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PPCUG NEWS

A PUBLICATION OF THE PRINCETON PC USERS GROUP

Monday, December 8, 2003

Annual Meeting and Holiday Party

Election of officers for 2004 will be held at our Annual Meeting. Expect a fine array of food for your holiday enjoyment. There is no formal program but simply two hours for you to socialize with other members.

At:

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

About PPCUG	2
November Minutes	2
Decorating the Desktop.....	3
Digital Cameras	4
Grandma's on the Net.....	6

Save \$10 on your 2004 PPCUG renewal! Read your monthly newsletter online and pay only \$20 dues. All members will get an email when the new issue is available at the PPCUG web site. Since we'll save money by not printing and mailing your copy, we'll pass on the savings to you. If you prefer to receive a printed, mailed copy of the newsletter, indicate that on your renewal form and pay \$30 in dues.

Coming Events:

January, 2004 - Windows XP Tips - Clarke Walker
February, 2004 - Turbo Tax Time - Joel May

About PPCUG

General Meetings

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

7:00 PM: Social Time / Tech Corner

7:30 PM: Meeting comes to Order

7:45 PM: Featured presentation

For information about upcoming meetings or joining PPCUG, see our web site:

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

Board Meetings

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

Board Members

President:

Clarke Walker 609-883-5262

Vice-President:

Tom Carman 732-828-6055

Secretary:

Don Arrowsmith 609-883-9874

Treasurer:

Paul Kurivchack 908-218-0778

Members-At-Large:

Al Axelrod 609-737-2827

Vic Laurie 609-924-1220

Kim Goldenberg 609-631-9140

Sol Libes 609-520-9024

Chairpersons

Hospitality:

Bill Hawryluk 609-655-0923

Member Records:

Paul Kurivchack 908-218-0778

Newsletter Editor:

Don Arrowsmith 609-883-9874

Program Coordinator:

Sol Libes 609-520-9024

Web Master:

Don Arrowsmith 609-883-9874

Annual Dues

Dues are \$30 per calendar year with a mailed newsletter or \$20 per year with online access to the newsletter. New members pay \$2.50 or \$1.75 per month times the number of months remaining in the current year.



November Meeting Minutes

The meeting began at 7:35 with Clarke acknowledging new visitors. A slate of nominations was announced (Clarke Walker for Pres., Tom Carman for VP, Don Arrowsmith for Sec., Paul Kurivchack for Treas., Al Axelrod, Vic Laurie, Kim Goldenberg and Sol Libes for MAL) and additional nominations were requested – None were offered. Elections will be held next month. Q&A concerned speed of cable Internet service from Patriot Media and disposal of unwanted PCs.

At 7:50 Jim Griggs of PS Ink started his presentation on reinking cartridges for ink jet printers. Jim had brought a lot of props and stock for sale and so was able to illustrate techniques for refilling units from Lexmark, HP, Epson and Canon printers. He explained the differences between pigmented and non-pigmented inks, thermal vs. piezo technology, and chipped vs. non-chipped cartridges. From the same manufacturer there are many different types of cartridges which each require slightly different ways to fill. Especially interesting was his description of how your computer tells you that you are low on ink and ways of resetting that indicator if you choose to refill an empty. Printer mfrs. continue to try to outwit the refilling industry to keep their profit margins high.

Jim's company also sells high quality photo paper imported from Switzerland. In a dramatic demonstration, he rubbed an ice cube repeatedly over a print on his paper and tried and failed to wipe off any color to his shirt. Simply touching the ice cube to a piece of HP paper resulted in a distinct smear on the print. He was nice enough to bring 8 sample packets of different papers to be raffled off to the attendees. Many of the members present purchased one or more of his products. More information is available at www.TheInkJetRefillStore.com.



Decorating the Desktop Vic Laurie, PPCUG

For the holiday season, I think something a little lighter is in order so here is an article on how to make the icons on the desktop more decorative. Many people are unaware that the icons that are used in the default configuration are not fixed but can be changed to suit a PC user's preference.

Where to Find New Icons

Before discussing how to change your desktop icons, we need to know how to find a supply of possible new icons. Every Windows computer already has many files containing a wide range of icons. Many of the program DLL files have icons embedded in them. Also there are some special DLL files that are icon collections. These embedded icons are not immediately visible and viewing them requires either some special software (see list of references) or one of the Windows procedures given below. Depending on your version of Windows, files with icon collections may include *cool.dll*, *moricons.dll*, and *shell32.dll*. Many other DLL files will have one or two icons embedded. The DLLs are usually in the folders **Windows**, **Windows\System**, or in XP in

the folder **Windows\System32**.

If the supply of icons that comes with Windows is too limited for your tastes, collections of icons can be downloaded from many places, some free, some not. There is also software for creating your own icons. Some references are given below.

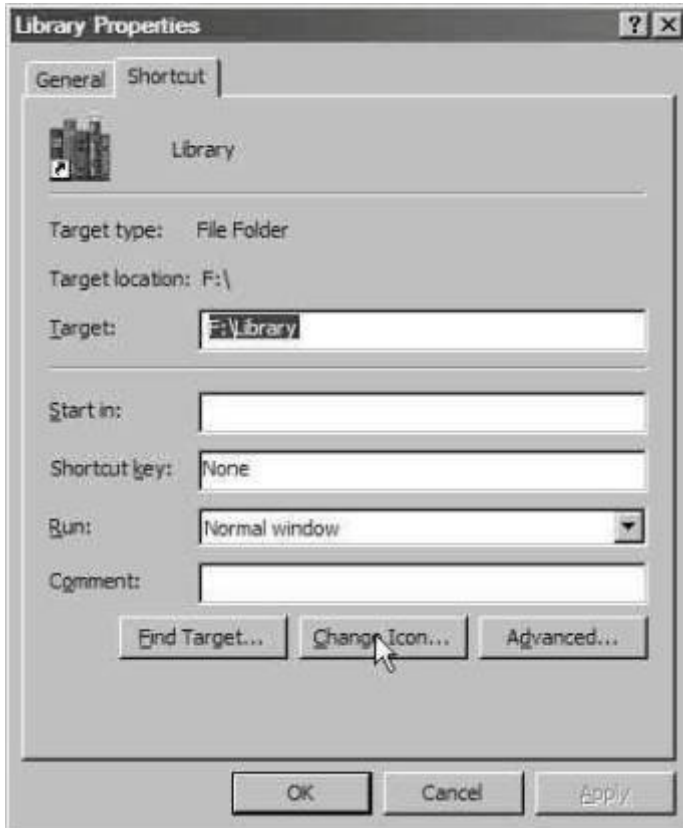


Figure 1. Properties for shortcut

Shortcut Icons

The icons for shortcuts are easy to change in all versions of Windows 9X/Me/XP. Right-click on a shortcut to open the context menu and choose "Properties". The properties sheet contains a button "Change Icon..." (Figure 1) Click this button to obtain the box shown in Figure 2.

The entry for "Look for icons in this file:" will show the source of the present icon and the "Browse..." button will allow for the selection of a different source file. The various icons contained within a source file will be displayed and the one that you wish can be selected. The source file in Figure 2 is a type known as an icon library. These files have the extension ICL. A file can also consist of just a single icon and nothing else and these files have the extension ICO. Unless you download icon collections from one of the many Internet sources, however, your icons are likely to be in a DLL file. Use the browse function (Figure 3) to search for icon-containing files on your computer. Browsing through files while in the "Change Icon" window will display whatever icons are embedded. Note that the entry for

"Files of type:" has several choices. When first looking for icons, it is best to choose "All files".

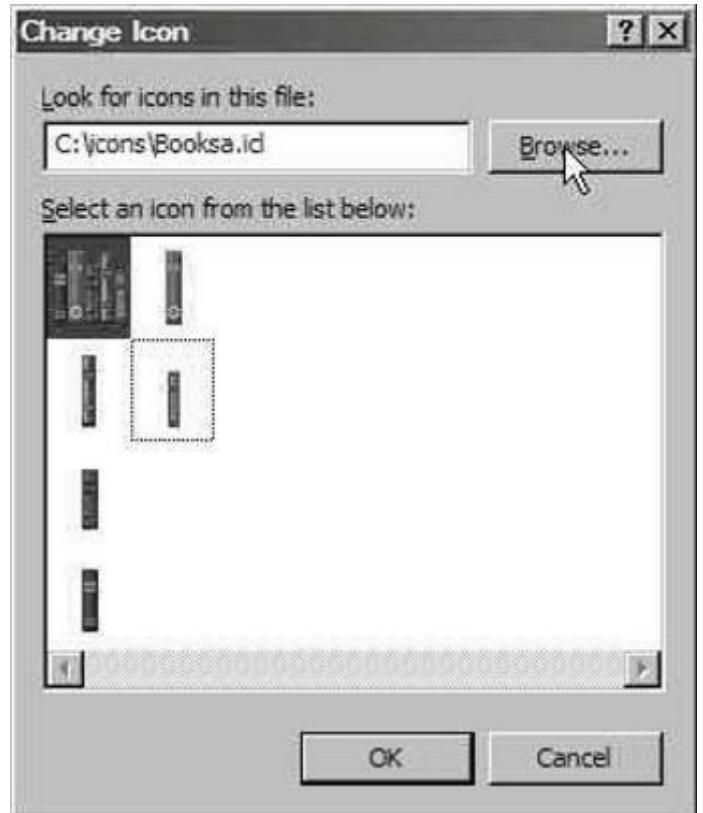


Figure 2. Change icon

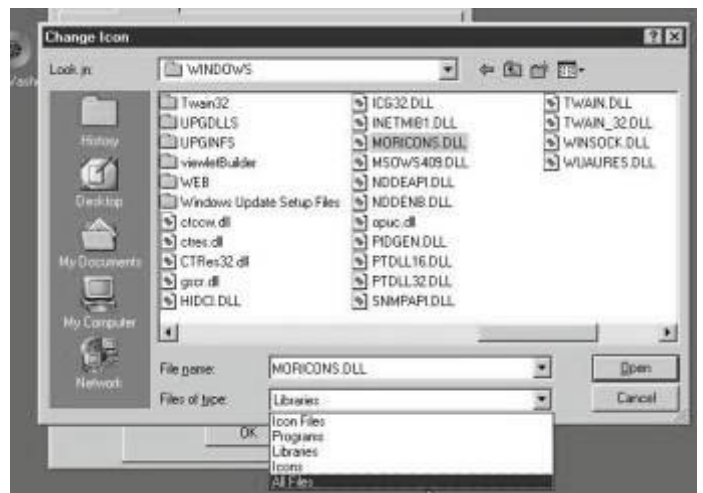


Figure 3. Browse window for changing icons

Folder Icons

If, like me, you have some folders on your desktop and want to have individual folder icons instead of all having the same generic manila folder, Windows XP makes it easy to change. Right-click on a folder and open "Properties". Click the "Customize" tab on the properties sheet (Figure 4).

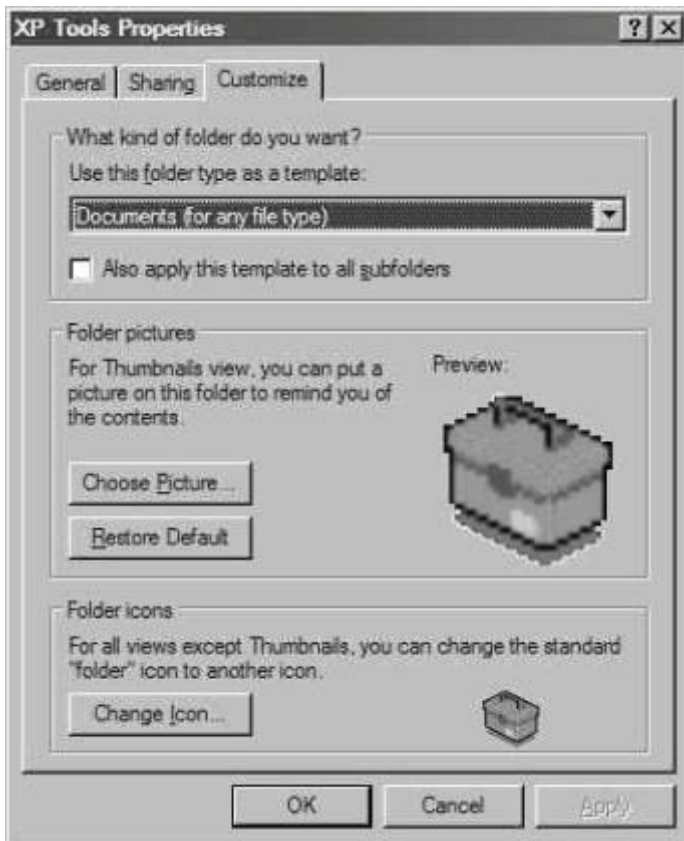


Figure 4. Customize tab on folder properties sheet (XP)

Click “Change icon” and proceed as for shortcuts. The procedure for changing folder icons in Windows 98/Me is more complicated and involves a file called “desktop.ini”. See the microwave reference below.

References

Icon editors and other icon tools
<http://downloads-zdnet.com.com/3150-2195-0.html>
http://www.pcworld.com/downloads/file_description/0,fid,7028,00.asp

How to create icons
<http://download.com.com/1200-2023-959974.html>

Large collections of icons, some free, some shareware
<http://iconlibrary.com/>
<http://www.iconarchive.com/>
<http://www.iconbazaar.com/>

Free icons that children might enjoy
<http://www.debidawn.com/>

Microsoft site explaining how to customize folders with the file *desktop.ini*
<http://tinyurl.com/mqffb>

Freeware “ActivIcons” for manipulating icons

http://www.cursorarts.com/ca_ai.html

Commercial software “IconForge”
http://www.cursorarts.com/ca_if.html



Too many Programs! Clarke Walker

I have too many programs on my computer running Windows XP. When I select my “Start” button on the Task Bar then select “All Programs” I get a long list that disappears off the right side of my screen.

At the November meeting one of our members raised the same problem. Another helpful user suggested that we create folders to group our programs together. This intrigued me so I decided to look into this. Sure enough you can go to your computer’s “Document and Settings”, “*your user name*”, “Start Menu”, “Programs” folder and create (group) folders. Use names that make sense to you, like “Adventure Games”, “Racing Games”, “I Never Win Games”, etc. Then drag the folders and/or shortcuts into these group folders.

To complete the operation you will need to go to “Document and Settings”, “*your user name*”, “Start Menu”, “Programs” and create more (group) folders for programs that are *not* limited to your personal account.

For me the two locations are:
 C:\Documents and Settings\Clarke\Start Menu\Programs
 C:\Documents and Settings\All Users\Start Menu\Programs

One caveat which I read in PC Magazine is that the uninstall programs do not always delete the shortcuts that are in these embedded folders.

Another technique is to create a scrolling “All Programs” list. Right click on a blank area in the task bar. Select “Properties”, the “Start Menu” tab, the “Customize” button, and the “Advanced” tab. In the “Start menu items:” list check the box for “Scroll Programs”. If you get tired of scrolling you can clear this box and go back to the grid layout.

Of course I could change the resolution of the monitor or better get a bigger screen. Or even delete some programs!



Digital Cameras for the Holiday Season Ira Wilsker

Whether advertising hype or legitimate analysis, many of the published pundits are predicting that this winter will be the prime season for digital camera sales. In compliance with traditional technological history, digital cameras have improved in quality and features while plunging in price. I

got a “deal” on my first digital camera three years ago, with 640x480 resolution which is 0.3 (that’s three-tenths) of a megapixel resolution, 10x optical zoom, slow serial connectivity, and 2 megs of memory for \$270, about one-half retail. For the record, that camera still works fine. Today our local retailers are offering technologically superior digital cameras with 10 times the resolution and 16 times the built-in memory, with fast USB connectivity, for about the same price. In many markets, digital cameras far outsell comparable 35mm cameras. Digital cameras require no film (only memory), require no processing (no trips to the photo counter with the concurrent cost of processing), and provide the instant gratification popularized by the obsolescent Polaroids of yesteryear.

Two of my daughters expressed an interest in a digital camera for the holidays so I have been shopping around. There is a myriad of techno-babble terms being bantered about in describing digital cameras that may require some explanation here so all can understand.

The primary feature being touted by digital camera makers is “megapixels”, or millions of tiny dots of resolution. A “pixel” is the common vernacular for “picture element”, which is each tiny dot of information that you see on your computer screen. To put megapixels in perspective, a computer monitor with the common 800x600 resolution means 800 pixels wide by 600 pixels high, or 480,000 pixels. Likewise a 1024x768 resolution, common on today’s 17 inch monitors, is 786,432 pixels. If the primary intent is to email digital photos, or post them to the web, then very high resolutions are unnecessary. Someone recently sent me a huge image file as an email attachment. The picture was of a new grandchild, and taken with a 2.1 megapixel camera, at maximum resolution. The sender did not practice good “netiquette” and reduce the size of the image to reasonable dimensions (such as 320x240 or 640x480), so his large image was three times the size of the screen on my 17 inch monitor. The only way to view the unedited image was to scroll left and right, and up and down. In most cases there is little need to take photos at the maximum resolution; almost all cameras allow for smaller, lower resolution photos.

If the user wants to print the photos with a photo grade printer on high quality inkjet or laser photo paper, 2.1 megapixels, can produce an excellent quality 5x7 inch print, and a reasonable 8x10 inch print. Many of the moderately priced digital cameras are now being offered with 5 or more megapixels. With an appropriate printer and paper, 5 megapixels can produce an excellent quality 8x10 print, and a decent 11x17. The holy grail of digital cameras, 12+ megapixels, the resolution of good quality slide film, was passed about two years ago by the high-end professional models. Many professional photographers, who dismissed digital photography as a low quality fad a few years ago, are now embracing the new technology.

The ability to zoom the image in and out is a popular feature in most cameras. The two methods of zoom available on

digital cameras are optical and digital zoom. In terms of sharpness, optical zoom is superior to digital, as the image itself is manipulated, rather than the pixels making up the image. The less expensive cameras typically only offer digital zoom (adequate for common snapshots), but the better cameras offer either optical zoom or a combination of the two.

The memory available to the camera determines how many images it can hold before the data must be downloaded to a computer or other device. Most digital cameras have some built-in memory, and allow for the addition of supplemental memory in a variety of formats. Some cameras minimize the need for digital memory by writing the image directly to a floppy disk or mini-CD. Since the integral memory in a digital camera can typically hold only a small number of images, it is important to determine the price and availability of additional memory in the proper format. Memory comes in different capacities and formats from tiny cards, to rectangular “memory sticks”. All camera memory is not the same, and differs in speed (faster is better, but often at a price), and power consumption (less power consumption is better by prolonging battery life). According to Lexar, one of the major manufacturers of digital camera media, the number of photos that can be held in memory varies by the resolution of the photo and the capacity of the media. If the inexpensive 32meg memory card is used, at maximum resolution, a 2 megapixel camera will store about 35 images, while only storing 12 images from a 5 megapixel camera. Media of 256megs (often around \$50) can hold much more; 284 images at 2 megapixels, and 102 images at 5 megapixels. A chart showing the capacity of different media is available at www.lexarmedia.com/digfilm/index_cf.html. It should also be noted that the memory, also referred to as “digital film”, can be reused indefinitely.

Almost all new digital cameras come with some form of fast USB connectivity to download images to the computer. Accessories such as docking stations, and external card readers are a convenience, but not a necessity.

As an added convenience, most local photo finishers now print photo-grade images directly from the camera memory, at prices lower than printing them yourself. Now we can have the best of both worlds.

Ira Wilsker is the Advisor for Region 8, APCUG Representative & Bylaws Chair for the Golden Triangle PC Club, a columnist for The Examiner in Beaumont, Texas, and has two radio shows. He also graciously shares his articles with the APCUG editors.

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Grandma's on the Net!

Grandma used to make us cherry pies
and call us on the phone.
She would talk to us for hours; now
she leaves us all alone.

We miss her homemade biscuits and
I'll make this little bet -
If you want to contact Grandma,
you'll have to surf the net.

Grandma's surfin' the net, yes, she's
surfin' the net.
We've been calling her all morning
and we haven't got her yet.

She's on her e-mail network with all
her electronic friends.
If you want to talk to Grandma,
you'll have to surf the net.

Grandma's never surfed at Malibu or
caught a wave at Waikiki.
She's never seen a surf board; hang
ten doesn't mean a thing, you see.

She's never met a beach bum;
to her Moon Doggie is just a pup.
But when she heads to her computer,
you know the surf is up.

Grandma's getting older and her eyes
are getting dim.
Her random access memory is
half of what it's been.

When St. Peter comes to call,
she'll say I can't go yet.
He'll have to wait on Grandma,
'cause Grandma's surfin' the net.

--- written by just another old Grandma ---

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