

ACPCUG Newsletter

**North Canton
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July 12, 2004**

Inside:

Page 1—Deals Guy

**Page 5 –Viruses, Worms
& Other Security Issues
By Sue Crane**

**Page 10-Comdex is His-
tory by Steve Bass**

**Page 13—TECH NEWS
By Sue Crane**

**Page 16– Computer
Power Protection By Ira
Wilsker**

**Page 18– Online and In
Person by Billy Mabray**

**Page 20- How and when
to enable Windows
XP's firewall by Linda
Gonse Page 22– Club News**

July Program:

***Backing Up Outlook by Art
McRowe + Q&A + Backing
Up Your Cell Phone by
Frank Ramsey***

July 2004

Akron-Canton PC Users Group

From The DealsGuy for August, 2004, by Bob (The Cheapskate) Click of the Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

The American Water Works Assn. show we worked in June was interesting, [<http://www.awwa.org>], although most products were of an industrial/municipal nature. I spoke to an exhibitor about their automated meters that could be read while driving by. He said the meter was battery operated and it continuously emitted bursts every six seconds with all the latest data digitally contained. The meter's expected battery life is "ten years"! Another company with automated meters said theirs transmitted the data in short blasts similarly, but they are picked up by sophisticated antennas and receivers on high buildings, or towers in the area, saving a drive-by meter-reader. Looks like more people will be out of work and probably applying at Burger King since I see very few new jobs available. I'll tell you about the "Tapping Contest" event in this show next month since I already have a lengthy column for this month.

(Continued from page 1)

There is an announcement from Binary Research posted on my Web site that I will also publish in the column next month.

***Quick Reply For Your E-mail**

Since three editors forwarded this announcement to me, (thanks for bringing that to my attention), I decided there was sufficient interest for the DealsGuy column to include it. Unlike most announcements, this one also offers a discount for user group members. Here is the announcement, but edited: "Our company, ErstenWare, would like to announce the release of Quick Reply 2.07, a god-sent gift to any e-mail user for Windows 98/ME/NT/2000/XP. We'd like to offer your members a 15% discount off the regular price of \$19.95. The discount coupon code is - "975409871341" and is redeemable at [http://www.erstenware.com/quick_reply/discount.html].

"With this application, any person can free him/herself from having to explain over and over again what the refund policy is, where to get certain information, how to pay for a product or service or who should be contacted in the event of emergency. Even regular 'non-commercial' users with heavy e-mail volume can save up to 50% of time previously spent answering e-mails by creating mini-templates - a set of phrases regularly used. Quick Reply is very good at maintaining an orderly database of snippets, replies, sentences or text fragments that can be inserted into the body of an e-mail or even a regular letter within a second. Any typical reply can be customized and personalized on the fly and inserted via dragging and dropping. The program supports hotkeys and macro commands. The content may be reformatted and copied to clipboard as well."

***Get Panda Free**

Panda Software feels IT Professionals have a lot of influence in the industry. I imagine that's why they are offering IT professionals their AV software free. Panda Antivirus, an excellent AV product, is again offering its AV software FREE to IT professionals. Check the details at: [<http://www.pandasecurity.com/VIPIT>]. Thanks to Ira Wilsker, an APCUG director, for making us all aware of that one. I use Panda, although I can't seem to get my latest version to work right, so far. Their tech support has not been much help either. Last year's ran just great, but I wonder if there are bits and pieces left that interfere causing it to lock up, even though I removed the previous version per their instructions.

***News From Aladdin**

Aladdin has a new user group coordinator. If you didn't see this posted on my Web site, Ernest Breaux is the new kid on the Aladdin block and will take care of your UG requests. He announced new products and here are his descriptions:

"Four essential Computing solutions from Aladdin Systems; Internet Cleanup 4.0, StuffIt Deluxe 8.5, Spring Cleaning and SpamCatcher For windows are now available.

"Introducing New Internet Cleanup 4.0. This offers the most powerful protection yet for users who want to protect their privacy and guard against spyware. Spyware slows down your computer, invades your privacy and can reveal sensitive information. These new tools eradicate spyware and prevent sensitive information from leaving your computer. IC4 includes a Personal Information Blocker that safeguards names, phone numbers, addresses, credit card information and bank account numbers. IC4 prevents these and other specified pieces of information from being transmitted over the Internet without users' permission. In addition, IC4 includes file and folder locking as well as application locking features. Only IC4 provides the user all of the tools necessary to protect their privacy, security and PC, all in one complete and integrated package.

"**Special offer!** \$19.99 for Internet Cleanup 4.0, regularly \$29.99, offer valid through the end of Sept. [<http://www.aladdinsys.com/ug/cleanup>]

"ZIP, ACCESS, BACKUP, AND SEND! StuffIt Deluxe makes using the Internet fast, safe, and secure! Whether you store data securely in space-saving archives or safely send it to friends and co-workers, StuffIt makes it easier than ever to backup, upload files, and more, automatically! Reclaim wasted space on your hard disk! Store data in archives up to 98% smaller than their original size! Quickly and easily backup your data! Schedule backups to happen while you are away! StuffIt will take care of it all and send you a message when the backup is completed! Super search your data! Get instant access to any file whether it's on the network, in a local hard drive, or even burned onto a CD in the office next door, StuffIt will find it for you! Integrated with Windows and Microsoft Office! 100% integration with MS Word, Excel and Outlook eliminates 90% of your keystrokes. Compress, save, and send in a single click!

"**Special offer!** \$29.99 for StuffIt Deluxe 8.5, regularly \$39.99, offer valid through the end of Sept. [<http://www.aladdinsys.com/ug/stuffit>]

"One-click cleanup. Easy for you. Good for your PC. Programs and pictures,

folders and files, it's amazing how quickly a hard disk fills up! When the time comes to clean up, let Spring Cleaning carry the load. From deleting duplicates to archiving programs, Spring Cleaning puts a suite of easy-to-use tools and one-click solutions at your fingertips. Fix Registry problems caused by old files nothing makes your computer more unstable than a Registry full of junk. Bad data builds up over time, causing error messages and a host of other problems. Spring Cleaning sweeps out the clutter to keep your system running smoothly.

Special offer! \$19.99 for Spring Cleaning, regularly \$29.99, offer valid through the end of Sept. [<http://www.aladdinsys.com/ug/spring>]

Special offer! \$19.99 for SpamCatcher, regularly \$29.99, offer valid through the end of Sept. [<http://www.aladdinsys.com/ug/spam>] I featured Spam-Catcher three months ago so I know you are already familiar with it.

"This one is for Macs: "The Big Mix is a powerful compilation of music and audio tools that deliver everything you need to record, mix, and play music your way! The Big Mix is the perfect complement to GarageBand and your iPod. Software Includes: Audio Hijack, Disco, Doggiebox, GrooveMaker 2.5 LE, iPodRip, iTunes Publisher, Making More Music, MP3 Rage, and Spark LE. Capture webcasts and more with Audio Hijack. Mix in real-time with Disco. Create drumbeats with Doggiebox. Remix studio-quality loops with GrooveMaker's massive library. Import tracks from your iPod with iPodRip. Share with the world with iTunes Publisher. Learn tempo, scales, and more with Making More Music's multimedia tutorials. Fetch album cover art, clean up ID tags, and convert MP3s to play in CD players with MP3 Rage. Finally, use Spark LE to edit and blend your audio files into high-quality masters!"

Special offer! \$49.99 for The Big Mix, regularly \$59.99, offer is valid through the end of Sept, but try anyway if you miss that deadline. [http://www.digitalriver.com/dr/v2/ec_MAIN.Entry17c?CID=152708&SID=1839&SP=10007&PN=5&PID=624494]

That's it for this month. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click [bobclick@mindspring.com]. Visit my Web site at [<http://www.dealsguy.com>] for interesting articles from user group newsletters. I also posted some interesting NEW Web site pages for your viewing. They contain new product announcements that I received over a period of time. More will be forthcoming when I get the ambition.

Viruses, Worms & Other Security Issues

By Sue Crane, Editor

Bearly Bytes, Newsletter of the Big Bear Computer Club

It wasn't a good month for Internet Explorer. A computer virus designed to steal valuable information like passwords spread through a new technique that converted popular Web sites into virus transmitters. Hackers made subtle changes to the Web site so visitors get a piece of code that's designed to retrieve software that records a person's keystrokes. Such data, which can include credit card numbers, bank accounts and passwords, are collected for remote delivery to hackers, experts say.. Security experts worried about its method of delivery. The virus takes advantage of three separate flaws in Microsoft products and can be difficult to detect. Software updates to fix two of the flaws were released in April, but the third flaw is newly discovered and has no patch available yet. Computer owners can search their computers for the files "Kk32.dll" or "Surf.dat" to see if they are infected. They should obtain the latest security updates for Microsoft products and their anti-virus and firewall programs. For the flaw that lacks a patch, users should turn up security settings on Internet Explorer browsers to the highest levels. Users could also turn off the "JavaScript" feature on their browsers, though doing so could cripple functions on some sites. Removal tools are available from major anti-virus vendors. Security researchers suggest that using Microsoft alternatives is one way to surf the Web worry-free.

Computer viruses overall are on the rise. According to Sophos, "The number of new viruses released on the Internet in May hit a 2-1/2-year high." Bill Gates claims Microsoft is responding to viruses and other online threats faster. "We will guarantee that the average time to fix will continue to come down," "The thing we have to do is not only get these patches done very quickly ... we also have to convince people to turn on auto-update."

Cisco Systems issued a patch for a security flaw in one of its Linksys routers that could give hackers access to consumers' home networks. Linksys WRT54G 802.11g wireless router & other new Linksys routers, using firmware versions 2.02.7 and 2.02.2. Cisco posted a beta version of the new firmware (<http://www.linksys.com/download/firmware.asp?fwid=201>) on the Linksys Web site. Customers using the new Beta version should not experience problems even with the firewall turned off.

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

Microsoft is set to phase out support for both NT 4.0 Workstation and Server in the coming months. Microsoft officials have denied that the company is using product-support cut-off dates as a tool to force Windows users to upgrade. Windows 98 support was discontinued this month, too, but there are several sites on the Internet where 98 users can go for assistance. If you're not upgrading to Windows XP and you need help, do an Internet search for "Windows 98 + support".

Microsoft revealed a new long-term support policy along with upcoming technologies to boost security and reduce spam. The company will now guarantee a minimum of 10 years of support for all business and developer products, giving all customers the option of installing (IMF) Intelligent Message Filtering, a spam-blocking add-on. They also promised future improvements in spam blocking through E-mail Caller ID, a system Microsoft is working on to verify the sender of a message, thus enabling people to block junk messages.

Windows XP, SP2 will de-emphasize backward compatibility with legacy systems and code for the sake of security. Microsoft admits that as many as one application in 10 will experience problems due to the upgrade. However, Security experts advise Windows XP users install the update immediately and Windows expert Paul Thurrott suggests, "If you ignore or put off this release, you'll only be hurting yourself." Microsoft won't be offering this service patch to those who have pirated copies of Windows XP. SP2 will check for bad Product IDs looking for pirated copies and will not install.

Yahoo's new Anti-Spy toolbar gives adware the benefit of the doubt. Users who want to use the toolbar to identify adware have to remember to check a special box each time they scan. Meanwhile, Yahoo pays Claria Corp. (formerly Gator) a percentage of ad revenue when users click on paid listings. Claria and WhenU.com Inc., are accused of tricking users into accepting adware downloads and pop-up ads.

After Google introduced G-mail with 1Gb of free storage, competitor Yahoo quickly increased its 25Mb of free storage to 100 Mb free. The following day Yahoo's email business was so good, most users couldn't log on – or in many cases even get yahoo.com to load! In addition to Yahoo's increased traffic, a reported DNS attack halted traffic on Microsoft, Google, Yahoo and Apple, among others. Akamai Technologies Inc., which provides services improving the reliability of large Web sites,

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

claims the problems were caused by a "sophisticated" large-scale DDOS attack.' After other sites were restored, Yahoo users were still reporting glitches including site inaccessibility, slow page loads and inoperable buttons on the site. And now G-mail users are reporting they can't get messages through to users of Microsoft's Hotmail. Yahoo's web sites and services stumbled for the second time in less than a week when users were unable to log onto Yahoo's instant messaging program. Yahoo described the problem as an "isolated hardware-related issue. Some users also received confusing notices that their accounts had been suspended for exceeding storage limits when that was not the case. Microsoft will increase Hotmail's free e-mail storage limits from 2 megabytes to 250MB and its paid e-mail service, which costs \$19.95 a year, from 10MB to 2 gigabytes, to counter rivals Google and Yahoo, who increased their online storage last month. Hotmail changes will begin in early July.

Phishing has become a major concern for banks and credit-card issuers, which end up footing the bill when a criminal runs up unauthorized charges on a stolen credit card. Visa USA, the FTC, the Better Business Bureau and the other coalition members said they plan to work together to teach consumers how to avoid phishing scams and to report suspicious e-mail to authorities. The advice to consumers is simple: Don't click on the link. "If you do, you may be the catch of the day," said Howard Beales, director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection. Beales encouraged Americans to forward any suspicious e-mail messages to the FTC at uce@ftc.gov. Such information is valuable, he said, because it helps investigators track scam artists, many of whom change their Web site locations and e-mail addresses frequently in an effort to frustrate law enforcement officials. Consumers can also send suspicious mail relating to their visa cards to phishing@visa.com. Beales stressed that legitimate companies rarely if ever send e-mail asking customers for sensitive data. Customers who have any question about such a request should go directly to the company's Web site by typing the company's Internet address into a browser window, rather than by clicking on a link in a suspicious e-mail. A number of private-sector firms have joined to create the Trusted Electronic Communications Forum that will work to design technical solutions to the phishing problem. The Anti-Phishing Working Group's Web site (<http://www.antiphishing.org/>) posts alerts about the latest phishing attacks and advice about how to avoid Phishing scams and what to do if you've given-out your personal information.

Yahoo, Microsoft, EarthLink, America Online, British Telecom, Comcast

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

and other members of The Anti-Spam Technical Alliance (ASTA) announced a proposal of best practices for filtering and sending e-mail, authenticating e-mail senders by IP address or with digital content signatures to help prevent e-mail fraud, They called on ISPs to "police their networks more aggressively and cut off machines suspected of being launching pads for spam." When such machines are found, Internet providers are urged to block their Internet access until their owners come forward, at which point they will be given help to remove spyware, adware and malware. Group representatives believed the zombie problem is going largely unchecked because some ISPs are not taking such action. The Alliance is proposing that ISPs who are quarantining zombies might reject all mail from networks that are not doing so. ASTA, recommends that all PC users install virus protection and security systems and suggested that ISPs implement rate limits on outbound e-mail traffic, control automated registration of accounts and close all open relays. The IETF, which develops the technical standards that run the Internet, will publish initial recommendations on e-mail authentication in August. The FTC, meanwhile, plans to address the issue this fall. 'Filtering technologies are not enough.' Says Bill Gates. Microsoft is adding tools that would combat the forgery of e-mail sender addresses and allow senders to 'qualify' their messages so they can guarantee delivery. ... In addition, Mr. Gates said Microsoft is developing technologies to detect and block 'dictionary attacks,' where spammers send e-mail to a random assortment of names and then harvest the real addresses by collecting those that generate bounce-back messages." A Utah judge has granted an injunction to adware maker WhenU.com to temporarily halt the state's new anti-spyware law from going into effect on the grounds that the law is unconstitutional.

Security analysts have been warning of a cell phone virus. A group of underground virus writers has showed off what is believed to be the world's first worm that can spread on advanced mobile phones. The worm, named Cabir, was sent to security software firms Kapersky Lab of Russia and U.S.-based Symantec by a member of 29a, a group of virus writers from the Czech Republic and Slovakia who pride themselves in creating "proof of concept malicious viruses," the "Cabir" virus takes an approach that hampers its spread--it asks for permission to infect your phone.

Symantec, makers of Norton Antivirus, says the next big worm is likely to exploit flaws in instant messaging clients—and it will spread faster than any other worm on record. Eric Chien, chief of research at Symantec Se-

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

curity Response. "An instant-messaging threat could spread to a half a million machines in 30 or 35 seconds." All it takes is 30 seconds; IM users should be running antivirus software. Most engines have plug-ins for IM clients. Chien recommends using something other than the free clients, something that uses encryption and goes through a more rigorous testing process.

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"It's bad. In 1998, the Lotus exhibit consisted of a bus in the parking lot with a box of Winchell's donuts on the table..."

Comdex is History

Comdex was inflated, owners were arrogant, and since 1998, it was clear the show was destined to fall into the bit bucket.

by Steve Bass, PC World; Author, PC Annoyances.

In a downward spiral for the last five years, Comdex is finally kaput. The show owners declared it dead when they cancelled the November, 2004 event. Many of you have been attending Comdex since close to forever, and most of you knew the show was destined to fall into the bit bucket.

Good riddance. In the last few years, the show's become an empty shell of its previous life. So much so that room prices on the Strip were as low as \$50 a night during Comdex week in 2003.

The problem was I couldn't not attend. Even though I didn't enjoy myself and couldn't find lots of really nifty products to write about, I still drove in from Pasadena and stayed for two nights. Call it nostalgia. Or maybe I was just hoping there would be one more chance that Comdex would get back on its feet.

But nope, it's really over.

Dig Into the Files

I dug around and found some of Comdex the missives I sent in the last few years.

December, 1998: Comdex is toast. It's fading rapidly and while it'll always be with us, it's never going to be "bigger than ever."

I polled lots of people and all agreed. The attendance was dismally low. Softbank's claim of 250K attendees was a lie. It was based on registrations--not attendees--something made lots easier because the normal \$100 "Exhibits Only" fee was waived when you registered on Softbank's Internet site.

My best sources are the cabbies, and all emphatically said 60- to 90K

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

tops. And it was easy to see. I never had to wait more than five minutes for a cab. Ever. Even at 5:00pm. Parties weren't well attended. In fact, for the first time ever, there was actually walking-around room at the exclusive Spencer party.

Iomega was back promoting their Clik gizmo. But wait, weren't they doing that last year? And Castlewood was pushing their 2.2GB ultra SCSI removable storage disk that wouldn't ship until next summer.

The quality of the show was also disappointing. The Sands was filled mostly with OEM stuff—lots of system boards, drives, memory checking devices, and other boring equipment. Joe Bohannon nailed the entire Sands Convention Center in five hours, something that ordinarily takes a day and a half.

I couldn't even find anything very inspirational.

For instance, Creative Labs had a second generation Live sound card. Wow. Sure, there were some booths with interesting things--wireless networking was cool, as was HP's Jornada, their oddly named sub-notebook--and I found a few products to write about. But overall, I could've done just as well surfing the web.

Why has Comdex slowed down? Simple: Games went to E3, anything about the Web went to Internet World, and e-commerce apps also needed their own specialized trade shows.

Worse, it appears Softbank's jacked up the price on everything. That's happened before, but my hunch is vendors aren't going to take it much longer. (That happened to the Food Show when Pepsi and Coke pulled out, literally destroying the event. And Deere, the largest exhibitor of the Machinery Show, left the show high and dry when told they'd be charged double--the new policy put them into both agriculture and machinery.)

At Comdex, the newly remodeled Las Vegas Convention center was missing Intel, IBM, and other big vendors. The Lotus exhibit consisted of a bus in the parking lot with a box of Winchell's donuts on the table. One of the Lotus reps said this is their last Comdex.

On the exhibit floor, the Japanese companies were slugging it out, with Sony and Samsung making lots of noise, each trying to impress the other. Phillips created a small, loud city, and Microsoft was in their corner with more vendors than spectators.

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

Me? At \$329 a day for the hotel room and the five days lost...I dunno. It may also be my last Comdex.

October, 2000: Comdex is struggling. That's because most other trade shows specialize while Comdex tried to cater to everyone. Funny, in the past Comdex charged an outrageous \$100 for admission just to the exhibit floor. This year they're offering a free exhibits pass. (Too bad the hotels haven't caught on to this trick...) This is my last Comdex, for sure.

December, 2001: The Comdex mood this year was all business, with somber overtones. Journalists clustered around in small groups, talking about layoffs, and concerned with the dozens of freelancers gone missing. Lots of PR people didn't make it to Comdex; many of those who did were kvetching about having to share sleeping rooms with colleagues.

I don't know that I'll be back next year. While the exhibit floor didn't have the sizzling array of products I saw at previous Comdexes, like last year, the place to be was the evening press events: Showstoppers, Digital/mobile Focus, and Silicon Northwest.

December, 2003: Sleeping rooms are under \$60. The show floor at the Convention center has lots of curtains and barriers to make it look as if there are lots of vendors. The aisles are narrow so it feels crowded. There are practically no big vendors, except for Microsoft, and even their exhibit is small.

I've said it every year, but this time I really mean it. This is definitely the last Comdex I'm going to attend. (And I'll see some of you at the Consumer Electronics Show in January, 2005!)

Steve Bass is a Contributing Editor with PC World, a 23 year veteran of PIB-MUG, and a founding member of APCUG. He's also the author of *PC Annoyances: How to Fix the Most Annoying Things about Your Personal Computer*, O'Reilly Press. It's available on Amazon for \$7.98 at <http://snurl.com/annoyances>.

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TECH NEWS

By Sue Crane, Editor
Bearly Bytes, Newsletter of the Big Bear Computer Club

Get your DDR SDRAM now! With back-to-school demand for more PCs due to pick up during the month of July, computer memory prices are expected to rise again. After an unexpected spike in April, prices have fallen about 24% to around \$4.80 for 256 megabytes of DDR SDRAM from a peak of \$6.30.

Hewlett-Packard Co. will replace memory modules in up to 900,000 HP notebooks with an "industry-wide" design flaw that can cause system lock-ups. The problem is tied to the interaction of DRAM and Intel chipsets. HP's replacement program will send the customer a kit containing a screwdriver and instructions for replacing the faulty modules. The customer can then ship the DRAM to HP and receive a new module free. HP appears to be the only computer manufacturer taking action. A representative from Dell Computer Corp. said the company is "looking into it."

Computer trade show Comdex, once the biggest event on the tech calendar, has been canceled this year, making room for the growing interest in shows emphasizing consumer electronics and specialist IT gear.

Personal computer makers have been eager to revolutionize the way people watch movies, listen to music and record their favorite TV shows. Last month Intel launched new core logic and motherboards, along with a new socket format for the Pentium IV, targeting the high-performance desktop PC market. The new technology gives PCs more powerful sound and graphics, a speedier link for peripherals and memory, and an ability to run a wireless data network, turning the PCs into home entertainment devices. The inclusion of Wi-Fi access point technology allows new PCs with the chipset to become wireless gateways for other mobile devices. Intel was unable to ramp up the Wi-Fi technology in time for the launch, but Intel spokesman Dan Snyder said Intel will announce the technology now and provide availability later throughout the year.

Sun Microsystems has designed 3-D interface software to compete with the PC desktop and file folders. Sun's "Project Looking Glass", is a 3D interface allowing documents or images to be turned sideways and spun around so that notations can be made on the back. Sun is initially planning to use the technology on desktop machines running Linux or Sun's Solaris operating system. Sun president and COO Jonathan Schwartz says Project Looking Glass reflects a swing in software development back toward desktop ma-

(Continued on page 14)

(Continued from page 13)

chines instead of running programs on centralized servers.

Meanwhile the digital home has become a reality! At the Samsung Tower Palace in Seoul, \$1 million-plus apartments are outfitted with Internet-enabled ovens, security cameras and wall-mounted flat-panel displays. The company has tests under way in Canada, Australia and Europe, and it recently struck deals with two U.S.-based home builders to conduct digital home trials in the U.S. Wiring homes in the U.S. will cost from \$2,000 to \$10,000.

The Virtual Doctor Will See You Now. Some health care providers are offering e-mail medical advice and "e-visits". So how do you get doctors who don't want to use e-mail because they are too busy, worried about privacy, and not being paid for it to buy into the program? Pay them, of course! In August, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Massachusetts will start paying primary care physicians for 'Web visits' with their patients. Blue Cross will be expanding a pilot program that pays doctors to respond to patient e-mails. Watch for the program in your area...

From truckers in the U.S. and Canada to Yak farmers in the mountains of Nepal, more people are jumping in with wireless technology. Yak farmers are taking advantage of a wi-fi network set up in a remote region to keep in touch with their families where there are no phones or other communication. And at networked farms of the future, farmers sit in their pickups with a laptop, drive robot tractors and even feed the hogs remotely. Two Georgia farmers are already using the technology: One uses wireless video to monitor vegetable packing; another uses a wireless network equipped with GPS to monitor irrigation systems. Robotic tractor technology has also proven useful in insect control. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) hopes to reduce fatigue-related accidents by enticing drivers with free Wi-Fi hotspots so they'll stop more often and check their e-mail. Meanwhile, the whole city of Chaska, Minnesota will soon be blanketed by a Wi-Fi hot-spot and city officials plan to offer wireless Internet access as a municipal service for about \$16/month for home users, creating a "connected community." The manager of arena operations for the Charlotte Bobcats is including Wi-Fi wireless in the design of a new \$265 million arena. He says, "Some people will think this is the geeky thing, the nerdy thing. But they were probably saying that 10 years ago when other people were going to Web sites and using e-mail." Other sports teams are following suit; Giants CIO Bill Schlough says: "It's

(Continued on page 15)

(Continued from page 14)

like walking into Starbucks -- except our Wi-Fi is free!"

Game developer Respond sign has created a first-of-its-kind game geared toward helping the player lose weight through exercise and diet. The game, titled "Yourself! Fitness", is designed for the Xbox and features a virtual personal trainer who guides the player through a customized set of exercises and diets; players advance to the next level when certain fitness goals are met. Next year the Xbox Live version will allow players to use a wireless headset to chat with each other during their workouts

"The Effect of File Sharing on Record Sales," released by Harvard Business School professor Felix Oberholzer-Gee and his co-author Koleman Strumpf, of the University of North Carolina caused a ruckus in the music industry. The team concluded Internet music piracy not only doesn't hurt legitimate CD sales, it may even boost sales. The researchers contend that most downloading is done over peer-to-peer networks by teens and college kids, groups that are "money-poor but time-rich," and wouldn't have bought the songs they downloaded, anyway. The team also claims illegal downloading may actually help the industry with an older crowd who download a song or two and then, if they like what they hear, go out and buy the music.

"Toxic dust" found on computer processors and monitors contains chemicals called PBDEs which have been linked to reproductive and neurological disorders. "The levels in the dust are enough to raise a red flag, but not enough to create a crisis," said Dr. Gina Solomon, senior scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council and assistant professor of medicine at University of California, San Francisco. "I have an old computer monitor in front of me now, and I'm not about to throw it away. But when I get a new one, it darn well will be free of these chemicals." Dell, along with Apple Computer Inc. and others, stopped using PBDEs in 2002.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a federal law designed to restrict Internet pornography violated Americans' rights to freedom of speech and upheld an injunction excluding prosecutors from filing criminal cases under the Child Online Protection Act, or COPA, until a full trial takes place. COPA restricts the use of sexually explicit material deemed "harmful to minors" on commercial Web sites. But the law isn't dead: COPA now goes back to a Philadelphia appeals court for a full trial.

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(Continued on page 16)

(Continued from page 15)

text with proper credit given the author. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

Computer Power Protection

By Ira Wilsker

Now that summer is upon us, and our air conditioners seem to cycle on and off endlessly, we may have noticed our computer screens flicker or shrink ever-so-slightly for a moment when the AC compressor powers on. With our intermittent yet common summer thunderstorms, we may have noticed our lights flicker, occasionally accompanied by a power outage of varying lengths. While these and similar effects may be an emotional strain upon us personally, they may also be an indication that we may need to protect our computers from unseen electrical damage.

The most basic form of electrical protection for our computers, which should be considered as mandatory for all computers, including notebook computers used away from the home or office, is a surge suppressor. Power surges, also referred to as spikes, are short term increases in voltage, often occurring when major electrical equipment, such as air conditioners or freezers are turned off. These surges and spikes can damage sensitive electronic devices such as computers, TVs, microwave ovens, and other devices. Surge suppressors to minimize the risk of damage are readily available in a variety of forms and prices, ranging from an inexpensive suppressor in the form of a power strip, to large box shaped devices that provide surge protection with line conditioning and a battery backup function. A recent review of the selection available locally at the office supply, electronics, and discount stores indicated a vast array of power strip type surge suppressors, ranging in price from about \$3 to almost \$100. One caveat is appropriate here; many users have a standard power strip connecting their computers to the wall plug. While almost all power strips offer some form of overload protection, typically with a circuit breaker, standard power strips offer no other protection for power related problems, and need to be replaced with a decent quality power strip that has a surge suppression function with a UL 1449 rating.

The ability of a surge suppressor to dissipate the surge or spike is measured in "joules", with a higher joules rating indicating a greater ability to absorb and dissipate the excess voltage from the surge. Almost all surge suppressors have a limited life expectancy, and may wear out. Many of

(Continued on page 17)

(Continued from page 16)

the better ones have an LED or other device indicating the proper functioning of the surge protection. It is a good practice to frequently inspect your surge suppressor, and to immediately replace it if there is even a hint or suspicion of malfunction. Power surges are one of the major killers of computers and other electronic devices. In my house, each of my major electronic devices, including TVs, microwaves, stereos, cordless phones, and of course computers, is connected to a functional surge suppressor. I also carry a good quality surge suppressor – power strip in my notebook computer case which is always used whenever my notebook is plugged in.

While the primary function of a surge suppressor is to protect plugged-in electrical devices from surge related damage, many of the suppressors on the market also provide additional functionality. Common in most better suppressors is an electronic noise filter, which reduces the electrical noise, often referred to as "RFI" or "EMI" interference, carried through the power lines. This electronic noise may be thought of as a type of static, and commonly comes from a variety of transmitters, welding devices, printers, lightning, or other sources. This type of line noise can cause errors in computer programs and data files, and possibly also damage some hardware components. In purchasing a surge suppressor, I recommend that one be purchased that includes electronic noise filtering.

I have repaired countless computers where the modem was "fried", or destroyed by a power surge. It is widely known in professional circles that power surges and spikes can also come through a phone line, as well as a coax cable, network cable, or other form of data connection. Many surge suppressors also include one or more protected lines explicitly for a phone or fax cable, TV or satellite cable, or other types of network cable. For those of us that still use dialup connections to the internet, or use fax machines, a surge suppressor that has a phone jack should also be a necessity. The phone plug from the wall connects to the jack in the suppressor, and another cable is used to connect the suppressor to the modem or fax machine. Generally, there is no significant degradation of signal while connected to a fax machine, but some 56K modems may suffer a slight degradation of signal or speed. This slight performance is a small price to pay for the added protection provided by the suppressor. All of my phone lines and cable TV coax is connected to the same surge suppressor that protects the device they are connected to.

As an added benefit, many models of surge suppressors also carry some form of insurance coverage to repair or replace devices connected to

(Continued on page 18)

(Continued from page 17)

them from covered perils, often including lightning. The amount of coverage provided is often high, but is sometimes used as a marketing gimmick. As with all types of guarantees and insurance, be sure to read the fine print, and follow explicitly the directions for filing a claim.

Better safe than sorry.

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Online and In Person **by Billy Mabray,** **Oklahoma City PC Users Group**

In the early days of the Internet, a common fear was that people would spend too much time online, creating a world of isolated loners. Computer users would stop spending time in the real world, preferring to type instead of talk. While this may be true for some people, many others are finding the Web has enhanced their social life, not hurt it. The proliferation of e-mail, instant messaging, and chat rooms are evidence that people are connecting more now than ever before.

What about real life social interaction? People still like to meet in person, and there are many Web-based services to help people do just that. These services are blurring the lines between virtual and real communities. People are finding friends online and getting together in real life. Others are using the Internet to keep in touch with their real-life acquaintances. Internet users are finding they can connect with other people better than they ever have before.

A common example of virtual communities creating real-life friendships is PC user groups. People typically learn about their local group through that group's Web site. Much of the group's communication is done online. For these groups, though, the real point of using the Internet is to facilitate real-world get-togethers. Meetings, presentations, and study groups bring people together who have similar interests, but would otherwise have not found each other. Web sites and mailing lists allow for efficient communication, while group activities create opportunities for learning

(Continued on page 19)

(Continued from page 18)

new things and meeting new people.

Meetup.com offers a similar service, but for a broader range of topics. Meetup.com arranges monthly get-togethers in cities around the world on a vast array of topics. For example, the third Tuesday of every month is International Poker Meetup Day. If you are interested in meeting poker players in your area, visit the Web site, type in your zip code, and join the poker meetup nearest you. Members vote on where to meet each month, and they RSVP through the Web site. If enough people RSVP, the get-together will take place. Meetup.com offers many features for communicating with other members, planning agendas, and more. There are literally thousands of topics, with new ones being added all the time, so you are bound to find something you are interested in.

For those who are interested in communicating and spending time with friends they already have, there are online services to help with that too. Yahoo Groups, for example, lets you set up your own personal portal. A Yahoo Group includes a mailing list, photo gallery, polls, online chat, and more. You can set up a group for your family and invite all your relatives to join. Then the whole family can upload photos, plan the next reunion, or talk about what's been going on in their lives. Similarly, sites like Classmates.com or Reunion.com allow old classmates and military personnel to reconnect with each other. These services are a great way for people who don't get to see each other very often to stay in touch.

Along the same lines is a wave of new services known as social networking applications. There has been an explosion of these sites in the past year: Friendster, LinkedIn, Orkut. The idea here is to map relationships – someone invites you to join, and you in turn invite all your other friends to join. The Web site shows you people who are directly connected to you (friends), as well as those who are connected to you through other people (friends of friends). You can then use the service to keep in touch with your friends, and to meet new people through friends you already have.

So, are these virtual or real communities? The line is blurring, and the distinction between the two will most likely disappear in a few years. Technology continues to improve the way we interact. Rather than turning us into loners, the Internet is helping us to make new friends, and to keep in touch with old ones.

(Continued on page 20)

(Continued from page 19)

Billy Mabray and his wife, Angela, own Smart Goat, a local software development and Web design business. They are members of the OKCPCUG. Comments or questions on the article are welcome and can be addressed to: billy@smartgoat.com.

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How and when to enable Windows XP's firewall **by Linda Gonse,** **Editor, Orange County IBM Users' Group, California**

Most users are aware of a need for an antivirus program and a firewall in order to be protected from regular, daily Internet threats.

What some may not know is that Windows XP has a built-in firewall. While it lacks the bells and whistles of a full version firewall, such as Norton or Zone Alarm, it is still useful.

You can enable it by going to Control Panel and clicking on the Network Connection icon. In the Connections window, right click on the name of your connection and click on Properties in the drop-down menu. Click on the Advanced tab. Check the box next to "Protect my computer and network by limiting or preventing access to this computer from the Internet." Then, click OK.

Follow these steps each time you wish to enable the firewall for other Internet connections on your computer.

But, before enabling XP's firewall, you should be aware of these points:

- It must not be used through software or hardware routers.
- It only works on incoming Internet traffic, not outgoing traffic from spy-ware, Trojan viruses, or hacker tools.
- On local area networks (LANs) with other computers, it will block File and Printer Sharing.
- It can be turned on or off for each of your dial-ups, LAN, or high-speed Internet connections.

(Continued on page 21)

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Note: Meeting Place:
 North Canton Public Library
 185 North Main Street
 North Canton, OH 44720
 I-77 Exit (Portage) turn *EAST*.

From Rt.77, take the Canal Fulton/North Canton Exit (Portage St.)

Head east on Portage St. (If traveling north, you will turn right. If traveling south, you will turn left.)
 Follow Portage for approximately 1 1/4 miles to a sign that reads: "All thru traffic bear left."

Do not bear left. Continue straight on Portage until it dead-ends at Ream St.

Turn left on Ream. The Library is the 2nd building on your right. Small amount parking alongside and more across the street at rear of building.

Upcoming Computer Shows:

Peter Trapp at Tadmor Temple, Sunday, **July 18th, 2004**

3000 Krebs Drive, Akron, OH.

Exit 120 off I-77 (Arlington Rd.)

Right on Jarvis. Right on Krebs to top of hill. 10am-3pm

Please note change in contacting ACPCUG Newsletter Editor
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