ACPCUG Newsletter

North Canton Public Library, 185 North Main St. North Canton, OH

March 7, 2005
6:00—8:45 PM

Inside:

March 2005

Akron-Canton PC Users Group

From The DealsGuy for April, 2005,

by Bob (The Cheapskate) Click, Greater Orlando Computer User Group.

My wife and I worked some great trade shows lately and they just keep coming. We worked some real estate shows that didn't have spectacular exhibits, but they did have great speakers. Since we worked security for the production crew putting together the great entertainment for attendees, we met all the celebrities when they came in back stage. My wife got a nice greeting from Dr. Phil McGraw and we met Tony Robins (famous motivational speaker), Brooks Robinson (Ball player), James Brolin (Marcus Welby, MD. and Hotel) and Katie Curic. The most interesting thing in the exhibit hall was, two guys sculpting a giant sandcastle, which was impressive. They worked the entire show doing it.

Among others, we worked the PMA (Photo Marketing Assn. show). [http://www.pmai.org] It was a great show with over 29,000 attendees. All the great names in photography, hardware,

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cameras and software were there with fantastic booths. Plenty of very large printers were being demonstrated also. Unfortunately I had personal business and ended up with little time to browse that show. The Panasonic booth had a wonderful scale model village as a simulated winter snow scene. It had all the usual old time village buildings and vehicles, some small rotating carnival rides, moving ice skaters on a simulated ice rink, moving snow skiers, a working train and other working models. It was very impressive in about a 12-foot square area. Lights came on in buildings and streetlights when nighttime was simulated. The person setting it up told us he could put one in our living room if we liked, but we told him we didn't have room. (money either)

One day I was entering the show floor and Jerry Stephens from Toronto Users Group yelled at me. You probably remember him from the days when he was active in APCUG. We had little time to talk, but it was sure nice to see him.

The Nikon booth had eight young people dressed in bright yellow jump suits and riding yellow electric scooters all around outside the building greeting people. They were giving out yellow candies on a card inviting folks to visit the Nikon booth and get in on the daily drawings for fabulous prizes. Another booth was giving away USB flash drives, which is getting more common all the time.

Best of all, we worked the Home Electronics Expo [http://www.ehxweb.com], one of my favorites. Talk about a candy store venue; that was it for me. I saw many cabling, switching and speaker booths along with companies for planning your digitally controlled house. There were speakers in all kinds of configurations that could blend into the décor of your house or garden and patio; for example, some looked like a rock [http://www.stereostone.com].

In one booth they had a luxury easy chair with a controller that was precoded for over 680 movies (1-888-442-3269). Just pop in your favorite movie on a DVD and the console recognizes the movie and creates the sensations quite realistically for what you are seeing on screen while in that easy chair. It even simulates a bumpy road and only six grand for it all. I often sleep through a movie so that wouldn't work well for me. My proofreader wondered how the chair handled the bullets in a shooting scene, or a steamy sex scene.

I saw door locks controlled by a sensor that could recognize your

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thumbprint to open the lock, then the same sensor could recognize another fingerprint to open or close your garage door [http://www.ekeyUSA.com]. I may have a deal on them. Another company had technology to track all use of locks in your company and who used them, putting the data on a Web site that could be easily tracked from anywhere by the proper person.

I loved the Panasonic doorbell that had a camera in the button panel. When a presence is sensed, it turns itself on along with a light, if needed, and you could see who was there on a small LCD monitor inside. The entire person was visible, even at close range. That will be out in July and I want one [http://www.panasonic.com/CSD]. I didn't see them on the Web site, but maybe soon.

There was a booth with weather stations that were elaborate and looked very sturdy. It looked to be more of a commercial unit and they used a computer monitor for the stats [http://www.weatherhawk.com]. They had an attachment that would verbally tell you what you wanted to know, including "please shut your windows as rain is imminent." I saw dozens of big screen plasma and LCD monitors, and TVs. The one that impressed me most was the NEC 61" plasma screen. It was so sharp and crystal clear that it almost looked three-dimensional.

There was just too much to write about in this article, but you can take a look at the show's Web site to see the exhibitor list. It was not a large show, but certainly a good one with about 9,000 attendees. I had notified several editors who asked me to e-mail them it was coming again after I wrote about it last year, but didn't run into them. The NCSA (National Systems Contractors Assn.) show [http://www.nsca.org]. will be here March 10 and I hope to at least explore it. I'm told it's a similar type of show, except mostly for contractors and installers.

Another Deal From Gene and Linda Barlow:

User Group Relations has another interesting and helpful product for you. These days our computer life is chuck full of ID and passwords and we are urged to change them frequently. So how do you remember them all? You could write them all down and hide the list under your mouse pad <G>, or you could get smart and use MyPasswordVault by WhiteCanyon Software to store all those IDs and passwords and keep them at your disposal. Linda sent me the product just before deadline so I haven't tried it yet, but I will soon because it has some great features. Make life easier

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with this unique product and use the discount offered to users group members to buy it for just $15.00 (MSRP $25.00). Go to [http://www.usergroupstore.com] and use the special code UGDEALS to order.

Attention Gamers!

NevoSoft announces a new space shooter/puzzler game below: (edited so check their Web site)

"SAINT PETERSBURG, Russia. - January 27, 2005: NevoSoft is proud to announce the release of Zzed, the latest version of an electrifying space shooter mixed with lots of action, adventure and puzzle. Zzed will put the player into the spaceship and take on a tough galactic mission with over 60 levels to win. With superb cartoon graphics, exhilarating gameplay and original music, Zzed will be the ultimate source of enjoyment for kids and parents alike.

"The game comes to life as Zzed, a young and ambitious alien, has been sent on a special mission by his corrupted boss, Mr. Zzapone. There, in the backwoods of the galaxy Zzed will have to protect the space foundries of his boss from vast space garbage fields. However, the real reason of the mission is Zzapone's fear that Zzed will throw him down the corporate throne. Zzed leaves home with a heavy heart as the assignment separates him from his beloved alien sweetheart. To win the ticket back home, Zzed has to remove all space garbage from around the galaxy."

"Zzed is not all about shooting. The game will also challenge your reaction and thinking, said Alexey Serebrov, CEO of NevoSoft. "As you go from level to level, the speed of garbage fields increases. Therefore, you will have to act fast and smart.

"Availability: Zzed runs under Windows 98/Me/2000/XP and costs $19.95 (USD). Registered customers are entitled to the unlocked gameplay, free updates and lifetime technical support. An evaluation version of the game limited to the 40-minute gameplay is available for free at: [http://www.nevosoft.com/zzed/zzed_demo.exe]. For more information, visit us at [http://www.nevosoft.com]. Use a 10% discount for purchasing the game for user group members. Just use coupon - ZZED-3B51 - during ordering process and you get the game only for $17.95 (instead of $19.95). Or you may simply order discounted Zzed by clicking on this link:

[https://www.regnow.com/softsell/nph-softsell.cgi?&ss_coupon=ZZED-3B51&item=8323-15] We didn't see the discount coupon working yet, so you may have to e-mail them as I had no time to contact them at this

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point. Sorry!

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].

FTC Names Its Dirty Dozen: 12 Scams Most Likely to Arrive Via Bulk Email

Email boxes are filling up with more offers for business opportunities than any other kind of unsolicited commercial email. That's a problem, according to the Federal Trade Commission, because many of these offers are scams.

In response to requests from consumers, the FTC asked email users to forward their unsolicited commercial email to the agency for an inside look at the bulk email business. FTC staff found that more often than not, bulk email offers appeared to be fraudulent, and if pursued, could have ripped-off unsuspecting consumers to the tune of billions of dollars.

The FTC has identified the 12 scams that are most likely to arrive in consumers' email boxes. The "dirty dozen" are:

1. Business opportunities

These business opportunities make it sound easy to start a business that will bring lots of income without much work or cash outlay. The solicitations trumpet unbelievable earnings claims of $140 a day, $1,000 a day, or more, and claim that the business doesn't involve selling, meetings, or personal contact with others, or that someone else will do all the work. Many business opportunity solicitations claim to offer a way to make money in an Internet-related business. Short on details but long on promises, these messages usually offer a telephone number to call for more information. In many cases, you'll be told to leave your name and telephone number so that a salesperson can call you back with the sales pitch.

The scam: Many of these are illegal pyramid schemes masquerading as legitimate opportunities to earn money.

2. Bulk email

Bulk email solicitations offer to sell you lists of email addresses, by the millions, to which you can send your own bulk solicitations. Some offer software that automates the sending of email messages to thousands or millions of recipients. Others offer the service of sending bulk email solicitations on your behalf. Some of these offers say, or imply, that you can make a lot of

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money using this marketing method.

The problem: Sending bulk email violates the terms of service of most Internet service providers. If you use one of the automated email programs, your ISP may shut you down. In addition, inserting a false return address into your solicitations, as some of the automated programs allow you to do, may land you in legal hot water with the owner of the address's domain name. Several states have laws regulating the sending of unsolicited commercial email, which you may unwittingly violate by sending bulk email. Few legitimate businesses, if any, engage in bulk email marketing for fear of offending potential customers.

3. Chain letters

You're asked to send a small amount of money ($5 to $20) to each of four or five names on a list, replace one of the names on the list with your own, and then forward the revised message via bulk email. The letter may claim that the scheme is legal, that it's been reviewed or approved by the government; or it may refer to sections of U.S. law that legitimize the scheme. Don't believe it.

The scam: Chain letters-traditional or high-tech-are almost always illegal, and nearly all of the people who participate in them lose their money. The fact that a "product" such as a report on how to make money fast, a mailing list, or a recipe may be changing hands in the transaction does not change the legality of these schemes.

4. Work-at-home schemes

Envelope-stuffing solicitations promise steady income for minimal labor-for example, you'll earn $2 each time you fold a brochure and seal it in an envelope. Craft assembly work schemes often require an investment of hundreds of dollars in equipment or supplies, and many hours of your time producing goods for a company that has promised to buy them.

The scam: You'll pay a small fee to get started in the envelope-stuffing business. Then, you'll learn that the email sender never had real employment to offer. Instead, you'll get instructions on how to send the same envelope-stuffing ad in your own bulk emailings. If you earn any money, it will be from others who fall for the scheme you're perpetuating. And after spending the money and putting in the time on the craft assembly work, you are likely to find promoters who refuse to pay you, claiming that your work isn't up to their "quality standards."

5. Health and diet scams

Pills that let you lose weight without exercising or changing your diet, herbal formulas that liquefy your fat cells so that they are absorbed by your body, and cures for impotence and hair loss are among the scams flooding email boxes.

The scam: These gimmicks don't work. The fact is that successful weight loss requires a reduc-

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tion in calories and an increase in physical activity. Beware of case histories from "cured" consumers claiming amazing results; testimonials from "famous" medical experts you've never heard of; claims that the product is available from only one source or for a limited time; and ads that use phrases like "scientific breakthrough," "miraculous cure," "exclusive product," "secret formula," and "ancient ingredient."

6. Effortless income

The trendiest get-rich-quick schemes offer unlimited profits exchanging money on world currency markets; newsletters describing a variety of easy-money opportunities; the perfect sales letter; and the secret to making $4,000 in one day.

The scam: If these systems worked, wouldn't everyone be using them? The thought of easy money may be appealing, but success generally requires hard work.

7. Free goods

Some email messages offer valuable goods-for example, computers, other electronic items, and long-distance phone cards-for free. You're asked to pay a fee to join a club, then told that to earn the offered goods, you have to bring in a certain number of participants. You're paying for the right to earn income by recruiting other participants, but your payoff is in goods, not money.

The scam: Most of these messages are covering up pyramid schemes, operations that inevitably collapse. Almost the entire payoff goes to the promoters and little or none to consumers who pay to participate.

8. Investment opportunities

Investment schemes promise outrageously high rates of return with no risk. One version seeks investors to help form an offshore bank. Others are vague about the nature of the investment, stressing the rates of return. Many are Ponzi schemes, in which early investors are paid off with money contributed by later investors. This makes the early investors believe that the system actually works, and encourages them to invest even more.

Promoters of fraudulent investments often operate a particular scam for a short time, quickly spend the money they take in, then close down before they can be detected. Often, they reopen under another name, selling another investment scam. In their sales pitch, they'll say that they have high-level financial connections; that they're privy to inside information; that they'll guarantee the investment; or that they'll buy back the investment after a certain time. To close the deal, they often serve up phony statistics, misrepresent the significance of a current event, or stress the unique quality of their offering-anything to deter you from verifying their story.

The scam: Ponzi schemes eventually collapse because there isn't enough money coming in to continue simulating earnings. Other schemes are a good investment for the promoters, but no

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for participants.

9. Cable descrambler kits

For a small sum of money, you can buy a kit to assemble a cable descrambler that supposedly allows you to receive cable television transmissions without paying any subscription fee.

The scam: The device that you build probably won't work. Most of the cable TV systems in the U.S. use technology that these devices can't crack. What's more, even if it worked, stealing service from a cable television company is illegal.

10. Guaranteed loans or credit, on easy terms

Some email messages offer home-equity loans that don't require equity in your home, as well as solicitations for guaranteed, unsecured credit cards, regardless of your credit history. Usually, these are said to be offered by offshore banks. Sometimes they are combined with pyramid schemes, which offer you an opportunity to make money by attracting new participants to the scheme.

The scams: The home equity loans turn out to be useless lists of lenders who will turn you down if you don't meet their qualifications. The promised credit cards never come through, and the pyramid money-making schemes always collapse.

11. Credit repair

Credit repair scams offer to erase accurate negative information from your credit file so you can qualify for a credit card, auto loan, home mortgage, or a job.

The scam: The scam artists who promote these services can't deliver. Only time, a deliberate effort, and a personal debt repayment plan will improve your credit. The companies that advertise credit repair services appeal to consumers with poor credit histories. Not only can't they provide you with a clean credit record, but they also may be encouraging you to violate federal law. If you follow their advice by lying on a loan or credit application, misrepresenting your Social Security number, or getting an Employer Identification Number from the Internal Revenue Service under false pretenses, you will be committing fraud.

12. Vacation prize promotions

Electronic certificates congratulating you on "winning" a fabulous vacation for a very attractive price are among the scams arriving in your email. Some say you have been "specially selected" for this opportunity.

The scam: Most unsolicited commercial email goes to thousands or millions of recipients at a time. Often, the cruise ship you're booked on may look more like a tug boat. The hotel accom-

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modations likely are shabby, and you may be required to pay more for an upgrade. Scheduling the vacation at the time you want it also may require an additional fee.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit www.ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

Tech News

By Sue Crane, VP / Editor, Big Bear Computer Club

www.bigbearcc.org

IRS partners Intuit, TaxAct and eSmartTax are offering no-cost services to everyone this year. Two additional companies, FreeTaxUSA.com and FileYourTaxes.com, are extending free services to residents of certain U.S. states. The 10 remaining participating companies, including tax giant H&R Block, have no-cost programs for specific demographics, such as people over the age of 60 or members of the military. 40 states and the District of Columbia are working on a national Internet sales tax system. SSTP (Streamlined Sales Tax Project) has issued two requests for bids for software and Web-based networks to track online purchases sales tax payments. As currently envisioned by the states, Web merchants would pay nothing for the services; instead, the vendors would take a cut from tax revenues

EBay and Intel have developed a "Rethink Initiative" which seeks to bring together public and private organizations to promote recycling and reuse of old PCs and consumer electronics products. The announcement comes days after the Electronic Waste Recycling Act of 2003 became active in California, requiring consumers to pay an Electronic Waste Recycling Fee for certain devices, including monitors and laptop computers. EBay president and chief executive officer Meg Whitman said. "I would love to try as an industry to come together with market-based solutions so we won't have to face federal and state regulation."

Vonage, the No. 1 Internet phone company, is offering its subscribers a wireless Wi-Fi phone that can make calls over the Internet at homes or at public Wi-Fi hot spots. New phone will let consumers make VoIP calls from any Wi-Fi hot spot. Wi-Fi calls are essentially free, in contrast to cell phone

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calls, and customers will plug a regular phone into an adapter linked to a broadband Internet line. Vonage will then turn the calls into data that travel by Internet before being converted back to voice at the other end. Meanwhile,Comcast Corp., the nation's biggest cable company, said Monday it plans to roll out phone service over the Internet to all 21.5 million of its customers within the next year and a half, bringing the online technology into the mainstream.

New technology known as eICU ("Enhanced Intensive Care") lets physicians miles away from their patents manage health care via cameras and banks of computer screens. the technology is already in use at least 18 hospital systems nationwide. Whereas traditional health care systems rely on nurses to notice a problem with a patient and relay the information to a doctor, eICU informs the doctor directly. The doctor can check the patient's ventilator, intravenous medication and anything else in the patient's room, and one physician notes: "The camera is such that I can count eyelashes."

If you've bought a plasma TV, you might get one-upped in two years, when TVs using new carbon technology arrive. A new type of flat-panel display that will rely on diamonds or carbon nanotubes--two forms of pure carbon--to produce images. Theoretically, these "field effect displays," or FEDs, will consume less energy than plasma or liquid crystal display (LCD) TVs, deliver a better picture and even cost less.

RaySat has developed a satellite antenna that turns a moving vehicle into a mobile Wi-Fi hotspot. In addition to the Internet access service, RaySat has developed an antenna that enables cars to receive satellite TV broadcasts -- an application that may have broader appeal among consumers. RaySat expects to launch its new product in the third quarter of this year.

For people fed up with pecking out text messages on their mobile phone, Samsung Electronics may have an answer. The South Korean electronics maker has developed what it is calling the world's first mobile phones that can convert spoken words into text messages. ll three handsets will be released in the U.S. sometime during the first quarter.

In Asia, cell phone handset makers are already marketing phones with embedded memory devices (a chip or magnetic strip) that can be swiped against credit or debit card readers in much the same way consumers now use plastic, and trials are underway to bring the technology to the U.S. Details are still being worked on important issues such as security. "The phones are exciting, but it's going to be a long time" before a widespread

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base of U.S. merchants and consumers are equipped to use them, says Visa International VP Sue Gordon-Lathrop.

The U.S. Army is sending 18 remote-controlled robotic soldiers called SWORDS (Special Weapons Observation Reconnaissance Detection Systems) to Iraq, but they are not the autonomous killer robots of science fiction: a SWORDS robot shoots only when its human operator presses a button (after identifying a target on video shot by the robot's cameras).

MOST IDENTITY THEFT OCCURS OFFLINE. Despite growing concerns over online fraud, a new study conducted by the Better Business Bureau and Javelin Research finds that most cases of identity theft can be traced to a lost or stolen wallet or checkbook, rather than vulnerable online financial data. Computer crimes make up just 12% of all ID fraud cases in which the origin is known, and half of those are attributed to spyware that sneaks onto computers and steals private information.

Random acts of literacy

by Sherry Zorzi, APCUG Advisor

Director, Cajun Clickers Computer Club
www.cajunclickers.org

You may find one in your doctor's waiting room or at the hairdresser's. You may spot one in a shopping cart in the parking lot at Winn Dixie or on a chair at Starbucks. You may come upon one in the break room at work or even on a bench in the park.

A book. It could be paperback or hardback. It could be well-thumbed or brand-new. It sports a stick-on label with a cartoon of a jaunty running book with stick-figure arms and legs. "I'm not lost; I'm traveling. Take me home," the label reads.

Welcome to the **BookCrossing** phenomenon. It's operating quietly here in the Baton Rouge area, it's free, it's as anonymous as you want it to be, and it's great fun.

Thanks to a unique website started in April 2001, the invented term

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"bookcrossing" has become so mainstream that it made it into the **Concise Oxford English Dictionary** by August 2004. *"Bookcrossing, n., the practice of leaving a book in a public place to be picked up and read by others, who then do likewise."*

Avid reader Ron Hornbaker, a web designer in Kansas City, was intrigued by websites like **Where's George**, which tracks U.S. currency by serial number, and wondered what else would be fun to track. Thus was born **BookCrossing.com** and the rest is rapidly becoming history.

The basics of bookcrossing are, appropriately, the "3 R's." Read, register and release. *Read* a good book. *Register* it at **BookCrossing.com**. When you register the book, you'll get a unique ID number for the book. You can write an online journal entry for the book, a review, if you like. Stick a label on the book with the ID number and the address of the website. *Release* the book for someone else to find and read. You can give it directly to a friend, mail it to another bookcrosser who has expressed interest in that book, or (my favorite!) just leave it in a public place for someone else to find.

When you find a released book, visit the website and enter the ID number of the book. You can do this anonymously if you wish. You'll have an opportunity to make your own journal entry, in which you can describe where you found it and even review the book yourself. If you log the book, the releaser will know when and where the book was found and you'll both be able to track future finds as well.

More than 300,000 bookcrossers worldwide have registered almost two million books! Bookcrossers live in 150 different countries. There are almost 500 bookcrossers in the Baton Rouge area, so you just might happen upon one of our releases in a neighborhood near you.

At the **BookCrossing.com** website, you can click a link to "go hunting" for books released in your area within the last 30 days which have not yet been reported found. As of this writing, there are 39 books in Baton Rouge waiting to be found.!

There is also an online community at the website, with discussion forums ranging from general chit-chat to serious talk about books.

Do you really think you'll ever reread your collection of paperback James Lee Burke mysteries? Or all those diet books you've collected?

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What are you hoarding them for? Why not make someone else's day? If you love your books, set them free!

*Sherry Zorzi is a Director of Cajun Clickers Computer Club and host of **"The Cajun Clickers Computer Show"** heard every Saturday morning at 9 a.m. on WJBO Radio.*

Configuring a Basic User's PC

By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor & Columnist,
AARP Computers and Technology Website

Don't be alarmed by the high-falutin word "configuring". It just means deciding what components -- otherwise called "parts" -- will perform various PC functions. It's like old-days car buying: reviewing a dealer checklist to pick dozens of individual features, from radio to power steering to disc brakes and more.

The good news is that almost any current PC with a printer and Internet connectivity will handle mainstream requirements. That means that a generic Windows PC is usually adequate -- but you should upgrade if you'll do anything challenging or exotic.

Just as when buying a car, the first step in buying a computer is deciding what you'll do with it: e-mail, Web searching/viewing, word processing? Financial work with Quicken? Digital photography? Simple games? Ultra-demanding tasks like high-end games and digital video editing?

Just as when making any major purchase, a small investment in learning pays off for years. Before buying a PC, learn the basics: -- take a class, buy a book, attend local computer user group meetings, consult Web sites, read technology magazines at the library.

As you look at applications' system requirements (processor speed, RAM size, hard drive storage capacity, video card speed and memory, etc.) note differences between minimum and recommended specifications. Vendors are often too optimistic -- and that's being charitable -- about what's

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needed for their software to run productively. It's much safer, and not much more expensive, to buy at least the recommended choices. In fact, I usually buy a little more power than I need. This bumps cost just a little and it avoids future problems and upgrades. Purchasing this way greatly extends a PC's life and makes it more compatible with future innovations, at least for a while.

Remember that as PCs evolve, a range of choices is always available, from bleeding-edge new to borderline obsolete. An equally valid – and more economical -- approach to configuring is finding the current technology "sweet spot" the point where cost, performance, compatibility, and useful life are in balance.

A key decision is whether to buy a brand-name system or an unknown-brand machine, have a PC built to order, or build it yourself. Choices for laptop computers are much more limited: brand-name systems dominate, trailed by a few off-brand manufacturers. There are no build-it-yourself options, though manufactured systems can be customized extensively.

Each purchasing choice has advantages and advocates. Brand-name systems can be evaluated and compared by consulting references such as Consumer Reports magazine, are available everywhere via catalog or online shopping, and may have better standard or optional warranties (often worthwhile for quick service and peace of mind). But brand-name systems sometimes suffer from using commodity parts vs. best-quality components.

Unknown-brand machines can be reliable money savers or risky acquisitions. I'd only buy such a system from a trusted store with a flexible return policy. I favor having PCs built to order by small local shops with established reputations, offering maximum flexibility and consultation during design. And I've enjoyed watching my PCs take
shape as they're assembled from a tableful of parts!

Some people build their own PCs, often with training and mentoring from computer user group volunteers. This demystifies system innards, greatly facilitating diagnosing and repairing problems and upgrading components. Build-to-order and build-yourself allow specifying brand-name parts for improved performance and reliability.

No matter where you purchase, look carefully at monitor choices. Traditional CRT monitors prices have declined, allowing buying larger devices with better resolution. And newer/thinner/lighter LCD panels offer a power-

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ful -- though sometimes less flexible -- alternative. Visit stores to compare brands and models and explore settings to match your preferences.

Decide how you'll back up your software and data. Choices include a second -- perhaps external or removeable -- hard drive, writable optical media such as DVD, and tape. The first two are most often used, with each having unique advantages. Follow your backup plan regularly; nothing ruins a day like losing months or years of can't-be-replaced
data, not to mention having to reconstruct all your software.

Small choices can make large differences in productivity and comfort. For example, mouse technology has advanced far beyond the traditional two-button wired device. Mouse alternatives include trackball and wireless devices, gadgets with many extra programmable buttons, wheel mouses allowing horizontal/vertical scrolling, etc. Considering how much time you'll use your pointing device, it's worth spending a little extra money to have the device that suits you best!

Windows offers many choices for easing use -- enlarging type, making keyboarding easier, providing special audible and visual cues, etc. Accessibility options are found in different places -- usually via Control Panel or the Start menu. It's worth exploring these to tailor your PC to your individual preferences. Similarly, small add-on programs can greatly improve a PC's comfort factor. Remember that Windows is highly configurable: you can change how it looks and operates. As you become familiar with your new PC, explore options/settings/preferences. Just as you wouldn't insist on driving a car with seats and mirrors exactly as they came from the dealer, don't be captive of Microsoft's
initial settings!

Name-brand computers usually include software bundles. Vendors shout about how valuable they are and how much money you're saving on them -- but that's only true if you'll use the software provided. As soon as you have your machine, examine pre-installed software and remove anything you know you won't use. Then defrag your disk and then install the programs you'll use. These simple steps will make your machine run
better by decluttering it.

Finally, If you understand how to do this, use built-in tools such as MSCONFIG to chop out unneeded services started by default when your system boots.

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Software bundles often include junior-grade versions or limited-time trial copies of critical tools such as anti-virus and anti-spyware software. For system reliability and security, upgrade these to full versions and subscribe to update services.

Not much else in modern life besides computers keeps getting faster/better/cheaper. And it's not hard to find or build a computer that meets needs for several years, runs reliably, and doesn't break the bank.

Cyber Security in 2005?

by Pim Borman
SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.
www.swipcug.apcug.org

As more and more computer users gain fast, always-on, broadband access to the Internet via cable or ADSL telephone lines, computer security becomes a critical issue. This was convincingly illustrated in an article in *USA TODAY* (11-30-2004, thanks to Duane Morrow). The paper teamed up with Avantgarde, a tech marketing and design firm, to see what kind of attacks were attracted by variously equipped computers hooked up to a broadband DSL connection. Relatively unprotected computers, wide open to the Internet, underwent attacks at a sustained rate of 340 per hour, or once every 10 seconds on average. These computers consisted of a Dell Windows XP with Service Pack 1, and an Apple Mac X. Most of the attacks were no more than "door knob rattlers" and did not result in actual penetration. Nevertheless, out of 139 thousand attacks in two weeks nine managed to take over the Windows XP computer and started to tie it into a larger network of hijacked systems. Another computer, equipped with Windows Small Business Server, underwent 25 thousand attacks in two weeks, 61 per hour on average, of which one managed to take over the system. The Apple computer was not compromised, probably because it uses an operat-

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ing system not targeted by most intruders.

Computers protected by an active firewall underwent far fewer attacks, from 2 – 4 per hour, because firewalls hide the presence of a computer on the Internet from casual passers-by. These computers used Windows XP with Service Pack 2, Windows XP with the ZoneAlarm firewall, and a Microtel Linspire (Linux-based) computer with a basic firewall in the operating system.

Note that these "honey pot" systems were totally passive. Attacks did not depend on users' actions, such as visiting infected Web sites or downloading email attachments that might cause infiltration by worms and viruses. It is also clear that fairly simple protection measures, such as a firewall, thwarted the vast majority of malicious attackers.

The foremost obstacle to achieving a safer Internet is the ignorance and/or indifference of too many computer users, especially those with a broadband connection; but notice that with an attack rate of once every 10 seconds even Internet browsers using a limited telephone connection can be vulnerable!

If Moving Can't Be Fun, At Least Make It Painless

By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor and Columnist,
AARP Computers and Technology Website

It's said that "two moves equals one fire" in terms of inconvenience and turmoil. Fire victims might disagree, but there's no doubt that moves range from disruptive to agonizing. Having just moved -- and, in the process, reengineered my family's computing and Internet setup -- I'll share tips for recreating or transforming technology when moving.

Some aspects of moving are the same whether the trip is cross-country or down the street: packing boxes, dealing with new quarters, etc. But moving locally allows shuttling between old and new sites, avoiding the long-distance "D-Day" moment when everything must be in transit.

I'll focus on technology: computers, Internet issues (ISP/cable/DSL), system backup, telephone (local, long distance, cellular), and electricity. (Just ensure that someone attends to non-tech services such as gas and newspaper delivery!) And remember, just as insurance needs differ, no single move strategy fits everyone. Decide what to do based on your technical skills and how you'll be affected by problems.

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It shouldn't be hard to identify what you've got -- computers, accessories, network connections, etc. But listing local dependencies may be challenging. What do you depend on locally? Just as you know your doctor and plumber -- what's your technology support structure? If you use a local ISP (Internet service provider), will it be available after you move? If you rely on neighbors or local user group for technical assistance, who will replace them? Remember that AARP's technical community at http://community.aarp.org/rp-computers/start is always as near as your Web browser!

Make and update to-do lists; take notes on conversations with vendors to track progress and follow up when (all too often) necessary.

First, inventory your technology and set goals. Balance recreating your current setup against improving it. The first choice reduces change and perhaps stress; the second can offer better computing.

Next, identify what you need. If you generally keep a list -- mental or written -- of technology problems (slow computer, fuzzy monitor, pokey Internet connection), moving may be the time to solve them.

Finally -- and most fun -- think about what you want. If you're moving when retiring, you may take up new hobbies. Dealing with music, digital photography, and movies all require more computer power: CPU speed, RAM, and hard drive space. And losing access to the office computer and network can suddenly make an upgrade essential.

Plan your new place's technology; decide where to place your computer(s). Custom space and furniture are nice but not essential. Make sure there are enough electrical outlets and that circuits can handle the load. Locate other connections you'll need such as telephone and cable (TV/Internet). Draw a floorplan and experiment with placing

furniture and equipment -- it's much easier to redraw lines than move heavy objects.

When your move is set, deal with utilities at both ends. You may not care when service is terminated, but there's sometimes a wait to establish telephone and cable service. For local moves I've had good results from visiting utility offices rather than making changes by phone: I could look at current products/services literature, discuss options, and read contracts. Consider new service plans -- for cable TV, ISP, cell phone, long-distance calling. Your post-move needs may be different and plans have likely

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evolved since you last evaluated them.

My wife thinks -- likely correctly -- that my first priority after moving is getting online. Even if you've arranged broadband service, there may be problems: wiring or account setup may not be done; your PC configuration may not match the new service; etc. If access is essential, establish and test backup dial-access service before moving -- even if it requires a long-distance phone call.

Keep essential materials such as manuals and software install disks handy. Locate a user group where you're going, perhaps join before moving and introduce yourself to group leaders so you have a welcoming committee ready. Solicit recommendations for consultants or service shops, just in case.

If movers will handle your equipment or you're shipping it, make sure it's adequately insured.

If staying in touch is essential, warn people that you're moving and that you'll be offline and explain how you can be reached (cell phone, new address, etc.). Auto-responders (sending a canned message to people who e-mail you) can be helpful but should be used with caution so they don't respond inappropriately (e.g., to mailing lists to which you're subscribed).

If you're moving locally, set aside fragile equipment or anything you want to keep in sight, such as financial or medical records, and shuttle it to your new place.

For longer moves, allow extra time to pack electronics carefully in original boxes. (Now you know why you keep boxes!) Consider carrying or shipping boxes containing irreplaceable material (one data backup, software CDs, etc.)

Label cables when you disassemble your PC and network and record where they connect. If you're nervous about disassembling your equipment, a local consultant can likely prepare it for shipping. That's better than having movers do it! For extra protection, remove your hard drive and pack it in soft clothing you'll take with you. That will doubly protect you: from damage if the computer is dropped or banged, from losing data if the computer is lost or stolen.

Carry a tested backup (software and data) separate from your PC. If

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you have desktop and laptop computers, you may be able to back the desktop system up on the laptop hard drive.

Once you arrive, even if you're in a hurry, don't neglect power protection -- using at least a surge protector, preferably a UPS (uninterruptible power supply).

Update anything displaying your address such as Web pages and email signature files. Tell tech-involved organizations such as your ISPs and domain name registrars that you've moved so you receive bills and notices. Now kick back and relax; enjoy your well-organized technology.

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Sounding the alarm over spyware threats and antispyware cooperation

by Linda Gonse, Editor, Orange County IBM PC Users' Group
www.orcopug.org

When I first learned about spyware makers iSearch and iDownload threatening anti-spyware advocates and anti-spyware makers in February to cease and desist listing them as candidates for removal or face legal action, I was incensed. http://www.windowssecrets.com/050224/

Several sites have received the letters and now face steep legal fees in fighting this brazen and outrageous threat to consumer rights to share information and protect ourselves from being victimized by spyware. http://www.edbott.com/weblog/archives/000491.html

What these spyware makers are saying is that their products are not spyware, although available studies and articles all show that the products are indeed spyware. http://www.dslreports.com/shownews/60608

But, wait. It gets stranger. Another spyware company, WhenU, actu-

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ally struck a deal with Aluria to be delisted as spyware. Aluria develops anti-spyware technology used by AOL and several other ISP's affecting millions of users. Aluria actually agreed to remove WhenU from the definitions it uses for Spyware Eliminator. WhenU products are now declared "Spyware SAFE" and are left intact on the systems of users, although WhenU's products did not change! What's more, Ad-aware and Pest Patrol have also stopped listing WhenU's spyware. http://www.dslreports.com/shownews/58023, http://tinyurl.com/6b96j

Why is this happening? And, what effect will it have on users?

Apparently, spyware vendors, in anticipation of looming anti-spyware laws, are attempting a public image makeover that includes buying legitimacy from anti-spyware developers. http://tinyurl.com/4rj9o The spyware makers are being driven by money. And, antispyware makers who cooperate with them do so for the money, as well.

If we cannot learn who makes spyware from advocacy sites, and we cannot rely on antispyware makers to list them for removal, we computer users are the ultimate targets/victims for the sleazy programs that install and run on our computers without our knowledge and approval, that affect the performance of our computers and programs, and invade our homes and our privacy, without fear of litigation or removal.

Isn't this where computer users and user groups must band together and pressure antispyware companies to keep these perpetrators in their databases? Shouldn't we lend our support to antispyware vendors and tell them not to cave into these demands or we won't buy or use their products? Isn't this a good time to write to your legislator? NOW! Before you lose the right to protest and deny these companies access to your computer and private information.

Names and addresses of your elected state and federal officials are at http://www.congress.org/congressorg/home/. Find contacts at antispyware companies by clicking on links at https://netfiles.uiuc.edu/ehowes/www/soft6.htm .

VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol)

By Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.,
Member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.
www.spcug.org

Are you using the Internet for your local and/or long distance service? If not, then maybe you need to read this article to find out how some computer users are saving "mucho dinero" on their telephone calls.

VoIP stands for Voice over Internet Protocol. There are ways to use the Internet for free phone calls, low cost phone calls (2¢ per minute) or a monthly fixed rate for both local and long-distance calls. So how is it possible to transmit your voice over your Internet connection? We'll look at some of the technical aspects first. Then I can discuss some of the services that are available for you to check out further.

When you use your telephone your voice is converted into electrical impulses and transmitted over copper wires to another phone. There it is converted back to sound waves. These impulses are transmitted via several switches in the telephone network. This system is referred to as the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN). As long as you are talking on the phone you have a constant circuit connection between the two phones. In the original PSTN system, all calls required a dedicated wire for each call. For the period of time you were on the phone you "owned" a copper wire connection between your phone and the other party. In today's PSTN, all calls are digitized and can be combined with thousands of others running over fiber optic cable between central stations. However, the connection between the two phones must remain open for the length of the call.

When computer data is transmitted over phone lines or cable, it is also in digital form. However, the data is sent in packets and does not require a dedicated pathway to reach its destination. In fact, when a computer sends a stream of data packets, they may all arrive at their destination after traveling different routes. There are thousands of possible paths between any origin and any destination. In addition, packets from other origins can use any time spaces between your packets. This is a more efficient system, as a circuit does not need to be kept open. This system is referred to as packet switching.

So if your e-mail is being chopped up into small packets, how does the system know what to do with them? Each packet contains an address that tells the router what its final destination is. The sending computer sends the packet off to a router and then goes on to its next operation. The router se-

lects a path to another router and sends the packet off. This process continues to the destination computer. At the destination, the receiving computer assembles the packets based on the information contained in each packet.

So what does this have to do with Internet phones? Very simple. VoIP uses the packet switching technology to transmit your call. The digitization of your voice occurs either through your sound card or a device known as an analog telephone adapter (ATA). There are also Internet phones which connect directly to a network router and handle the conversion process. The voice packets that result from these various adapters are routed over the Internet in the same way as data packets. When you make a phone call, there is always dead space when no one is talking. With the packet system, other data packets from other sources are being transmitted over the Internet making maximum use of its capacity.

In the early days of VoIP sound quality was poor and the method of operation more like using a walkie-talkie. Today's equipment is vastly improved. Sound quality on many VoIP systems is the equivalent of that found in the PSTN. Depending on the system you are using, you can dial any number and your call will be routed over the Internet. In such a system, you and the party you called won't see any difference in operation or sound from that of the PSTN.

So why would you be interested in using an Internet phone instead of your current local/long distance PSTN service? One big factor for many people is cost. The cost of Internet service ranges from free to $25/month (more in some cases) for unlimited calls. In addition, many of the VoIP services offer features that cost you extra through your local phone company. It is not unusual for a VoIP provider to include Caller ID, Call waiting, Call transfer, call forwarding, voicemail and three way calling as part of the basic price.

Now let's look at some of the providers and their services. Skype (www.skype.com) offers a free service that allows you to connect to other Skype users. The software for this can be downloaded from their website. It took just a few minutes to install it on my computer. Once you have installed it, you need to setup a call list of other users. So you have to contact people that you call frequently and have them install the Skype software. From that point on, it becomes much like instant messaging. If the person you are calling is on-line, you can connect and talk to them. Otherwise, they have no way to know that you are calling. The reverse is also true if they want to call you. The minimum hardware you need for this are speakers connected to your sound card and a microphone. You can also use a headset with a built-in microphone. It is also advisable that you have a

broadband connection, either cable or DSL. In my testing of it, once I had a connection, the call was quite clear with no background static or other problems.

So what do you do if you have Skype and want to call someone who doesn't have Skype? You can get SkypeOut that allows you to call any phone number anywhere in the world for about 2¢/minute. After you install the SkypeOut software you buy credit on their Internet site which you can then use for your calls. Some reviewers have had sound problems with SkypeOut. I have not tested it.

There are other free services available as well. One is Free World Dialup (www.freeworldialup.com). This is a quote from their website: "FWD allows you to make free phone calls using any broadband connection using devices that follow Internet standards. This can be a 'regular' telephone connected to a packetizer, an IP Phone or any number of free soft-phones (software for your PC or PDA)." In order to use the system you need to download and install the software. Then you obtain a phone number from FWD. The hardware you need is a SIP compatible ATA adapter that you connect to a network router that connects to your modem. You can then connect any telephone to the jack in the ATA adapter. Now you're ready to dial any FWD user anywhere in the world. However, you can not dial a regular PSTN phone from this system without purchasing time from another VoIP provider. The advantage of FWD over Skype is that your computer doesn't have to be on to receive calls. Your phone will ring just as it did when connected to the PSTN phone system.

There is another advantage to FWD. This system uses the Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) standard. This allows FWD users to call others who are not member of FWD but are connected by a different SIP compatible service. Other free services currently using the SIP standard are IPTEL.org and SIPPhone.com. Skype does not adhere to the SIP standard.

Now we get to the services that charge a monthly fee. These providers furnish a SIP compatible ATA adapter and in some instances the router for your telephone connection. This list includes companies like AT&T (CallVantage), Verizon (VoiceWing), Packet8, VoicePulse and Vonage. Of these, AT&T and Verizon are the most expensive. Several of these providers are preparing wireless units that will allow you to connect through any WiFi hotspot. Vonage has announced that they expect to have a wireless unit available by mid-summer 2005. That means you could make and receive call while you are on the road. Also, by taking your ATA adapter with you when you travel, connections can be made through broadband data ports in many hotels and motels.

Of these providers, Vonage has been in the game longer than the others and has a strong reputation as to its quality. They have two basic plans: (1) $24.99 for unlimited calling in the U.S. and Canada, (2) $14.99 for 500 long-distance minutes. They also offer virtual phone numbers with any area code you prefer. Dialing other numbers in your area code requires just seven digits. You can add a fax line for $10 per month or toll-free numbers for $5 per month. With Vonage and these other providers, you can call any PSTN number or numbers on the FWD network. For more details on the specific services provided by these companies I would suggest you check their web sites.

So what are the drawbacks to VoIP services? First, if your Internet provider has a service outage, then your phone service is also down. Second, if there is a power outage you lose your phone service unless your system has a battery backup to keep it running. Another disadvantage is that most of these services can't connect to 911. In some cases, you can call 911 after you have provided the service with location information for their files. They need this information so the system will know where to direct the call. However, the 911 operator can't see your name or address and you have to provide that information when you make the call.

In spite of these disadvantages, VoIP usage is rapidly increasing. If you are interested in testing VoIP, I suggest you start with one of the free services. Try it, you may like it.

How I Made a Movie

By Chuck Guion, Editor
Rockport Computer Users' Group, Inc.
www.rcug.net

Many of our club members saw Patty Beasley's movie that she made on Joe Files. She used Windows Movie Maker 2 (WMM2) to make it. I thought I would also create some movies. Patty gave me some hints on how she made her movie. One very helpful tip she gave me was to first create your movie in PowerPoint and save each slide as a JPG. You can add text, templates, etc. while you are in PowerPoint. Another way to make a movie is to use WMM 2.1. (You don't have to use PowerPoint; you can use Video Effects, Video Transitions, and add text within the program.)

If you haven't downloaded XP's Service Pack 2, then you should download and install it since WMM Version 2.1 is included. Open up WMM 2.1 and make a Collection (import all of your slides from PowerPoint into the Collection). Start a New Project and drag the slides into Storybook View. Import a music file (MP3) from Windows Media Player (download Version 10 from www.microsoft.com/windows/windows media and install it) and drag it to the far left in Timeline View. You can also use a microphone to narrate your movie. But you cannot narrate and play music at the same time.

You can play the Storybook and Timeline and shorten your music by moving the corner arrow to the left and cutting it off. You can add Transitions and Video Effects in the Timeline View (in WMM 2.1).You can also lengthen the time your slide stays on the screen. If you want to take a break, you can give your project a name and save it.

When you are satisfied with your movie you can save it as a WMV file in My Videos or put it on a CD. The music files are large so you may want to save them on a CD.

You can bring video clips into WMM 2.1 and add them to your movie. You can also take slides from Digital Video Recorders and bring them into WMM 2.1 but you may have to buy a special video card to get your Analog and Digital recorders to work with WMM 2.1.

Windows Movie Maker has the usual help files but you might to go to for more help on using WMM 2.1.

I have made several movies for the CAUG DigiCam SIG and have also made some on architecture, boats, and birds. WMM 2.1 is a good way to make a family movie. Gather old pictures, cards, poems, etc., scan them, and bring them into WMM 2.1. You can also record your children and grandchildren's voices and put them in the movie. The possibilities are endless. Why don't you try making a movie? It's a lot of fun!

Hackers are NOT Crackers

by Berry F. Phillips,
Member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City
www.ccokc.org

The media loves to publish stories about so-called hackers breaking into computer systems and causing destruction. It is time to set the record straight, based on historical truth.

The hacker culture actually started in the 1950s when computers were huge to say the least, and programming then meant connecting wires to electrodes. While they did not call themselves hackers then, that for the most part explains what a hacker is. A hacker may be defined as a person who enjoys exploring the details of programming systems and how to stretch their capabilities as opposed to most computer users who prefer to learn only the minimum necessary.

Hacker as a term was first adopted as badge in the 1960s by the hacker culture surrounding the Tech Model Railroad Club (TMRC) and the MIT AI Lab. All computer systems that we use today are based on early hacker research. Much of this research was done out of love for the subject and the fame within the hacker community. One must be recognized as a hacker by the hacker community, which is a certain ego satisfaction. Several famous hackers from the first computer club, the Home Brew Club, were instrumental in founding major computer companies.

Around 1980, a new breed of computer-fed kids evolved, due to easy access to the Internet in the United States and Europe. They soon learned that they could break into other people's systems. Unfortunately, the media called them hackers and the name sort of stuck, when in fact hackers do not consider such illegal security breakers to be hackers, but crackers.

Hackers build things; crackers break them!

Much of the freeware on the Internet comes from hackers. It would seem that hackers have been given unjustly a bad name by the media and deserve an apology at the least. While crackers should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law for their illegal actions.

While it is true that many hackers possess the skills for cracking, they outgrew any desire to do so except for immediate, benign, practical reasons. Contrary to non-hacker belief, there is no thin line between being a hacker and being a cracker.

Hackers built the Internet, maintain Usenet, work in IT computer security, and all Internet related businesses owe their origin to hackers. We can demonstrate our respect for their considerable IT achievements by making sure we do not use the term, hacker, when we mean cracker, who is involved in illegal cybercrime.

My thanks to Philip Tellis who did considerable research that was the basis for this article to correctly inform the public.

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: **NO SHOWS scheduled yet for year 2005**

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Contact ACPCUG Newsletter Editor:
New e-mail address: acpcugnews@yahoo.com

Club Officers area code 330, unless noted otherwise			
President	Frank Ramsey (2007)	699-4711	aframsey@yahoo.com
VP, Community Liaison	Rick Lubinski (2005)	928-7179	lubinski@bright.net
Secretary	Walt Ruthenburg (2006)	283-7867	wruthenburg@usa.net
Assistant Treasurer	Murray Davis (2006)	440-248-0021	murray5050@yahoo.com
Treasurer	Jim Albright (2005)	923-8686	jra823a@netscape.net
Newsletter Editor	Art McRowe	666-3189	acpcugnews@yahoo.com
VP, Software Evaluation	Dave Bohm (2007)	762-6745	bohm320@aol.com

Club News

March 2005 Program

- ***Adobe Acrobat Review*** **by Rick Lubinski +**
- ***Q&A +***
- ***Demo of Firefox browser*** **by Frank Ramsey**