

May 25th

Josef Carl Engressia, Jr.

(aka Joybubbles; his legal name from 1991)

Born: May 25, 1949;

Richmond, Virginia

Died: Aug. 8, 2007

Although Engressia was born blind, he discovered when he was five years old that he could dial phone numbers by clicking the hang-up switch rapidly ("tapping"), and at seven that whistling at certain frequencies could activate phone switches.

Engressia's high school yearbook photo shows him in a phone booth, and as a student at the University of South Florida, he was nicknamed "Whistler" due to his ability to place free long-distance phone calls by whistling the proper tones. He later graduated with a degree in philosophy.



J. Edgar Hoover (1940). Photo by Harris & Ewing.

Engressia telephonic skill set attracted the attention of the FBI, and J. Edgar Hoover even circulated a memo to the Secretary of Defense and the Director of the Secret Service, warning of Engressia's activities.

On June 2, 1971, Engressia was charged with malicious mischief, given a suspended sentence, and decided to abandon phone

phreaking [May 17]. Ironically, at around this time he became more widely known, after featuring prominently in the *Esquire* article by Ron Rosenbaum, *Secrets of the Little Blue Box* [Oct 00]. For example, Rosenbaum wrote: "Every night he sits like a sightless spider in his little apartment receiving messages from every tendril of its web."

The 1992 movie "Sneakers" [Sept 9] featured a character called "Whistler", who combined traits of both Engressia and John Draper [March 11]. The character was played by David Strathairn.

First App Store May 25-27, 1993

Electronic AppWrapper (EAW) was the first commercial software distribution catalog to offer digital data encryption and digital rights management for applications, music, and other data. It was developed by Jesse Tayler at Paget Press in Seattle.

The system began as a paper catalog in 1991, primarily listing software for the NeXT computer [Oct 12]. However, by issue #3, CD-ROM disks were being included at the back, protected by EAW.

A customer would check out a demo included on the disc and, if interested, hit a buy button, enter a credit card number, and submit the order via email to Paget Press. After payment, a decryption key was sent to the buyer to install the full version of the software. This was an entirely new way to buy software.

On this day, EAW received an 'official' seal of approval after it was demoed to Steve Jobs [Feb 24] during the NeXTWorld Expo. Taylor recalled the occasion: "He stood there with his hands put forward in that sort of guru, prayer pose – but not saying anything. So, I finished the demo and there was silence when I said, 'so there it is, we think NeXT should put this in a box for

everyone who buys a computer'. He said simply, 'I like it' and nothing more."

Woodstock of the Web

May 25-27, 1994

CERN [Sept 29] hosted the first international World Wide Web conference (WWW1), later dubbed the "Woodstock of the Web." The event was organized by Robert Cailliau [Jan 26].

Eight hundred people applied to participate, but only 380 were admitted, along with many gate-crashers. There were 49 formal presentations, 11 workshops, and numerous informal discussions. After Tim Berners-Lee's [June 8] keynote, the first presentation was by David Chaum on DigiCash, a secure, anonymous system for financial transactions over the Web, which he demonstrated live.

The Best of the Web Awards, set up by Brandon Plewe, were given out on May 26. The best overall site was NCSA [Jan 15], with CERN receiving an honorable mention. The best educational site was "Introduction to Object-Oriented Programming Using C++" created by Marcus Speh. It was the first online course in the Globewide Network Academy (which Speh co-founded). The subject combined a chat room, an HTML textbook, and links to other C++ resources.

The first six inductees into the World Wide Web Hall of Fame were also announced: Berners-Lee, Marc Andreessen [July 9], Eric Bina [Oct 25], Kevin Hughes, Rob Hartill [Jan 5], and Lou Montulli [Sept 8].

The real Woodstock was billed as "An Aquarian Exposition: Three Days of Peace & Music", and is often regarded as a pivotal moment in popular music. It was somewhat larger than WWW1, attracting in excess of 400,000 people. Joni Mitchell wrote the song "Woodstock", but didn't perform

at the festival, or at WWW1 for that matter.



Not the Woodstock of the Web.
Photo by Mark Goff.

Roadrunner Runs May 25, 2008

The Roadrunner Supercomputer (built by IBM and the Los Alamos National Lab) became the first supercomputer to sustain a speed of one petaflop, one thousand trillion calculations a second. It actually reached 1.026 petaflops, and bettered this in Nov. with 1.456 petaflops.

The machine was made up of 12,960 Cell processors (which powered the PlayStation 3 [Nov 11]) and 6,480 AMD [May 1] Opteron dual-core processors. It occupied 300 server racks, covering 6,000 sq. ft.

The Roadrunner was notable for being the first hybrid supercomputer, essentially using the Opterons to handle basic I/O, with the Cells as accelerators. This approach was considered radical but paid off, and many later supercomputers have followed a similar design.

The Roadrunner's primary purpose was to perform nuclear weapons calculations. Non-weapon tasks included helping to map the HIV genetic tree and simulating the Big Bang in an attempt to better understand dark matter.

After a mere five years, it was shut down on March 31, 2013, and its electronics were shredded due to the classified nature of most of its work.

At the time, it was still the 22nd fastest supercomputer but its power consumption was considered excessive. For example, the 21st fastest machine used half the power for the same performance.

CIX Still Alive May 25, 2011

CIX (aka Compulink Information eXchange) was an online discussion system, and one of the earliest British ISPs. In 1988, CIX provided the first commercial Internet email and USENET access in the UK [Jan 29]. At its peak in 1994, it had more than 16,000 users.

The core of its service were thousands of "conferences", similar to newsgroups, but limited to CIX subscribers (nicknamed "The Cixen").

CIX had begun as a FidoNet BBS [Dec 1], set up by Frank and Sylvia Thornley in 1983, but was relaunched in 1987. The service was funded by a monthly subscription charge rather than by advertising.

On this day in 2011, to the surprise of many who thought it was long gone, CIX was purchased by ICUK, an ISP formed by an ex-employee, Leslie Costar.
