

The Voice of FCUG

April 2003
Volume 23 No. 11
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Meeting 7:30 pm 1st
at New Canaan
Historical Society
13 Oenoke Ridge Road

BOILERPLATE

"The Voice of FCUG" is the monthly newsletter of the Fairfield County Computer Users Group, Inc., a registered non-profit organization dedicated to helping members use their PC computers. Non-commercial and non-profit users are free to copy or quote material herein; proper credit and sending a copy of the publication to the Editor would be appreciated.

Members can exchange ideas and opinions through this newsletter, at a monthly meeting held the first Tuesday of most months, at occasional SIG programs, and on a bulletin board reached from the Club Internet Web-site at www.fcug.org.

Meetings and SIG groups are open to the public. Membership costs \$30/Yr, prorated. For information and payment contact

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251 Weed Street, New Canaan, CT. 06840**

To submit articles or letters for The Voice send an e-mail message to thevoice@fcug.org, hopefully with article attached, or mail paper, or even a diskette in ASCII, Word, or WordPerfect format to:

The Voice, 280 Main Street, Westport, CT 06880

Oh, and the Historical Society is marked on the Hagstrom map of New Canaan.

The Editor's Desk

Now it can be told. Must confess that, the last couple of months, your Voice has come to you courtesy of MS Publisher after all! Lost control of the printer from OpenOffice and in both months had, at the last moment, to switch all the copy from the one program into the other. Publisher is pretty much off on its own; it can receive text or pictures, but can only save the whole document, with pictures embedded, in its own format, which I have yet to find anyone else able to read. To add insult to injury, it does not recognize (any more than any other MS program I know) the OpenOffice format. I noticed, after printing was done, several places in the March issue where I had missed translating advanced punctuation after the transfer. There may have been other strange characters lying around – I apologize. All is well now . . . I hope!

-ooOoo-



Program for 1st April 2003

Call to order Fearless Leader – Charles Bryk 7:30

Novice topic: . . . Effective Use of the Mouse – Roger Giler . . . 7:40
Care and feeding of what elsewhere in this issue
is dubbed the “Filthy Rodent” . . .

Q and A: Moderator – Dick Husta 8:00
Back by popular demand. We have to stop meeting like this, Nick!

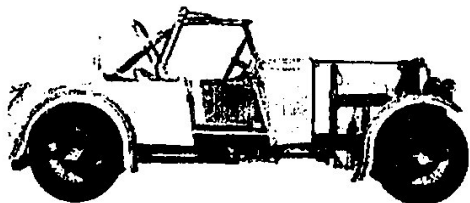
Epicurean Break Chef du Soir – Hugh Robertson. 8:20

Main topic: Adobe Acrobat – Bea Mull 8:30
Using the (free) Reader, and a look at the Real Thing.

(Possibly followed by a raffle)

Adjournment 10:00

LOOKIN' FOR A RIDE?



If anybody who wants to attend meetings has a transport problem, please mention it and together we will look for a solution. You can also contact Membership Chairman Dick Booth (dick.booth@juno.com or phone 203-847-8047). He can tell you who lives near you, or

might pass by on their way.

In Memoriam

It was with great sorrow that we heard that club member Jack McAllister died on the 4th of March 2003 – ironically, the same day as the March meeting. He was in the hospital for about 109 days and died of a form of pneumonia which did not respond to antibiotics. He was 86 years old and bright and alert right up to the end.

If members would like to send a card to his wife Polly McAllister her address is

1412 Meadow Ridge,

Redding CT 06896-3224

and the telephone number is

203-544-9463



THE WAY WE WERE – APRIL 1983

Graphics Cruncher – John Krause. 5 pages about a graphics program, with three pages of program listings.

“For Sale: RS-232 Interface Board. Original Radio Shack . . . \$150.00”

Ask Alan. Alan fielded two questions with complete answers, including program fragments.

The Mailbag – Marvin Kronenberg. Demonstration Datalist menu.

How to Use the \$NAME Routine in NewDos80 – Vigo Smith. Reprinted from S-BUG of December 1982.

Categories – Bruce T. Goldman. Four pages, including listing.

Board of Directors Meeting – Pat Todd.

“1. The FCUG newsletter is #1 in the USA, but Al can't do it alone.

Give him a call – give him a hand.

“ . . . 3. FCUG needs legal advice re incorporation. . . .”

FCUG Meeting – March 1, 1983 – Pat Todd.

“Nominating committee: Herb Cantor, Al Abrahamson, Sid Gross, Bob Jackson, Ed Miles, Roger Giler, Dennis Palmiero, Gligor Tashkovich.

“Cleanup Committee: Dave Pederson, Ira Friedman, Humphrey Udall, Joel Feinberg, Joe Powers.

“Set-up Committee: Dave Pederson, Don Beverly, Dave Berganini, Charles Castillo.

“Fair: . . . Committee: Aaron Bisberg, Don Beverly, Mike Brotherton, John Krause, Charles Castillo.”

Super Blinker Plus – Sid Gross. Yet another incarnation, this time with automatic formatting for date and phone number. Four-plus pages, including listing.

Satellite Calculator – Fred Wise. One-plus pages of listing for satellite-tracking program.

Finding online help for Microsoft Office applications

Ben Briggs

When you have a question about a Microsoft Office application, the first resource you're likely to use is the application's Help menu. Each Help menu offers a number of ways to search for answers and explanations. You can ask the Office Assistant a question, or search through the Help contents and index. With Office 2000 and more recent versions, you can even link to information on the Internet. However, when the Help menu doesn't provide an adequate answer to your question, don't give up – check out the Microsoft Knowledge Base, a searchable database of technical support articles covering Microsoft products, at <http://support.microsoft.com/search>.

For additional support, visit Microsoft Product Support Services at <http://support.microsoft.com/directory>.

Here you'll find a collection of personalized support options available for home, education and business customers; partners and resellers; developers; and IT professionals. The answers are out there... you just have to know where to look for them!

-ooOoo-

NOSE TO THE GROUND



Stand by for fireworks!

Phoenix Technologies are reported (found this in The Register in February) to be developing a new BIOS with diagnostic and even internet-connection capabilities, independent of which operating system is installed. They say it “promises a means for OEMs to include diagnostic and self-help capabilities, Internet access and remote desktop builds, even after a major system malfunction.”

Being outside the operating system and using reserved (hidden?) areas on the hard disk, it will allow users to run diagnostics, some applications and internet access “almost instantly – without waiting for Windows (or Linux) to boot.”

The Register saw a demo running on a Compaq Tablet PC. It was as yet

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not completely organized, but seemed to show that one could boot a Windows PC and go straight to the Internet without touching Windows.

Interesting to see what happens when this news hits TBOR (The Beast of Redmond, as some call them). Apparently Phoenix expects it will be ready in about three months – less by the time you read this. . .

* * * * *

Microsoft announced last December, the Register reported recently, that they intend to develop Windows Rights Management Services (known as RMS) to control what business users can do with sensitive documents. It means you will not be able to print or forward confidential files, including financial reports, legal and planning documents. As the Register says, “Just the thing to prevent embarrassing leaks then, at least in theory.” At first, the system will be useful only for guarding Office 2003 files, but this will expand to cover other Web and corporate documents.

Actually, it sounds a lot like the user restrictions already available in Linux, and maybe Windows itself. In Linux I can specify that certain files can be read but not written, for example, or not read at all, by different users.

However it may be, RMS uses a new (MS?) standard called XrML (Extensible Rights Markup Language), and Microsoft will release two software development kits in the second quarter of 2003 to enable developers to begin to build rights management capabilities into intranet and client applications. Is XrML another diversion from the otherwise-agreed standards of everybody else? I guess those interested will find out in due course. . .

* * * * *

Also read in VnuNet a few weeks back that a new version of the Lovgate.C worm is floating around. Don't leave your inbox full of old email, as this variation replies to all your incoming email and all those old messages lurking in your inbox. It also looks for email addresses stored in web page caches on your hard drive.

The item's author added “While it does not destroy data it does leave a Trojan that allows remote access to your computer via port 10168 and sends a message to either 54love@fescomail.net, or hacker117@163.com/”

The infected messages come with a variety of headers – and watch out for one of the following attachments:

billgt.exe	card.exe	docs.exe	fun.exe
hamster.exe	humor.exe	images.exe	joke.exe
midsonng.exe	news_doc.exe	pics.exe	PSPGame.exe
s3msong.exe	searchURL.exe		setup.exe
tamagotxi.exe			

Luckily, infection reports are nowhere near as common as Klez and Bugbear. Still, keep your eyes open and your Anti-Virus up-to-date.

* * * * *

Michael Robertson, he of Lindows fame, is still being attacked by TBOR, which claims the word “Windows” belongs to it. But the District Court judges in Seattle have required Microsoft to produce so much evidence (over 300 boxes, I read – wonder how big a “box” is?) that the trial is having to be put back from April to the start of December. That'll keep Redmond busy!

---ooOoo---

Linux Down Under **OR A TRS Model 4 user first acquires a PC.** **By John Mercer**

*Adapted from e-mail messages by John Mercer, Editor of the Newsletter of SYDTRUG,
The Sydney TRS-80/MSDOS Users' Group.
(Some of us may remember our first essays into the GUI environment...).*

Ever since the early 80s, when the IBM PC was in its infancy, I have been prejudiced against MS-DOS. From what I heard about it, it was nothing more than a revamped CP/M, and in those days was nowhere near as good as the Logical Systems offerings for the TRS-80. I was continually hearing moans and groans about unreliability and such like problems. With the introduction of Windows the situation didn't seem to improve. Also, I was not impressed by the Graphical User Interface which most people seemed to go into raptures over.

While I had little thought of forsaking my Model 4, it seemed for a while that OS/2 might be a better option if I ever decided to change. However, regardless of its merits, OS/2 didn't seem to catch on, and in any case I still wasn't particularly interested in changing.

Then it became obvious that a certain company which shall remain nameless had no intention of continuing to support anything but the more recent versions of their GUI-based OSs, and that finally convinced me that there had to be a better way to go. Eventually I heard about Linux which seemed to have a lot going for it. In fact the only drawback I could see was that the majority of computer users seemed to have succumbed to the brain-washing of the GUI proponents and therefore there would be little, if any, support available from fellow club members who were in a position to help.

Still, not really wanting to face the prospect of learning a completely new system, in all probability I would not have made a move to get a new machine if circumstances had not seemed to make it imperative.

When our group first joined APCUG, my position as newsletter editor required that I be able to access the GLOBALNET, as it was then known, in order to download articles. In those days it was possible, by courtesy of various sponsors, to access their BBS via Compuserve for up to one hour per day with the sponsors picking up the charges. This served as my introduction

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to telecomputing. However, technology interfered once more, and it became no longer possible to use the Compuserve connection. This led to my introduction to the Internet. A local ISP, run by an ex-member of our user group, was supporting those like myself who could not, or perhaps would not, use more technically-advanced telecomputing methods. Although I had expected the change to be traumatic, it turned out to be fairly straightforward after I surmounted the first couple of hurdles.

It was only then that I discovered how technically inefficient the Compuserve connection had been. It had been quite common for me to complete a full hour session without getting a single file downloaded due to aborted transfers. I had been putting this down to the inability of the Model 4 to meet the challenge. However, once I connected through the Internet, there was rarely an instance of a transfer not being completed.

Then, regrettably, once again technology stepped in and made things difficult. The ISP, a relatively small family-run business giving superb service to its customers, combined with a larger organisation. In due course, this meant that they eliminated all their analogue modems and it was no longer possible to connect with the Model 4.

It took me some weeks before I was able to locate my present ISP who was prepared to support analogue modems and shell accounts. So, when they in turn decided to pension off their low-speed equipment, I was not prepared to go through another “search and locate” experience, as it is most unlikely there is still an ISP who supports analogue modems, at least for new customers. My Model 4, which has been upgraded with an XLR8er board using the HD64180 CPU microprocessor, can satisfactorily download files at 9600 bps, but writing to the screen is unreliable above 4800 bps, apparently due to the absence of suitable handshaking.

All this led to my buying a contemporary computer which has Red Hat Linux 7.2 as its only operating system. Having been thoroughly frightened by some of the horror stories which I had heard concerning the effects of many and varied forms of viruses, etc., particularly as I had heard there had been some which could affect Linux machines, I decided it would be a sensible idea to have my machine fitted with two hard drives in caddies. Then one could act as the active drive while the other could serve as a backup, removed from the machine, to ensure that it could not be infected with a virus and would be available to get things up and running with the minimum amount of trauma.

It seemed a good idea, but in the event, things didn't work out quite the way they were planned. For some reason which I cannot yet understand, the dealer decided that it would be preferable if the two drives were of different sizes. According to their logic, it was supposed to make it less likely that I would back up the wrong drive, and thus defeat the whole purpose of the backup exercise. Personally, I believe that if I am about to back up the wrong drive, and it must be admitted that this is by no means impossible, the size of the drive is not likely to prevent me doing so.

As it happened, the installation seemed to have been made with BOTH drives participating. This appeared to be confirmed by the fact that it was not possible to boot the machine with one of the drives missing. It must be

confessed that I cannot now recall whether I tried both possibilities or only one, but I am almost certain that I checked the case with 20 GB drive missing. In any event that is all in the past. When I originally placed my order, I made it quite clear that I was particularly interested in working from the command line, but fortunately the installation did include enabling Gnome.

I say fortunately because at first the keyboard came close to driving me completely crazy. It was set up with what seemed to be the maximum possible repeat rate and minimum delay. I have never been a touch typist and if you have ever tried copy typing with a Model 4 you will realise that having the keyboard permanently fixed to the computer makes it very difficult to have the hard copy on the desk in front of the machine and still type effectively the way any typing tutor would expect. As a result, my typing technique would drive a tutor to distraction. The only way I could get any success with the new keyboard was to attack it like a woodpecker and this I found extremely tiring. Anyway, I was unable to find out how to fix this problem from the command line, but eventually worked out how to get it sorted via Gnome. I never was able to enable the key click feature no matter what I tried. This would have helped considerably as an audible indication of unwanted key repeats, but no matter, I guess I will have to live without it.

One of the reasons why I am so slow to acquire skill with new projects is that I am reluctant to try anything until I am reasonably sure what is going to happen before I actually start. No doubt you have often heard the advice given to beginners concerning computers: "Don't be afraid that anything you type at the keyboard can do any actual harm to the computer. At the worst, you will only have to reboot and start again." Well, my attitude was encouraged by an experience I had soon after getting the new machine. I had purchased a copy of "Linux for Dummies" thinking that that ought to be a suitable level for a beginner. Unfortunately, most of it was unintelligible to me. By the time I know enough to understand it, I probably won't need it. But that seems to be par for the course with most computer documentation. Written by geniuses, but unintelligible to beginners. There of course have been some notable exceptions.

Anyway, I did find one bit which seemed to be of interest and it referred to customizing the X system. First of all it suggested making a backup of ONE file so that it would be possible to return to whence you came if things didn't work out. This seemed to a very sensible precaution, so I followed the instruction.

Unfortunately it appears that there should have been TWO files backed up, as after I had completed the exercise it seemed that two files were created during the process. I was not actually intending to change anything. All that was planned was to have a look at what it was all about.

At first it seemed to be simple enough and each successive screen gave you the opportunity to do nothing and proceed to the next screen if desired. Then came the poser. One screen insisted upon making a choice and there did not seem to be any way out other than to make a choice. I guess that I must have made the wrong one, because after the exercise was finished, things were not as they should have been. Well, no problem. That was why the author

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suggested backing up that file. So all that would be necessary would be to go in and copy it back over the altered file and all would be well.

Not so! When I inspected the directory containing the file which had been backed up, it became apparent that TWO files had been created during the exercise. What with one thing and another, it took me some time to get things back to where it seemed they ought to be. I still cannot be sure, but it seems quite possible that my reckless venture into the unknown may have precipitated a near disaster which occurred soon after. Everything SEEMED to be working properly and the Linux machine was sitting there minding its own business and displaying a file which I had downloaded from the BBS and subsequently unzipped (compared to the TRS-80 the speed was incredible) while I transcribed it into the Model 4 for use in the newsletter. (At that time I still had not mastered the art of mounting the floppy drive to transfer files between the two machines.) All at once I noticed that both hard drives appeared to be working continuously. After watching them for a couple of minutes they showed no sign of the LEDs going out, so shutting down seemed to be in order. It was not, however, all beer and skittles. The shutdown process hung part way through and it was necessary to start pressing buttons. After a few moments to let things settle down, and attempt was made to start it up again. This too only proceeded so far before hanging, so it was evident that it was time to send for the Mounties!

Next day (naturally the problem occurred in the middle of the night) I rang the dealer and described the symptoms. The technician who had actually installed Linux tried to talk me through some corrective measures but eventually decided that it would be necessary for me to bring it back and he would reinstall the system. It would only be necessary to bring in the tower. There would be no need for any of the peripherals. The machine was collected a couple of days later and when I got it home it was evident that things were not as they ought to be. Most noticeably, the mouse was completely inoperative.

I rang again and was told to bring it back with both keyboard and mouse. It turned out the technician had forgotten that I used a serial mouse and had set up for a PS/2 one. When the machine was initially put together, the only three-button mouse they were able to get was a serial type. I was also told the BIOS had been changed – possibly a direct result of my excursion into the unknown.

At least some good came out of it. The technician organised the drives so that the machine can now be booted with only the 40 GB drive in situ. Also he enabled the printer which had been overlooked in the initial installation – though I have yet to try using the printer with the Linux machine. All that little exercise cost me \$150 and being deprived of the machine for about a week. So perhaps you can see why I am reluctant to “bravely go where no man has gone before!”

When I eventually got the system up and running again a number of changes became apparent. The most significant is that Gnome is no longer installed. At least, when I key in “StartX”, what comes up is KDE. As you are probably tired of hearing, I am not enamoured of the GUI idea, but it does

seem to me that Gnome was a bit easier to make sense of than KDE. Not having a background in Windows, the whole GUI business is completely new to me, and I fail to see what the attraction is for those who seem so enthusiastic about it. Those little icons, for the most part, seem to me to be pointless. Until one is thoroughly used to each one there seems to be no way of working out what they represent. To me the whole business is counter-intuitive. One repeatedly hears the argument that “one picture is worth a thousand words”. That may be true in some cases, but why is it then that so many pictures need captions to explain them? As I often say, I gave up picture books soon after leaving kindergarten.

Pictures may enhance the text, but rarely, in my opinion, do they make a satisfactory substitute. I guess that skill with the mouse is largely a matter of hand and eye coordination so, hopefully, practice will make perfect, or at least produce some improvement. Presently, when I am using the “filthy rodent” an observer could be excused for supposing that I was intoxicated....

--oOoOo--

A Visit to Westchester

by Bea Mull

Recently I took a little field trip and attended a meeting of the Westchester PC User Group. They hold meetings on the first Thursday of each month – two days after our regular meetings.

If you've been to a MarketPro computer show at the Westchester County Center in White Plains, WPCUG usually has representatives sitting at a table out front. Nice, targeted exposure.

Their brochure says they have 650 members. Based on the 50 or so people who attended the meeting I visited, their demographics seem to be about the same as ours.

Meetings are held in the auditorium of the White Plains Middle School. Although I'm hardly “geographically challenged”, I think the map on their newsletter is hard to follow. If I'd spent 5 more minutes figuring out where I was, I was going to give up and go to the Westchester Mall.

The meetings start at 7 with an hour's worth of questions and answers led by the club president, John Hauf. Although they had microphones for people in the audience to use, most people didn't use them. And those that did didn't hold them close enough. It was verrrry difficult to hear. And since the questions or comments from the audience weren't repeated by the president or the main speaker, it was like a series of personal conversations were taking place. It gave me a whole new appreciation for our accommodations at the Historical Society (CTPC facilities are acoustically better too.)

There did seem to be a lot of talk about spam. And a fair amount of AOL-bashing.

The regular part of the meeting starts at 8 o'clock. This night's meeting

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featured International Paper. It was similar to a program CTPC/FCUG had a couple of years ago, complete with eh freebie packs of papers.

Membership in WPCUG (covers an entire family) is \$50 a year. It may sound like a lot compared to FCUG or CTPC, but for that price members get access to a wide variety of workshops (SIGs). Based on the number of announcements during the meeting, it's apparent that the printed and posted workshop schedules aren't cast in stone. Workshops are held in a variety of locations around White Plains.

No refreshments were served, though several people had cups of coffee marked "Dunkin Donuts". I wondered where the DD was – it seemed I'd been on every street in the area.

The club's upcoming schedule of main meeting topics doesn't seem to be posted anywhere, but they went over it during the meeting and some of it sounds very interesting:

March – Video Editing

April – Dreamweaver

May – a representative from the District Attorney's office will speak

June – open

July – build a computer with John Hauf

August – swap meet

The meeting ended about 9:30. Forty-five miles later I was back home in Stratford. Thank goodness it was easier to find my way home than it was to find the meeting. . . .

For those of you who may be interested in visiting a computer club meeting somewhere during your travels, check out www.apcug.org and poke around until you find the directory (listed by state and country) of user groups. Most user groups are very receptive to visitors.

---ooOoo---

Q&A by C.G.Delan

(Copied from the January 2003 issue of Hard-Copy, the journal of the Chicago Computer Society (www.ccs.org))

Q: *System Restore in Windows XP or ME is not a "Go Back" program. For a comprehensive discussion, I append Fred Langa's description: www.informationweek.com/shared/printableArticle?doc_id=IWK20020711S0009*

Briefly, it doesn't back up your user files and documents. It focuses on system-level files; it doesn't back up most files you create. If you permanently delete an important document or spreadsheet, or want to go back to an earlier version of such a document, System Restore

can't help you. It isn't a true "roll back" tool. If you install new software that crashes badly, System Restore may be able to get Windows running, but may not erase the errant program as a whole.

A: OK, you're correct, but I'm not sure why you're telling me this. I presume you're expanding on my answer on the subject in the Nov. *Hard-Copy*, and that is probably worth doing. If you felt more info was needed, others may have felt the same. Here are the relevant points from that item:

“. . . GoBack was sold to Roxio . . . Microsoft's System Restore is a similar, *less fully-featured*, utility . . . [Emphasis added.] System Restore is very useful *if* you have an emergency. It is not something to be used casually . . . But when nothing else works it can be a lifesaver.

“ You might also want to consider buying GoBack itself, as it offers more flexibility than MS's ST. . . ”

I've used SR many times and while, as you correctly note, it is no GoBack, it *can* be a lifesaver when WinME self-destructs (as it is wont to do). I haven't had occasion to use it in XP. It doesn't do everything, but what it does is useful and better than nothing. Anything that makes it easier (or even possible) to get Windoze resurrected is nice to have around. Langa's explanation of it is worth reading and I commend it to readers. But I also suggest readers consider replacing SR with GoBack.

Thanks for writing. I urge any readers who disagree with my comments, or find them erroneous or lacking, to let me know. By the way, Jerry Maizell tells me he is working on a new review of GoBack 3.x, which should appear in a future issue of *Hard-Copy*.

Q: *I've heard of a new browser that doesn't look like a browser, so that anyone approaching or passing your desk will think you're working. Of course, I would never think of playing during work hours. But if there is such a browser it could be fun to have around. Does it exist, or are my pals pimping me?*

A: The “Boss key” is back!

In olden days when DOS was boss and Lotus 123 was what office workers were supposed to have on their screens, some genius came up with software that allowed you to play games, then when the real boss approached you could hit a “Boss key” and up popped a spreadsheet simulation. Times and software have changed, but apparently the desire to beat the boss hasn't. Enter *Ghostzilla*, “the invisible browser.”

“Ghostzilla browser shields you from the looks of people around you when they try to see if you are surfing the Web. With Ghostzilla they see your normal work screen. You see the Web page, drawn to appear inside your work application and to look like that application to a bystander.

“If someone comes too close, move the mouse away from the Web page and it disappears, leaving the original application frame. When the coast clears, another mouse move brings Ghostzilla and the Web page back inside your application.”

That quote is from <http://ghostzilla.com>, where you can download the Mozilla-based beauty for free. If you're willing to part with ten bucks plus shipping, you can get Ghostzilla on a CD and run it from the CD, thus leaving

no tracks of any kind on your PC.

The developers make a sound, if tricky, point: good companies and good managers understand that a happy, relaxed worker is a more productive one. Thus, they say, “The happiest and most productive workplaces are where programs like Ghostzilla are completely unnecessary.”

Of course, if you work in a less enlightened place, your Ghostzillain may haunt you on the unemployment line.

Q: *Recently purchased a Polaroid CD-R/CD-RW (\$29.95 after rebates). Included with the CD-RW is software by NTI. The CD-RW works fine using the Roxio Easy CD Creator 5 Platinum software.*

When I try to use the NTI software it comes up with a window that says “cannot recognize the Polaroid Hardware.” Went to the NTI web site, could not get any answer. Called the software company, they were as useless as a tit on a boar hog. I tried everything I know to make it work. Any help will be appreciated.

A: Very good deal on the CD burner. Congrats on being a smart shopper.

It sounds like you have *both* Roxio's and NTI's CD-burning software installed on the same computer. Generally speaking, that is not a good idea. You should select one or the other and uninstall the one you don't select. As Roxio is working well, I would suggest you stick with it, unless you have reason to believe that NTI does something that Roxio does not (or does it better).

If it works, don't fix it and don't fool with it. Just enjoy it.

Q: *I don't trust the security and encryption abilities of ANY website. I believe any website is vulnerable to a proficient hacker. Thus, I have never given my SSN on a website, nor a credit card number. Any business that does not provide a verbal option for getting my credit card by phone loses my business – and this has happened. Today I wanted to take advantage of United Airlines “Chicago specials” (\$89 round-trip to Washington,DC) and was told, upon calling, that I had to apply on line (OK) and provide my credit card number (not OK). Lowest comparable reservation fare by phone” \$198. What's your position on this? Is it legal to give credit info online in order to get the best prices?*

A: IANAL. (I Am Not A Lawyer.) And asking a lawyer about anything is likely to cost substantially more than the difference in airfares. Not to mention that if one goes to court one may well come out in worse condition than when going in. That's why I always vote against retaining judges. I figure if we keep changing them they can't do as much harm as when they get comfortable on their benches.

You are right that any website can be hacked. You are also right that giving your SS number out (on the Web or anywhere else) is dangerous, and I strongly recommend against doing so on the Web. I don't even like to give it out in person and do so reluctantly even when it's required by law (such as with banks).

The neo-*proto-Commie-Fascists* who prance around the halls of our state and federal governmental dens of iniquity would like nothing better than making SS numbers into the kind Hitler's SS used to tattoo on their prisoners'

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arms. That is also the goal of the current push to consolidate state driving licenses into a national one. (Though they haven't yet come up with the tattooing idea, give 'em time.)

Credit card numbers, however, are another matter entirely. Here's why:

1. Most, if not all, credit cards limit your liability to \$50.
2. You give your credit card to strangers all the time, without a second thought. In a restaurant you give your card to a waitress who disappears for 15 minutes. What is she doing – or what *might* she be doing – with it? Photocopying it?

Similarly, you give your card to the teenager at the gas station, whom you've never seen before and may never see again. He could easily run it through a cheap device to copy and reproduce it, and you would never see him do it. This is a common occurrence across the country.

When you give your credit card number by phone to an airline clerk how do you know that the clerk isn't making a record of it for his own personal use? Or to sell the number to criminals? Some airlines even use prison inmates to answer their phones. So do some computer companies and other businesses.

3. I've never had a case where a credit company has collected a disputed charge. Here's a strong example related to me by a colleague:

"I once was forced to give my Amex card number over the phone to a towing company in order to get my car back. The towing outfit was strictly a bunch of thieves, as they had already been paid for the tow by the motor club. But I *did* give them my card number.

"Yet when I later wrote Amex explaining the circumstances, they reversed the charge."

For the reasons stated above, and because buying online is so convenient and often so much cheaper, I do not hesitate to buy online with a credit card.

BUT I am careful to deal only with companies that I believe are legitimate. I buy online, with a credit card, almost every day, have done for years, without (serious) problems so far. I buy everything from books to computer equipment to airline tickets. I love buying online. I detest buying by phone. When I buy online I always have a record of the transaction, just in case there should be a problem. When buying by phone everything disappears into the ether.

OTOH (On The Other Hand) *never* give any personal or financial information in response to e-mail. No legitimate company would send such e-mail.

(I do not mind giving my credit card number by e-mail when *I* originate the transaction. There are few cases, however, where this is necessary. If unsure in any way, just say no.)

Q: I would like to ask you a question about DVD players if I may. I was going to buy one when I heard that the new disks were going to have gold backs instead of silver backs. The word is that some machines can't read the gold backs. Is this true? How would I be able to tell from reading the box? Thanks in advance for your answer.

A: I am no DVD maven. Understanding the machinations of the entertainment

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industry monopolistic trolls is an art, not a science.

So, as usual when I find myself twisting slowly in the computer wind, I turned to Doug Allen the Oracle of Ottawa (Illinois), master of BSD, Unix and 1,000 things that most folks (including me) know little or nothing about. Here's Doug's response:

“Is there such a thing as a gold back DVD? Yes. Will it break many of the current players? We shall see.

“The change was (supposedly) to allow them to go to higher density and capacity. It's also supposed to make it harder to use the DVD/VCR combo units to copy DVDs.

“Some test results suggest that some older DVD players may have problems getting reliable playback on disks that are copied. Nothing suggested that an original would fail to play in a current player. Of course, this was supposedly true when CD-ROMs first came out, too. They managed to mess up a lot of early adopters there also.

“It would be silly, given the state of the market. But it wouldn't be the first time that the studios, the vendors and the content providers would've shot themselves in the foot either. I'll wait and see.”

Beyond Doug's wise words, for a general understanding of DVDs, here are two sites that are as reliable as info on DVDs gets:

- x The “official DVD FAQ: www.dvddemystified.com/dvdfaq.html. The FAQ is updated fairly regularly.
- x VCD Help, which covers whatever's left that FAQ may have missed: www.vcdhelp.com.

Q: I'm a neat freak. I admit it. I like to keep my Internet Explorer toolbar as simple and uncluttered as possible. My IE toolbar includes only the menu and the back and forward arrows, home, stop and refresh icons. Is there a way also to do without the Address bar (which takes up so much screen real estate) and call it up on demand? I recall reading about doing that, but can't find the reference.

A: I respect neatniks with the same conditional stipulation by which I respect non-smokers: as long as they don't harass me to become one, I let them live.

Yes, by all means, get rid of that wasteful and unsightly Address bar: right click the Toolbar, then uncheck Address Bar. You are now in control. Press Ctrl+O, type in your URL, then press Enter.

Now neaten up your e-mail by getting rid of the HTML format in which you sent your message. If the Great Webmaster in The Sky had intended e-mail to be HTML, we would have all been born as hyperlinks. Until the Raelians work that out, send e-mail in plain text, as the Elohim intended.

Found at a website which shall remain anonymous . . .

FCUG board meeting 14 Jan 03

Attending: Lenny Bloom, Dick Booth, Charles Bryk, Andy Burns, Bob Clark, Ed Congelton, Clyde Hinman, Beatrice Mull and Gordon Nugent.

Future meeting subjects, probably set for Feb and Mar, with four possibilities for May and June.

Feb: John Roy: half program, fill with Parks Picker and possible extended Q&A.

March: Alpha 5 Relational Database will get back to Charles shortly. Lenny, KVM (keyboard video mouse) – novice subject could possibly expand to main program.

April: Bill will do Linux/Open Office, mentioned as a scheduling swap arranged by Ed.

May or June: PC Warehouse: Bea will check them.

OCR: Charles will invite Alan Abramson.

MP-3: Walt of CPC expert, or Marv Fleischman.

Front Page, Microsoft's big program: by new MS regional man.

Alternate meeting sites: Ed has learned that High-speed DSL service may be available to us in the Historical Society in three months. However, some consideration of alternate sites is necessary in view of expanding membership and attendance, and future joint meetings with Norwalk club. Possibles: Westport Library, Norwalk Library second-floor room, return to New Canaan Country Day School.

December party: Despite success record of these parties, some thought was given to improvements for next time. We could trim the \$539 subsidy spent this time by eliminating the bartender, the free wine, or both. Attractive alternate site to explore: Giovanni II.

Membership: Dick will bring more of our attention to guests by providing them with bigger badges, so we can make them feel more welcome.

--o-O-o--

KVM SWITCHES

A FCUG Novice Presentation By Lenny Bloom

KVM stands for Keyboard Video Mouse switch. These switches are designed to let you run multiple computers using one monitor, keyboard and mouse. Say, in your house, you have limited desk space, but you want to view both your old computer and your new CPU. You cable in a KVM and you can switch between computers. No software is required. With higher versions of KVMs you can attach 4, 8, 16, or up to as many as 512 computers, to show on

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one screen. This can save enormously on the cost of equipment and space.

Since this is not networking or data sharing, you cannot spread a virus from one computer on the switch to another. One FCUGer has hooked up his old CPU and a new machine. He downloads from the Internet to the old machine and test anything questionable there, before taking a floppy and moving the program over to his business computer.

Shown at the FCUG meeting were three versions of KVMs: a Belkin four-CPU switch; a clone six-CPU switch; and an EDI MAX four-CPU switch.

The price depends upon the number for computer connections, the brand and cabling. Be careful to check that cables are included in your price, or that might be an additional purchase. On some models there are audio switches that transfer speaker and microphone connections. Another price-raising feature is an “on screen” display. A KVM cable switch can have a fifteen-foot cable, but you can buy extender cables that will carry your signal to up to 2000 feet. This and Daisy-Chain connections are how Internet providers back up to more than 500 CPU servers in a room with one monitor.

Before you go out to buy, check what connections you have on your computer: USB, PS/2, or AT. Your keyboard should also have the same connection or an adaptor cable.

You can pick up KVM switches at office stores such as CompUSA or Staples. A Belkin KVM 4-CPU switch, with Audio, costs \$160 at Staples. A two-port, with audio, is \$130. These Belkins have five-year warranties. Prices for KVMs range from \$60 for a 2-CPU KVM to \$500 for a 16-CPU KVM with “on-screen” display.

You can buy KVMs over the Internet at www.tigerdirect.com or www.computergate.com. A fifteen-foot, tri-headed, KVM cable with PS/2 connectors at both ends is \$9.99 and shipping from Computergate. By studying product descriptions on the Internet sites noted you can learn more about the switches. You can also pick up KVMs at the local computer fairs; in this area look at www.coganfairs.com or www.marketpro.com to check their schedules.

--ooOoo--

FCUG Meeting 4th March 2003

Fearless Leader Charles Bryk brought the meeting to some sort of order at 7.32 pm. The evening started with the usual warnings about cigarettes and the need for care in this location. Actually, although the room was by no means full, there was an absolute crush of people and equipment, as both speakers had brought their own hardware. A rough count gave 55 as the attendance once things got rolling. Two full desktop computers, each with its own screen-display hardware, take up quite a space, and with the extra laptops, etc., it seemed at one point it would be hard to get things organized at all. . .

Jim Sullivan warned us about the Mac/PC Shootout coming in three weeks at CTPC, and we were given brief one-line indications of the next three months' meetings. Wait for it – not going to spoil the suspense here. There was also some discussion of Juno, which at \$10/month can offer cheap access to the Internet. Somehow, the date 1977 appears in these notes, but with the first PCs coming out about 1979, it seems doubtful Juno could have been that early.

Lenny Bloom gave us the Novice presentation, on KVMs. What are they? was the first question. This reporter had thought of KiloVolt Meters, and wondered why they would be needed, and Andy Burns introduced the subject as possibly covering a breakfast cereal, or a birth control pill. But it turned out to be quite mundane: KVM stands for “Keyboard, Video, Mouse”, and a KVN is a multi-switch – with a twist. Since Lenny Bloom has kindly provided the Voice with an article on the subject which appears above, no more will be said here, except that he did hand around sample switchboxes for people to examine.

Martin Hamar emceed the Q&A, at which it seemed Dell was the major topic, and a lot of rhubarb developed as the session wore on.

Q: My new Dell monitor came with cables for both digital and analog connections. Why?

A: The monitors are packed with both for convenience.

A+: It is best with digital screens to use the native resolution the screen is designed for. Higher or lower, picture quality is reduced.

Q: Should I use a wireless, or wired, network?

A: Hard-wired is as much as ten times faster. Also the security is better. Remember the stories in the Voice about linking into office networks from the street outside?

A+: The streets of New York have, in places, strange symbols painted on the footpaths. These are symbols for hackers indicating “hot spots” for free access to networks, rather like the symbols used by hobos n the Depression.

A+: Linksys can provide amplifiers for wireless networks allowing contact over greater distances (and more chance for hangers-on!).

Q: How can I pick an ISP?

A: Do a web search with Google for “Choose an ISP”

Q: I cannot make contact with either my D; drive or my CD-ROM.

A: If both are on the same channel, the motherboard cable connection may have worked loose.

Q: My screensaver and the sleep mode on my monitor clash.

A: Get rid of the screensaver. They are not needed today.

Q: On bootup I often get a Windows Protection Error, followed by a fall-back to Safe Mode. Then I have to boot again.

A: Your RAM may be on the way out, or the sockets may have loosened.

Q: I have an XP and two 98SE computers. If a 98SE machine copies a file from the XP, all seems fine, but if the XP copies or moves a file from a 98SE there is a ten-second delay with everything locked up before the transfer is made.

A: The XP is probably checking transfer permissions, looking for viruses, etc.

A+: You could remove the problem by converting the XP machine to FAT32 hard disk format.

A++: If you map the drives on bootup the problem can also be reduced. (How to do this? “The answer is obvious!” was the final reply. . .)

As the discussion wandered, Martin gave such an interesting introduction to astronomy and computers that he was almost booked on the spot for a future meeting. Watch the Voice!

The Snyders had been standing patiently all this time, it seemed, waiting at the refreshment table for customers to appear, and they certainly did. There were acres of doughnut holes, cookies and applejuice, more than enough even for this hungry throng.

At last it was time for the Linux demonstration. Unfortunately, the speaker had left his notes at home (!) so a few of the introductory comments were wrong, or forgotten. It turns out that what should have been said was roughly this:

In 1991 a Dutch college professor named Andrew Tanenbaum wrote a small UNIX-like, student-level operating system for the PC called MINIX, and made the software available in a book he wrote called “Operating System.” Meanwhile, Richard Stallman had started the GNU project to provide free software. A lot of programs were written, but what was really lacking was the kernel of a better operating system – and in August of that year a young Finnish university student named Linus Torvalds announced by e-mail to the MINIX news group that he had written one. People flocked to it, and soon Linux was being ported to other machines. In April 1996, researchers at Los Alamos National Laboratory, instead of spending millions on a super-computer, used Linux to run 68 PCs as a single parallel-processing machine to simulate atomic shock waves. This home-rigged combination only cost about \$150,000 – and ran steadily for several months without a re-boot.

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The Linux logo is a penguin – like the floppy toy on the computer at the meeting. Why? Linus Torvalds visited the southern hemisphere, where he tried to pat a penguin, and it bit his hand. (Seems as good a reason as any. . .)

The demonstration machine, which started in Windows ME and showed the existence for that OS of the OpenOffice suite, was re-booted into Linux, where not only was this issue of the Voice spun through in OpenOffice for Linux, but other word processors and spreadsheets were shown, and connection made to the Web. Basically, anything you want to do with Windows can already be done with Linux – and with many different programs from which to choose. For example, not only was OpenOffice available on the demonstration machine, but Koffice and Star Office as well, each with a full suite of options – and all came with the system installation package.

Probably the major differences between Linux and Windows are: that you write 'cd /' with a space and a forward slash, instead of 'cd\'; that 'ls' or 'ls -l' replaces 'dir' to show a list of folder contents; and that drives are treated as file folders, not hardware. It is also possible to read and write MS-format drives, while Windows cannot even show the presence of a Linux partition, except when FDISK is run. There were quite a number of questions, but your reporter found it hard to keep track of what was going on at this point.

Enough. Time for the raffle. There were several really nice prizes – and the first winner of the evening was Charles Bryk, our Fearless Leader! He recused himself, and other winners came forward when called to retrieve the goodies. What was sad was that two people would also have been winners, if they had not left before that part of the meeting. . .

Finally, everything ground to a halt and we piled the chairs back in the closet, packed up the hardware and carted it out into the evening chill some minutes after 10pm.

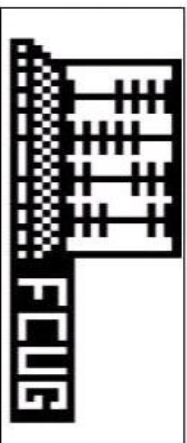
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