

# PPCUG

## NEWS

A PUBLICATION OF THE PRINCETON PC USERS GROUP

### Monday October 15, 2001

## The GIMP

### GNU Image Manipulation Program

#### Jon Abolins

Jon will demonstrate *The GIMP* GNU Image Manipulation Program. It is free and can be downloaded from the web <http://www.gimp.org>. It is used for photo retouching, image composition and image authoring. This program runs on PCs, Macs, and Linux systems.

At

#### Lawrence Library

Meeting Rooms 1 & 2

US 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 implies endorsement of its programs*

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Digital Photo by Ed Weiss

John Konvalinka discussing how to use the Internet for tracing family histories at the September General Meeting.

## About PPCUG

### General Meetings

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

7:00-7:45 PM: Social Time / Tech Corner

7:45 PM: Meeting Comes to Order

8 PM: Featured Presentation

For information about upcoming meetings or joining PPCUG call 908-218-0778 to leave a message.

### Board Meetings

For Meeting Location, Date and Time, call 908-218-0778

Board meetings are open to All.

### Board Members

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### Web Site

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

### Annual Dues Rates

Normal dues rate is \$30 per year.

New Members Only: after February, the rate is \$2.50 per month times the number of months remaining in the year.

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## Coming Events

### November 19, 2001 - Home Networks & Broadband Sharing

PPCUG Member Jonathan White. (Note: Third Monday)

### December 10, 2001 - Elections & Holiday Party

Join us for the installation of Officers, food & prizes.

### January 14, 2002 - Palm Pilot, more than a PDA

Cass Lewart will demonstrate there is more to a Palm Device than just the calendar & contacts.

### February 11, 2002 - Windows XP

Learn about all the new features of XP and why you should upgrade.

### March 11, 2002 - Add a Second Hard Drive to your System!

Paul Kurivchack will demonstrate how easy it is to install that second drive you desperately need.



## Presidents Message

by Paul Kurivchack

Well has the world changed since our last meeting that second Monday night of September? I know the events of September 11 will remain on everyone's mind forever but let us not forget the outstanding presentation John Konvalinka did educating us on how to use the Internet to search for your family history.

I know that I will always remember that it started as a beautiful fall day, happy at work on the twenty seventh floor overlooking the Hudson River in mid-town Manhattan. Then the word came that something happened at the World Trade Center and all the TV's were turned on to watch in horror of the events taking place about sixty blocks south of us. Then the worry came out that Times Square could be the next target and we had to exit our building. I'm not sure if everyone was just numb over what happen that day or if the strength of New York City workers poured out to eased the panic and to exit the city in such an orderly and peaceful process. People were sharing their cell phones for you to call home, there was no pushing or shoving, everyone had their story to tell while waiting in the line for the ferry. I made it home fine after being bused around Northern New Jersey but that was OK. It was a day that proved that New York City will always be a great place to visit and work.

I for one will have a very hard time every morning looking toward New York without the Trade Center. My train ride each morning travels in such a way that just as we turn to enter Newark, I would watch the sun rise over the twin towers, a site I never took for granted but enjoyed each and every day. A site I will never see again.

Lastly, to our members and friends, my thoughts and prayers go out to you for your loss that day and the strength to continue on.

See you all on the 15<sup>th</sup>.



# Windows Tips: Basic Maintenance

By: Vic Laurie - PPCUG

Over the last few years Windows maintenance has been a pet theme of mine. I have given a variety of presentations and lectures and written a number of articles on the subject. Here I am going to get on my soapbox again. I know from experience that many ordinary home PC users would benefit greatly from just a modicum of basic knowledge on the subject. I also know from experience that there is a lot of inertia and considerable reluctance to learn that basic knowledge. It's a shame because I have encountered many instances where a PC user tells me about a problem that could have been fixed in 10 or 15 minutes with a little basic knowledge. Instead he or she loses many days waiting for a friend or relative to fix it or spends a fair amount of money for a technician. (Or in some cases even buys a new computer.) In this article I outline the basic things that I think would be of use to all PC users, whatever their technical background. True, you could go through life and never need any of this stuff. On the other hand, a little preparation might just save you from a peck of trouble. (Please note that there are also several relevant articles and PowerPoint presentations available for downloading on the site <http://www.vlaur.com>. Both the Windows 98 Tools and Maintaining the Computer pages pertain.) Another general reference is <http://www.extremetech.com/article/0,,s%3D2&a%3D10855,00.asp>.

## Updating Virus Protection

Most computers nowadays come with an anti-virus program. However, many people fail to keep their database of virus definitions updated. All the major anti-virus programs come with an update feature that should be used regularly. New viruses appear daily and updating every two weeks is not too often. Unfortunately, the major companies no longer provide unlimited updates but have started charging after one year's (or even less) usage. Depending on your version, subscriptions are in the range of \$5 to \$15 per year. There are still some free services but these are subject to change at any time. If you do need to buy a new anti-virus program, you may be better off buying a utility suite. For very little additional cost they include many other useful utilities.

Information about anti-virus software can be found at <http://www.zdnet.com/products/stories/reviews/0,4161,2768351,00.html>  
<http://www.zdnet.com/zdhelp/filters/subfilter/0,7212,6003257,00.html>  
<http://www.pcmag.com/article/0,2997,s%253D1474%2526a%253D2736,00.asp>  
<http://support.microsoft.com/support/kb/articles/Q49/5/00.ASP>  
<http://www.pcworld.com/reviews/article/0,aid,55803,00.asp>

I have not tried it but some people recommend the free pro-

gram at [http://www.grisoft.com/html/us\\_index.cfm](http://www.grisoft.com/html/us_index.cfm)

## Preparing for Disaster

Unfortunately, hard drive failure is not all that uncommon. If it occurs, everything that is on the drive is lost (unless you resort to an expensive recovery service). Also, if you do get a virus, a lot of your disk may be wiped out. Or, in a variety of other ways, files may be corrupted or lost. Botched software installations, system crashes, or just plain carelessness can lose valuable data. Thus, backups are essential. Ideally, the whole system should be backed up to some external storage device. At a minimum, all files such as passwords, favorite places, address books, financial and tax records, important documents and correspondence (including e-mail), and any other personal data that has more than transitory value should be backed up to some place other than your hard drive.

**“A certain amount of housekeeping will help your system to be more efficient and stable.”**

Windows 98 comes with a backup accessory in **Programs | Accessories | System Tools | Backup**. The program may not be installed by default so you may have to add it from the Windows disk. The Windows disk also contains a tool called the System Recovery Wizard. An article on how to do a full system restore with it is at <http://support.microsoft.com/support/kb/articles/q187/5/26.asp>. Personally, I prefer other ways of backing up, such as Norton Ghost, but this may be more than the beginner or casual user wants to cope with. At the very least, regularly copy essential files using a CD-RW, Iomega drive, or other storage medium. If you really don't have much that is important on your system, you could conceivably use diskettes but at a capacity of 1.44 Mbytes each you won't get much storage, even with some form of file compression. Information on backup media and software is at <http://www.pcmag.com/article/0,2997,s%253D1474%2526a%253D2800,00.asp>

Also see [http://windows.about.com/c/ht/00/07/How\\_Back\\_System0962932997.htm](http://windows.about.com/c/ht/00/07/How_Back_System0962932997.htm). In addition to providing a way to restore the entire system, backup software generally provides a way to replace individual files.

In general, restoring a system may require some sort of boot disk. The process of creating a Windows startup disk is described at [www.microsoft.com/windows98/usingwindows/maintaining/tips/beginner/Bootdisk.asp](http://www.microsoft.com/windows98/usingwindows/maintaining/tips/beginner/Bootdisk.asp). Norton Ghost and other software create their own particular versions of a boot disk. Whichever form of backup you use, be sure to create the appropriate boot disk.

## Restoring the Registry

Less catastrophic than a hard drive crash, a corrupted Registry is nonetheless a major matter for the unprepared. Almost all Windows 95 home users that I have known never backed

Windows Tips continued on page 4

up their Registry and had a serious problem if anything ever happened to the Registry. Fortunately, Windows 98 automatically makes backup copies once a day for each of the last 5 days that the system has booted. (Of course, if you never reboot, you will not have this protection.) Restoring one of the five backup copies of the Registry is easily done by means of the system tool, Registry Checker (*scanreg.exe*). It does require going into DOS but the process is quite painless even for the novice. If one day your computer informs you that it won't boot into Windows because the Registry is corrupt and you are staring at the black and white DOS screen, simply type "scanreg /restore" (without quotes) and enter. You will get a screen asking which of the five Registry backups you wish to restore. They will be dated so pick one from a date when you know everything was functioning. See <http://support.microsoft.com/support/kb/articles/Q183/8/87.asp> or <http://216.167.71.32/windows98/start-145.shtml> for more details.

In Windows Me (and sometimes in Windows 98) you will have to use a boot disk because DOS is not available. It is imperative, therefore, to make a boot disk to have handy for any such emergency. (See above).

## Disk Maintenance

Windows comes with two system accessories that should be used regularly to keep the file system on the hard drive healthy. These are ScanDisk and Defrag. They can be accessed in Programs | Accessories | System Tools or by entering "scandiskw" or "defrag" (without quotes) into the Run line. ScanDisk can be run in either the "Standard" or "Thorough" modes. The latter takes quite a while and need not be run very often. Microsoft suggests running Standard once a week, while Thorough is suggested once a month. Personally, I think the average home user could get away with using one month and four months, respectively, but the number is arbitrary. In any case, ScanDisk Standard should always be run after any system crash. More on ScanDisk is at

[www.microsoft.com/windows98/usingwindows/maintaining/tips/beginner/scandisk.asp](http://www.microsoft.com/windows98/usingwindows/maintaining/tips/beginner/scandisk.asp)  
<http://support.microsoft.com/support/kb/articles/Q186/3/65.ASP>

Heavy computer users should defrag once a week while once a month is probably adequate for average home use. The best procedure is to run right after ScanDisk. Note that the first time that Defrag is run is likely to be a lengthy session. It may take several hours, depending on your disk size and condition. At about 10% defragmented the system will seem to hang for many minutes but will eventually go on. More information is at [www.microsoft.com/windows98/usingwindows/maintaining/tips/beginner/diskdefrag.asp](http://www.microsoft.com/windows98/usingwindows/maintaining/tips/beginner/diskdefrag.asp)  
<http://support.microsoft.com/support/kb/articles/q186/1/71.asp>

Ron Badour has good pages on ScanDisk and Defrag (sometimes slow to load) at

<http://badour.freewebsites.com/html/scandisk.html>  
<http://badour.freewebsites.com/html/defrag.html>

An important consideration in running either of these tools is to have nothing else running in the background. You can do *Ctrl-Alt-Delete* to bring up the list of running programs or more easily use the neat program EndItAll from PC Magazine (see the discussion at <http://pages.zdnet.com/hampsi/Articles/Hurry2.htm>)

## File Maintenance

A certain amount of housekeeping will help your system to be more efficient and stable. Windows programs use a lot of temporary files, which can accumulate at an alarming rate. In particular, the folders \Windows\Temporary Internet Files\ and \Windows\temp\ can really build up. These folders should be cleaned out periodically. An easy way to do this is to go to My Computer and right-click on the icon for the C: drive. Open the Properties sheet and make sure the "General" tab is selected. Then click "Disk Cleanup." You will be given a choice of temporary folders to clean, including the Recycle Bin. More on Disk Cleanup is at <http://216.167.71.32/windows98/start-141.shtml>. Also, an entire article on cleaning up is at <http://pages.zdnet.com/hampsi/Articles/clean.htm>. Incidentally, if you click on the "Tools" tab in the properties sheet, you can access ScanDisk and Defrag from here as well as Microsoft Backup (if it is installed).

## Conclusion

The procedures outlined here are not onerous. Nor do they require any special knowledge. However, a PC user who carries out these minimal basic steps on a regular basis is likely to have a better computer experience. Things may still go wrong but the prepared user will have much less trouble overall.



## Minutes for the General Meeting September 10, 2001

By: Don Arrowsmith

Paul opened the meeting with a give away of copies of Money 2001, Casino, Corel Print Office, 2 versions of Quick-en and many tee shirts.

John Konvalinka then presented the evening's program: "Successful ways of using computers and the internet in genealogical research". This excellent overview of computer assisted genealogy was accompanied by an extensive hand-out which is available at John's web site: [www.konvalinka.com](http://www.konvalinka.com) under the "Syllabus" link.



# Give Your Portal Some Pizzazz

Customize your browser's home page and increase your productivity

By: Steve Bass, Pasadena IBM Users Group

I was at a buddy's house recently and spotted something alarming. His home page—the screen his browser automatically opens with—was MSN.

Yeah, you heard me. Not only hadn't he switched to another home page, he wasn't even aware that he could modify the page and get rid of much of the useless junk. With an ad-blocking program, he could also avoid all of Microsoft's blaring, shameless self-aggrandizements.

My hand started twitching. I was about to lunge towards his mouse and try to single-handedly change his home page, when his wife shouted "barbecue's ready."

I was on my third beer when two things struck me. I'd had enough to drink and I had to help this guy out.

## Dumping the Ads

You can decide for yourself whether blocking ads is ethical. As far as I'm concerned, ads that are deceptive (the one that looks like a download gauge and says "click here"), pop up boxes (or worse, those damn X-10 camera pop-under boxes), and blinking Flash animations are all fair game.

My favorite ad jamming utility is WebWasher ([www.webwasher.com](http://www.webwasher.com)). It's free for personal use and if you accept the defaults, easy to use. Of course you can tweak WebWasher in dozens of ways, fine-tuning it to, say, allow some cookies to be released while withholding others.

## Point Me Home

Changing your Home page is a five minute operation. It's straightforward in Internet Explorer (IE). Go to the Web site you want to use as your Home page. Then from the Tools menu, choose Internet Options and click *Use Current*.

In Netscape, go to the Web site you want to use as your Home page. From the Edit menu, choose Preferences. (I'm using version 6.01; your Netscape version may have slightly different menu settings.) You'll need to find the *Navigator* category or a dialog area that shows the Home Page option. Click the *Use Current Page* button and you're done. But while you're there, examine the Toolbars section of the Options area. Uncheck the buttons Netscape automatically adds, things you might not need or want.

## Presto Chango

You may encounter a sleazy web site that changes your Home page without permission. It's happened to me and it threw me for a loop. Not only couldn't I figure out how they did it, I couldn't change it back to my original Home page. First try the previous instructions. If that doesn't fix it, you'll need to change a setting in your Registry. Fred Langa has a way to do it and he explains the process here: <http://www.langa.com/newsletters/2000/2000-07-10.htm#2>

## Playing Around with Portals

I think of my browser—and Home page—as the center of my online activity, sort of a control panel that gets me to other places quickly and efficiently. I've never counted the hours but

I'm guessing my browser's on screen about 40 percent of the time. (Probably another 40 percent is with Eudora and the balance in Word and PowerDesk.)

By the way, a portal isn't something mysterious or esoteric. It's simply a single integrated point for access to information, people, and other Web sites; a personalized and customized user interface.

While I'm not happy with Yahoo's emulation of Microsoft (they bought eGroups only to make it a complicated chamber of horrors), their portal is terrific. My bias towards using Yahoo is two-fold: Yahoo provides a variety of information, more than most portals, and it's blessedly easy to customize a page. Better, I have five separate Yahoo pages, each serving a different need. For instance, my main page includes the following:

- \* News: Technology, local, science, world, and others.
  - \* Calendar: A quick view of my upcoming events with access to my calendar.
  - \* E-mail and messaging: I get to see my Yahoo mail account and who's online for an instant message.
  - \* Local area events.
  - \* Bookmarks: I use this handy category to jump to sites that I want access to but aren't important enough to add to IE's Links bar.
  - \* Weather.
  - \* Financial portfolio: A small, password-protected box that lets me see my daily losses.
  - \* Mapping: Similar to MapBlast.com but with a pull-down history.
  - \* News clipper: Yahoo automatically searches its news database to find articles that I'm tracking.
- I have other Yahoo pages, each accessible from my Home page.
- \* Entertainment: with a listing of movie show times for theaters in Pasadena and an evening's worth of TV listings.
  - \* Yahoo Search Tools: I have all my lookups here—Yellow Pages, E-mail and phone searches, as well as bookmarks that link me to people and reverse phone directory pages.

## Yahoo's a Flex Champ

Page layouts are simple to design. Most Yahoo modules—Calendar, Maps, E-mail, Weather, for instance—can be placed on either side of the Home page. Bookmarks Portfolio, News, and other modules can be removed from the page to become a separate, temporary floating boxes. And the content can be set into either two medium sized columns or two narrow and one wide column.

Creating a Home page Portal is a fun project, has the potential to let you navigate the Web faster, and unlike installing a new operating system, is guaranteed not to hose your PC. §

*Steve Bass is a Contributing Editor with PC World and runs the Pasadena IBM Users Group. Write to him at [steve\\_bass@pcworld.com](mailto:steve_bass@pcworld.com). Check PCW's current edition at [www.pcworld.com/resource/toc/index.asp](http://www.pcworld.com/resource/toc/index.asp) and sign up for the Steve Bass online newsletter at [www.pcworld.com/bass\\_letter](http://www.pcworld.com/bass_letter).*

# My Tale of Woe

By: Richard Robusto - Las Vegas PC User Group

On Monday, February 26, I turned on my computer and got a message before it would boot up saying that my stack in the config.sys file was not correct. I tried repeatedly to open the config.sys file, but I could not get past the initial message. Well, I said, "No Problem, I'll use my trusty ole Go Back Program." Sure enough, it allowed me to go back 2 days and I booted up into Windows. Guess I took care of that. Now, I'll arrange the stack in the config.sys file. The first keystroke and the system froze up. So I reboot. No luck. Then I try to get to Go Back again. No luck. It would not even begin to start the configuration so that the Go Back screen would come up. After some serious thinking and using a few choice words, I hit upon the idea of using the emergency discs, which Utilities had me make when I first installed the Utilities Program. Ok, I guess I got this problem licked. I went through the procedures that it lead me through. Insert disc 2, then disc 3, then insert Emergency Utilities disc. Then there was a flashing of lights, programs were running and eventually, everything stopped. Well, what could it be? Then I went looking again and I got a message that the C drive did not have any fat clusters and could not be recognized. When I asked one of my knowledgeable friends what that meant, he told me that I had blown out all my fat clusters on the C drive. I said, "How bad is that?" I got a loud groan and a bad message. That dreaded word REFORMAT! That meant all my files and anything else I had would be gone. So I took the computer to the Windows workshop on Saturday. A few members who were quite knowledgeable helped me out to get started in reformatting my hard drive. I finally formatted the C drive. Had to do it twice. The first time something went wrong. Ultimately, I got it formatted and got ready to install Windows ME. I had been running Windows 98 but when this problem happened I procured a copy of Windows ME. I was not ready to install ME but with this reformatting and being able to make a clean install instead of an upgrade, I used the ME program. Ok, everything is done and I'm ready to roll. I had my genealogy program on my removable hard drive, so I was able to remove it while formatting and save it. However, after Windows ME was installed and running, I could not access the removable hard drive D. I got a lot of suggestions, such as I needed specific software to let my C drive recognize my D drive, etc, etc.

Well, when I got home and set up, I tried to get on line and get my mail. I found that the modem was not working. Great. That meant that I probably needed new drivers to make it work, which I couldn't download cause I couldn't get on-line.

So I went down to Apex where I bought the computer and Eldon, the guy who puts these things together, put in the new driver for the modem and then it worked. Then I asked him about the software for the removable hard drive. He took a look and said that the drive could not be accessed cause it was a non-dos drive. Non-dos? What is non-dos and how did it happen? How that happened is a mystery. Probably when I first used the Utilities rescue discs. He said I had to reformat it in order to make it work. (I started to shake) He said, "No way out. It must

be done" So he reformatted it and sure enough he got it to work. Of course I lost the entire genealogy program. I remembered that I had made a backup of the data file about a week before, so I figured I could get it back. When I finally got it back home and working, I reinstalled all the necessary programs including the Genealogy. Then I went looking for my backup disc. I found that I had made that 2 days before all this happened. Talk about LUCK! There must have been about 3 months work in there. I transferred the data files into the program and it gave me a series of warning messages that the files weren't working properly and would not save anything. At that point I started to sweat. With my pulse rate rapidly approaching top speed, I gingerly went in and changed the attributes in the properties windows. Finally, it started to work the way it should. Talk about RELIEF!!! At that point I had to go get a cup of that strong Starbucks coffee. It just reinforces that old saying, Backup! Backup! It's not IF you have a major crash, it's WHEN! Now, if you want to acquire this set of rescue discs, I'd be very happy to send them to you. I don't anticipate using them again as I have forgotten how to spell the name of the company. Are you sure you don't want to blow your fat clusters out on your C drive? I am now back on-line with a nice clean registry, which I am going to tackle next so that when I come over to your house I can fine tune your registry. Of course, that's after I utilize the Utilities rescue discs to get your computer in shape. And if by chance, it happens to blow out the fat clusters in the C drive, never fear, I know the procedure to fix it.

Richard Robusto, [ricmar12@juno.com](mailto:ricmar12@juno.com) is a member of the Las Vegas PC User Group as well the Southern Nevada User Group. You generally find him at most meetings and he is willing to share and help whenever possible.

## Help Wanted!

### PPCUG Treasurer

After four great years of serving as Treasurer, Tom Canavan is giving up his post.

If you are currently a PPCUG member and would like to help manage the finances of our group, we would like to hear from you!

Call Paul @ 908-218-0778



# PRINCETON PC USERS GROUP

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

## PPCUG Member E-mail Directory

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