PPCUG

NEWS

A PUBLICATION OF THE PRINCETON PC USERS GROUP

Monday December 10, 2001

Elections & Holiday Party

Celebrate the coming holidays and another successful year of the PPCUG!
In addition to the Elections and Party, Sol Libes will present:
"How to Use Your Computer As An Audio Jukebox"
Also, bring your PC related questions, Comments and Suggestions
to the meeting as we will have an open forum!

At

Lawrence Library

Meetng 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

In this issue

Jonathan White, (left) starting his presentation on Home Networking with President Paul Kurivchack looking on at the November General Meeting.

Digital Photo by: Tom Carman

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 upcoing 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.

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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.

Presidents Message
by Paul Kurivchack

Let me start this month Presidents message thanking new member, Jonathan White for his excellent presentation on home networking. Jonathan has only been a member since August, but was willing to jump in with both feet to provide a very timely presentation. With DSL/Cable broadband service finally reaching many more of our members homes than a year ago, and with many members having multiple computers in their homes, now is the best time to jump in and set up a home network Couple this with very affortable prices for DSL/ Cable modems, routers and switches, all you need is the time and direction for setting up your first home network. I hope that those members in attendance went home with a better understanding of basic home networking and gained the guidance for deciding which technology, hardwired (CAT5 Cabling) or wireless will work best for you. Thanks again to Jon for an excellent presentation. Hopefully we will see him again in the future with another presentation for our group.

The nominations for officers were finalized at the November meeting and now all that we need to do is to vote. Please attend the meeting to show your support for our officers and board members.

After the voting, we will have our Question & Answer open forum there will be a short presentation by Sol Libes on using Your PC As An Audio Jukebox. Create music libraries on your PC from CD's, old records, the Web and arrange them like a disk jockey. Hopefully Sol will put together a collection of holiday favorites for the party.

As part of the Holiday Party festivities, we will have a **Windows XP Drawing!** Microsoft has donated a copy of Windows XP Professional Edition full version (not upgrade version - costs $399). We will hold a drawing for this. Drawing tickets will be $3 or 2 tickets for $5. Members Only.

Lastly, I will have an updated Membership Renewal form at the December meeting and will be accepting renewals for 2002. For any members who do not renew on the 10th, we will be mailing it to you this year. The dues are still $30.00 per person/family.

I look forward to seeing all of you on December 10th to share in the friendship we have as members of the Princeton PC Users Group and to reflect back on the past year of our group. For those unable to attend, my best wishes to you and your families for a very happy and joyous holiday season.

Windows Tips: Some Comments On XP

By: Vic Laurie - PPCUG

In return for my minimal contribution to one of Microsoft's "Extreme" events (I watched while Sol Libes and Paul Kurivchack worked), the company generously provided me with a copy of Windows XP Professional to try out. Since I know that many people are curious to learn about the new operating system, I am going to describe my recent experience with it. My comments are directed at the home user and will be a purely personal description with no pretense at a thorough or comprehensive study. It is not possible to discuss all of the many new features of XP in this limited space and I will concentrate on the installation. As you will have doubtless noticed, computer publications and the Internet are replete with professional assessments and intensive studies and those interested in more detail can consult the list of references at the end of this article.

After I was given a copy of XP, I hesitated before trying an installation. I have had no experience with the precursors of XP such as Windows NT or Windows 2000 and this was brand-new territory for me. The Internet is full of stories about XP that range from ecstatic to dismal and I wasn't sure what to think. One thing in particular that concerned me were the many stories about older software and hardware not working on XP. Since XP is a new system building on NT, it was to be expected that many older applications and hardware would have problems but there seemed to be a lot of even knowledgeable experts encountering various troubles. I was still using some old stuff (even a DOS program) and I was wary of what might happen to them. Also my present system was working just fine and was all tweaked and tuned up. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," is usually a pretty good philosophy for computer users. So I wavered. In the end, however, I succumbed to the temptation to see what this new system was like. It is, after all, what the great majority of PCs sold in the future will be using.

But I didn't rush in. First, I took a relatively small step. I have an almost new machine with a 1.2 GHz processor, 256 MB of RAM and a 40 GB hard drive so I had no worry about limitations in those areas. I decided to dual-boot so that I could always use my previous system if the XP installation gave difficulties. Setting up a dual-boot of XP and 9X/Me is a very easy process. (Note that the older system should always be present first.) However, the two operating systems do need separate partitions (also called volumes) and the partition where XP is to go should be set up in advance (see the article at http://support.microsoft.com/support/kb/articles/Q306/5/59.ASP). First I did a complete system backup and prepared an empty partition .When I began the XP installation, it noticed right away that I already had a Windows operating system and asked which partition I wanted to put XP on (I have four partitions on a 40 GB disk). I told it and about ½ hour later I had XP installed. A few more minutes and my DSL and dial-up connections were configured, my HP 682C printer was recognized and working, and I had a dual-boot system. There were a few problems, of course. I couldn't get my old 100 MB parallel-port ZIP drive to work even with a new driver but I didn't try very hard. My heart wasn't really in it because the 100 MB ZIP drive was supplanted long ago by a CD-RW. Windows XP comes with CD burning software and I had no trouble writing to a CD with my IDE connected burner. However, I should point out that one of the big trouble spots in XP is with common CD burning software such as that from Roxio (or formerly from Adaptec). Also, USB connected CD burners often need new drivers (and not all models from all manufacturers have them). In fact, USB connections in general seem to be a problem spot. My Visioneer model 7600 USB scanner, for example, has no Microsoft approved driver although Visioneer provides a work-around at their Internet site. In general, one has to expect to have to get some new hardware drivers and to do some tinkering. There are a number of Internet sites that will help with finding driver updates. One I use is http://driverzone.com/. I did not spend a lot of time installing software programs since I had access to all of them from the older system and was going to test software elsewhere (See below). I did try my ancient (but still good) DOS bridge game (no installation needed, just a click on the file) and it worked perfectly with the old graphics looking better than they ever do with Windows 98. This program is so old it originally came on 5 ½" floppies! I also installed the freeware ZoneAlarm firewall and had trouble until I realized that XP has its own firewall that I had to turn off.

This dual-boot setup was different from previous ones that I have used since each system could see all the files and partitions including the other operating system. DOS/Windows 9X/Me systems have to be on the C: drive. When dual-booting Windows 9X and Windows Me, for example, the partitions containing the operating systems are invisible to each other so that they can both think they are on the C: drive. Windows XP, on the other hand, can be on any other partition and the two systems do not have to be hidden from one another. This does not mean however, that the same program installation used by one system can be used by both systems since each has to have its own Registry entries. In other words, you have to do a second installation of any application software unless it is the simple type that does not use Registry entries. There is a Microsoft utility that supposedly allows for the transfer of all your settings and files from one system to another but I did not try it. It is described at http://www.windows-help.net/WindowsXP/howto-01.html

Here I should mention that I was using the FAT32 file system for all partitions. Those who are new to NT based systems may not be aware of the different file systems in use. There is no space here to go into details but all users of XP need to know that there are in use two (and more) distinct ways of physically setting up files on a disk, the FAT system and the NTFS system. Windows 9X/Me systems have to use the FAT system, usually FAT32. Windows XP can use either FAT32 or NTFS. Converting from FAT to NTFS is easily done in XP, if desired, but it is a one-way process. Going back to FAT would require special software. NTFS offers much greater security, even down to the indi-

ArtIcons 3.0
Software Review

By: Paul Kurivchack - PPCUG

How many times have you installed a new application or created a desktop shortcut and just didn't like the icon that was offered to you? Did you ever say to yourself, is there a way to just tweak the icon to fit my needs? Well, Aha-Soft Company has created a very cool icon creation / editing application that just about covers everything you would ever want in an icon utility including managing icon libraries.

ArtIcons 3.0 was released back in September in anticipation of Windows XP and its new icon format that gives the icons a smooth edge and the "High Color Depth" look. That however does not stop you from using ArtIcons today on any version of Windows 9x, NT or 2000 and is available via download from: http://www.aha-soft.com.

ArtIcons does two things extremely well. Create and Edit icons and secondly, manage all the icons on your system. I'll start with managing the icon libraries first. Just to start out however, I have to mention that ArtIcons assumes you want to jump right in and start creating a new icon as it brings up a New Image
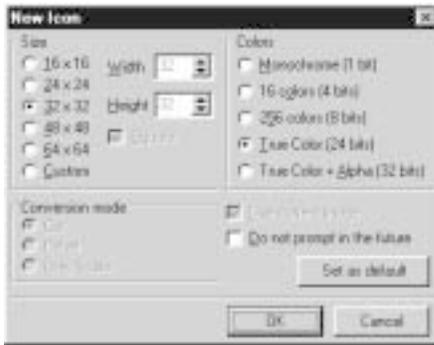

Figure 1

Format pop up box (Figure 1) asking to select the image size and color. Hit OK for the default image size of 32 x 32 and True Color for the moment. I will cover Creating/Editing icons a little later.

Icon Libraries

This is a very cool feature. Did you wonder how many icon (*.ico) files are really on your system? Well now, you can find out. Go to File menu and select New Library. A New Icon Library tab appears on the Windows Bar. A local tool bar appears just beneath that with a variety of tools to select from such as New Icon, Import Files, Find in Folders and Find in Sub Folders. I started with Find in Folders, as I had no idea where to start looking for all my icons and selected the root of C:\. ArtIcons started scanning for every icon in the root of C:\ and automatically found over four thousand icons and then dumped them into five library (*.icl) files. I was totally amazed over the shear number of icons found, but what ArtIcons does next is even more amazing. By going to the Library menu item and then selecting delete duplicates, I was able to reduce the library down

to a manageable 1610 icons in just one library. There are still four others to go through. If you want, just drag and drop icons into a most used icon library after the scanning process is completed. Then only open that library containing the fifty or so most likely to use icons (figure 2).
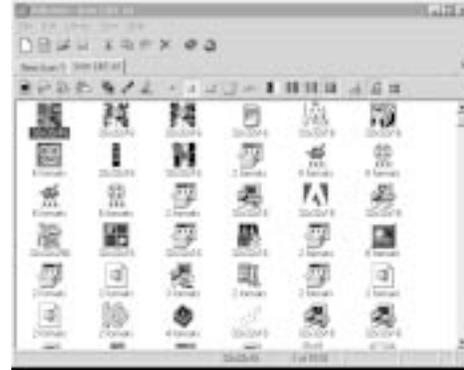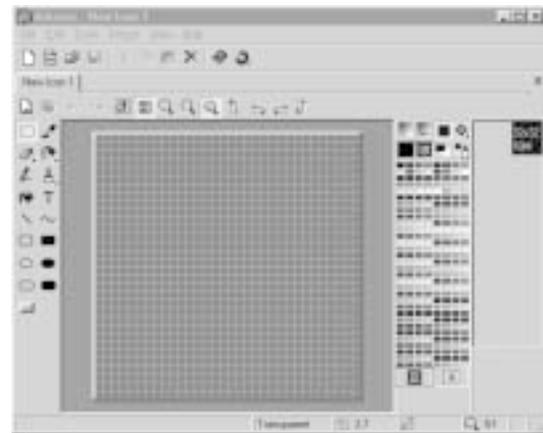

Figure 2

Why the big deal about the libraries? You can sort the icons by name, by type, see how they look at different sizes 16x16, 32x32, 48x48 or 64x64. A very powerful tool to get you started in managing all the icons on your system and for creating new icons. Another attraction to using the library is if you are not a professional artist, trying to create an icon from scratch can be very intimidating. By using an existing icon as a guide, you can see how the icon created, learn how to use the various tools, change colors, etc., before setting off designing your own icons.

Icon Creation / Editing

Here is where the true artist in you can come out. Whether you create from scratch or import from a icon library all the essential drawing tools are laid out on the left hand side of the

drawing pad (32 x 32 grid line pad) with the color palette to the right. A view window also appears on the right side to show what the actual true size icon will look like as you are creating it.

Drawing tools include the pencil, paint brush (different brush heads), spray can, flood fill, text, line and shape (rectangle, ellipse and rounded rectangle, filled and unfilled) tools. Color pick-

vidual file level., and is the choice in multi-user environments with only XP, Windows 2000 or other NT based systems. I think, however, that in general the home user should consider sticking with FAT32. You must use FAT for Win 9X/Me. And even for XP I like the idea that a DOS boot disk can still access the hard drive, which it cannot if it is NTFS. In a dual-boot setup, experienced computer users might make the XP partition NTFS and the others FAT32 but I believe in keeping it simple for home use.

Having been quite impressed with the ease of installing the dual-boot, I next decided to try an upgrade on an older, less powerful system to closer approximate what a typical user might encounter. Only systems with Windows 98 and later can be upgraded; Windows 95 is not eligible. "Upgrade" is actually a bit of a misnomer. XP is really a changeover to an entirely different operating system and the "upgrade" consists in more or less completely replacing the older operating system. I used a machine at the Ewing SeniorNet Center for a trial upgrade with their copy of XP. It is a 400 MHz Celeron system with a BIOS that is at least 4 years old. It has 128 MB of RAM (forget anything less for XP) and an 8 GB hard drive. It had Windows 98SE with a variety of installed software. Before installation actually begins the XP disk presents you with a menu that includes a check of your software for compatibility. I ran it and was told that Norton System Works 2000 wasn't going to work nor was AOL 4. This wasn't news since these are two programs that are widely known to be incompatible. In general, no older anti-virus or system utility program can be expected to work and AOL is AOL. (For XP Norton has just released System Works 2002 and AOL has just come out with version 7). I then started the installation which ran with very little need for human intervention. It took about 1 ¼ hours. The computer is on a local area network and the configuration of that as well as the Internet settings was done without a hitch. An HP 660c printer was recognized and in general the installation was uneventful. A quick check showed most programs were functioning with the exception of Norton and AOL as already mentioned. Also Photo Deluxe 3.1 did not work and the settings for NetMeeting were missing. If I had tried them I imagine some of our old hardware like scanners would not have worked but all in all it was a pretty smooth upgrade. I then formatted the drive and restored the system with a Norton Ghost image to its previous Windows 98 state. That is the surest way to return if you want to get rid of XP. However, when you upgrade, XP has an Uninstall option that supposedly returns the old configuration but I didn't try it.

Windows XP is designed for multi-user environments and allows for much more control over who has access to files and programs. Consequently, during installation more attention has to be paid to setting up accounts and passwords. If the NTFS file system is in use, I am told that security can even be set for each file individually. There is also a feature that families will like which provides an individualized setup for each account that in effect provides a separate computer system with its own settings and software. Mom, Dad, and the kids can switch back and forth among their own particular setups without disturbing anybody else.

No article on XP can fail to mention Windows Product Activation. The controversy swirling around this issue has been discussed so much and so widely that I am going to limit myself to this: the upshot for the average home user is that your XP installation disk is valid on only one machine. That doesn't mean that you can't try it on your spouse's machine and then uninstall it and then try it on your laptop and then uninstall it but you can't leave it for more than 30 days on any machine without activating it. Otherwise it locks up. Activating is painless if done on the Internet and associates your particular machine configuration with the product code on your installation disk. Those who want more details can check the references at the end of this article.

The Bottom Line
Does XP present too many problems with older hardware and software? The range of different programs and hardware out there is so large that some incompatibilities are inevitable. Windows 9x tries to accommodate the very old as well as the new and is notoriously unstable as a result. At some point the operating system that is in primary use has to be modernized and the transition troubles that are occurring are a price for that progress. My experience has been pretty limited but so far I am impressed with XP. I just wish there were a cheaper version for the home user with fewer bells and whistles but that's marketing, I guess.

Should the average home user upgrade to XP? For many people I think the answer is, "Not yet, and then only on a new computer." For many, the total cost of upgrading, including new software and hardware, is going to be similar to buying a new computer. Then there is the aggravation of getting older stuff to work. Some of us enjoy tinkering but I suspect not everybody would think of it as fun. I also suspect that many of the new features in XP that concern multimedia and networking may not be all that relevant to many home users. The fact is that, however you look at it, sooner or later most of us will be using XP. But for now, if you already have a system that works for you, then waiting for the inevitable improvements and bug fixes may be your best course. So who might benefit from switching right away? If stability is important then XP is clearly an improvement. If security of your files in a multi-user environment is important, XP offers much better options in that area. If you are big on networking then the Professional version would make it much easier. More help on the pros and cons of switching to XP is in the references below.

For More Information on XP
To see if your system is ready for XP:
Check hardware compatibility at http://www.microsoft.com/hcl/default.asp
There is an upgrade advisor (please note that this is a 30+ MB download) at http://www.microsoft.com/WINDOWSXP/home/howtobuy/upgrading/advisor.asp
PitStop provides an XP readiness check at http://www.pcpitstop.com/xpready/

Among the many reviews and assessments are these:
http://www.pcmag.com/article/0,2997,a%253D15991,00.asp

http://www.zdnet.com/products/stories/reviews/
0,4161,2809517,00.html

http://www.pcworld.com/features/article/
0,aid,63223,pg,1,00.asp

http://www.infoworld.com/articles/tc/xml/01/10/29/
011029tcwinxp.xml   http://www.winsupersite.com/reviews/
windowsxp.asp

http://www.informationweek.com/story/IWK20011115S0014

Some frequently asked questions:

http://support.microsoft.com/directory/content.asp?id=fh;EN-US;winxpfaq

http://www.geocities.com/marfer_mvp/xp_notes.htm

The difference between the professional and the home versions

http://www.winsupersite.com/showcase/
windowsxp_home_pro.asp

http://www.windows-help.net/WindowsXP/home-vs-pro.html

Minutes for the General Meeting November 19, 2001

By: Don Arrowsmith

The meeting came to order at 7:45 with Paul asking for questions. At 8:00 Jonathan White began the main program - an overview of home networking. He first described four technologies to interconnect your computers: dedicated wiring using Category 5 cables, wireless, an overlay on your telephone wiring and an overlay on your house power wiring. Various pieces of hardware were shown including cables, network interface cards, hubs and routers. Tips were presented for configuring your Windows software to support networking. Finally, a low cost (~$100) firewall was described. SmoothWall is a standalone system based on Linux to be run on a dedicated PC (which can be an old 486 system). SmoothWall functions as a sturdy firewall to protect your home network from Internet bad guys. It is available as a donation-ware download from http://www.smoothwall.org. Jonathan runs YES! Consulting LLC and has various networking links available at http://www.yes-llc.com/homenetworkinglinks.html.

er and eraser fill out the tools you can select from. Essentially all the tools you could ever want or need to create a new icon are there at the ready.

The color palette allows you to create foreground and background color schemes, apply color gradients, chess fills and many more all with over a million colors. For Windows XP icons you can add drop shadows, smooth or negative effects.

One of the more interesting features of the product is its ability to scroll the drawing palette, roll left, roll right, roll up or roll down. This is really cool when using color gradients and you just don't want it dead center, roll it to where you want the colors. This roll feature works with text, and the drawing shapes. No need to start over if it doesn't fit. Just roll it.

ArtIcons supports the import and export of a wide variety of file formats. Here is a partial lists: ICO - Windows Icon, CUR - Windows Cursor, ANI - Animated Cursor, BMP - Windows and OS/2 Bitmap, GIF - CompuServe Graphics Interchange, JPG - JPEG JFIF Image, PNG - Portable Network Graphics, PSD - Adobe Photoshop Image, WMF   - Windows Metafile Format and a bunch more. It is not only desktop icons but also cursors and more.

Conclusion

If you want the most powerful, easy to use icon creation/editing utility, ArtIcons is it. It has more built in features than you could ever need or want, but with a very low learning curve. Something I find very important when it is an application that you may not use every day. If you know how to use Windows Paint, you can use ArtIcons.

System Requirements

ArtIcons is a quite small application only taking up about 2 MB of hard drive space. It operates on Pentium 133 and up with 16 MB RAM. It will run on just about any PC out there today.

Price

As shareware download, $19.95. The Pro Version, which is what I reviewed, is $29.95. But as a special offer to our user group, the Pro Version can be had for $19.95 by downloading the application and registering it at: http://www.regsoft.net/purchase.php3?product. Password is: PCGROUP. Not a bad deal, a ten-dollar savings. Visit Aha-soft at: http://www.aha-soft.com.

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(Last Update: December 2, 2001)
Send Updates to kurivchp@optonline.net for inclusion in this listing.

Happy Holidays from the Officers & Board

The 2002 Nominations Are!

President .... Paul Kurivchack
Vice President .... Tom Carman
Secretary .... Don Arrowsmith
Treasurer -Acting .... Tom Carman
Member-At-Large .... Jon Abolins
Member-At-Large ...... Kim Goldenberg
Member-At-Large .... Vic Laurie
Member-At-Large .... Sol Libes

ELECTIONS & HOLIDAY PARTY
DECEMBER 10, 2001
LAWRENCE LIBRARY