The Cursor

Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group

Meeting Location
Fairfax County
Government Center

apcug
Member of

Next Meeting:
July 19, 2008

Presidential Bits

July 2008 Meeting

By Paul Howard

While June's meeting was lightly attended, no doubt because of beautiful weather, those who were there witnessed successful trouble shooting projects, and an informative series of videos on repairing laptop computers by author Scott Mueller.

Geof Goodrum helped Neal Grotenstein set up a Wifi wireless router for use with a laptop computer. Scott Hanak worked with Henry Kennedy to overcome an error message that appeared every time Henry booted his computer, and also worked on troubleshooting a printing problem. Don Ferret brought in a laptop with several issues, including Internet Explorer freezing on closing. With Scott Hanak's assistance, that issue was resolved by removing Google and Yahoo toolbars. Other problems were cured, or troubleshooting paths were suggested.

After the board of directors' meeting, held now at Wegman's dining room on the second level of the Fairfax store, the gang was able to verify that three memory modules worked properly, and installed two in Jim

Brueggeman's wide-screen Toshiba Satellite laptop.

Get A Free Digital TV at Our Next Meeting

Learn How to Convert Your Analog TV to Receive Free Digital Channels

Kurt DeSoto will discuss the Federal government's mandate for TV stations to transition from analog to digital channels by February 17, 2009, and what it means to viewers. Topics to be covered include: (1) the differences between analog TV, digital TV, standard definition television, and high definition TV sets and broadcasts and how to determine the capabilities of your TV sets , (2) how to configure your existing analog sets to receive free over-the-air digital channels by using a converter box subsidized by the government, (2) how to submit an order online during the meeting (or later at your convenience) for up to two $40.00 coupons from the government to help defray the costs of the boxes, (3) when and how to connect the boxes to your analog sets, and (4) how to keep getting low power analog channels, such as foreign language channels. If time permits, Kurt will provide

Lloyd's Web Sites for July, 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

1. MIT: OpenCourseWare–Want to look at MIT courses? http://ocw.mit.edu/OcwWeb/web/home/home/index.htm OCW is a free publication of course materials used at MIT. OpenCourseWare shares free lecture notes, exams, and other resources from more than 1800 courses spanning MIT's entire curriculum

2. Yahoo! Shine – http://shine.yahoo.com Yahoo! Shine is a new website for women. The site offers nine categories ranging from Fashion & Beauty to Parenting, and will feature content from many of the most popular lifestyles publishers, including Conde Nast Publications and Hearst Corporation.

3. Project Gutenberg – www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page Project Gutenberg is the Internet's oldest producer of free electronic books, eBooks, or eTexts. There are over 20,000 free books in this collection

4. Small Business Administration: Free Online Courses – www.sba.gov/services/training/onlinecourses/index.html Available courses are identified by topic. You can learn about the specific courses by clicking, 'About these Courses.' In general, the courses are all self-paced and should take about 30 minutes to complete. Most of the courses require a brief online registration.

5. FindLaw – www.findlaw.com FindLaw is the most comprehensive set of legal resources on the Internet for legal professionals, corporate counsel, law students, businesses, and consumers.

6. Respectfully Quoted: A Dictionary of Quotations – www.bartleby.com/73 2,100 entries in this collection of quotations.

7. How Recessions Work – http://money.howstuffworks.com/recession.htm In this HowStuffWorks article, you will find out what recessions are, see why they occur, and examine the criteria economists use to identify them. Site also looks at the effects of recession as well as explores some of the ways a country can turn the economy around again.

8. U.S. Major Metro Newspapers – http://newslink.org/metnews.html A listing of U.S. major metropolitan newspapers.

9. Understanding Your Telephone Bill – www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/understanding.html The Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Truth-in-Billing rules require telephone companies to provide clear, non-misleading, plain language in describing monthly services for which you are being billed. Here is a detailed description of some of the charges or line items that may appear on your traditional wireline telephone bill, your wireless telephone bill, or both.

10. English Pronouncing Dictionary – www.howjsay.com Enter the word you want and when it appears in pink, mouse over it to hear it spoken as often as you want. Each word is individually pre-recorded and no form of synthetic speech is used. Both American and British spellings are provided. Pronunciation is in Standard British English, with World English alternatives. Over 82,000 words listed.

an actual demonstration of how to hook up a converter box to an analog TV set so the group can watch cartoons in digital format for the rest of the meeting, since it is Saturday after all. Gosh.

Neal Grotenstein will provide a short discussion about protecting your email address from Internet email address harvesting programs.

(The following web page link to access a list of Digital TV Stations received in this area was inadvertently left out of last month's "Keeping Up" column: http://www.wacug.org/recmtgs.html)

GNU/Linux SIG

By Geof Goodrum, WAC

Now Serving Wine (1.0)

After 15 years of development, the Wine Project released stable version 1.0 on June 17. 2008 (v1.1.0 was released on June 27th). As described by the Wine web site (http://www.winehq.org/), "Wine is a translation layer (a program loader) capable of running Windows applications on Linux and other POSIX compatible operating systems. Windows programs running in Wine act as native programs would, running without the performance or memory usage penalties of an emulator, with a similar look and feel to other applications on your desktop." For example, when a Windows program requests user input, Wine substitutes an equivalent X-Window System function for the Microsoft® Windows® OS function.

While GNU/Linux has excellent open source replacements for most common Windows applications such as web browsers and office suites, there are niche applications and games that are not available for Linux. Wine allows users to transition to GNU/Linux while bringing their favorite Windows programs with them. Wine works with DOS programs as well as 16 and 32 bit programs from Windows 3.1 to XP. The Wine Project plans to support 64 bit Windows applications in the future.

While not every Microsoft Windows software runs well under Wine, a wide variety of games and productivity applications do. The Wine Project maintains a community database of application compatibility reports and configuration advice at http://appdb.winehq.org/. There are also commercially supported versions of Wine that are optimized for various programs, such as CodeWeavers (http://www.codeweavers.com/) and the closed source Cedega Gaming Service (http://www.cedega.com/).

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 June 5 – July 2, 2008.

Distribution
64 Studio 2.1
Arch Linux 2008.06
ArtistX 0.5
CentOS 5.2
Damn Small Linux 4.4
eAR OS 1.10
Finnix 92.0
GoblinX 2.7 "Mini"
Greenie Linux 3.0.2H
Kurumin NG 8.06
Linux Mint 5
MilaX 0.3.1
Molinux 4.0
Myah OS 3.0 "Box"
Myah OS 3.0 "Dragon"
Network Security Toolkit 1.8.0
NexentaCore Platform 1.0.1
openSUSE 11.0
Pardus Linux 2008
Parsix GNU/Linux 1.5r0
Pioneer Linux 3.2
Sabayon Linux 3.5
Scientific Linux 5.2
sidux 2008-02
StartCom Enterprise Linux 5.0.2
SystemRescueCd 1.0.4
VectorLinux 5.9
Voltalinux 2.1
Zenwalk Linux 5.2
Zenwalk Live 5.2

Linux Software of the Month

The software described below is downloadable at the links provided or may be requested on CD. 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 (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.

July 2008

Floola - v3.0. http://www.floola.com/. Freeware executable by Tomas Camin. Floola is an application to efficiently manage your iPod or your Motorola mobile phone (any model supporting iTunes) under Linux, Mac OS X, and Windows. It can be run directly from your iPod and needs no installation. It supports all commonly used iPod features including photos, artwork, podcasts, and smart playlists. It automatically converts any incompatible audio or video file so that you can copy almost any file to it. It even allows adding YouTube and MySpace videos with

a single click.

Freenukum – v.0.2.6. https://launch-pad.net/freenukum/. Free GNU General Public License source code by the Freenukum Team. The Freenukum Jump'n Run game is a clone of the old EGA graphics based 2D game Duke Nukem. It uses the original Duke Nukem level and graphics files.

Geotag – v0.055. http://geotag.sourceforge.net/. Free GNU General Public License source code by Pablo d'Angelo. Hugin is a toolkit for stitching digital photographs and assembling panoramas, together with an easy to use graphic front end.

Nload – v0.7.2. http://www.roland-riegel.de/nload/. Free GNU General Public License source code by Roland Riegel. nload is a console application that monitors network traffic and bandwidth usage in real time. It visualizes the in and outgoing traffic using two graphs. It also provides additional information, such as the total amount of transfered data and the min/max network usage.

Kernel Source – http://www.kernel.org/. 2.6 kernel source code for all

platforms (stable 2.6.25.9 and pre-patch 2.6.26-rc8).

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For Anybody Who Has Thought About Trying Linux

By Drew Kwashnak, Linux SIG Leader, Danbury Area Computer Society, CT
www.dacs.org
dacseditor(at)dacs.org

For anybody who has thought about trying Linux, it has become easier than ever before with Ubuntu 8.04 LTS Hardy Heron. As with most Linux distributions, Ubuntu is available as a free download and is freely distributable. it is even available already-installed on Dell computers.

The most common method is downloading the ISO image from Ubuntu's website (http://www.ubuntu.com) and burning it onto a CD.

From the site, you can download the Desktop version or Server for 32-bit and 64-bit systems. There is even an option to download what is called an alternative version which is just the installer and does not include the LiveCD portion, which also includes an installer. If you are like me, until a couple months ago, and living on dial-up or you do not have a CD burner handy or just don't want to put in that much effort then you can order a free CD through the corporate sponsor of Ubuntu, Canonical, ShipIt department.

I have been very pleased with the speed with which their CDs arrive. Alternatively, the website contains links to vendors where you can buy the CDs from under $5 to more, and they can handle large orders as

well.

Once you have your CD in your hot little hands, trying Ubuntu is as simple as placing it in your CD-ROM tray and rebooting your system. If system will boot from the CD and after a short moment you'll be greeted with the Ubuntu welcome screen.

If you want to "try before you buy," then you can choose the default "Try Ubuntu without any changes to your computer" and your hard drive will not be touched during your session unless you choose to. You don't even need a hard drive to select this option; you just will not be able to install it from the session.

If you are more certain or just daring then you can go straight into the installer and in about 60 minutes (45 minutes if you know what Different Strokes For Anybody Who Has Thought About Trying Linux by Drew Kwashnak you are doing) you're booting to your new Ubuntu installation.

Ubuntu will scan your hardware and load the modules and drivers necessary for your system. If you have hardware that has proprietary drivers available, Linux cannot include them in the CD for legal reasons. Ubuntu works around this by providing a Restricted Drivers tool that lists all such hardware found on your system and provides the ability to download and install the necessary drivers in a click or two, legally.

Now that you have Ubuntu up and running on your system, what can you do? Plenty! Ubuntu brings you a fullfeatured operating system complete with:

• Firefox 3.05 beta web browser

• OpenOffice.org 2.4 full featured office suite compatible with pre-Office 2007 Word, Excel, PowerPoint and some Access files.

• Evolution personal information manager for email and calendar goodness, a Microsoft Outlook user can feel comfortable with. There is even plug-ins to allow Evolution to access existing Microsoft Exchange servers.

• Pidgin multi-protocol instant messenger including Yahoo, MSN, AIM, Jabber, IRC and more.

• Gimp (GNU Image Manipulation Program), a powerful Photoshop-like image editing program that includes filters, layers and a host of goodies.

• F-Spot image manager for categorizing and minor editing of all of your pictures as well as easily importing pictures from your digital camera.

• And much, MUCH more…

If Ubuntu doesn't come with a particular application, thousands of free applications are available from the Ubuntu online repository which are easily installed and updated from the Synaptic package manager.

When you decide to install Ubuntu onto your hard drive or virtual machine you only need to click the "Install" icon on the desktop to start the process. After seven or so easy questions the installer will copy the files over to the hard disk. Depending on your system's speed this could take about 60 minutes, more or less. It will even detect if you have Windows installed and offer to transfer over your files and compatible settings from your Windows accounts!

Of course, if the limitations of the LiveCD, such as settings are not saved from session to session, and you are hesitant to partition and install the full operating system on your hard drive Ubuntu offers yet another alternative called Wubi. Wubi is, from the Ubuntu website: "Wubi is an officially supported Ubuntu installer for Windows users that can bring you to the Linux world with a single click. Wubi allows you to install and uninstall Ubuntu as any other Windows application, in a simple and safe way."

Are you curious about Linux and Ubuntu? Trying them out has never been easier!"

Wubi can be downloaded as an .exe file directly. With Linux the installation is not the end, only the beginning! Whether you try the LiveCD, Wubi or a full installation you will find a wealth of quality applications, refreshing freedom and a community unlike any other! If you have problems, questions or want to find out more then you need look no further than the third Wednesday of every month for the DACS Linux SIG at 7:30 p.m. in the DACS Resource Center!

Drew Kwashnak: Has been losing more nights of sleep with Linux since 2002 and just can't keep from downloading and trying the latest versions! When not working with Linux he works with ASP.NET and Microsoft SQL Server for a small financial company.

He is also the DACS Linux SIG leader and a father of 3.

Links:
Ubuntu:
http://www.ubuntu.com

Get Ubuntu:
http://www.ubuntu.com/getubuntu

ShipIt:
https://shipit.ubuntu.com/

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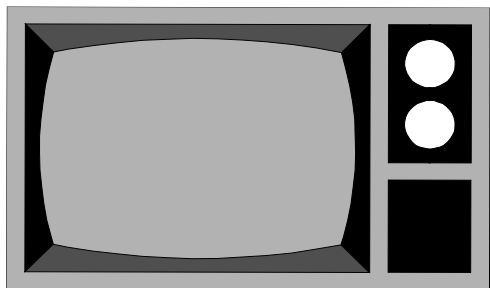
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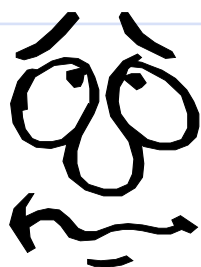**Washington Area User Group Partners**
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CPCUG   NCTCUG   WACUG

The Digital TV Dilemma?

Have Questions?
Not sure if your tv is ready for digital?

Special Workshop:
Entering the Digital TV World

Saturday, June 28
10:30 a.m., Room 229

Practical help on how to transition your analog TV to receive digital signals. Certificates for conversion boxes will be available.

Digital TV Dilemma?

By Kurt DeSoto, WAC Member

Have Questions about the February 2009 change-over to all Digital Broadcasting?

Kurt DeSoto will discuss the Federal government's mandate for TV stations to transition from analog to digital channels by February 17, 2009, and what it means to viewers.

Topics to be covered include:

(1) the differences between analog TV, digital TV, standard definition television, and high definition TV sets and broadcasts and how to determine the capabilities of your TV sets

(2) how to configure your existing analog sets to receive free over-the-air digital channels by using a converter box subsidized by the government,

(3) how to submit an order online during the meeting (or later at your convenience) for up to two $40.00 coupons from the government to help defray the costs of the boxes,

(4) when and how to connect the boxes to your analog sets, and

(5) how to keep getting low power analog channels, such as foreign language channels. If time permits, Kurt will provide an actual demonstration of how to hook up a converter box to an analog TV set so the group can watch cartoons in digital format for the rest of the meeting, since it is Saturday after all. Gosh.

Email Etiquette

By John Roy, President, The PC Users Group of Connecticut
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Do you really know how to forward an e-mail? It is estimated that over fifty percent of email users do not know how to do it properly. Do you wonder why you get viruses or junk mail? Email messages get forwarded countless times without concern for the security of the previous sender's addresses.

Every time you forward an e-mail there is information left over from the people who got the message before you, namely their e-mail addresses and names. As the messages get forwarded along the list of addresses builds and builds creating a huge resource for spammers. All it takes is for someone to get a virus and the infected computer can send that virus to every e-mail address that has come across that computer. Even if the address collection doesn't result in a virus it surely will be harvested by spammers or someone looking to make a couple of cents for a listing of good email addresses. How do you stop or at least minimize the propagation of email addresses? There are several easy steps that we should all practice.

(1) Before you send out a forwarded e-mail, DELETE all of the other addresses that appear in the body of the message (at the top). That's right, DELETE them. Highlight them and delete them, backspace them, cut them, whatever it is you know how to do. It only takes a second You MUST click the 'Forward' button first and then you will have full editing capabilities against the body and headers of the message.

If you don't click on 'Forward' first, you won't be able to edit the message at all.

(2) Whenever you send an e-mail to more than one person, do NOT use the To: or Cc: fields for adding e-mail addresses. Always use the BCC: (blind carbon copy) field for listing the e-mail addresses. This is the way the people you send to will only see their own e-mail address. If you don't see your BCC: option click on where it says To: and your address list will appear. Highlight the address and choose BCC: and that's it, it's that easy. When you send to BCC: your message will automatically say 'Undisclosed Recipients' in the 'TO:' field of the people who receive it.

(3) Remove any 'FW:' in the subject line. You can re-name the subject if you wish or even fix spelling.

(4) ALWAYS hit your Forward button from the actual e-mail you are reading. Ever get those e-mails that you have to open 10 pages to read the one page with the information on it? By forwarding from the actual page you wish someone to view, you stop them from having to open many e-mails just to see what you sent.

(5) Have you ever gotten an email that is a petition? It states a position and asks you to add your name and address and to forward it to 10 or 15 people or your entire address book. The email can be forwarded on and on and can collect thousands of names and email addresses. A FACT: The completed petition is actually worth a couple of bucks to a professional spammer because of the wealth of valid names and email addresses contained therein.

If you want to support the petition, send it as your own personal letter to the intended recipient. Your position may carry more weight as a personal letter than a laundry list of names and email address on a petition. (Actually, if you think about it, who's supposed to send the petition in to whatever cause it supports? And don't believe the ones that say that the email is being traced, it just isn't so!)

(6) One of the main ones I hate is the ones that say that something like, 'Send this email to 10 people and you'll see something great run across your screen.' Or, sometimes they'll just tease you by saying something really cute will happen IT AIN'T TRUE, IT'S NOT GONNA HAPPEN!!!!! (Trust me; I'm still seeing some of the same ones that I waited on 10 years ago!) I don't let the bad luck ones scare me either, they get trashed. (Could that be why I haven't won the lottery?)

(7) Before you forward an Amber Alert, or a Virus Alert, or some of the other ones floating around nowadays, check them out before you forward them. Most of them are junk mail that's been circling the net for Years! Just about everything you receive in an email that is in question can be checked out at Snopes. Just go to http://www.snopes.com/. It's really easy to find out if it's real or not. If it's not, please don't pass it on.

So please, in the future, let's stop or at least minimize the junk mail and the viruses by taking the steps outlined above.

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E-Mailing Photographs

By Richard Kennon, Editor, Amador Computer Users Group, CA
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First, we **must** understand that photograph (image) size in the camera and in the computer is measured in **pixels**. These are the basic dots of color that make the picture. **Do not** pay any attention to anything that says "inches" or "pixels per inch." These terms are meaningless when we are considering a picture either in the camera or in the computer. They may come into play later if we want to print the photo on paper. But, that is another subject for another time. For now, we think only of pixels. Most cameras record too many pixels to e-mail. For instance a 6 megapixel camera will make a picture about 3000 pixels wide by 2000 pixels tall and the file size may be several megabytes. Our screens are usually only about 1000 pixels wide (some are larger and some smaller). So, if we e-mail the native picture, it will be wider than the screen for the recipient <u>and</u> the file will be so large, it may take "forever" to download to the recipient's computer. It is possible the service provider will not even accept it.

There are two things we must do

to make a photo e-mailable. The first is to *resize* or *resample* the picture. We want to change the picture width from 3000 pixels to 800 pixels, for instance. This process is called resizing or resampling. We have to pick the best 800 pixels out of the 3000 to represent our photo. Well, no, that is not exactly correct but it simplifies things to think of it that way. We don't have to worry about it because a lot of very smart programmers have developed ways (algorithms) to help us. Just remember, you want to resize or resample to get the photo down to a size convenient for e-mailing. I usually use 800 pixels or 900 pixels width for pictures I attach to e-mails. *(See image 1 on page 10)*

The second thing to do to make a photo e-mailable is to save it in **JPEG format (.jpg).** That is a format that reduces file size a lot and picture quality a little so the picture can be downloaded more quickly and still be nice to look at. Some software programs give you choices of compression amount with numbers ranging from 1 to 10. One will result in a very small file but the picture quality will not be good at all. A 10 will give the very best quality but with a very large file size. A reasonable compromise is to use 5 or 6. I usually use 6.

How do you do this? First, I will describe how to do it with a free Microsoft program. Then I will try to look at some other programs.

Microsoft Power Toys for XP has a Resize Pictures toy that is slick and easy but feedback says it only works on XP. It can be downloaded at http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/powertoys/xp-powertoys.mspx. Right click on an

image name or thumbnail in Explorer or My Computer and choose **Resize Pictures.** You are limited to four specific sizes but they are good choices. They don't tell us what compression they are using but the results look OK. Unless you tell them under **Advanced** to replace the image in the file, it will make a copy. That's good. They will add the word, "Large", "Medium" or "Small" to the end of the name you have chosen.

If you are happy with this solution, then read no further. But, if you want to use a picture editing program, maybe this will help.

In Photoshop Elements 5, click on **Image>Resize>Image Size** and this window will pop up. Note that there is some garbage at the bottom about "inches" but we will ignore that. First we will click the **Resample Image** box. That puts the Pixel Dimensions in play and that is what we want. I selected the Width box and changed the width to 800 pixels. Since the **Constrain Proportions** box is selected, that is all I have to do. (*See image 2 on page 10*)

Note, down at the bottom, that we have several choices of sampling algorithms. This is frosting on the cake. I read somewhere that I should use **Bicubic Sharper** when downsizing so that is what I do. (*See image 3 on page 10*) Most programs don't give us all these choices. Then we should click on **File>Save As** and give the photo a new name. I often just use the same name and add "_800px" so the next time I will know it is ready to e-mail. Here we can choose the JPEG format and the compression amount. Photoshop Elements 6 is out now and sells for about $100. If you are able to spend that much and

want one of the best editing programs, I highly recommend it. (*See image 4 on page 10*)

Let's look at Picasa2. It is a free program from Google and looks really good but I do not have much experience with it. By all means, try it first because the price is right! When it comes to e-mailing photographs, it is a little more automated but not any easier to use than Elements. First, click on **Tools>Options>E-Mail**. Then select the width you want in pixels. There are six choices. Then click on **Apply** and **OK**. (*See image 5 on page 10*)

The next step is to click on **File>E-Mail** and you will get three choices of how you want to e-mail your photos. Fortunately, I use Outlook Express so my choice is listed.

When I clicked on Outlook Express, an e-mail page popped up with the photo attached. At this point we can write something else on the e-mail and send it. I recommend this so the recipient will know it is really from you and not something sent out by a virus. When I receive e-mails that only say "Attached", I **Delete** them without looking at the attachment. This saved me one time when I received a virus from my sister-in-law that she did not know she sent. She spent weeks and dollars getting her computer back up. Oh, I digress. If you want to send more than one picture (and, who doesn't?), you must select the picture and click on the Hold button near the bottom of the screen. Do this for each photo you want to send and they will all be attached to the e-mail. The program automatically chooses JPEG format and a compression ratio but does not tell you. That is OK as the pictures I tried looked good. Picasa2 has considerable capability for editing photos in many respects. Try it!

There are many other editing programs that I haven't mentioned and have no experience with. In all cases you want to change the picture's size in pixels by resizing or resampling. Pay no attention to anything that says "inches" as that will have no meaning for this process. Sometime later we will talk about printing pictures and then we will use inches.

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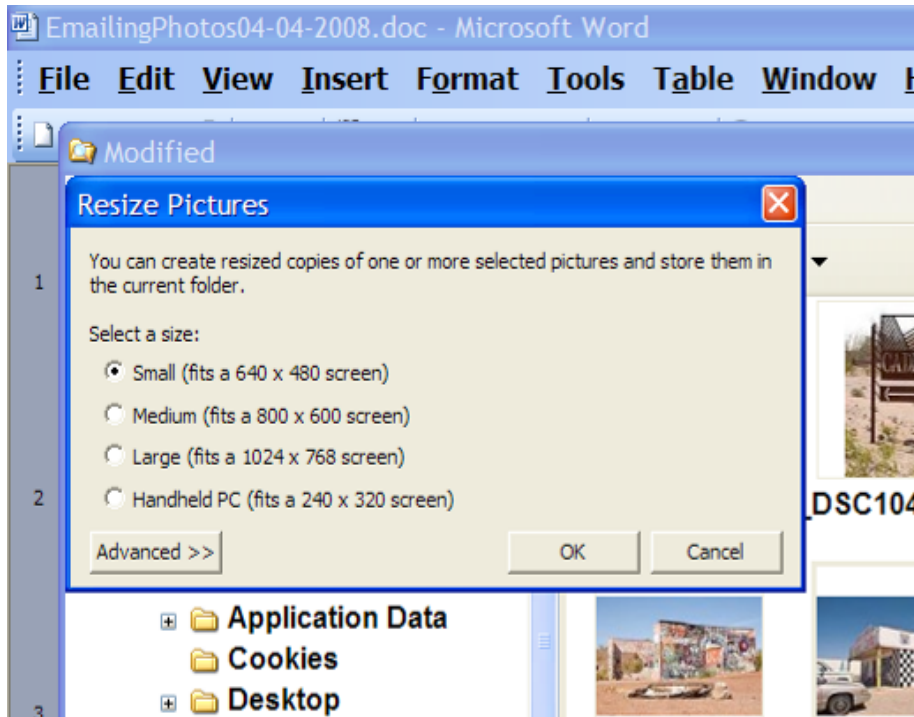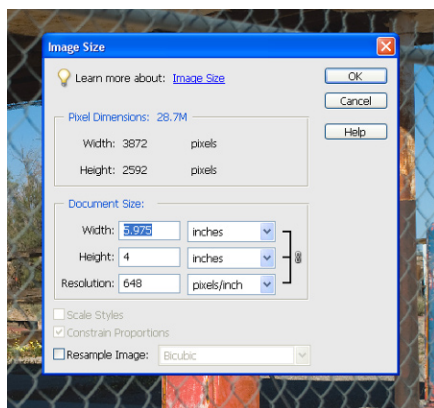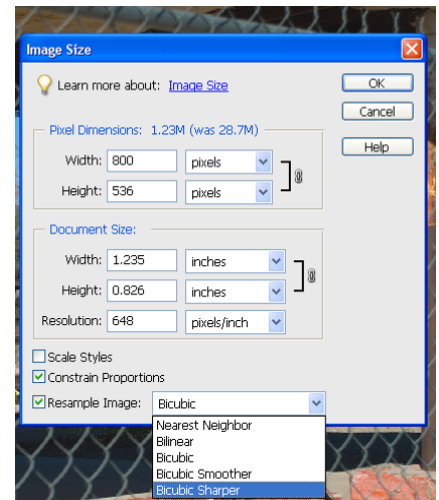Screenshots for this article appear on the following page — *Editor*
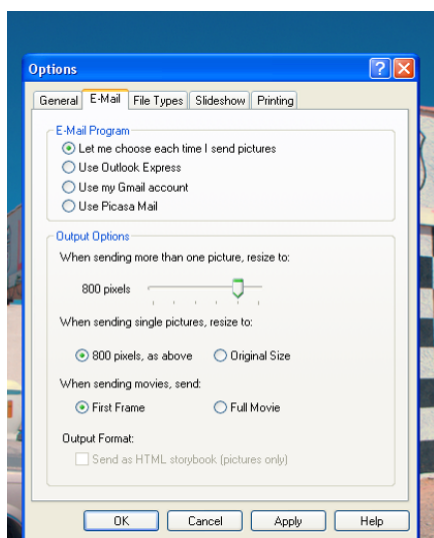
Image 1

Image 2

Image 3

Image 4
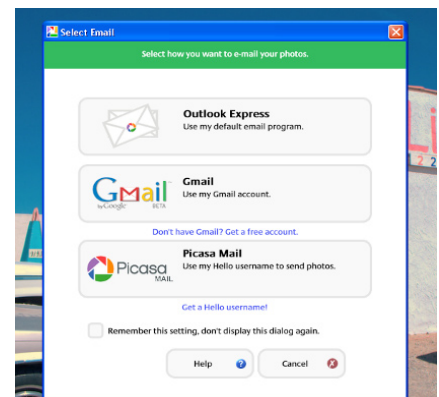
Image 5

The 2007 WAC Board of Directors, SIG Leaders and other Volunteers

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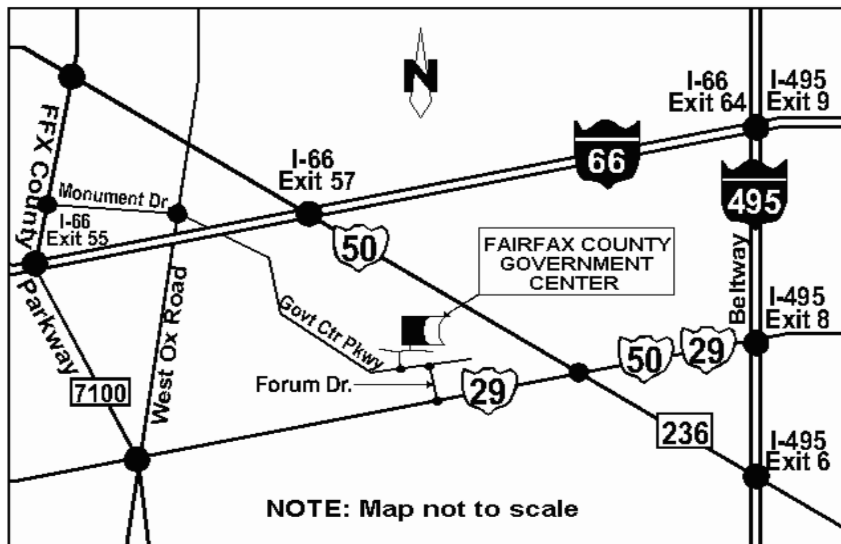
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Label

The New, The Best, and The Worst - May 2008

Collected by Pim Borman,
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Tales of Woe
Sorry, Folks, but this month I can't think of any New and/or Best to report on, only Troubles, with a Capital 'T.' So let's get started.

Spinrite 6.

Son Mike's computer recently refused to boot, and his main concern was the potential loss of some recent data files that he had not yet backed up. Regrettable, but it happens to the best of us - literally. The local school system lost all the students' test results of the current term because the computers crashed. The data were not securely backed up. Whom to blame? No one other than the operator, IBM, symbol of computing excellence. According to the local paper, the IBM representative claimed that this had never happened before and could not be explained. Sound familiar?

Back to Mike. When it was clear that he could not boot from the hard drive, not even in safe mode, the next step was to use a Windows XP setup disc and use its Repair function. Windows labored mightily, trying to repair his drive, but kept getting bogged down with a variety of obscure error messages. At one time he got a DOS prompt that allowed him to list the files on his computer, but when he tried to copy them he was denied access. When we booted his computer with a Live Ubuntu Linux CD he could also see his precious files, but access

was again denied.

There is a lesson to be learned from this. The Windows XP operating system runs on a partition configured in the NTFS format. When data files are saved in that format, Windows XP (and Vista) by default protect those files from access by others. That is a nice safety feature for those who really need it, but it makes the data unavailable over your network, or evidently even from a DOS prompt. You can beforehand designate specific data files to be shared, but it is a lot of bother, easily forgotten. Here is the lesson: store all your data files on a separate partition set up in the older FAT32 format, and they'll be available whenever and wherever you need them. Even better, also back them up to an external drive in FAT32 format.

At this point I remembered reading about a terrific file recovery program, Spinrite 6, available for $89 from Gibson Research Corporation, owned and operated by Steve Gibson, the well-known computer guru (www.grc.com). We downloaded the program and converted it to a bootable disc. After booting Mike's computer with the Spinrite disc it immediately announced that his drive was subject to imminent failure. Well, that's what we spent the $89 for. We started the file recovery mode, with a warning that this could take a looong time, think 24 hours or so.

Several days later, after running something like 60 hours during which the program every so often would get bogged down and had to be restarted, the program had progressed to 93% completion and refused to go any further. No indication that any files were available to be recovered.

Mike installed Windows XP on a new drive and put the old wreck in an external hard drive enclosure connected to a USB port of his computer. The old drive was unreadable at this point. Still unwilling to give up, Mike tried the old standby, Windows' checkdisk with the /F parameter (for "fix") to let Windows try to repair salvageable parts of the drive. It worked! After several repeats of the procedure he was able to recover most of his lost files that meanwhile also had become accessible. So much for Spinrite, mark one up for good old DOS.

Acronis

After creating the Spinrite disc, and before using it on Mike's computer, I tested it on my desktop computer by doing a routine check of my hard drive, expecting it to be in perfect shape. To my surprise Spinrite halted about 5% into the inspection because the hard drive was overheating. Newer serial (SATA) hard drives are equipped with a SMART program that reports many operating parameters of the drive. Windows can't read SMART, but Spinrite can. On inspection I found that the cooling fan for the hard drive compartment was kaput. It was easily replaced by the local people who built my computer, but even then the drive continued to overheat, a clear warning that it may fail any time.

I bought a new 500 GB Maxtor drive (on sale for $99!) which came with a utility, "MaxBlast" to copy an exact image of my setup to the new disc, avoiding the necessity to reinstall everything. The way it wanted to go about it was to do a three--way partition of the 500 MB drive, similar to the 3 partitions in the old (250

MB) drive, but twice as large. It was going to copy everything on the old drive to the new drive, including my Linux programs in their partition, with the warning that the Linux system would no longer be bootable. That was not what I had in mind, I just wanted to copy an image of the C: partition from the old to the new drive. Since MaxBlast turned out to be version 10 of disk manager Acronis, I gave Acronis-11 a try in the hope that it would be more flexible. I uninstalled MaxBlast and tried to install Acronis 11, but it balked. I tried to remove all traces of Max-Blast from the Registry, but Acronis still wouldn't install. I uninstalled as much as possible of Acronis and tried to reinstall MaxBlast. No luck; darn. So much for Acronis.

After clean installations of Windows XP and Ubuntu Linux on the new drive, Windows could not find my Internet connection. After struggling several days I finally realized that my motherboard needed to be software-configured and that I did not have the correct drivers. Thanks to the local availability of the guys who originally built the system I got the correct drivers and all was well. Ubuntu never had any problem. It downloaded and installed the required Linux drivers automatically.

Ubuntu

Windows Vista is not the only operating system with compatibility problems on installation. Ubuntu and other Linux distributions have more than their share of installation problems. Most of these appear to be due to proprietary graphics systems for which Linux has no drivers (yet). I have been recommending for years that people ought to start

using Linux, but on both occasions where I convinced someone, it turned out that Ubuntu was incompatible with their systems. Computers with integrated graphics and many laptop computers have low-cost proprietary hardware (made in China) that is attuned to Windows, but unlikely to have Linux drivers. Standard graphics cards from major manufacturers are more likely to have Linux drivers available, and those based on the NVidea chip set have Linux support from the manufacturer.

You can try to run Ubuntu from the CD-ROM without installing it on the hard drive, a so-called "live" installation. If that works, your system is probably compatible and you can proceed with a permanent installation. If it doesn't work, not much is lost since the distribution is free. In any case, Linux is a large program and requires at least 256 MB of RAM and 10 GB of hard drive space.

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From My Vista

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Just about every year I make some sort of 'major' effort to move for-

ward with technology in some way on my primary home workstation. I periodically wipe out the machine and start a fresh OS install from scratch. I reasoned that as laborious a reinstall is, I may as well bite the bullet and this time make the move to Vista. What made the timing right was that Microsoft gave Windows Vista Ultimate 32-bit w/SP2 for those who attended the APCUG 2008 LDC. Here's my experience.

Check Compatibility

When loading an OS it is important to make note of your hardware and key software. Vista Update Advisor will highlight any hardware or software compatibility issues of which to be aware. In my case, the only issues to address were applications that would be replaced with new Vista versions—no big deal. In terms of hardware, my machine-checked out OK. Last I had heard, my ATI All-In-Wonder 2006 video card was not yet supported in Vista, so I double checked the AMD (they now own ATI) website and confirmed there are now Vista drivers and software. It's a Go!

Backup Data

Next, I made backups of all my important data. This time around I used an external USB hard drive and just dragged and dropped the data to a 'backup' folder. I wanted to start fresh and clean, so I didn't bother making a backup of my Windows or Office user settings. There aren't any new BIOS updates for my motherboard, so I was all set to go.

Time for Install

I started the install process around 8 p.m., electing to wipe all partitions on the hard drive. My first boot to

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the desktop post install was shortly after 10 p.m. So far, so good. And, considering this is a P4 2.4GHz machine, I was rather impressed. Vista's graphics worked from the get-go because the ATI All-In-Wonder 2006 uses an ATI Radeon 9600 compatible chipset for which Vista loaded drivers. Sound worked. Networking worked. I expected SOMETHING to be wrong, due to all the horror stories I had heard! My machine even received a 3.2 on the "Vista Experience Index". That means I can use

Aero! Now we're cooking!

Post Install Issues

A notice appeared that Windows detected hardware and needed to install drivers. My system's motherboard has an integrated Realtek AC'97 sound card. Unfortunately there isn't a Vista driver for the MIDI interface. If I want to hook up MIDI devices in the future, I will probably need to disable the built-in sound card and install a properly supported one to gain MIDI interface functionality.

Watching TV is one of the things for which I built this machine, and I expected to use Vista Media Center. This is where my second issue came up. While AMD (they bought ATI) has released updated Vista drivers and software for the ATI AIW 2006 video card, they didn't actually 'fix' the issue with how the ATI Hydravision software accesses the TV Tuner. I searched around for a solution and came across a Home Theater application called "Beyond TV" by SnapStream. So far that seems to solve my issue. Beyond TV has a ton of cool features (worth looking at even if you aren't going

to Vista).

Reality Check

In my consumer opinion, lack of proper drivers for an OS is the fault of the hardware integrator and not the OS maker. AMD is blaming Microsoft's changes in DirectX 10 D3D (which happen to address performance and security) as why the ATI TV Tuner software doesn't work. Well, AMD, how come Snap-Stream could figure it out? AOpen has not released any new drivers for their implementation of the AC'97 chip on my motherboard. I can live with AOpen's choice because most people don't use the MIDI interface feature of sound cards. AMD has no excuse for not supporting an expensive video card that is bought for the very feature they aren't supporting. My buying habits will be adjusted accordingly in the future.

Supporting Apps

Along with Beyond TV, I installed what I consider 'Base Supporting Apps'. These included Avast! Antivirus, Notepad++, Pidgin, Adobe Reader, Adobe Flash Player, Adobe Shockwave Player, TrueCrypt, PrimoPDF, and WinSCP. Office Ultimate 2007 is going to round out the Office Suite. Everything installed smoothly. No issues, arguments, or contentions between apps.

Where I Stand

My machine has paid its dues many times over and the driver issues didn't affect my ability to use what I needed, so I was OK with that. Others with more particular needs should be aware that integrated soundcards, atypical hardware, old devices, and fancy graphics capture cards may require special attention. Replacements may need to be considered. I'm not suggesting everyone run out and install Vista. This

is now the fourth time I've installed Vista on a machine—first time on one I plan to use regularly. All said and done, the experience has been pleasant and not anything like the horror stories I've heard. At the time of this writing it's been about two weeks and all continues to work well. This article was typed on that system using Word 2007 and sent to the editors with Outlook 2007.

From my vista, Vista works just fine.

Vista Upgrade Advisor:

http://www.microsoft.com/windows/products/windowsvista/buyorupgrade/upgradeadvisor.mspx

Compare Vista Editions:

http://www.microsoft.com/windows/products/windowsvista/editions/choose.mspx

SnapStream Beyond TV:

http://www.snapstream.com/products/beyondtv/

I'M ASKED...

By Bill Funk, a member of the Arizona Association for Computer Information, inc. (ASCIi)
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by APCUG member groups.

I just bought a Digital SLR; with the prices as low as they are, I couldn't resist.

Since I want to take photos of my grandchildren, and the built-in flash isn't as powerful as I need, I bought a new flash. It's the same brand as my camera, and is supposed to be all automatic. But, the photos aren't right. I thought the better flash would let me take photos inside, and freeze the movement of the grandkids, but the photos are as blurry as with the camera's flash.

What's going on?

You're right, the on-board flashes on most DSLRs aren't very bright. Buying the new flash is the right idea, but it doesn't work the way many people think it does.

You're probably using the camera as a Point & Shoot: setting the camera to make the exposure decisions, and pressing the shutter button. There's nothing wrong with that, but doing things that way won't get your flash to work the way you want it to.

Instead, you should use the Manual mode for exposure (check your camera's manual for how to enter the Manual mode). While you're looking at the manual, check to find the highest shutter speed you can use with the flash, too.

Then, in Manual mode, set the shutter speed at, or maybe slightly below, that speed (I use 1/125 sec on my camera; it's fast enough to freeze most action), then set the aperture (f/number) for the desired result as far as depth of field is concerned, and set the ISO as desired. Set the flash to auto (check the manual), and fire away. This way, the camera will use the settings you chose, ignoring the amount of light in the scene. The flash will check to see what the camera is set to, and fire itself, checking the results as it fires to give the right amount of light to the scene. Neat, eh?

The way you're doing it will make the flash act as a "fill" flash, meaning the camera's exposure system will use the existing light in the scene to set the exposure, and the flash will intelligently fire to fill in shadows, but not be the major source of light in the scene. This is also the usual way the camera's on-board flash works, even though many cameras will set the shutter speed to take advantage of the flash's extra light to help freeze motion. The problem here, though, is that the on-board flash just isn't bright enough to light up a dark scene (such as a room) very well.

One of the really neat things about digital photography is that, regardless of the actual type of the camera, experimentation is cheap. In this case, once you get the basics of flash use down, you can experiment with different shutter speeds and aperture settings for different results. Also, off-camera flashes like yours will usually let you turn the flash head up and down, and side to side, for bounce flash. With bounce flash, you're bouncing the flash off the ceiling or wall. This tends to spread the light from the flash out to reduce that sharp look that a straight-on flash gives, and it also reduces harsh shadows (as well as changing where the shadows are); more to experiment with!

This brings up another question: if you have an older flash from your film days, can you use it with your new DSLR? The answer is a very firm: maybe. The problem is that most older, film-era flashes have a higher trigger voltage than what DSLRs can tolerate. In other words, using that old flash can cause some expensive damage to your DSLR. There are some devices that can be put between your older flash and your DSLR's flash shoe that will solve the problem. However, a new flash will also work much better with your new DSLR, and do things that old flash can't even dream of doing.

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