

December 2004 Volume 20 Number 12

PPCUG NEWS

A PUBLICATION OF THE PRINCETON PC USERS GROUP

Holiday Party and Elections Monday, December 13, 2004

The election of officers for 2005 will be held at our Annual Meeting. There should also be a nice selection of snacks for your holiday enjoyment. There is no formal program scheduled but just two hours for you to socialize with other members.

Lawrence Library
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
US Alternate Route 1 South & Darrah Lane, Lawrenceville, NJ
*Meetings of an organization at any of the facilities of the Mercer County Library System
in no way imply endorsement of its programs.*

Coming Events:

January 10, 2005 - Single-disk Linux by Kim Goldenberg
February 14, 2005 - Google by Joel May

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This is the last newsletter I will put together as PPCUG Editor. I hope you've enjoyed the last 18 issues as much as I've enjoyed doing them. We are moving out of the area so I will be leaving the club. I will miss seeing all of you and enjoying the varied programs at our meetings. Thank you for the support you've given me - I hope you will continue to give help to my successor. Oh, and happy holidays to you and your family.

- Don Arrowsmith

About PPCUG

General Meetings

Second Monday of the month at the Lawrenceville Library, Alternate Route 1 and Darrah Lane.

7:00 PM: Social Time / Tech Corner

7:30 PM: Meeting comes to Order

7:45 PM: Featured presentation

For information about upcoming meetings or joining PPCUG, see:

<http://www.ppcug-nj.org>

or email us at:

ppcug@njcc.com (Please include "OK" in the subject line.)

Board Meetings

Board meetings are open to all members. Notice of an upcoming meeting will be posted on the web site.

Board Members

President:

Clarke Walker 609-883-5262

Vice-President:

Tom Carman 732-828-6055

Secretary:

Don Arrowsmith 609-883-9874

Treasurer:

Paul Kurivchack 908-218-0778

Members-At-Large:

Al Axelrod 609-737-2827

Vic Laurie 609-924-1220

Kim Goldenberg 609-631-9140

Sol Libes 609-520-9024

Chairpersons

Hospitality:

Bill Hawryluk 609-655-0923

Member Records:

Paul Kurivchack 908-218-0778

Newsletter Editor:

Don Arrowsmith 609-883-9874

Program Coordinator:

Sol Libes 609-520-9024

Web Master:

Don Arrowsmith 609-883-9874

2005 Annual Dues

Dues are \$40 per calendar year with a mailed newsletter or \$20 per year with online access to the newsletter. New members pay \$3.25 or \$1.75 per month times the number of months remaining in the current year.



Minutes of the November Meeting

The formal meeting was opened by Clarke at 7:35 with a request for nominations. All of the incumbent board members are running for reelection with the exception of the Secretary. Elections will be held during the December meeting. Topics discussed during the Q&A included: Can files quarantined by AdAware be selectively restored; A user can't run Scandisk or Disk Cleanup on his system. Suggested causes were one or more corrupt files on C: or files in the IE cache with long file names; A user followed a suggestion from an earlier meeting and replaced the hard drive on his W98 system with a new, larger one and upgraded to WXP; Q - What's the best backup solution? A- Buy an external USB hard drive; A user wanted to know how the alphabetize his favorites - Open the favorites, Right click and select Sort by Name; A user is getting an error message from Outlook when trying to search multiple contact folders.

Vic Laurie began his overview of the Windows Registry just after 8. Covering both the W9x and WXP registries, he talked about its structure and what it's used for. Backing up, editing and cleaning the registry were described. The full set of slides is available at Vic's web site:

http://vlaurie.com/computers2/slides/shows/Registry_files/frame.htm



Toshiba Memory Problems

Certain Toshiba notebooks have bad memory modules which could malfunction under certain rare conditions. Toshiba will replace the affected memory including shipping. The link will provide more information including a list of affected models and an executable that will tell you if your machine is at risk. Note: The club's portable is not affected. <http://www.toshibadirect.com/content/pc/b2c/CEP.html>



Review: Microsoft Photo Story 3 Sol Libes

Photo Story 1 was originally introduced in January 2003 as an application included with Plus! Digital Media Edition, a paid Microsoft product distributed online. Microsoft sold over one million copies of the \$20 package. They later released a package upgrade that included Photo Story 2, a completely new application.

Now Microsoft has released Photo Story 3 as a free download. <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/digitalphotography/photostory/default.msp>

It is a terrific slide show program and a significant upgrade over version 2. If you are a digital camera owner and also a Windows XP user then grab it!

Features

Photo Story 3 uses a wizard type of user interface that steps you through the creation of a slide show. It has a photo editor providing the basic functions of photo editing allowing you to correct color levels, remove red eye, rotate, crop, change contrast and brightness and add a few effects. Then you can add text titles to your pictures.

In the next phase of the wizard you can add motion to your story, and if you have a microphone attached to your computer you can add narration. You can even create a story with a single photo by using the panning-motion effect with narration, a simplified "Ken Burns" effect.

One can also add a music track with some basic editing features. And, of course you can add transitions between slides, a feature also found in Movie Maker 2. Movie Maker 2, is also a free Microsoft download. [ed. Note: see a review of MM2 later in this issue.] If you installed Windows XP Service Pack 2 (SPP2), MM2 was installed on your system automatically.

In the last step, you can save your slide show in a wide variety of file formats suitable for viewing on a computer, on a Pocket PC, Windows-Powered Smartphone, or for displaying on a TV with a Media Center PC. You can also create a compressed file that will be moved into your email program so that you can email it to friends and family.

Limitations

The program does however have a few limitations. First of all, since it uses a wizard interface, you have to do it Microsoft's way. Power users will find it better to use menu-driven photo and sound editors first before bringing their photos and sound files into Photo Story.

Second, if you want to give copies of your slide show on CD or DVD to other people you will have to find some other software to do this. This can only be done directly if you have Windows XP Media Center on your system.

Conclusion

Photo Story 3 is an almost perfect tool for digital photography enthusiasts and a must-have utility for anyone who enjoys digital photography. The effects generated by this application are stunning and compelling. By making Photo Story 3 available for free to all users of Windows XP, Microsoft has both elevated the status of the XP platform and given all XP users a terrific "thank you" present.



Some Favorite Free Software

Vic Laurie

I try a lot of different freeware; I keep some but discard most programs. The majority of those that I do keep are for occasional use only but every now and then I find something that I use a lot. In this article I am going to mention three of my all-time favorites.

IrfanView

This program has been in use on my system for years and has been mentioned in previous articles. However, it is so useful that it deserves repeated consideration. This graphics program is one of the best freeware programs you will ever find. Year after year, its author, a Bosnian named Irfan Skljanc, keeps improving an already great program. Unless you get into graphics and photo editing in a fairly big way, this program has most features you might need. It has a host of

Open...	O
Reopen	Shift+R
Open with external editor	Shift+E
Open in HEX viewer...	
Open ASCII file...	
Thumbnails	T
Slideshow...	W
Batch Conversion/Rename...	B
Rename File...	F2
Move File...	F7
Copy File...	F8
Delete File...	Del
Save	Ctrl+S
Save as...	S
Print...	Ctrl+P
Select TWAIN Source...	
Acquire...	Ctrl+Shift+A
Batch Scanning...	Ctrl+Shift+B
Copy Shop...	
MRUDs...	
Exit	Esc

Figure 1

Information...	I
Create New (empty) image...	
Create Panorama image...	
Rotate Left	L
Rotate Right	R
Custom rotation...	
Vertical Flip	V
Horizontal Flip	H
Resize/Resample...	Ctrl+R
Canvas size...	
Increase Color Depth...	
Decrease Color Depth...	
Convert to Greyscale	
Negative	
Enhance colors...	Shift+G
Sharpen	Shift+S
Red eye reduction (selection)	
Effects	
Swap Colors	
Palette	

Figure 2

Undo	Ctrl+Z
Create custom selection...	Shift+C
Insert text into selection...	Ctrl+T
Cut - selection	Ctrl+X
Cut - leave selection	
Crop selection	Ctrl+Y
Copy	Ctrl+C
Paste	Ctrl+V
Delete (Clear display)	D
Clear Clipboard	

Figure 3

free plug-ins that enable it to be a viewer and editor for a wide variety of graphical formats. It can create slide shows; do batch processes, and perform many editing jobs. It can also act as a player for many multi-media formats although that is not what I use it for. Figures 1-3 show some of the program menus. The Web site is <http://www.irfanview.com/>

Aside from its functionality, this program is a great example of how software should be (but rarely is) written. Not only is it compact and fast but also the author makes sure that you understand exactly what changes it makes in your system and gives the user easy ways to refuse or undo the changes.

Karen's Replicator

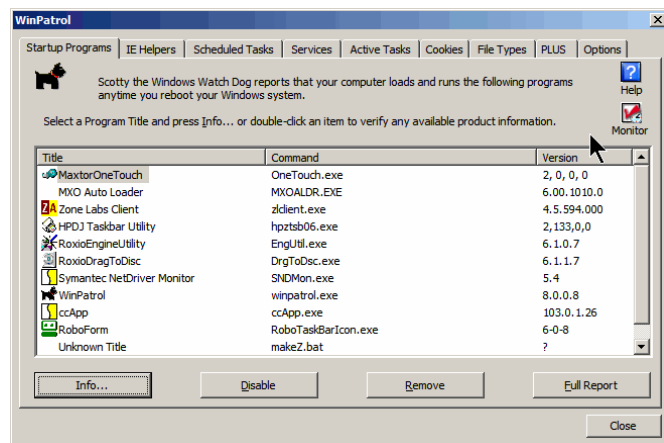
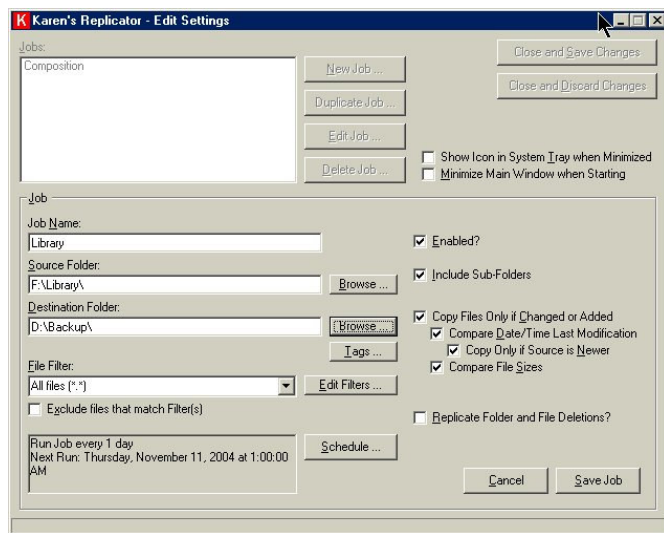
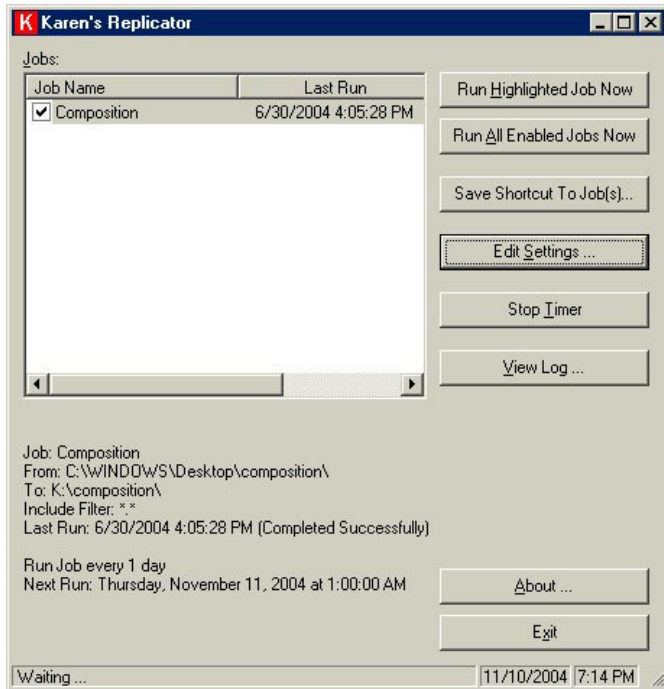
Karen Kenworthy has a host of free useful programs at her Web Site <http://www.karenware.com/>. I use a number of them but the one that I use daily is her very nice little backup program, Replicator. I think that it is an excellent choice for the average PC user who does not want to get involved with elaborate backup software. The program allows for scheduled or manual backups of any folders that you choose. Only stuff that has changed since the last backup is copied and it goes very fast. Even folders with many files copy quickly. Figures 4 and 5 show several of the Replicator windows. A good way to use this program would be for backing up all of your personal data and files.

WinPatrol

This is a very good program for monitoring and controlling what runs on your system. As figure 6 shows, there are tabs for a variety of functions including Startup Programs, IE Helpers, Services, Active Tasks, and more. This is a very handy way to see just what is going on in the system and what is installed. There is even an "Info" button where information about what a service or program actually does can be obtained. This program will help guard your system against spyware and other problems. There is also a paid version, which has even more information. The Web site is <http://www.winpatrol.com/>

Contribute to the Software Authors

When I find a free-ware program that I use a lot, I feel that I ought to make some small contribution of \$10 or whatever to the author. (Most programs provide information about how to do this.) After all, these programs are a lot of work and the only way to ensure that good and useful new utilities keep appearing is to provide some incentive. Sometimes the free-ware has a paid version with more fea-



tures. WinPatrol is an example. ZoneAlarm, the firewall that I use, is another. Karen Kenworthy has a CD with all her programs for a very reasonable price.

One way or the other, the authors of good programs deserve our support. If you like and use some freeware, I hope you will be able to contribute something to the writer of the program.



Review: Windows Movie Maker 2 Sol Libes

The Macintosh has always been the preferred system for creating and editing videos. Microsoft was noted for catching up. With Windows Movie Maker 2 (WMM2) they have created an excellent competitor to Apple's iMovie program.

Windows Movie Maker 1.0 was introduced as part of Windows Millennium Edition (ME). It enabled users to do simple video captures, editing, and file sharing. However, it lacked many of the tools of Apple's iMovie and was harder to use. Needless to say, most people ignored it.

WMM 1.1 was introduced with the initial version of Windows XP. It added support for Windows Media Video (WMV) and Audio (WMA) file formats, non-compressed AVI video recording and output to Pocket PC devices. They followed with WMM 1.2 featuring near better resolution and compression features.

In early 2003 Microsoft began including the beta version of WMM 2 with Windows XP. The product is now out of beta and version 2.1 is included in Service Pack 2 (SP2). WMM 2.1 is a complete redesign offering advanced capture, compression, and video quality features and more editing capabilities, title creation, transition, and effects. The library has 60 different transitions, 29 effects, and 43 titles to choose from. If this is not enough you can get even more by buying Microsoft's Plus! Digital Media product (\$20 list). Best of all it has a wizard mode called "AutoMovie" that captures raw video and creates a final movie without any user intervention.

It is a great tool for also creating slide shows from your digital pictures and adding music accompaniment. Windows Photo Story 3 (WPS 3) [ed. note: see review in this issue], also a free Microsoft product, is designed specifically for creating slide shows. WPS 3 however cannot create slide titles and lacks the video effects of WMM 2. It would be nice if the best features of both products could be integrated. Until then, I recommend using both products and choosing the one best suited to the particular slide show you want to create.

Editing Videos and Slide Shows

You can capture directly from either a digital or analog camcorder, VCR, or digital camera into WMM 2. To capture digital video you will need a Firewire input (IEEE-1394). To capture analog input you will need either a card with analog inputs or a device like the Belkin USB VideoBus II which connects to a USB port. If you have a TV tuner card, you can capture TV programs for editing. Also, it is possible to use a digital camcorder to convert an analog input to a digital video output provided the camera

has an analog input (many do).

Once you have your video clips in WMM, you can delete unwanted parts, merge different clips, and insert still pictures. If you find video editing too time consuming or frustrating you can use the AutoMovie mode that steps you through the necessary steps. It analyzes the video and audio content, finds the best content, takes at least a segment of each clip, and creates a highlights movie with clean edits, simple cuts, fades, and titles. AutoMovie offers choices for background music, length of music, adding transitions that match the beat of the music, as well as effects and editing styles.

Movies created using the AutoMovie wizard can later be edited. If you do not like the titles, effects, or transitions it created, you can change them later. You can also add or remove clips from your movie. The end result is a movie laid out in the Storyboard/Timeline which can also be played in a preview window.

If you want, you can connect a microphone to your computer and add a narration track. This is really nice if you create a slide show. You can have background music and have it fade in and out with the narration. You can adjust the time of each slide, effect, and transition. It is an incredibly powerful program with a very large collection of effects and transitions.

Sharing and Distributing Movies and Slide Shows.

You can save your movies and slides shows to your hard disk in the WMV file format. This produces a file that is far smaller than the DV-AVI file format, yet the visual quality is almost as good as DV-AVI. You can also output them directly to CD, send them via email, upload to a web server, route it back to a DV camcorder, or send them directly to a Pocket PC PDA. Before you try to send your movie clips in email, first check the maximum file size that your ISP permits. I use a Comcast cable high speed connection and am limited to a 6MB maximum file size in outgoing email. This limits me to a video that is less than 1 minute or a slide show that only has a few slides. Microsoft Photo Story 3, on the other hand, can produce a compressed slide show file with many more slides, however the image quality is reduced significantly.

I got around the 6MB Comcast email limit by putting the movie or slide show in my 25MB web space on the Comcast server. Then I put a link to the file's location in the email.

In Conclusion

Microsoft Movie Maker 2 is an excellent movie and slide show editor. It is very easy to use and has a lot of features. It is free and is included with Windows XP. I strongly recommend it to anyone with a digital camera or digital camcorder. It is a very good product for converting old videos provided you have a way to input the videos (listed earlier).

It is a consumer level product that is an excellent product for beginners. Experienced video editors will no doubt find it lacking in options. The option that is most lacking is the ability to create a movie DVD. You will have to use some

other program (e.g. MyDVD) to create a DVD that will play on a TV with a DVD player.

If you are a Windows XP user and own a digital camera or digital camcorder, check it out. I know you will like it.



Link of the Month

Clarke Walker sends along this link to the official list of when Microsoft will no longer support their software:

<http://support.microsoft.com/gp/lifeconhdmu>



Understanding USB Viny La Bash, Sarasota FL PC Users Group**

Hail USB! Until a few years ago if you wanted to add an external device to your computer, such as a scanner or a Zip drive, it needed your one and only parallel port. The trouble with this was that your printer had already staked out that territory. One way of getting around the problem was installing an A/B switch. However, if you needed more than one device, you had to install an A/B/C/D switch. Sometimes moving among these devices meant having to turn one off before you could use another, and often you had to reboot before your machine would recognize another device on the switch.

Early Palm Pilots and digital cameras sought your serial port. Computers had, and most still have two serial ports, but they were slow and almost always involved installation of controlling software.

There were also devices that came with their own controller cards. This meant you had to open the case and install the card in an expansion slot, provided you had one available. Things could get crazy quickly, and you had to handle IRQ conflicts, more cables, and additional power cords.

Rescue arrived with the introduction of the USB port (Universal Serial Bus) that lets you attach almost anything to your computer quickly and easily. Windows XP is designed to support USB so device conflicts are gone. The standard allows up to 127 devices on a single USB port. In practice, no one uses that many devices. USB connectors let you attach everything from TV tuners to modems. It's an amazingly flexible technology. If you had a toaster with a USB connection you could hook it up, but it's doubtful you could watch bread turn brown on the screen.

Installing a USB device is incredibly simple. Windows XP senses it through a process called auto-detection, and asks for the driver disk if it's needed. If you have previously installed the device, XP activates it, and it's ready for use. Part of the beauty of USB is that you can connect and disconnect devices at any time without having to reboot your machine or change any options. If a cable is built-in to a USB device it will connect to your computer with its own "A" connector. Otherwise it will connect with a "B" connector. "A" and "B" connectors are of different sizes and shapes so there is never a question of getting them mixed up.

Today, most desktop computers are built with least four USB ports. That is inadequate, but there are relatively inexpensive USB hubs available that act as expansion devices. The number of ports available on an expansion hub can vary from as few as two to as many as seven, depending on your needs and how much you care to spend. Plug the hub into your computer, and then plug your devices into the hub. You can chain hubs together, and build dozens of available USB ports on a single computer.

The USB standard lets USB connected devices draw their power from their USB connection to the PC. This works well for mice, digital cameras, web cams, and other devices that use small amounts of power. Printers, scanners, and other high power accessories require their own power supply, and they can be plugged into hubs that do not have their own power supply. If you run out of USB sockets and you have a lot of low power devices, get a powered hub so you don't overwhelm the PC bus.

Inside your computer the USB bus lets the computer act as a host to all USB devices attached to it. If you have the up-to-date USB 2.0 standard, data can be transferred at up to 480 megabits per second. If you were moving text, that works out to about 30,000 pages of documents per second. That's a maximum rate, not typical of actual use. Nevertheless, it's impressive.

USB has other advantages. You can plug in or remove USB devices without having to reboot your machine, and the computer can put USB devices into an inactive state when conserving power. XP queries all USB devices when your machine powers on, assigns each one an address, and determines what kind of data it needs to send or receive. XP keeps track of the total bandwidth of all the attached USB devices. If the combined devices reach 90% of the 480 megabit maximum, XP denies access to any additional devices. The remaining 10% is reserved for transmitting control characters, stop and start transmission codes, error checking, and other overhead.

USB 2.0 encourages the development of innovative products that would be impossible to develop with the older standards. It's the solution for all PC users who want an instant, no-hassle way to connect new hardware like digital joysticks, scanners, digital speakers, digital cameras or a PC telephone to their computer. Plug and Pray has truly become Plug and Play.

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**Princeton PC Users Group
PO Box 291
Rocky Hill, NJ 08553**