The Cursor

Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group

Meeting Location:
Fairfax County
Government Center

APCUG
Member of

Next Meeting:
July 15, 2006

Presidential Bits
July 2006 Meeting

By Paul Howard

In June, Geof Goodrum narrated video footage from the January Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, which he attended after serving as WAC's representative to the Association of Personal Computer User Groups annual meeting. Geof encouraged WAC members to attend future meetings, since the meeting's emphasis has shifted to topics of interest to members, beyond the user group management themes of past meetings. 2007 conference information: http://www.apcug.net/events/conference07/indexa.htm For information on the 2006 meeting, see: http://www.apcug.net/events/conference06/conf06files.htm

Only one computer was brought in for the attentions of our tech team. Unfortunately, this Windows 2000 laptop, which would not boot up, defied our ministrations. The members spent the bulk of the meeting with an expanded Q&A session, which was very successful.

July Meeting

WACUG's July 15th meeting will be held in the Fairfax County Government Center . The topic is "How to Make Movies Like Steven Spielberg."

At our next meeting, Kurt DeSoto will present a tutorial on the basics of desktop video editing. It is much easier and cheaper to make your own movies now than when Frank Capra did, so why not plan on making some yourself? All it takes is your favorite footage, photographs, and music to make a fun alternative to slide shows or PowerPoint presentations. If you do not to gain access to the red carpet in Hollywood, at least you will thrill your friends and family.

Kurt will discuss the equipment and software you will need as well as provide information on helpful sites and resources. If time allows, he might also show a few examples of the movies he has created. Ron Howard, move over!

Washington User Groups Discuss Cooperative Efforts

On June 25th, the presidents of the Capital PC User Group, National Capital Technology and Computer User Group, and Washington Area Computer User Group, held the second of a series of meetings to discuss issues of mutual interest and begin planning for future cooperative ventures. Dennis Courtney, Jim Rhodes, and Paul Howard met

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Lloyd's Web Sites for July, 2006

by Lloyd Johnson, WAC Member

http://www.wacug.org is the URL for the Washington Area Computer User Group. Visit it for past issues of Web Sites with Hyperlinks.

1. Low cost overseas telephone calling. Try using 10-10 calling codes. You can find a 10-10 code for just about any country at:
   www.1010phonerates.com
   or
   www.1010565.com

   After finding a 10-10 code, simply punch it in before dialing the international area code and phone number.

2. For tips on preventing Identify Fraud check the U.S. Federal Trade Commission Web site:
   www.consumer.gov/idtheft

3. From Bill Bales; just about every Legal form may be downloaded at:
   www.ilrg.com/forms/

4. Before you leave the USA, leave an itinerary with a contact at home and **register with the U.S. embassy at your destination by filling out a form at:**
   www.travel.state.gov

5. Summertime is grilling times. For many recepies, some healthy, log on to:
   www.epicurious.com

6. Community classified-ad service. Sell something or find a Soul Mate. Its free:
   www.craigslist.org

7. Three Dimensional modeling/animating Open Source Project:
   www.blender.org

8. Library Thing lets you catalog your book collection-free up to 200 books; $10 per year or one time $25 beyond 200:
   www.librarything.com

9. The on-line home of National Oceanic & Atmosphere Administration (NOAA) gives articles and resources about weather. Just in time for Hurricane Season:
   www.noaa.gov

10. If you need a tech shock or other Nerd thing, check out:
    www.thinkgeek.com

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Have a safe and wonderful 4th of July!

GNU/Linux SIG

By Geof Goodrum

Google Earth for Linux

Linux users have a native version of the popular Google Earth 3D world mapping application with the version 4 beta released on June 16th. Google Earth is free for personal use; versions with GPS support and commercial use licenses are available for a fee.

Features in this beta release include a new user interface with checkbox selection of data layers (e.g. roads, political boundaries, geographic databases), more realistic textured 3D models of buildings, and faster loading of geographic data.

I particularly enjoy the dynamic map tags linked to online databases for earthquakes, shipwrecks and National Geographic articles. Users can also enter points of interest through the Google Earth community forum.

The software does require significant system resources to run well. The recommended system configuration for Google Earth is

- Kernel 2.6 or later
- glibc 2.3.5 w/ NPTL or later
- x.org R6.7 or later
- System Memory (RAM): 512MB
- Hard Disk: 2GB free space
- Network Speed: 768 Kbits/sec
- Graphics Card: 3D-capable with 32MB of VRAM
- Screen: 1280x1024, 32 bit color

Google Earth may be available through your GNU/Linux distribution's update utility (e.g. emerge googleearth in Gentoo), or can be downloaded from http://earth.google.com/download-earth.html. The download is approximately 16 MB. Unfortunately, license terms prohibit redistribution on WACUG CD of the Month.

Linux CD of the Month

In addition to the monthly CD described below, WACUG can provide CD-R and DVD±R media for any downloadable GNU/Linux operating system distribution (e.g. Fedora Core, Mandriva, Ubuntu, Debian, Knoppix). Please note that download versions of commercial distributions do not include official technical support or printed documentation.

Discs are available only by pre-order. Contact Geof Goodrum 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 CD-R discs are available with a $3 donation; GNU/Linux distributions on multiple CD-Rs or single DVD±R are available with a $6 donation.

July 2006

Photo Organizer – v2.31a. Free GNU General Public License source code by Solomon Peachy. Photo Organizer is multi-user photo management tool that was designed for professional photographers. It offers a searchable photo database that supports photo version control, client management, photo submission history, EXIF, IPTC, XML, and XMP, user quotas, a datebook, and printing labels and color brochures in PDF and PS formats. It uses PostgreSQL, features a Web interface, and uses ImageMagick and DCRAW to handle over a hundred image formats including several RAW formats. Photo Organizer requires PHP 5.0 or later, PostgreSQL 7.4 or later, and ImageMagick 6.0 or later.

Slam Soccer 2006 – v1.0.1. Free GNU General Public License source code and executable and Creative Commons music/data files by Andreas Wenger et al. Slam Soccer 2006 is a 3D soccer game done in a comic style, featuring eighty teams, twenty stadiums, ten weather conditions, fifty adboards, ten referees, nine commentators (five german, two english, two french) and support for english, german and french languages. The game can be played with a keyboard or gamepad. This game requires Java VM, an 800MHz or faster CPU, 256MB of RAM, a 3D video card with 64MB of RAM, and 200 MB of free disk space.

Tomsrtbt – v2.0.103. Free GNU General Public License bootable floppy and CD image by Thomas Arthur Oehser. Tomsrtbt stands for "Tom's floppy which has a root filesystem and is also bootable." This GNU/Linux distribution on a floppy disk has a wide variety of command-line tools useful for reading or repairing Linux, CD-ROM, FAT, VFAT and NTFS filesystems, partitioning and formatting disks, and editing files (hex and text). It works with common network cards and includes webserver, telnet and file transfer programs.

GNU/Linux Distibution Updates
- Security and bug fix monthly updates for Fedora Core 5.

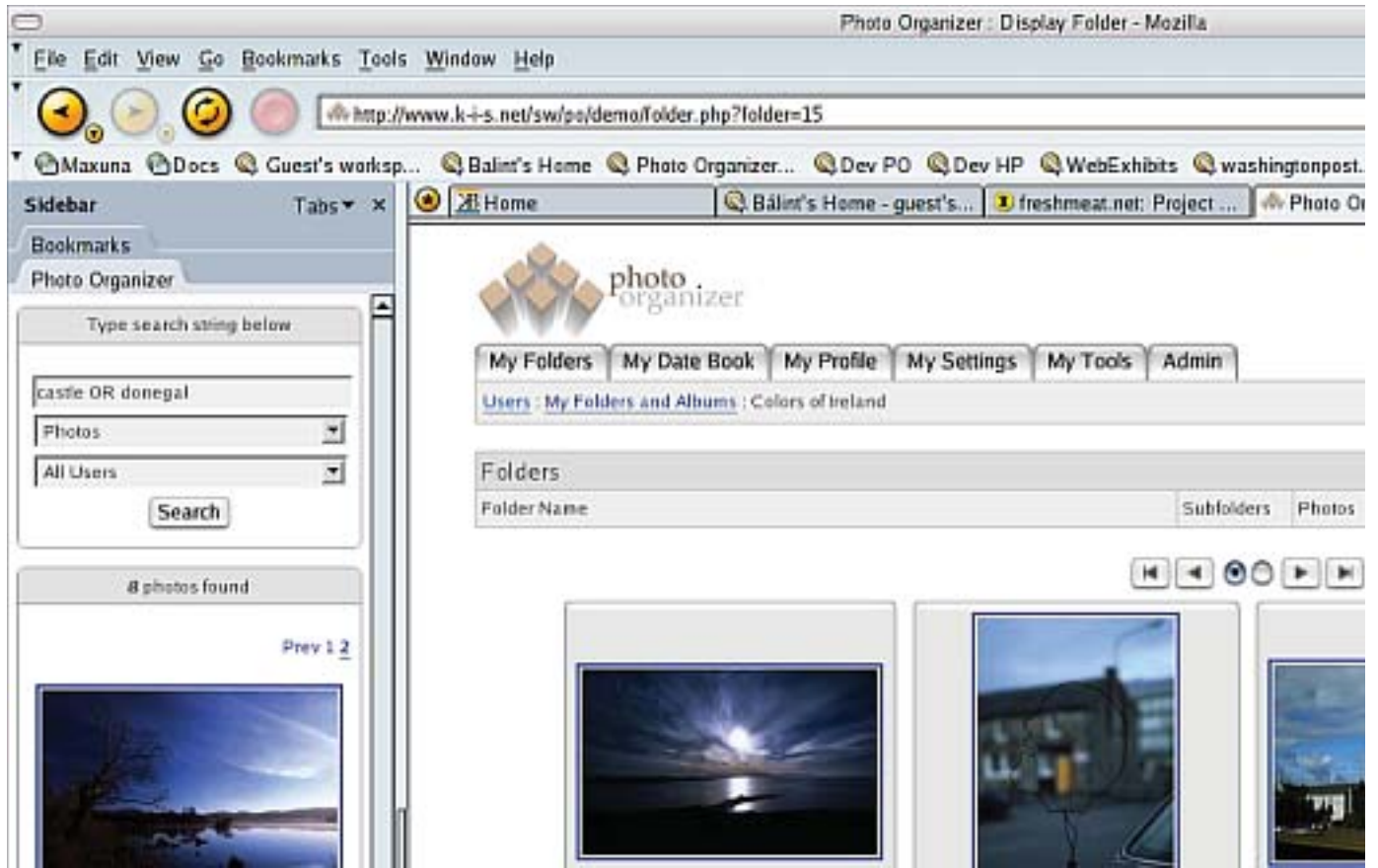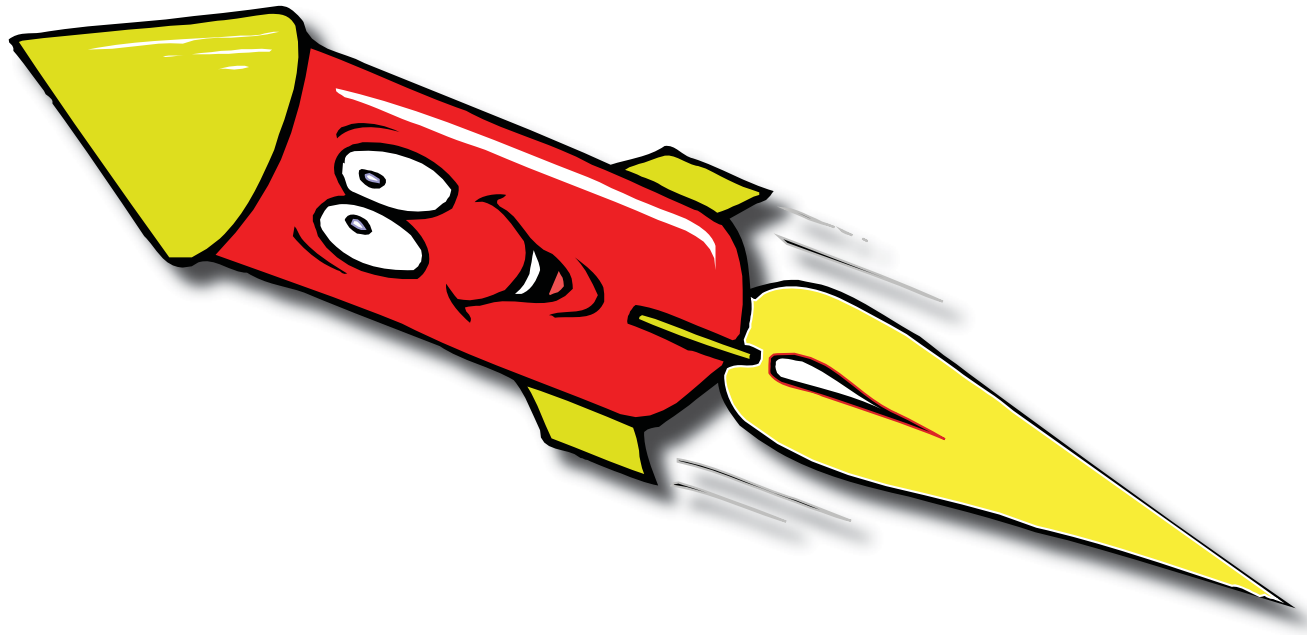**Kernel Source - The latest versions of 2.4 and 2.6 kernel source code for all platforms**.

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Tux

Screenshot of Slam Scoccer 2006

Screenshot of Photo Organizer

Keeping Up – July 2006

by Paul Howard

I'm writing this on Tuesday in the last week in June, and wondering if we'll ever see the sun again, for more than 15 minutes at a time. For three days, the Weather Bug forecast has had a thunderstorm cloud in every day's panel for the next week. The *Post's* Metro section has a huge picture of the route I took to work for the last dozen years before retiring, with trucks and loaders trying to cope with the mud from the overflow of the Northwest Branch, and editorial content indicating it will take several days to repair the road.

Amazingly, I managed to get out and mow my back yard this morning before the first deluge of the day. I had visions of being out there in flippers, mask, and snorkel behind the mower - which could have been more than a little exciting, since I use an electric mower. I'm absolutely convinced we're going to turn into frogs or mossy-backed turtles. Does Lowe's sell plans for the Ark?

Gas for Your Gadgets

Everything seems to be battery - operated these days. When the gadget in question doesn't use disposable cells, nickel-cadmium (nicads) or another battery chemistry, such as nickel - metal hydride, which can be recharged, are often the power source of choice.

Back before the end of life as we knew it - 1999 - preparing for the Y2K bug, my wife and I stopped in a Sunny's Surplus / Sporting Goods store. Not wishing to usher in the New Year with cold beans, we bought a one-burner camp stove, and an emergency radio for Mozart. The AM-FM radio was a marvel, complete with power sources of a hand crank generator, photocells, and provisions for two disposable AA cells - which would, of course, be cheating.

Linda used the radio in her office, keeping it on a window sill, where daylight provided enough charge from the photocells to keep the radio perking along. Just the ticket, until the internal nicad cells, charged by the photocells or generator crank, finally wouldn't take a charge - we wouldn't want to use disposable AAs, after all - not hardnosed emergency enough, right? Taking the radio apart, I discovered two internal nicad cells, connected together as a battery, with welded on terminals to connect to the radio's circuitry and the generator and photocell charging systems.

In doing some research after a user group discussion of suppliers of UPS (uninterruptible power supply) batteries, I came across BatteriesPlus, a franchise chain with Washington area locations in Rockville, Springfield and Fairfax. http://www.batteriesplus.com/ I went to the Fairfax store, and they were able to make up a custom battery, complete with terminals welded on. My Y2K radio was back in service, with a little help from my soldering iron, at a cost of $7, vs. twenty bucks for a new radio. With that success, I starting going through my collection of battery powered gadgets at home, and salvaged a collection that been dead or dying.

My Norelco Maverick rechargeable beard trimmer had been running on AC for over a year, but the internal nicad had gotten to the point that it wouldn't hold any charge at all, so the mustache trimmer finally packed it in. This unit uses a single nicad cell with custom welded on terminals. With a few minutes for disassembly, desoldering, soldering, and reassembling, a renewed trimmer for $3.49 - about 10% of the cost of a replacement trimmer.

Next for refurbishment was a Dorcy rechargeable flashlight - a unit we've had for years. This unit plugs in an AC outlet, and includes a standard 4 watt nightlight, operated by a photocell switch, so it turns on at dusk. An option switch allows the flashlight to blink about once per second on AC power loss - so you can easily locate the flashlight in the dark. This unit includes two AA sized nicads for the flashlight feature, and they now failed to hold a charge. When I got the purchase replacements home, I discovered the store tech had given me AAs with the configuration to accept welded terminals. The positive terminal wasn't protruding enough to contact the flashlight's terminals, so I had to go back and swap them for a more conventional AA configuration, where the positive terminal protrudes about 1/16th of an inch above the top of the cell. $6.99 got this unit back in service, with replacement flashlights usually selling for $15 - $30, depending on features.

Another rechargeable flashlight candidate was a Black & Decker Spotlighter, which required a 3 cell nicad battery pack replacement, with welded terminals, for $11.99. With the proliferation of high light output LED (light emitting diode) flashlights, some of the advantages of conventional rechargeables are

eliminated. However, in this case, I've still got a flashlight that works, and will probably hold up for another five years. With nicads, the trick is to remember to treat them right - discharge them completely once a month and then recharge them, to avoid memory effect.

In my eagerness to refurbish my gadget collection, I probably went too far with a Black and Decker Dustbuster Plus. I had BatteriesPlus replace the three cells in the battery pack, then scratched my head when the Dustbuster didn't even whimper - I thought the switch or motor was bad, then: pound fist into forehead! This unit required the standard three cell pack, common for the units in this series, a brown, roughly square assembly that fit between the handle and the dust nozzle - and a second two cell pack in the handle, for a total of six volts. So, I expended $19.96 for replacement batteries, and a current model Dustbuster, using 7.2 volt batteries, goes for $18.99.

Overall, though, I'm a happy camper - old toys back in action, with a new "gas" supply!

The archive of ten years of illustrated "Keeping Up" columns is available on line at: http://www.nctcug.org/kpupind.html

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at the invitation of Gabe Goldberg, regional representative of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups.

The groups have agreed to share meeting and event publicity throughout their memberships, work on joint meeting opportunities, share speakers, and explore the potential for sponsorship of a regional meeting of APCUG user groups later this year. Group members are encouraged to visit the other organizations' web sites, sample their meetings, and consider membership in multiple user group organizations. Sharing resources and member benefits across the partner groups will evolve, as discussions continue.

Washington Area User Group Partners
Meeting Information
CPCUG - http://calendar.cpcug.org/events.html
NCTCUG - http://www.nctcug.org/

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Oops !

Access Family Accounts in Emergencies

By Gabriel Goldberg, APCUG Advisor; Columnist, AARP Computer & Technology Website, www.aarp.org

It's clear how important it is for each of us to maintain current wills, powers of attorney, medical directives, and other such documents. And family members, trusted friends, and advisors such as lawyers need quick access to them. In their absence, at stressful times, important actions and decisions become needlessly difficult.

With much data now stored electronically, emergency preparedness requires that loved ones or advisors can access personal information stored online, on computers, and in electronic gadgets like cell phones and PDAs (personal digital assistants, Palms and Pocket PCs). This preparation merely adds our electronic lives to a readiness checklist.

It's no more exotic or worrisome than opening joint bank accounts or giving a house key to a trusted neighbor.

Actions we should take are as unique as our legal, medical, and financial profiles. Preparation is especially important because laws and business practices don't match today's technologies.

News stories highlight some of today's challenges and risks. A soldier in Iraq used e-mail and a Web site to communicate with the world. When he was killed, his parents wanted to preserve what he had created. But his ISP refused to allow access or provide the data, citing privacy concerns. Similarly, when a Texas man's wife died, he cancelled her cell phone. The company also disconnected his phone, which had been on the same account. He couldn't reactivate it, leaving him isolated at a difficult time.

Where to begin? Many such legal and logistical problems can be avoided by simply including two names on accounts such as online banking and investing, mortgage service, bill paying, e-mail, and Web services. This way either person can deal with accounts on the other's behalf. But ensure that both names aren't required for routine actions.

Then record account names, passwords, and Web addresses for family members, trusted friends, or a lawyer, accountant, or executor. They needn't have the list until it's to be used so just ensure that they can find it and that it's kept updated.

Those of us in the baby boomer "sandwich generation" may have parents and children to look out for and with whom to share our technology preparation information. Preparation requires replacing the common mindset of independence with one of readiness and collaboration. An estate attorney can be a valuable resource, providing legal documents, objective advice, and what-if scenarios.

Commercial services are arising to help. Denver-based Family Matters USA [www.familymatters.com] claims to have "identified, researched and solved over 120 tasks that an estate executor or family could perform". They believe that while privacy issues affect all sorts of accounts, proper legal forms, a legitimate need, and perseverance (sometimes escalating to a supervisor) will yield the desired information.

While organizations typically handle employees' work information during emergency situations, supervisors and individuals should inventory what they use on the job and how others might need to access it.

At home or at work, the largest obstacle to emergency preparation is the wealth of information we use from memory. You can start an inventory by noting details of online accounts, Web site bookmarks saved, and passwords stored. Then make a list to share with someone who may need to follow in your electronic footsteps. Remember to safeguard your list, whether it's on paper, a PC, or a USB drive [www.aarp.org/learntech/computers/hardware/secure_usb_drives.html]. But don't hide the list itself behind a secret password!

Finally, there's a very tangible step to take. Emergency responders encourage using a high-tech replacement for traditional wallet contact-list cards [www.macmillandictionary.com/New-Words/050808-ICE-number.htm]. They commonly check victims' cell phones or PDA directories for entries filed under "ICE" ("in case of emergency") to determine whom to call.

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Backup Awareness Month

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Advisor; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio & TV show host
iwilsker(at)apcug.net

WEBSITES:

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 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 can 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 the paper records 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, email, 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 insure 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 that we 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", 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, and 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 form 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 that 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 backup awareness month; every month should be backup awareness month!

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.

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Working Together For Our Members

CPCUG.ORG   **NCTCUG.ORG**   **WACUG.ORG**

The Cursor

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Send article submission and reprint requests to the Editor: cursor@wacug.org

2006 WAC Membership/Renewal Application

2006 Dues are for the Calendar Year and include Disk Library Discounts, and WAC's monthly newsletter, *The Cursor*, by 1st Class mail to your home.

Individual/Corporate/Family Dues: $25.00

Remit payment in person at the WAC Membership table on meeting day, or by mail to:
Washington Area Computer User Group
30 Fendall Ave.
Alexandria, VA 22304-6300
Make checks payable to WAC. Please do not send cash by mail. *Thank you for joining WAC!*
Complete if you name and address do not appear on the reverse side. Include E-mail Address
Name:
Street:
City:
State:　　　　　　　Zip:
Phone: (　　　) 　－

E-mail:

Membership Survey: Help us to help you by completing this survey. List the computer systems you own / use (in order of preference)

Operating System(s):
Modem(s):
Printer(s):
Other Hardware:
Favorite Software:
Connection: (circle one)　　　　Dial-up　or　Broadband

Circle Your Interests:　Photo Printing　　Investing　Games
Digital Photography　　Internet Access　　Education　Music
Graphics/Animation　　Genealogy　　　Video　　Finance
Programming Language(s)
Hardware Upgrades/Repair　　　　　List others below

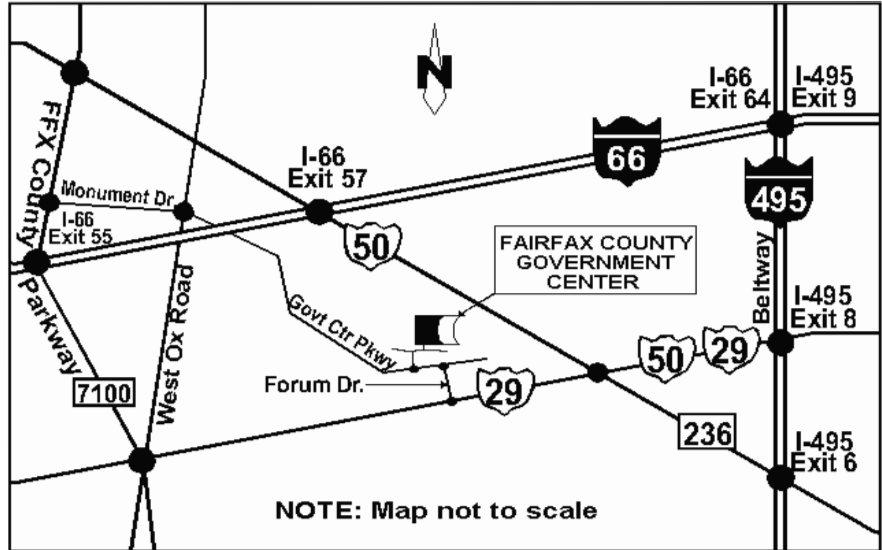**Next WAC Meetings:**   • July 15   • Aug 19   • Sep 16   • Oct 21   • Nov 18

Call (703) 370-7649 for the latest meeting information or Visit our Web Site at:

http://www.wacug.org

July Meeting will be held at
the Fairfax County
Government Center

Through Front Entrance to
the Left Hallway, Past the
Elevators to:
Conference Room 9/10

Service Desks Open at 12:30
Meeting Starts at 1:00 PM
FREE ADMISSION
BRING A FRIEND!