



The Cursor



*Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group*

Meeting Location
Fairfax County Government
Center
Fairfax, VA



Next Meeting:
June 20, 2009



Presidential Bits

by Paul Howard, President WACUG, president@wacug.org

May's meeting attendance suffered from the great weather, and the "attraction" of yard work, but an enthusiastic crowd thoroughly enjoyed Gabe Goldberg's presentation "A Little PC Cleaning Pays Off!" OLLI's picnic tables provided an ideal venue for a physical cleaning demonstration with a shop vac, creating clouds of dust that could never be countenanced indoors. Simultaneously, a PC Clinic staffed by WAC's Scott Hanak, and Roger Fujii and Nick Wenri of NCTCUG, helped get three computers that had been slowed to a crawl, back up and running effectively.

Summer Meetings at the Government Center

Beginning with our June 20th meeting, we'll be back in Room 2/3 of the Conference Center at the Fairfax County Government Center, and plan to be there for the July 18th and August 15th meetings as well. So, set your navigation system for 12000 Government Center Parkway, and join us for a summer of computers and technology!

June's meeting: Nintendo Wii & Playstation 3: Just for Kids?

Chuck Roberts will introduce us to Nintendo's system. While the Wii is not all that popular among hard-cord gamers, it is one of the most popular gaming consoles available. In fact, many industry pundits have pinioned that the Wii is vastly over rated. So what makes it so popular among families, seniors, and lots of young folks? Come see for yourself as Chuck brings his Wii to provide a demonstration (and possibly challenges members to a match) — are you up to the challenge?

Geof Goodrum will bring the group up-to-date on the Playstation 3. The Playstation Store (online) now has downloadable movies and TV shows for purchase and rent (many in HD). You can store and view these from the PS3 hard disk. Playstation Home is a virtual 3D world to explore. Meet and talk with other PS3 users around the world, view videos, play games, and customize your virtual self (avatar) and online living space. Purchase virtual items.

The PlayTV DVR (Dual Tuner HD) accessory is not available in the US, yet. Bummer!

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Lloyd's Web Sites for June, 2009

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 Sites:

1. **How many people have your name?** – www.census-online.us A list of people with your name is free; however, there is a cost for details.
2. **Springtime Allergies** – www.mayoclinic.com/health/springtime-allergies/AA00060. Before you settle for plastic flowers and artificial turf, try these simple and effective strategies. A Mayo Clinic site. Related site: [Hay Fever Resources: Mayo Clinic](http://www.hayfeverresources.com/mayo-clinic). Also www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/allergy.html
3. **Journalism Help: Finding Data on the Internet.**– <http://nilesonline.com/data> This site may help.
4. **Bankruptcy** – www.nolo.com/resource.cfm/catID/462A9501-9B21-4E09-A08C5A7B8AF51A79/213. This Site features a FAQ, glossary, comparison charts, and other legal resources on Bankruptcy.
5. **Day of the Week Calculator** – www.searchforancestors.com/utility/dayofweek.html. Enter the date to calculate the day of the week for an historic or future year. Related site: [Calculate Days Between Two Dates](http://www.calculate-days-between-dates.com).
6. **Online Conversion** – www.onlineconversion.com. Convert just about anything to anything else. Over 5,000 units, and 50,000 conversions.
7. **Gethuman** – www.gethuman2.com. When you're tired of wasting money and time due to phone systems that require you to press 10 or more options in order to reach a real person and spending many minutes or even hours on hold, consult the GetHuman database of secret phone numbers and codes that immediately get an actual, live person on the line for customer service at nearly 1000 major companies.
8. **The Hubble Heritage Project** – <http://heritage.stsci.edu/index.html>. The Hubble Space Telescope (HST) is a research tool dedicated to scientific studies of nature
9. **Ready for some fantasy football?** – www.fantasyfootballhub.com



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

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GNU/Linux SIG

By Geof Goodrum, WAC

Initial Impressions: Kubuntu 9.04 on the Dell Inspiron 1100

In the interest of trying out the latest and greatest, I upgraded the Kubuntu GNU/Linux distribution on WAC's Dell Inspiron 1100 laptop from version 8.10 to 9.04. The Inspiron laptop itself dates from 2003, so it is hardly cutting edge. The CPU is a 2.0 GHz Intel Celeron, the video chipset is Intel 845GL with 8 MB video memory, the display is 14" XGA. WAC previously upgraded the memory from 128 MB to 1GB, which dramatically improved performance. The laptop has a DVD-ROM drive and a 20 GB hard disk (10 GB allocated to Windows XP Home and 10 GB for a GNU/Linux distribution).

Kubuntu 8.10 had a compatibility issue with older Intel graphics chipsets like that on this laptop, which caused a screen lockup until the desktop effects feature was disabled manually. Previous versions of Kubuntu supported desktop effects on this laptop, but it is "eye candy" not essential for operation.

Happily, Kubuntu 9.04 seems to recognize the graphics chipset issue and disabled desktop effects by default when installed on this system. The new KDE4 desktop is pretty, but is significantly different from the default KDE3 desktop in the previous version and requires some getting used to. I found that the desktop panels would disappear if KDE user settings were misconfigured, and only keyboard shortcuts could activate menu items. The easiest fix was to reinstall Kubuntu. I found that the new Network Manager, now implemented as a KDE4 desktop "plasma widget", did not have a configuration option for wireless networks using the most secure WPA2 encryption feature. Open (unencrypted), WEP encrypted, and WPA encrypted wireless networks are supported. This issue is documented in the bug database with some suggested workarounds, but it indicates a lack of maturity in the new KDE4 desktop widgets (however, KDE4 can use Apple Mac widgets). Kubuntu 8.10 supports WPA2 wireless networks well, and had a better selection of desktop gadgets with more configuration options.

All in all, Kubuntu 9.04 works and looks nice, but the less adventurous should wait for the next Kubuntu release to allow some shakeout of KDE4 issues, or chose a more conservative GNU/Linux distribution (look for my upcoming article about CentOS 5.3).

The Kubuntu website has more information about the new features in version 9.04 at <http://www.kubuntu.org/news/9.04-release>.

Google Wave: The Future of E-mail?

After a year of secret development in Australia, Google demonstrated at the Google I/O 2009 developer's conference what e-mail could be if starting over using current technology. Brothers Lars and Jens Rasmussen, creators of Google Maps, were given permission to put together a team to investigate the possibilities. The result is impressive, even at this early stage. Using only the HTML5 web standard (compatible with browsers such as Firefox, Google Chrome, and Safari) and using some functions of Google Gears that they have proposed for the HTML5 standard, what Google is calling

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Wave merges a number of existing technology bits and pieces into a collaborative messaging framework. Instead of e-mails being sent, copied, and replied to point to point with the 40 year old system in use today, the model is closer to a bulletin board where messages are stored centrally and shared among the designated recipients, who can update the message content with replies and corrections. If the recipients are online, they see message replies and updates character by character in real time (there will be an option to show replies/updates only when complete). Message attachments such as files, videos, photos, etc. are available instantly and update dynamically. New recipients can be added to the discussion, and have the ability to playback the message thread to understand the chronological order of how it developed. The wave can be linked to a blog just by adding a blog ID as a recipient. Messages in the wave then get posted to the blog, and messages posted to the blog showed up in the wave. The demonstration included real-time contextual spell checking – the spell checker recognized the difference between “bean” and “been” as used in a sentence and made the proper spelling corrections. Another demonstration showed real-time language translation – both the original English text and a French translation appeared as it was typed. Other applications included user surveys and a playable chess game executed through a wave.

The Google team also demonstrated “Federation”, or how waves can be shared and distributed among servers. A group in one company can receive a proposal from outside the company, create a private discussion within the wave among themselves, and then make a reply to the external recipients. The private discussion is never distributed beyond the internal corporate wave server, so the outsiders never have access to it.

Best of all, Google is releasing “the lion’s share” of Wave code under an Open Source license, and has granted the developer community outside of Google accounts on the prototype system and information about the Application Programming Interface (API) with encouragement to try it out, suggest improvements, and begin building extensions. They made information about the wave protocol available for review, as well. By doing so, Google has a good chance at promoting adoption of Wave as a new open standard for messaging and collaboration. This model worked quite well for Google Maps and Google Earth.

Google plans to release Wave for public use in Google’s

Gmail and other services later this year. Google’s web site about Wave is <http://wave.google.com/>, which includes a YouTube video of the entire 1hour 20 minute Google I/O demonstration. The feature descriptions and videos on the web site will really help you appreciate the scope of this project.

Palm Prē Plans Announced

The new Palm® Prē™ smartphone became available from retailers on June 6th. The Palm Prē was previewed at the 2009 International Consumer Electronics Show and won both Best in Show and People’s Voice awards, and is receiving favorable reviews (e.g. <http://wtop.com/?nid=108&sid=1688939>). The Prē features a true multitasking webOS™ operating system based upon the Linux kernel. Sprint is the exclusive service provider for the initial release. The announced price is \$199.99 after a \$100 rebate and activation of a two year Sprint Everything Plan with data service contract. Reports indicate that Best Buy stores will provide the rebate at the register. One of the initial applications available from the online catalog allows the Prē to run software applications written for earlier Palm devices. Besides being a true multitasking smartphone with a multitouch gesture interface, the Prē features a fold out QWERTY keyboard, USB 2.0 connectivity, ability to interface with iTunes and Amazon to load and play DRM-free content, a 320x480 resolution 3.1” screen with 24 bit color, 3 MP camera, 8 GB built-in storage, Bluetooth 2.1, 3G and Wi-Fi network with instant messaging, e-mail, web, and search, and GPS capability. For a complete list of features with video demos, visit the Palm and Sprint web sites at (respectively):

<http://www.palm.com/us/products/phones/pre/index.html>

<http://now.sprint.com/nownetwork/productPage.html>

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 21 – June 3, 2009.

Distribution	
ArtistX 0.7	Calculate Linux 9.6
Canaima GNU/Linux 2.0.1	CentOS 5.3 “Live CD”
Ekaaty Linux 3	Foresight Linux 2.1.1
grml 2009.05	Hacao Linux 4.21

Hymera Open 20090601	iMagic OS 2009.5
Kiwi Linux 9.04	Kubuntu 9.04
Linux Caixa Mágica 14	Linux Mint 7
Mandriva Linux 2009.1	Mythbuntu 9.04
NetSecL 2.4	Parted Magic 4.1
PC/OS 10 "Open64 Workstation"	Puppy Linux 4.2.1
Red Hat Enterprise Linux 4.8	Sabayon Linux 4.1 "KDE"
Sability 9.04	SimplyMEPIS 8.0.06
SystemRescueCd 1.2.0	Tiny Core Linux 1.4
Toorox 04.2009	Ubuntu 9.04
Ubuntu Studio 9.04	Webconverger 4.7
Xubuntu 9.04	Zenwalk Live 6.0

Linux Software of the Month

The software described below is downloadable at the links provided or may be requested on CD, or copied onto a USB flash drive at the WAC 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 (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 2009

GIMP FX Foundry – v2.6.1. <http://gimpfx-foundry.sourceforge.net/>. Free GNU General Public License script plug-ins for GIMP 2.6 by various authors. This release features 117 additional scripts for the GNU Image Manipulation Program (GIMP) to create special effects with photos and graphics, including a Roy Lichtenstein effect to render graphics in the pop artist's style, a script to antique photos, and a script to render a planet image.

Open Clip Art Library – v0.19. <http://openclipart.org/>. Free Public Domain clip art in Scalable Vector Graphic (SVG) format. The Open Clip Art Library is a collection of royalty free (public domain) clip art, enhanced with creative commons metadata. It can be redistributed with free software or closed software and with various software distributions. This release contains over 12,000 high quality graphic files released into the public domain by over 1,000 artists.

Pipewalker – v0.6.1. <http://pipewalker.sourceforge.net/>. Free GNU General Public License C source code by Artem A. Senichev. This is a puzzle game where pieces of a computer network are to be turned in the right/left direction to make all computers connected to the same network. This game is clone of NetWalk. System requirements include OpenGL and X Window server.

PS3MediaServer – v.1.10.5. <http://code.google.com/p/ps3mediaserver/>. Free GNU General Public License Java executable and source code. PS3 Media Server is a DLNA compliant Upnp Media Server, written in Java, with the purpose of streaming or transcoding any kind of media files from a PC to a DLNA client such as the Sony Playstation 3, with minimum configuration. It's backed up with the powerful Mplayer/FFmpeg packages. The server supports a wide variety of audio formats (including OGG, FLAC, AC3, DTS, LPCM), video formats (MKV, FLV, OGM, AVI, MP4, TS, M2TS, MPEG), and image formats (JPG, PNG, GIF, TIFF).

Kernel Source – <http://www.kernel.org/>. 2.6 kernel source code for all platforms (stable 2.6.29).



Make Your Wireless Network Safe

By Marjie Tucker, Editor
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Wireless networks are becoming more and more popular, but they do add some additional security risks. You need to spend a little extra time to ensure that your data and your identity are secure.

What are the Risks?

Because wireless networks don't require a cable between the computer and your Internet connection, it's relatively easy for someone else to use your Internet connection for free, to hijack your messages, or to sneak into your computer and view or steal your data.

So What Should I Do?

There are several important steps that you should follow to protect yourself and your computer:

1. Don't use a default password on your wireless equipment. Most networking devices are pre-configured by the manufacturer with a simple password to simplify the setup process. This is the password that allows you to access the router configuration. These "default" passwords are well known by anyone who has used a similar device and they are available online, eroding any protection they might have provided. Check the instructions that came with your device and immediately change the password.

Remember that the best passwords contain both upper and lowercase letters as well as numbers. And, always shy away from passwords that can be easily guessed by your friends - such as the names of your children or your dog.

Experts suggest using a poem to derive a "pass phrase." You merely take a line from a poem or poem title and use the first letter of each word. For example, using the poem "Mary had a little lamb" you would use the letters from the first line - Mary had a little lamb; its fleece was white as snow - mhallifwwas. Add at least one uppercase letter by capitalizing the M for Mary - Mhallifwwas. Next add at least one number by changing some of the letters to numbers, such as making the first letters for little and lamb into 1s. Now we have a phrase (Mha11ifwwas) that is reasonably secure and very easy to remember.

2. Restrict your network to only your computers. Every computer device has an embedded address on it called a media access control (MAC) address. Wireless access points and routers can be configured to exclude all other MAC addresses.

3. Encrypt the data on your network. Encryption prevents outsiders from viewing your transmissions. There are two methods of ensuring that your information is adequately protected, Wired Equivalent Privacy (WEP) and Wi-Fi Protected Access (WPA). Because WEP has several security issues associated with it, WPA is considered the more effective method, if it is supported by your equipment. However, since this is another area where a secure password is important, you should use a passphrase like I described in item #1.

4. Choose a unique SSID. Your equipment may have a default name that identifies your network, called an SSID. Be sure to setup a unique name and, if possible, avoid broadcasting that name. That will make it harder for outsiders to find your network.

5. Install a firewall for your network. Microsoft Vista and XP both provide a firewall that is designed to protect your computer, but your network itself will be safer with its own firewall. A host based firewall is easy to obtain (some of them are free over the Internet) and can be installed directly onto your wireless device.

6. Install and regularly update both anti-virus and anti-spyware software. You can keep attackers at bay with these protective programs. However, remember to update both of them on a regular basis. New viruses and spyware attacks are being developed daily; so your software must be updated to be effective.

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Google Offers Free Medical Records Service

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; Radio & TV Show 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 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, RX America, 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”, “My-CareTeam- 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 uti-

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lizes 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 column 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 synergistic 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 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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Bookmarks Page

by Hank Pearson, Treasurer and Webmaster, ASCII
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Wouldn't it be nice if you could view a searchable webpage of bookmarks for your favorite websites? You can, but why?

Find Bookmarks with Forgotten Names

One reason to view your bookmarks as a webpage (as an alternative to looking in a menu) is to be able to find sites when you can't remember the first word in the name.

Let's say you have a Firefox bookmark named Carbonite Online Backup, and you can't remember Carbonite but you know you are looking for the word Backup. On your Bookmarks page (you will soon learn how to view), you can easily search for Backup.

You are using Firefox, aren't you? If you haven't discovered Firefox, download it from Mozilla (<http://mozilla.com>). It's free, fast, and secure. Make Firefox your default browser.

View Bookmark Descriptions and Tags

Another reason for a bookmarks page is to give you plenty of room to view (and find) descriptions of your bookmarks. You will learn how to add tags to improve your searches.

Zoom In and Out

A third reason to display your bookmarks on a webpage is to allow you to zoom the text in and out so you can see it clearly. To zoom any webpage, press Ctrl+Plus or Ctrl+Minus, using the numeric keypad.

DIY for Fun and Learning

So, how do you display your bookmarks as a webpage? You could download a tool to do the work for you, or download a tool to search bookmarks. But it's easy enough to DIY (Do It Yourself). It's interesting, fun, and educational. Are you just using your computer to perform certain tasks, or do you also enjoy learning by experimenting? If you like to learn, this tip is for you.

Find the Bookmarks File

You don't need to create a bookmarks webpage. It already exists on your own hard drive! The name of the file is simply bookmarks.html. Press Win+F to find it. (While holding down the Windows key (next to Alt),

press F, for Find.) In the left window pane, click 'All Files and Folders'. In 'All or part of the file name', type 'bookmarks.html' (without quotes). Click Search.

If you get multiple results, it's easy to determine which bookmarks.html file to use. It's the newest one. In the View menu (of your Search Results window), click Details. In the right window pane, click the Date Modified column header (to sort the list). The file you are interested in has the newest date and time (for a file with the Type shown as Firefox Document).

Bookmark the Bookmarks File

Double-click that newest bookmarks.html Firefox Document to open it in Firefox. Press Ctrl+D to bookmark the bookmarks.html file. In the Name field, insert a hyphen (-) at the beginning (to name the bookmark '-Bookmarks'), so this new bookmark will appear at the top of the list.

Now, with your Bookmarks page displayed, press F5 to refresh the view. (F5 is a common shortcut key for Refresh.) Surprise? The new -Bookmarks bookmark is at the bottom - not the top. Let's address that. (This is Firefox 2.0.0.11. Future versions might vary.)

Create Another Top Bookmark

First, create another bookmark that will be displayed at the top. For example, open Google.com, press Ctrl+D, and name the bookmark -Google (starting with a hyphen).

Sort Your Bookmarks

Now, in the Bookmarks menu, right click any bookmark, and click Sort by Name. Look in the Bookmarks menu to confirm that the bookmarks are indeed sorted. Note the two bookmarks that begin with hyphen (-) at the top of the menu.

Look at your Bookmarks page again, and press F5 to Refresh. The new bookmarks are still at the bottom.

Rearrange Your Bookmarks

To force Firefox to rearrange your bookmarks page, move a bookmark in the menu. In the Bookmarks menu, drag, for example, either new bookmark that starts with a hyphen up or down to precede or follow the other bookmark that starts with a hyphen. (Having two hyphen-prefixed bookmarks lets you rearrange those two at the top without rearranging the other bookmarks.) Press Escape to close the menu.

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Refresh your Bookmarks page with F5. The bookmarks on the webpage are now arranged as shown in the Bookmarks menu. (Do you need to refresh three times? No, we simply demonstrated that the bookmarks.html file is rearranged when you move a bookmark in the menu.)

Finding Bookmarks on the Page

When you are viewing your Bookmarks webpage, press Ctrl+F for Find. Type Backup, for example, and press Escape (to close the Find toolbar). To find the next occurrence of Backup, press F3. (F3 is a common shortcut key for Find Again.) When you find the desired bookmark (link), click it (or Ctrl+click to open the site in a new tab). (Or press Enter, or Ctrl+Enter to open the site in a new tab.)

Add Descriptions and Tags

To add or change descriptions of your bookmarks, in the Bookmarks menu, right-click the bookmark you want to edit, and click Properties. In the Description field, type anything (including your own tags) that might help you find your bookmark and remember what it is for. After clicking OK and pressing F5 (for Refresh), you will see your new Description in the Bookmarks page.

Make Changes through the Menu

Now that you know where bookmarks.html is located, you might be tempted to edit it directly with a text editor. Mozilla warns that it is automatically generated, so do not edit it, as your changes would be lost. Make your changes through the Bookmarks menu.

Displaying your Bookmarks as a webpage is a start in discovering many more tips and tricks related to Firefox.

— Hank Pearson (hank.pearson(at)asciigroup.org) is the Treasurer and Webmaster for ASCII (www.asciigroup.org). He is a long-time member who frequently writes articles for the group's newsletter, and has served as President, Secretary, Newsletter Editor, and Presentations Coordinator

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For Geof, the PS3 is a winner because you can run alternate operating systems on the PS3, such as Yellow Dog or Ubuntu Linux. This system will run applications such as the OpenOffice suite on your TV. It will use USB and network peripherals. Other strengths: Create and manage a digital media library - share media across a network with other DLNA devices. Rip CDs to several audio formats. Upload and catalog digital video. PS3 has a native web browser built-in. Play DVDs and Blu-ray discs. Supports progressive mode and upscaling, SD to 1080p resolution.

Unlike the Wii, the PS3 doesn't have a big library of fitness/personal enrichment type titles. Most are sport or fight/war games. There are a several puzzle and creative games, which will be demonstrated as time permits.



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Operating System(s): _____

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Favorite Software: _____

Connection: (circle one) Dial-up or Broadband

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Graphics/Animation Genealogy Video Finance

Programming Language(s) _____

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Next WAC Meetings: • Jun 20 • Jul 18 • Aug 15 • Sept 19 • Oct 17

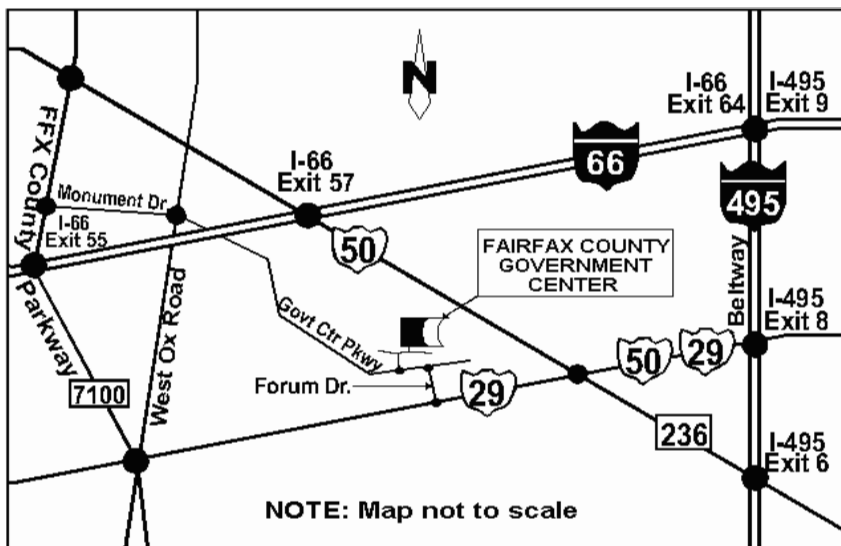
Call (703) 370-7649 for the latest meeting information or Visit our Web Site at:
<http://www.wacug.org>

June Meeting will be held at the Fairfax County Government Center. Once you're inside, bear to the left and proceed down the hallway. Look for the meeting room on the right-hand side of the hallway.

FREE ADMISSION

BRING A FRIEND

Service Desks Open at
12:30. Meeting Starts at
1:00 PM



Washington Area Computer User Group
30 Fendall Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22304-6300
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June 12, 2009

Home Financial Records

By Richard Kennon, Editor, Amador Computer Users
Group, CA
www.acug.org
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On August 7, 2007 Dick Johnson gave us an excellent presentation on “Personal Finances” with emphasis on record keeping and check writing. I, like Dick, have used QuickBooks to write my checks and keep my financial records. Recently, a friend chided me for not using BillPay at my bank. I had looked into this a long time ago and determined that my bank charged a little more than it cost to write a check and mail it – so no good. After my friend prodded me to join the 21st century, I checked with my bank, again, only to discover that if they changed the name of my checking account, BillPay would be free. Done. So, I write many fewer checks than before. Perhaps I can write them by hand! (Gasp) That is reason #1 for this effort.

Reason #2 is that the average household (at least mine) does not need the sophistication of an accounting program to keep household records. About the only thing we need besides a check record (i.e. stubs) is a way to collect some information for the IRS each year. Twenty or twenty five years ago, I wrote such a program in Basic and used it for most of those intervening years. But, Bill Gates decided that he would no longer let me run Basic programs using his latest operating system. That program also printed the checks on an old Epson 24-pin printer that served wonderfully for at least twenty years. That is when I turned to QuickBooks.

These two intersecting forces of minimal “accounting” and lowered demand for check writing led me to wonder if, just maybe, an Excel spread sheet might do the job. Yes, I think it will. This thinking has resulted in a spread sheet that looks suspiciously like a check record in your check book. There are four added columns and they are “Account”, “Memo”, “Cleared” and “Reconciled.” Maybe “account” is too grand a term. What I mean it to be is a code name that may apply to a number of different checks written to a number of different payees. This might be like lumping the electric, gas, water and phone bills under “Utilities.” Or, lumping Red Cross, American Cancer Society and Yosemite Fund under “Contributions.” But, then, one might write enough checks to one organization (i.e. Church at The Cross) to make that a separate “Account” like “Church.” The Cleared and Reconciled columns are

useful when it comes time to see if you and the bank agree. This is such an anxious moment that I use smiley faces to indicate it is done. Here is an example of what the spread sheet looks like. It is assuredly a fictitious account because I don’t think I know anyone with this much money.

See Fig 1

I had to scrunch it together to print it here. It looks better on the Excel spreadsheet where I set it up to print in Landscape orientation so there is plenty of room for about 48 lines per page. There are lots more accounts you will want to use such as Taxes, Medical, Insurance, House Payments, etc. I am a terrible organizer so I am sure you can do a better job of this than I can. Think mostly of what you need for outside demands like the IRS. Don’t think in terms of detailed budgets because, admit it, you are not going to follow through with that. It seems as if I should be much more organized than I really am when I use QuickBooks or other accounting program. That is why I have a big “Miscellaneous” group in our personal records. That is none of the IRS’s business.

One nice thing about Excel is that when you start to type something you have typed above in the same column, Excel finishes the entry for you. So, we two-fingered typists can create entries more quickly later in the year! I have anticipated that you and I will make less than 400 entries per year so have activated 400 lines on each sheet. Of course, the spreadsheet does the calculations automatically. The sheet is locked except for the columns where entries are required.

Now, how do we find out how much we gave to charity for the IRS? On the spreadsheet there is a little down arrow by each of the column headings that can be searched. Like this.

See Fig2

I have clicked on the Account column arrow and a choice box has dropped down. I have selected “Miscellaneous” and once I did that, this display popped up.

See Fig 3

Do that for any other account name or payee name and you will have the information you need for preparing your income tax. You can print this sub-list in the usual way. Now, to get out of this, click the arrow in the same column and then click on (All). The original full list will show up. You can do that operation in either

See Home Finances next page

the Payee or Account column and you will have all you need to find out how much money you have spent in any given category. For some fun, you can click on the arrows in the Check Number column and search for a check number or all the checks over some number or under a certain number. You can do the same in the Date column. This may come in handy when the sheet grows large late in the year and you want to find an entry made on or before or after a certain date.

See Fig 4

I did that here on the Check # column. Then I selected (Custom...). That sounds a little scary, doesn't it? It's not. The next thing to pop up is:

See Fig 5

You can choose "is greater than" or any other description of what you want to find. Then, on the right you type in the amount, say 500. Click OK and all the checks with numbers greater than 500 will pop up. Again, close this out by clicking the arrow and then (All).

A word of caution – be consistent. That is, do not call the electric company "PG&E" one time and "Pacific Gas & Electric" another time. Do not call an account "Charity" one time and "Contributions" another time. Keep it simple. Life would be simpler if we did not have to pay so many bills and it is also simpler if you use fewer accounts. Miscellaneous is a wonderful account.

Printing may also present a challenge. If you click View>Page Break Preview, you will see that 400 lines cover eight pages. If you just click File>Print>OK, you will get the pages you want plus all the blank pages up to eight. So, In order to get just what you want, click on View>Page Break Preview first to see what pages you want. Then you can select just those pages in the print window.

I will be glad to share this spreadsheet with anyone who wants to look at it more closely with the usual disclaimers about it is not my fault if you go bankrupt and so forth. You can copy the last blank sheet as many times as you wish so the workbook can last forever.

If you are interested in constructing your own spreadsheet, here are some particulars that might be of interest. What I call the search option is accessed by clicking on Data> Filter> AutoFilter. If you do this while in the Payee heading, it will put the arrows and the

function in all the contiguous headings to the right. I put a blank column after the Memo heading so it would stop there. The formula in the Balance column below the Beginning Balance is (are you ready for this?). =IF(OR(E9<>"", F9<>""), H8-E9+F9, ""). This is not so complicated. The classic IF statement says something like this: "IF (something is TRUE, then do this, else do that)." Now, the 'something is true' part says if cell E9 is not equal (<>) to blank ("") or cell F9 is not equal (<>) to blank (""). That is, if either of the two cells under the Amount heading or under the Deposit heading is not blank then... do some arithmetic. That arithmetic is subtract the Amount of the check and add the amount of the Deposit to the previous Balance, H8-E9+F9, in line number 9. The 'else do that' is leave this cell blank (""). That is why all the cells below the active row are blank but will light up with a balance as soon as an entry is made. Just click on the + in the lower right corner and drag this formula down 400 rows. Isn't this slick?

With BillPay in full swing, I find that I write many fewer checks but I still have to keep a record, don't I? The bank record is handy on the web but it only shows those charges that have cleared. I want to know whether I am solvent if they all clear. So I need a record. My accounting needs are mostly limited to keeping a ready record for tax purposes. Budgeting is not my thing. For these reasons a check record with the addition of an "Accounts" and a "Memo" column is satisfactory. The frosting on the cake is the added feature of being able to isolate various accounts and payees for whatever reason. While I may have made the transition to the 21st Century, I have also simplified my life somewhat by not being dependent on Intuit to write my checks for me and demand that I account for every last penny. How often is it that computers simplify your life?

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See Figs 1-5 next pages

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	Checkbook								
2									
3	Owner's Name	Dogburn Crankshaft							
4	Address	12345 Home Dr.		Tuesday, September 18, 2007					
5	City, State, Zip	Podunk, AK 99999							
6							Cleared		Reconciled
7	Payee	Account	Date	Check #	Amount	Deposit		Balance	
8	Beginning Balance	Beginning Balance	03/15/07					\$123,456.00	
9	Church At The Cross	Church	04/23/07	BillPay	\$500.00	\$700.00		\$123,656.00	
10	PG&E	Electricity	05/19/07	BillPay	\$85.98			\$123,570.02	
11	ACES	Trash Hauling	05/25/07	BillPay	\$77.93			\$123,492.09	
12	Amerigas	Propane	05/17/07	124	\$234.00	\$123.00		\$123,381.09	
13	Church At The Cross	Church	06/21/07	125	\$400.00			\$122,981.09	
14	PG&E	Electricity	06/23/07	126	\$78.92			\$122,902.17	
15	ACES	Trash Hauling	06/24/07	BillPay	\$77.93			\$122,824.24	
16	Red Cross	Contributions	06/25/07	BillPay	\$25.00			\$122,799.24	
17	American Cancer Society	Contributions	06/27/07	BillPay	\$33.00			\$122,766.24	
18	Payless Market	Groceries	07/22/07	BillPay	\$44.00			\$122,722.24	
19	Cash	Cash	07/30/07	127	\$100.00			\$122,622.24	
20	Volcano Telephone Company	Phone	08/11/07	128	\$67.45			\$122,554.79	
21	Yosemite Fund	Contributions	08/13/07	120	\$25.00			\$122,529.79	
22	Wells Fargo Bank-Visa	Miscellaneous	08/24/07	BillPay	\$1,456.23			\$121,073.56	
23	Cash Machine Withdrawal	Miscellaneous	08/30/07	Cash Machine	\$200.00			\$120,873.56	
24									

Fig 1

B19	▼	fx	Cash							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
1	Checkbook									
2										
3	Owner's Name	Dogburn Crankshaft								
4	Address	12345 Home Dr.		Tuesday, September 18, 2007						
5	City, State, Zip	Podunk, AK 99999								
6										
7	Payee ▼	Account ▼	Date ▼	Check # ▼	Amount ▼	Deposit ▼	○	Balance	○	
8	Beginning Balance	Sort Ascending	03/15/07					\$123,456.00		
9	Church At The Cross	Sort Descending	04/23/07	BillPay	\$500.00	\$700.00	○	\$123,656.00		
10	PG&E	(All)	05/19/07	BillPay	\$85.98		○	\$123,570.02		
11	ACES	(Top 10...)	05/25/07	BillPay	\$77.93			\$123,492.09		
12	Amerigas	(Custom...)	05/17/07	124	\$234.00	\$123.00	○	\$123,381.09		
13	Church At The Cross	Beginning Balance	06/21/07	125	\$400.00		○	\$122,981.09		
14	PG&E	Cash	06/23/07	126	\$78.92			\$122,902.17		
15	ACES	Church	06/24/07	BillPay	\$77.93		○	\$122,824.24		
16	Red Cross	Contributions	06/25/07	BillPay	\$25.00			\$122,799.24		
17	American Cancer Society	Electricity	06/27/07	BillPay	\$33.00			\$122,766.24		
18	Payless Market	Miscellaneous	07/22/07	BillPay	\$44.00			\$122,722.24		
19	Cash	Phone	07/30/07	127	\$100.00			\$122,622.24		
20	Volcano Telephone Company	Propane	08/11/07	128	\$67.45			\$122,554.79		
21	Yosemite Fund	Trash Hauling	08/13/07	120	\$25.00			\$122,529.79		
22	Wells Fargo Bank-Visa	(Blanks)	08/24/07	BillPay	\$1,456.23			\$121,073.56		
23	Cash Machine Withdrawal	(NonBlanks)	08/30/07	Cash Machine	\$200.00			\$120,873.56		
24										
25										

Fig 2

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	Checkbook								
2									
3	Owner's Name	Dogburn Crankshaft							
4	Address	12345 Home Dr.		Tuesday, September 18, 2007					
5	City, State, Zip	Podunk, AK 99999							
6							Cleared		Reconciled
7	Payee	Account	Date	Check #	Amount	Deposit		Balance	
18	Payless Market	Miscellaneous	07/22/07	BillPay	\$44.00			\$122,722.24	
22	Wells Fargo Bank-Visa	Miscellaneous	08/24/07	BillPay	\$1,456.23			\$121,073.56	
23	Cash Machine Withdrawal	Miscellaneous	08/30/07	Cash Machine	\$200.00			\$120,873.56	
410									
411									

Fig 3

AK 99999

Custom AutoFilter

Show rows where:

Check #

equals

equals

does not equal

is greater than

is greater than or equal to

is less than

Use ? to represent any single character

Use * to represent any series of characters

OK

Cancel

itions	06/27/07	BillPay	\$33.00	\$12
neous	07/22/07	BillPay	\$44.00	\$12

Fig 5

[illegible]