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Dual-Boot Revisited, Part 2

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Although the title above says “Part 2”, this is actually my third article featuring GParted (Gnome Partition Editor). It’s just the second one that refers back to my original set of dual-boot tests (performed almost two years ago now). With the release of Vista, some people might ask if dual-boot tests with Windows XP matter anymore. In actual fact, there are other reasons (not directly involving XP **or** Vista) why the particular structures I used for these tests may no longer be viable. I plan to use this as the basis of a future article. For now, let’s just say that these tests are “hoops” that all versions of Linux should be able to jump through. Here, we’ll be taking another look at the ones that didn’t make the cut before.

In the two previous articles, I performed comprehensive examinations of GParted, as launched from a Linux-booting live CD. My standard of comparison was the floppy-booted DOS version of Partition Magic 8 (hereafter referred to as PM8). As I write this, the current GParted download is version 0.3.3-0. However, I began my tests using GParted LiveCD version 0.3.1-1 (hereafter referred to as GP31), so that’s what I’m still using here. GP31 didn’t get an “A” in those two rounds of tests, but it got a **solid** “B+”, and has earned a permanent place of honor in my personal/professional computer tool kit. It’s very good now, and (as I said last time) it can only get even better.

With this article, GP31 stops being the experimental subject. This time, we’ll use both GP31 and PM8 to check out the latest versions of those seven distributions (six Linux, one BSD) that gave me partition problems in my 2005 dual-boot tests. For starters, I have to make something very clear: When I got my first version of Partition Magic, it found some of my existing partitions to be sub-standard, and refused to work with them. (I had to back up each partition’s data, erase that

partition, create a new one with Partition Magic, and then restore the original’s backed up data to the new partition). After that “getting acquainted” period, in the dozen or so years since, those fourteen partitions from 2005 were the **only** “bad” partitions I ever ran into, personally **or** professionally. Let me repeat that: Only. Only, only, only, only, **ONLY!** You can see why running into that many of them at essentially the same time might have made me a little bit flustered. As we saw last month (and as I’ll repeat below when appropriate), nine of those partitions were almost certainly good. They were just out of PM8’s league. Five bad partitions aren’t nearly as bad as fourteen, but that still isn’t the best of recommendations for Linux. So more testing was in order.

But first, a note about time: From first word typed to last read-through before submission, this article took almost two months to write (just before Christmas 2006 to just after Valentine’s Day 2007). Most people will read it in less than twenty minutes. While I can’t claim that I didn’t do anything else during that period (there was, after all, a **lot** of other stuff going on), I can say that the various procedures necessary to complete these tests took a lot more time than I thought they would. I’m glad I allowed the extra time, because I **sure** needed it. Please keep that total elapsed time requirement in mind as you zoom through the rest of this article.

Here’s a list of the seven distributions that previously produced problem partitions, in their 2005 Distrowatch Top 100 order, followed by their original test results. (Note that partition condition wasn’t counted as part of the test back then, so it didn’t affect any Pass/Fail outcomes).

2. Ubuntu 4.10 (Failed)
3. Fedora Core 3 (Failed)
5. SUSE 9.2 (Barely Passed)

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- 13. PCLinuxOS 0.81a (Passed)
- 17. Yoper 2.1 (Passed)
- 44. Minislack 1.0.1 (Passed)
- Over 100. PC-BSD 0.6 (Passed)

Now, here they are in **current** order (which changed a bit since last month), with their current version numbers and CD counts:

- 1. Ubuntu 6.10 (1 CD)
- 2. openSUSE 10.2 (7 CDs)
- 3. Fedora Core 6 (5 CDs)
- 5. PCLinuxOS 0.93a (1 CD)
- 13. Zenwalk (formerly Minislack) 4.2 (1 CD)
- 28. PC-BSD 1.3.01 (2 CDs)
- 102. Yoper 3.0 Beta (1 CD)

I re-did the five that passed the 2005 tests first, saving Ubuntu and Fedora Core for last. The test computer was the same one used for the last two articles; containing a SOYO SY-K7VTA Pro motherboard with an AMD Athlon 1.7 GHz. processor, 768 MB memory, an NVIDIA TNT2 AGP video card, a built-in VIA AC97 sound card, a Western Digital 80 GB IDE hard disk as the primary master and a Sony CD/DVD reader as the primary slave. A Linksys LNE100TX ethernet card and a Netgear DSL router provided the internet connection. This same computer was used for the 2005 experiments; except it had a Maxtor 80 GB hard disk and only 512 MB of memory back then.

Speaking of the 2005 tests, someone might ask me; “Why did you do them in the first place?” Well, I got the idea while watching John Raff add a Fedora Core 3 dual boot system to the club computer. Quoting my then-self; “John had to be very careful not to do any damage to the club’s existing XP SP2 system, but I can recklessly and irresponsibly blow out all the hard drives I want”. That’s exactly what I did then, and what I repeated now. For this article, I’ve dispensed with the “round” structure I used in the recent articles, and gone back to the structure I used in the very first article.

Nit-Picker’s Note: I have an aversion to printing something that I **know** isn’t true. Further into this article, the term “logical partition” will appear. Both PM8 and GP31 claim to be able to identify and manipulate them, and yet **there’s no such thing as a logical partition**. I had a detailed explanation I was going to insert here, but it passed 300 words and wasn’t even half done. I realized that it was much more than a note, so I pulled it. Maybe it’ll become an article on its own someday. Here are the highlights: One hard disk can have a maximum of **four** partitions. There are only **two** types of partitions: primary and extended. There are **two** types of drives: physical and logical. One primary partition can contain one and only one physical drive. One extended partition can contain many logical drives. Drives can, in turn, be formatted into at least ninety-one file systems. Those formatted drives are what the operating systems actually interact with, **not** the partitions. Unfortunately, the word “drive” is used in many other areas of computing, but the word “partition” is not. Programs such as

PM8 and GP31, which actually manipulate physical or logical **drives**, say that they are manipulating primary or logical partitions instead so that they can use that exclusive word. Because of their one-to-one correspondence, saying “primary partition” instead of “physical drive”, while less informative, isn’t wrong either. However, substituting “logical partition” for “logical drive” (with the accompanying phrase “inside an extended partition” implied, if not stated outright) is just **not** right. Yet, sometimes using the absolutely correct terminology can cause more problems than it solves. I think that might be the case here, so I’ll use “logical partition” below, but I **won’t** like it.

Round One: Standalone Installation

In the 2005 round one, each distribution had to pass only two tests. It had to access the internet “out-of-the-box” (via DHCP from the DSL router), and it had to play something through the built-in AC97 sound card. You wouldn’t think this would be too much to ask, yet 42% of the distributions I tested back then couldn’t do one or the other. This time, I added making “good” partitions as the third criteria. When checking partitions, I used PM8 first. For those partition types it can read, it’s still my favorite. Especially when working with older computers, booting from a floppy is still better than booting from a CD, if you can. Also, I greatly prefer the way PM8 exposes any partition table problems up front. However, GP31 has now become my highly valued “second opinion”.

Round One, Test One: openSUSE 10.2

In 2005, SUSE 9.2 came on multiple CDs or a single 3.13 GB DVD. I picked the DVD. At the time, the ISO image for that disk was the biggest file I’d ever downloaded. I was anxious to see how an install DVD performed, so I tested it first. I guess I started out in a more forgiving frame of mind than I possessed later on, because I gave SUSE 9.2 a low but passing grade. It claimed to have detected and installed my sound card, but I couldn’t get it to make a sound. In any of the subsequent tests I performed, that would have been an automatic failure. Thus, openSUSE 10.2 was the only installation I thought might fail this time due to lack of sound.

In my 2005 tests (and in my repeat test last month), SUSE 9.2 created two primary partitions. PM8 correctly recognized the small one as a Linux Swap partition, but it identified the large one as a yellow Ext2 partition. (Remember, yellow is the color Partition Magic displays when it can’t quite figure out what’s going on. A good Linux Ext2 partition would have been deep purple). Last issue, GP31 identified that partition as a good **Reiserfs** partition (a type that PM8 **can’t** recognize). Now let’s see what happened with version 10.2.

OpenSUSE 10.2 has a 3.6 GB single-layer DVD image available for download. (They also **sell** a double-layer DVD containing even more packages). I’ve had occasional early-morning drop-out problems with my ISP lately, so I didn’t download the DVD version this time. (Losing a two-hour CD download is bad enough. Losing a twelve-hour DVD download would be just too painful). OpenSUSE 10.2 has seven download CD images. (Eight if you count the

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mini-CD that starts an across-the-internet install). CDs 1 to 5 and the Addon-NonOSS CD (which contains packages with closed sources or non-OSI-compliant licenses) have the same content as the single-layer DVD. The seventh (Addon-Lang) CD contains translations into additional languages **beyond** the seven languages that the CDs or DVD support natively. The “plain vanilla” installations that I chose for these tests only required CDs 1 through 3.

As before, I disabled the firewall for this disposable installation. There was another new feature that I turned off as well: Search for Web Updates. It also wanted me to choose either the Gnome or the KDE desktop. Not having a favorite, I went alphabetically and picked Gnome. (Later, I re-did the whole thing with KDE. Except for a slightly different look and feel, it didn't make any difference). This time, there was no ambiguity about the default automatic partitioning scheme (which, as before, I accepted unchanged). It clearly said that it would create one Swap and two **Ext3** partitions, and it did.

The entire install sequence took about 45 minutes. On first boot-up, I could just barely hear the opening fanfare. I located the volume controls and turned them up. In 2005 (and last month), I did everything I could think of with 9.2's volume controls, to no avail. This time, 10.2's controls responded properly. Just to make absolutely sure, I played an audio CD, and it worked fine. I guess I agree that setting the sound too low initially is better than setting it too loud, so I can't be too peeved. Without firewall settings to worry about, I got internet access immediately. That just left the partitions.

Re-booted from its floppy, PM8 saw three primary partitions (unusual, but perfectly legal): a brown 2,055.2 MB Linux Swap partition, a deep purple 20,481.3 MB Linux Ext3 partition, and a deep purple 53,780.1 MB Linux Ext3 partition (all colors correct). Re-booted from its live CD, GP31 saw three primary partitions: 2.01 GB linux-swap, 20.00 GB ext3, and 52.52 GB ext3. Adjusting for spelling and GB/MB differences: identical readouts (and no problems).

So my previous reservations vanished, and openSUSE 10.2 passed with flying colors.

Round One, Test Two: PCLinuxOS 0.93a

In their documentation, PCLinuxOS has been a bit schizophrenic about numbering; referring to the version I previously tested as both 0.81a and 8.1a. Looking back over my previous articles, I see that I was guilty of this as well. This time, I'll keep to the correct release numbers. For my version 0.81a stand alone installations, I had to manually create one Swap and two Ext3 partitions (accepting the default types and sizes provided). Both times, PM8 got a partition table error and couldn't view anything. Last month, after GP31 re-sized all three partitions, PM8 could read the hard disk contents correctly. By fixing those partitions and thus removing the error that had confounded PM8, GP31 proved that those partitions were, in fact, bad in the first place. Here's what happened this time:

PCLinuxOS version 0.93a was released in **three** different sized ISO live/install CD downloads: “MiniMe” (299 MB),

“Junior” (484 MB), and “Big Daddy” (685 MB). Being a real he-man, I chose “Big Daddy”. The less-than-release-one version number means that the developers still consider this to be beta quality software. From the playful names, an impartial observer might infer that they feel it's just about ready for prime time. I'd agree. It looks great. (Although as far as appearance went, version 0.81a looked pretty good, too). Booting as a live CD took two minutes. Both sound and internet worked right away. A desktop icon launched the hard drive installation routine, which took another ten minutes. Last time, there was no automatic partitioning option. This time, there was a “Wizard”. In a glaring departure from the otherwise attractive background appearance, a hideous cartoon figure was displayed at this point. It'd probably give little kids nightmares. Since finding any improvement in partition creation was, in fact, the whole reason for this test, I let it do what it wanted, ugly or not.

In 2005 (and last month), I ran into two problems during setup. First, the way the boot loader screen was laid out, it was possible to skip the boot loader installation while thinking it had been done. Second, the setup routine required creation of a new user and the changing of the root password. Yet, when the new system booted, that user was gone and the root password was still “root”. This time, the boot loader selection was obvious, and the new user and root password changes stuck.

Re-booted from its floppy, PM8 saw a deep purple 5,993.0 MB Linux primary Ext3 partition and a 70,323.6 MB extended partition containing a brown 1,098.2 MB logical Linux Swap partition and a deep purple 69,225.4 MB logical Linux Ext3 partition (all colors correct). Re-booted from its live CD, GP31 saw a 5.85 GB ext3 primary partition, plus 1.07 GB linux-swap and 67.60 GB ext3 logical partitions inside a 68.68 GB extended partition. Again, adjusting for spelling and GB/MB differences, identical results (and no problems).

So PCLinuxOS 0.93a passed the partition tests this time as well. Could this be a trend?

Round One, Test Three: Zenwalk 4.2

Well, if it was a trend, it was a short one, because Zenwalk let me down big time. Last month, I predicted that a new version would arrive in time for this article, and I was right. Zenwalk 4.2 was released on January 6, 2007. I intended that to be the cutoff date for new downloads, but as you'll see below, I made one more last minute exception. The version I tested two years ago (and re-tested last month) was released under the former distribution name: Minislack 1.0.1. Then, it had no automatic partitioning, so I had to manually create one Swap partition and one Ext2 partition, which gave PM8 partition table errors. Last month, GP31 showed that it could fix them, thus verifying that they were actually bad to begin with.

Zenwalk 4.2 had an automatic partitioning option, but only for the entire hard disk. That's what I wanted this time, so I let it run. It popped up three “formatting” messages, then displayed a screen announcing that it had created three primary partitions: a 3.91 GB xfs, a 1000.12 MB swap, and a 69.64 GB ext3. That first partition type annoyed me. It meant that PM8

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would definitely have trouble with the finished hard disk, because it doesn't know about the xfs file system. The rest of the installation proceeded unremarkably. It wasn't as polished or automatic as some of the others, but the non-graphical manual selection screens that came up were straightforward and understandable, so they didn't cause any problems. The total setup time was seventeen minutes.

Now for the betrayal: When the newly installed system booted for the first time, I didn't hear a fanfare. The internet worked, but I got **no** sound. Audio input/output was controlled by the completely non-graphical alsamixer program, just like in Minislack 1.0.1. In 2005, I had the same problem at first, but I finally got alsamixer to work. (When I repeated the Minislack installation last month, I was just interested in the partitions, so I didn't even bother with sound). This time, no matter what I tried, I couldn't get it to make a peep. Angry and frustrated, I finally had to give up.

As expected, when re-booted from its floppy, PM8 got a partition table error and couldn't view the drive contents. When re-booted from its live CD, GP31 saw a 3.90 GB xfs primary partition, a 1004.06 MB linux-swap primary partition, and a 69.65 GB ext3 primary partition. I had no need (or desire) to run Zenwalk again, so I used GP31 to delete the xfs partition, leaving 3.90 GB of unallocated space in its place. Unfortunately, when re-booted from its floppy, PM8 still got the partition table error. Re-re-re-booting from the GP31 CD, I shrunk and then reexpanded the other two partitions, then booted once again from the PM8 floppy. Finally, PM8 displayed 3,992.7 MB of Unallocated space, a brown 1,004.1 MB primary Linux Swap partition and a deep purple 71,319.8 MB primary Linux Ext3 partition. Adjusting for spelling and GB/MB differences, identical results.

Since PM8 could see the partitions after I pulled my GP31 shrink/grow trick, I knew that the original partitions were (to put it kindly) sub-standard. Trying to find out what utility had created them, I re-booted the Zenwalk 4.2 install CD and picked the manual partition option. Up popped cfdisk 2.12, the **exact** same version of the exact same utility that Minislack 1.0.1 used in 2005. (Its copyright dates are from 1994 to **1999**). Now, I **like** cfdisk 2.12. I've adopted it as my "third opinion". It has already beaten out both PM8 and GP31, by successfully identifying file systems that they couldn't. (It says it knows 91 formats, and I'm taking its word for it. There's no way I could test out such a claim). However, I'd never trust it to **create** new partitions. They may be "good enough" for some people, but it's been clearly shown (at least to me) that cfdisk's partitions are just **not** up to the Partition Magic standard of perfection.

I'd heard good things about Zenwalk, but I didn't find anything to support that here. It hasn't updated its ancient (by Linux standards) partitioning tool in at least two years. As far as its ancient sound utility goes, things seem to have actually gone backwards. It got a double failure now, for partitions and retroactively for sound. Exit Zenwalk.

Round One, Test Four: PC-BSD 1.3.01

PC-BSD installs the KDE GUI on top of FreeBSD (a Unix-like operating system that is **not** Linux). In 2005, PM8 got a partition table error. That time, however, I broke with my usual practice of trusting PM8 implicitly. I suspected that the single partition created by the install routine was good, but out of PM8's league. Last month, during the PC-BSD 0.6 re-test, PM8 got another partition table error. GP31 was able to view that partition, but could only identify it as "unknown". Only cfdisk 2.12 correctly identified it as a FreeBSD partition.

After the new PC-BSD 1.3.01 install (which took eighteen minutes and had no problems), PM8 gave me a surprise. It showed a single yellow 76,316.6 MB primary "FreeBSD/386" partition. PM8's Info function yielded an additional detail — it was of "Type A5 (Hex)". Yellow is the color that PM8 displays when it can't quite figure out what's going on, but this time it was at least able to access the partition table and pull back some identifying information. Maybe there actually **was** something wrong with the partition tables created by the previous 0.6 installations, and 1.3.01 finally got it right. I can't know for sure, but that's what I'm going to assume until convinced otherwise. GP31 displayed a single 74.53 GB primary partition, of type "unknown". Again, cfdisk 2.12 correctly identified it as a FreeBSD partition, and confirmed the A5 type as well.

There may have been something wrong with the partitions created by previous releases, but not any more. PC-BSD version 1.3.01 passed with honors.

Round One, Test Five: Yoper 3.0 (Beta)

Last time, I incorrectly predicted that Yoper wouldn't be appearing here again. On January 21, 2007, more for completeness than from any sense of expectation, I visited their Web site. It turned out that for 2007, the Yoper development team adopted a policy of producing a new Beta release each week. So, in fairness, I downloaded their "weekly-2007-03" ISO CD image. Their documentation said that the install routine was one of the things they were still working on, so I expected a bumpy ride. I didn't expect the installation to bomb out almost immediately because it couldn't find any hard disks. I tried it again and got the same result. I was just about to toss the CD when I had a thought. I'd deleted all previous partitions from the hard disk before I started. What if, for some wacky reason, the install routine couldn't detect an **empty** hard disk?

Now, I need to wax nostalgic. In previous articles, I've mentioned that I used the late, great PowerQuest company's Drive Image program for many years, and was quite satisfied with it. I only switched to Ghost because I changed jobs, and that's what the new place used. However, something about Ghost gave me an idea that had never occurred to me before. I called it an "instant drive formatter". Quite simply, it was a Ghost image of an empty FAT32 partition from a 500 MB hard disk. I named the file MT_FAT32.GHO. At 22,681 bytes, it was small enough to be included on every Ghost floppy boot disk

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that I ever made. With the FAT32 file system rapidly going the way of the dodo bird, this might be my last opportunity to use it. (It also had a 6,287 byte brother named MT_FAT16.GHO. That one's already flying around up there in dodo heaven). When I said "instant", I meant it. It takes longer to start up the Ghost program than it does to format a disk using my image. In this particular instance, it took thirty-seven seconds to load the command line version of Ghost **after** its DOS floppy finished booting. (I agree, it would have gone faster from a hard disk, but that's **not** the way I use Ghost). Then, simultaneously restoring and expanding my image to fill our 80 GB subject hard disk took just **three** seconds, from start to finish. Of course, this method does absolutely nothing to check for bad sectors, but I've always advised customers to separately test all hard disks regularly with Spinrite or some similar utility. In this case, I practice what I preach, so I **know** all my hard disks are good.

When I ran the Yoper install routine for a third time, I found that I'd guessed right. It detected the hard disk, so it didn't bomb. However, it still had no automatic partitioning routine; and when the manual partitioning tool popped up, it was good old cfdisk 2.12. I didn't bother proceeding any further. Since Yoper 3.0 Beta was still using my favorite known-bad utility, it failed right away for partitions.

Round One, Test Six: Ubuntu 6.10

Ubuntu 4.10 had separate live and install downloads, but Ubuntu 6.10 came on a combined live/install CD. (It's actually a three-way CD. When inserted into a computer already running Windows, it autoruns and displays a small selection of Windows compatible versions of open-source software). **All** previous Ubuntu hard disk installations gave PM8 partition table errors.

It took about five minutes to boot to the live CD desktop. That is a bit slow for a live CD, but it seemed like an eternity because all I could do was stare at the Ubuntu logo screen. I couldn't find any way to switch to a view of the background operations. (Not that I can understand all those messages, but at least something different is always happening). Once the desktop started, I got sound and internet right away. Clicking an icon on the desktop started the hard disk installation, which took another half hour. I re-checked sound and internet from the hard disk, then shut it down.

Re-booted from its DOS floppy, PM8 saw a deep purple 74,114 MB primary Linux Ext3 partition, and a 2,212.1 MB extended partition containing a brown 2,212.0 MB logical Linux Swap partition (both colors correct). Re-booted from its live CD, GP31 saw a 72.37 GB primary ext3 partition and a 2.16 GB extended partition containing a 2.16 GB logical linux-swap partition. Adjusting for the GB/MB shift: identical.

Ubuntu finally passed for partitions.

Round One, Test Seven: Fedora Core 6

Fedora Core 3 threw me an interesting curve in 2005. Version 6 did the exact same thing, so I'll just describe it once below.

Fedora Core 6 came on five CDs. The minimal installation I chose needed only disks 1 and 2, but it still took thirty-five minutes. As usual, I selected "no firewall" during installation. When it was finished, I got both sound and internet. As with version 3, PM8 (when re-booted from its floppy) reported a deep purple 101.9 MB Linux Ext3 primary partition and a **yellow** 76,214.6 MB "Type 8E (Hex)" primary partition. After my experience with PC-BSD above, I've reinterpreted the way I read this message. It's yellow, so PM8 can't quite figure it out. However, since PM8 was able to extract some valid information from the partition table, that's pretty good empirical proof that the table didn't have any errors, and that the partition was **good**. GP31 saw a 101.94 MB ext3 primary partition (with a "boot" flag) and a 74.43 GB **unknown** primary partition (with an "lvm" flag). Both PM8 and GP31 did the best they could, but only cfdisk 2.12 could completely identify the second partition as a Linux LVM partition (type code 8E). From the research described in last month's article, we now know that LVM means **Logical Volume Management**; a method of allocating space on mass storage devices that's supposed to be more flexible than conventional partitioning schemes. LVM has been implemented in the Linux kernel since 1998, but hardly anybody uses it.

It created an obscure partition, but an absolutely legal one, so Fedora Core 6 passed.

End of Round One

APPENDIX I: APOLOGY

I really thought I could get everything in this month, but we're past 4,500 words and my deadline is fast approaching. The tests are all done (not without a few surprises). However, believe it or not, it's going to take me longer to transcribe my unintelligible pencil notes for each test into legible typewritten text than it actually took to run the test itself. Therefore, both space and time considerations indicate that this is the logical place to stop. So much for the title of this article! I'm not going to change it, even though we didn't quite get to the dual-boot stuff this time. We won't be getting there next time, either. Next month's issue (April) is the one we actually print out on real paper, as a handout for the Trenton Computer Festival. I've got something in the works that's more suitable for that wider audience, so the rest of the dual-boot tests will have to wait until May. Again, I apologize. As partial compensation, here's a blast from the past:

APPENDIX II: WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

When I started work on this article, it was still 2006 for another few days. Being in a "New Year" state of mind, I'd been going over the events of 2006, examining what I did and what I didn't do; in real life, and also in my newsletter submissions. While looking through my club-related files, I found five paragraphs that I'd written in late 2005 (which refer even further back to something I wrote in 1999). I originally intended them to be part of my "Selected Short Subjects" article in the January 2006 issue of ACGNJ NEWS. Instead, I wound up replacing them with a single paragraph that started out in a similar way, but ended up describing another idea I once had

Continued

that would have made a good newsletter article circa 1995; if I'd ever got around to actually writing it down, that is. (What! You didn't read that article? Well, you can still download back issue newsletters at the ACGNJ Website). I copied these five unused paragraphs into a file named FORLATER.DOC, which I promptly forgot about until I found it again just now. For me, they're doubly nostalgic; harkening back to the New Year's Eves of both 2005 **and** 1999. So here they are, just as I wrote them in 2005:

From time to time throughout the nineties, I had vague ideas for articles I could have written for the newsletters published by two clubs I was in (a car club and a computer club (**not** this one), but I only finished one, for that computer club's then hard-copy newsletter, in the waning days of 1999. Of course, it involved Y2K. Essentially, it was a re-write of a detailed instruction sheet I'd made for several of my customers. It described a problem that might be experienced by computers that had to be left on all night, every night, to perform their jobs, and **couldn't** be taken down and rebooted after midnight the morning of January 1, 2000. (The officially recommended procedure for most people; right after the century turned, reboot your computer, go into the CMOS setup, and fix the clock if necessary). Of course, as soon as I sent it off to the editor, I thought of several changes that would have made it better, especially regarding how and why this particular situation came about. Here's the revised and expanded (a lot more wordy but hopefully more informative) introduction I **wish** I had used then:

Like mainframe computer designs of the time, the original plans for the IBM PC did not contain a day-and-date clock. Instead, a software clock was included as part of the operating system. Each time the computer was started, an operator was required to set the clock manually. For mainframes, which hardly ever shut down, this wasn't a big deal. For PCs, it rapidly became a giant pain in the posterior. Alert manufacturers quickly jumped in, providing hardware clock/calendar expansion cards that contained internal batteries, so they didn't turn off when the computer was turned off, and were therefore always set correctly. But they were still outside accessories, not connected to the operating system. Each time the PC was turned on, a special command had to be entered, to run the manufacturer's proprietary program and transfer the time and date from the hardware clock to the software clock. However, now it didn't have to be done manually. That command could be written into AUTOEXEC.BAT, and thus run completely automatically every time the PC was re-started, with no operator intervention required. The motherboard manufacturers finally included an on-board battery as part of the AT (286 up) design. They used it to power both a built-in clock/calendar (now called a Real Time Clock or RTC) and their new CMOS setup system, which stored the computer's peripheral connection information electronically rather than mechanically, eliminating a whole bunch of DIP switches previously located on the motherboard. When the AT standard was initially laid out, which came first, the CMOS or the RTC? It's a "chicken or egg" question. Perhaps it has the same answer.

Unfortunately, the operating system couldn't be radically altered, so it still got its time/date information from the software clock. But a small change was made. From then on, if an AT-compatible RTC existed in any PC, and if a file named AUTOEXEC.BAT existed in the root directory of that machine's boot disk (either hard or floppy, and even if it was a zero-length file), then the software clock was automatically updated whenever the computer booted. Operator input was necessary only if AUTOEXEC.BAT **wasn't** there. Even then, it was easier. When the "Enter new date" prompt appeared, the RTC's information was already filled in. If it was correct, the user just had to press the Enter key. If, for some reason, it was wrong, entering the correct values updated the RTC and the software clock simultaneously. The same for the "Enter new time" prompt. However, as long as the computer ran continuously without rebooting, the software clock would only be updated by the RTC under a few circumstances. It was quite possible for the two clocks in an always-on computer to go out of synchronization, and to stay that way for a long time before a random software clock update occurred. In 1995, I worked with a PC-based back office program that phoned retail stores each night via 14.4K modems and polled their cash registers. If, during the considerable time it took to run this program, the software clock was altered by even a tiny bit, **all** the data collected that night could be corrupted. The software company made **very** sure all their customers had strict instructions on how to update the software clock before running that program.

That back office program accepted the RTC as correct, and assumed that if the two clocks were different, then the **software** clock was wrong. That wasn't the case when it came to Y2K. When tested for year 2000 compatibility, most newer and many older RTCs had no problems. Very few failed completely. Those computers would have to be replaced. However, a **whole lot** of RTCs had a small defect that no one had expected. Once set to the year 2000, they could correctly handle dates for at least the next thirty years, but they couldn't get there by themselves. When the last second of 1999 ticked away, they wouldn't roll over into 2000. They'd go to 1900 or 1980. The software clock in such a computer would roll over just fine. So now you'd have a computer which seemed to have advanced into 2000 correctly, but beneath the surface there was (literally) a ticking time bomb. Eventually, a software clock update would occur, and the operating system's date would suddenly be wrong.

I concluded the article by advising anyone running an always-on computer to assume the worst and act as if their RTC **hadn't** rolled over correctly, and described a guaranteed 100% positive way to manually reset both clocks to the year 2000 after midnight on January first without rebooting. (Go to a DOS prompt and run the DATE command). Then, I sat back and watched my mailbox, waiting for the next newsletter to arrive. It never came. The club's officers decided, with that exact issue, to convert to an "online newsletter". So I only saw my article on the screen. It just wasn't the same.

APPENDIX III: A BRIEF CLOSING REMARK

See you next month. ☺

Zune — the New Digital Media Player from Microsoft

Cass Lewart (rlewart@monmouth.com), ACGNJ

I was always fascinated with portable MP3 players and wrote several articles about them. At the January 2007 convention of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG) in Las Vegas, which Ruth and I attended, Microsoft, which sponsored several events during the convention, conducted a raffle for a Zune player. There were over 200 participants in the drawing. The first person whose name was drawn from the hat was not present, I was the next and only winner and I promised the Microsoft people that I would write a review. I found many Zune reviews on the web mostly written by people who did not even see the player. I figured out that I could do a better job.

The astounding success of Apple's iPod obviously convinced Microsoft that there is a large demand and a lot of money to be made in the portable player market — Zune was the answer. After experimenting with it for a couple of weeks I came to the conclusion that Zune is a strong entry. The hardware is superb, but the software leaves much to be desired. There is no printed Users Manual in the package, just a page of sketchy instructions. Limited information is available through Help files, on-line manuals and a toll-free support line.

First the hardware

A quiet 30 GB drive from Toshiba, as stated in the FCC submission, stores zillions of “songs”, if this is your cup of tea. The screen is larger than that of iPod, shows bright colors and has excellent resolution. The built-in FM tuner, with ear-phone cable used as antenna, has excellent sensitivity and sound. The tuner uses Routing Data Base System technology to recognize station call letters and programs, if this information is provided by the station. During a membership drive you may even see on screen the number to call to make a pledge. Time and date functions were unfortunately left out.

A widely promoted feature of Zune, which makes it a “social” animal, is the capability to transmit wireless music and video to another Zune. Note that an item received from another Zune can be watched or listened to only 3 times during the next 3 days, then it “dies”. I could not test this feature as neither Best Buy nor Dell had an operating Zune on display.

Something to be aware of is that trying to sync to a second computer erases all contents on the player unless the player is designated as “guest”, which poses some restrictions. Digital Rights Management (DRM) raises its ugly head. The internal battery is charged via a USB2 port on your computer or an optional power supply.

Now about software

I got bad vibes when I first inserted the Zune CD into my computer running Windows 2000. The cryptic error message on the screen was: “path to device or program could not be found”. I admit that, as I noticed later, small print on the box warns that Windows XP with SP2 or Vista are the only operating systems that support the player.

The player does not appear as a drive in “My Computer”, you can only access it via Zune Desktop software. This approach, also used in the iPod, tightly controls what material the user can upload or download to the player. I tried to make Zune appear as a drive by making some changes to Registry. Such changes were suggested in the Yahoo Zune forum, but I have not been successful so far.

Unprotected MP3, JPG and WMV files can be “dragged” to the Zune Desktop and organized into Playlists. Unprotected files in AVI or BMP formats can be converted to work on Zune. DRM protected files from Apple or even from Microsoft not specifically designed for Zune will not work. After “dragging” files to the Zune Desktop you have to connect the player to the computer via a special cable provided in the package and click on the “Sync Now” button. A small sign will appear announcing the completion of the Sync process. There is no visible progress bar.

I looked into commercial sources of audio/visual material for the player. As I mentioned in previous articles there are many sources of free MP3 spoken word and music files. A number of on-line stores advertise unlimited downloading for a one time fee of \$30–\$50. However, I could not find out what they actually offer. I did not find any full time movies. Microsoft's own store offers many “songs” for under a dollar each. A feature of Zune which I did not investigate is its TV connectivity — it requires a special \$29.95 cable. Both NTSC and PAL formats are supported.

I still use my simple, small, under \$50 Sansa 512 MB MP3 player. It has no video, a hard-to-read small screen and no WiFi. But it has a built-in voice recorder, the player appears as a drive on my desktop and it uses AAA batteries. I don't have to worry that it would run out of charge. It even came with a printed though rather poorly written manual. Make your choice! ☹



From The DealsGuy

Bob (the cheapskate) Click, Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

***An Attempt To Change Urologists**

A neighbor told me about his urologist who, he said, used the latest laser equipment, and had been written up in the newspaper as using very advanced procedures. I decided the best might not be too good for me, so since I am having urinary problems, I would try him. I went for my appointment and in came a Nurse Practitioner to examine me. (You all know how I feel about that.) While she asked her questions and did the preliminary work, I told her how I felt about the use of NPs substituting for doctors and that I felt I should always be actually diagnosed by the doctor. In so many words, she assured me she was just as capable as any doctor, and that she often offered suggestions that helped the doctors there. Maybe! However, she assured me I would definitely see the doctor, which turned out to be about 15 seconds when he stuck his head in the door and greeted me.

Needless to say, I didn't make another appointment no matter how good he was. My old urologist might not have the latest equipment, but he is the one who actually examines me. I feel he is capable so I'm going to stick with him. I have since seen him and he assured me he also has the same laser equipment. I am not comfortable being examined by a "substitute doctor" who has nowhere near the training an actual doctor goes through making important decisions concerning my health.

***Interesting Items**

Here are two items I found interesting in Information Week. Read about invisible RFID ink for cattle that also won't contaminate anything [here](#). Also a robot called "iRobot Create" that you can send to the kitchen if you are thirsty. I couldn't find it on the magazine's Web site so here is the product's URL: <http://www.iRobot.com/>. They have other robots that you have probably heard about, such as the Rhumba robot vacuum cleaner.

***Reminders**

The reminder about a free version of Tax Act for doing your taxes is never very timely, but perhaps it's because of how early I must write this column and the fact that I'm not even doing my taxes yet. <http://www.taxact.com> You can even file your tax return electronically now with the free version.

If you don't feel comfortable doing your federal income tax on your own computer, and you make \$39,000 or less, you can call for an appointment with an IRS volunteer who will meet face-to-face with you to do it. Call 1-800-829-1040 to find the nearest IRS volunteer office.

Don't forget the free income tax help from the great folks at AARP. Call the AARP chapter near you to see where they offer this help, and the times they are available.

Two items below are announcements that included a user group discount. I have edited them, but they are mostly in the vendor's own words so check further on their Web sites for complete information. I have not tried any of the products myself although I was invited to do so. They both sound very useful.

***Manage Your Clipboard History**

One Version Is FREE And A Nice Discount On The Other. LW-WORKS Software has released Version 4.0 of Clipboard Recorder, an application that helps users manage their Windows clipboard history and provides easy ways for users to access their saved clipboard data. Once its running, Clipboard Recorder adds an icon to your system tray and monitors your system clipboard. As you copy any data from other applications to the system clipboard, Clipboard Recorder will capture it and store it to the listening clipboard record list in a compressed format.

Clipboard Recorder provides four ways to select the records; Popup Window, Floating Window, Menu Window and Main Window. Most of the time, you don't need to leave your working application to access your clipboard history! The selected clipboard records can be pasted to your working application directly just as if you have pressed "Ctrl + V". Clipboard Recorder also features transferring clipboard data between computers. Therefore, users can do "Ctrl + C" on one computer and "Ctrl + V" on another.

Clipboard Recorder is available in two versions, Professional and Standard (Freeware). The professional version with complete online help costs \$29.95 (user group members get a 30% discount using the coupon code "Special"). Clipboard Recorder 4.0 runs under Windows 98/ME, Windows 2000, or XP Home and Professional. Visit the LW-WORKS Software home page at <http://www.lw-works.com> to order Clipboard Recorder or to download a fully functional trial copy.

***Here Is Help To Sort Your MP3 Files**

This handy utility will sort a musical collection of any size, quickly reorganizing folders and renaming files on your hard drive. MP3 Sorter physically rearranges music on your hard drive while similar programs just create a list of files, but make no actual changes. After you use MP3 Sorter, all changes will be seen in Explorer as if you arranged files manually. Prior to actually rearranging files, MP3 Sorter allows users to see the structure of files and folders after renaming/rearranging takes place. MP3 Sorter renames files according to the artist's name and the title of the track and places them in folders like this; "Artists\Album + Year". The utility has an adjustable renaming system.

The utility has a preview window showing the newly arranged structure and comes with a Duplicate Checker that insures against accidental overwrites. You can see the transfer result to avoid any transfer mistake, and if you want to undo the transfer operation, it is possible to return the original file and folder structure with the help of the Roll Back Manager. Also, you can make MP3 Sorter delete source files, which will be done only if copying was successful. MP3 Sorter provides an advanced editor so you can change custom tokens whenever you like. After MP3 Sorter neatly reorganizes your MP3 collection, you will be able to find required music tracks on your hard drive with the speed of a radio DJ.

Continued

Pandora – a Free Music Resource

Sandy Berger (sandy@compukiss.com), CompuKISS (www.compukiss.com)

The Internet is filled with free resources, but some are better than others. Here is one of the best free music resources on the Web.

Pandora is one of my favorite music websites. Just surf over to www.pandora.com and type in a song or an artist that you like. Pandora analyses your choice and creates a music station with similar-sounding music. It will then play comparable songs that it thinks you will like. You can add more music and/or artists to the station to refine your choices. You can also tell Pandora whether or not you like the song that is playing. It uses your likes and dislikes to refine the songs it chooses. You can create up to 100 different stations with different types of music.

Pandora was created by the Music Genome Project, a group of musicians and music-loving technologists who have broken music into hundreds of music attributes or “genes” such as melody, harmony, rhythm, instrumentation, orchestration, arrangement, lyrics, and harmony. They then use high-tech methodology to analyze the musical qualities of each song and rendition.

The results are uncanny. I created several music stations with different genres that I like and in almost every case I was presented with similar music that I found very pleasing. You can experiment with different combinations. For instance, putting James Taylor and Willie Nelson together gave me an interesting, but likable mix of music.

Pandora is pretty smart. Typing in The Christmas Song and choosing Diana Krall as the artist gave me a whole station of mellow Christmas music which is just what I was looking for.

Typing in The Nylons and Take 6 gave me a nice selection of acappella and harmonistic music.

Pandora also lets you bookmark songs or artists so you can remember what you liked. You can look up more information about artists and songs right on the site. Two clicks will lead you to iTunes or Amazon where you can purchase the music. You can also share your music by emailing your stations to friends.

Pandora is ad-supported so you will see ads for everything from gym shoes to cell service. I found the ads to be unobtrusive, but if you want to get rid of them, you can pay to eliminate them. For \$36, you get 12 months of unlimited use with services exactly the same as the free version, but without the ads.

Since the ads don't bother me, I'll continue to use the free version of Pandora. It's an entertaining website that provides much listening pleasure to keep me company when I am working on the computer.

If you are into music, you may also want to check out two other music resources: MusicIP Mixer and Goombah. Like Pandora, both of these sites provide intriguing music adventures.

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DealsGuy, *continued*

MP3 Sorter runs under all versions of Microsoft Windows and costs \$24.95 (USD) for a single-user license, but users group members get a 10% discount by using [this URL](#). Licensed customers are entitled to the fully functional version of the product, free technical support and free upgrades. Further information on 'MP3 Sorter', as well as a free trial copy is available free of charge from <http://www.prograce.com>.

Product page link: <http://prograce.com/index.php?page=mp3>

Download link: <http://prograce.com/download/MP3SorterInstall.exe>

***The Bundle Is Back!**

Colleen Toumayan from Diskeeper Corporation tells me the “Bundle” is back. It consists of one Diskeeper Home Edition, and one Undelete 5 Home Edition for just \$49.95. Most of you already know the good qualities of Diskeeper products. Get it here: purchase.diskeeper.com/checkout/addtocart.aspx?Item=2140 I'm glad Colleen stayed (she had considered leaving Diskeeper) with the company because she keeps me apprised of special offers and is a great resource.

***Free Software That is Interesting**

I saw this in Mug Monitor, newsletter for Macon Users Group, <http://www.maconusersgroup.org> and wondered if it would interest any of my readers. It is called Google Sketchup 6. It is a FREE 3D modeling software that helps you in remodeling or landscaping. It has to do with Google Earth. I can't fully explain it so check it out at <http://sketchup.google.com/>. It is a great deal because if you want their Pro version, it will cost you a cool \$495. I don't know what that one has that the free one does not, but you can read up on it.

That's it for this month. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. I have some new product announcements on my Web site page. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Visit my Web site at <http://www.dealsguy.com>.

Spin It Again

Rod Rakes, APCUG Advisor, Gwinnett SeniorNet PC Users Group, Huntsville PC User Group

Convert vinyl records and cassette tapes to MP3's and CD's.

What is it?

Spin It Again by Acoustica is a software program that will make it easy to convert your collection of cassettes, 33's, 45's and even 78's to MP3/WMA/WAV files or directly to CDs. Some folks have even used the program to rip 8-Tracks. Remember those?

Cost?

\$34.95 retail, but \$27.96 for User Group members. This 20% discount is available online from the link below. You must use the code "CLUB2007." You will receive a registration code via email. But, you can try it free for three times. (3 albums).

Where do I get it

and/or read more? <http://www.Acoustica.com>. The program is an 8+ MB download.

System Requirements

If you have a Windows computer with a soundcard you're ready to use the software!

How good is it?

Really good! First off, I was impressed by the voice instructions when the program starts. There is a Hookup Wizard with photos of how to connect to your amplifier, cassette player or turntable. Songs are automatically divided into files based on the lull between songs. A Level Wizard sets the volume level automatically based on playing a portion of your loudest song in an album.

You can save the files as MP3, OGG, WMA or WAV files. A variety of choices are available to clean up the recordings, e.g., Damaged Record, Damaged Tape, Tape clean with Equalizer, Tape Noise Begone, Warped record, even a No-preamp blues setting, etc. Someone referred to this as a Mikey cereal eater that eats Snap, Crackle and Pop. Accept the defaults and it's very easy work.

I recorded three record albums and two cassette tapes of music using a stereo amplifier, cassette player and turntable. The result was free of any clicks, pops and hiss of the original recordings, at least to my ears. The only "problem" I had was a song by Judy Collins that had long silent passages which fooled the software into thinking there were several songs. But, it was easily fixed with the Merge options. (Be sure to read the tutorial.) I chose to save the songs in MP3 format and gave each a name in the chart before actually hitting the



Save/Convert button. You can embed in the files the Artist, Title, Genre, Year and add comments. On the last test I chose to record an album directly to CD using the Spin It Again software. It worked like a charm with no need to make a later recording from the MP3's using Nero, Roxio, etc.

I had a priceless cassette tape of family nonsense that had been re-recorded from reel to reel tapes from long ago when my children were small. The volume varied greatly. I placed the cassette tape in a small inexpensive hand held player (Walkman type) and connected a cable between the speaker

jack and the Line In jack in the back of my computer. This meant I could adjust the sound during the low and high volume sections of the tape by using the player's volume control. That worked satisfactorily since the tape was not perfection in the first place. The recording was even better than the original with little or no hiss and a more consistent volume level! There is an option for auto-leveling the volume for a given song to eliminate distortion on high peaks.

An MP3 file of LaPaloma had a loud click at the 51-second mark that could not be cleaned properly even with the special peak click filtering after manually isolating the click. I was finally able to eliminate the click but each side of the original click had a warble that was worse than the click. The Help file said if this happens, try to make a better recording somehow. Since it was only one click, I would guess there was a spot of something on the vinyl surface or a pin point gouge. You can't make a purse out of a sow's ear, huh?

One of the fun and useful features is the ability to adjust the speed of a recording. I recorded several old 78 RPM records using the 45 RPM speed of my turntable and increased the speed accordingly using the drop-down menu until it sounded normal. I'm trying to find my 78 RPM copy of Roy Acuff's "Sixteen Chickens in a Frying Pan." Everybody needs to hear that.

For the tinkering types out there, many tweaks are available including a change in sampling rates, sensitivity of track detection, recording levels, etc.

Highly recommended.

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Traveling with Computers

Diane George (digeorge@sbcglobal.net), PC Community (<http://www.pcc.org>)

My husband and I have taken several cruises and both of us do some other traveling for business and pleasure that keeps us in a hotel for several days at a time. Being addicted to using our computers, it's impossible to travel without our notebook computers. We both take our own notebook computers. As a result we need to do a little additional planning to take what we need to connect and use both computers.

First item is a small power strip. We found some lightweight ones with a short power card and four outlets that are easy to fit into a computer bag. Because we also take digital cameras, it helps to be able to plug in several devices at once, computers and chargers. While most hotels have multiple outlets, cruise ships typically have one outlet so the strip is doubly important.

Did I mention that we use bags on wheels that can be carried on an airplane? The basics need to fit into that bag. Usually there is enough space for some personal items (e.g., toothbrush, underwear, medications).

We take lots of spare batteries—neither one of us can stand to use the touch pads on our notebooks so we use cordless mice. The cameras also use batteries. Plan to bring the used batteries back with you as most places don't provide for disposal of spent batteries.

When we are going to be staying in a hotel, we take a small wireless access point — it's designed for travel and comes with a carrying case that includes the Ethernet cable that is needed. The one we have is made by Linksys and is slightly larger than a deck of cards. For some hotels, this will allow us to simultaneously use an Internet connection. This will usually work where hotels provide free Internet access — it

doesn't help when there is a charge because they track the user's IP address for billing purposes.

Expect to pay about \$10 a day for Internet access at those hotels that charge — they may have wireless access, but be sure to pack an Ethernet cable in your computer bag in case they don't. There are still some hotels that only offer a modem connection, but in general most hotels now offer some type of Internet access.

On board ship, connections are provided via satellite and the cost is fairly high. On our most recent cruise, the basic charge was 75 cents per minute on a pay as you go basis. You could also purchase longer time periods for a lower rate per minute, e.g., 100 minutes for \$55. Connections suffer from some lack of reliability due to weather and satellite positions. The ship offered wireless access in a few locations for people with their own computers. The charges applied whether you used the ship's computers or your own. We opted not to use the on board access because the cost did not seem reasonable. On other trips, we used on-shore Internet cafes to review email, in Mexico, Costa Rica and the Caribbean. This trip (Hawaii) we did not find any that were near the port.

One of the conveniences of having Internet access on board was the ability to check-in online for our flights while we were still at sea. Southwest Airlines, in particular, allows you to check in 24 hours before your flight time. If you check in online within the first couple of hours, you will usually be assigned to the A group — first in line to board. The ship offered a short (30 minutes) package for \$12.95. I was able to check in four people at Southwest and had a few minutes to spare — nobody said it was fast!

Continued

Back Issues Needed

The editor is attempting to build a CD containing all issues of ACGNJ News in pdf format, but our collection is incomplete. We're hoping some faithful reader has been hoarding them and will be willing to lend them to us just long enough to scan them. We promise to return them quickly. Thanks Joseph Gaffney, who loaned his collection for scanning. Below is a list of what we still need.

1985: June, July, August, September

1984: August

1976: January, February, March, April (pamphlet-size booklets)

1975: All issues (pamphlet-size booklets)

If you can supply any of these missing issues (or scanned images or good copies), please contact the Editor by email (bdegroot@ptd.net). Those who supply missing issues will receive a free copy of the resulting CD as our thanks for your help. ☺

Advertising Rates

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1/4 page	3¼ x 5 2¼ x 7	50	Negatives rightreading, emulsion side down. Halftones/photos \$10 extra
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Finally! Essential Tech Books for Non-Dummies

Gabe Goldberg (gabe@gabegold.com), APCUG Advisor, <http://www.compuKiss.com>

With holidays just past, many people reading this article from AARP's Web site will need techno-wisdom for dealing with gifts received by family, friends, and themselves. But with conflicting suggestions from mailing lists, Web sites, stores, and manufacturers all around us, a trusted guidebook is valuable.

The books are "Sandy Berger's Great Age Guide to Better Living Through Technology", "... to the Internet", and "... to Gadgets & Gizmos". Their common design is open and uncluttered; accessible language is clear but not dumbed down; there's no mention of dummies or idiots.

Good personal-style writing engages the reader, calming and building confidence. Sandy shares her sense of excitement and discovery and offers clear opinions on technology and how it affects us. That's pleasantly different from most technology books. And agree or disagree on individual items, you'll certainly know where she stands.

Ideas and technology are amply illustrated by easy-to-read screen images and clear photos. I'd have liked a "lay-flat" binding for easy reference at the computer.

The "Great Age" title credits Pablo Picasso with saying, "Age only matters when one is aging. Now that I have arrived at a great age, I might as well be twenty". Chapters begin with other thought-provoking quotations. My favorite, highlighting the empowering nature of the books' subject matter, comes from marketing guru Greg Arnold: "All greatness is achieved while performing outside your comfort zone". Fear often comes from lack of understanding; don't worry, the books aren't uncomfortable reading — but they may challenge you to try new things.

The books open onto Contents at a Glance — a list of chapter titles and page numbers. That's handy, giving a quick focus without requiring flipping past usual book-front boilerplate. Each book includes a brief "What's Inside" write-up, noting that there are no special instructions for reading, and highlighting unique design elements. The Technology and

Continued

Traveling with Computers, *continued*

Online check in requires you to print your boarding passes. At many hotels, you can get the concierge to print your boarding pass—you give them the confirmation number and they will do it for you. On the ship, we could have paid for the Internet access and to have the passes printed, but instead we took a printer with us so we were able to print our own. I saved the passes as PDF files and then took them back to our stateroom for printing.

In prior years, we took a small photo printer with us, but found that to be too limiting. We bought an HP 460, an inkjet printer, which prints photos and 8 ½ x 11 pages as well. It was designed to be mobile, so is fairly compact and lightweight. It can be tucked into a suitcase among your clothes. The printer has an AC adapter and a USB connection. We took a small supply of paper, both plain and photo paper tucked in the bottom of a suitcase.

Aside from printing boarding passes, we also used the printer to print photos to give to some of the friends we made during the cruise, passengers and staff. The pictures were much appreciated.

This leads to the main reason for taking the computers — we take a lot of pictures with two digital cameras. On cruises, in particular, we have to download the images in order to recover space on the memory cards. Even with multiple cards for the cameras, we would never have enough storage space without off-loading the images. We get pictures from our in-laws who travel with us and spend some time on the trip organizing the images before we get home. On the last cruise we had five days at sea before we got home, so there was plenty of time to work on them.

Another item that has been useful is a small external drive. We have a 40 gigabyte drive that is about 6 inches by 3 inches and ¾ inch thick. It connects via USB and does not require a power supply if you connect it to your computer directly. This allows us to back up the photos and to share them with each other or our traveling companions. You may also want to take a card reader if your notebook doesn't have a built-in card reader. A USB hub may also be useful.

We take a small scanner (about 1 inch thick) and a folding table. Because there is usually one desk in hotel rooms or in staterooms, the second notebook user has to resort to using the coffee table, a chair or the bed. It's really inconvenient and hard on the back, so we have a small plastic table that comes apart and is easy to reassemble. It folds to less than 2 inches thick and fits in a medium size suitcase. You can work with a notebook and have room for a mouse. It weighs about two pounds so it's not a big burden to include it and it saves fighting over who gets the desk.

Before you leave, double check to make sure you have all the USB cables that you need, as well as the adapters for your devices. If you take a printer, be sure to include extra ink cartridges. Depending on where you travel, you may or may not be able to find what you need.

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Internet books include valuable sidebars calling out Sandy's Tips,

Blooper Alerts, Lingo, and Trivia. Selected items in Gadgets and Gizmos are designated Sandy's Favorites.

Sandy Berger's Great Age Guide to Better Living Through Technology reminds us how pervasive technology is, how much things have changed in our lifetimes, and how change is accelerating and never-ending. It covers topics such as how families can use the digital world, how technology has affected shopping, travel, health, finances, and even meeting people. Throughout, it encourages continued learning at any age — after all, we know HOW to learn. This book shows much that's worth learning. It's not preachy or prescriptive. For example, it lists diverse search engines, giving attributes and advantages for each. Many are specialized, less known than Google/Yahoo/etc., and yet may be best for fulfilling certain quests. I'm happy that it highlights the wonderful Library of Congress. This treasure, local to me, is available to all online.

Sandy Berger's Great Age Guide to the Internet focuses on getting online, learning the language of the Internet, having fun and communicating, and avoiding problems and staying safe. It reports scientists believing that humans use about 10% of their brainpower, and speculates that most people use about 10% of their PC's power — and aims to help raise both numbers. The book starts gently, introducing Internet concepts and terms, and assembles them into tips and tricks for Web searching, e-mailing, understanding Web advertising, and even building our own Web pages. It gives tips for picking an ISP (Internet service provider), demystifies browser windows components, and offers netiquette advice for instant messaging. I take issue, though, with its use of the term "hacker" as bad guy; I grew up hearing it as a term of praise [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacker].

Sandy Berger's Great Age Guide to Gadgets & Gizmos is a different sort of book, a bit hard to categorize. It's a catalog, shopping guide, and a tour through current and future technology. It offers gift ideas for oneself or Santa; if you observe someone reading it with widened eyes, you'll guess what they'd like gift wrapped for them. It's not Consumer Reports, since it doesn't compare choices head-to-head. But its interesting and opinionated narrative gives products' good and bad news; general advice and principles are interleaved so it won't become outdated as fast as a simple products list would. If Santa had watched me, he'd have seen me reading carefully about phones and clocks — two of my interests.

As you've seen, the books are complementary — it's worth collecting them all. They're easy cover-to-cover reads, or you can refer to them for specific ideas, services, and products. Good indexes locate topics quickly; because the books topics are inter-related, a consolidated index of the three books' top-

ics would be useful. Perhaps the publisher will provide one online. There's some necessary overlap but they provide different information with varying orientation and emphasis. Overall, the books fulfill their "Better Living Through ..." titles' promise, delivering usable information about evolving technology areas.

Specifications

Book Title: Sandy Berger's Great Age Guide to Better Living Through Technology

Author: Sandy Berger

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Que

ISBN: 0-7897-3440-0

Price: \$20

URL: www.quepublishing.com

Book Title: Sandy Berger's Great Age Guide to the Internet

Author: Sandy Berger

Paperback: 268 pages

Publisher: Que

ISBN: 0-7897-3442-7

Price: \$20

URL: www.quepublishing.com

Book Title: Sandy Berger's Great Age Guide to Gadgets & Gizmos

Author: Sandy Berger

Paperback: 242 pages

Publisher: Que

ISBN: 0-7897-3441-9

Price: \$20

URL: www.quepublishing.com

Note: Sandy and Dave Berger have set up a special link on [compukiss.com](http://www.compukiss.com) [<http://www.compukiss.com>] so APCUG members can purchase the books at a 35% discount.

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XP Disk Maintenance Tools

Dick Maybach (n2nd@att.net), Brookdale Computer User Group (<http://www.bcug.com/>)

Windows disk operations have improved greatly over the years to the extent that we seldom have problems with XP. However, XP does include tools to inform you about your disks, to improve their operation, and, if needed, to repair the data on them.

For general information on your drives, use the *Disk Management* tool — right-click on *My Computer*; select *Manage*; and select *Disk Management* (under *Storage*). You will see a table showing the properties of all your partitions as well as a graphical summary. Select a volume in the table or on the graphic, click on the *Action* menu item, and then click on *All Tasks* to see a list of the actions you can perform. Be careful, as some of these are drastic and irreversible, e.g., format and delete the volume.

If you suspect that a hard disk is corrupted, double-click on *My Computer*, right-click on the desired drive, select *Properties*, select the *Tools* tab, click the *Check Now...* button in the Error-checking section, and click the *Start* button. This will run an updated version of the old *chkdsk*. Don't select either of the options. If you do find problems, run the program again, but before you click *Start*, select *Automatically fix file system errors*. You may have to reboot for the operation to complete. Also, be aware that this may result in the loss of some files. If there still errors, run the program again, but select both options. (You can also run this program from the command line; type "*chkdsk /?*" in a Command Prompt window to see the options. I prefer the command-line version, because it's more informative.)

With time, Windows collects many unneeded temporary files. To clean these up, double-click on *My Computer*, right click on the desired disk, select *Properties*, and click the *Disk Cleanup* button under the *General* tab. Windows will take a few minutes to analyze your disk, and then will display a list of actions and how much space each will recover. You can single-click on each name to see its description. I select everything except the last two (*Compress old files* and *Catalog files for the Content Indexer*). Clicking the *More Options* tab shows other ways to recover space by removing Windows components, removing installed programs, or deleting old system restore points. Under the *General* tab, you will see two check boxes, *Compress drive to save space* and *Allow Indexing Service to index this drive for fast file searching*. By default, the first is not checked and the second is; don't change these. Large disks are very cheap, and if you are running low on space, a much better solution is to install a second disk and keep you user data on it. Compression adds complexity, and I've seen it cause serious problems.

With use, a disk gradually becomes fragmented. That is; long files are broken into parts and scattered over the disk. You can correct much (but usually not all) of this with XP's disk defragmenter. Double-click on *My Computer*; right-click on the desired drive; select *Properties*; select the *Tools* tab; click on the *Defragment now...* button in the *Defragmentation* area; and click the *Analyze* button. Usually, you will be told that there is no need to defragment the volume. If so, take the advice. If you do decide to defragment the disk, bear in mind that there is a small risk of destroying its contents, since many files will be deleted and rewritten — a power failure could be catastrophic. Before you defrag a disk, run *chkdsk* or, even better, back it up.

A little-known command-line utility is *fsutil*. To run this first open a *Command Prompt* window (found in the *Accessories* group), then type "*fsutil*" to produce a list of *fsutil* commands. Usually, you will have to stack up several *fsutil* commands to do anything useful. For example, typing "*fsutil dirty query c:*" will show you whether you need to run *chkdsk* on C:. It can be worthwhile to explore the other features this command, being careful of course that you don't make any changes to your file system.

The *recover* command will make undamaged portions of a damaged file readable. For example, to recover the damaged file *c:\n2nd\junk*, open a *Command Prompt* window and type "*recover c:\n2nd\junk*". Like most command-line programs, you should be careful when using *recover*.

A very powerful command-line program is *debug*, but you can do a lot of damage with it if you are not an expert; I recommend that you avoid it. If you are curious, type "*debug /?*" in a *Command Prompt* window to find out more about what it can do.

The NTFS file system is superior to the older FAT32 one. If you are still using FAT32, seriously consider converting it to the NTFS format. For example, to convert your C: drive to NTFS, open a *Command Prompt* window and type "*convert c:/fs:ntfs*". There are two caveats: (1) the conversion is not reversible unless you buy third-party software, and (2) if you dual-boot both XP and an earlier version Windows on the same PC, the old version can't read NTFS volumes.

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Continued

Registry Adventures

Al Gruber (AlGruber@Comcast.net), SouthEastern Michigan Computer Organization (<http://www.semco.org>)

Suppose you try to delete a file on your Desktop, but instead the system starts to install a program. You furiously click cancel a dozen times, and it stops. So, you try the delete again, and it happens again, and again, even after rebooting. Evidently, some wires are crossed in your computer: the delete key is now assigned to installing a program called ScanSoft PDF Create. That's what made me delve into the registry.

By way of background, I've had problems with ScanSoft ever since their last upgrade, so I knew enough to demand that they remove their setup program, and hallelujah, that did give me back my delete key. But it made sense to me that this fixed only the symptom. Somewhere in there, the wires were still crossed. And that somewhere must be in the registry. Unfortunately, I didn't know enough about the registry — and though I know a little more now, I still haven't fixed the problem.

To start, I pulled down my copy of Windows XP Registry Guide, (Jerry Honeycutt), which I had always planned to read "one of these days." It's a good book, but at over 450 pages, my mind wandered to the registry-cleaning program (System Mechanic 6) I had recently bought from ZoneAlarm. Their general idea is that they scan your computer for errors and then fix them. Not being that trusting, I finally found out how to stop them from making the fixes before I could review and approve them. Then I ran the program. Surprise, they had no proposed fixes. My Registry was perfect!

But I knew that was wrong. As I was following the Honeycutt book and inspecting the registry, I had discovered many out-of-date entries involving the Start > All Programs menu, some for programs I had uninstalled and others perhaps caused by my habit of combining programs under suitable headings. For example, I have a heading called Graphics that holds 10 different graphics-related programs.

When I asked the System Mechanic techie why their program might not find known registry errors, he explained that they must be shared programs, which I could pin down by running System Mechanic in protected mode. I did, and now found a grand total of 1 error.

I now decided to try some other registry cleaners. Here's a partial list of the commercial offerings: Error Nuker, Free Registry Fix, PC On Point, RegCure, Registry Fix, RegistryHealer, Registry Mechanic, Registry Medic, System Mechanic.

Unfortunately, most of these programs give off a bad smell. These are inexpensive programs; most in the range of \$20 to \$30, but they all try to give the impression that they're free: e.g., "free download," "free scan," but to fix your registry, you must pay. The most egregious is "Free Registry Fix," which claims on its opening screen: "the world's only FREE registry cleaning software on the market today." Their price is \$29.95! Mind you, I understand their problem. Since I don't need registry cleanings very often, I might take my free cleaning without ever buying. But still, it's a shell game. And frankly, I am reluctant to give them my credit card. (Actually, there are at least 4 genuinely free programs, but they are a bit

harder to find: CCleaner, EasyCleaner, RegScrubXp, Eusing Free Registry Cleaner.)

Another point is that the commercial product information is more hard sell than information. "Statistics show that over 93.7% of pc's have corrupted registries;" "Don't compromise with second best;" "100% guaranteed." If there are product differences, and there clearly are, I couldn't find them in their literature. And of course, their documentation is weak. This was especially disappointing because I was hoping their documentation would give me a clue about my problem.

These programs all use about the same approach. They offer to scan your registry (Free! Free! Free!). These scans invariably find lots of "dangerous" errors. To fix these, you must register the program, which is when you find out that it isn't free after all. The programs do give you one or two free fixes. But since all of them find hundreds of errors, you invariably have too many for their free offer. Incidentally, the program that claims to be the only freebie in the universe does give you 50 free fixes, but I don't think you qualify if you have over 50 errors.

After the scan, these programs go automatically into their repair phase, unless you have figured out how to opt out, which again took me quite some time. (The problem here is that they never tell you if choosing "fix errors" will still let you back out.)

So, after System Mechanic had said I had an error-free registry, here's the number of errors I found in the various programs:

Ccleaner (really free) ·····	1000*
EasyCleaner (really free) ·····	251
Error Nuker ·····	267
Free Registry Cleaner (really free) ·····	1651
Free Registry Fix ·····	740
PC On Point ·····	739
RegCure ·····	2374
Registry Fix ·····	714
Registry Mechanic ·····	430
Registry Medic ·····	1575
RegistryHealer ·····	3777
RegScrubXp (really free) ·····	339
System Mechanic ·····	0

* Estimate, no total supplied

Now, I knew System Mechanic was wrong when they said I had no errors. But when Registry Healer says 3,777 there must be some grade-inflation going on. After all, my computer boots and runs ok. The ScanSoft problem is a suspicion at this point, not a blue screen emergency. So why should I let Registry Healer repair these errors. I suppose it would speed boot-up and shutdown. Would it actually run faster? The sales pitch says yes, but as I said, I'm not that trusting.

To give you a little more feel, here are the warnings from "Free Registry Fix":

Continued

274high severity problems — apps won't run, system may crash.

121medium severity — app errors or won't run.

345low severity — computer will run slow.

This seems like a good time to tell what little I have found out about the registry. First, it is loaded into memory when the computer starts. The part we are interested in resembles a Rolodex, a list of programs and their addresses. Entries are added when you install a program, and removed when you uninstall.

Apparently, not all programs uninstall properly; some entries are not removed from the registry — outdated cards left in the Rolodex. This may create a junky registry, but should not automatically cause problems. Another factor is that programs often involve multiple parts, hence multiple entries in the registry. So, if each improperly uninstalled program had 10 parts, the amount of junk might be that much greater. But aside from the wasted time riffling through left-behind cards, no real harm should ensue. Even if you call a contact whose number has been disconnected, all that happens is a no-answer, i.e., the program won't run because you uninstalled it.

Finally, there are other ways to cause registry junk. If you occasionally reorganize your Start button > All Programs menu, it turns out that old entries are not deleted from the registry. Example: I moved Word from its old category called MsWord to a new one called Microsoft. In terms of the Rolodex analogy, this is like adding a card when a contact changes her name. If she keeps her phone both cards are usable, but the old one becomes superfluous as you switch to using her new name.

Are we getting any closer to understanding how a group of registry cleaners can be so far apart in the number of errors they find? Hold on. Registry cleaners conduct their scans by problem categories that they describe with names that are suggestive but by no means clear. I think that the differences in their results are caused by which categories they pick, and perhaps how tight their rules are. (Though it seems likely that System Mechanic contains some programming errors.) Here are my guesses as to what their categories mean:

Typical Registry Errors Categories

The first 5 items below are written into the registry at the time of program installation, but not always fully deleted at un-installation. Many registry cleaners offer to delete the useless left-behind entries.

1. Software Locations: At installation, applications enter their location in the registry.

2. Controls/ActiveX files/Shared DLLs, Browser Helper Objects: Applications enter the location of their *.dll and *.ocx files in the registry.

3. Help Files: Some applications enter the location of their help files in the registry.

4. Installers/Add/Remove Programs: Applications enter the location of their install and uninstall programs files in the registry.

5. Start Menu and Startup (boot up) entries: At installation, applications enter the location of both of these items in the registry.

The following items are written into the registry at various other times. The cleaners check to see if they represent real addresses. If not, they are useless and can be deleted.

6. Windows Services: This tells the location of various Windows services.

7. Windows Fonts and Sounds: These sections tell the location of installed Windows font and sound files.

8. File Extensions: This lists file extensions (e.g.: *.txt) and tells which if any applications may open them. If an extension lists no programs, or only nonexistent programs, the entry is useless.

9. History List: This section is scanned for invalid history files paths.

10. Invalid Paths and Folders: this section is scanned for any other non-existent files and folders.

11. Hardware Drivers

To summarize, I am guessing that looking for somewhat different errors causes cleaners to get different problem counts. This is only a guess because their product descriptions aren't that specific. Surprisingly, nobody claims to look for more problems than their competitors. I suppose, on these grounds, I should pick Registry Healer because it finds (and fixes) the most errors.

But then, I must face the question; should I let Registry Healer delete the "problems" it reports, so that my system won't crash (which it doesn't do anyway) and will run faster (which I suppose is possible)? I admit that part of my reluctance is fear. Whenever anybody mentions editing the registry, they first warn that you could cripple your computer for life, so back up first. And the registry cleaners themselves, of course, say that their software is not created for any useful legal purpose and that users cannot rely on them working.

Part of my problem is with the concept of backups. If my computer won't start after deleting the "problems," and if I had a backup, and, if I had a boot disk, and, if I could get into restore mode, I should be able to rescue the situation. But with my luck, the computer will start fine. Then three weeks later, some program I haven't run since the "cleanup" will not run. And three weeks is long enough (for someone with senior moments) that I probably won't connect it with the cleanup. And if I did, would I want to lose whatever new stuff I had done since then? No!

This brings to the fore one missing feature of all the cleaner programs. My specific problem is a possible registry error involving ScanSoft. But the cleaner programs don't let me search for ScanSoft errors. They just report what they want to report, and on top of that, they all want to report something different.

Speaking of features, here are some of the differences I noticed between programs: As you know, the cleaners find and delete calls to missing programs. A couple however, also search for the missing programs, so they can correct the call if

Continued

Dufferdom — Tales of the Ordinary User

David D. Uffer (daviduffer@sbcglobal.net), Chicago Computer Society

When you think about it, you may come to the view that there are users and there are abusers of personal computers. Of course, the direction of the abuse may be at issue: the PC could seem to be abusing the user, not responding as it had and probably should. A techie may find a fine point where the user has not followed the rules and the PC was just responding to some erroneous action or mistaken understanding. You may believe that. You may believe that machines are always constant and humans variable. I don't. Electronic circuits are complex enough in their construction and interaction that they can go corrupt on their own. Ask a techie. Ask Murphy how he found his Law.

I think I have one of Murphy's PCs. And it may be that it does have a mind of its own, or at least an inclination to uphold and sustain Murphy. It has no brand name. It has been multiply upgraded, revised, and enhanced so that any original identity is no longer valid. I've tried various names. I discontinued Mongrel when I felt it was disrespectful, that the PC's ego, if any, would suffer. In view of its heritage, I used Legacy for a while. Then sort of settled on Custom. That's descriptive, respectful, and honorable. But there are times I want to call it Murphy.

Or maybe call up Murphy and ask him to pick up his PC — and thanks for the loan. But maybe he thinks it's mine. And maybe he's right and I'm stuck with it. Maybe it'll get better if I treat it gingerly, or just gently. But it recently developed this cute trick of getting the screen to go blank and black, not to return until some secret rite is performed upon it by a repair guy who says it's nothing special, just reconnecting. I've tried that too and sometimes it does whatever magic is required. The screen comes back and pretends it hasn't been up to anything sneaky. Then I tried being analytical and have successfully reduced the number of cables it took to achieve

restoration. I've got it down to just 5 USB connections plus the Ethernet port. Almost gives me some pleasure to anticipate the next blackout and further reduction in cable connections. Almost a game.

The most recent blackout seems to have occurred as a result of accidentally hitting the F12 key. I'll try it intentionally when I get some slack time for fooling around and some courage. Maybe I'll learn something. I do have yet to learn another key quirk. While typing a long message or document, I accidentally invoked another kind of vanishing act by touching some key in the bottom row. Immediately, I was back at the basic desktop screen, all message or document image having gone forever bye-bye. That's when I learn and relearn that re-doing a message or document usually makes it better. Authors call it rewriting and it's a royal pain but good for the soul. I've yet to discover what key or combination causes that reaction. Same reason: chickenhearted.

Now then there may be another reason. It might just be another prank Microsoft or its staffers play on users. A colleague of mine some time ago visited Redmond for some genuine learning and came back with some tricky mini-programs that made the keys or mouse pointer behave in tricky ways, like wandering around or appearing to lose data. You can find subsequent versions of such programs by browsing the Internet, if you value frustration or scaring your colleagues. If you seriously seek and cannot find such items, you can ask me by way of Beata Kernan, who knows how to get in touch with me, at Iccsadmin@comcast.net.

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Registry Adventures, *continued*

they find it. I don't know how successful this is, but it makes sense to me. Registry Healer is one of these. For the rest, when they say repair, they really mean delete.

Another feature I like, is the ability to send a list of the errors to disk or printer. This caters to my cautious nature; it lets me think about the "problems" before agreeing to delete them. Registry Healer and EasyCleaner both offer this.

Another feature I found useful is that one click takes you from the error to the actual registry entry. Again, this reflects the fact that I was trying to investigate a specific problem, rather than running a housecleaning operation. About half the programs, including Registry Healer, offer this feature.

Finally, most but not all have some form of online documentation, though most of it is pretty amateurish. Their general rule is to explain the obvious (click scan to do a scan) (click cancel scan to cancel scan) but gloss over the mysterious, such as the purpose and implications of selecting certain registry categories.

Over the years, I have downloaded many trial versions of small-time programs, usually without knowing exactly what they are supposed to do, and why. If the documentation tells me why they made the program, that's a big plus in my purchase decision. And if it then explains logically and coherently how it works, I get confidence. If the documentation sounds smart, I believe the program is smart. By contrast, my problem with the registry cleaners is that they do lots of shouting but not much explaining.

Finally, as you know, I still have lots of questions. I am leaning toward Registry Healer, but haven't bought it yet. E-mail me if you have answers. Who knows, maybe we can do a sequel based on your expertise.

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SIG News

C/C++ Programming

Bruce Arnold (barnold@blast.net)

<http://www.blast.net/barnold>

This group is devoted to programming languages in general and C, C++, and C++ for Windows programming in particular. Each month a small but hopefully useful program (complete with source code) is presented for discussion.

February 20: General Review of .NET Programs Covered Recently ☞

Macintosh Users

Keith Sproul (ksproul@noc.rutgers.edu)

This group is no longer meeting, but Keith is still available to help Mac users via telephone or email. ☞

Java

Mike Redlich (mike@redlich.net)

<http://www.javasig.org>

The Java Users Group covers beginner, intermediate, and advanced level Java programming. Primary focus is on developing useful/practical applets and applications, but can include related topics such as Java I/O, JavaBeans, Reflection, object-oriented programming and software design issues. Meetings are held the second Tuesday of the month starting promptly at 7:30 PM.

February 13: Developing Amazon Web Services with Java. With ten services launched, Amazon Web Services provides developers access to inexpensive, scalable web-based business solutions and infrastructure. Amazon.com opened its technology and product vault in 2002, via Amazon Web Services, to allow developers the ability to construct powerful applications using the resources the company spent ten years and over \$2 billion developing. Jinesh Varia, Evangelist for Amazon Web Services, looks at real world examples of how developers have utilized Amazon Web Services' open APIs to develop exciting, profitable businesses. Jinesh will also demonstrate the newly launched Amazon Elastic Compute Cloud (Amazon EC2) which allows developers to build a virtual computing environment in minutes and only pay for computing usage. This session will also explore other innovative integrations of Amazon Web Services such as Amazon Simple Storage Service, Amazon Simple Queue Service, Amazon Mechanical Turk.

March 13: To be determined ☞

March 2007

Web Dev

This SIG is intended to be an open forum for all Website Development techniques and technologies, to encourage the study and development of web sites of all kinds. All languages will be considered and examined. Anyone interested please contact the Chairperson in charge. The current project is a CMS for the club. Anyone interested in starting a new project, come to the meeting and announce / explain. Provide as much detail as possible. One can also send projects to the ACGNJ Newsletter editor for inclusion in the next volume.

WebDev should be an all-encompassing development and examination forum for all issues, applications, OS, languages and systems one can use to build Websites. We currently have two Web dev languages .NET and Java as SIGs but the other languages and OS need to be investigated, examined and tested; Windows, Linux, UNIX, DEC, Vax, HP etc. Intel-PC, Motorola-MAC etc. Our next meeting March 14. ☞

DotNet

Jim Wong

<http://www.jimw.net/acgnj/>

Meetings are postponed until further notice.

Online Auction

Bill Brown (onlineauction@acgnj.org)

Due to overwhelming response to a seminar held on April 7, the membership decided to form a permanent group. The group will meet on the **first and third Wednesdays of the month**.

These are the eight topics for discussion. We will cover all types of online auctions, as members chose. The general format of the meetings will be from 7:30 to 10 PM. The first 45 minutes will be to discuss the topic for the evening. A short break will be taken, the remainder of the time will be for specific questions to the topic followed by general questions and bull session. During the entire time, online presence will be established and examples will be given on screen.

1. Getting Started: Different Auctions Registering. Buyer account, sellers account Navigating websites.
2. Buying and selling. An overview of searching, sniping, snuffing.
3. Finding things to sell Gnoming, Clearance, Bargain Bins, Flea Markets, Garage Sales, Solicitation
4. Listing an item. Choosing a category, Setting a Price. Buy it now strategies
5. Maintaining your sales. Revising and re-listing.
6. Collection and payment follow ups.
7. Packaging, shipping, Inventory management.
8. Going further. Ebay express, stores ☞

PHP?

Anyone interested in a new PHP SIG (Interpreted Script Programming Language), please get in touch with John Raff (jraff@comcast.net). PHP is a widely-used general-purpose scripting language that is especially suited for Web development and can be embedded into HTML. If you are new to PHP and want to get some idea of how it works, try the introductory tutorial (<http://us2.php.net/tut.phpv>). ☐

Genealogy

Frank Warren (kb4cyc@webwarren.com)

<http://www.webwarren.com/kb4cyc/gensig.shtml>

Genealogy SIG is for genealogists interested in computers and computer users interested in genealogy, and is a forum to assist members in furtherance of both endeavors. Meetings usually focus on genealogy more than on computers. We meet at 8 PM on the fourth Thursday of the month, but we do not meet in November or December. In addition to our Web page, we also have an electronic mailing list. Messages to the list should be addressed to gensig@webwarren.com. To subscribe, include the line "subscribe gensig" in the body of the message. **Next meeting March 22** ☐

Layman's Forum

Matt Skoda (som359@aol.com)

<http://www.acgnj.org/groups/laymans.html>

We meet on the second Monday of the month (no meetings in July and August) to discuss issues of interest to novice users or those who are planning to get started in computing. Watch our Web page for updates and announcements. ☐

NJ Gamers

Gregg McCarthy (greggmc@optonline.net)

<http://www.NJGamers.com>

www.lanparty.com

The next Friday Night Frag will be March 9, 6 p.m. to Saturday 12 noon — 18 hours for 5 bucks!

BYOC - Bring your own computer

BYOF - Bring your own food.

and if you don't like sitting on metal chairs... BYO chair! ☐

Firefox Activity

Firefox@acgnj.org

This SIG is intended to be an open forum for **all** FireFox and Mozilla techniques and technologies, to encourage the study and development of web sites of all kinds. All the browsers will be considered and examined. Meeting third Monday of the month at 7 PM.

The first meeting of the FireFox Activity was led by David McRitchie to discuss, argue and kick around many concepts and ideas. Web2 is definitely in the mix. All are encouraged to "think out of the box" about new web site design. All members and guests are invited to check out the design concepts and voice their opinion. ☐

Investing

Norm Wiss (cut.up@verizon.net)

http://www.acgnj.org/groups/sig_investment.html

The Investment SIG continues with presentations on how to use analysis programs TC2000 and TCNet. Large charts are presented on our pull down screen and illustrate the application of computer scans and formulas to find stocks for profitable investments. Technical analysis determines buy points, sell points and projected moves. Technical analysis can also be used on fundamentals such as earnings, sales growth, etc. **Our next meeting: March 8.** ☐

LUNICS (Linux/Unix)

Andreas Meyer (lunics@acgnj.org)

<http://www.acgnj.org/groups/lunics.html>

LUNICS is a group for those who share an interest in Unix and similar operating systems. While we do quite a bit with Linux, we've also been known to discuss Solaris and BSD too. We generally meet on the first Monday of the month at 8 PM at the Scotch Plains Rescue Squad. See the web page for directions and more information. **Next meeting March 5.** ☐

Window Pains

John Raff (jraff@comcast.net)

<http://www.acgnj.org/groups/winpains.html>

This meeting is a combination of the older PC Symposium, PC User Group and Random Access Session which are now defunct. The intent is to provide the members with Windows oriented application discussions both Microsoft and Linux style. The presentation will be directed toward the more heavy technological level of attendee, although newbies are welcomed.

March 16: Overview of Podcasting

April: No meeting

May: How to Hookup Wireless Peripherals, by Mark Douches ☐

Main Meeting

<http://www.acgnj.org/groups/mainmeet.html>

Evan Williams (nhpressgo@blast.net)

March 2: VoIP Overview, Vonage

April: Cool Web Sites by Paul Natanson ☐

Best Choice Investment Activity

Norm Wiss (cut.up@verizon.net)

http://www.acgnj.org/groups/sig_bcinvest.html

This is a new event to ACGNJ. They will be using the Best Choice software for real-time trading. This new investing group had been previously meeting in South Amboy and has been in existence for almost a year. They are expected to join ACGNJ as members. **The group meets the first and third Tuesday of the month from 10:30 AM to 2:30 PM** at the Scotch Plains Rescue Squad building. ☐

Guru Corner

Jo-Anne Head (tinrock@aol.com)

If you need help with any of the technologies listed below, you can call on the person listed. Please be considerate and call before 10 PM.

	Hardware	
	Scott Vincent	973-539-8169
	Software	
HTML	Jo-Anne Head	908-769-7385
	Mike Redlich	908-246-0410
CSS	Jo-Anne Head	908-769-7385
	Frank Warren	908-756-1681
ColdFusion	Jo-Anne Head	908-769-7385
Java	Mike Redlich	908-246-0410
C++	Bruce Arnold	908-735-7898
	Mike Redlich	908-246-0410
ASP	Mike Redlich	908-246-0410
Perl	John Raff	973-560-9070
	Frank Warren	908-756-1681
XML	Mike Redlich	908-246-0410
e-Commerce	Rick Elbanna	800-323-7575
Genealogy	Frank Warren	908-756-1681
Networking	Scott Vincent	973-539-8169
Home Automation	Charlie Huffsmith	732-549-1734
	Frank Warren	908-756-1681
	Operating Systems	
WindowsNT	Scott Vincent	973-361-5793
Windows95	Rick Elbanna	800-323-7575
Windows98	Rick Elbanna	800-323-7575
Windows3.1	Ted Martin	732-636-1942
	Charlie Huffsmith	732-549-1734
	Macintosh	
Mac O/S	Keith Sproul	(732) 821-4828

Discount Computer Magazine Price List

As described by the DealsGuy

	1 yr	2 yr	3 yr
Computer Games	\$10.95	20.95	29.95
Computer Gaming World	14.95	28.95	41.95
Computer Shopper1	16.97	32.95	47.95
Dr. Dobbs Journal	15.95	30.95	
Mac Addict	10.97		
Mac Home Journal	15.97	29.97	
Mac World	12.95		
Maximum PC	9.95	18.95	27.95
Microsoft System Journal	21.95	39.95	
PC Gamer	12.95		
PC Magazine (22/44/66 Issues)	25.97	48.95	68.95
PC World	16.95		
Wired	6.00	12.00	17.00

These prices are for new subscriptions and renewals. All orders must be accompanied by a check, cash or Money Order. Make payable to Herb Goodman, and mail to:

Herb Goodman, 8295 Sunlake Drive, Boca Raton, FL 33496

Telephone: 561-488-4465, e-mail: hgoodman@prodigy.net

Please allow 10 to 12 weeks for your magazines to start. For renewals you must supply an address label from your present subscription to insure the correct start of your renewal. As an extra service I will mail a renewal notice about 4 months prior to their expiration date. I carry more than 300 titles at excellent prices — email for prices. ☐

ACGNJ MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Sign up online at <http://www.acgnj.org/membershipApplication.html> and pay dues with PayPal.

	US/CANADA	FAMILY OF MEMBER (No Newsletter)	Dues	FOREIGN	STUDENT	SENIOR CITIZEN (Over 65)
1 Year	\$25	\$10		\$55	\$20	\$20
2 Years	\$40					
3 Years	\$55					\$45

Mail this application and your check to:
AMATEUR COMPUTER GROUP OF NEW JERSEY, INC., P.O. BOX 135, SCOTCH PLAINS, NJ 07076

New Member Renewal Address Change

First Name _____ Last Name _____ Phone _____

Mailing Address _____ E-Mail _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ URL _____

What topics would you like to see covered at club meetings? _____

Other Local Computer Groups		
Princeton Macintosh User Group: 7:15 pm 2nd Tuesday, Jadwin Hall, A-10, Washington Rd, Princeton, (609) 252-1163, www.pmug-nj.org	NY/NJ/CT Relational Database User Group: Corporate and independent users. (212) 839-0125	New York PC: 3rd Thurs, 7 pm, PS 41, 116 W 11th St. For info call hotline, (212) 533-NYPC, http://www.nyipc.org
Computer Education Society of Philadelphia: Meetings & Workshops at Jem Electronics, 6622 Castor Ave, Philadelphia PA. www.cesop.org/	Brookdale Computer Users Group: 7 pm, 3rd Friday, Brookdale Community College, Bldg MAN Rm 103, Lincroft NJ. (732)-739-9633. www.bcug.com	NJ Macintosh User Group: 8 pm, 3rd Tuesday, Allwood Branch Library, Lyall Rd, Clifton NJ. (201) 893-5274 http://www.njmug.org .
PC User Group of So. Jersey: 2nd Mon., 7 pm, Trinity Presb. Church, 499 Rt 70 E, Cherry Hill, NJ. L. Horn, (856) 983-5360 http://www.pcugsj.org	Hunterdon Computer Club: 8:30 am, 3rd Sat, Hunterdon Medical Center, Rt 31, Flemington NJ. www.hunterdoncomputerclub.org , (908) 995-4042.	NY Amateur Computer Group: 2nd Thurs, 7 pm, Rm 806 Silver Bldg, NYU, 32 Waverly Pl, NYC. http://www.nyacc.org
Morris Micro Computer Club: 2nd Thurs., Bill Traywick, (201) 635-5393	Central Jersey Computer Club: 8 pm, 4th Friday, Rm 74, Armstrong Hall, Trenton St. College. Rich Williams, (609) 466-0909.	NJ PC User Group: 2nd Thurs, Monroe Rm at Wyckoff Public Library, 7 pm. Maureen Shannon, (201) 853-7432, www.njpcug.org
Philadelphia Area Computer Society: 3rd Sat, 12 noon Main Meeting, groups 8 am-3 pm. Upper Moreland Middle School, Hatboro PA. (215) 842-9600. www.pacsnet.org	Fairlawn Computer Club: Last Monday, Fairlawn Senior Citizen Center. Joe Mathias (fair.lawn.computer.club@juno.com)	Princeton PC Users Group: 2nd Monday, Lawrenceville Library, Alt Rt 1 & Darrah Lane, Lawrenceville, Paul Kurivchack (908) 218-0778, http://www.ppcug-nj.org
Workshop, Hands-On: 2 P.M. to Midnight on last Saturday of the month. First United Methodist Church, Church and Atlantic Streets (one mile from GSP exit 117A), Aberdeen NJ. Bring your project, computer and extension cord. For information call Burke Mawby, (908) 566-7445.		

Classified

FREE TO MEMBERS. Use our classified ads to sell off your surplus computer stuff. Send copy to Classified, ACGNJ NEWS, P.O. Box 135, Scotch Plains NJ 07076 or e-mail to the editor, bdegroot@ptd.net. Classified ads are free to members, one per issue. Non-members pay \$10. Send check payable to ACGNJ Inc. with copy. Reasonable length, please. Deadline: 1st of preceding month. (For example, April 1 for May issue.)



<http://www.apcug.net>

Radio and TV Programs

Computer Radio Show, WBAI 99.5 FM, NY, Wed. 8-9 p.m.

Software Review, The Learning Channel, Saturday 10-10:30 p.m.

On Computers, WCTC 1450 AM, New Brunswick, Sunday 1-4 p.m. To ask questions call (800) 677-0874.

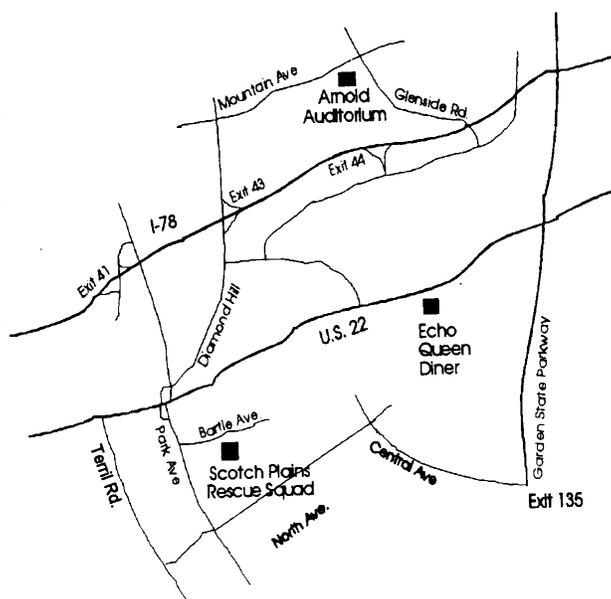
PC Talk, Sunday from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m., 1210 AM Philadelphia. 1800-876-WPEN, Webcast at <http://www.pctalkweb.net>.

MarketPro Shows

<http://www.marketpro.com/>

June 3-4: NJ Convention Center, Edison

June 24-25: Meadowlands Expo Center Secaucus



Directions to Meetings at Scotch Plains Rescue Squad, 1916 Bartle Ave., Scotch Plains NJ

From New York City or Northern New Jersey

Take Route 1&9 or the Garden State Parkway to US 22 Westbound.

From Southern New Jersey

Take Parkway north to Exit 135 (Clark). Stay on left of ramp, follow circle under Parkway. Bear right to Central Avenue; follow to Westfield and under RR overpass. Left at light to North Avenue; follow to light in Fanwood. Right on Martine (which becomes Park Ave). Right on Bartle Ave in middle of shopping district. Scotch Plains Rescue Squad (2-story brick) is located on the right. Do not park in the row next to the building — you'll be towed.

From I-78 (either direction)

Take exit 41 (Scotch Plains); follow signs to US 22. Turn right at light at bottom of hill and use overpass to cross Rt. 22. Follow US 22 Westbound directions.

From US 22 Westbound

Exit at Park Avenue, Scotch Plains after McDonalds on the right, diagonally opposite Scotchwood Diner on the left, immediately before the overpass. After exiting, turn left at the light and use overpass to cross US 22. Bear right at bottom of ramp to continue south on Park Avenue. Turn left at the second light (a staggered intersection). Scotch Plains Rescue Squad (2-story brick) is on the right. Do not park in the row next to the building — you'll be towed. We meet on the second floor, entering by the door at the right front of the building.

From Western New Jersey

Take US 22 Eastbound to the Park Avenue exit. The exit is about a mile past Terrill Road and immediately past the overpass. Exit onto Park Avenue South and follow the directions above to the Rescue Squad building. ☐

From the President

Michael Redlich

Greetings and Happy New Year! Yes, I know that March has arrived and the first quarter of the New Year is almost over, but this was my first opportunity to officially welcome everyone into 2007 as the new President of ACGNJ. It didn't seem that long ago when I first joined the club as a member in 1996. I formed the ACGNJ Java Users Group in 2001 and served as ACGNJ Secretary in 2006. I am also happy to report that the Java Users Group is now operating in its seventh year.

As we proceed further into the 21st century, our biggest challenge is to grow our membership while maintaining the quality, educational opportunities that our current members enjoy. The emergence of the Internet and "plug-and-play" technology seemed to have caused a significant drop in our membership over the past decade. We need to somehow overcome this phenomenon, keep up with the fast-paced world of technology, and to find innovative ways to provide additional resources to our members. As an effort to move in this direction, we invited a local Podcasting group to make a presentation at this month's Window Pains meeting. The Main and Window Pains meetings have been taped since last year, and this could be excellent medium for making those meetings available for viewing. The other SIGs can take advantage of this as well. So if you are interested in learning more about Podcasting, please mark your calendar for March

16, 2007. Hopefully, your schedule will allow you to attend this meeting.

The annual Trenton Computer Festival (TCF) is another excellent resource for our members. I'll talk more about TCF next month, but in the meantime, please mark your calendars for April 28-29, 2007. After a successful debut in 2006, the TCF Professional Seminars return for a second year on April 27, 2007. All you need to know about TCF can be found at <http://www.tcf-nj.org/>. I also encourage you to tell all your friends about TCF.

Whether you are setting up a printer, installing/upgrading an operating system, or writing a program in C++, there is an ACGNJ member that most likely has the required expertise. All you need to do is attend meetings or contact one of the gurus listed in this newsletter. We are all indeed more than happy to help.

I am proud to have been elected President of ACGNJ. I look forward to working with the dedicated folks on the ACGNJ Board of Directors, and to continue the work that has been started to do what is best for the club. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my predecessor, Evan Williams, for the work he has done during his three-year tenure as ACGNJ President. ☺

ACGNJ MEETINGS

For the very latest news on ACGNJ meetings visit the ACGNJ Web Page (<http://www.acgnj.org>)

Tuesday, February 27, 2007

Board of Directors Meeting

Friday, March 2

8 P.M. - Main Meeting, Evan Williams (nhpressgo@blast.net).

Monday, March 5

8 P.M. - Lunics (Linux/Unix). Andreas Meyer (lunics@acgnj.org)

Tuesday, March 6

10 A.M. - Best Choice Investing, Norm Wiss (Norm.wiss@acgnj.org)

Wednesday, March 7

7:30 P.M. - Online Auction, Bill Brown (onlineauction@acgnj.org)

Thursday, March 8

8 P.M. - Investing, Norm Wiss (cut.up@verizon.net).

Friday, March 9

6 P.M. to 5 A.M.- NJ Gamers. Gregg McCarthy (greggmc@optonline.net), 732-721-6507. Break 8 to 10 P.M.

Monday, March 12

8 P.M. - Layman's Forum, Matt Skoda (som359@aol.com), 908-359-8842.

Tuesday, March 13

7:30 P.M. - Java, Mike Redlich (mike@redlich.net) 908-246-0410.

Wednesday, March 14

7 P.M. - WebDev SIG, Evan Williams (nhpressgo@blast.net)

Thursday, March 15

8 P.M. - Dot Net, Jim Wong, no meeting.

Friday, March 16

8 P.M. - Window Pains, John Raff (john@jraff.com).

Monday, March 19

7 P.M. - Firefox Activity, David McRitchie (firefox@acgnj.org)

Tuesday, March 20

10 A.M. - Best Choice Investing, Norm Wiss (Norm.wiss@acgnj.org)

Tuesday, March 20

8 P.M. - C/C++ Users, Bruce Arnold (barnold@blast.net), 908-735-7898

Wednesday, March 21

7:30 P.M. - Online Auction, Bill Brown (onlineauction@acgnj.org)

Thursday, March 22

8 P.M. - Genealogy SIG, Frank Warren ☺

All meetings, unless otherwise noted, are at Scotch Plains Rescue Squad, 1916 Bartle Ave., Scotch Plains, N.J.
Directions and map inside back cover.