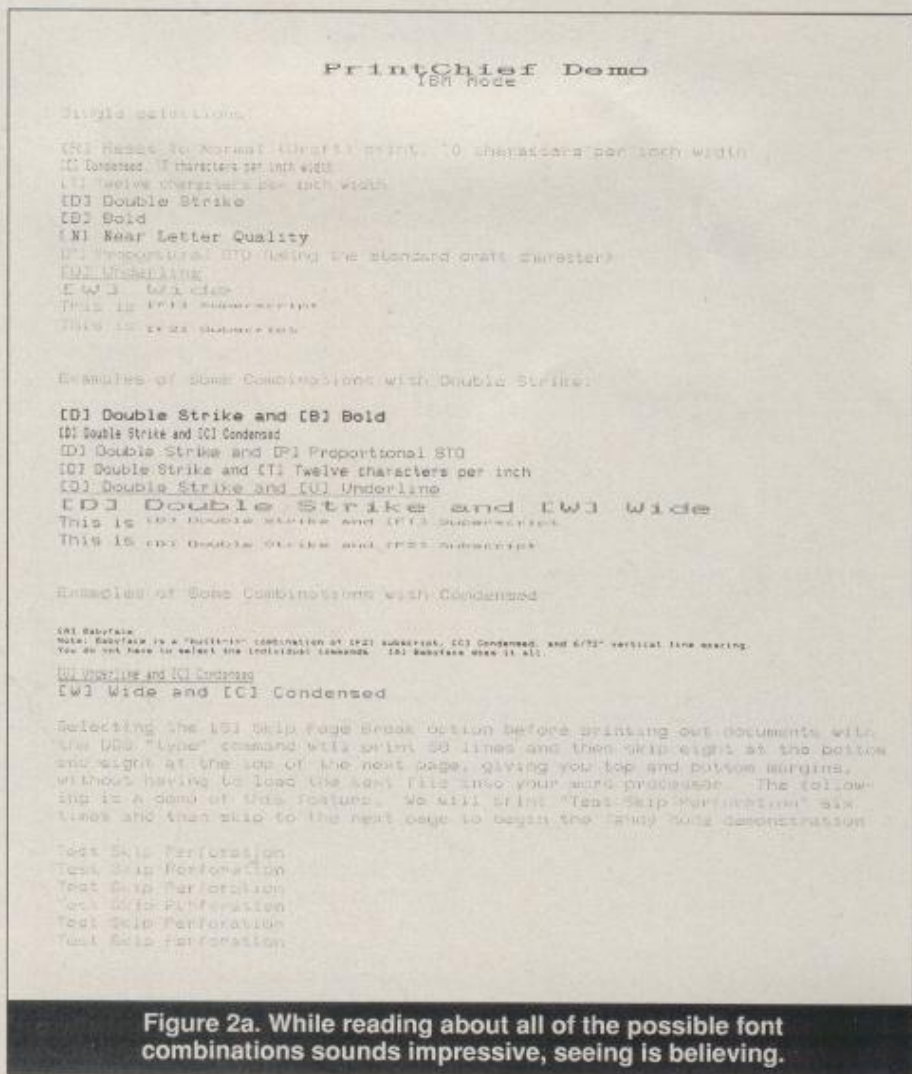


Figure 2a. While reading about all of the possible font combinations sounds impressive, seeing is believing.

tained two or three of the many fonts possible, why not all of them? Smyth imagined that such a program would have to work so smoothly that no one would have any trouble understanding how use it.

"That kind of thinking cost me a bucket full of money and many long hours of frustration," Smyth said, "but today such a printer control program is available to all users of the Tandy DMP-107, -130, -130A, -132, -133, -134, -430 and -440 printers."

After thinking through his ideas many times, Smyth formed Arrowhead Productions and hired a programmer to write the program he imagined. Smyth himself took on the responsibility of testing the program and writing the manual. It took a year to develop a program that fulfilled his requirements. The final release of the *PrintChief*

program was delayed another 18 months due to Tandy's intense evaluation process and the publication dates of *The Radio Shack Software Buyer's Guide*.

Software mogul or just a "good ol' country feller," the story behind *PrintChief* represents the fruition of one man's dream. From a frustrated new computer user prompted by printer problems to write a nasty letter to the CEO of Tandy to the man behind Arrowhead Productions was a long road. "Although it took two-and-a-half years and lots of frustration from conception to market," Smyth admitted, "we do get our giggle boxes turned over when we receive calls from Radio Shack stores throughout the nation with inquiries about *PrintChief*."

upon I found myself limited to using only *PrintChief's* IBM mode.

In order to give *PrintChief* full control over the DMP printer, the line-feed filter box must be changed to the Off position, and the characters-per-inch setting must remain at 10. The next step involves creating a *PrintChief* dialog box using the Desktop menu. After selecting Create from this menu, I was instructed to type *PrintChief* for the menu title and PC.EXE for the program name. The manual then suggests entering .BAT for the file extension. This is done so that the dialog box remains empty and ensures that double-clicking on this dialog box runs only the *PrintChief* program. With *DeskMate* 3.3, I was able to create a button, like the one used for PC-Link, by leaving the file-extension box blank. Of course the Start-up Directory selection will differ from system to system. Positioning the dialog box or button on the desktop concludes the setup procedure.

Conclusions

While I was very impressed overall with *PrintChief*, I did find two drawbacks. The first is that words in the middle of a sentence cannot be printed in a different font (for example, you cannot italicize a word or phrase in the midst of text printed in another font style). Using the one-line word processor promised to offer a solution; when I tried it, however, the print head would position itself over text already printed on the page. I was able to work around this limitation with much difficulty by using the *Norton Editor* to mark and print selected blocks of text with different font selections. I do recognize that this feature is more a function of the software application containing the text than anything with which the printer control program can deal.

The other drawback occurred when I used the program from within *DeskMate*. Losing underlining I can live with, but losing the bold font was a little harder to swallow. I reconfigured *DeskMate* with an IBM printer driver and regained both Underline and Bold, but in the process I lost the ability to switch to the Tandy mode and subsequently lost Italics.

PrintChief is a product of Arrowhead Productions, Inc., 2764 Hillcrest Ave., Titusville, FL 32796, 800-332-1141; \$29.95. The program can be ordered through Radio Shack's *Software Buyer's Guide* or purchased at your local Radio Shack store. It is available in 3½-inch (Cat. No. 903-2304) and 5¼-inch (Cat. No. 905-2304) disk versions.

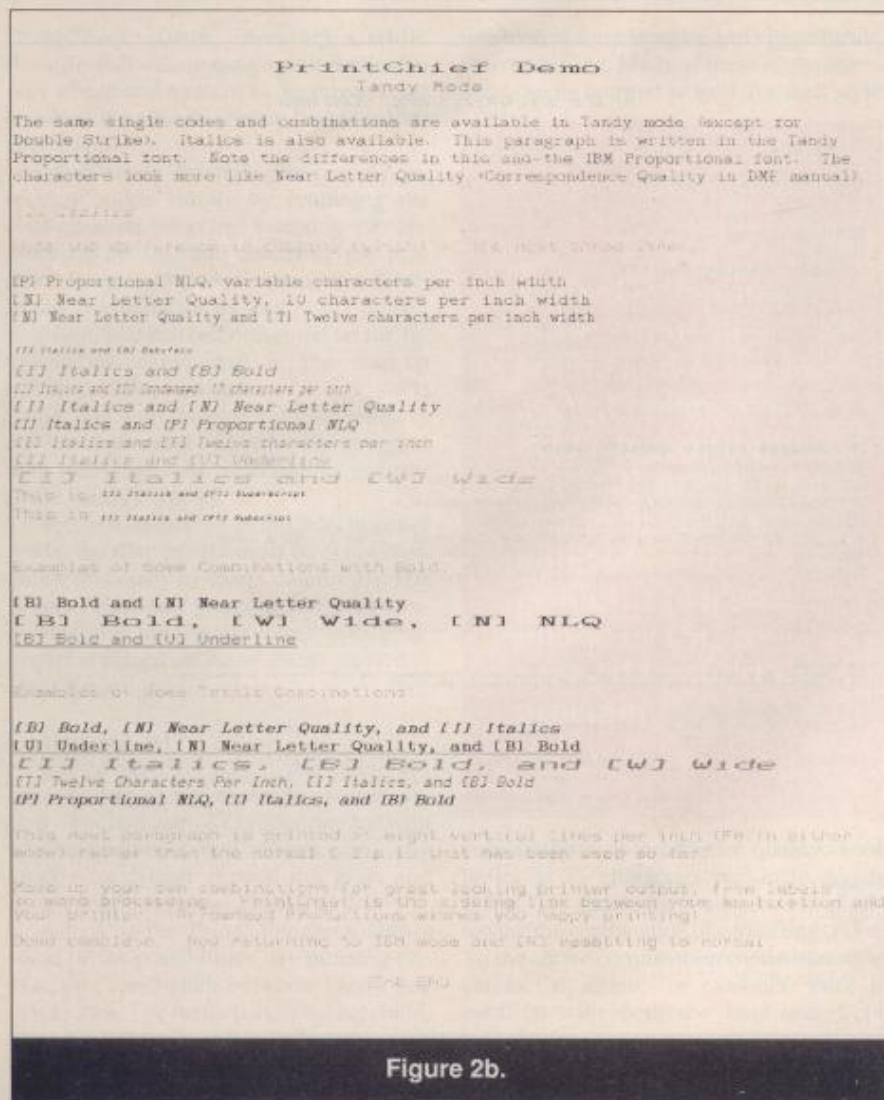


Figure 2b.