

PPCUG

NEWS

A PUBLICATION OF THE PRINCETON PC USERS GROUP

Monday May 12, 2003

Lindows Operating System

Jim Russ

The Lindows OS is a popular version of Linux that is being pre-installed on some very Low-Cost PC Systems.

Lindows has a friendly graphical interface and supports popular Microsoft Windows file types

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: Tom Garman

Don Arrowsmith presenting the mapping features of the Garmin Street Pilot III GPS System to the group at the April 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.

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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

June 9, 2003 - Batch Files & Scripting - Vic Laurie

July 14, 2003 - Music & Video on Your PC - Don Slepian

August 11, 2003 - To Be Announced

September 8, 2003 - Genealogy - Blanche Sneath

Presidents Message

By: Clarke Walker

Again I am starting off by thanking members of the Group. This time it is to those who volunteered to help with the Parcel Pick-Up at the Trenton Computer Festival. We had great weather and a wonderful time. This activity earned several hundred dollars for our Group.

The turn out of vendors and buyers was far less than several years ago when the TCF was at its peak. However there was still plenty to buy. It also gave the lecture series a better chance to get noticed. The fine lectures that are available are one of the best facets of the TCF. I have been going to the TCF for close to 20 years (this was the 28th). I use to enjoy watching the ACM Graphic SIG videos and learning tips from fellow buyers.

The first computer show I ever went to was in the mid-seventies (I think it was 1975). The show was held in the basement and parking garage of a hotel in Atlantic City. My friend and I drove down from Bergen County. As we stopped at the rest areas we came across other people heading to the computer show in Atlantic City. We wondered if we were Lemmings (a popular computer game from the late eighties) headed for the cliffs. I do not know how many people were there but it was extremely crowded as we got pushed up and down stairs. The "hot" computer was the Altair. It came in a kit and I believe had 256 (yep 256 bytes!) of memory. I later learned that some guy, Bill Gates, was there taking orders for software (he had yet to own.)

At the May meeting we will have a guest from the Hunterdon Computer Club. Jim Russ will tell us about Lindows. Please invite your Linux friends to join us that evening.

For more information on the Altair see: http://www.wcsif.cs.ucdavis.edu/~cslclub/museum/items/mits_altair_8800.html
<http://www.VirtualAltair.com>

TREASURER WANTED!

Like to handle money and keep the books,
well the PPCUG needs your help.
Starting July 1, 2003 we need a new Treasurer.

If you are interested,
contact

President, Clarke Walker for information.

Ranton Rebates

By: Vic Laurie - PPCUG

Maybe it's the world situation, maybe it's old age turning me into a curmudgeon, maybe it's the proliferation of useless things like blue ketchup, but for whatever reason I have the irresistible urge to issue a few protests. I am going to deviate from my usual format for these articles and indulge in a little personal expression on a pet peeve.

I am talking about that sales gimmick, the rebate. In the last few months, I have had to send in a dozen or more rebate requests. It seems that you can't buy anything related to computers these days without having to get involved with a lot of rebate games. I resent having to go through all the nonsense of filling out forms, cutting up boxes to remove proof of purchase codes, making copies of invoices or sales slips, mailing all the collected stuff and then waiting so long for the rebate check that I forget what it's for. I would really prefer a simple reduction in price. Unfortunately that won't happen since the rebate thing is a marketing ploy. It's a come-on and the companies hope you won't actually apply for the rebate. Statistics seem to show that a lot of people don't bother and the companies do all they can to throw up obstacles to discourage as many people as possible.

First, there is the special form you have to get. No copies, please, only the original will do. Where is the form? Sometimes you have to ask for it at the store where you make your purchase. Tough luck if you forget to ask. (Oh yes, don't forget to ask for an official duplicate of your sales slip while you're at it.) If the rebate form comes with the box, it is often buried in the middle of a lot of advertising literature that you have to sift through before you find it. Is the form clearly marked as such? Of course not, that would be too easy. It's in an obscure place in the middle of a page sandwiched between advertising blurbs for useless (but expensive) services. The lines on the form are very small so that only by using special micro-writing techniques can you get your name and address filled in. As a result, I often get rebate checks made out to odd names. Fortunately, my bank doesn't seem to care that I bring in checks for "W. Lavie" or other strangers. No doubt, however, companies will keep hoping that I won't be able to cash some of their checks.

I recently bought a HP printer and ran into a new version of "Let's make the rebate form hard to get." This time the only way to get the required rebate form was to go to a special Web site. There I had to fill out a form to see if I was eligible for the rebate. They wanted to know a whole lot of things, including marketing survey stuff like my employer, my income, my job function. OK, I made up some fake data for that part but then they wanted to know the code for the model of my new printer-not the model number, mind you, but the *code* for the model number. To get this code, I had to go look it up in another Web site. After I entered the code number (it had no resemblance to the model number), next they wanted the *serial* number of the actual printer I had bought. Do you know where the serial number is? It's on the bottom of the printer. I had already installed the printer to see how it worked so now I had to remove the paper, disconnect a cable, and turn the printer upside down to get the serial number. (Along the way a couple of parts fell off.) All this was required, not to actually get a rebate form, but just to see if I was eligible to get a rebate form. It was almost like trying to get into some secret fraternity. Finally, I received the stamp of approval and was ruled to be eligible. Now, I had to go to yet another site to finally get the mail-in rebate form. But guess what. At this new site I had to fill in much of the same information I just got through filling in at the

previous site. Clearly, HP is hoping I will throw up my hands and say a \$25 rebate isn't worth the hassle. But I trudge on. Finally, I get the rebate form and print it out. Now I have to fill out the same information on the rebate form that I just entered twice on Web sites. Not to mention that I have to retrieve the box that my wife already put in the garbage so I can cut off the proof of purchase or whatever part that is wanted. Also according to the rebate form, I need the "original invoice". What invoice? I ordered the printer on the Internet so all I have is a confirming e-mail and the packing slip that came with the printer. Big red letters are stamped on the packing slip, "This is not an invoice." Also the rebate form says that the printer's serial number should be on the invoice. Nothing that I have has the printer serial number on it. I write the number on the packing slip, send it in, and hope. The \$25 rebate is no longer the incentive. It is now a primordial struggle with the forces of HP.

Of course, HP is not alone in this type of obstacle creation. I recently used the Internet to order a couple of computers from Dell for two grandchildren. When you order on the Internet, Dell often promises a significant rebate, ranging from \$100-\$200, depending on model. However, instead of just reducing the price at the time of purchase, they make you mail in a rebate request. They have all the information about you and your order right there on the Internet, but you still have to go through the whole charade of filling out and mailing in stuff. You have to go to a special site to find the rebate form; it doesn't come with the computer. (Sound familiar?) Then you have to mail in the rebate form with the packing slip that comes with the computer. Unfortunately, one of the grandkid's computers came with a packing slip that had no mention of the rebate. How that problem will resolve, I don't yet know. The point is that such problems would not arise except for the whole ridiculous business of having to mail in stuff. The convenience of doing business on the Internet is partly vitiated by this rebate nonsense.

Another company that pulls this kind of stunt is Intuit. I buy my income tax software on line. According to Intuit, the state software is included in the price. But, you have to pay extra for the state and then mail in a rebate form to get the money back. Intuit knows who I am and that I have just downloaded the federal software from them and that I have paid for it. Nonetheless, I have to mail in a form, a proof of purchase, and a sales slip (all printed out from the Internet). I will then wait for three months until I (hopefully) get back the money that I should not have had to pay in the first place.

Making the rebate request form an obstacle is only one of the tactics used to discourage people from applying. Getting together the various and sundry things that must accompany the rebate form is another hurdle. Sometimes it's a version of a scavenger hunt. Especially if you have a wife like mine whose first and immediate reaction to anything that arrives is to throw all the packing material and boxes into the trash. It would be one thing if they always asked for the same part of the box but that wouldn't be playing the game. They have to make it hard enough to cause some more people to drop out of the process. So it's a game of trying to find which little thing on the original box that they want mailed in this time. No, it's not the UPC code, no, it's not the product code; oh, *there* it is, it's one of the tabs that are used to close the box. I even once had to make a photocopy of the bottom of a laptop. Toshiba insisted on having the serial number (like HP). My word wasn't good enough, however. They wanted real proof and insisted on a photocopy, not of an invoice but of the machine. Have you ever Xeroxed the bottom of a laptop?

If you manage to get as far as collecting all the hodgepodge of

Ranton Rebates continued on page 5

Microsoft Streets & Trips 2003 Software Review

By: Paul Kurivchack - PPCUG

I started out some years ago with Automap Streets Plus as part of the Office97 Small Business Edition and then added TripPlanner98 a short time later. I then upgraded to Streets & Trips 2001 to get a combined trip planner and address finder in one package and used it extensively when planning any trips. Streets & Trips 2003, the current version from Microsoft just continues being a great travel planning software package but now I am using it in a whole new way, as a on-board navigation system for my automobile.

So this review of Streets & Trips will be slightly different than normal, as I will discuss the features and benefits of Streets & Trips plus the GPS receiver and my real life adventures in using an on-board Nav system.

To start out, S&T's (Streets & Trips) will run on just about anything. For my Nav system I am running it on a Sony Vaio 300 MHz laptop with 64 MB RAM running Windows98se. I did learn from earlier experiences with S&T's to install all the map data onto the hard drive. This is not only for better performance but I have had issues with accessing the data CD sometimes. In fact with the Sony Vaio, as it has no CD-ROM drive, I had to copy the two full CD's over to it just to do the install as I kept getting a administrative install error about installing over a network (I guess I could have taken the time to figure it out). This also give me some peace of mind that should something go wrong with S&T's, I can just re-install where ever I am. As with all Microsoft software, installation was a breeze.

Launching S&T's brings up the main window with the standard tool bar at the top, a place to type in an address, zoom slider and a split main window displaying North America, a small view of the world and a Key for the map symbols. If you want to find a place, simply type in the street, city and state, hit find and map will appear with a pushpin showing the location. Want to plan a route to or from that location, simply select the Route Planner icon on the tool bar (A little Red Car) or select Route from the top menu items. Add the start location, intermediate stops and the final destination; Hit the Get Directions button and S&T's works on planning the route for you. There are a number of options for route planning that can be selected such as start and stop times, breaks, lunch, quickest, shortest or preferred types of roads. Recalculation is extremely fast so doing what-ifs is not a problem. Once the route is prepared, the map is highlighted in green with written driving instructions, including construction information shown above. Both are printable to take with you on the trip. One trick I have learned in the past is to not only print out the travel route, but to go back to the destination area map, zoom in to see as much of local street level area as possible so once you arrive you have a better reference if anything goes wrong when you miss that turn. One feature that I would live to see added is the option to print in black & white only without all the background shading vs. the color printing that all mapping software prefers. While I think that S&T's has the best looking maps (they look like the old free Exxon Road Maps) they suck the life out of color ink jet cartridges fairly fast. All in all, S&T's is a very robust product, works extremely fast and is fairly accurate (I did find a new piece of highway that does not exist on S&T's).

Now onto the real future of travel planning software, adding a GPS (Global Positioning Sensor), a laptop computer and your auto. S&T's has had the option of adding a GPS built in at least as far back as S&T's 2001. It is just now that the price of the GPS receiver

ers have dropped in price to make it economical and used Pentium processor laptops can be had for a couple hundred bucks.

As I said earlier, I a using a Sony Vaio PCG-505TX laptop. What makes this unit very nice is that it is very small, has a touch pad mouse and a USB port. It only has a 10.5 diagonal screen (this is one time small is good) as the laptop has to fit between the two front seats. I then purchased via the web from: www.getagps.com a Deluo Electronics Universal GPS receiver (USB) for \$99.00 plus shipping. The receiver is about half the size of a deck of cards. It has a magnet built in to attaching to the roof of the auto (I have it mounted inside on the dashboard). The biggest issue I had with the whole setup was mounting the laptop so it would not have to sit on the passengers lap or just on the seat, but that is up to you. I created a home grown mount instead of going the over \$100 commercial laptop mount available, added a 150 watt power inverter to convert 12 volt DC to 120 volt AC the laptop could use. Based on picking up a low cost laptop, a complete package will set you back under a grand. Still, it is quite a bit less that commercial auto systems but maybe not as elegant as the built in units.

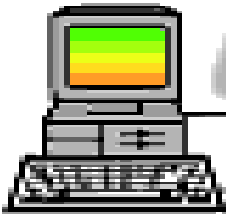
Now the proof in the pudding, did it work? Yes it worked great. Once I launched S&T's and plugged in the GPS receiver, selected Tools / GPS / Track Position, S&T's activated the GPS and within 30 to 60 seconds it locked onto three GPS satellites and brought up my current position as a full screen map. S&T's updates the map every 15 seconds and as you travel it updates the overall position of your location as you move along.

I used it on two trips I have taken recently. Once on a fairly routine trip I have been taking to Pennsylvania for the past 40 plus years that I can remember (I can not get lost on this one) and the second to our recent vacation to Myrtle Beach and Charleston, South Carolina. On the South Carolina trip I only used the track position feature instead of the route-planning feature, as I knew the routes I wanted to go but wanted the detail mapping ability of the destinations upon arrival. Well S&T's paid for itself on the first night. We arrived in Wilmington, North Carolina just as it was getting dark and in looking for a motel, I missed the exit (motel was listed as a street address but the sign listed a state highway route number). We went down a couple of blocks, sensing we missed the street, we pulled over (Never try to use the mapping software while driving) so we could zoom in for added detail of the area and immediately found the missed street on the map, turned around and was at the motel within five minutes, all in the dark and never before having been in the city. Accuracy is remarkable. Even at 65 mph, if we are on top of an over pass, the map showed us right there, S&T's kept up. The only trouble with GPS is that it needs a clear view of the sky so going through a tunnel or under bridges you would lose the signal. The Deluo receiver and S&T's acquired the signal very quickly and moved us to the me position, normally under 30 seconds.

City driving was the most useful feature of the GPS Nav system as you could roam around checking out the local architecture and historic sites without losing your bearings. It also proved very useful on our return trip in finding alternative routes when there were a number of auto accidents on Route 95 that was delaying traffic very badly.

While I have praised S&T's for its accuracy, details of it maps and ease of use I also tested the DeLome Street Atlas on my trip. One feature of Street Atlas that I really liked when using with the GPS was that the position of the map always move from bottom to top of the screen regardless of North, South, East or West. Just like the

Streets & Trips continued on page 5



PRINCETON PC USERS GROUP

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PPCUG Member E-mail Directory

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Axelrod	Albert	aaxelrod@nerc.com	Krisak	Bill	BobKrisak@worldnet.att.net
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Kleinerman	Milton	kukumafi@Juno.com			

(Last Update: May 5, 2003)

Send Updates to kurivchp@optonline.net for inclusion in this listing.

Ranton rebates continued from page 3

stuff that has to be mailed in, you have to put a very long address on an envelope to be mailed in to some obscure location like a small town in South Dakota. I guess they hope that, by making the address very complicated and out-of-the-way, some applications will go astray in the mail. Lost mail is clearly what they had in mind when they designed the format of a typical rebate check. It looks nothing like a check and has a very close resemblance to junk advertising mail. I am constantly tossing advertising stuff that looks just like the format that is used for rebate checks. Also, it is the size of a postcard and easily gets stuck in the middle of the flyers from the grocery stores that we never look at. That the check should get lost or inadvertently thrown away is clearly what companies are hoping for. They also take so long to mail the check that they must be hoping that you will forget about it. I sent a rebate request to Symantec in early December; the check came in mid-March. If the check, in fact, never comes how many people will have all the documentation or the energy needed to inquire? But don't get your hopes up, HP, this is a duel to the death. I am carefully checking the mail every day,

Streets & Trips continued from page 4

way you drive, top is forward, left turns are on the left screen and right turns are on the right screen as compared to S&T's maps showing always North as the top of the screen. The mapping detail was not as clear and concise as S&T's so I only used Street Atlas for a short time. One other feature that Street Atlas has over S&T's is voice commands for driving directions. I did not use the feature so I cannot comment on it.

All in all, Streets & Trips 2003 is a great addition to traditional paper maps or even planning services. Print out the maps you need and your on your way.

Lastly for the adventurous driving types like me where my old motto was "If I have a full tank of gas and a map, I can go anywhere without getting too lost" is now "If I have a full tank of gas, I can never get lost using Streets & Trips 2003 with my GPS".

PS: My wife who knows I am a gadget freck had just as much fun using the GPS Nav System on our trip as I did.

General Meeting Minutes

April 14, 2003

By: Don Arrowsmith

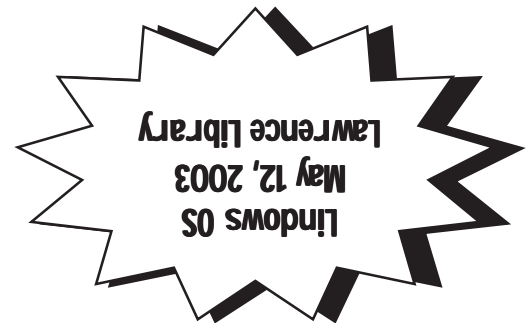
The meeting opened at 7:48 with Clarke Walker making announcements about upcoming programs, TCF parcel pickup, and an ACM/IEEE meeting. Q&A topics included: Reconditioned ink cartridge experiences; Using external hard drives with firewire or USB interfaces as backup devices for one or more computers; a Lexmark printer that stopped working after making a loud noise.

Don Arrowsmith announced that a Yahoo! Group has been formed: ppcug-nj. This is a closed membership group with moderated posting. All current members have been added using their recorded email addresses. The closed nature means that non-group members must apply for membership and be approved before being allowed to see other members' addresses and the messages, which have been posted to the group. The moderated feature means that messages can be sent to the group but must be approved before they will be sent to the members of the group. A welcome message was sent to all members with additional information about the group. The officers feel that it will enhance our ability to communicate with you while protecting you from more spam email.

The club purchased a Toshiba portable computer as noted in last month's newsletter. This unit was used for tonight's presentation and was on display for the members to see and try. Please consider this resource when you are thinking about volunteering to present at an upcoming PPCUG meeting.

The main program for the evening was on the Global Positioning System. Don covered some technical basics of GPS and its uses in various devices for finding out where you are. The unit demonstrated was a Garmin Street Pilot III Deluxe for use as a navigation aid in your car. This unit comes with a PC program called MapSource and a map set called North America City Navigator, which covers all of the US, and more developed parts of Canada and Mexico. The PC program has many features but is mainly used by Don to select which sections of the map set to copy to the SP3 unit and to locate waypoints (destinations), which can be copied to the SP3. The copying of maps is done by an included USB programmer into a 128MB memory device and copying waypoints uses a serial port on a PC.

The SP3 unit was then demonstrated. Unfortunately it could not 'see' the required number of satellites inside the meeting room. It was run in a simulation mode with a preset route, which showed its multiple screens, its search functions, and its voice prompting for upcoming turns. Several links to web pages concerning GPS and this device are available at our PPCUG web site at the meetings page (<http://www.ppcug-nj.org/schedule.html>).



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