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PPCUG *NEWS*

A PUBLICATION OF THE PRINCETON PC USERS GROUP

HOLIDAY PARTY!

Monday, December 12, 2005

We will be holding our Holiday Party from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

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.*

In this issue:

Coming Events:

January 9— Steven Kieley on "Bring Your Family Album to Life"
February 14—TBA
March 13—TBA

About PPCUG

Minutes of the November Meeting

Clarke started the meeting at 7:30 p.m. by demonstrating Adobe Reader's ability to "speak" PDF documents.

Since no member was interested in reviewing "Home Internet Security", visitor Terry Stimpfel agreed to review the book.

Clarke was the first one to raise a problem he is having. When he uses Microsoft Photo Story 3 to create background music he gets no sound. If he imports backgrounds music he does get sound. So he knows his sound card is working. No one has come up with a solution or apparently experienced the same problem.

There was a discussion about wireless networks. If you have a wireless network and turn off your modem, someone tapping into your wireless network can still see your network. If you connect to a neighbor's wireless network, the neighbor can see you and if their network is connected to the web, your PC is vulnerable to being accessed by anyone on the web.

Marty asked about an older laptop that has no USB port. There are PCMIA cards available that have USB ports and there also are serial-to-USB cables. However, when Marty stated that the laptop is running WIN95, the consensus was that these conversion devices may not work with WIN95.

Doug Dixon started at 7:50 PM. Doug first pointed out that there were some give-aways for later in the evening. For example, there were some MediaOne products.

Doug's topic, "Introduction to Podcasting, Videocasting, Blogging, Vlogging, and RSS" is also discussed on his Manifest Technology site at http://www.manifest-tech.com/. A PDF that he used in the presentation is at http://www.manifest-tech.com/docs/dixon_blogs_notes_0510.pdf

What is blogging? It's a chronological journal on the web but it's a little more than that. It's a publication for readers who come in a regular way – there is a commitment to publish regularly. A Blogosphere is a community of people who blog. To keep track of blog entries, a permalink is used. It is a permanent link to an individual blog entry. If one makes a mistake in a blog, one can go edit it by crossing out what is wrong, correcting the mistake, and perhaps crediting someone with the correction. News.com lists their choice of the top 100 blogs out of the 14 million blogs in existence. Technorati.com also gives a most popular blog list. They measure the number of links to blogs and order them that way. Blogdex is an MIT project that tracks and rates blogs. Live Journal is community blogging especially between teenagers. Myspace is used for linking with and meeting friends of friends. It's also used heavily by teenagers. Facebook is used to connect with schoolmates. For blog tools, see blogger.com, for example.

How does one keep track of blog sites? There are tools such as RSS and XML that can be used for content syndication feeds. Incidentally, there is a RSS feed from the

PPCUG site. There are various readers that will read these feeds and present them to you. Some of these are free like, for example, the Google Reader. Also, Feedster and Bloglines help you search RSS feeds.

So far we have discussed text and feeds. Now on to Podcasting. Podcasts refers to short amateur audio clips on the web – it's the same idea of publishing to an audience. You can set up a tool to automatically download feeds over night – then pick up your MP3 player and have them to play during the day. Apple has good Podcasting sites. TheDVShow.com is a blog-supported Podcast site. OurMedia.org is a free storage site for this type of material.

We have discussed words and audio. What is left is photos. PhotoBlogging consists of ways to organize albums, makes it easy to upload and download photos, and provides mechanisms to upload from a camera phone and to view on a camera phone. Flickr is perhaps the most popular site for PhotoBlogging. People on Flickr use tags to organize photos. Dot-Photo.com is a more commercial version.

Finally, we have the Video Blog also called Vlog or Vid Blog. Vlog allows you to bluescreen and to put up tag lines.

- *Joe Budelis*

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President's Message

At the November meeting we accepted nominees for the various Club Officers. This month we will vote on Officers for next year.

I want to thank all the Officers, Board Members and Presenters. And of course the members who make the Group worthwhile. I also want to thank Joe Budelis for being Secretary this year. And especially to Paul Kurivchack for all the years of service as Treasurer and past President. Paul will remain active as a member of the Board.

We are seeking presenters for our Winter meetings.   Please contact Sol Libes (sol@libes.com) if you wish to make a presentation or have a topic and/or speaker to suggest.

- *Clarke Walker*

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Link of the Month

Want to know everything? Go to this site for a free encyclopedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki

Have you discovered a useful link? Then share it with the members of the P PC UG.

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Review of "PC Annoyances"

by Vic Laurie., http://vlaurie.com
Member of the Princeton PC Users Group

If you are a reader of the magazine *PC World*, you will be familiar with Steve Bass's column "Home Office". Also his articles are often used in PC user group newsletters. He has collected a bunch of his writings plus some additional material into a book that is in the "Annoyances" series published by O'Reilly. The book is in its second edition now and includes entries on Windows XP SP2.

The book is divided into seven sections covering 1) Email, 2) Windows, 3) Internet, 4) Microsoft Office, 5) Windows Explorer, 6) Music, Video, and CD and 7) Hardware. The presentation follows the "Annoyances" format. An "annoyance" is stated and is then followed by a solution. Actually, I think they strain a little too hard at fitting everything into the "annoyance" category. Computers can certainly be annoying but many of the so-called annoyances in the book are just things that computers do and the solutions are often just tips on how to use the computer. However, this is an unimportant quibble and the topics and solutions cover a variety of topics helpful to a PC user. Bass has a breezy style with his own particular brand of humor that he intersperses throughout his writing. In the front of the book is a page with several quotations, one of which (anonymous) so tickled my fancy that I cannot resist repeating it here.

May the fleas of a thousand camels infest the crotch of the RealPlayer developer who decided to stick icons in my System Tray, Startup menu, and desktop, and may his arms be too short to scratch.

Amen, brother.

Altogether, the book contains 217 tips or solutions for common problems. As would be expected for a book on PCs, many of the topics concern Windows or other Microsoft programs. However, there are still quite a few tips for users of other applications. For example, the email section contains tips for AOL, Eudora, and Gmail users as well as for Outlook Express and Hot Mail.

Some of the solutions probably require a higher level of familiarity with the workings of Windows than the average PC user has but many will allow even the novice to fix some of the most common 'annoyances'. Occasionally the solution requires the purchase of some application that is designed for a specific task. For example, Bass recommends the purchase of a $20 program to make some changes in dialog boxes. Personally, I doubt that the average PC user will be interested in this.

I'm a fan of Bass and have subscribed to his free *PC World* newsletter *Tips and Tweaks* for a long time (http://www.pcworld.com/resource/newsletters/index.asp). I like his suggestions and think the book is a nice collection of many of the things most likely to be troublesome in a PC. I don't want to cut into the sales of this useful book but it has to be noted that much of the material has appeared on the Internet already in Bass's column and elsewhere. A list of his previous columns is at http://www.pcworld.com/resource/columnist/0,colid,43,tk,sb,00.asp.

If you know how to search, Google or other search engine will also turn up most of this stuff. The good people at O'Reilly will even help you find things (http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/pcannoy2/annoyance_download.html). Now, I have to admit that searching around the Internet is not as convenient as a nice, easy-to-read paperback book with large print; so you may want to buy it and do some bedtime reading to see how to make your PC easier to use.

PC Annoyances, Second Edition
By Steve Bass
Second Edition March 2005
Publisher: O'Reilly
ISBN: 0-596-00882-1
252 pages, $19.95 US

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Synopsis of John Lemasney's Talk

by Joe Budelis, http://Budelis.com/
Member of the Princeton PC Users Group

At the October meeting John stated that he was presenting as himself and as a representative of the Linux Users Group of Princeton (http://www.lugip.org/) which meets in the same building albeit in another room. John's presentation is at http://ghost.rider.edu/cii/presen/oss. He started by explaining that Open Source Software (OSS) means you can get to source code and can customize it; for example, you can get rid of stuff that you do not need, for example, drivers. It allows you to do something you normally can not do with proprietary software.

He discussed Wikipedia which is an Open Source encyclopedia – anyone can add to it. Wikipedia is an example of Mediapedia which allows anyone to have their own encyclopedia that anyone could update. Mediapedia is the technology that

Wikipedia is built on. John will be happy to provide help to anyone wanting to install Mediapedia. In Wikipedia we looked at GPL, the GNU Public License, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GPL. Open Software is a very altruistic set of ideas. If you accept it as the truth, it can succeed. John accepts it and knows a lot of other people who do.

John discussed "The Cathedral and the Bazaar" by Eric S. Raymond. This book convinced Netscape writers to make it open source. The Open Source version is Firefox and it's gaining in popularity since it went Open Source. John discussed some of the advantages of Firefox over IE, for example, it's faster. At https://addons.mozilla.org/ there are hundreds of extensions that can be added to Firefox. Answer to question about how to have Firefox open a new URL in same tab is a setting: Open in Background.

John also spoke about Creative Commons. OSS is about protection of the code and openness of a set of ideas. Creative Commons has a somewhat more restrictive OSS license than the GNU Public License. OSS is a whole suite of products. It has desktop applications such as games, productivity software, media software, video editing software, etc. For example, The GIMP is another possibility for editing photos that is perhaps better than PhotoShop and you don't have to pay $700 for it. There are also server applications, such as Moodle, MySQL and PHP. At Rider, about $70,000 per year is paid for the Blackboard, a Learning Management application which can not be altered. Moodle does everything that Blackboard does for free and the only thing requested in return is that the users try to make it better. If Moodle had been around before Blackboard was installed at Rider, it would have been the product of choice. A modification to Blackboard would have to be done by Blackboard's suppliers and would be charged as a custom application change. Linux is OSS. MySQL is a great way to edit databases from a distance over a secure shell. Creative Commons provides images, music, etc that can be used without any payment, even for business purposes. S5 is static HTML, in fact John used S5 for this presentation – it looks very similar to the proprietary package called PowerPoint. The S5 project gives you the structure for the HTML, that is, the framework is given. You can look at the code and see exactly how everything is being rendered. You can use any HTML editor to edit S5. S5 is the idea that you can combine HTML, CSS, and javascript. It gives templates. For more info, see OSS and S5 links in John's blog. Here is the S5 link: http://www.meyerweb.com/eric/tools/s5/ .

Sunbird is a calendaring project for Mozilla that uses the iCall standard. You can get Firefox from mozilla.org. John carries his settings, bookmarks and everything to run Firefox that he carries with him on a memory stick so that he can run it on any PC. John reviewed some of the extensions available for Firefox. See the Addon link above for details. Thunderbird is an OSS Gmail; it's a client similar to Outlook Express. John also gave some more info on The GIMP. See the slides for screenshots. OpenOffice.org is Sun's Open Source Office Suite. OpenOffice and StarOffice are becoming closer; main difference now is that you pay a nominal amount for StarOffice and you get a printed manual with it. Massachusetts has adopted an Open Document Format, part of the Oasis standard, for exchanging documents. OpenOffice can open Word documents and can save documents back to Word format. It also has macro and VBA functions.

Apache contains the best known Open Source projects. To try a lot of OSS projects, you can go to TheOpenCD.org and burn a CD using the ISO format. For example, instead of buying Adobe Acrobat, you can use PDFCreator to create PDFs. You can use Audacity to cut audio tracks. Celeste lets you see the night sky. Notepad2 is a Notepad replacement.

Redhat.com/fedora and debian.org distribute Linux free. Ubuntu.org is all about freedom but also about style and flash. Lupig.org also has their own distribution of Linux. In fact they offer the bootable CD method that will not change Windows on your PC but will allow you to try Linux. Filezilla is a FTP Client. VLC is a Windows Media Player look alike with many extras. Blender is a 3D application. Inkscape is a Corel Draw look alike.

Lemasney.blog gives John's personal items of interest.

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Buying a PC for the Holidays

by Vinnie Labash., labash@spcug.org
Member of the Sarasota PCUG, Florida

Don't buy a low end PC this year if you have any plans of moving to Microsoft's new Vista operating system next year. If you're sticking with XP, almost anything will do, even video that's integrated with the motherboard.

Vista is not due for almost a year, but a little forethought before buying will prevent much regret in 2006. I say this because

if Microsoft keeps only half its promises about new features and improved security in Vista, most of its customers will want to make the move to the new operating system. If your computer's specifications are too weak or only marginally acceptable to Vista, you will either not be able to upgrade or wish you hadn't tried.

Let's start with the processor. You don't a need top-of-the-line CPU, but don't buy any thing that's less than mid-range. Either Intel or AMD will do, and you should probably go for a duel-core processor for added speed and processing muscle. By the time Vista is on the scene, a lot more 64 bit software may be on hand. A 64 bit processor makes good sense since it can also handle today's 32 bit programs.

Microsoft appears likely to make 512MB of RAM its minimum requirement. Never settle for minimum requirements with memory. I'm sure you could fly cross-country in a two seat one engine monoplane, but your flight would be much more comfortable if you were sipping your favorite beverage while lounging in a high powered commercial passenger jet. Memory is cheap. Buy at least one gigabyte of memory, two if you decide on a 64 bit processor.

Only masochists should buy a machine with video that's integrated with chips on the motherboard. Integrated video shares your processor memory with your applications and often results in poor performance. Buy the cheapest video card that has at least 256MB of on-board RAM. You will be happy.

You will need a fast DVD drive that is capable of recording multiple formats. This is an ideal storage medium for backups. Get two. They're not prohibitively expensive any more.

More and more people have digital cameras, picture-phones, music players, video-cams, and other peripherals which attach to computers in one fashion or another. Look for a machine with at least six USB 2.0 connectors. It doesn't hurt to have one IEEE 1394, or Firewire connector.

You owe it to yourself to have a 17" or larger flat panel monitor. Don't tell me you can't afford it. Dell makes a 23" outstanding flat panel device for less than $1,000. Even good 19" monitors can be had for $450 or less.

Hard disk space has never been cheaper. Dual 250GB hard drives need not be an extravagance this holiday season if you want the space for music and video files. Optionally, install RAID 1 for disk mirroring and instant automatic backup. If one hard drive is enough, an external USB 2.0 connected hard drive is an excellent backup device.

Audiophiles can consult Creative Labs and drool over X-Fi Elite Pro. Then spring for good speakers with a subwoofer. The rest of us can be content with audio chips integrated with the motherboard.

Media center PCs come with remote control devices and a TV tuner. They are meant to be operated from a distance to play music, present slide shows, view photos, and watch TV. Don't buy the cheapest machines because they leave out a lot of important features.

Most salespeople are paid on a combination of salary, commissions, and bonuses for selling specific makes and models. Know what you are looking for before visiting a showroom, and don't let a sales person talk you into more or less machine than you want. It's a very good idea to come to your next PC User Group meeting and get the best advice from all the friendly people you will meet there. Many of them will help you configure your new machine.

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Digital Cameras Blossom as Popularity Increases

by Ira Wilsker, iwilsker@apcug.net
APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX

Much to no one's surprise, the popularity of digital cameras is exploding, as the quality improves even more, and the cameras become more affordable. Digital photography, which was initially slow, grainy, and sometimes difficult to manipulate has matured, and is now nearly universal. With the dramatic improvements in digital camera and storage technology in recent years, much of what early adopters of digital photography experienced has changed for the better.

Sitting in front of me as I type this column are two digital cameras, each of which are representative of the respective technol-

ogy of the day. One of the cameras is a JVC GC-S1U which is about 5 years old, and when it was new it was considered a technological marvel and state of the art in its day, but by today's standards, while still functional, is technologically obsolete. One of the first digital still cameras available, it has a .3 (that is 3/10) of a megapixel image of 640x480 pixels, which is miniscule by today's standards. It takes 4 AA batteries, which are good for only a few dozen photos before they are exhausted, even less if the integral flash is used. Reviews of the day used the expression that this camera "eats batteries". One of the first cameras on the market to take a memory card, it uses the now large format by current standards CF or Compact Flash card for additional photo storage. Connecting to the computer via a very slow serial connection made photos slow to download, unless an external card reader was used to read the CF card. One feature that this antique camera has, that is still impressive by today's standards is a 10x optical zoom. The processor in the camera is horribly slow by today's standards, with a noticeable lag between pressing the shutter and capturing the image, along with a long delay for a follow up snapshot.

The newer digital cameras on the market clearly show the technological improvements that have become commonplace. New digital cameras come in a wide assortment of prices and features, from tiny key-chain size cameras, to cameras embedded in a ballpoint pen, to inexpensive disposable cameras to pocket size marvels, to SLR (Single Lens Reflex) type cameras with extreme resolution rivaling 35mm film, and using an assortment of available lenses, just like traditional 35mm cameras. Zoom can range from the less expensive and generally inferior digital zoom, to the superior optical zoom. Zoom ranges typically range from 3x to 12x, with some models offering a combination of optical and digital zoom to increase the ability to manipulate the closeness of the image. Many of the newer digital still cameras can also capture video and sound, often in the popular MPEG-4 30fps (30 frames per second) format, the length of the video being only limited by the amount of storage available on the memory card.

The second camera I have in front of me is a new, state of the art Casio EX-S500, one of a series of new cameras Casio is producing in the "Exilim" series. The camera is actually small compared to my older camera, only being about 3.5 inches wide, by about 2.3 inches tall, and about .6 (6/10) of an inch thick, weighing only about 4 ounces. This full featured camera will easily fit in a shirt pocket or purse. It uses the tiny SD memory cards. With an excellent 5 megapixel maximum image size, this camera will take digital photos in six different sizes ranging from an enormous 2560x1920 pixel size (5 megapixels), to the smaller 640x480 size (3/10 of a megapixel). It should be noted that the smaller the image, the more images that can be stored in the memory card. Also, the smaller images are more appropriate if they are going to be emailed, an important consideration in "netiquette". The larger size images are appropriate if large photos are to be printed in 8x10 inch or 11x14 inch sizes, or even larger.

Zoom is provided by a telescoping 3x optical zoom, which can be coupled with an integral 4x digital zoom, giving a maximum zoom of 12x. The lens produced very bright and sharp images. When the camera is turned off, the telescoping zoom lens is retracted into the body of the camera, making the front of the camera nearly flat. One technological marvel built into this camera an "Anti-Shake DSP" which is a digital signal processor that removes the effect of moving the camera while the image is being recorded; this contributes to an exceptionally sharp image by removing or minimizing the blurring many of us encounter when we move the camera as we take a photo.

Despite the small stature of the camera, it also can record movies and sound in three formats, 640x480 in both high quality and normal mode, and a smaller image 320x240 size for extended play. Video is saved in MPEG-4 format, and the sound is saved in the universal WAV format. With a common and inexpensive 256 megabyte memory card, the camera can capture about 8 minutes of video and sound at the high quality setting, and about 45 minutes at the extended play setting. Simply, available memory and battery power is the limiting factor in the length of the video that can be shot at any given time.

While my old camera ate batteries, having a very short battery life, this new Casio Exilim has a proprietary rechargeable lithium ion battery with a normal capacity of about 200 photos before it needs to be recharged.

The camera has a shutter speed of 1/8 to 1/2000 of a second, rivaling many of the classical 35mm cameras, and includes a multi-mode flash, self timer, bright 2.2 inch LCD screen, and a mini-cradle which simultaneously connects the camera to a USB 2 high speed connection as well as AC power to charge the internal battery. There is also an "AV Out" jack on the cradle. Included with the camera are two CDs of software to download and manage the still images as well as the video. A set of included video cables allows the playing of video direct from the camera when it is docked in the cradle.

The body of the Casio Exilim EX-S500 camera is stainless steel, and available in a typical steel grey color, as well as white or orange toned stainless steel. This camera has a suggested retail price of $350. Locally these cameras are available at Circuit City, CompUSA, Radio Shack, Target, Ritz Camera, Sharper Image, or online from Casio at www.casio,com.

Casio is now marketing some excellent quality digital cameras, and should be strongly considered when shopping for better quality and full featured digital cameras.

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Nominees for 2006 Officers

President .... **Clarke Walker**
Vice President .... **Tom Carman**
Secretary .... **vacant**
Treasurer .... **Houston Landis**
Board Members-At-Large
   .... **Al Axelrod**
   .... **Kim Goldenberg**
   .... **Paul Kurivchack**
   .... **Vic Laurie**
   .... **Sol Libes**