The Cursor

Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer Users Group

NEWS FLASH

Presidential Bits

By Paul Howard

April Meeting

April's meeting will feature a discussion and demonstration by member Bob Mason about MicroSoft's Office 2003 suite of programs. Bob will provide an overview of the suite, and details of the Excel spread sheet and Access database products. Bill Walsh will discuss T Clock, a freeware application for keeping your pc's internal clock synchronized with NIST standards.

How Long Have You Been Using Computers?

There's always another opportunity to demonstrate my ignorance. Because there's at least 748 ways to copy files, I managed to look like a complete dolt the other day when I couldn't readily find Windows Explorer on an unfamiliar system, and needed to copy a bunch of material from a CD to a thumb drive. I'll be calling on my user group friends to demonstrate file management techniques from My Computer

and other similar resources. I've gotten addicted to Power Desk, a great little file manager, which makes me completely blank on other ways to perform simple tasks. Guess I'll need to take the Windows XP Basics course !!

Wireless Networking - Is Yours Secure?

Bought a new laptop on March 19th, and had the opportunity to discover that CompUSA does honor its price protection policy, when Circuit City offered the same Toshiba A45-S150 for $100 less two days later. I could spend several pages talking about the rebate perambulations with this purchase, but instead - a cautionary tale.

One of the features of this new machine is built in 802.11g WiFi connectivity. While noodling around with the new toy, checking out the task bar icons, I moused over one, and got a bubble note that said I had a wireless connection - say what? With some right clicks, and investigation, first thing you know, I'm surfing the web sans wires. See *Bits* page 7...

Lu Spriggs Web Sites for April 2004

Visit the Washington Area Computer Users Group web site for past versions of Spriggs Web Sites w/hyperlinks.

http://www.agnitum.com/ — whether you use DSL or Dial-up, a firewall is necessary. This Agnitum firewall has free download for 30 days to try, $39.95 to purchase. Keep your files out of hacker's hands!

http://www.netflix.com/ — rent all the DVD's you can watch for $20.00 a month. Free delivery both ways, no due dates, keep 3 at one time. Over 18000 titles!

http://www.webshots.com/ — the complete way to enjoy digital photos! Download photos, free, for your desktop. Sign up for their free weekly bulletin of recent photos available at their site. Upload and store your personal photos. order prints (3" x 6")at 29 cents each.

http://www.amerimark.com/ — Amerimark has 5 different catalogs, offering you apparel, beauty, shoes, health, and jewelry. In business since 1969.

http://www.java.com/ — Java allows small programs to run inside your web browser. Get it free, here.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/carguide/ — visit Warren Brown's Car Guide for reviews and selected videos of certain car models.

http://www.radiohistory.org/ — review the infancy of Radio. Their Museum is in Bowie, Md. open Sat. and Sun. from 1 to 4 p.m.

http://www.orbitz.com/ — visit this site for the lowest cost travel, motel, cruises, and vacation rates.

http://www.symantec.com/downloads/ — visit this site to obtain the latest updates to your Norton anti-virus definition file for NAV 2000 - NAV 2004.

http://www.nfpa.org/sparky/ — Sparky the Fire Dog will reach the kids and families with fire and life safety lessons in a creative way.

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Some Interesting Computing Facts

Remember when you got your first desktop computer? Do you remember how much it cost? How about memory? How much memory did it have? It probably didn't even have a hard drive. But if it did, it was about 10 Mb in size and it cost lots of $$ money $$. Compare that to today's typical desktop or portable computer.

Today's computer comes with more CPU power than the IBM System 360 had when it was retired ten years ago! And today's operating system require a minimum of 256 Mb of RAM. Smart shoppers immediately opt upward for a minimum of 512 Mb of RAM.

It is not uncommon to see new computers outfitted with 40, 60 or 80 Gb of hard disk space. Where is it going?

Here's some interesting facts from the University of California, Berkeley. This information is borrowed from the April 5, 2004 edition of Computerworld.

They estimate that 5 exabytes of new information was recorded on paper, film and magnetic and optical media. How much is 5 exabytes?

Kilobyte: 1,000 or 10^3 bytes. 2 KB = a typewritten page.

Megabyte: 1,000,000 or 10^6, bytes. 1 Mb = a small novel.

Gigabyte: 1,000,000,000, or 10^9, bytes. 1Gb = a pickup truck full of books.

Terabyte: 1,000,000,000,000, or 10^{12}, bytes.

1 Tb = 50,000 trees' worth of printed pages.

Petabyte: 1,000,000,000,000,000, or 10^{15}, bytes. 2Pb = all U.S. academic research libraries

Exabyte: 1,000,000,000,000,000,000 or 10^{18}, bytes.

5Eb = all the words ever spoken by human beings.

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GNU/Linux SIG

By Geof Goodrum

New Software Releases

Several Open Source projects released significant software upgrades in late March.

On March 23, the GIMP Team released GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Program) 2.0. The latest release has major improvements in the user interface that make it easier for the novice or professional to create and edit graphics and images. The code base has been reworked extensively to make it easier for the open source community to contribute plug-ins and code enhancements. While originally developed for Unix systems, this is the first stable release that also runs on Mac OS X and Microsoft Windows operating systems. A document summarizing the features of GIMP 2.0 is available at *http://brix.gimp.org/files/presspack/about.pdf*.

The OpenOffice.org Project announced OpenOffice.org 1.1.1 on March 29. While primarily a bug-fix release (557 issues addressed since the 1.1.0 release), this multi-platform office application suite now has the ability to download automatically any of 87 spelling, hyphenation and thesaurus dictionaries and has enhanced support for languages that use a comma instead of a point/full stop as the decimal point. The release notes are available at *http://download.openoffice.org/1.1.1/release_notes_1.1.1.html.*

The GNOME Development Team released the GNOME 2.6.0 desktop environment on March 31. The Nautilus file manager is more responsive and has a new, more intuitive user interface with easy access to files over a network (Nautilus can mount filesystems from Windows, ftp, sftp, and WebDAV servers). Keyboard layout selection and assignment of key macro functions (e.g., support for enhanced multimedia keyboards) have been improved. There are also improvements to the Epiphany web browser, PDF viewer, and accessibility features. Vector graphics support is more evident in desktop themes and games. The volume control now supports the ALSA sound drivers as well as the older OSS sound drivers. These and other enhancements are described in more detail at *http://www.gnome.org/start/2.6/notes/rnwhatsnew.html*.

Business Improves for Linux Distributors

Business has been good for Red Hat, Inc., publisher of Red Hat Enterprise Linux (RHEL). After a profitable third quarter, Red Hat announced net income of $5 million for the fourth quarter on total revenues of $37 million. The net income for fiscal 2004 (ended February 29) was $14 million, compared to a net loss of $6.6 million in fiscal 2003. The stock price has risen dramatically after unexpectedly strong sales of RHEL. More information is available at *http://investors.redhat.com/*.

Mandrakesoft, publisher of Mandrake Linux, emerged from 'redressement judiciaire' (Chapter 11 like protection) on March 30 after their exit plan was accepted by France's Commerce Court. The plan provides for the payment of creditors, without recapitalization as a precondition, over a period of nine years. The company normalized its activities by refocusing its core business on Linux, dramatically reducing costs, optimizing business activities, and by developing high margin revenue lines. As a result of restructuring, Mandrakesoft recorded it first quarterly profit since 1999 of 270,000 EUR on 1.42M EUR of revenue during the period between October 2003 and December 2003. For more information, see *http://www.mandrakesoft.com/*.

Debian) on CD-R.

NEATO!

Happy Birthday E-mail!

By Jim Smith, President, Business and Professional Microcomputer Users Group, Inc. (BPMUG), Connecticut

Spring has finally arrived and the winter weather is starting to give way to warm, sunny days. March was the anniversary of E-mail. Yes, in March of 1972 the very first basic e-mail program was written and the "@" sign was chosen for its "at" meaning. Here it is 32 years later and e-mail is a mainstream means of communication and an normal tool for most businesses and for personal use.

Naturally with this handy mainstream concept comes those wanting to abuse it. I would hope that most of you are aware of some of the tricks and hoaxes that can be offered via e-mail. For the others, I'd like to review some of the more common ones so you won't be tricked.

First, there are the obvious scams trying to get you to buy endless supplies of gimmicks that promise to make many of your body parts larger or somehow enhanced. Less obvious are sites that promise prescription drugs for bargain rates and ones with Hormone Growth solutions, or great mortgages on-line or credit repairs and many others. Much like the snake oil sales team of yesteryear, most of these are scams. The occasional one that is legit should also be considered suspect since anyone desperate enough to jump on the wagon with the snake oil sales team is not likely to be around for long enough to deliver anyway. Businesses that use unsolicited commercial e-mail (spam) to sell their products should be viewed with great caution.

Then there are hoaxes that alert you to something that request that you spread it to everyone in your e-mail address book. Any time you get an e-mail that tells you to spread it around, think about it first! Most likely it is a hoax. The most recent one I've seen is the one that asks everyone to not buy gasoline from the big producers in order to prove a point. Searching on-line will give plenty of reasons why this is a farce but it still doesn't stop people from continuing to send it around. Of course there are plenty of hoaxes around about viruses that will eat your computer unless you send it along to everyone else you know. There are jokes that beg to be sent to everyone and there are emailed chain letters that promise doom and gloom for breaking the cycle. Don't continue to clutter up the e-mail system with these.

Here's something to consider -- if you do what you are told and send these to everyone in your address book, and they turn around and add the addresses from their list, and it goes through that for a while, eventually it will likely land in the hands of someone that will sell all of those e-mail addresses to junk emailers who will delight in sending a huge assortment of get-rich-quick and body enhancing scams to everyone listed. I get enough of those spams without friends adding my e-mail address to those lists.

The other popular e-mail hoax is the endless variation on the Nigerian widow with too much money from her late husband and looking for a trusting American with a bank account ready to enter into a business deal in exchange for a percentage. These scams have been around for longer than e-mail has but, rather than using US Postal Service and phones to deliver the pitch, e-mail is a much cheaper way to fish for unsuspecting victims.

Speaking of fishing, there is another hoax that is know by its variation, "Phishing". Phishing is when someone tries to get you to divulge credit card or passwords by pretending to be legit. If you get an e-mail from PayPal asking you to "Click Here" and confirm your account info or from Citibank asking you to verify your credit card number, or from EBay asking you to type in your password so they can keep your account active, these phishing trips are hoaxes! Do not fall for them no matter how legit they appear to be. If you are not sure of something like that, be suspicious. Assume first that it is a phishing expedition rather than assuming it is legit. With a keen sense of skepticism, many of these hoaxes will become

Linux CD of the Month

In addition to the CD-R discs described below, I can provide any downloadable GNU/Linux operating system distribution (e.g. Fedora Core, Mandrake, **Note:** download versions of commercial distributions do not include official technical support or printed documentation.

Beginning in 2004, each disc will contain incremental monthly updates for major GNU/Linux distributions instead of cumulative set of updates for one distribution. This will help distribute security patches quickly and, on average, leave more room for other software. If your distribution is not included, please request it.

Discs are available only to WAC members by pre-order. Contact me by phone (703-370-7649) or E-mail (*ggoodrum@bigfoot. com*) at least 48 hours before meeting day to order or for more information. Single discs cost $4 each; GNU/Linux distributions on two or three discs cost $6 per set. All executable programs are for Intel x86 compatible Linux distributions unless stated otherwise. Your requests and suggestions are always welcome!

April 2004

OpenOffice.org - v1.1.1. Free GNU General Public License source and executable code. OpenOffice.org is an office application suite including an integrated word processor, spreadsheet, presentation manager and drawing package. It also includes tools for managing simple databases and interfacing with third-party database management systems. You can publish your work in Portable Document Format (.pdf), and release your graphics in Flash (.swf) format - without needing any additional software. OpenOffice.org supports complex text layout (CTL) languages (such as Thai, Hindi, Arabic, and Hebrew) and vertical writing languages. Import and export filters are available for a wide variety of document file formats, including Microsoft Office.

Libwpd - v0.7.1. Free GNU General Public License source code and executable packages for Red Hat 9, Fedora Core 1, and SUSE 9. libwpd is a library for reading Corel WordPerfect formatted document files into other applications. Utilities are included to convert WordPerfect documents to raw (plain text with embedded codes spelled out), plain text (no embedded codes) and HTML.

WriterPerfect - v0.2.0. Free GNU General Public License source code and packages for Red Hat 9 and Fedora Core 1. WriterPerfect is a filter add-in for OpenOffice.org that uses the libwpd library to import Corel WordPerfect formatted documents (export is not yet supported).

GIMP 2.0 - v2.0.0. Free GNU General Public License source code and executable packages. The GNU Image Manipulation Program is a powerful image creation and editing application for such tasks as photo retouching, image composition and image authoring. GIMP supports layers, plug-ins and several script interfaces (Perl, Python, C), with many functions built-in for sophisticated effects such as applying textured surfaces to text and animating graphics. GIMP also includes context sensitive help. A user manual is included.

GNU/ Linux Distribution Updates - Security and bug fix monthly updates.

Kernel Source - The latest versions of 2.4 and 2.6 kernel source code for all platforms.

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obvious. They prey on our not thinking too much but just doing as we are asked. Most people that fall for them are thoroughly embarrassed after it is over because they realized that if they had stopped to think about it they would have realized the absurdity of it. Don't be hooked in a phishing expedition!

So with 32 years of emailing behind us, there are many wonderful things about e-mail and some things to watch out for. I've given you a few of them… it is up to you to stay alert to many of the other ones that are out there. BPMUG is a great resource for those wanting to find out whether something that sounds too good to be true, is true or not. Don't be taken in. Stop to ponder it first and then verify it. Then if you find an amazing deal to get rich quick that you just know will work… don't share it with me. I probably won't believe it anyway.

Now get out from behind your computers for a few minutes and have a wonderful Spring!

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context with proper credit given the author. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

Do you use one space or two spaces at the end of a sentence?

By June Hall, Editor, Windows on the Rockies User Group, Colorado

Like most people I was taught to use two spaces at the end of a sentence when using a typewriter. But when I started editing the company newsletter in the l980s, was taught to use one space at the end of a sentence in published material.

If you type the question at www.google.com, the websites are numerous and contain contradictory answers, replies, and opinions.

Original typewriters had monospaced fonts. Monospaced type is text produced by characters that are evenly spaced. A "W" takes up just as much room as an "l." Thus, around skinny letters there was more space than around wide letters. To clear everything up, it was decided that an extra space should be added after a sentence to make it easier to see where one sentence ended and the next began.

In the very early days two spaces were also used in published material, but then along came the lead-casting Linotype machine. The linotype used wedges for spaces, rectangles for letters. After filling the line as close as possible, the operator would pull a handle, and the wedges would be forced upward, expanding (and thereby justifying) the line o' type, which would then be cast in lead. If the operator typed two spaces in a row, you had two wedges next to each other, and that tended to gum up the operation. So only one space was used.

On Woodys Watch (www.woodyswatch.com), Woody told us about all the mail—friendly mail, angry mail, congratulatory mail, why-don't-you-check-your-facts mail, my-teacher-taught-me-this-and-my-teacher-ain't-stupid mail—he received after making a somewhat tongue–in-cheek remark about "cleaning up after people who inevitably type two spaces after every period." Woody ended by stating if you want to sell what you write, use one period because that's the way the industry works nowadays.

A copyeditor at The University of Chicago (Chicago Manual of Style) thinks, "In our efficient, modern world, there is not room for two spaces at the end of a sentence."

Publishers want single spaces after periods. Most desktop publishers believe desktop publishing (electronic type-setting) should follow the commercial publishers rule, "One space at the end of a sentence."

Two spaces can cause problems with line breaks in certain programs. Web pages use only one space between sentences. HTML is set up to only display one space no matter how many are typed. A browser, like Netscape Navigator or Internet Explorer, will only display one.

Some people using word

processing state, "those of us who use word processing software are no longer typists but typographers. While our typewriter keyboards limited our capabilities in creating text, our word processors allow us to do what professional typesetters have been doing for centuries. Consequently, many of the rules we learned as typists do not apply in the world of word processing."

The majority of people who never do desktop publishing have no reason to change from using two spaces. Even some publishers prefer using two spaces in their personal correspondence and notes.

After getting used to using

Should sentences be separated by one space or two spaces? Yes.

only one space at the end of a sentence in writing for published material, I use one space for everything—most everything. I have to watch myself if I type a letter for my husband as he wants two spaces. One of the first things I do when I receive an article for a newsletter is to go to Edit/Replace and put in two spaces to he replaced by one space.

I liked the website with the info below:

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Unless you intend to provide ISP services for your neighbors, or like the TV commercials, perhaps a wide screen TV and $20K girl robot <grin>, run, don't walk, to the news stand and pick up a copy of the March issue of *Smart Computing* or *Maximun PC* . Read their cover stories on wireless networking. Invoke all the security features and suggestions for keeping your wireless network secure. Otherwise, the chalk marks in front of your house may not be hopscotch related, and you might find gearheads war-driving by your house at all hours. You, too, may be asking, "Where'd my wallet go?"

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Computers --- From the Very Beginning for New Users

By Charlie Paschal

Editor/Publisher, Palmetto Personal Computer Club, Columbia, SC

Columnist, The (Columbia) State newspaper, SC

One of the biggest "panes" about Windows is that just about anything can break it -- such as installing a new program or getting rid of an old one.

There's a right way and a wrong way to do both -- but even if you do things the right way, you still can have problems. Windows 2000 and XP have better ways to recover than 98 but it's still not a perfect world. That's where the knowledge of one keystroke might be able to save your skin.

One hidden setting in Windows

2000 and XP (not in 98) also could help you, or someone from technical support, right the Windows ship. This one is turned off by default in those two versions of Windows but I'm going to tell you how to fix it.

Here are the steps:

* Left click on Start.

* Right click on My Computer, then left click on Properties.

* Click on the Advanced tab at the top of the next dialog box

* Click on Settings in the startup and recovery section of the next dialog box.

* Uncheck the box next to Automatically restart under the System failure section.

* Click OK twice.

Smart Computing Magazine Tips

The following tips are reprinted with permission from Smart Computing. Visit http://www.smartingcomputing.com to learn what Smart Computing can so for you and your user group

Save Pictures from the Web: Although some photos on Web pages are copyright protected, in Internet Explorer you can try to save them as files on your own computer. Right-click the picture, select Save Picture As, and specify the location where you want to save the picture.

To Better See a Web Page: If you're having a bit of trouble distinguishing some of the words on an oddly formatted Web page in Internet Explorer, select Internet Options from the Tools menu. Use the Colors And Fonts button under the General tab to specify how you want the text to look. Then click the Accessibility button, select the checkboxes that tell IE to ignore site-specific colors and sizes, and click OK.

Add Google to IE: If you use IE, you can download a toolbar from Google that will add a search box to your browser's interface. To download the Google toolbar, go to *http://www.google.com*. Click the Services & Tools link. Scroll down to the Google Tools section and click the Google Toolbar link. Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click the Get The Google Toolbar button. Next, click the Terms Of Use button and then click the Install With Advanced Features button.

Security: Responding to Firewall Alerts: Featured as a Web-only article on SmartComputing.com (March 2004 issue - Vol 15, Issue 3), we use firewalls to manage and secure the communication between our PC and a network (usually the Internet). When we install a firewall, we must configure it to accept or reject various connections, and most firewalls eventually "learn" the difference between normal and abnormal connections based on usage patterns over time. Still, no matter how carefully you set up and configure a firewall, you'll see alerts from time to time, so don't panic. Most alerts simply provide information, but knowing what alerts mean and how to deal with them can help keep your PC (and its precious data) secure. Visit *http://www.smartcomputing.com/support/links.asp?id=780* to read more.

Cut the Cord: From the January 2004 issue of Smart Computing (Vol 15 , Issue 1), find why going wireless is the way of the future. We show you everything you need to know about setting up a wireless network. Visit *http://www.smartcomputing.com/support/links.asp?id=781* to read more.

E-mail on the Go: If you travel a lot, and you don't have a portable computer, consider using a browser-based e-mail service such as Hotmail or Yahoo! mail. Provided you remember your login ID and password, you can send and receive e-mail via any Web browser from any Internet connection in the world.

Amazon.com: Amazon.com now has a feature called Search Inside The Book. With it, you can search for any word or phrase inside a book and view the entire contents of more than 120,000 books. Point your browser toward the Amazon.com (<*http://www.amazon.com*>) Web site and conduct a search as you normally would. When the search results appear, look for paragraphs beginning with the words "Excerpt From" and followed by a link to a page number. Click that link to see a scanned image of that page. This process is even faster than thumbing through the books on your bookshelf. To use the feature, you must register with Amazon.com, but registration is free and definitely worth the effort.

Squeeze Large Attachments Through E-mail: Featured as a web-only article on SmartComputing.com (February 2004 issue - Vol 15, Issue 2), this article shows you options for e-mailing large attachments. For example, we'll show you how to send numerous photos or several seconds of video that your internet service provider normally won't accept, or won't make it to the receiver's inbox due to lack of space. Visit <*http://www.smartcomputing.com/support/links.asp?id=777*> to read more.

Wireless Networking Tips

By Chuck Roberts

General advice

Lots of choices are available when it comes to wireless networking and new vendors are arriving on the retail scene daily. For example, which protocol should you use, A. 802.11a; B. 802.11b; or C. 802.11g? There is no "correct" answer, but keep some facts in mind as you choose.

Even with a cable-modem broadband connection, your Internet speed is around 3.2 Mbps max. Will 54 GHz make it any faster? It depends on what you're asking. Your Internet connection will not be any faster, but the speed between devices on your network will. Bottom line, unless you have some special reason to improve the network speed on your network 802.11g is a waste of your money and will not increase your Internet speed but you will at least bragging rights for the extra ca$h you spent.

Several vendors have arrived recently in the wireless components marketplace. Is any single vendor "better" than the competition? Answer: Too early to tell. What I will tell you is that universal standards have yet to be established in the wireless arena. Many vendors offer proprietary features that only work with other components they supply. As a result, my advice is to use a single brand for all your wireless components. That way you leverage your investment and maximize the value of the money you spend on wireless networking.

Specifics

A network that includes both wired and wireless components is called an infrastructure configuration. A network that includes only wireless components is called an Ad Hoc network.

When configuring the Wireless Access Point (WAP) or the Wireless Card, several pieces of data are required.:

SSID – is the unique name shared among all devices in a wireless network. The SSID must be the same for all devices. The name is case sensitive and must not exceed 32 characters.

Channel – Select the appropriate channel from the list provided to correspond with your network setting, between 1 and 11 in North America. All points in your wireless network must use the same channel in order to function correctly.

Security Settings

WEP – Wired Equivalent Privacy encryption for your wireless network. You only have three choices for this setting. Disabled, Enabled with 64-bits or enabled with-128 bits. This feature specifically may be unique to a particular vendor. Some vendors enable you to use a passphrase (simple to remember) instead of entering 26 hex digits for 128-bit encryption.

Now that you have the WAP installed and basically configured you are good to go.

However, even 128-bit WEP encryption will not protect your data. Someone packet sniffing your wireless network can, given enough time, crack the WEP and intercept the data on your wireless network

Filtering

One method to improve the security on your wireless network is to use filtering. Usually accessed via the "advanced tab," this allows you to control which computers may or may not communicate with the Access Point based on their MAC address or Media Access Control Address.

Every network interface card manufactured has a MAC address built into the card. This is a unique number assigned by the manufacturer to any Ethernet networking device, such as a network adapter, that allows the network to identify it at the hardware level.

By identifying those MAC addresses that you allow to communicate with the WAP, you automatically eliminate all those MAC Addresses that are not listed or entered into the WAP settings for improved security.

Summary

While this is not a complete list of terms and cautions, it is some basic information that will help you build and implement a secure wireless network in your home or office.

I highly recommend moving to an operating system newer than Windows 98 that supports a secure logon with a password e.g., Windows NT, 2000, or XP.

What does this do? Let me set up a scenario for you. You install an application that corrupts (or changes) a file the system needs to run correctly. If the box above is checked, the system will automatically restart, showing a brief "blue screen" that doesn't give you (or anyone else) a chance to see what the error is before Windows restarts again. It's a vicious circle.

With the above box unchecked, although Windows still might not run, at least it will stop on the above blue screen, meaning you might be able to trace down the problem, perhaps replacing the needed file or get help from a more experienced technical support person who can identify the problem and talk you through fixing it.

This is not a total solution but it gives you a fighting chance. With the above box checked, you don't have a chance at all since you have no way of identifying the problem. If you're using Windows XP or 2000, before you go to bed tonight, uncheck that box. By the way, Windows 2000 will make you restart your computer after hitting OK twice -- XP won't.

The other keystroke might get you out of an install mess. Sometimes with this one you have to be really quick because you have to hit it while Windows is starting up. With computers getting faster and faster, you don't have much time to hit this key because once Windows starts loading the desktop, hitting this key won't help.

One of the ways to make sure you have time to hit the keys is to turn the computer off completely, then get poised to hit the F8 key. It's along the top row of keys of your keyboard and you MUST strike it before Windows starts loading the desktop.

(With some computers this is made even harder by a flashy screen they display while in the background, Windows is busy trying to load everything. Even if you get this type of screen once you hit the power button, hit F8 anyway.)

Sometimes you'll get a message that you have a keyboard error and be asked to hit F1 to continue. If that happens, press F1, then F8 again. You should then get a menu in a DOS-like black screen.

Let's say that you install a program in Windows (any of the above three versions) and then you start getting error messages or, even worse, Windows won't run at all. The one you want to choose is "Safe Mode." This is Windows with all the good stuff removed. The operating system uses a minimum set of drivers and, to tell you the truth, it looks grimy because the display is using only 16 colors. I remember the days of 16 colors on monitors and they looked pretty good back then; now I'm spoiled with millions of colors.

Once Windows loads, Windows 2000 and 98 will look pretty much the same, except for the few colors. This is the time to go to the Control Panel, click on Add/Remove Programs and remove the program that started giving you the trouble in the first place.

You also can go into Device Manager (right click on My Computer, then left click on Properties) to disable drivers of devices you suspect are creating the problem. By clicking on the + sign next to a category, you can see the all the devices listed. Right clicking on the device will give you a context menu. On that menu is a "disable" device option. That's what you might want to do if that's the one with the problem.

While in this cocoon of safety, you can do such stuff as change video drivers, adjust video drivers or uninstall a program that is creating problems.

How to uninstall a program:

* Open the Control Panel.

* Double click on Add/Remove Programs.

* Select the program you want to uninstall and follow the directions from the Wizard.

In many cases, this will fix your computer. If it doesn't, at least you have a fighting chance by unchecking the automatic boot and learning how to use the startup menu that contains a goody that can help you rescue your system.

Questions, comments: Charlie@askcharlie.com.

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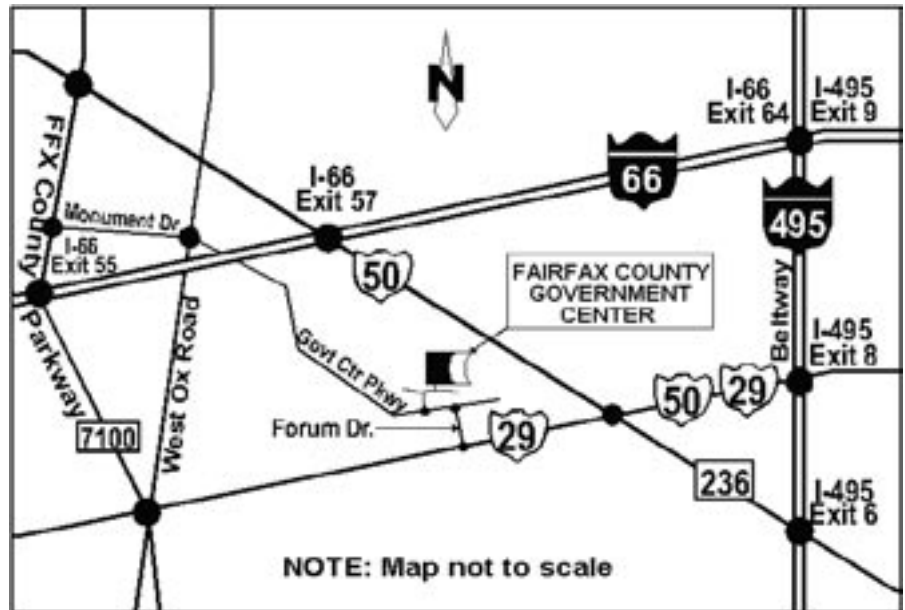
Next WAC Meetings: • April 17 • May 15   • June 19   • July 10   • August 21

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