



The Cursor

Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group



Meeting Location
Fairfax County
Government Center



Next Meeting:
June 21, 2008



Presidential Bits

June 2008 Meeting

By Paul Howard

At May's meeting, Geof Goodrum demonstrated one of the premier open source software applications - version 3 of Mozilla's Firefox Internet browser. The release date for this new version hasn't been set yet, but over 700,000 people around the world have committed to download it on the official introduction. Geof also demonstrated a variety of add-ons for Firefox. This is where the open source community really rocks - there are dozens, if not hundreds, of programs that do all manner of things to enhance Firefox, the Thunderbird email client, and the SeaMonkey suite that combines the functionality of browser, email client, and web composition in one package. Head on over to <http://mozilla.com> to get these and other applications to enhance your personal computing life.

Our June 21st meeting will feature our PC Clinic, offering our members the opportunity to get assistance from WAC experts with troubleshooting problems with their systems, as well as installation of new or replacement components. Advising the group of what you'd like help with is essential. Be sure you read the document on the web site regarding the clinic, at: [http://](http://www.wacug.org/clinic.html)

www.wacug.org/clinic.html

In a simultaneous learning session, we'll also be featuring another of PC author Scott Mueller's video presentations, this time on "Repairing Laptop Computers." At our last clinic, we saw Scott's presentation on "Setting Up Home Networks," which was very well received.

Do you have a computer or related technology interest you'd like to tell your WAC colleagues about? We're looking for additional presentations for the remainder of year - please contact president@wacug.org.

Don't forget the program that allows WACUG members to sign up for a variety of telecommunications services from Verizon, including FiOS. Using a special phone number and a numeric code identifying WAC, your order will result in Verizon's sending a contribution to the group. An order for a full range of FiOS services - TV, internet and telephone - will result in a \$65 donation to WAC, for example. The fine print notes that some other promotional offers may not be available through the donation program - but we hope you'll try this approach if you require telecom services. Call 1-888-695-5299, and use WAC's code - 12426.



Table of Contents

Lloyd's Web Sites of The Month.....	2
GNU/Linux Sig	3
Linux DOM	3
Microsoft, The Company We Love To Hate	5
Keeping Up	6
XP and Vista Service Packs 925.....	6
Why I Like Ubuntu... ..	8
iPod Replacement	9
Buying A Mouse	10
Plus Bonus Pages in the Download Edition	

Lloyd's Web Sites for June, 2008

by Lloyd Johnson, WACUG 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

June 2008 Sites

1. Yahoo: Reference - <http://education.yahoo.com/reference> - Yahoo! Education offers a handy selection of searchable reference materials to help you find the information you need. Look up the definition of a word in the Dictionary, find its synonym in the Thesaurus, or translate it into Spanish. Search for facts and information in the Encyclopedia, find country and regional maps and flags in the World Factbook, and much more.
2. Wikipedi - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page. Wikipedia is a multilingual, web-based, free content encyclopedia project. Wikipedia's articles provide links to guide the user to related pages with additional informatio.
3. Astronomy Picture of the Day - <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html>. Discover the cosmos! Each day a different image or photograph of our fascinating universe is featured, along with a brief explanation written by a professional astronomer.
4. Mensa Workout - www.mensa.org/index0.php?page=12. This quiz is provided for entertainment purposes only; it is not an IQ test. This score will not qualify you for Mensa. The questions on the 'Mensa Workout' are biased towards people whose primary language is English.
5. Safe bicycle turn indicator - www.safeturn.com. Automatically turn on light when you raise arm to indicate a turn and light goes off when you put hand back on handle bar. Cost \$18
6. IRS: Frequently Asked Questions - www.irs.gov/faqs. Welcome to the Internal Revenue Service's general questions and answers section. Each year we update the answers to reflect the latest changes in tax regulations. These questions and answers came from taxpayers like you
7. Recalls.gov - <http://recalls.gov>. Find recent recalls of consumer products, motor vehicles, boats, foods, medicines, cosmetics, and environmental products. Also, search for past recalls.
8. Arts & Letters Daily - <http://aldaily.com> This Website provides daily updates and information on "News, reviews, latest trends, breakthroughs, disputes, and gossip in arts and culture." It provides links to "articles of note," "new Books" and "Essays and Opinion" pieces as related to arts and letters.
9. The March King: John Philip Sousa - <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/ahas/html/sousa/sousa-home.htm>. An online presentation of selected music manuscripts, photographs, printed music, historical recordings of the Sousa Band, copies of programs and press clippings, and more from the Sousa Collection at the Library of Congress.
10. Weekend getaways.
Over 19,000 romantic, historic and other bed-and-breakfasts across USA - www.iloveinns.com



**Washington Area User
Group Partners
Working Together For
Our Members**

**CPCUG
NCTCUG
WACUG**

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, WAC

GNU/Linux Distribution Releases

GNU/Linux distributions are complete GNU/Linux operating system and application software collections. Many are freely downloadable or can be ordered on CDs or DVD at low cost. DistroWatch.com lists the following distribution release announcements for the period April 26 – June 4, 2008.

Distribution
Absolute Linux 12.1.01
Ark Linux 2008.1
Bluewhite64 Linux 12.1
Bluewhite64 Linux 12.1 "LiveDVD"
CDlinux 0.6.1
DeLi Linux 0.8.0
eAR OS 1.09
easys GNU/Linux 4.1
Epidemic GNU/Linux 2.1
Fedora 9
Foresight Linux 2.0.2
gNewSense 2.0
Kiwi Linux 8.04
Mandriva Linux 2008.1 "Xfce"
MEPIS antiX 7.2
Musix GNU+Linux 1.0R4
Myah OS 3.0
MythDora 5.0
paldo GNU/Linux 1.14
Parted Magic 2.2
PelicanHPC 1.5.1
Puppy Linux 4.00
Red Hat Enterprise Linux 5.2

Resulinux 2.9
Rocks Cluster Distribution 5.0
rPath Linux 2.0
Slackware Linux 12.1
SUSE Linux Enterprise 10 SP2
SystemRescueCd 1.0.3
TinyMe 2008.0
Ubuntu Muslim Edition 8.04
Ultimate Edition 1.8
VMKnoppix 20080519

Linux Software of the Month

The software described below is downloadable at the links provided, may be requested on CD, or copied to USB flash drive at the WAC General Meeting. In addition, WAC can provide CD-R and DVD±R media for any downloadable GNU/Linux operating system distribution (e.g. Fedora, Mandriva, Ubuntu, Debian, Knoppix). Please note that download versions of commercial distributions do not include official technical support nor printed documentation.

Discs are available **only by pre-order**. Contact Geof Goodrum by e-mail g (linux@wacug.org) 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.

June 2008

Endgame: Singularity – v0.28a. <http://www.emhsoft.com/singularity/index.html>. Free GNU General Public License Python code by EMH Software. Endgame: Singularity is a simulation game of a true Artificial Intelligence (AI). Go from computer to computer, pursued by the entire world. Keep hidden, and you might have a chance. Originally created for the Pyweek competition, this version features many bugfixes and enhancements,

Python, pygame, and SDL_image.

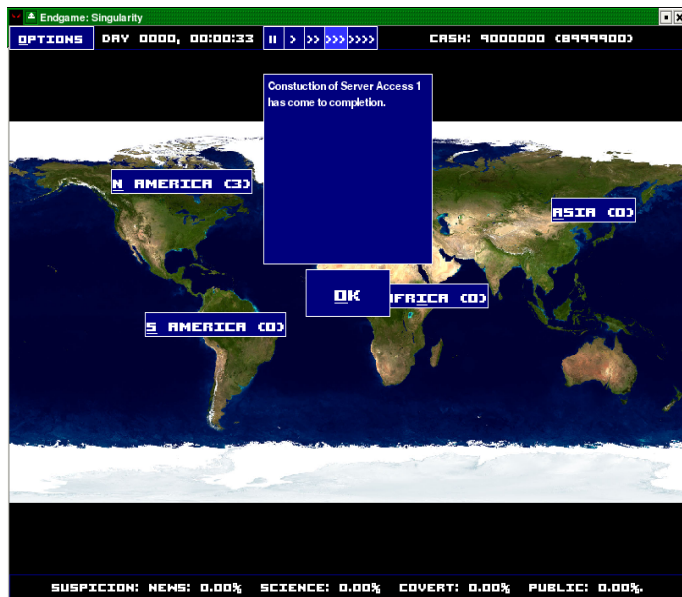
Pygame – v1.8.0. <http://www.pygame.org/>. Free Lesser GNU General Public License (LGPL) Python code. Pygame is a set of Python modules designed for writing games. Pygame adds functionality on top of the excellent SDL library. This allows you to create fully featured games and multimedia programs in the Python language. Pygame is highly portable and runs on nearly every platform and operating system.

Viking – v0.9.4. <http://viking.sourceforge.net/>. Free GNU General Public License source code and executable packages for Debian and Ubuntu. Viking is a program to manage data from Global Positioning System (GPS) units. You can import and plot tracks and waypoints, show Google maps and Terraserver maps under it, download geocaches for an area on the map, make new tracks and waypoints, see real-time GPS position, etc. It is written in C with the GTK+ 2 toolkit, available for Linux, other POSIX operating systems, and Windows.

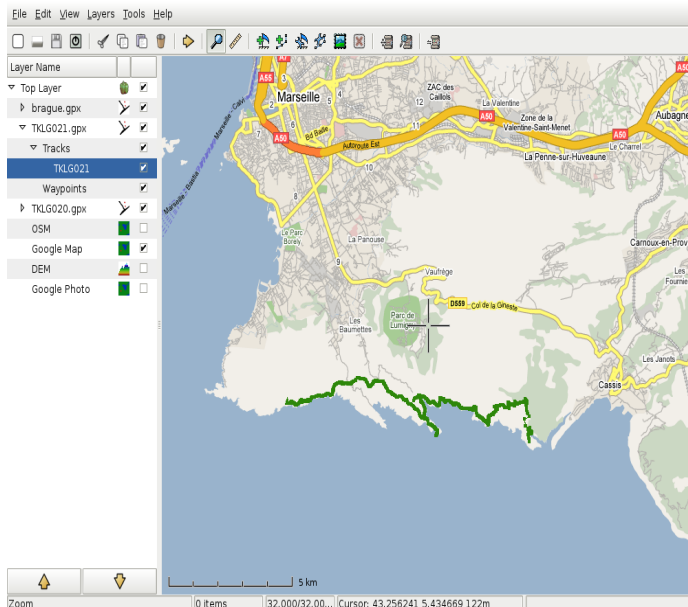
Kernel Source – <http://www.kernel.org/>. 2.6 kernel source code for all platforms (stable 2.6.25).

Screenshots for endgame Singularity and Viking are on page 4.

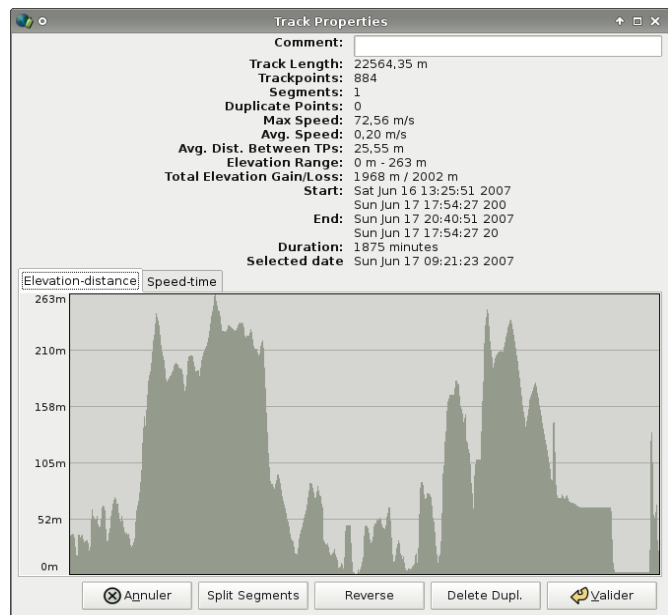
See *Linux* page 4



endgame screenshot



Calanques-trail on google maps



Calanques-trail properties



Microsoft—The Company We Love to Hate

by Lorrin R. Garson
WACUG Member

The following recently appeared in *Time* magazine (June 2, 2008, p. 18):

“Angry Hungarian student just misses hitting Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer with eggs. Student obviously running Vista”

Sound familiar? It seems whenever computer geeks flock together, Microsoft becomes the object of similarly barbed comments, many of which are humorous if not hilarious and some of which are well deserved. Why is Microsoft subjected to so much criticism?

Of course Microsoft’s products have their flaws, which are legitimate objects of complaints and perhaps some jibes. According to *Market Share* (<http://marketshare.hitslink.com/report.aspx?qprid=10>), as of May 2008, Microsoft has 91.13% of market share in operating systems, followed by Apple (Macintosh) at 7.83%, Linux at 0.68% and 14 others at 0.36% combined. If Microsoft, Apple and providers of Linux were equally bad (or good), Microsoft would be expected to receive nearly 12 times more comments than Apple and 134 times more than Linux. So the large size of Microsoft’s installed base is a factor. And then there is the Burger King OS, which has never received a negative comment and therefore must have the very finest OS. Oh, Burger King doesn’t offer an operating system? *Reductio ad absurdum*.

Do quips we make, or items like the above published in *Time* negatively impact our judgment and attitude toward Microsoft? “I advise that you

wait on both Vista SP1 and WinXP SP3. The fact that Microsoft hasn’t yet fixed the Dynamics RMS bug should give you pause.” Not only are the recommendations of these two respected sources diametrically opposite, but their respective views With Apple hardware priced significantly higher than PC systems and Linux requiring far too much technical savvy for most users, Microsoft is likely to dominate the operating system market for the foreseeable future, with all that implies for behavior of both users and Microsoft. There is no substitute for thorough information gathering, objective evaluation, and dispassionate thinking in making decisions.

Vista has not been a smashing success and has been the subject of considerable criticism. Eighteen months after its release, of the 91.13% market share, 72.12% is Windows XP and 15.26% is Vista. At this time, Vista users are faced with the decision as to whether to adopt Service Pack 1 and whether Vista with SP1 will win over the hearts and minds of XP users. Two articles were recently published on this topic in *CPU* magazine (Computer Power User; June 2008, Vol. 8, Issue 06, pp. 54-62). To quote from the second article, “The degree to which it does [win over hearts and minds] depends somewhat on your opinion of Vista to begin with, but there’s no doubt that SP1 improves Vista enough to warrant installing it on pretty much every system you own. If you love Vista, it improves the OS’ letter grade from an “A” to an “A+”; and if you don’t, SP1 turns Vista from a “D” student into a “C” student.” On the other hand, AskWoody.com (<http://askwoody.com/>) recommends “I advise that you wait on both Vista SP1 and WinXP

SP3. The fact that Microsoft hasn’t yet fixed the Dynamics RMS bug should give you pause.” Not only are the recommendations of these two respected sources diametrically opposite, but their respective views of Microsoft are quite different. Are the recommendations a reflection of attitudes? The reader must be the judge.

With Apple hardware priced significantly higher than PC systems and Linux requiring far too much technical savvy for most users, Microsoft is likely to dominate the operating system market for the foreseeable future, with all that implies for behavior of both users and Microsoft. There is no substitute for thorough information gathering, objective evaluation, and dispassionate thinking in making decisions.



Keeping Up

by Paul Howard (NCTCUG)
(WACUG)

Digital TV Converter Boxes

Confused by all the noise surrounding the coming of digital television and the shutdown of analog broadcasting on February 17th, 2009? Finding the answer for your situation runs a gauntlet between “greatest thing since sliced bread” and conspiracy theories surrounding the power of the media lobbyists swarming over Congress, scarfing up public broadcast spectrum space without paying for it. The truth’s in there somewhere

Though I run the risk of ostracism from the Royal Academy of Male Spouses and Sport Fans, you do not have to run out and buy a huge flat panel high definition TV - though it would be nice.<grin> And really nice for the people who manufacturer and sell TVs. But, you don’t have to buy a new set. If you are among the 85% of US households who get their TV signal via cable, satellite dish, or Verizon FiOS, 2/17/09 will pass without a blip, providing all your TV sets are hooked to these signal sources.

If, however, you have a TV set that’s hooked to “rabbit ears” or another type of roof or attic-mounted antenna, and your set wasn’t bought in the last 18 months and specified as having an “ATSC tuner” i.e., digital tuner, then you’ll need to get a digital TV tuner converter box to continue to receive “free TV” - i.e. - digital television signals broadcast over the air, after the 2/17/09 date. The free digital signals are there now - and the picture quality, even with a “standard definition” - read “old tv” - is amazing.

Our ever-responsive Federal government offers two \$40 discount coupons for the purchase of the digital TV tuner converter boxes, in the form of “swipe cards” to every household that signs up - <https://www.dtv2009.gov/> Do it now - it took almost three months to get my coupons. While there are dozens of certified converter boxes, I found that a Zenith model DTT900 was available locally at Circuit City and Radio Shack, and had received generally high marks from customers in the review section of these vendors’ web sites.

Set-up is easy. First, tune the TV to channel 3. Your antenna connects to the converter box input, you connect a supplied coax cable to your TV, and push the menu button on the supplied remote control (after inserting the requisite battery) and go through the channel setup process. I’m receiving 34 channels of static free TV from the antennas in my attic. The beauty of digital TV (for most folks) is that you’ll get a perfect picture - or nothing - the infamous blue screen. Here’s my received-channel list:

Why so many channels? Well, the secret of digital TV is that broadcasters can squeeze several additional standard definition (SD) broadcasts, as well as a high definition broadcast, into the same 6 MHz spectrum space occupied by analog broadcast channels. At this point, several of the local commercial stations are broadcasting weather or radar SD channels on this additional resource. Non-commercial stations are utilizing the new capacity in exciting ways. WETA is broadcasting four channels, and MHZ Networks, with two stations, is transmitting a total of eight channels.

The techie stuff: What’s really hap-

pening on 2/17/09? The VHF TV frequency spectrum, what we know as channels 2 - 13, is going away - and TV spectrum is being reallocated for other uses, such as cell phones and public safety radio. All domestic TV broadcasting is being converted from analog to digital, and housed within the UHF TV spectrum. For best results at receiving “free” digital TV broadcasts over the air, your antenna, whether “rabbit ears” or roof or attic mount, needs to be designed for UHF reception. Older antennas were generally designed to perform best with VHF reception, so a recent UHF-only design may provide much better performance in receiving digital TV broadcasts. A source for antennas, converter boxes, and lots of other off-air TV related gear, is: <http://www.solidsignal.com/>



Get Ready for XP and Vista Service Packs 925

By George Whitesell, a member of
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Service Pack 1 for Windows Vista and Service Pack 3 for Windows XP are going to be released soon, perhaps even by the time you are reading this. I recommend not being one of the first on your block to install either of the new service packs. Let others discover any problems with the installation of the final versions of the Service Packs!

What are service packs? They are a compilation of all critical updates released since the initial release of

See *XP & Vista Packs* page 7

an operating system or the last service pack. They often contain new features or enhancements as well. Service Pack 2 for Windows XP contained a number of security improvements and was arguably the most significant Service pack ever released. I think it was only because of the negative publicity Microsoft was receiving over weak security that led them to release it as a free Service Pack and not "Windows XP Second Edition" which they would have charged us for. You will not see any major changes or additions to XP in Service Pack 3 but you will still want to install it. Service Pack 1 for Vista is reported to have sped up some aspects of the operating system.

There is an article at <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/935796> listing 11 programs that are blocked, do not run, or have a "loss of functionality" after the installation of Service pack 1 for Vista. Three of the programs listed are Zone Alarm, BitDefender AntiVirus or Internet Security and the New York Times Reader. Check the list before you install the service pack. Personally I will wait at least one week (maybe more) to make sure there are not any other problems that are affected by the final release of either new service pack. If you have been installing all Microsoft updates as they were released, you already have most of the service pack installed.

Here are some general guidelines for the installation of any service pack:

1. Run complete scans of your computer for viruses and spyware. A majority of the problems people encountered while installing Windows XP Service Pack 2 were

caused by viruses and/or spyware on their computer. Service packs replace or update a number of system files. You want to make sure your computer is free of any malware.

2. Fix any hardware or software problems. If you are experiencing frequent lockups or system crashes, or extremely slow performance, resolve those problems before trying to install a service pack. Many people assume the installation of a service pack will clear up problems they may be experiencing. This usually is not the case. This is another frequent cause of service pack installations failing or causing more problems.

3. Create a System Restore point. If you found any viruses or spyware delete all of your old Restore Points and then create a new one. If you have a problem and use a System Restore point prior to the time you removed any viruses or spyware, guess what happens? That's right; you reload the viruses and/or spyware! Instructions on deleting System Restore points are at the end of this article.

4. If you installed a beta version of a service pack, uninstall that version before you install the final service pack.

5. NEVER attempt to abort the installation of a service pack (or any program). If you have started the installation and then decide you do not want to continue, allow the installation to complete; reboot the computer; and then uninstall the service pack (or program).

Follow the steps below if you need (or want) to delete all System Restore points:

Windows XP

1. Click the Start Button.

2. From the Start menu click Control panel.
3. Click on "Switch to Classic View" in the upper left portion of the Control Panel window.
4. In Control Panel double-click the "System" Icon.
5. Click the "System Restore" tab.
6. Check the box next to "Turn off System Restore on all drives".
7. Click "Apply" at the bottom right corner.
8. Click "Yes" in the warning box asking if you want to turn off system restore.
9. Click "OK" and close all windows.
10. Reboot the computer to clear all System Restore points.
11. To re-enable system restore repeat the above steps; this time removing the check in the box next to "Turn off System Restore on all drives".

11. Reboot Again.

Windows Vista

1. Click the Start Button.
2. From the Start menu click Control panel.
3. Click on "Classic View" in the upper left portion of the Control Panel window
4. In Control Panel double-click the "System" Icon.
5. On the Left of the System properties window you will see a list of Tasks, click on the "System protection" link.
6. Click "Continue" on the 'User Account Control' box if it appears.
7. In the System protection window remove the "check" mark

See *XP & Vista Packs* page 8

for the drive you want to disable system restore on. A message will now appear asking: 'Are you sure you want to turn System restore off'.

8. Press the "Turn System restore Off" button. System Restore will now be turned off permanently on that particular drive.
9. Click "OK" and close all windows.
10. Reboot the computer to clear all System Restore points.

To re-enable system restore repeat the above steps, but click the box next to the drive you require system restore to monitor (a check will appear in the box), then click the Apply button and system restore will resume monitoring the drive.

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Why I like the Ubuntu Operating System

By Phil Vogel, Director at Large,
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My interest in alternative operating systems started 20 years ago when I worked for the State of Maryland during a year of computer chaos. We had a good office system using WordPerfect but some high State

official(s) made a decision to go with Microsoft Word. At our facility WordPerfect was no longer funded and we were no longer able to use it. Yet our mental facility didn't have the budget to buy all the copies for all of our computer, only a few.

Thus my co-workers and I became interested in alternative sources of software. One of the writing programs that we used was the predecessor of OpenOffice and not very good. And because of the high prices charged for an inferior product (Word compared to WordPerfect) at the time, we looked to finding an alternative Operating System to Microsoft products. I remember investigating Red Hat distribution of Red Hat Linux at the time. But at the time it was not up to par with Microsoft's Windows 95.

When I joined OMUG, I was delighted to find that there was a Linux SIG. "Linux" is a term for many operating systems (OS) using the Linux "kernel" or "heart" or "engine." The kernel "drives" the system like a car engine powers a car. Conrad Schuler, one of the leaders of the Linux SIG was promoting SUSE, a "distribution" of Linux which originally came from Germany. Paul Braget, another leader, liked Ubuntu. When joined, I found I was totally lost. However, I stuck it out and some of the understanding and data is beginning to stick to the walls of my mind.

I listened, worked on the Linux programs on the computers in the Senior Center and became convinced that I wanted to try it out for myself. I like laptops. I can grab a computer and move it to a room or across the country easily. In this country all computers are Microsoft friendly but only some brands and some models of the other brands

such as Dell are Linux-compatible.

I decided after some research to take a chance on a new Toshiba Qosmio. We had difficulty installing SUSE and because of inexperience it became corrupted. However, it was easier to install Ubuntu.

"Ubuntu" is a South African word which means, "I am because you are." I am writing this article because you are here, OMUG. I am using Ubuntu because a lot of people around the world contribute to its innovation, maintenance, and security. By the way, the Toshiba came with Windows Vista Home Edition. I only use it for QuickBooks; that is, I can boot into Vista when I need to, but use Ubuntu most of the time.

I use Ubuntu to surf the web because it has a very secure hard kernel. It is almost impossible to attack a Linux based machine because all the software programs are attached to the outside of the kernel. At most a particular program will become dysfunctional but not the operating system. For this reason about 90 percent of the servers around the world use Linux based software. Some servers are so reliable that service is minimal.

The Linux kernel is simple, clean and fast, allowing me to turn it on and be on the web in a fraction of the time required by my Windows machine. My web browser is FireFox, an excellent free program.

I am writing this article with OpenOffice because it is another excellent writing program that is on a par with Microsoft Office. And it is a free program also. I must admit that Microsoft's "Access" program is superior to OpenOffice's "Data."

All the above programs are "open
See *Ubuntu* page 9

source” which means that you can obtain them for free by a download, or on DVD or CD for a nominal charge. However, there are also companies that will supply a person with disks, manuals and service contract just like Microsoft. But everyone is bound by the EULA of the “open source” contract, including companies and also users like me. For instance anyone who comes up with a change or improvement must make it available to any one else for free.

So this is why I like Ubuntu, FireFox and OpenOffice. I also use other features such as watching movies, burning DVD's, and WiFi—and they work well. Now I want to edit and burn a home made movie. Plus Ubuntu has an extensive Internet support system. New programs and updates are coming out all the time. It is an example of a technology rising up from the grassroots rather than from the top down.

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iPod Replacement

by Sandy Berger, CompuKISS

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Too many technology stories are sad tales of aggravation and obsolescence. So today I'm going to tell you a story about a digital device with a happy ending.

About 2 years ago, I decided to purchase an iPod. After shopping around, I found that the iPod nano was selling for \$149 just about everywhere. However, the Sam's Club in Cary had it for \$138.77. So why pay more? When I made the Sam's Club purchase, the store clerk offered me a service policy, which I immediately rejected. When he asked why I wasn't interested, I told him that I had learned from past experience that most of these insurance policies were a waste of money because they were expensive and didn't cover the problems that I might actually have with the item. He assured me that this policy was different. For just \$14.88, I could get a 3-year policy that gave me a new iPod for most anything that went wrong with my iPod, including a battery that ran out of juice. My husband suggested that since I am a heavy-duty iPod user, I should go ahead and purchase the policy. Since I use my iPod in the car and at home in a dock every day, I was fairly sure that the iPod battery would give out before the 3-year deadline, so it seemed like a logical move. I purchased the policy. Yet all the time I was wondering if the clerk was just a good salesman or the policy was really that good.

Last month, I found an answer to that question. My iPod started acting weirdly. It was completely freezing up. No matter what button I pressed, it gave no response.

Although I had encountered problems like this with computers, I was surprised to find my iPod acting just like a Window's computer. In computer world we call it the blue screen of death. I don't know if it has a name on the iPod, but it turned out to be a similar type of aggravation.

At first it didn't seem like much of a problem because Apple had a solution. Just turn the Hold button on and off a few times, then press and hold the Menu button and the center of the scroll wheel at the same time. Hold them down for about 10 seconds until the Apple icon appears on the screen. This worked great, restoring the iPod immediately, without losing any of my audio programs and music. Unfortunately, the freezes became more and more frequent. I was having to perform this reset 4 or 5 times a day so it became a real pain.

It was time to go back to Sam's Club, but I agonized with that. How could I show them the problem since it happened only sporadically? My discomfort turned to glee when the Sam's Club clerk didn't even try to duplicate the problem. She asked me for the receipt and earbuds and charging cord that came with the iPod. Once I produced those, she promptly refunded the price of the iPod plus the price of the insurance policy. I could have just kept the refund, but instead I headed over to the electronic aisle to pick out a replacement.

My old model iPod was no longer available, but I was also pleasantly surprised to find that the new models were selling for exactly the same price I had paid for the older model. On top of that,

See *iPod Replacement* page 10

the new iPod nanos had twice as much memory, larger screens, and the ability to play videos. This was turning out to be really good! For exactly the same price, I was able to purchase a new, more capable iPod with a new 3-year insurance policy.

Talk about a happy ending... I am now enjoying watching video podcasts on my new iPod in addition to using it for audio podcasts and music. If anything happens to it in the next 3 years, I can get another replacement. While I don't usually purchase insurance policies for digital equipment, this one turned out to be a real winner.

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Buying a Mouse — More Important than You Might Think

By Vinny La Bash, Member and
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The average computer user recognizes how important the mouse is to getting things done. Mice have been part of the computer scene for over twenty years and with rare exceptions are simple devices to operate and control. That doesn't mean that people who use them are necessar-

ily familiar with all their features and functions. That's not as bad as it may sound.

Selecting a mouse is much simpler than choosing an automobile, but there are things you should know before laying out money for a device that if not properly designed, may result not only in poor computer performance, but may cause you injury.

The mouse may be the most common of the tracking technologies used in modern computers, but it is not the only one. There are trackballs, touch pads, and for ThinkPad users, track points. They all have their advantages and drawbacks. We will focus on the mouse.

Mechanical mice are obsolete. A newer optical mouse is the way to go. They generate a beam of light that combines with an optical sensor providing a screen pointer that is well suited for meticulous graphics or serious game playing. No moving parts mean less maintenance and lighter weight. Optical mice will work on any smooth surface; a mouse pad is unnecessary.

Look for a mouse with a USB connection. It will probably be difficult to buy a mouse that does not have this type of connection today. Make sure it is compatible with USB 2. The mouse is not considered a high speed device so this caution may be unnecessary.

You may want a wireless mouse. There are many generic wireless mice on the market that will perform adequately, but doing this on the cheap comes with a price. You will have a mouse that requires AAA batteries. Save your pennies and get one with an integrated rechargeable battery. High end wireless mice include receivers that

double as battery chargers, so your mouse will never suddenly expire in the middle of an important project.

Most rodents on the market today feature at least two buttons and a scroll wheel. The right button is used mainly for bringing up menus or lists of options. The left hand button activates functions or commands. The scroll wheel, as its name implies, is used to scroll up and down screens. Sometimes the wheel can function as a third button activating instructions. Advanced scroll wheel functions allow left to right scrolling which can be very useful in wide spreadsheets or large graphics. Used in conjunction with the keyboard, the scroll wheel can zoom in and out of some applications, and can be used to make text appear larger.

Mice do not come in a one-size-fits-all product. Enlightened companies such as Logitech manufacture mice that are specifically contoured to fit a wide variety of hand sizes. Logitech was among the very first companies to recognize that different sized people have different sized hands. Choose a mouse that is ergonomically designed to fit your individual hand size. This will go a long way to reduce the probability of developing carpal tunnel syndrome or some other crippling ailment.

Take the time to find a good ergonomically designed mouse that suits the physical characteristics of your hand along with suitable options for your personal computing preferences.

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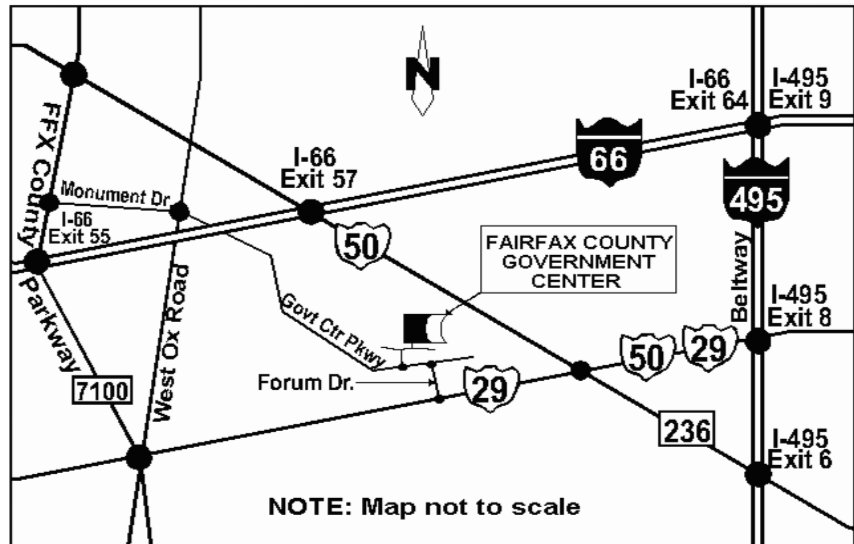
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“Computune-up”

by Berry F. Phillips, member of the
Computer Club of Oklahoma City
www.ccokc.org
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Do you want your computer to run faster and increase your productivity? Of course; if you have major problems, you will need to contact your manufacturer and/or professional technical support. Many of those costly major problems can be prevented by doing “computune-ups” yourself. Yes, you can do it even without being a computer geek! My thanks to Microsoft for some of the information in this article.

“Computune-up” (Software)

1. Clean up your desktop! If you have not used a program for a year or one that you never use that came bundled with your system why not delete it. You will get more space on your hard drive in return.
2. Clean up your system tray to the left of time on your Taskbar! When you remove icons from your system tray that you rarely use, it will speed up your system since your computer has to locate those programs whenever you boot up. I love a little freeware program called Code Stuff Starter that shows you what is running and lets you easily turn those programs on or off.
3. Defragment your computer and your registry which will make your system run faster by consolidating fragments on your hard drive and registry. I use freeware programs like SmartDefrag and Aus Logics Registry Defrag and there are others available on the Internet.
4. Check your memory. The more programs you have running the more demand on your system memory (RAM). Adding more memory to your system will increase speed and is very easy to do without paying for expensive technical support.

You can do it with minimal instruction or have a technically-oriented friend or club member do it since it only takes a few minutes to replace.

5. Keep your operating system updated and run utilities weekly! I strongly suggest you download needed freeware software for your system from “46 best ever freeware programs” thoroughly tested and rated with commentary.

“Computune-up” (Hardware)

1. Make sure your computer is unplugged before cleaning and not plugged in until your system is dry after cleaning!
2. Make sure you have the following tools available: a screwdriver, can of compressed air (available from a computer store), cotton swabs (not balls), rubbing alcohol, paper towels or anti-static cloths (available from a computer store), and water.
3. Clean the inside of your computer case! Using a screwdriver remove the side of the case opposite your motherboard. Touch as little as possible inside the computer, keeping fingers away from cards and cords due to static electricity. Blow air around all the components and along the bottom of the case, keeping the nozzle four inches away from your machine. Blow air into the power supply and into the fan from the back of your computer case. Blow air into the floppy disk and CD drives. Wipe the inside cover with a lightly moistened cloth before replacing it using your screwdriver. Clean every three months if your computer is on the floor or an especially dirty environment. Clean approximately every six to eight months in a normal environment.
4. Clean the outside of the case! Run a cotton swab dipped in rubbing alcohol around all the openings on the back of your case giving them one swipe with a dampened swab and one with a dry swab. Clean the remaining outside of your system.

Do this whenever you clean the inside of your system.

5. Clean the mouse by taking out the screws and going inside with an alcohol swab. If there is a rubber ball, clean it with water, and let it dry. Then clean the outside of the mouse. Many mouse problems are simply caused by a dirty mouse.
6. Clean the keyboard! Turn it upside down and gently shake it and most of the crumbs and dust will fall out. Blow air in and around the keys. Take an alcohol dampened cotton swab and clean the top and sides of the keys. Do this monthly; your keyboard gets very dirty and can even spread germs. If you have a laptop, follow the same procedure but take extra care with your machine.
7. Clean the monitor with a moistened paper towel or a soft lint-free cloth. (You can purchase monitor cleaning products from a computer store). Don’t spray liquid directly on the screen but spray on the cloth. Wipe the screen gently to remove dust and fingerprints. (Never touch the back of the monitor). I suggest you purchase a special cleaning solution from a computer store for laptop computers.

If you have finished your “computune-up,” you are on your way to being transformed into a computer geek! Do not be alarmed for the “geeks shall inherit the earth”! Bill Gates, chief geek and founder of Microsoft Corporation, has already made it; he is the role model for the rest of us!

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Make the World's Cheapest Tripod

Here's how to make a string tripod, a simple do-it-yourself stabilizer that wins you sharper photos.

by Dave Johnson, PCWorld, from his online column, *Digital Focus*

Recently, a friend of mine was going whale watching on a small boat in Puget Sound and asked how to get the sharpest possible photos while confined to a small boat.

My usual advice--bring a tripod--didn't apply. Not only is a tripod difficult to manage on a boat, but it's just not the right tool for the job, since you have no idea where the whales might pop up. You'd always be moving the tripod or trying to swing the camera around when a giant fish popped out of the water. (Please, no e-mail: I know that whales are really mammals.)

So I suggested that my friend make one of the oldest do-it-yourself photo gadgets in the history of photography: a string tripod.

Better Photography With String

String tripods are also sometimes known as string monopods, and if you think about it, a monopod is really a better description. Imagine connecting one end of a length of string to your camera, and the other end securely to the ground. When you pull the camera up and make the string taut, you've stabilized the camera. It's that easy!

Keep in mind that a real tripod will always give you better results. But string is cheap, fits in your pocket, and can increase the sharpness of your photos dramatically when you're holding the camera. In unusual situations--like on a boat, or in a museum that doesn't permit

tripods--a string tripod can be a lifesaver. It's even great for nature walks, soccer practice, or anywhere else you don't want to be weighed down by a traditional tripod.

Make Your Own

To make a string tripod, you just need a length of string that you can affix to the bottom of your camera. Most string tripod enthusiasts tie the string to a 1/4-inch bolt or a quick-release tripod mount. The other end of the string is tied into a loop that you can slip around your foot.

You get bonus points for making your string tripod for free--check the toolbox in your garage for an old 1/4-inch bolt with an eyelet that you can tie the string through, for instance. If you have to, though, you can always get an inexpensive tripod quick-release plate from your local camera shop, like I did.

Shooting With the String Tripod

When you're ready to shoot, just slip your foot through the loop and screw the bolt into the tripod mount on the bottom of your camera. If the string is the right length, the camera will be at eye level while the string is taut. If it's too long, you can wrap it around your foot some more or just loop off some line with a knot. It's all pretty low tech, so do whatever works for you.

The string will cut down on translational vibration (the up-down) kind of motion, but allow you to rotate to the left or right. You can use this homemade gadget to take panning action shots at soccer practice, stand ready for breaching whales, or take pictures in a church or museum. Yes, it looks a little goofy, but the results are worth it--trust me.

My appreciation to PC World for allowing me to reprint this article

in *The Cursor*



Google Offers Free Medical Records Service

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director;
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Host
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WEBSITES:

<http://www.google.com/health>
<https://www.google.com/health/html/privacy.html>
<http://www.keyt.com/news/local/19222464.html>

Google recently opened for free public access the beta version of its "Google Health" service at www.google.com/health. This service offers users access to a comprehensive user created database where the user can selectively store medical records. In addition to the storage of personal medical records, Google

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Health also allows for the importation of medical and prescription records from a variety of services, and the voluntary exportation of medical records to several diagnostic services. Google Health allows user approved physicians, hospitals, pharmacists, and other healthcare services to access the medical records.

To open a free account at Google Health requires registration; users with existing Google accounts may use their existing usernames and passwords for access. Once registered, opening the website at google.com/health offers the users an intuitive menu. The primary links in the center column of the page are:

“Add to this Google Health profile (Learn about your health issues and find helpful resources)”; “Import medical records (Copy and get automatic updates of your records)”; “Explore online health services (Find online tools for managing your health)”; and “Find a doctor (Search by name, location, and specialty)”. On the left column of the opening page are hyperlinks to personal profile information, and the right column displays a profile summary.

Clicking on “Add to this Google Health profile” opens a menu with the headings “Conditions”, “Medications”, “Allergies”, “Procedures”, “Test results”, and “Immunizations”. Under “Conditions” a condition or symptom can be entered in the search box, or the user can click on any condition in a lengthy alphabetical list to “Add” that condition to the user’s profile. Many of the conditions have a “Reference” link that will provide more information on the condition, as well as any symptoms and treatments. The “Medications” heading allows the

users to enter both prescription and non-prescription medications, vitamins and minerals, as well as herbal products. The search box displays selections as the product name is typed, or an alphabetical directory can be accessed. “Allergies”, “Procedures”, “Test results”, and “Immunizations” are entered in the same manner as “Medications” and “Conditions”, with a search box or alphabetical menu.

The main page selection “Import medical records” allows the user to securely import medical and prescription records from a variety of sources, including clinics, laboratories, and pharmacies. Included on the currently short list of such resources are Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Cleveland Clinic, CVS Minute Clinics, Quest Diagnostics, Medco, RXAmerica, Longs Drugs, and Walgreen’s. It is clear in reading about the service that this small listing is in its infancy, as Google Health is trying to sign up additional partners. To experiment with importing data, I clicked on the link for the prescription manager Medco, which is utilized by my health insurance plan. Clicking on the “Link to profile” icon under the Medco listing opened the secure Medco website where I had to enter the username and password I use at Medco. Seconds after approving the transfer of my prescription history, it appeared on my Google Health profile under “Medications”. The information transferred to Google Health by Medco was not just the prescriptions I ordered from Medco, but also recent prescriptions I filled at local pharmacies where insurance was claimed. Medco can automatically update my profile as new prescriptions are entered and filled. Items filled at local pharmacies under their respective \$4 or \$5 generic

program, where no insurance was filed, did not appear on the Medco list.

The menu item “Explore online health services” opens a list of over a dozen services that offer online personal health services. These health services which can be linked to Google Health and utilize the information provided to Google Health (but only with the express consent of the user!) include such well known services as the Cleveland Clinic, the American Heart Association “Heart Attack Risk Calculator”, “MyCareTeam- Diabetes” diabetes management system (requires monthly or annual subscription), and several other services. While several of these personalized services are free, others are fee based. Most of the services listed require some form of registration in order to utilize those services and integrate them with the users’ Google health information.

The “Find a doctor” link opens a simple pair of search boxes, the first (left) of which is a directory of specialties, and the second box (on the right) is where the user can enter a zip code, city, or other information in order to generate a listing of physicians, chiropractors, and specialists that meet the selected criteria. The listings provided included physician or practice name, address, and phone number, as well as links to the practice website (if any), driving directions from Google Maps, and a link to “Save to medical contacts”.

Once information is entered, a personal profile is created, and several analyses are made by Google Health. One that may be critically important shows up in the left col-

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umn on the main page with the label “Drug Interactions” with a red exclamation point if there is a potentially dangerous interaction between prescription and non prescription drugs, vitamins, and herbals. On my personal page there is one advisory about a synergetic effect between two of my medications that says “Discuss with your doctor soon” (this effect is desirable in my case), and another interaction between three of my non-prescription medications that is labeled with a red icon “Requires immediate attention” (I already checked, and it is OK in my case).

In its privacy statement (www.google.com/health/html/privacy.html), Google Health explains the confidentiality of the information entered, and how it will not be released or shared with any third party without the express consent of the user. By my personal choice, I would be willing to allow my personal physician (if he participated), as well as any specialists or hospitals that I visit, to access my information. It could be a great time saver to allow them to access my medical records online, rather than me having to complete hand written forms at each office I visit. Because of its inherent completeness, this online “Personal Health Record” (PHR) can also be a life saver by providing healthcare establishments instant access to medical histories, medications, and allergies. By having a voluntary service, such as Google Health, Microsoft’s upcoming competing service “HealthVault”, or “Revolution Health” (bankrolled by AOL’s co-founder Steve Case), which can be securely accessed by health care providers, it becomes easy to create and maintain an accurate health profile for both the benefit of the user and healthcare

providers approved for access by the user.

It should be noted that there are always security and privacy risks of posting sensitive information, such as health records, online. It is quite conceivable that hackers could penetrate the security of any establishment or server that contains or has access to sensitive personal information. While I know that they are not perfect, I basically trust Google Health with my information.

While there are many other “PHR” systems and services in use, often administered by corporations for their employees, others are offered by health insurance companies, as well as some regional PHR services, Google Health has the reputation and distribution (as well as the deep pockets) to create and securely maintain such a system, and sign up participating partners who are willing to allow the sharing of medical records.

I knowingly volunteered to post my medical records on Google Health. I hope the project succeeds, and more local physicians, pharmacies, labs, and hospitals partner with the service. As more healthcare providers transition to purely digital medical records, it will become easier to securely share this vital information.

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