Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group

Computer News

Inside This Issue:

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group has served novice and experienced computer users since 1983. Through its monthly meetings, newsletters, online forum, special interest groups, mentor program and community involvement, it has helped educate people of all ages. The NVPCUG provides opportunities for people to find friends who share common interests and experiences. Through its Computers-to-Schools program, members refurbish used computer equipment for donation to local schools. Since January 2003 the NVPCUG has donated 398 computers and 109 printers.

Calvin Ross to Speak on Search Engines at the January 18 NVPCUG Meeting

By Susy Ball, Programs Coordinator

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group will meet Wednesday, January 18, 2006, 7:00-9:00 p.m., at the Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa, California.

Did you ever wonder how a person might use the Internet to perform research to write an article or even look up a recipe or settle a trivia question dispute? Well, you can find out how to do these things and even more when you hear **Calvin Ross,** our speaker at the general meeting of the NVPCUG this month. He is a very popular computer columnist for the *Napa Valley Register*, and he teaches computer technology classes at Vintage High School in Napa. He will be discussing Google's new search capabilities, as well as some of its other new features.

Calvin Ross

Michael Moore, NVPCUG's Computer Tutor Coordinator, has arranged for **Ken Manfree** to conduct the **Computer Tutor** session that precedes the main presentation. Ken will talk about using hyperlinks to access information in a computer. A hyperlink is an element that provides direct access from one distinctively marked place in a hypertext or hypermedia document to another in the same or a different document. Typically, you click on a hyperlink to follow the link. Hyperlinks are the most essential ingredients of all hypertext systems, including the World Wide Web.

Ken is a retired communications equipment installer. He has been an NVPCUG member since May 2000, and he served as Membership Director in 2002 and Programs Director in 2003.

Jerry Brown is our Random Access Moderator. He will lead the **Random Access** portion of our meeting with an open-floor question-and-answer period, during which you can ask questions about specific computer-related issues you have encountered and receive helpful information from other meeting attendees. Don't forget that you can e-mail your questions before the meeting. (*questions@nvpcug.org*)

The NVPCUG can be a resource of practical information about your computer. So bring your questions and friends to our next meeting. **Guests are always welcome**.

President's Message—HAPPY NEW YEAR!

By Dianne Prior

As the new President of NVPCUG, allow me to introduce myself. I am Dianne Prior. When I was in high school in the '60s I decided I wanted to be a computer programmer, although I'd never seen a computer. Later I did do some programming for mainframes with punch cards, until I had my two children. I haven't "worked" since then, and in those 25 years the world of computers and programming has left me far, far behind. I have assembled my own PC computer, but I'm just a novice when it comes to making it work.

Dianne Prior

I wish all our members and friends a Happy and Trouble-free New Year. Computers can give us trouble every now and then for no apparent reason. Finding solutions to our computer hassles is what the NVPCUG is for.

We had a wonderful time at the December "meeting" at **Dick and Sandy Peterson's** Christmas House (lots of tasty food, satisfying drink and good company). **Sandy** won the drawing for the get-acquainted party game we played. **Orion Hill** was selected as "Outstanding Member" for all the efforts he has put in for the NVPCUG, especially his work on the Computers-to-Schools program and the Used Computer Equipment Sales. Orion organized a silent auction for the Holiday Party that brought in $113.50.

Thank you to all the members who are serving on the Board of Directors for 2006 or otherwise helping out. These members are: **Susy Ball** (Programs Director, Product Review Coordinator with **Marcia Waddell**), **Ron Dack** (Vice President, Webmaster), **Orion E. Hill** (Computers-to-Schools Coordinator.), **Julie Jerome** (Secretary), **Bob Kulas** (Special Projects**), John Moore** (Facilities Coordinator), **Dick Peterson** (Mentor Program Coordinator), **John Simcoe** (Publicity), **Jim Stirling** (Newsletter Editor), **Dean Unruh** (Librarian), and **Roy Wagner** (Treasurer). Other members helping out are: **Jerry Brown** (Random Access), **Jim Gillespie**, **Jim Hearn** (Newsletter Circulation), **Mike Moore** (Computer Tutor), **Bob Simmerman** (Greeter Coordinator), **Marcia Waddell** (Product Review Coordinator with **Susy Ball**), and **Bill Wheadon** (Computer Recycling Coordinator). I will rely on your strong support.

For the time being I will continue as Membership Director.

We still need someone for the position of Used Computer Equipment Sales Coordinator. If you would be willing to at least work on that committee, please contact me or any of the directors.

I hope we will have a fun year with smooth sailing.

Peace and Good,
Dianne Prior

Come to the NVPCUG General Meeting on the Third Wednesday of Each Month

NVPCUG Special Interest Groups

In SIG meetings you can learn about a subject in greater detail than is feasible at NVPCUG general meetings. SIG meetings are open to everyone. Meeting times and locations occasionally change, so for current meeting information, see our Web site, *www.nvpcug.org*, or contact the SIG leaders.

Digital Photography SIG
Meets: Monthly, second Wednesday
7:00 to 8:30 p.m
Piner's Nursing Home,
Conference Room
1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
Leader: **Susy Ball**
(707) 337-3998
SusyBall@aol.com

eBay SIG
Meets: Monthly, fourth Wednesday
7:00 to 8:30 p.m.
Napa Valley Genealogical Library
1701 Menlo Ave., Napa
Leader: **Tom Kessler**
(707) 258-1884
kesstom@yahoo.com

Investors SIG
Meets: Monthly, second Monday
5:30 to 7:30 p.m
Jerry Brown's home,
23 Skipping Rock Way, Napa
Leader: **Jerry Brown**
(707) 254-9607
bqandjbb@sbcglobal.net

Macintosh SIG
Meets: Monthly, second Thursday
6:30-8:30 p.m.
Napa Senior Activity Center
1500 Jefferson St., Napa
Leader: **Jim Gillespie**
(707) 252-1665
napanerd@pacbell.net

Membership News
by Dianne Prior, NVPCUG Membership Director

A BIG WELCOME BACK to Bob McKenzie, who has rejoined our group after over four years' absence. We look forward to having him with us.

THANK YOU to the 15 members (including 2 associates) who renewed in December. Because of the holidays I've been way behind on notifying individuals that their memberships are expiring. I hope to rectify that in the next few days.

Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group
Officers for 2005

Board of Directors

President	Dianne Prior*	252-1506	President@nvpcug.org
Vice President	Ron Dack		VicePresident@nvpcug.org
Secretary	Julie Jerome	224-6620	Secretary@nvpcug.org
Treasurer	Roy Wagner	253-2721	Treasurer@nvpcug.org

Other Directors: Susy Ball, Jim Gillespie, Orion E. Hill, Bob Kulas, John Moore, Dick Peterson, John Simcoe, James Stirling, and Dean Unruh

Appointed Officers

Computer Equipment Sales Coordinator	(Volunteer Needed)		
Computer Recycling Coordinator	Bill Wheadon	224-3901	Recycler@nvpcug.org
Computer Tutor Coordinator	Mike Moore	255-1615	Tutor@nvpcug.org
Computers-to-Schools Program Coordinator	Orion E. Hill	252-0637	CTS@nvpcug.org
Facility Arrangements Coordinator	John Moore	252-3418	Facility@nvpcug.org
Greeter Coordinator	Bob Simmerman	259-6113	Greeter@nvpcug.org
Librarian	Dean Unruh		Librarian@nvpcug.org
Membership Director	Dianne Prior	252-1506	Membership@nvpcug.org
Mentor Program Coordinator	Dick Peterson	224-6170	Mentors@nvpcug.org
Newsletter Circulator	Jim Hearn	224-2540	
Newsletter Editor	James Stirling	944-1177	Editor@nvpcug.org
Product Review Coord.	Marcia Waddell	252-2060	Reviews@nvpcug.org
Programs Director	Susy Ball	337-3998	Programs@nvpcug.org
Publicity Director	John Simcoe	258-8233	Publicity@nvpcug.org
Random Access Moderator	Jerry Brown	254-9607	Questions@nvpcug.org
Special Projects Director	Bob Kulas	255-9241	Projects@nvpcug.org
Webmaster	Ron Dack		Webmaster@nvpcug.org

*All telephone numbers are in Area Code 707.

NVPCUG Calendar

Wednesdays	9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Computers-to-Schools work parties. To volunteer, contact Orion Hill, (707) 252-0637.
January 4	7:00-9:00 p.m.	Board of Directors meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
January 9	5:30-7:30 p.m.	Investors SIG meeting, Jerry Brown's home, 23 Skipping Rock Way, Napa
January 11	7:00-8:30 p.m.	Digital Photography SIG meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
January 12	6:30-8:30 p.m.	Macintosh SIG meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson St., Napa
January 18	6:30-9:00 p.m.	General Meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson St., Napa
January 25	7:00-8:30 p.m.	EBay SIG meeting, Napa Valley Genealogical Library, 1701 Menlo Ave., Napa

Heroes of Might and Magic I-IV

By Amitabh S. Bedi

I have been a strong fan of the turn-based role-playing strategy series of four games known as "Heroes of Might and Magic" (HMM) since I first encountered them almost ten years ago. I do not care much about most turn-based strategy games, but this series is exceptional.

Now many HMM fans are asking about Heroes V, which should be out in 2006. The series was started by New World Publishing and continued jointly with 3DO (which had acquired New World Publishing). After the firm went out of business, rights to the series were acquired by Ubisoft. Nival Interactive is developing Heroes V for Ubisoft.

With the projected release of Heroes V only months away, a review of the series and its development seems appropriate. Hopefully Ubisoft will continue to produce the earlier games as well as the newest one.

Heroes

HMM has two major features: a strategical element and a role-playing element. The heroes of HMM provide the role-playing element within each game of the series.

They gain experience, develop skills and acquire useful items. They serve as your generals and you lead them into battle. In Heroes I, II, and III, each army consists of one hero and at least one creature. Armies require heroes to move around the world, but not to garrison towns, castles, and other locations (Heroes III allowed you to garrison mines and fortresses). Heroes IV differs in that it allows for armies with two or more heroes as well as many creatures, for armies consisting solely of heroes, and for armies consisting solely of creatures. However, heroes are still needed to attack garrisons or to claim mines, towns, or creature dwellings.

Hero Skills and Types

Each hero in Heroes I, II, III, and IV belongs to a hero type. However, the nature of the hero types and the number of them has changed as the series has evolved. In Heroes I and II, there is one hero type per creature alignment. In Heroes III there are two hero types per creature alignment. Heroes IV has several dozen hero types. In Heroes I, II and III the hero type is fixed and unchange-

Orion E. Hill Named Outstanding Member of the Year 2005

Orion E. Hill was recognized as Outstanding Member of the Year at the NVPCUG holidays party on December 21, 2005. President Dianne Prior presented Orion with an award and a gift basket. The selection of Orion was made by the 2005 board of directors at its final meeting December 7.

This was the second time the board has recognized a member with this designation; Bill Wheadon was the board's choice in 2004. Orion, who has been a member of NVPCUG since 1995, has served as an elected or appointed officer for ten years, frequently filling more than one position at a time. He served as president of the group in 2004 and 2005, after having functioned at various times as vice president, programs director, treasurer, membership director, special projects director, computer recycling coordinator, used equipment sale coordinator, and computers-to-schools program coordinator. Many of these programs were initiated by him.

Many of Orion's efforts have resulted in

Orion E. Hill

NVPCUG's outreach to the Napa Valley community. His work with the Computers-to-Schools program, aided by volunteers who put in hundreds of hours in refurbishing donated computers, has resulted in the presentation of nearly 400 fully operational computers and 109 printers to Napa County public schools, with additional equipment given to nonprofit organizations and disadvantaged students and adults.

Orion has also been active in recruiting and coordinating volunteers to assist with the Napa County electronic waste recycling events annually since 2001. This program has resulted in not only the retrieval of thousands of pieces of usable computer parts, but also the safe delivery of tons of obsolete or unworkable materials for disposal. Other retrieved or donated computer equipment was offered to the public for sale at greatly reduced prices, netting $8,400 for NVPCUG operating expenses and special projects.

able. In these games, if you know a hero's type you may be able to predict what skills the hero will start with and what kinds of skills it is predisposed to develop. In Heroes IV, hero type is determined by hero skill specialization and can be changed, albeit with some difficulty.

Moreover, the nature of the heroes' skills has changed considerably as the game evolved. The main characters of Heroes I have four primary skills: Offense, Defense Knowledge, and Power. Offense and Defense improve the offensive and defensive abilities of the creatures under a hero's command. Heroes possessing spell books memorize spells and cast them. Heroes may forget spells after casting them, and the number of times a hero can cast a spell without forgetting is primarily determined by its Knowledge. The strength or duration of a hero's spells is determined by its Power.

Heroes II changed the nature of Knowledge. Here heroes have mana and use it to cast the spells they have learned. The amount of mana that heroes have is primarily determined by their Knowledge. They also are given a different type of skill, called a secondary skill. Each hero starts with two secondary skills (save for the Wizard, which starts with only one) and can learn up to eight (out of fourteen).

Up until Heroes III, heroes of every type started out with the exact same skills. In Heroes III, each hero has a specialty, a skill that no other hero of its type (and perhaps no other hero of any type) has. There are more secondary skills in Heroes III, and each hero can learn up to ten.

Heroes IV has a radically different skill system, one based on skill families and prerequisites, not specialty skills. It does not have the primary skill/secondary skill format of its prequels, although many of those skills are still available to its characters. The way in which they are developed is significantly different. Each hero starts out knowing a little bit about one skill family and can learn up to five (out of nine). It can acquire secondary skills within a skill family only if it is familiar with the primary skill. Development of secondary skills within a skill family is a prerequisite for development of the primary skill, and vice versa.

Heroes IV has nine skill families; five magical families and four 'might' (non-magical) ones. The magical skill families are Nature, Chaos, Death, Order, and Life. The 'might' skill families are Combat, Nobility, Scouting, and Tactics.

Mastering the magic

Heroes have had magic at their disposal since Heroes I. However, the nature of magic and the routes to mastery of it have changed considerably throughout the course of the series. The most important trend is towards professional – ization and specialization, from merely needing a spell book to cast magical spells to needing familiarity with a form of magic in order to cast low-level spells.

Heroes I and II have only one kind of magic, and any hero with a spell book can cast spells. Heroes II and III additionally require possession of the secondary skill Wisdom for mastery of higher level spells (levels three, four, and five). In Heroes III there are four types of elemental magic (Earth, Air, Fire, and Water), and it is possible for a hero to acquire a secondary skill in each type of elemental magic. Heroes who acquire a secondary skill in any form of elemental magic can cast magical spells of that kind at lower cost and (eventually) with greater effectiveness.

Like Heroes III, Heroes IV has several types of magic. However, the magical specialties of Heroes IV are not the same as those of Heroes III, and there are no spells that can be cast by just any hero. A hero cannot cast magical spells unless he or she has become acquainted with at least one of the five types of magic, and familiarity with each type affords a hero the ability to cast spells of that type (skill levels permitting).

Each magical specialty has a primary skill. As a hero's primary magical skills increase in a specialty, so do the levels of the spells that she can cast. The most potent spells are available to those heroes who develop a magical specialty to grandmaster level (level 5).

In addition to a primary skill, each skill family has three other secondary skills, two of which are the same for each magical specialty. Each of the magical specialties has a secondary skill that increases mana and mana regeneration, and another skill that increases the effectiveness of spells cast. The nature and value of the third secondary skill of the magical specialties varies from one magical family to another.

Creature alignments

A strategy game must have armies for the gamer to lead into battle. In HMM the soldiery come from a wide array of races, which are clustered into groups that might be termed creature alignments. Creature alignment is one of the most important concepts in HMM; each type of creature belongs to a creature alignment and is happiest when all of its comrades (in any given army) belong to its alignment. When there are too many different such alignments in a given army everyone feels worse. Heroes II had six creature alignments: Necromancer, Wizard, Knight, Sorceress, Warlock, and Barbarian. Heroes III kept these six and added three more, though those additions were arguably its weakest ones. Heroes IV eliminated these last three but retained the original six of Heroes II, albeit with different names.

Fans of these four games in the series are eagerly anticipating the arrival of the fifth. □

Ami Bedi is a long-time member of NVPCUG now living in Fresno, California.

Digital Cameras Blossom as Popularity Increases

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; radio & TV show host

Web site: *http://www.casio.com*

Much to no one's surprise, the popularity of digital cameras is exploding, as the quality improves even more and the cameras become more affordable. Digital photography, which was initially slow, grainy, and sometimes difficult to manipulate, has matured and is now nearly universal. With the dramatic improvements in digital camera and storage technology in recent years, much of what early adopters of digital photography experienced has changed for the better.

Sitting in front of me are two digital cameras, each of which is representative of the respective technology of its day.

One is a JVC GC-S1U that is about five years old and still functional; when it was new it was considered a technological marvel and state of the art in its day, but by today's standards it is technologically obsolete. One of the first digital still cameras, it has a 0.3 (that is 3/10) of a megapixel image of 640x480 pixels, which is miniscule by today's standards. It takes 4 AA batteries, which are good for only a few dozen photos before they are exhausted; even less if the integral flash is used. Reviews of the day used the expression that this camera "eats batteries." One of the first cameras on the market to take a memory card, it uses the now large format by current standards Compact Flash (CF) card for additional photo storage. When I connected to the computer via a very slow serial connection the photos were slow to download, unless I used an external card reader. One feature that this antique camera has, still impressive by today's standards, is a 10x optical zoom. The processor in the camera is horribly slow by today's standards, with a noticeable lag between pressing the shutter and capturing the image, along with a long delay for a follow-up snapshot.

The second camera I have in front of me is a new, state of the art Casio EX-S500, one of a series of new cameras Casio is producing in the "Exilim" series. The newer digital cameras on the market clearly show the technological improvements that have become commonplace. They come in a wide assortment of prices and features--tiny key-chain-size cameras, cameras embedded in a ballpoint pen, inexpensive disposable cameras, pocket-size marvels, even Single Lens Reflex (SLR) cameras with extreme resolution rivaling 35mm film, and---using an assortment of available lenses--just like traditional 35mm cameras. Zoom can range from the less expensive and generally inferior digital zoom, to the superior optical zoom. Zoom ranges typically from 3x to 12x, with some models offering a combination of optical and digital zoom to increase the user's ability to manipulate the closeness of the image. Many of the newer digital still cameras can also capture video and sound, often in the popular MPEG-4 30fps (30 frames per second) format, the length of the video being only limited by the amount of storage available on the memory card.

My Casio EX-S500 camera is actually small compared to my older camera, being only about 3.5 inches wide, 2.3 inches tall, and 0.6 (6/10) of an inch thick, weighing only about 4 ounces. This full-featured camera will easily fit in a shirt pocket or purse. It uses the tiny SD memory cards. With an excellent 5 megapixel maximum image size, this camera will take digital photos in six different sizes, ranging from an enormous 2560x1920-pixel size (5 megapixels), to the smaller 640x480 size (3/10 of a megapixel). It should be noted that the smaller the image, the more images that can be stored in the memory card. Also, the smaller images are more appropriate if they are going to be e-mailed, an important consideration in "netiquette." The larger-size images are appropriate if large photos are to be printed in 8x10 inch or 11x14 inch sizes, or even larger.

Zoom is provided by a telescoping 3x optical zoom, which can be coupled with an integral 4x digital zoom, giving a maximum zoom of 12x. The lens produces very bright and sharp images. When the camera is turned off, the telescoping zoom lens is retracted into the body of the camera, making the front of the camera nearly flat. One technological marvel built into this camera is an "Anti-Shake DSP" which is a digital signal processor that removes the effect of moving the camera while the image is being recorded; this contributes to an exceptionally sharp image by removing or minimizing the blurring many of us encounter when we move the camera as we take a photo.

Despite the small stature of the camera, it also can record movies and sound in three formats, 640x480 in both high-quality and normal mode, and a smaller image 320x240 size for extended play. Video is saved in MPEG-4 format, and the sound is saved in the universal WAV format. With a common and inexpensive 256 megabyte memory card, the camera can capture about 8 minutes of video and sound at the high-quality setting, and about 45 minutes at the extended-play setting. Simply, available memory and battery power are the limiting factors in the length of the video that can be shot at any given time.

While my old camera ate batteries, having a very short battery life, this new Casio Exilim has a proprietary rechargeable lithium ion battery with a normal capacity of about 200 photos before it needs to be recharged.

The camera has a shutter speed of 1/8 to 1/2000 of a second, rivaling many of the classical 35mm cameras, and it includes a multi-mode flash, self-timer, bright 2.2-inch LCD screen, and a mini-cradle that simultaneously con-

TID BITS

By Gregory West, Editor, *SCUG Report* and Tid Bits column

"The Sky's the Limit"

Fewer and fewer people today are using that term, and for good reason. In many areas of life there are no limits, including technology. For instance: "As their average commute time rises, North Americans are making their vehicles increasingly homelike, with cushy seats, multiple zones of climate control and DVD players. So it's no surprise that the next big thing in vehicle accessories is satellite television" (Associated Press). I say, never mind with the TV, how about running WIFI through the FM radio; now that would be a good limit for all of us.

Guessed This Gadget?   MP3 player, I presume? Well, you are half-right, partially...Up for a new cell phone and more? Be prepared to see the people around you wired for almost everything: "Sony Ericsson W900 is a high quality fully specified music player, phone and imaging device capable of super-fast downloads of all types of multimedia – music, video and graphics." This gadget is a UTMS machine. It is a "(Universal Mobile Telephone System): third-generation telecommunications system based on WCDMA-DS." With a 2 GB card you can listen to over 100 finger O songs while calling your boss to explain why you are late for work again. According to Sony, this Walkman/Phone/etc. is also "an entertainment device. The W900 exploits the UMTS-delivered capabilities to the full, delivering fast and smooth download and browsing of video, games, sound and graphics. The high performance 3D Java gaming engine is put to the test with the embedded Asphalt

nects the camera to a high-speed USB 2 connection as well as to AC power to charge the internal battery. There is also an "AV Out" jack on the cradle. Included with the camera are two CDs of software to download and manage the still images as well as the video. A set of included video cables allows the playing of video directly from the camera when it is docked in the cradle.

The body of the Casio Exilim EX-S500 camera is stainless steel, and it available in a typical steel-gray color, as well as white or orange-toned stainless steel. This camera has a suggested retail price of $350. Locally these cameras are available at Circuit City, CompUSA, Radio Shack, Target, Ritz Camera, Sharper Image, or online from Casio at www.casio,com.

Casio is now marketing some excellent quality digital cameras and should be strongly considered when shopping for better quality and full-featured digital cameras.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.

Urban GT 3D from Gameloft, where users can experience the thrills of extreme racing at the wheel of the ultimate sports cars." What, no WIFI yet? Darn!

OK, This One Was an Easy Guess? Sort of...

Not really; yes, it is a USB flash drive, however this baby is much more than your average storage case. This is *Bionopoly*. Say what?

According to *gizmodo.com*, this is what is known as a fingerprint reader, "the first USB drive with built-in biometric authentication" or a "bio computer-on-a-stick." Most thumb or flash drives will store only your files; *Bionopoly* does much more, and for about the same price as the others. This gadget claims it "will pave the way for you to do away with the usual start-up process of your computer and directly boot to it. This is because the bootable USB flash drive has a built-in operating system of its own. The system further contains *OpenOffice* to support *Microsoft Office* files, the *Mozilla FireFox* Web browser, and an e-mail client, as well as an instant messaging client which supports services like Yahoo and AOL and a PDF-creating program." Fabulous features; however I am going to wait until they offer more GBs of storage...and the price wars really begin.

Extra protection for your *Firefox*   One of the reasons *Firefox* is safer than *IE* is that *Firefox* does not entertain *Active X* controls. Now *Firefox* gets even safer with a new "*NoScript*" control feature. "*NoScript*" is a program designed for the *Firefox* browser to allow you to control Web sites from automatically using *JavaScript* or *Java.* You control on which sites you want to use these features, sites you trust.

"This whitelist-based preemptive blocking approach prevents exploitation of security vulnerabilities (known and even unknown!) with no loss of functionality... Experts will agree: *Firefox* is really safer with *NoScript*." *http://www.noscript.net.* "Staying safe has never been so easy!" For all *Firefox* extensions go to: *https://addons.mozilla.org.*

Convert Your Files to PDF - fast and free

It doesn't get much simpler to make your own PDF creations. Some free PDF makers insert advertising or watermarks, but not the *CutePDF* utility. And to make things even better, this program's "configuration choices are pretty close to nil." (*PCWorld* Nov. 2005). Get the details and program download here: *www.cutepdf.com.*

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.

Don't Be a Loser at the Rebate Games

by Jim Sanders, Editor, North Orange County Computer Club, *editor@noccc.org*

Most of us have bought something that sounded like a great value — "After Rebate or Rebates." Everywhere from a great price to *free*! Most such offers are legitimate, though they may require a fair amount of work to claim. Most are never claimed. Most offers say you will have to wait 6 to 10 weeks for a check (for some that turns into 6 to 10 months). Many have tricky fine print. A few are outright scams!

Below are a list of things that you should do, as opposed to just think about, if you're going to buy an item with a rebate and have any real intention of claiming the rebate and actually getting it. Following that are three e-mails that dealt with a denied rebate claim for our new President Elise Edgell.

If you are going to buy an item with a rebate, do the following while you are at the checkout stand, ***not after you get home***:

- Write down the sales clerk's name, then ask him to show you that you have all the items needed to claim the rebate. Ask him to put an X on the correct UPC barcode.
- Make sure you have a copy of the correct rebate form(s). Some are inside the box. You just paid for the item, it is yours; open the box and read the terms.
- If it is an upgrade rebate, it is better to find out if your old product qualifies *before* you go to the store. Check the vendor's Web site, call the store and ask!

Read the fine print! Then read it again!

Read the "Proof of Purchase" requirement list.

- Does it require the *original* "Sales Receipt," or is a copy OK? If the original is required, ask the store for a duplicate original that is acceptable for a product exchange if there is a problem with the product. Some stores provide a "Rebate Receipt." Make sure that matches the requirement list.
- Check the postmark requirement, I have seen one that gave you only three days to get it postmarked. Don't wait till the last day to mail it.
- Make sure a Web site address and/or telephone number is included that you can use to contact the rebate center about your rebate. Most of the upscale rebate centers include an 800 number.
- Make two copies of *all* documentation submitted. If you don't have copies and a cheesy rebate center decides to tell you they never received your request, you're up the proverbial creek. I am working on an article about using your scanner for this purpose.
- I think it is a good idea to include one of the documentation photocopies with the submission, to make

the point that you have copies. Mark it "CC: Vendor, My Files." On the larger rebates, buying the 95-cent proof of delivery service at the post office is cheap insurance.

Having a witness to the mailing doesn't hurt. Err on your side of the game. If it says 6 to 8 weeks, check at 6 weeks, don't wait three months. Be reasonable with phone calls, but check the Web site as often as you like. Mark your calendar to remind yourself to check on the rebate. Keep a folder for all of your rebates. Move completed ones to another folder. Once you get your rebate check, read how long it is good for. Some are good for 6 months. Most are void after 60 days. A few are void after 30 days. I got one that was expired when it was delivered. When you think you have been shafted, don't just grimace and bear it, complain. Complain to the retailer. Complain to the vendor. If all else fails, file a complaint with the FTC at *www.ftc.gov*. You can also file a complaint with the Better Business Bureau at *www.bbb.org*. Taking the retailer to Small Claims Court is an option.

The e-mail exchange with BFG Technologies, Inc. First letter

Dear Sir, My name is Jim Sanders, and I am the editor of the North Orange County Computer Club's newsletter, the Orange Bytes. PDF copies of the publication are available at *http://www.noccc.org*. For several weeks I have been gathering material for an article on the rebate games. Our members should see it in the next issue of the newsletter. This is a hot issue with our members, as a number have been burned by various rebate offers. In a lot of cases it was due to not reading the fine print, not crossing all T's or dotting all I's, or a claim that the request was never received or not received in time.

In some instances the rebate was a pure scam. A few refused rebates may be caused by human error on the part of the highly trained, intelligent, well-paid staff of the rebate center. A common reason given for a rebate denial is that a required piece of documentation was not included.

All too often, that claim cannot be refuted, as the original was sent in and the suggestion to photocopy all submitted documentation was not followed because of the hassle involved. In an interesting coincidence of timing, our club President, Elise Edgell, showed me the rebate denial postcard that she received on 7/16/2005. The reason given for the refusal: "We did not receive a sales receipt with your request." She had purchased a BFG GeForce FX 5500 OC at a special Fry's Electronics' one-day sale, where a $50 rebate was offered on your product. In this case, Elise did scan all the documentation sent in with the rebate and kept it as a JPG file. In addition, the origi-

nal documentation was stapled to a printout of that file and a notation was hand-printed on that sheet, in bold marker pen: "CC: Vendor, My Files." That file is attached to this e-mail. As both of us bought the product and requested the rebate in the same way, it will be interesting to see if I get the same postcard.

I understand that you contract the rebate function to other companies, but the typical club member that has a problem thinks the problem is with the company that made the product and offered the rebate. It is your reputation that suffers, not the rebate center.

Would you express your opinion on which of the above reasons might be the cause of this rebate being denied?

Sincerely,
Jim Sanders, Editor, NOCCC Orange Bytes

Response from BFG

Hi Jim,

Thanks for contacting BFG Technologies, and thanks for giving us the opportunity to clarify this particular rebate situation.

Looking at the picture in your attachment of Elise's submission, it appears there is not a copy of her "Sales Receipt" included along with the other required items.

In addition to the "Rebate Form/Receipt" and the "Proof of Purchase" cut from the box, a copy of the "Sales Receipt" is required. With Fry's it can sometimes be confusing because they label the Rebate Form as a "Rebate Receipt." This could lead a customer into thinking that the form was both the rebate form AND the sales receipt, although they are actually two separate items.

Some additional information that may be of interest; this is one of two rebates that have the highest redemption rates we have ever run. This indicates to us that majority of customers are including all the correct documentation and getting the rebate for this particular program.

In this particular case, the rebate house did refuse the rebate on proper grounds. However, we will contact the rebate house and approve Elise's rebate, and yours as well. We often do that for customers who contact us and believe that that they were denied incorrectly. We look into individual cases and make approvals where the facts support it.

Thanks again for giving us the opportunity to respond. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact us.

Kind regards, John @ BFG

Reply to response letter

Hi John,

Thank you for your quick response and also for fixing the problem.

In an effort to resolve why it became a problem in the first place, I made a trip to the Anaheim Fry's Electronics store. I asked to speak to the person in charge of dealing with rebates. The woman that responded to that request was pleasant enough, but not very helpful. I asked why Fry's was having their checkout clerks tell customers that the "Rebate Receipt" is the same as the full sales receipt for rebate purposes. Her response was:

"Well, sometimes it is and sometimes it's not." The discussion lasted several minutes. It bogged down into questions of semantics, perception, lack of explicit wording, and responsibility. Her rebuttal to your assertion that it is a "Rebate Form/Receipt" was that if you cut that form in two just above the line "Rebate Form:" you have a "Receipt" and a "Rebate Form." That to help the customer by not having multiple, small, separate documents that are more easily lost, or difficult to match up with the appropriate rebate form, they are printed together. That the "Proof of purchase requirements:" Section 3, says "a copy of your receipt," not "Sales Receipt," not "Full Sales Receipt," not "Rebate Receipt," just "Receipt." That obviously the "Rebate Receipt" is a receipt. I commented that the Fry's IT department controlled what is printed and how it is printed. That it would be trivial for them to better separate the two forms with a couple of extra blank lines, a line of asterisks, and a line that says "Cut here." That they could easily have changed Section 3 to explicitly state what kind of "Receipt" was required. That if printing the "Rebate Receipt" is supposed to be a courtesy to the customer, it would be trivial to have the computer print out a "Duplicate Sales Receipt" when that was required by the vendor. That if Fry's is going to the effort to provide this courtesy service at all, they should go the extra step, and endeavor to do it correctly, rather than in the current, confusing, fashion. I commented that Fry's apparently feels it is their responsibility to remind customers that they should make a copy of all documentation submitted for a rebate by handing out a yellow sheet with that warning; why not expand it to include a caution about the receipt problem.

Her response was in essence, I don't have any control over what the IT department does. I counted to ten, thanked her for her time and left. I hope this feedback helps you with future programs.

Sincerely,
Jim Sanders Editor, NOCCC Orange Bytes

On 7-23-05 we put on our best optimistic face and went to the *http://www.rebatestatus.com* Web site to see how well the rebate had been approved. We were hoping to see a message like: "The check is in the mail.," and lo and behold we did. Pony Express or 4th Class, but in the mail.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.

The New, the Best, and the Worst

Collected by Pim Borman, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.*swipcug@sigecom.net* , November 2005

Vista…

"A distant view or prospect, especially one seen through an opening, as between rows of buildings or trees." (*Dictionary.com*)

It is also the name of the long-awaited next version of *Microsoft Windows*, not available until at least the second half of 2006 but already widely previewed and discussed in PC magazines. What do we glimpse in the distance? Should we fight or switch?

The most significant improvement in *Vista* might well be security, stated to be a primary goal. Only time will tell – we'll still be facing continuing patches, updates and periodic Service Packs, I expect.

New *Internet Explorer 7* will be a major make-over, mostly to catch up with features long since available in *Opera* and *Firefox*. It will also be available to current *Windows XP* users. *Windows Media Player* gets a boost, but will also be available in *Windows XP*.

Vista will appear in 32 and 64-bit versions, to accommodate the new 64-bit CPUs now available from AMD and Intel. Visually, the windows will sport new folder icons that show thumbnails of their contents, although I wonder how they handle folders with dozens of subfolders and files. If your graphics card can handle it, the icons will also be semi-transparent, wow!

Originally, *Vista* was supposed to support a new file system, WINFS. I understand that this file system does away with branching directory trees to store files. Instead, files all get dumped in large containers, maybe such as the current "My Documents" areas. Instead of assigning unique file names you label the files with any number of suitable tags, similar to the labels currently used in *Picasa2*. The contents of the files are also indexed on the go to facilitate a search for keywords such as already provided by Google Desktop Search and Yahoo Desktop Search. *Vista* is expected to include a similar search function even before WINFS eventually is implemented. But WINFS will not initially be part of *Vista.*

As *PC Magazine* puts it "… it increasingly appears that *Vista's* differentiating features, aside from the sleek new shell interface, will be the ones that are less visible to typical users: hardened security, better diagnostics, and improved manageability in enterprise environments."

Vista will require an up-to-date computer system, with plenty of processor speed, memory, and graphics capability. Manufacturers of scanners and printers will surely provide the necessary drivers for newer equipment, but older peripherals may no longer work. Will it be worth the additional cost and aggravation to upgrade?

Dedicated gamers will love it – they need all the speed they can get, at any cost. Also, if you work with demanding graphics programs, large databases or similar CPU-intensive programs you'll probably want *Vista* for better support of multi-core, 64-bit CPUs. Media enthusiasts will love the new features, but why use them on a general-purpose computer?

For the rest of us, we're probably better off waiting until we need to buy a new computer that is almost certain to include *Vista*, whether we like it or not. At least we'll get it at a discount. I estimate that *MS Windows, Office* and *Media Player* contain at least 50 percent bells and whistles that are of no interest to 75 percent of its users.

Last year Microsoft announced a crippled version of *Windows*, called *Windows XP Starter Edition*, being made available at low cost in certain developing countries. According to CNet News.com (*http://snipurl.com/winstart*) the local versions of the program were made available in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, India and Russia. Cost in Thailand was reported to be $36, not including *MS Works.* Its intended use is in local schools for the obvious reason: catch 'm young. Read on…

…Or Else?

"The MIT Media Lab has launched a new research initiative to develop a $100 laptop—a technology that could revolutionize how we educate the world's children. To achieve this goal, a new nonprofit association, One Laptop per Child (OLPC), has been created."

"The machines, which will run a version of the Linux operating system, will also include other applications, some developed by MIT researchers, as well as country-specific software. 'Software has gotten too fat and unreliable, so we started with Linux.'" (*http://snipurl.com/mitlap*).

These two quotes from recent MIT press releases point at new directions in the Computer Revolution. First of all, there is the realization that computers are here to stay as a basic necessity in a civilized society. To the three **R**s of basic education we need to add a fourth **R**equirement, computer lite**R**acy. The cost of general purpose computers has to come down further to make them available to every schoolchild, even in this country, let alone in the developing nations. That clearly includes the need to eliminate the high cost of the *MS Windows* operating system and commercial productivity programs written for *MS Windows*. Essentially free *Linux* is the obvious alternative.

Here is another quote, from *desktop.linux.com* (*http://snipurl.com/INaccess*): "A number of Indiana high school students returning for the fall semester will find brand-new *Linux* desktops in their classrooms. Under the Indiana Access Program, which uses desktop *Linux* systems

and standard hardware configurations to keep costs low, Wintergreen Systems Inc. and Linspire Inc. are providing computers for classrooms. The arrangement could result in as many as 300,000 *Linux* machines being deployed during coming years, the companies said in a statement." And Indiana is arguably not a third-world nation.

When a new generation of students gets weaned on *Linux,* they are likely to continue using that operating system in the future, creating the critical mass that it takes to become generally accepted as an alternate desktop tool. Some of the students will inevitably be interested in hacking the system, resulting in new and improved programs, as well as some new *Linux* viruses, I fear. Their efforts will be facilitated by the availability of all the underlying code, in contrast with *MS Windows* programs that jealously hide the source code.

Besides the effort to introduce *Linux* in school computers, several large cities as well as developing nations, notably China, have made it a priority to deploy *Linux*-based desktop computers. In the near future most of the growth of *Linux* will probably take place in developing areas of the world. Acceptance in the USA and other Western countries will be slowed by the difficulty or reluctance of users to transfer databases from *MS Windows*-based programs to comparable *Linux* programs. It may take another generation, but after maturing overseas *Linux* is likely to return in force to the Western world.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.

Informative Tech News
By Bob Elgines; CRCC Editor, *elginesz@rraz.net*

More Free Spyware - There is another one out there like *Spybot*, called *SpyBlaster,* which can be downloaded at: *www.javacoolsoftware.com*. There is a slight catch— you will need to manually update, unless you pay $10 for an automatic update subscription. This, unlike *Spybot,* will prevent installation of spyware.

PCI Express vs AGP-8X Graphic Cards - Are they here to stay? The PCI-Express cards are about the same speed and higher in price. So don't run out and change your motherboard to accommodate the PCI-Express. The only difference right now is the bandwidth, but there are not programs out there to use this advantage. Its main use would be for gaming.

Windows 2000 Info! - Microsoft released an update containing a collection of previous patches. The final service pack for *Windows 2000* is SP4, which was released in March, 2003. Support for *Windows 2000* will end in 2010.

What is "*Windows XP N*"? - *Windows XP N* is a version without the *MS Media Player*. *Windows XP Home* (the standard version) sells for the same price.

What is "Windows XP Media"? - Basically the standard home version with all of the latest photo, music, and movie enhancement pack. This includes such things as *Plus!Photo Story, Media player, Movie Maker*, etc. These items can be downloaded from Microsoft for free in most cases.

New Microsoft Windows Software - Microsoft's new operating system called "*Longhorn*" has been officially named "*Windows Vista,*" and it is set to be released to the public in 2006. The three new goals are summarized as Clear (new methods), Confident (better security) and Connected (seamless) by Microsoft developers.

New WD Hard Drive - Western Digital released a new high-class series of Caviar drives and announced a new high-capacity drive of 400 GB SATA (Serial). This drive has a speed of 7200 rpm, 16 MB of cache, and a transfer rate of 150 MBps. The WD Caviar SE16 400 GB is priced at approximately $280, with a three-year warranty.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.

A USB Primer

By Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D., Sarasota PCUG, Florida

By now most computer users are familiar with the term USB, or Universal Serial Bus. This connection port on your computer is designed to replace the older serial, parallel and PS2 ports. Probably within a year you won't find any new computers with these older ports. They will have only USB. There are some things you might find useful about USB ports and hubs that could reduce or eliminate problems in dealing with them.

USB ports have a number of advantages over the old system of parallel/serial ports. They do not require I/O memory space or individual IRQ lines. Anyone who has had to work with older computers and operating systems will remember the problems of trying to prevent IRQ conflicts when connecting external devices such as scanners or modems. How many times did the sound card manage to steal IRQ's that you had to have for another device? USB also allows for automatic device configuration and hot-plug capability. The hot-plug or hot-swap function means that you don't have to power down the computer and go through a restart when you want to connect a new device. In instead you simply connect or disconnect the USB cable. The computer will recognize the device and connect to the proper driver. That is assuming this isn't the first time you have used the device and that the driver has already been installed. You commonly have to install drivers for external hard drives, printers, scanners, card readers, etc. You generally don't have to install drivers for mice and keyboards that connect to the USB ports.

Next, consider that USB operates at three possible speeds: low speed, or 1.4 megabits/second; full speed, or 12 megabits/second; and high speed, or 480 megabits/second (mbps). Low speed and high speed can be used with either USB 1.x or USB 2.0 hosts. The high speed can be used only with USB 2.0. The host is the computer that provides the USB connections. For USB 2.0 operation the host computer's "root port hubs" must support USB 2.0. That means the computer must have USB 2.0 drivers that are supported by the operating system. *Windows XP* (service pack 1.0) and *Windows 2000* both support USB 2.0. The root port hubs are the USB connectors on your computer and are usually connected to the motherboard. You can also identify them in the Device Manager where they will show under the USB Host Controller.

Although the USB specifications indicate you can daisy-chain up to 127 devices from one port, this is not likely to happen, because of the power drop that occurs over long connections. You can get external hubs that allow you to connect 4–7 devices to a single root port hub. The external hubs are repeaters that relay transaction information from the computer to a device connected to the hub's port. There is a catch to this as well. Some USB 2.0 hubs will decrease their maximum output if you have a USB 1.x device attached to a port. This means that any USB 2.0 device attached to the hub may not function or will function at a lower speed. I learned this the hard way with an external USB 2.0 hard drive. I thought the problem was the drive, but it was the hub. I had a USB 1.0 card reader attached to the hub, and as a result the current output to each port was reduced to the point that it was not sufficient to run the drive. This occurred even though the hub and the drive had external power supplies.

An ample power supply is necessary to operate USB devices. Root hub ports can provide 5 volts and up to 500 milli-Amps (mA) of current. The USB power specifications state the USB ports should provide between 100 mA and 500 mA. Devices connected directly to the computer are able to obtain the maximum current. So let's take a situation where we have a hub connected to the computer's root port hub. The hub is receiving 500 mA of current at about 5 volts. If only the current received through the connecting cable powers the hub, the output from each of its four hubs will be only 100 mA. This is referred to as a "bus-powered" hub because it receives its current solely from the USB bus in the host computer. However, if the hub has its own power supply and is receiving at least 1.6 Amps from this supply, then it can provide a 500 mA output at each port. In this case, the hub should be able to support high-speed USB 2.0 devices.

On some computers you will find an icon in the system tray that is a "hardware disconnect." In this instance, you need to double-click the icon and wait for it to permit you to disconnect the hardware device. This icon does not appear with all USB devices. Since installing SP2, I haven't seen this icon in my system tray. There are some reports of computers with SATA drives showing this icon. Since the SATA drive is supposed to be hot-swappable like USB devices, I'm not surprised that the icon shows up. However, with my Seagate SATA drive, I still don't see this icon. That may be because my motherboard doesn't support the hot-swap function even though it supports SATA drives.

When you plug in a USB device to either a hub or a computer port, there is an initial identification process referred to as the "configuration" step that occurs. During this configuration process the device cannot draw more than 100 mA. If it does, the process will fail and it will appear that the device failed to work. The configuration process identifies the device, its drivers, and its power requirements. Only after this process is complete will the device be able to draw more than 100 mA current. Since this process is not instantaneous, some time must be allowed by the user before attempting to use the device. In

addition, this configuration may not occur if the device is plugged into the computer before the computer is turned on and booted. In these cases, it may be better to connect the USB device after the computer is fully operational. Most of the time, the computer will identify and configure the device during the bootup.

Microsoft has a knowledge-base article on troubleshooting USB problems (#310575). Typically the problems relate to drivers or power problems. However, they also point out that high-speed devices should be connected with high-speed cables only. The low-speed cables may distort the signal as a result of their reduced amount of shielding. Another really complete source of troubleshooting information can be found at: *http://www.usbman.com/winxpusbguide.htm*. This has references for *Windows ME* as well as *XP* and *Windows 2000*. However, anyone who hasn't dumped *Windows ME* should seriously consider doing so as soon as possible. *WinXP* is such a tremendous improvement over *ME* and will really make your computing experience much more enjoyable. My computer hasn't locked up or crashed in more than six months, probably longer. I really don't keep track anymore.

So what devices are typically high speed and require USB 2.0? Let's start with external USB hard drives. Seagate has a very interesting technical paper on external hard drives. In this paper they state that most 2 ½" external drives require 1000 – 1100 mA during the start-up cycle and then can function at the 500 mA maximum current available from the USB port. They also state that most USB ports can support up to 700 mA on a continuous basis. This is something I have not found elsewhere. Consequently, my recommendation is that when looking for an external drive, pick one with its own power supply. I wouldn't want to depend on one that drew all its power from the USB bus.

Other high-speed devices include laser printers, scanners, and multi-function printers. All of these should have their own power supply. Other devices that operate at full-speed and don't need external power are blue-tooth adapters and card readers. This is only a partial list of what is available in USB devices. Just remember when you are looking at them that the term full-speed does not mean 480 mbps, instead it is the slower 12 mbps.

Dr. Lewis is a former university and medical school professor. He has been working with personal computers for more than thirty years. He can be reached via e-mail: *bwsail@yahoo.com.*

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.

Tech News

By Sue Crane, Vice President & Editor, Big Bear Computer Club, California
www.bbcc.org   sue.crane@charter.net

AMD plans 4-core Opterons by 2007

Advanced Micro Devices put a quad-core server processor on its road map and promised to upgrade its software investments, as it outlined its general technology direction for the next couple of years. The new processor will incorporate four cores connected together by a new version of the Hypertransport Interconnect technology, and will support DDR3 (double data rate 3) memory. The 2006 dual-core chips will also introduce AMD's Pacifica virtualization technology and its Presidio security technology into AMD-based systems. AMD's goal for 2006 is to improve its standing within the business PC market, both in desktops and notebooks.

Phishers use Phony IRS Tax Refund to Scam Consumers

A spam e-mail message has been sent around the world telling people they are eligible for a $571.94 tax refund from the IRS. The e-mail offers a link to a fraudulent IRS Web site, but the link actually goes through a legitimate Government Web site. The link in the phishing e-mail goes to a forged IRS Web site that asks for a Social Security number, tax returning filing code and credit card details including security codes and PIN. The government is aware of the issue and is working to fix it.

New TIVO Product Promotes Targeted Ads

After introducing a generation of television viewers to the joys of skipping over ads, TIVO plans to launch a new service to let its subscribers seek out the advertisements they've cut loose from their TV viewing. Digital video recorder (DVR) maker TiVo is positioning the new service, scheduled for a mid-2006 launch, as a way for subscribers to find targeted ads in categories that interest them. The opt-in technology will let TiVo subscribers use keyword searches to look for information on specific products or services. The ad service will be free for subscribers; pricing for advertisers is still being determined.

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.

Ram & Reason: A Virus and Incident Checklist

By Rob Rice, Member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City

Much has been said about virus and malicious software prevention, but what if all of your precautions fail? So there you are, happily clicking along the Internet when suddenly a popup ad obstructs your view. You start to close it and then another and then another pop up so that in just a few seconds there are so many pop-up ads that you cannot possibly close them all as they just keep coming. So what do you? Delete them as fast as you can in hopes that they will stop? Turn off the computer? Suddenly a program appears from nowhere and informs you that you have been infected with a Trojan virus and the program needs to scan your system so that the Trojan can be removed. The problem is that you do not remember ever having installed this program. Do you trust it?

There are some industry-accepted procedures for dealing with this type of incident and any virus or Trojan infection. Just follow these five simple steps in the following order to minimize damage:

1. Do not turn off your computer unless you are certain that your files are being actively deleted!
2. Disconnect the network cable from your computer and/or turn off your wireless connection.
3. 3. Write down any error messages and the names of any programs or software that was running at the time the infection occurred.
4. 4. Mark the computer "Do Not Use."
5. 5. Run any of your applications that you are certain are yours and that might have opened identifying a virus attack. Next, run your antivirus, anti-Trojan tools.

Step 1:

Do not turn off your computer. Not every Trojan and virus is the same, so this rule will have exceptions, but generally you do not want to turn off the computer unless you can see that the virus is deleting your files. If you think that it can be stopped from deleting your files without turning off the computer, then don't do so. The reason is that while turning the computer off will temporarily stop the damage, more harm can come when you turn the computer back on. System files can be infected when loading, boot sectors contaminated, hard drive partitions erased, registries corrupted. For example, on a Windows system every time you make a major system change, one of the first things that it wants you to do is reboot, "To allow the changes to take effect." In the case of a virus or Trojan, the last thing you want to do is to allow the changes to take affect.

Step 2:

Disconnect the network cable from your computer and/or turn off your wireless connection. Trojans are designed to open a door and let other Trojans, spyware and viruses in. Physically disconnecting its link to the Internet stops this behavior, prevents your personal information from going out and prevents other machines from being infected. Many checklists have this action rated number 1, and for good reasons. I rate it here as step 2 because step 1 is simply a quick decision that can have a significant impact on the recovery outcome.

Step 3:

Write down any error messages that appear and the names of any programs or software that were running at the time the infection occurred. This is important not only for repairing the system but also for identifying which alerts are real and which ones are bogus. Error messages that contain misspellings and poor grammar are likely bogus and generated by the virus.

Step 4:

Mark the computer "Do Not Use." This is in case you get called away and have to leave the system alone for any length of time.

Step 5:

Run any of your applications that you are certain are yours and that might have opened to identify a virus attack. Next, run your antivirus anti-Trojan tools. It's possible that your antivirus or anti-Trojan software may have detected the attack and started running a system scan or is prompting you and waiting for instructions. If you are certain that it is your software, then let it do what it wants to do and let it clean the system. If you have any doubts as to whether the program is in fact one of your programs, then *do not run the software!*

Some Trojans actually install and run a program pretending to be antivirus/anti-Trojan software and scan your system, all the while claiming to be cleaning your computer. In reality it is part of the Trojan. Some of these programs look very commercial and very polished, so be careful!

Rob Rice is a computer specialist working in Anchorage, Alaska. Rob can be contacted at articles@isp.com

The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups has provided this article.

Thank You !

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group is grateful for the support provided by the following companies*:*

Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group

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Make check payable to **Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group.**

Mail application/renewal to: **Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group, Attn.: Membership Director, P.O. Box 2866, Napa, CA 94558-0286.**

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Revised 12-4-05

For more information about the NVPCUG, visit our Web site: http://www.nvpcug.org

# NVPCUG Members Enjoy Annual Holidays Party December 21

John Pitt and **Jerry Brown**, a.k.a. Santa Claus and the popular leader of the Random Access feature at monthly meetings and of the Investors Special Interest Group.

Photo by Orion Hill

Two good friends at the party were **Dick Peterson** and **Richard Wagner**. The party was held at Dick's Christmas house.

Photo by Orion Hill
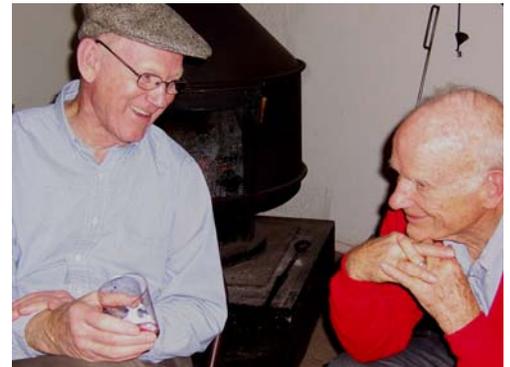
Gathered around a table for the evening meal were **Jaci Tolman, Lee Ward, Lou Schirm, Pete Kreider,** and **Bob Simmerman.**

Photo by Susy Ball

Dick Wolfe and **Ron Dack** exchange humorous comments at the silent auction site.

Photo by Orion Hill

Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group
P.O. Box 2866

Address Service Requested