



The Cursor



Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group

Meeting Location:
Fairfax County
Government Center



Next Meeting:
April 15, 2006



Presidential Bits

April 2006 Meeting

By Paul Howard

At March's meeting, Chuck Roberts gave another of his excellent presentations, with this the third in his series of discussions of versions of Adobe PhotoShop Elements. Materials from Chuck's talk will be available on the group's web site on the "recent meetings" page: <http://www.wacug.org/recmtgs.html>

Questions continue to arise about how to safeguard your computer while you're on the Internet. We believe there are three primary elements: anti-virus software, a firewall (either hardware or software), and protection from spyware, adware, and other assorted kinds of malware. At the March meeting, door prizes included copies of an excellent new book on this topic – "The Symantec Guide to Home Internet Security." Links on the web site's "protection page" will provide more information about this book. The web site's protection page is an extensive listing of software and reference resources to help keep you out of trouble: <http://www.wacug.org/recmtgs.html>

Our next meeting will return to

our third Saturday schedule, and will be held on April 15th. We are scheduled for rooms 4 & 5 (next to room 2/3, where most of our meetings have been held), at the Fairfax County Government Center.

Bill Walsh will demonstrate CyberCorder, a program by Skyhawk Technologies that allows use of your computer as an audio recorder, either directly off the internet, or via the audio input jacks, to make recordings at specific times, such as you would program a VCR or DVR to do. So, if your favorite radio broadcast has a web stream, but no archive of programs, you can capture them with CyberCorder. (Question for Bill – "Do you use a left click for Al Franken, and a right click for Rush Limbaugh?")

Bill has arranged for Skyhawk to set up a 20% discount for user group members. The details will be on the "recent meetings" page. The discount can be obtained via a web coupon, or via snail mail. Details: <http://www.wacug.org/recmtgs.html>

Jorn Dakin will discuss F Secure Internet Security, a product for protecting your computer from the devilry of the Internet. It is produced by a Finnish company, founded in

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Overheard at a recent WACUG Meeting...

"Taxes, taxes, taxes...
Everywhere I go it's taxes!"

Hey, we don't need any
more stinkin' taxes!"

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Lloyd's Web Sites for April, 2006

by Lloyd Johnson, WACUG
Member

<http://wacug.org> – is the URL for the Washington Area Computer User Group. Visit it for past issues of Web Sites with hyperlinks

1. Stay Dry with umbrellas that fit 2 persons – www.umbrellastand.com/uniquedesigns.html
2. The U.S. Department of Labor's Employee Benefits Security Administration has published a free booklet to help Americans calculate the financial resources they will need to ensure a secure retirement "Taking the Mystery Out of Retirement Planning" 1-866-444-3272 or www.dol.gov/ebsa under publications
3. Good visuals where you can locate homes in your neighborhood and get their assed value (around 2004 assessments) – www.zillow.com
4. Music information. Type an artist then click on one of their songs – www.music-map.com
5. Information and links on protecting your system and yourself from viruses, hackers, spyware, etc – www.adbusters.com
6. Music Lessons online – www.notationstation.net
7. This utility notifies you by e-mail or customized Web page when any Web page you specify is updated. – <http://www.ChangeDetect.com/>
8. It's not really film; It's digital video. Who cares? – www.ifilm.com

9. Fight spring allergies. Consult a regional pollen calendar click on News then search for pollen calendar – <http://www.hon.ch/Library/Theme/Allergy/Glossary/ntham.html>. Enter your age, current savings and investments and expected returns to find out how old you'll be when your portfolio hits one million dollars – <http://www.kiplinger.com/links/millionairetool>



A message from Big Brother!

NCTCUG

Visit our "sister" user group. The National Capital Technology and Computer User's Group meets the first and fourth Wednesday of the month. They meet in Carlin Hall in Arlington at 5711 South 4th Street. Visit their web site for more information, a map and directions:

<http://www.nctcug.org/>
Meetings start at 7:00 PM



GNU/Linux SIG

By Geof Goodrum

Linux CD of the Month

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

Discs are available only by pre-order. Contact me by phone at (703-370-7649) or e-mail (ggoodrum@bigfoot.com) at least 48 hours before meeting day to order or for more information. Single discs are available with a \$3 donation; GNU/Linux distributions on two or three discs are available for a \$6 donation per set. All executable programs are for Intel x86 compatible Linux distributions unless stated otherwise. Your requests and suggestions are always welcome!

April 2006

Checkstyle – v4.1. Free GNU Lesser General Public License Java code by Oliver Burn. Checkstyle is a development tool to help programmers write Java code that adheres to a coding standard. It automates the process of checking Java

code to spare humans of this boring (but important) task. This makes it ideal for projects that want to enforce a coding standard. Checkstyle is highly configurable and can be made to support almost any coding standard. An example configuration file is supplied supporting the Sun Code Conventions. As well, other sample configuration files are supplied for other well known conventions.

Liquid Weather ++ - v11.0. Free GNU General Public License desktop theme. Liquid Weather ++ is a superkaramba desktop theme and desktop applet for displaying weather information and forecasts. It displays weather information in a compact and easy to read format, the latest earthquake data, monitors up to five webcams and notifies of major storms in a given area. Requires superkaramba v0.37 or later, KDE desktop, PyQt v3.13 or later, and ImageMagick.

Oolite – v1.62. Free Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 License source code and executable by Giles Williams. The game is an independent interpretation and re-creation of the classic 3D space trading and combat simulation game, Elite. Oolite is an open ended game, based around traveling from star system to star system as a lone wolf trader or bounty hunter or pirate or any role the player chooses; there is no set goal apart from perhaps to gain the coveted Elite combat rating. Whatever the player chooses, danger

lurks - the Police may come to your aid, but with the size of space, they may take their time. Or if the player is less than legally clean, the Police might only be coming to finish them off. There are several missions, and the game is expandable. Requires GNUStep and SDL libraries, 3D accelerated graphic card and 1 GHz or faster processor.

GNU/Linux Distribution Updates

- Security and bug fix monthly updates for Fedora Core 5.

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



Hard Disk Disasters

By Dick Maybach, member Brookdale Computer User Group, New Jersey

Hard disk failure is the most serious PC problem, because it jeopardizes all your data. Even if everything else in your PC dies, if your hard disk is good, you can just move it to a new machine and be back in business as though nothing had happened.

The first problem is to recognize hard disk failure. Look for one or more of the following symptoms.

- A squealing or clicking noise – you will have to open your system case to find where the noise is coming from. Diskette and CD-ROM drives and fans can produce similar noises.
- A longer than usual time to boot up.
- A longer than usual time to open a folder or file.
- Spontaneous file or folder name changes.
- Frequent error messages.
- Missing or corrupted files or folders.
- Frequent “blue screens of death”.

If these begin to appear, immediately copy your data files (most likely your *My Documents* folder) to another device, preferably one with removable media, such as a CD-ROM or a DVD. Do not turn off your PC and do not spend time trying to diagnose the problem before saving your data. Every second you delay increases the likelihood that more data will be lost.

Clearly, the best defense is to back up your data before you have a problem. However, few people do

this, and even if you do, it may have been some time since your last backup.

If your hard disk fails before you can save your data, all is not lost. If your data is very valuable, for example if it's customer data, you can send your disk to a commercial firm that specializes in data recovery. This service will cost from several hundred to several thousand dollars, but usually there is no fee unless they are at least partially successful. If you decide to do this, shut off your PC immediately and contact the firm for instructions. If your data is worth less than this amount, there are two things you can try that may work.

- Remove the hard drive from the system unit and give it a light tap by holding a screwdriver by its blade and tapping the unit with the handle. Reinstall the hard drive and reboot.
- Remove the drive and place it in a freezer for several minutes, until it is cold to the touch. Reinstall and reboot.

If either of these works, move your data to a safe place immediately.

If you have only a partial disk failure, save as much data as you can; then try the following.

- Restart your PC, but before Windows boots get into the BIOS setup utility. If you watch the screen carefully, you should see directions on how to do this. Often you will press F2 or F10. Look for an area called Utilities or something similar and run any drive diagnostics available.
- Run CHKDSK. (Click on *Start*, then on *Run...*, and at the prompt type “chkdsk x: /r”, where x: is the drive in difficulty. If c: is prob-

lem drive, you will probably see a message that chkdsk can't check the drive now, but will offer to check it the next time you restart. Answer “y” and reboot.

- Run diagnostics supplied by your drive manufacturer, or if you don't have one, use Western Digital's Data Lifeguard Diagnostics, available free from <http://westerndigital.com>. Versions are available for both Windows and DOS.

You can take some simple steps to prolong the life of all your PC components.

- Keep the system unit clean, especially if it sits on the floor. Once every month or two open the system case and remove any dust and debris with a vacuum. I prefer this to compressed air, which just moves the dirt to a new resting place.
- Don't move your PC while it's operating; especially, don't jar it.
- Use a power surge protector or preferably an uninterruptible power supply (UPS). The latter are widely available for \$100 or so. Besides reducing stress on your components, one of these will save your data if the power fails. I always had a UPS at work, and every so often I would see the lights blink and hear streams of profanity from other offices whose occupants did not have one.

Modern PC components are quite reliable, and the chances are that you will replace your computer before anything fails. However, you should have a plan in case there is

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a problem. Similarly, the chances are that you will replace your car without ever having an accident yet you still wear a seatbelt, and carry insurance.

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The Future of Broadband Access

By Bob Hewitt, Editor
The Journal of The Computer Club,
Inc., Sun City Center, Florida

This may end up to be a case of who gets there fastest with the mostest.

The goal is Broadband. Just about all computer owners want it. Many cannot afford it. But every provider wants to get the biggest share of the pie.

The telecommunications industry was in the driver's seat first with dial-up. Then came cable as a carrier and telecom countered with DSL. Up rose Wi-Fi, Broadband Wireless Mesh, and finally BPL (Broadband over Power Line).

Pew Internet and American Life Project released a survey finding that about 55 per cent of internet-using Americans enjoy a broadband connection at home or at work.

Since computers have overwhelmed the marketplace, it may be somewhat misleading to lump them together.

The goal of computer mavens is the most speed per dollar expressed in Kbps (Kilobits per second), Mbps (Megabits per second), or preferably MBps (Megabytes per second). The latter conforms to the standard measurement of file size and gives an operator an instant impression of the time involved in achieving a download or a transfer, depending on the speed of his CPU or internet connection.

Because their infrastructure was already in place, the telephone and cable industries became the leaders in delivering internet resources to their subscribers at \$10 to \$50 per month depending on speed. But then came the advent of wireless transmission, commonly called Wi-Fi, with its short range signal providing access principally to portable (laptop) PC's—a significant advantage to travelers who were charged a small amount for access.

Almost paralleling the transition from fixed telephone to cell phone, Wi-Fi evolved into wireless mesh internet which has sparked a huge demand for municipal wireless broadband. Fifty four localities, including major cities, are in the process of establishing or already have established such services.

Tempe, Arizona established a wireless access network last November, covering 40 square miles, with an access cost of \$30 a month per subscriber or \$3.95 per hour.

Manassas, Virginia became the first citywide Broadband-Over-Powerline site last October when it opened a 10 square mile site available to all at \$29 per month.

Philadelphia has contracted with Earthlink to cover its 135 square miles with wireless internet service--

--the cost to Earthlink an estimated 10-million dollars and a cost to residents an estimated \$20 per month for service. It's assumed that Earthlink will amortize its investment by income from advertising.

The excitement over wireless broadband in heightened by a comparison of download speeds available. The fastest of the three Wi-Fi formats now in use (the 802.11g) is 54 Mbps (megabits per second) or 7 Megabytes per second which is 18 times faster than the cable modems of today. Further is the recent approval of the IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) for the new 802.11n Wi-Fi format which may be two years before activation but could achieve data processing speeds of 600Mbps; an almost incomprehensible 75 Megabytes per second—200 times today's cable modem speed.

At that rate, one could download 80 minutes of music in 10 seconds or an entire opera in 30.

The wired communications industries are not unaware. Witness the fact that they have spent millions of dollars lobbying state legislatures to kill off community internet. Over the past few years, no less than 14 states have enacted legislation that bans or places limits on municipalities from building community internet projects. Florida Governor Jeb Bush signed a law last June that prevents cities from offering broadband if there are competing private services.

There are anti-competitive issues at the federal level, also. Republican Representative Pete Sessions of Texas introduced an anti-community internet bill which would prevent any city in the country from
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providing internet access if a private company offers internet services nearby—even if the private company serves as little as 10 per cent of the residents.

Republican Senator John Ensign of Nevada introduced the Broadband Investment and Consumer Choice Act which would severely hamper cities' ability to build and manage wireless networks.

In response to Ensign's bill, Republican Senator John McCain and Democrat Frank Lautenberg introduced legislation that gives municipalities free rein to offer broadband and would overturn state laws banning such activities.

Now that President Bush has lent his support to a broad set of proposals to get every corner of the country access to broadband connectivity by 2007, it will be interesting to watch both sides welcome that goal as supporting their particular positions.

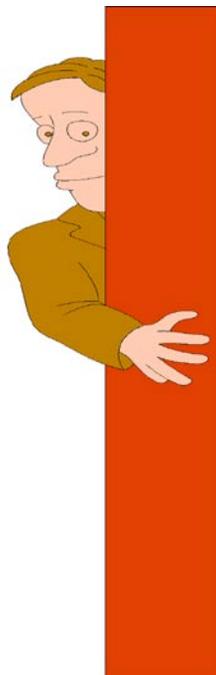
The big question for the public is cost. There have been no definitive publicly-available figures on installation and maintenance of the cutting-edge WiFi mesh application.

Jupiter Research has estimated that the average cost of building and maintaining a wireless network is \$150,000 per square mile over five years. Bert Williams, vice president of marketing for Tropos Networks, which has successfully provided mesh based WiFi hardware in several locations around the world, says, "We usually talk in terms of \$75,000 per square mile for our gear." Adding the ongoing costs for backhaul and system management, he believes the total to be closer to \$100,000 per square mile, while Sky Pilot Networks quotes \$50,000.

A long and vigorous battle is ahead involving the established vs the un-established. But one thing is certain. Everyone is going to end up with a piece of the pie. For this is still early in the digital age and there is plenty to go around.

- muniwireless.com
- informationweek.com
- zdnet.com
- vnunet.com
- jupitermedia.com
- arstechnica.com
- eetimes.com
- mercurynews.com
- slate.com
- eweek.com
- mistershape.com
- S. Derek Turner

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Hey Buddy, come here!

Why Settle, Do It Your Way

by Lee Alexander, Member of the Macon Users Group, Franklin, NC

Icons You can make your PC more colorful and distinguish folders by using icons other than the ubiquitous manila folder. Right-click a folder and select properties; under the Customize tab, click the Change icon button and you will see more than 250 icons to choose from. Actually, the file, Shell32.dll, contains 1484 icons on my system. A good many of these are duplicates in different sizes and color depths. Sizes range from 16 x 16 pixels through 96 x 96 pixels; color depths can be 16, 256, or True colors (24-bit for a range of 16,777,216 hues).

Using one of my favorite free utilities, *IrfanView*, you can view and do minor editing such as changing size, color depth, and rotating the image.

TIP: Open an IrfanView window and Drag the file Shell32.dll into it. You can then see previews of the icons, one by one. If you want to do extensive editing of folder icons, create a shortcut to shell32.dll on your desktop. Then right-click on it and choose "Open With" - Irfanview.

I have created an Excel spreadsheet with a brief description of about 100 selected icons - Shell32Icons.xls.

Acrobat Reader

This free utility is much in demand of late as many program manuals are now written in the .pdf (Portable Document Format) format. A few handy keyboard shortcuts are:

Adobe uses <Ctrl> L (instead of F11

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1988. F-Secure Internet Security 2006 includes antivirus software, as well as a personal firewall. The product can filter unwanted spam from your email and, with the help of the parental control feature, block access to websites with questionable content.



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as in Microsoft products) to toggle full screen view.

Toggle the toolbars with F8.

Use the right/left arrow keys to advance/go back a page.

Adobe Photoshop, Etc.

You can hide the floating palettes in Adobe products (such as Elements), by hitting the <Tab> key. It is a toggle; hit it again to bring them back.

Word Toolbars

You can create a toolbar button for easily inserting a symbol into a document. Right-click a toolbar and select Customize and the Commands tab. In the categories pane scroll down and click on All Commands . In the right pane, Commands, click on Symbol: and drag it to a toolbar. This will open the Symbol dialog box. Click the symbol to be attached to the button and click OK.

The toolbar button now displays the font name (Symbol) followed by the symbol number. Since this is not very friendly information, we can change the button's appearance. With the Customize dialog box opened, right-click the button and choose Name: . To make the button resemble the symbol it's attached to,

use the <Alt> key and the four digits on the number pad for that symbol. You can add a graphic to the button by clicking on Edit Button Image. You're then presented with a simple grid and color palette upon which you can draw simple shapes.

Tips on Digital Photography and a PC Windows Picture and Fax Viewer

This versatile (for photos) utility is often overlooked in the availability of photo editors. As it is included with the Windows Operating System it is a "freebie" readily at hand. Typically, unless you have set file associations otherwise, double clicking on a photo will open it in the Viewer. The toolbar at the bottom has some handy features that are not immediately intuitive. The Previous and Next buttons allow you to view all the images in the folder of the first photo you selected. The Screen icon will start an automatic slide show; the Zoom, Rotation, and Delete are self explanatory. However, the Print icon can surprise you – it opens the Photo Printing Wizard. As you step through the Wizard, the Layout Selection provides a variety of print configurations from 8.5 X 11 to a 35 print "contact sheet."

If you have set a file association to open your photos in an editor, you can create a shortcut to the Picture and Fax Viewer on your Desktop or in the Quick Launch Tray. Right-click in the area you want the shortcut and choose New | Shortcut. In the Shortcut wizard, enter C:\Windows\system32\shimgvw.dll (assuming your Operating System is on the C: drive). Name the shortcut and click Finish. On the first use you will have to choose the program, Picture and Fax Viewer, and check the box to "Always use selected program ..."

Note that if you right-click and choose Edit, you will open the Paint program. The next-to-last button closes the viewer and opens the photo editing program associated with the file type.

Harrys Filters

Harry's Filters 3.0 is a Photoshop-compatible plug-in which can be used in dozens of different image editing applications e.g. Photoshop, Paint Shop Pro, Corel Photo-Paint and many other. It includes 69 effect filters, an Animation feature, options for saving and opening presets and an instant preview feature.

Harry's Filters 3.0 is freeware. You can use them for whatever you like, but you aren't allowed to distribute them without the author's permission.

Be sure to read the instructions about extracting the zipped file to the folder containing your photo editor.

At this point, the website link I had entered is no longer valid. This brings up a salient point – rather than hold on to old links (the dynamic nature of the World Wide Web is in constant flux, always changing) it is better to Google the topic or subject to get the latest information.

LCD Usage with a Digital Camera

The disadvantage of using the LCD, as opposed to the optical viewfinder, the camera is not braced against a body part (your head). It is difficult to avoid camera shake when the camera is held at arms length. Try tucking your elbows into your sides and exhale before pressing the shutter release – don't punch it.

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Keeping Up

by Paul Howard,
WACUG President

Slip-Slidin' Away

Five years ago, Linda and I decided it was time to use our living room for something besides the venue for my post-prandial snoozes, i.e. Dagwood naps. We moved some furniture, bought a new TV, relocated the sound equipment, and set up a low end home theater system. We have 5.1 channel sound, and while the TV is only 27", it works for us, given the room size.

With the new TV, a VCR with hi-fi sound and S-VHS recording capability was soon to follow.

The first time I put a tape in the new VCR, a change in technology was evident. Push in the tape cartridge, and the VCR skittered across the shelf like it was on wheels. This VCR was unlike several of the older units I owned, with a big power transformer, heavy metal chassis, and lots of weighty components, where sheer mass kept the unit virtually glued to the shelf. The S-VHS marvel weighed about four pounds, vs twenty plus for the older vintage units.

The solution was a product called Magic Cover® Grip, whose primary use is as a non-slip drawer liner, and for coasters. Then, there's office uses, such as keeping keyboards and trackballs from sliding around Formica desktops - an application I can heartily endorse. The material, a rubbery weave, comes in rolls, typically 12" wide by ten or twenty feet long. It looks like strings of flat 3/16" beads, connected horizontally by wavy threads, and with more threads at 15 degrees off each side of the vertical.

With scissors, I cut a piece of the Grip material to a hair larger than the horizontal and vertical outside dimensions between VCR's feet, and placed it under the unit. Now it feels like the shelf would topple before the VCR would move - no skidding at all. I've used the Grip material under my CD-R / DVD player - that was so light pushing any of the buttons slid it around the top of the audio cassette deck it sits on. I've used it under my speakers, to keep them from walking around their shelves, and on top of the TV, under the center channel speaker.

As you'd expect, Grip works great for lining tool boxes, keeping the contents from rattling around, and, in light colors, lets you spot the item you're looking for. At seven bucks for a twenty foot roll at Linens and Things, it's a bargain, IMHO. I've purchased the material in "natural" color - which looks like "computer beige" - but there are lots of choices, at least on the manufacturer's web site: http://www.kittrich.com/MC/Grip/mc_non_adhesive.htm

Gotta Maintain That Protection Software

Virtually everyone that uses a computer today is connecting to the Internet. Using the 'Net has become the "killer application" for current computer users, much as the Visi-Calc and Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheets were the apps that got personal computers through the door of corporations in the early eighties. With the Net has come viruses, adware, spyware, and other forms of malware. While awareness of these risks, and basics of combating them are generally known, a fair number of users fail to go beyond the first step - acquiring software to help prevent the bad guys from disabling

your computer.

Let's consider an anti-virus product, such as Symantec's Norton Anti-virus. Most such products come with their protection turned on, automatically checking the manufacturer's web site for updates to the AV definitions, which are then automatically downloaded and installed. Also, such programs are generally also set up to scan your computer at a specific time each week, to find and remove any viruses found. But - do you know these things are true? Have you checked the program options for the default settings? For example, if the default scan takes place at 8 PM Friday evening, and your computer isn't turned on then - quite simply, you won't necessarily catch any viruses that have crept in to your machine. Does your software have a "status" page that reports when the latest scan took place, and reports the date of the AV definition files being used?

So, you know your machine is automatically getting the updated AV definitions, and they're being installed, thanks to a pop-up window when it occurs. However, what about updates to the software itself? Symantec's products generally include a "live update" feature. Invoking this connects to the appropriate update web site, and information is exchanged with your computer to determine what updates are needed, not only "AV definition files" but patches to the programs that make up the AV software package. These need to be downloaded and installed. Are you following this approach with your software?



Flash as a fill-in.

Using flash as a fill-in in outdoor shots, such as when the subject is backlit, can reduce the shutter speed. If your camera has the ability, check the shutter speed and aperture after such a shot. When flash is forced, digital cameras typically compensate by lowering the shutter speed and/or increasing the aperture.

White Balance.

If your photos have an overall cast of color it could be a function of the White Balance. In a photo editor, find a patch of near-neutral gray and check the RGB color levels. They should be nearly equal in value. A free utility, Pixie, can check this for you. You can download the program from www.nattyware.com.

Color Management Schemes

Color schemes can conflict, if you use more than one of them. Select the color profile of either the printer or the photo editing software, not both. With inkjets, a greenish tone could indicate that no color scheme has been applied; a reddish hue may indicate two color schemes have been applied.

See More Thumbnails in Win Explorer

Hold down the <Shift> key when selecting the Thumbnail view to eliminate file labels = more pics per screen.

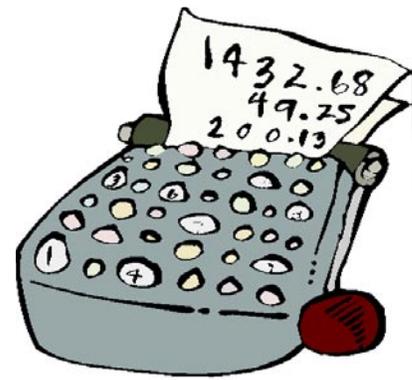
Auto-reduce Photo File Sizes

Windows XP has a neat feature to adjust the file size of photos for transmission over the internet. Select the photo(s) and right-click on one. From the pop-up menu, choose Send to and Mail Recipient. This

will bring up a dialog box, Send Pictures via E-Mail. The radio button *Make all my pictures smaller is selected by default*. Click on Show more options to see 3 degrees of reduction.

Although it creates a message with the reduced file size photos as attachments, you do not have to send the message. You can right-click on an attachment and from the pop-up menu select Save as or Copy to put it on the Clipboard. You then simply delete the message without sending it.

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**SO HOW DID YOU
MAKE-OUT WITH
YOUR TAXES?**



IS YOUR TAX SOFTWARE UP TO DATE?

... ARE YOU SURE?

Tidbits

By Charlie Paschal, PPCC

Is DOS Really Dead?

Microsoft officially made the break with DOS with Windows 2000 and XP. You can't start either operating system with a boot disk. You can, though, boot-up an ill-acting system with a boot disk that contains the correct files out of your root directory.

Both 2000 and XP use an NTFS file system – if you use the native file system the system expects – that supposedly can't be accessed with a floppy. There are certain floppies – available on the Internet – that can be used to access NTFS volumes.

Another floppy, also available on the Internet, allows a user to boot from it to a version of Linux that allows someone to access and change the administrator's password. It's useful for someone who has forgotten the administrator's password.

Knoppix – A Tool for Everyone

One of the greatest tools a computer technician has over a home user is the access of another computer. A second computer can be used to access the Internet and find answers to problems. When a home user's computer is crippled, it's very difficult to find answers – except by telephone.

Although it's not another computer, a very useful tool is a Knoppix CD. Knoppix is a version of Linux that runs from a CD. If you've got a broadband connection to the Internet, such as a cable modem, it automatically senses the connection and gives you access to the Internet. It usually finds all your hardware, giving you total access to your files and information. You usually can copy files to CDs, floppies or Zip disks.

Get Knoppix at www.knoppix.org. It's a large download, about 700 megabytes, but it comes in a form that you can use to automatically make a bootable CD. If you don't have this CD, download it (or ask a friend with a broadband connection to do it for you) as a tool for a day when Windows won't start.

Hex, binary, Decimal numbers

Ever wonder what people are talking about when they mention binary and “hex” numbers? It's the way computers “talk” and the language they understand. Our system, of course, is the decimal number system, which is 10 base. Binary is 2-based, while hex is 16-based. The binary is where you get the “1s and 0s” from because that's the only numbers used in that system.

For example, the number 11 in decimal is 1011 in binary and B in hex. Since 1s and 0s can easily show numbers from 0-9, hex is used to represent numbers from 10 through 16, meaning that A is 10, B is 11, etc. Because binary numbers can get complex, hex is used because it makes it shorter to write and it's easier for humans to remember.

If you ever want to do some conversions yourself without having to learn the mathematical way of doing it, use Windows calculator. Go to View and select scientific. Plug in a number in decimal and then click on Hex or Bin to see the number in that system. For example, 999 is 3E7 in hex. In binary it's 1111100111. See? You can remember 3E7 but it's not as easy to remember the binary version.

Don't forget system restore

Viruses are always a threat, but did you know that one can “return” without warning if you don't turn off one Windows XP feature when

cleaning up from a virus?

One of XP's great features is System Restore that can take your system back to a time when it was running better. I've used it countless times to return an ill-acting system back to a healthy time.

What if, though, you get a virus? Because System Restore can contain system settings that will restore the virus itself, it should always be turned off before you remove a virus.

To do that:

* Right Click on My Computer and select Properties and left click. Click on the System Restore tab and check the box labeled “Turn Off System Restore on all Drives.”

Then, clean up the virus and reboot. Don't forget to turn System Restore back on after cleaning up the virus.

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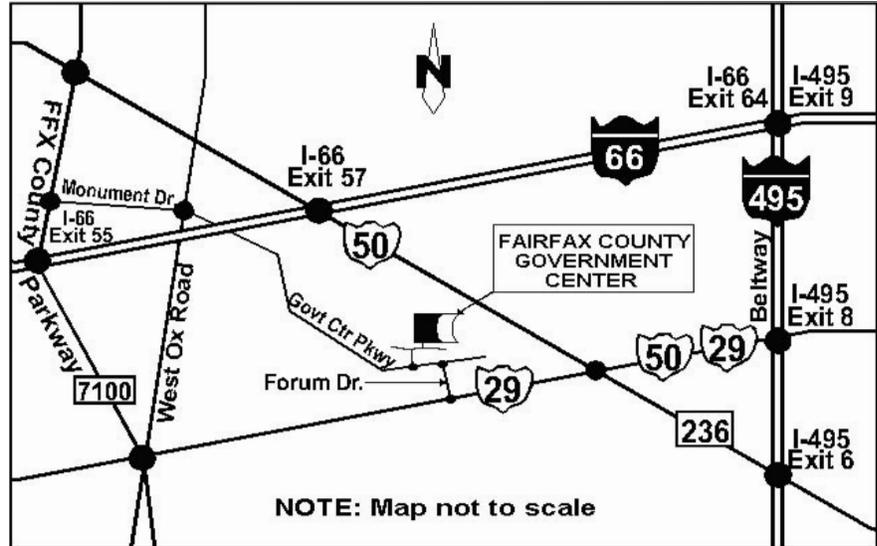
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