Napa Valley
Personal Computer
Users Group

P.O. Box 2866
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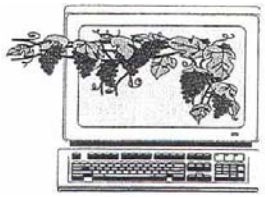
COMPUTER NEWS



Volume 23, No. 7 July, 2006

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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 434 computers and 128 printers.

Internet Security to Be Discussed at July 19 NVPCUG Meeting

By Susy Ball, Programs Director

The Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group will meet Wednesday, July 19, 2006, 7:00-9:00 p.m., at the Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson Street, Napa, California.

Ofer Tenenbaum

The main presentation of the evening will feature Ofer Tenenbaum, general manager of PNC, Inc. discussing problems of internet security and how the proliferation of IP networks brought new life to remote monitoring and security. He will specifically discuss how that is happening in rural locations, which is common to Napa County. Personal Network Computing Inc., is an information technology service provider, dedicated to bringing powerful solutions, in a simple and elegant way, to their customers. PNC's portfolio of products and services include IT outsourcing for small businesses and wireless high-speed Internet in Napa and Solano Counties.

Preceding the main presentation, **Jerry Brown** 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 isses and receive helpful information from other meeting attendees. Don't forget that you can also e-mail your questions before coning to the meeting *(questions@nvpcug.org).*

Following this, **Bernhard Krevet** will lead the **Computer Tutor** session discussing PDF files. PDF stands for Portable Document Format, which is an open standard file format, proprietary to Adobe systems, for representing two-dimensional documents in a device-independent and resolution-independent format. He will also demonstrate PDF-Xchange.

Need practical information that will help you make better use of your computer? Come to this meeting! Guests are welcome; admission is free.

Remember the Summer Potluck Picnic
Saturday, August 12, 1:30 p.m.
Petersons' Christmas Tree Farm, 1120 Darms Lane

President's Message—

Picnic and Raffles

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

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

Dianne Prior

Hey! We're going to have a raffle -- three of them, actually. You may purchase tickets at any of the meetings or at the picnic.

Thanks to several people who subscribed to *Smart Computing* and submitted our group name, we have earned two free subscriptions. We will raffle one subscription at each of our July and August meetings. Tickets will be $1 each, 6 for $5. You do not need to be present to win.

We have also received an unused 2003 version of Office XP Professional. It includes Access and MS Publisher in addition to Outlook, Word, Excel and PowerPoint. For this prize, tickets will be $5.00 each, or 3 or $10.00. The raffle will be held at our August meeting, and again, you don't have to be there to win.

We are still seeking donations to supply other items to be raffled. Please e-mail or phone me if you can help in any way.

The summer potluck picnic will be here soon, giving us a chance to meet our fellow User Group members in a relaxing and informal setting. The date is **Saturday**, **August 12 at 1:30** (unless you can help with setup at 1:00). Dick and Sandy Peterson have again graciously offered their Christmas Tree Farm as the location (1120 Darms Lane). This year the picnic will precede our regular August meeting, so you may sign up at our July meeting or by e-mailing me at prior@napanet.net. I need to know what potluck dish you are bringing and how many will be in your party. NVPCUG will provide soft drinks and water as well as chicken and steak to BBQ. You are welcomed to bring beer and wine if you wish.

If anyone has any problems or questions or suggestions (relating to Group issues, not computer use questions), feel free to contact me at president@nvpcug.org or phone me at 252-1506.

Peace and Good,

Dianne Prior

NVPCUG Calendar

Wednesdays		9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Computers-to-Schools work parties. To volunteer, contact Orion Hill, (707) 252-0637.
July	5	7:00-9:00 p.m.	Board of Directors meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
July	10	5:30-7:30 p.m.	Investors SIG meeting, Jerry Brown's home, 23 Skipping Rock Way, Napa
July	12	7:00-8:30 p.m.	Digital Photography SIG meeting, Piner's Nursing Home, 1800 Pueblo Ave., Napa
July	13	6:30-8:30 p.m.	Macintosh SIG meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson St., Napa
July	19	7:00-9:00 p.m.	General Meeting, Napa Senior Activity Center, 1500 Jefferson St., Napa

Napa Valley Personal Computer Users Group

Officers for 2006

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, Orion E. Hill, Jim Gillespie, Bob Kulas, John Moore, Dick Peterson, John Simcoe, James Stirling, 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	226-9164	Librarian@nvpcug.org
Membership Director	Dianne Prior	252-1506	Membership@nvpcug.org
Mentor Program Coordinator	Dick Peterson	259-1712	Mentors@nvpcug.org
Newsletter Circulator	Jim Hearn	224-2540	
Newsletter Editor	James Stirling	944-1177	Editor@nvpcug.org
Product Review Coord.	Susy Ball	337-3398	Reviews@nvpcug.org
Product Review Coord.	Marcia Waddell	252-2060	Reviews2@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.

Come to the NVPCUG General Meetings

Held the third Wednesday of each month

7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Napa Senior Activities Center

1500 Jefferson Street, Napa

NVPCUG *Computer News*

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The NVPCUG is an IRC 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit educational organization (EIN 68-0069663) and is a member of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization. Donations to the NVPCUG are tax-deductible as charitable contributions to the extent allowed by law. Copyright © 2006 by NVPCUG.

June Computer and Electronics Recycling Event Smoothest Yet

By Bill Wheadon, NVPCUG Recycling Coordinator

The Sixth Annual Napa County Computer and Electronic Recycling Event, for which NVPCUG was a co-sponsor, was held June 9 and 10 in the south parking lot of the Napa Valley College, Napa City Campus. This year's event was slightly smaller than last year's in terms of gross tonnage received: 180 tons this year versus 200 tons last year. We collected 23 truckloads, or 168 tons of material for recycling, with another 10.8 tons selected for reuse by the Computer Recycling Center of Santa Rosa and almost a ton (two pickup loads) by the NVPCUG for our Computers-to-Schools (CTS) program. Our CTS volunteers were more selective this year, due to a lack of storage space for the equipment; in fact, we took no monitors. Equipment selected for CTS reuse included 16 notebook computers, 55 minitower computers and 12 laser printers.

An interesting statistic is that of the 160 tons of material recycled, 84.2 tons, or approximately half, were monitors. In future years I expect the tonnage to fall off when the non-CRT monitors become obsolete and are recycled.

This event seemed to run smoother than previous ones due to sufficient manpower and also by separating the reusable equipment collection area from the materials recycling equipment collection area. This improved traffic flow. 644 vehicles came through on Friday and 891 on Saturday for a total of 1535 vehicles in the two days. Thanks to the following NVPCUG members and friends who helped direct traffic, conduct surveys, and select & load reusable equipment at this year's event**:** Karla Bailey, Julie Jerome, Bernhard Krevet (and his neighbor Charlie), Ken Manfree, Ray McCann, John Moore, Beryl Nielsen, Dianne Prior, Don Robertson, John Simcoe, Bob Simmerman, and Roy Wagner.

A special thanks to those who worked multiple shifts : Al Edmister, James Gray, Orion E. Hill, Swede Olmsted, Ray Riley, Otho Rosado, Jeff Solomon, Dean Unruh, and Jan and Bill Wheadon.

Urban legends et al, by Dean Unruh

If you need an answer to a question about an urban legend/Internet myth, here's a site with which to do your detective work: *www.truthorfiction.com*.

Besides giving you the lowdown on Internet high jinx, they also list current and recent virus threats and some links to removal tools plus a link to a free Web-based McAfee virus scan.

And, maybe most everyone else has discovered this but me, but just in case: I had a pop-up ad appear today, but instead of being displayed as a window it presented itself as merely a button on the taskbar. However, clicking on it wouldn't display it so that I could kill it with a CTRL + F-4. Also I keep the taskbar on auto-hide, and with this pop-up ad button on the taskbar, the taskbar wouldn't hide. Sooo, out of desperation I right-clicked on the ad button, which produced the options 'To Restore' or 'Close'. When I clicked on 'Close' I finally dispatched the offender.

The *WashingTOON Times* recently ran a (Web) article concerning the proliferation of new specialty search engines that target niche subject matter. They run the gamet from online video content to shopping, real estate and petrol (locating the best price thereof), overall addressing the topics of products, services and content. For instance, one person states that there is now over 4 million hours of audio and video content on the web and a Google search may return Googzillions (I just made that up--it's not a real number--well it could be--Google has just been added as a verb in the dictionary) of results which would take several lifetimes to investigate. Sooo, what's a boy (or girl) to do? Well, check out a specialized search such as:

-- *Blinkx.com,* a search site for TV and other video clips;

-- *Dealio.com*, a search site for pricing on 30 million consumer products;

-- *Gasbuddy.com,* which helps you find low cost gas in your city or suburb;

-- *LinkedIn.com,* a professional networking search and content management site for job seekers;

-- *SideStep.com,* a search service for travel services;

-- *StubHub.com,* an engine that helps you buy tickets to concerts and sporting events;

-- *Zillow.com,* a search site for real estate listings;

-- *TrustWatch.com,* a search site for consumers to identify spam and other fraudulent e-mails online.

If you're interested in checking out the entire article see: *http://www.washingtontimes.com/upi/ 20060705-095800-4746r.htm.*

Stay Crisp!
Dean Unruh

Creating Playable Compact Discs From Cassette Tapes, Vinyl Records, and Other Media

By Rex Williams, NVPCUG Member

Have you ever wanted to take your old cassette tapes or vinyl records and make digital audio files that could be burned on compact discs to play in your home, car, or portable audio disc player or that could be saved in one of the new MP3 flash-drive players? This could be particularly helpful for listening to lectures and training presentations. I found that creating MP3 or WMA format files that can be played on these devices is easy, if you have the required equipment and programs.

I want to get a general class (ham) radio license. One of the requirements for a general class license is being able to receive Morse code at five words per minute. Learning the code is hard for me because I have always learned best by sight, not by sound. I have Nu-Ware's *NuMorse*, a Morse code training program that can convert a computer text file into Morse code and play the code over headphones or a speaker. To study this way, I had to sit at my computer. I play golf twice a week and got to thinking that my golfing time could also be a great time to study Morse code. A round of golf takes about four hours. Most of that time is just walking or standing. Surely I could put some of that time to better use.

I already had an MP3 flash-drive player, which I had purchased at Wal-Mart for about $51.00, and the Morse code training program. All I needed was a way to get the Morse code files converted to MP3 sound format and transfer them to my MP3 player.

Searching on the Internet, I found several programs that I thought would do the job. Some of the programs were shareware and could be downloaded for free, others would have to be purchased. I selected PolderbitS Software's *Sound Recorder and Editor*, a shareware program, and downloaded it from the developer's Web site, *www.polderbits.com*. The software has an unrestricted two-week free trial period, after which the program can be purchased for $37.75.

Using a cable with a male connector at each end, I connected the headphone jack on my laptop computer to the line-in jack on my desktop computer's sound card. If you don't have the appropriate cable, you can purchase one at a Radio Shack store for less than $5.00. If you want to record from a tape deck or record player, you need a cable with a connector on one end that fits the audio output jack on your tape player or record player and a connector on the other end that is compatible with the line-in jack on your computer. Such cables are also available at Radio Shack.

I started the sound recorder and editor program on my desktop computer and selected the start recording option. Then I started the Morse code training program on my laptop. The recording of audio code began immediately. After recording the Morse code audio file, I stopped the sound recorder and the training program. The sound recorder and editor program's edit window automatically opened. I then edited the Morse code sound file to delete the blank space at the beginning of the recording. The blank space existed because the recorder program started recording in real time before I started playing the Morse code training program. After editing the sound track, I had the option of saving it in either of two formats: as a WAV uncompressed file or as an MP3 compressed file. Saving as an MP3 file is preferable, since an MP3 file is only about one-tenth the size of a WAV file. For example, the WAV file I first created was 11,423 kilobytes, while my MP3 file was only 1,037 kilobytes.

With the proper CD burner and media, MP3 files can be copied from a hard drive to create a music CD. Or, as I wanted, an MP3 file can be copied to an MP3 flash-drive. To save the Morse code sound file onto my flash-drive, I used *Creative Media Source*, a program marketed by Creative Technology (the maker of Sound Blaster). The program can transfer files from a hard drive to an MP3 player using a USB port. The program also allows converting MP3-format files to WMA-format files (which are smaller in size) for transferring or saving and allows burning a CD that can be played on a CD player. I also burned CDs using both *Creative Media Source* and Roxio's *EZ CD Creator*.

This was my first attempt to create an audio CD or an MP3 file from a source other than an existing audio CD. I found the undertaking was fairly straight-forward. If you have successfully used another technique or different software, I would like to hear about your experience.

Rex Williams is a longtime member of the NVPCUG. He originally joined in 1984, the year following the founding of our group. From 1985 to 1988 he chaired the Napa Valley Texas Instruments Professional Computer Users Group (renamed in 1988 as the Redwood Empire TIPC Users Group), which he and NVPCUG past president Orion E. Hill founded in 1985.

Backup Awareness Month

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Advisor; Columnist, *The Examiner*, Beaumont, Texas

Radio & TV show host *iwilsker(at)cug.net*

WEB SITES:

http://www.backupawareness.com
http://www.ntius.com
http://www.symantec.com
http://www.backupawareness.com/bestpractices.html

In case you had not heard, June is [was] Backup Awareness Month. It is not a federally recognized holiday, nor is it one acknowledged by resolution from some governmental authority, but an awareness service of one of the largest manufacturers of hard drives, the newly merged Maxtor and Seagate.

Sure, Maxtor and Seagate will benefit if we all rush out and purchase a large capacity hard drive so we can backup our critical data in the event of a hard drive crash or other tragedy that could damage or destroy our computers. This is really more of a win-win situation, as there is a very valid need for timely and comprehensive backups of our data. Lessons still unlearned from Rita, Katrina, and Wilma, as well as other countless disasters, fires, thefts, and other debacles should teach us that if we have a good backup of our files, we can easily survive a catastrophic data loss and be back in operation promptly.

Imagine in any business or other commercial environment how much information is stored on hard drives. Hard drives are electromechanical devices, and as such will indeed fail at some time. Murphy's Law dictates that a hard drive will always fail at the most inopportune time. Now imagine what would happen to that business or organization if suddenly all of its critical information was gone. No accounts receivable; no accounts payable; no client lists; no purchase orders; no employee or student data; no payroll and tax records; no correspondence; no records of any kind; and a plethora of other potentially devastating losses. Next imagine the time and cost that a company would incur if it had to rebuild that amount of information from paper records, if these did indeed exist. Can you conceive the utter devastation that a company would suffer with a catastrophic data loss?

Data loss is not just a corporate or organizational threat, but a personal one too. On my home computer, for example, I have countless family photos, tax records, family financial information, archives of correspondence and other important documents, music, bookmarks, address books, e-mail, and other information that would probably be irretrievable in the event of a complete hard drive failure. I really do not think that the IRS would accept as an excuse the fact that my hard drive crashed, losing my financial records.

We can backup our data in many ways without any substantial expense, or we can utilize sophisticated backup solutions. Backing up can be as simple as copying critical files to CD, DVD, flash drive, or other storage media, using the integral copy function available on all computer operating systems. We can use software, such as NTI's *Shadow* or *Backup NOW!* to manage our backup functions to our chosen media, or we can use utilities such as Symantec's (Norton) *Ghost,* to make a bit by bit copy of our hard drive which can be copied to a new hard drive, making it a mirror image of the original, ready to go. Now that broadband internet connections are more of a rule than an exception, there are commercial services that will do online remote backup and storage at off-premise locations, secure and separate from the host or home location.

Seagate/Maxtor have published some "best practices" (*www.backupawareness.com/bestpractices.html*) defining the tasks necessary to ensure the ability to recover our precious data. These practices can be summarized by the following tips (details on the website):

Develop a backup schedule – Make it routine, and not a task you have to remember to accomplish. Most modern backup software and utilities either backup in real-time (*NTI Shadow*), or can be scheduled at predetermined times (*NTI Backup NOW*!).

Back up everything – it is not necessary to waste time sorting data, as the speed of backup utilities, hardware, and hard drives, as well as the large capacity of new hard drives, make it unnecessary to determine what to backup

Give yourself room to grow – The rule of thumb listed on the site recommends that the minimum size of backup drives (or other media or storage solutions) should be at least double the current size of the hard drives being backed up.

Back up automatically – Referred to in the industry as "Set it and Forget It," this is a viable adjunct to backing up on schedule. Some real-time off-site backup services use a high-speed Internet connection to automatically back up all new data to an external location. Many software utilities are almost transparent and perform backups automatically, unattended.

Rotate backups – Use more than one drive or other system for backup. There are always risks that the backup itself can be damaged or otherwise flawed, and there is safety in redundancy. It is a good practice to store at least one current backup physically away from the location being backed up such that a catastrophe (fire, flood, etc.) at the host will not destroy the backup. It is also a good idea to be able to take a backup with you in the event of a crisis, such as when I took my external hard drive with a current backup of all of my files, when I evacuated from Hurricane Rita. With this external drive, I could also access critical files from another computer if needed, prior to returning home.

Don't procrastinate – Do not put off until tomorrow what you must be doing today. The complete Murphy's First Law of Computing is, "A properly backed up hard drive will never fail, but the first time you do not have a current backup, your hard drive will always fail at the most inopportune time." Sadly, all too many of us learn the importance of a backup immediately after our hard drive fails, as we come to the realization that all is lost.

June should not really be *the* backup awareness month; every month should be backup awareness month!

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

Dealing With Red-Eye in Photographs

By Susy Ball, NVPCUG Digital Photography SIG Leader

Red-eye is a photography term that refers to the red color that appears in the eyes of some subjects in a photograph. This happens in pictures of both people and animals. Red-eye usually occurs when the flash is positioned too close to the camera's lens and the light is reflected back to the camera from a subject's retina through her dilated pupils. Many point-and-shoot cameras come with a feature to help prevent red-eye. It's called the red-eye reduction mode. The camera fires one or more preflashes before taking the actual photo. These preflashes cause the subject's pupils to contract slightly, which reduces the red-eye effect. This is not an absolute solution to resolving red-eye, but it does work if you're in an area with low light. (This works well for posed group shots, but is not practical for snapshots.) A better alternative is to turn on all the lights you can in the room. The added light will help to shrink the subject's pupils and reduce the amount of light reflected off the retina.

You might also consider using an external or slave flash. With an external flash, you can angle the flash slightly higher than the subject you are photographing. This way, the flash doesn't go directly into the subject's face. A better alternative is to point the flash up at the ceiling so the flash's light can reflect off the ceiling and down onto the subject. This can also help provide a softer look to the subject because the flash isn't directly in the subject's face.

You may not have this choice, though, because most point-and-shoot cameras have a fixed flash and don't allow the addition of an external one. If this is the case, you can get an external flash called booster flash, such as the Quantaray MS-1, which doesn't connect to the camera like most external flashes. The slave flash option is helpful in reducing red-eye because it has a sensor on it that detects when the camera's flash has been fired, then the slave flash fires instantly afterward, just before the camera's shutter closes. If you don't want to invest the time and energy it takes to use an external or slave flash, another alternative to correct the effects of red-eye is through photo-editing software.

Almost all photo-editing software comes with some red-eye reduction tool. Some are better than others, though. There are some programs that detect only the color red and change the color to black or brown. Some of the more popular programs, such as *Corel Paint Shop Pr*o and *Ulead PhotoImpact*, let you change the red-eye to whatever color you'd like. This way if your subject has blue eyes, you can turn the red eyes to blue. In some photos many eyes need repairing, and it's easy with the new photo programs available today.

Join us in the digital camera SIG and learn some of the techniques available when editing your photos.

Web 2.0 and the Small Office/Home Office (Soho)

By John Abbott, member of the Bentsen Grove Resort Computer Club, Mission Texas

www.bgrcc.com john(at)bgrcc.com

Will the evolution of Web 2.0 have any lasting effect on proprietary software vendors? I believe so, even if to a limited extent. There are a myriad of new Web 2.0 companies springing up, each offering something unique. For some people, this will prove satisfactory enough that they will no longer purchase proprietary mail programs or word processors or possibly even spreadsheets.

The advent of *Open Offic*e has most certainly put a dent in the profit margins of Microsoft's *Office Suite*. There is a new look coming from *Microsoft Office* that adds a lot of eye candy to their existing Suite, but not a lot of additional function. I believe that between Open Source and the Web 2.0 companies the bottom line at Microsoft will feel their presence.

Microsoft is reacting to the popular features of *Mozilla's Firefox* browser by copying most of them into *Internet Explorer 7.* But *IE7* still doesn't have several of the most advanced features of *Firefox,* like ad blocking and several extensions made available for free download. And the folks at Mozilla aren't waiting for Microsoft to catch up; they are already beta testing *Flock,* a Web 2.0-oriented browser with blogging and social tagging built into its rich function package. However, if you don't consider yourself a true Web 2.0 juggernaut, then you may not enjoy it as much. It is designed to accommodate the blog grabbing and social bookmarking of Web sites.

Google is clearly among the leaders in Web 2.0 features. They offer online mail, online calendar, financial portfolio tracking, the best search engine, news aggregated to your personal interests, image search, even a Linux search engine or a couple of other specialized search engines. And Google was the company that forced the e-mail providers into offering 2 Gigabites of storage for their mail. *http://www.google.com/intl/en/options/*

But there are other companies close on the heels of Google. My current favorite is *inbox.com.* Inbox offers personalized e-mail, with spell checker, rich text (font control) manageable folders and the absolutely best spam system on the Internet. You can set your Spam to capture any mail not from someone in your address book. Or you can set it to challenge anyone not in your book and then hold that challenged mail in an "Unverified" folder where you can accept or permanently reject it. Along with the e-mail, you are offered 2 Gb of storage, with folders containing your various upload/download type .: music, documents, pictures or files. And if that weren't enough, Inbox also offers a calendar that e-mails you up to 3 reminders on calendared events. *http://www.inbox.com.*

Another great company is Zoho. Zoho derives its name from SOHO (small office/home office) and it has laid in virtually everything one would need. The Zoho stable contains e-mail, spread sheets, planners, collaborative white boards, etc. Their banner program is *Zoho Virtual Office,* which is complete with reminder calendars, e-mail, a virtual drive (only with XP) Instant Messaging, and task management. All of it can be collaborative for up to 10 users. Not all of the features are available on the free packages, but a small version is available for you to try before you buy: *http://www.zoho.com.*

The only thing missing from a small office/home office would be a telephone. Ah, but you can have that online too--from full-service phone systems like Packet8 to totally free Gizmo and Skype. The Packet8 system will give you an adapter to plug your phone into, or you can buy a Uniden phone system with a base phone and up to 10 wireless handsets for $79. Or you can use your current phone connected into their free adapter and you're up -- both systems carry a $20 a month fee for caller ID, three-way calling, and your choice of area code. And, depending on where you live, you can keep your phone number. If you want to get exotic you can buy their VideoPhone and then pay the same $20 a month. *http://www.packet8.net/*

But for the true Web 2.0 user, Skype or Gizmo reign supreme. Each is totally free and has adapters for a Web camera. Of course, if you are not calling another SIP subscriber you will have to buy an outgoing *and* an incoming outside line. I prefer using Gizmo because it has superior audio setup and a test point to call to check for echo suppression or the lack thereof. *http://www.gizmoproject.com http://www.skype.com.*

(continued on page 9)

Watch Out for Phone Phishing

From TNPCNewsletter(c) 2006 Dan Butler
Dan Butler is the Editor-in-Chief of TNPCNewsletter.com

TNPC Newsletter, July 11, 2006

We have talked about Phishing scams in the past. These are e-mails disguised as requests from a bank, PayPal, or other company. They are designed to get you to part with your login information to these services.

The latest variation is called "Phone Phishing".

Here is what happens. You receive a prerecorded message claiming to be from your credit card company telling you there has suspicious activity on your card. You are then directed to call a different number to resolve the matter. When you call the next number you are asked for your card number before you can speak to a representative. Giving your number is a routine part of calling credit card companies so little suspicion is raised. Of course the number is bogus and thieves are collecting your card information.

I have heard of this scam working along a "verify your password by phone" for services like eBay and PayPal.

The call is prerecorded and can be sent out via computerized "war dialers". No human interaction necessary. And with widely available Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) technology the location of the scammer is meaningless.

As always be careful with your information.

How do you protect yourself? Same as with e-mail scams. Don't call the number in the phone message. Call the official number of your bank or institution. If they need to speak with you they will know about it there. If they have no record of requesting you to call just ignore it totally.

Take a few minutes right now and note the phone numbers and web addresses for the financial institutions you interact with. When something crops up give them a call. Credit cards usually have the number right on the back. I have pulled a card out to call the phone number and found it worn off. So go ahead and write the numbers down now.

In all cases don't take these things too personally. Nobody sat down and said I am going to call only this person. It is just like spam. They send thousands to millions of these out and hope a few people bite.

Let's be careful out there.

(continued from page 8)

you can always use the services of Gizmo, which offers a free conference system. For those using Gizmo, it is entirely free. Those checking into the conference from their cell phones or landline phone will pay the standard rate to their provider. There is a great company called Live Office that gives you much better control (mute, mute group, roll call, etc.) and it too is absolutely free. The quality of its connection is much improved over Gizmo. And should you need to step up to a toll-free call-in system, Live Office offers them for a variety of rates.

http://freeconferencing.liveoffice.com/

And now you are equipped to take your entire home office with you in a USB thumb drive. And, depending on the version you use, it can all be automatically encrypted. SOHO has become portable and secure.

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, Website Editor, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.

http://swipcug.apcug.org/

Times Change

Leafing back through old copies of The P-See Ur-Gent, I notice that I started this monthly column in February, 1998. That makes this about the 80th installment – hard to believe. It started out as a discussion of things New, Best or Worst in the computer world, but much has changed since then. We are no longer impressed with incremental improvements in CPU performance. Arguments over the most proficient Web search engine have pretty well been settled for now. Discussions of viruses and other malware have grown way beyond the scope of this column. LCD monitors are no longer "prohibitively expensive, suffer from poor brightness, a narrow viewing angle, and relatively sluggish refresh rates."

I began to look for long-range trends in computer technology. In my July-August 1999 column I mentioned the birth of a new Web search strategy based on evaluating hyperlinks to identify the most relevant Web sites for a given search term. I specifically described a search program, called *Clever* , that was being developed by the clever folks at IBM and was highly successful. Typically, IBM used it only internally and did not make it publicly available. As a footnote I added that a similar program, being developed at Stanford University, was made available in beta form. Its name? Google.com. IBM missed the boat again.

It is no coincidence that I read about Google in the June 1999 issue of Scientific American. The most interesting new developments with potential long-term importance are not first reported in PC Magazine or PC World, but in high-quality publications with a more general readership. I often find interesting developments reported in *The Economist*, the outstanding British weekly news magazine, as well as on the Web site of the *BBC News*. Other good sources are national newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*, but I don't get to read those regularly. As a sign of the times, the April 22nd issue of *The Economist* carries three full-page in-your-face ads touting the energy advantages of AMD Opteron processor-based servers (e.g."You could've hired 250 engineers, 570 IT support people, 5,235 interns, and one new CIO with the amount of money wasted by non-AMD powered servers"). No mention of Intel (which is feeling the competition). David is starting to kick sand in Goliath's face!

On the other hand, *PC Magazine* is now mostly dedicated to gadgets, including a review in its May 9, 2006 issue of the Mercedes ML 350, which is loaded with electronics and sells for up to 70 thousand dollars. A 20-page review of Vista, not expected to become available until January 2007 at the earliest, reports that only 50 percent of current computers will be able to use it. Very few will be ready for the much-ballyhooed Aero Glass interface without upgrading their graphics capabilities.

PC World stays closer to specific computer topics, but how many "50 Best New Sites" and "Best Free Stuff" do we need? The most important contributions of these PC Magazines are their product evaluations. Otherwise, how would we have known that AMD managed to overtake Intel in CPU technology?

Wi-Fi Progress

In just a few years, as equipment cost dropped to affordable levels, wireless connections between computers in households have become commonplace. Several IEEE standards assure interoperability between different makes of equipment. The most popular standard today is 802.11g, capable of connecting at speeds up to 54 megabits per second (Mbps). It is backwards compatible with the older 802.11b which operates at up to 11 Mbps. A third standard, 802.11a, operates at up to 54 Mbps and uses a different frequency range to minimize interference with other equipment. It is not often used.

The IEEE has almost completed work on a new

standard, 802.11n, that should increase the transmission rate to a maximum of 540 Mbps. In anticipation of the new standard, several wireless connection providers have been marketing new products that provide faster connections over greater distances. According to *PC World* (February 2006) Netgear's $180 RangeMax 240 Wireless Router and $100 Notebook Adapter can connect at close range at about the same rate (100 Mbps) as a standard wired 10-100 Ethernet connection. The router has 3 antennas and transmits over 3 non-overlapping bands within the allotted 9.4 Mhz frequency band to achieve this performance.

The high speed may be useful when you use bandwidth-gobbling applications such as VoiP telephony, network gaming, or streaming audio and video. If you mostly use a wireless Local Area Network (LAN) in your home to share an Internet connection you have no need for premium high-speed wi-fi equipment. The fastest download speed available from my local cable provider, SIGECOM, is 6 Mbps with its premium Xstream service. At that speed, even the slowest 802.11b equipment is adequate for short distances. The 802.11g standard is preferred for connections at greater distances while maintaining sufficient transmission rates.

Since I bought a new computer I moved the laptop upstairs to my den at the other end of the house. As a crow would fly, if it were allowed inside and capable of penetrating floor joists and air conditioning ducts, the distance between the computers is about 35 feet. This is well within the range of 802.11g equipment in open areas, but due to the intervening obstacles I was unable to establish a reliable connection between my standard Netgear router and the Dell laptop with its built-in Dell-brand, 802.11g capable Wi-Fi adapter. I disabled that adapter and plugged in a standard Netgear wireless USB adapter (WG111v2) with the included USB cable. This gave me a strong connection to the router at the other end of the house, with a reported transmission speed of the full 54 Mbps. Although the cable allowed me to set up the adapter within several feet of the laptop computer, it was actually sufficient to Velcro the adapter to the lid of the computer so that it was roughly parallel with the antenna of the router. It goes to show that the quality of the Wi-Fi equipment can make a significant difference in the results when conditions are less than optimal.

Should You Shisen Sho?

Browsing through the games available with Linux distributions such as Linspire and Xandros, I happened on a Mah-Jongg variety called Shisen Sho. If you like to play Mah-Jongg you ought to give it a try – it is definitely habit forming. The game starts out with a square grid of Mah-Jongg tiles. The size of the grid can be varied, but I found 24x12 a suitable size. The goal of the game is to remove identical tiles in pairs, with the restriction that a pair of tiles can only be removed if they can be connected with no more than 3 straight lines (horizontal or vertical) without crossing other tiles. You can specify that the game must be solvable, although that doesn't guarantee that you'll actually solve it on a first try. The secondary goal is to solve the game in the shortest time. The game remembers previous scores to let you assess your increasing proficiency. My first game took me 40 minutes, but since then I have managed a few in slightly under 20 minutes.

There are many versions for *Windows* available. A listing is available on *http://home.halden.net/vkp/vkp/shisensho.html*. I downloaded a game by Daniel Valot from *http://dvalot.free.fr/games.htm* that is well implemented, but Google displays many other versions also. Shisen, in culinary circles usually called Szechuan after the Chinese province, is also known as Four Rivers. Give it a try!

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

Tech News

By Sue Crane, Editor, Big Bear Computer Club, California

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Ian Wright has a car that blows away a Ferrari 360 Spider and a Porsche Carrera GT in drag races, and whose 0-to-60 acceleration time ranks it among the fastest production autos in the world. In fact, it's second only to the French-made Bugatti Veyron, a 1,000-horsepower, 16-cylinder beast that hits 60 mph half a second faster and goes for $1.25 million. The key difference? The Bugatti gets eight miles per gallon. Wright's car? It runs off an electric battery. For a look under the hood, go here: *javascript:openWindow('popups/2006/biz2/wrightspeed/frameset .exclude.html','728x445','t oolbar=no,location=no, directories=no, status=no,menubar=no,scrollbars=no,resizable=no,width=728,height=445'.*

New security features in ***Windows Vista*** will largely eliminate the need to run separate antispyware or firewall software, according to a new analyst report. Vista does not include antivirus functionality; Microsoft plans to sell its Windows Live OneCare antivirus software separately starting next month. But while the changes in Vista should reduce the risk for most users, the security features mean upgrading won't be easy. The annoyance would come from features such as User Account Control, which is to be enabled by default and lets users run Windows with fewer privileges. "Although the new security system shows promise, it is far too chatty and annoying," wrote analyst Andrew Jaquit

Virtualization provides not only a way to use computers more efficiently, but it also offers a new, relatively painless way to install software. VMware and other virtualization advocates are working hard to promote the software distribution and installation technique. However, licensing constraints pose a significant impediment. VMware, long considered the market leader for virtualization software, potentially changed the virtualization software market by announcing that the upgrade to their GSX Server product would be renamed VMware Server and made available for free to anyone who wants it. Although VMware Server is free to download, test, and deploy, it may not be totally free to run in perpetuity. VMware plans to sell support plans for VMware Server that are anticipated to cost $350 - $400 per installation. These plans will be made available once VMware is out of beta and released.

Plug-in Hybrids A few small companies will start to offer services and products for converting hybrid cars like the Toyota Prius that currently get around 50 miles per gallon into plug-in hybrids that rely more heavily on electrical power and can get about 100 miles per gallon. But conversion won't be cheap--at least initially. California's EDrive Systems will charge around $10,000 to $12,000 to install the extra lithium batteries needed to turn a standard Prius into a plug-in hybrid when its service begins later this summer. At that price, and with gas at $3 a gallon, it would take around 160,000 to 200,000 miles of driving to break even. But some groups are looking to the do-it-yourself crowd for a cheaper solution. CalCars is working with independent inventors to bring the price of a DIY kit based around an open blueprint to about $3,000. Mass manufacturing, though, could lower the prices dramatically over time. Andrew Frank, a professor of mechanical engineering at the University of California at Davis said "We can't switch from where we are today overnight. It will take 20 years or more to take the PHEV (plug-in hybrid electric vehicle) to get into our society," Frank said. Nonetheless, "we can greatly reduce the amount of liquid fuel we use for transportation."

The next energy source: Barnyard animals? Microgy, which has discovered that manure and other waste products from cows, pigs and other livestock is a largely untapped source of energy The company builds industrial-sized "digesters" that, through heat and microbes, reduce mountains of waste into gas or electricity that can be reused on the farm or sold on the open market. The plant will start shipping natural gas methane) in the third quarter and, when fully operational, will churn out an estimated 1 billion cubic feet of biogas a year.

AgraQuest is one of a rising number of companies promoting biopesticides--substances that kill bugs with selectively bred microorganisms, rather than chemical concoctions. A novel fungus called Muscador lives naturally in the bark of a type of spice tree found in Central America and other tropical regions, emits a cocktail of about 30 gases that kills a variety of pests. Muscador-based products will likely start coming out this year. Organic biopesticides comprise only a small fraction of the overall $30 billion pesticide market, but they are growing rapidly.

The DARPA plans to hold its 3rd contest for robotic vehicles in November 2007, with a first prize set at $2 million. The entrants will have to carry out a simulated military supply mission in a mock urban area. and complete a 60-mile course in less than 6 hours, autonomously obeying traffic laws while merging into moving traffic, navigating traffic circles, negotiating busy intersections and avoiding obstacles. A location for the finals of the DARPA Urban Challenge has not yet been named.

Lego expects to release software, hardware and Bluetooth developer kits. The firmware code and the developer kits should be available by August when Mindstorms NXT is publicly available. 114 Mindstorms fans have been taking part in an invite-only developers program. The idea is that they will be able to write books about Mindstorms, as well as create new software and designs for it. the developer program participants are now free to discuss their projects, and much of that work should begin appearing on the Mindstorms Web site http://mindstorms.lego.com/?domainredir=www.mindstorms.com soon. the Bluetooth developer kit details the Bluetooth protocol built into the NXT microprocessor. That should enable users to design programs allowing any Bluetooth device to interact with Mindstorms NXT robots

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

Invitation to User Group Leaders and Members at SWUG Conference X3

Fun in the Sun & Computers, Too! The SW User Group Conference X3 offers fun-filled days packed with vendor presentations, great food & workshops, a chance to talk with user groupies from other UGs, and much more. The conference begins on Friday evening, August 11, and ends with lunch on Sunday, August 13. Workshops are offered for UG leaders and members, as well as educational workshops for enhancing attendee computer knowledge.

Location

This year the conference will again be held at the Town and Country Resort Hotel & Convention Center, 500 Hotel Circle North, San Diego, CA 92108 . The conference rate is $99/night, single or double. The rate is guaranteed for three days prior and three days post conference. Come on down and include the conference in a vacation! You can't sleep in your RV, but the host hotel has an RV parking area. Please make your reservations by July 19 to ensure you receive the conference rate. The phone number for reservations is 800.772.8527. Mention the Southwest UG Conference.

What is the cost?

$50.00 if your registration is postmarked by July 19.

$60.00 if your registration is postmarked by July 26.

$75.00 after July 27 and at the conference

The fee includes six meals, vendor presentations, workshops, conference T-shirt and Welcome Bag.

Please visit the Southwest Web site at http://www.swugconf.org for details.

We hope to see you at the conference,

Judy Taylour & Patricia Hill, Co-chairs

Internet Fraud

by Bob Schneider, Editor of the *PC Keyboard*, newsletter of the Spring Hill Teaching Computer Club, Hernando County, Florida
www.sthcc.net Drbob1012(at)hotmail.com

Internet fraud continues to be the fastest-growing crime in America (and perhaps the world). The most common technique for fraud today is "phishing." This means that some nefarious person connives you into to providing financial account information. They do it by mailing thousands of spam e-mails to lists of e-mail addresses they have accumulated. Perhaps one of your friends sent a neat joke to 40 acquaintances, including you (your friend's e-mail itself is, of course, spam). Someone out there farms e-mail address. They love it when your friend sends out those appeals and jokes—because they know that every e-mail address they capture (including yours) is current and good. They then send a message like the one below (actually received by the author) to those thousands of e-mail addresses. It matters not if you have PayPal or not. Many of the e-mails will hit someone who does, and they only need a lot of money from a few suckers to make the effort worth while. Of course, they substitute various bank names for PayPal, too.

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For your internet and financial safety, never respond to an e-mail asking you to check your account. If you are curious, call your financial institution. Also, you can always log in to your account the usual way (not by clicking on a link you receive in an e-mail) and check anything you wish.

A final note: tell your friends to stop broadcasting your e-mail address to the world, to spammers, pornographers, body part enlargers and thieves. Tell them they can comply with your request if they stop forwarding jokes, requests and other such to you and their other friends. Better yet, send them a copy of this article. They deserve it.

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Revised 8-19-05

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Computer Hysteria: Pew

by Berry F. Phillips, a member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City (CCOKC) and a regular writer for the CCOKC Web site and the *eMonitor* bfpdata(at) gbronline.com

The word "Pew" could conjure up several images in your mind. For example, you might think of a human expression uttered upon inhaling the exotic perfume of a skunk! Perhaps you might think of an aching back from that hard wooden pew at church! What does pew have to do with computing? Perhaps nothing. Take caution, because you are reading in the CHZ, the Computer Hysteria Zone!

The Pew Charitable Trusts, an independent nonprofit, was established between 1948 and 1979 by the children of Sun Oil Company founder Joseph Pew and his wife, Mary Anderson Pew, with the creation of the Pew Memorial Foundation honoring their parents' memory. In 2005, the foundation invested $177 million to fund the various trusts including the founding in 1999 of The Pew Internet & American Life Project which studies the social and civic impact of the Internet, often considered the most far-ranging, behavior-changing communications innovation since the invention of printing.

The Project produces reports that explore the impact of the Internet on families, communities, work and home, daily life, education, health care, and civic and political life. The Project aims to be be an authoritative source on the evolution of the Internet through collection of data and analysis of real-world developments as they effect the virtual world.

The basis of the reports are nationwide random-digit dial telephone surveys as well as online surveys. This data collection is supplemented with research from government agencies, academia, and other expert venues, observations of what people do and how they behave when they are online, in-depth interviews with Internet users and Internet experts alike and other efforts that try to examine individual and group behavior. The Project releases 15-20 pieces of research a year, varying in size, scope, and ambition.

Latest trends from the project reports show the adult users are now almost equally divided between men and women representing 73 percent of American adults who use the Internet. This represents approximately 147 million people. Here is what we do online: Send e-mail (91 percent), use a search engine to find information (91 percent), search for a map or driving direction (84 percent), look for health/medical information (79 percent) , research a product or service before buying it (78 percent), check the weather (78 percent), look for information on a hobby or interest (77 percent), get travel information (73 percent), get news (68 percent), buy a product (67 percent), surf the web for fun (66 percent), buy or make a reservation for travel (63 percent), look for political news/information (58 percent). For lesser percentages of use in online activities visit *www.pewinternet.org*, whose Web site was used to research this article.

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