

# ACPCUG Newsletter

**Akron Main  
Public Library  
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**April Program:  
New Venue!!**

***Starts at 6:15 PM***

***Nero Application Suite,  
Part 1*** by **Frank  
Ramsey** + **Q&A**

**April 2005**

**Akron-Canton PC Users Group**

**From The DealsGuy For  
May 2005 by Bob (The  
Cheapskate) Click, Greater  
Orlando Computer Users  
Group.**

We worked the NSCA (National Systems Contractors Assn.) [<http://www.nasca.org>] show and I took a quick look around. It's a companion show to the Home Electronics Expo, but is about three times as large. Attendance was somewhat lower than expected at about 10,000. If you were interested in electronic installations in a digital home, this would be the show for you. All the famous speaker manufacturer names were there and plenty of other quality audio equipment. Also troubleshooting instruments, even to spectrum analyzers. There were plenty of booths with switching systems, cabling and whatever you need for such things, not to mention plenty of large screen monitors and TVs although I didn't see a prototype of the new 82" Samsung LCD screen.

Not as many end user products were shown as at the Home Electronics Expo. It had a large area featuring the Security/Life Safety Pavilion, which I didn't spend much time in (even though it had free

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beer and popcorn). There were digital signage booths and several booths showing master clock systems for large buildings. I have not even scratched the surface of it all, but it got exciting when a water sprinkler accidentally opened right over of an expensive projector booth (Christy) and it was very close to the booth I was working that contained plenty of large screen TVs. It sure drowned the Christy booth, but they miraculously saved everything by working quickly to remove it.

Comp USA had a one-day conference at the Orange County Convention Center and user group people were invited. It turned out the CompUSA show was held in an exhibit hall adjacent to the Travel Goods show we were working and I got the chance to look around. I was surprised to see many booths with all kinds of names in computer paraphernalia. I spent a couple hours explaining what I do to vendors and asking about putting together a deal for exposure to about 60,000 readers who are all computer users; the usual begging thing. Many were interested and it was the best bonanza I had ever found in the ten years I have been doing this column and searching shows for leads. I felt I had enough leads sounding positive to last the column for a year or more. My shirt pocket was bulging with vendor personnel's business cards. I was also very surprised when I found the APCUG booth with Peggy Ireland, Suzy Ball and Caryl Hall working in it. It was great to see them again, although I had just seen them at the FACUG spring conference in Kissimmee.

Next morning my wife was up before I was and when I finally did get up, she sheepishly explained that she had washed my shirt without emptying the pockets. I can't explain the feeling I had when I saw all the business cards with many important leads that were turned to pulp in minutes, and almost nothing was salvageable. In the 39 years we have been married, we have never had a fight. It might have been possible then, but I was so devastated that I couldn't find the strength to be mad, just thoroughly disheartened. When we have mentioned the incident to friends, the wives tend to indignantly state that it is the husband's job to worry about emptying the pockets, not the wives'. I have found nobody in my court on that one except other men. Anyway, I am back to square one, but may have a couple of leads if vendors take the trouble to follow up without my calling them. There were very few brochures at that show to keep for info.

### **\*The Bundle Is Back**

I received a message from Colleen Toumayan at Executive Software telling me that their bundle pricing is back. If you want to improve your

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disk defragging and undelete software, here is another chance to save some money on these great products. I have not tried the Home Versions, but their products I tried in the past were impressive. The bundle contains Diskeeper 9, Home Edition, and Undelete 5, Home Edition for \$39.95. (Download only) To get it, the URL is [<http://consumer.execsoft.com/purchase/purchase.asp?RIId=50>]. Executive Software is also an APCUG sponsor.

### **\*Put Your DVD Burner To Work**

Here are two products that will help preserve your videotaped memories. They are "CameraMate VideoSafe" and "CameraMate Real Time Video" by Zio Corp. VideoSafe allows you to capture analog video/audio from any source and burn it to a CD or DVD. The VideoSafe hardware has plugs for the video/S-video/audio cables on one end and a USB cable to connect to your computer on the other end. An included CD has the drivers and software. The MSRP for VideoSafe is \$49.99 with a \$10.00 rebate sticker on the package. VideoSafe is mostly for a direct conversion from your source to your burner, so if you want to do additional work with your video in the process, the product below is for you.

Real Time Video is also an adapter and software for capturing the video/audio from any source for the purpose of burning to a CD or DVD. However, Real Time Video software also offers Autoedit Wizard, Autoedit Storyboard Wizard, Randomize Wizard and a DVD Burn Wizard. Software and drivers are included on a CD. Real Time Video's MSRP is \$69.99, but I suggest you shop wherever you can get the best price, even at local stores, then apply for the rebate. The URL for downloading the rebate form is on the rebate sticker on the box. This rebate expires on April 30, 2005, but they will honor it for us until May 31, 2005. The adapter cables with RCA audio/video/VHS C jacks are not included, but are easy to obtain and many folks have them lying around.

They sent me the products to try, but I was up against my deadline and a friend gave it a quick try. He had a few minor problems, but after tweaking some settings in his Windows operating system, he said it worked fine. He had no problems with the installation. It works with Windows 98SE/Me/2000/XP. However I didn't have time for some more extensive tests on his part. Video resolution is 720 x 480 for NTSC (the American TV standard). Their URL for more information is [<http://www.easiestvideoever.com>].

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**\*Announcement for Active Screen Lock (Edited)**

“ActiveScreenLock 2.3 could be of interest to users group members and they can get a 20% discount on ActiveScreenLock 2.3. The coupon code is DMVS-QJPR.

Best regards,

Michael McCarthy

pr@dmvsoft.com

February 8, 2005

For Immediate Release

DMVsoft Releases ActiveScreenLock 2.3

“How to protect your PC from unauthorized access with one mouse click. ActiveScreenLock is one of the most simple, yet effective ways to protect PCs from unauthorized access. While most people worry about viruses, trojans and spyware, folks tend to ignore the fact that co-workers, visitors or even family members are much more likely to get access to confidential data by simply walking up to a PC and looking it up. ActiveScreenLock is a software application that makes your PC inaccessible without entering a password. While Windows OS comes with the password-protected screensaver option that seems to have the same function, any advanced user knows that there are a number of ways to bypass this.

“When ActiveScreenLock is activated (either by clicking a tray icon or pressing a combination of designated hotkeys), the PC becomes inaccessible. Whenever anybody tries to do anything with the locked computer, the program displays a password-protected window placed on top of all the others. In order to remove it, a correct password needs to be entered. Key combinations Alt+F4, Ctrl+Alt+Del, Alt+Tab, and WinKey are blocked.

“If necessary, a program user can opt to disable task manager or hide the cursor. Restarting the locked PC will not undo the protection. Should anyone try to pick the password, the program will log all login attempts and what passwords were used.

“ActiveScreenLock has received dozens of awards, including Editor's Choice at TopShareware and FileHeaven, and 5-star rating at Softpicks, Shareup, FileTransit, SmartDownloads, and UKwares. A free demo version is available at [<http://www.dmvsoft.com/>] for evaluation (30-day

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free trial period). The price of a single copy is \$25 US Dollars. Registration removes all time limitations and nag screens, gives you free unlimited support and entitles you to free upgrades and new version updates.

If you have any questions, please contact Michael McCarthy at pr@dmvsoft.com

System Requirements:

- Operating system: Windows 95, 98, ME, 2000 or XP

Company Website

[<http://www.dmvsoft.com/>]

Product Page

[[http://www.dmvsoft.com/a\\_screenlock.htm](http://www.dmvsoft.com/a_screenlock.htm)]

Download

[<http://www.dmvsoft.com/ActiveScreenLock.zip>]

[<http://www.dmvsoft.com/ActiveScreenLock.exe>]

Buy Link

[<http://www.dmvsoft.com/order.htm>]

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 Cheap-skate) Click [[bobclick@mindspring.com](mailto:bobclick@mindspring.com)]. Visit my Web site at [<http://www.dealsguy.com>].



## **Digital Camera Scene Modes - What are all those symbols for?**

**By Larry Horn, Editor & Review Coordinator**

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You went out and purchased a digital camera for Christmas and now you have to learn how to use it. The instruction book mentions "Scene Modes" and you see a lot of funny icons on one of the dial of your camera so what are they and what do they do? The picture on the right is from an Olympus D8060 digital camera, so yours will probably look somewhat different but they are generally similar.

The first thing to remember is this a still a camera and you get a picture by having the right amount of light hit the film or light sensor in a digital camera. You do this by adjusting the size of the lens opening (Aperture), or the length of time the shutter is open (Shutter Speed ). How you adjust the two of these in tandem will create a different picture. Without going into a long photography course, I will briefly explain what each of these does.

The Aperture controls how much light is hitting the sensor at any instant and the depth of focus. If I want everything in the picture to be in focus, both near and far objects, I will choose a small aperture. If I want selective focus, for example taking a portrait with a blurred background, you adjust the camera the other way.

The Shutter Speed controls how long the shutter is open so the light can get to the sensor. For a sporting event where you want to stop the action, you would use a short shutter speed but if you want to blur the movement to imply motion, you would use a longer shutter speed. You would also use a very long shutter speed for night shots with motion you want to capture

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like fireworks.

How does this relate to Scene modes? In its Default setting, the camera guesses at the best exposure, adjusting the Aperture and Shutter Speed without really knowing what you are taking a picture of. It goes for an average setting. By selecting a "scene" on your camera, you are telling the camera what you are taking a picture of so it can make a better choice of how to set the camera. It generally gives more accurate and pleasing results than the default Auto mode.

What are some of the more common Scene Modes? I have listed them below and apologize for not drawing the actual icons but my art work is not that good.

**P Program or Auto:** This is the default where the camera makes all of the settings based upon an average.

**A Aperture Preference:** Here you set the aperture according to the effect you want and the camera sets the appropriate shutter speed.

**S Shutter Preference:** You set the shutter speed - fast for sports or slow for a motion- blur effect and the camera sets the appropriate aperture.

**M Manual:** With this setting you select everything with no help from the camera. Reserve this for experienced users who want to get creative.

**My Mode:** This is an Olympus term which lets you set everything manually and then save those settings. This is useful if you are frequently taking pictures in a set location and lighting setup. An example would be if you frequently sell items on eBay and want to include pictures so you set up "stage" where you take your pictures and want to easily remember the correct settings.

**Movie:** Many digital still cameras can now take short movies limited in length by the size of the memory card. They are low resolution and generally limited to only 1 or 2 minutes or less.

**Night:** This sets a slow shutter speed to capture the available light and may also allow for the use of flash for a subject close to the camera.

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**Landscape:** This setting is self-explanatory.

**Action/Sports:** This is really a shutter priority mode setting a high shutter speed to freeze the action.

**Portrait:** Used for taking pictures of people with the background blurred.

**Play:** This is usually a triangle similar to the play button on a CD player. It is used to view the pictures you have taken on the LCD screen.

**Macro:** You would use this setting to take close-up pictures.

Some cameras, like my Nikon CoolPic 4100, do not have all of these icons on the main dial but rather have a setting that says SCENE which brings up a menu on the LCD screen where you can set them. The Nikon even has scene modes for Party/Indoor, Beach/Snow, Sunset, Museum, Fireworks and others. The Nikon also has an additional feature they call Assist Modes. These modes actually place lines over the image in the LCD screen to assist you in positioning the subject in a more pleasing way and/or line things up for panoramas or architecture. You might even find a Burst or Multi-Shot mode for firing off a set number of pictures in rapid succession. I used this to get some great action shots at a bull riding competition last year.

I suggest that you pick up a good book on basic photography when you get your camera. Even with the camera's help, good pictures require the picture taker to understand the basic principals of photography and graphic composition. We have reviewed several in the Cache. Digital or Film, it is still photography. Additional suggestions:

Check camera and printer manufacturers' web sites. They frequently have lessons and tips.

- Kodak is an example. Go to: <http://www.kodak.com> then click on the Taking Great Pictures box on the top of the page.
- Olympus also has lessons which are more geared toward their cameras for examples but they are still informative. [http://olympusdigitalschool.com/photo\\_lessons/index.html](http://olympusdigitalschool.com/photo_lessons/index.html)

I like a monthly magazine called PC Photo ( <http://www.pcphotomag.com> )

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PC World Magazine ( <http://pcworld.com> ) has newsletters that are very informative.

( <http://www.pcworld.com/resource/newsletters> ) One of the newsletters by Dave Johnson was the inspiration for this article.

I hope I have given you some enlightenment as to what Scene Modes are and what they do. I encourage everyone to read their camera's manual to see what is available. Then use the Scene Modes because by telling the camera what you are doing, the camera will use that information and do it for you. You don't have to know the details of how to adjust the settings. The end result is more successful pictures that you will be proud of.

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## **How to Report Tech Problems to Get Answers**

**By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor and Columnist, AARP Computers and Technology Website. [ggoldberg@apcug.net](mailto:ggoldberg@apcug.net)**

Using computers and technology means having questions and problems. But you can't get answers and solutions without asking the \*right\* questions. A little preparation can be a big help in solving annoyances, mysteries, and disasters.

The more we use computers and technology, the more questions we have and problems we need solved. But it's hard to get answers and solutions without asking the \*right\* questions and describing the problem at hand. We're specific when visiting the doctor or auto mechanic: we describe what's wrong and when it began. We may even imitate the noise our car makes for the mechanic.

But when faced with computer oddities and malfunctions we sometimes revert to unhelpful generalities such as "My email is broken" or "My printer stopped working" or "I get an error when I start Word". Problem reports such as these don't allow diagnosing a problem; at best, they elicit a response like "Tell me more".

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It saves time to collect as much information as possible before asking for help. As a bonus, gathering problem details and considering relevant factors can often allow solving problems oneself!

Just as a doctor or mechanic needs details, someone analyzing a computer problem must know the environment in which it occurred. So describe your computer (hardware/software/networking/application/etc.) to provide context. Mention your operating system (Windows 98/ME/XP, Mac OS, Linux, etc.), what version of what application failed (Internet Explorer 6.0, MS Word XP, etc.), what Internet connection is used (dial or cable/DSL), and any other details that may help.

Don't omit details -- it's better to have too much information than to miss a crucial factor. Sometimes it's worth capturing screen images showing a problem; tools for doing this will be described in a future article.

Other important steps in describing symptoms and getting help are:

Distinguish facts from guesses and interpretations.

If an error message was issued, write it down, word-for-word. Then check it for accuracy. (Often searching Google for the error message text or a distinctive chunk -- entered in quotation marks -- will yield information on a problem.)

Note what you did just before the problem occurred and whether anything else odd happened since you last rebooted and before the problem at hand.

Mention whether the problem happened before, and if so how you resolved it.

List whatever (hardware, software, settings, network, \*anything\*) changed recently.

Explain if you attempted to solve the problem and what resulted. (Remember that rebooting often cures problems, though without explaining them.)

Note where you've already looked for information (product manual or Help, company Web site or FAQ, etc.).

Reread your query imagining you know nothing about the problem except

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what's in the query. Add what's missing that someone else needs to know in order to help.

To help friends or service personnel respond to your question -- and to let the question be filed and found -- use a meaningful Subject line, not Help!, Urgent, or Question. Describe the context (e.g., Windows XP) and the problem (e.g., Windows Update never finds new patches).

To help your helper help you --

Be clear about your overall goal, don't focus on an intermediate step you think is necessary -- you may distract someone into addressing how you're trying to do something rather than what you actually want to do.

Ask for help in the right/best place. AARP's Computers and Technology Web board <<http://community.aarp.org/rp-computers/start>> hosts many people with deep and diverse experience who are most generous with their time offering help and advice. And the Internet hosts thousands of mailing lists and newsgroups specializing in every imaginable topic. Searching for find the best place to pose a question will get you better and more complete answers and avoid your seeming like a novice for posting out-of-place queries.

As you work with an individual or a group, collaborate -- don't try to overpower them. Be respectful, not belligerent; don't make them feel stupid even if you feel they are. They may have missed a detail, you may not have conveyed the whole story.

If you're working with someone at a company help desk, don't try to "pull rank" based on age or experience or professional credentials. Mention past interactions with the company, emphasizing positive outcomes.

Finally, a longish document from Eric Raymond -- an influential leader of the "open source" (shared software development) movement -- at <http://www.catb.org/~esr/faqs/smart-questions.html> provides useful tips, though it's a little too harsh in places for my taste. But his comments on how to ask questions and where to seek help are interesting and helpful.

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## **Browser Doohickeys, Doodads & Gizmos**

**by Vinny La Bash, vlabash@home.com**

**Member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., FL**

**www.spcug.org**

Most people change their surrounding to suit themselves. Your desk probably has some pictures that trigger pleasant memories. You may have added some new plants to your garden. Whether you have engaged in something as monumental as redecorating your house or as trivial as changing the default ring on your cell phone, your general point is to make your surroundings look and act they way you want them to, not the way someone else thinks they should.

Tweaking your internet browser isn't any different. Due to the number of software add-ons available, you can change or add many different features. Some allow you to change the appearance of the interface; others help you to retrieve information more quickly. Several of them may even make using the internet easier. Despite their sophistication, most install quickly, and the majority of them are free.

Almost everyone who searches the Web uses Google, Yahoo or both. There are many other search engines, but these two dominate the bulk of the traffic. Switching between the two sites gets old quickly, so why not try Google's tool bar? It maintains a link to Google's web site, allowing instant access to many of Google's features no matter where else you may be on the Web. You can search, spell-check, block pop-ups, even turn UPS tracking numbers into web links.

Yahoo's tool bar has similar features, and it lets you search on-line yellow pages. You can check local movie and TV schedules. Yahoo has a nice email element, and it's very strong in financial features. You also get an anti-spyware tool.

Yahoo's tool bar is easy to find. Go to <http://www.yahoo.com>. Look toward the upper right hand corner of your browser window, click on the link, and follow directions.

For Google's entire bag of goodies, direct your browser to <http://www.google.com>, and then click on the more button. You may need to scroll down the list of other tools to get to it. When you're finished make a trip to <http://labs.google.com> and enjoy the feast. This is Google's technology sandbox. These are prototype projects Google is currently working on,

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meaning they are not quite finished yet. Even if you're not particularly adventurous, try the new Map feature. You may be so impressed you'll never use Mapquest again.

I do a lot of research online, and I have become a fan of Net Snippets because I can straightforwardly save a snapshot of a web page or any part of the page. The utility lets me save these "snippets" to organize for offline viewing. This eliminates the need to search for the same page multiple times, and is a godsend if the site ever goes offline. Net Snippets is the kind of tool you never knew you needed, but now you can't live without it. There is no one thing that grabs you, but a host of little things like the ability to highlight and annotate that make Net Snippets a "must have" tool. Get it at <http://www.netsnippts.com>.

RSS readers are rapidly emerging from obscurity to necessity. Depending on whom you ask, RSS stands for "Rich Site Summary", "RDF Site Summary", or "Really Simple Syndication". RSS is a dialect of XML and its "geek-speak" nature has probably contributed to its slow acceptance, but its benefits are undeniable. The technology notifies you whenever something on your favorite web sites changes.

The original RSS was designed by Netscape as a format for building portals of headlines to mainstream news sites. It has rapidly evolved into something far different and much more useful. Get news headlines, stock quotes or alerts when an item you've been waiting for is available. You can save yourself a lot of time because you don't have to visit individual web sites to see what's new. A large bonus is that RSS feeds can't be tampered with. What that means is they are immune from attacks by spyware, viruses, Trojans, and other assorted evil-intentioned software.

In Windows, Pluck is the most popular RSS add-on. It's easily downloaded from <http://www.pluck.com>. If you're still using the basic plain vanilla browser, try at least one of these tools to boost your web experiences. :

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## Tech News

By Sue Crane, Editor, Big Bear Computer Club, CA

[www.bigbearcc.org](http://www.bigbearcc.org)

**Molecular Computer Would Be Faster, Smaller & Cheaper.**

Researchers from Hewlett-Packard have created devices called crossbar latches that can be used to perform calculations in microprocessors, the same function silicon transistors now have. Crossbar latches--which consist of a grid of microscopic wires linked by molecules at their intersections--are far smaller and, potentially, far cheaper to make because they are produced using processes more like inkjet printing than the etching processes required for today's chips. HP has already shown how crossbar latches can be used in memory. "This is the final piece of the puzzle for building a molecular computer," said Phil Kuekes, senior computer architect and primary inventor at HP's Quantum Science Research (QSR) unit.

**New Laser Chip**

Intel has created a chip containing eight continuous Raman lasers by using fairly standard silicon processes rather than the somewhat expensive materials and processes required for making lasers today. The lasers emit a continuous stream of light that can then be modulated, or chopped up, into a stream of impulses that can represent data. Cheap optical parts could not only lead to faster computers but also to less expensive and more accurate medical equipment.

**Faster Hard Drives**

Dataslide proposes to abandon hard drive rotation in favor of vibration. A new prototype drive has a rectangular plate coated with magnetic storage material. A second plate hovers above with an array of lithographed heads on its surface. The lower plate vibrates from side to side at 600 times per second, a process that delivers data 10 times faster than a 15,000 rpm rotating disk drive. Dataslide envisions tweaking the product to increase the vibration to 100,000 a second -- equivalent to a disk rotating at 12 million rpm.

**Your Cell Phone Could Infect your Car!**

A report by IBM Security Intelligence Services predicts that viruses spreading to mobile phones, PDAs and wireless networks could infect the embedded computers that increasingly are used to run basic automobile functions. The average new car runs 20 computer processors and about 60 megabytes of software code, raising more opportunities for malfunctions.

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### New Technology Could Bring Sight to the Blind

A small camera mounted on spectacles and connected to the optical nerve could restore the sight of thousands of people suffering from deterioration of the retina, European scientists said Monday. The technology could also help people with the retinal disease macular degeneration, which can lead to loss of fine-detail sight and which is one of the leading causes of visual impairment in the United States. A camera mounted on glasses sends images to an electronic device implanted behind the eye and stimulates the optic nerve, which passes the information to the brain.

### Edible origami by Canon?

The Canon i560 inkjet printer doesn't just print menus Moto restaurant in Chicago; it prints menus you can eat. Homaru Cantu, the executive chef, prints menus and many other items onto edible starch-based paper. Instead of using the typical CMYK inks--cyan, magenta, yellow, and black--Cantu has filled the cartridges with edible solutions. Think SSSB: sweet, sour, bitter, and salty. Cantu uses combinations of these four liquids on the edible paper to create dishes unlikely to be found anywhere else, such as "baked map of Alaska" and a type of maki sushi that he wraps in flavored paper bearing images of sushi, instead of seaweed.

### Antispam Tools Initiate New HIV Vaccines

At the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections in Boston, workers for Microsoft Research said they have been using database and antispam software to identify previously unseen patterns in genetic mutations of HIV. The researchers said their work illustrates how medical experts can use machine-learning, data-mining and other software methods to sort through millions of strains of HIV and improve vaccines. By seeking out genetic patterns that could be used to train a person's immune system to fight the virus, they are already making headway, the researchers said. The group reported that the first of its proposed vaccine designs is already undergoing laboratory testing.

### Databases Charged as Lax With Personal Information

After the huge security breach by ChoicePoint, releasing personal information of 145,000 individuals earlier this month, Senators Charles Schumer and Patrick Leahy have requested hearings, declaring. "It's time to turn some sunshine on these developments so the public can understand how and why their personal information is being used," A Schumer spokesman claimed that a researcher at a major corporation not involved in investigations was able to get the complete social security numbers from Westlaw's information database using the "People-Find" feature. Other companies

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have recently acknowledged that they may have inadvertently left consumer information unprotected. The payroll records of at least a dozen companies were exposed to the Internet by a flaw in the online W-2 service of PayMaxx. A flaw in the PayMaxx Web site exposed the financial information of customers' workers, the payroll-services firm acknowledges. In addition, cell-phone service provider T-Mobile has dealt with ongoing security problems that have led to the publication of celebrity Paris Hilton's personal information and the phone numbers of many Hollywood stars.

#### Microsoft Authentication Changes Again

Customers who find themselves reinstalling Windows XP should be ready for a headache: Microsoft will no longer support activation over the Internet for PCs with Windows pre-installed. Intended to curb stealing and selling of Certificates of Authenticity, the new security measure will initially be limited to the Windows XP software preinstalled on systems shipped by the top 20 PC sellers.

#### Battlestar Galactica Available for FREE Download!

In an unprecedented move, The SciFi channel has made Episode '33' (Season 1 Episode 1) of Battlestar Galactica (season 1 hasn't even concluded) available for free, uncut and commercial free, online at SciFi.com. Also available are deleted scenes from the series.

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# **An Examination of Google's Gmail**

**By Richard Johnson**, Member of TUGNET, CA

www.tugnet.org

The two most useful features of Gmail are (1) its huge storage capacity, which essentially eliminates the need to delete messages, and (2) a lightning-quick search facility, allowing the user to retrieve any message almost instantly.

Gmail also touts its unique labeling system, that replaces other email services' folders (for filing incoming messages), its "conversation" grouping of messages, and its lack of banner ads or pop-ups. In this writer's opinion, the value of the labels is overblown. To label incoming messages is time-consuming and on the whole not particularly helpful. Unlabeled messages may be retrieved easily either from the main window (with the "Search Mail" button) or with Gmail's advanced search (accessible via "Show search options" on the main window). This writer uses the advanced search routinely, for finding messages.

It should be noted that Gmail is not ad-free. It's just that the ads are text ads (similar to the ads on Google's search pages).

At this time a Gmail user can receive HTML mail but send in plain text only. For security purposes, graphics are excluded by default from incoming messages, and you can vary this instruction on a message-by-message basis only.

**Spam control.** Gmail features its own rudimentary spam filtering system, discussed in greater detail below. While imprecise, this system cannot be turned off. Although you can create your own additional filters, the only way to stop Gmail from diverting legitimate mail to its spam folder is to add the sender to your contact list. (You can do so either directly or by marking a "Spam" message "Not spam.") At this writing Gmail still follows a quirky protocol under which bounce messages are diverted to the spam folder.

## **Should You Switch?**

Gmail is not for everyone. You should *not* switch to Gmail:

- if you find Web-based email just too slow,
- if you want pictures on your incoming messages, and don't want to have to bother with Gmail's one-click instruction (to include graphics) for each such message,

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- if you need to be able to compose messages in HTML,
- if you don't want to have to periodically check the spam folder for legitimate mail or bounced messages,
- if you prefer to read in your inbox all incoming mail, even mail that might be spam, or
- if you're happy with what you have, and feel it's not worth the trouble to notify folks of your new address.

You *should* consider switching to Gmail

- if you'd rather not fuss with setting up folders for messages that you've read and want to keep, but still want to be able to retrieve such messages speedily,
  - if you like Web-based email such as Yahoo Mail or Hotmail, but are fed up with the banner ads and popups you encounter,
  - if you don't want to have to decide which incoming messages to keep and which to delete,
  - if you've ever wanted to view an old incoming message only to realize that you'd permanently deleted it,
  - if you presently use a disk-based system like Outlook or Outlook Express, and don't want the hassle of backing up your messages to protect against their loss in a disk crash,
  - if you find your present email filtering scheme too complicated, or
  - if you like the idea of grouping related messages in "conversations," for easier reference.

### **Gmail Compared to Outlook Express**

Nearly all new Windows computers come bundled with Microsoft's Outlook Express. This fact may explain the overwhelming preponderance of that program among users. Both Gmail and Outlook express are free. But although price is not one of them, there are various reasons for choosing one over the other

### **Storage**

There are pluses and minuses to using a Web-based email system like Gmail, with respect to storage. A **plus** is that since messages are stored on the Web, they'll always be accessible to the user, regardless of any hard disk catastrophes. Moreover, an accumulation of large numbers of stored messages will not affect either the available disk space or speed of access. (However, Internet access—especially dial-up—can be uncomfortably slow,

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compared to disk access.)

One **minus** with a Web-based system is that the provider's server will accommodate only a limited amount of storage—typically much less than will easily fit on a user's hard drive. So the user may find older messages simply *gone*. This distinction is *turned around* by Gmail—which allows a **gigabyte** of storage, and in fact discourages the user from deleting *any* messages.

### **Filing**

With any email system, *sent* messages may be retained in their own mailbox. The conventional way of filing an *incoming* message for later reference is to move it from the inbox to another mailbox of the user's choice. This is the filing system used by Outlook Express. The user may need to create anywhere from a few new mailboxes to dozens, with names like "Purchases," "Events," "Subscriptions," "Bills," "Software reference," "Confirmations," etc. A simpler choice might be to send *all* such saved messages to a "Hold" mailbox.

Gmail has revolutionized email filing. (In its terminology, it doesn't even offer filing!) Rather than send it to a particular mailbox, the user simply "archives" the message. Archived messages in Gmail go to "All Mail," which is just like the "Hold" mailbox referenced above, except that it includes outgoing as well as incoming messages. A Gmail quirk is that while a user's *draft* will be found in All Mail, messages that Gmail considers *spam* will not.

Gmail's "labels" or keywords, can at least in theory facilitate a message search, in addition to the usual search criteria (sender, subject, date range, etc.). Multiple labels may be assigned to one message.

As would be expected with a system created by Google, searching for messages is lightning-fast. This rapid retrieval of messages actually renders Gmail's labeling system largely unnecessary, in this writer's view.

### **Spam Diversion**

Gmail has been criticized for having an insufficiently sophisticated spam blocking system. It's actually miles ahead of that of Outlook Express—but OE users often can use spam controls supplied by the Internet Service Provider. For this writer, Gmail's system is more than adequate.

Gmail controls spam by means of (1) message filtering—similar to that of Outlook Express, and (2) spam blocking.

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With either Gmail or Outlook Express, the user can set up filters to bypass the inbox and send the subject messages directly to "Trash" [Gmail] or "Deleted Items" [Outlook Express]. Outlook Express also has a "Block sender" option to keep those senders' messages from reaching *any* mailbox.

Using its own criteria, Gmail will divert incoming messages to its "Spam" folder. This criteria can be overridden by the user's action either manually to *add* messages to the spam folder or to *remove* them. This action by the user will continue to affect all messages from the same sender.

### **Further Considerations**

Any retrieved Gmail message will be accompanied by other messages in the same "conversation." You can think of this as your girlfriend's bringing her female cousins along with her on every date. It may be convenient if you want to relate to a cousin, but you need to remember who is the girlfriend and who is the cousin. Whether Gmail's "conversation view" is a positive or a negative is a call you'll have to make.

Gmail out of the box will not notify you when you have a new message. Keeping your Gmail window open won't tell you anything unless you refresh the page. And even with a fast connection, refreshing can be tediously slow. You can download the **Gmail Notifier**, but only if you use Windows 2000 or XP (or a later Windows version).

Additional points will become apparent with use. For example, a minor annoyance is Gmail's closing your history/favorites/search sidebar whenever you click on a link in a message. The best way to make up your mind about Gmail is to try it.

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## RSS Feeds

By **Greg Lenihan**, Editor, Pikes Peak Computer Application Society,  
CO <http://ppcompas.apcug.org/>

I believe I am an information junkie. I get more e-mail and subscribe to more newsletters than I can read. And yet I'm still searching for more. A few months ago, around the time of the presidential election, I discovered the world of Blogs (or Weblogs). These are online journals where authors post opinions and commentary and often link to the articles they are discussing. These often track back to more Blogs, and more authors worth reading, and before you know it, you can spend a good deal more time than you can afford searching for obscure opinions and facts.

After collecting a number of these sites as favorites in my browser, it became difficult to keep up with them every day. There are all kinds of subjects to choose from, but my favorites are news sites, political sites, and especially--technology sites. Most of these sites had or icons, which I knew had something to do with "feeds," so I decided to find out how to obtain the reader software necessary to subscribe to these feeds (or "channels").

RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary. RSS is a text-based format (XML, actually) that contains various tagged items like a title, summary, and a link to a URL. Instead of you having to continually go from site to site to see if there have been updates posted, these sites are able to "feed" their updates to you. All you need is a news reader or what is called an RSS "aggregator." This is a program that collects and organizes these feeds periodically so you can read them when you want. Then you can subscribe to these sites and automatically get these new postings. It's like creating favorites or bookmarks, except you don't have to continually go there. They come to you.

I started by going to [http://reviews.cnet.com/4520-10088\\_7-5143460.html](http://reviews.cnet.com/4520-10088_7-5143460.html) to read reviews and to gather recommendations. I found more options and more reviews of readers at [http://email.about.com/cs/rssfeedreaders/tp/top\\_rss\\_windows.htm](http://email.about.com/cs/rssfeedreaders/tp/top_rss_windows.htm). There are many different readers; some free, some not, with different goals. Some are stand-alone, others work with Internet Explorer, and one worked with Outlook. But the one that caught my eye was free and did not require a software installation. Bloglines (<http://www.bloglines.com>) is Web-based, which means I can access it from any computer with an Internet connection. I could be at home, at work, on the road, and I could still get my info fix.

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The signup was quick at the Bloglines.com site. I was just asked for a username (e-mail address), password, time zone, and language. A confirmation message is then sent to your e-mail account. You simply click on a link they provide, and you're confirmed. In addition, the site posts the top Blogs people enjoy, and with the click of a button you can subscribe. Of course, you are not limited to their selections. Any Blog or site with an RSS feed can be added to your aggregator. That is how you can use those XLM icons. If you click on one you'll see a lot of tagged text, much like HTML. But it supplies the link that enables you to subscribe by pasting this link into your aggregator.

Once you have your aggregator and get it running, all that is left is to find sites or Blogs whose content you are interested in. The site where you obtain your aggregator will probably offer you a number to choose from. To get an idea of what is out there, go to <http://www.blogstreet.com/search.html> and see the number of topics to pick from. I frequently subscribe to something that looks interesting and if it is not what I expected, it only takes a matter of seconds to unsubscribe. But actually right now, I have more feeds than I have time to read.

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## The New, the Best, and the Worst

Collected by Pim Borman SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc., IN

<http://swipcug.apcug.org/>

### Alternatives Revisited.

Last September I wrote here about alternatives to Microsoft programs. I specifically recommended the free (Mozilla) Foxfire as an alternative to Internet Explorer, and OpenOffice.org as a free replacement for MS Office. I also recommended the Linux-based Linspire operating system and programs library to replace MS Windows and virtually eliminate risks from MS-targeted viruses and worms. Linspire includes OpenOffice and Foxfire as well as dozens of excellent multimedia, photo editing, productivity and entertainment programs. Hundreds of more specialized programs are available by subscription to its extensive library. Linspire is the most user-friendly of the many Linux distributions available and requires absolutely no knowledge of Linux on the part of the user.

The column was reprinted in several other PCUG newsletters and finally caught the eye of Microsoft. I received a letter from Aaron Coldiron, manager of Mindshare, the MS connection with the User Group community. The letter is too long to reprint here, but is available on our Web site at <http://swipcug.apcug.org/special/MSalts.htm>. Following are some quotes from the letter and my comments.

Coldiron wrote: *"I'm concerned that some user groups are pushing members to adopt software that they ultimately won't be happy with."* Pushing? Heaven forbid! Suggesting maybe.

Quote: *"First, Windows XP Service Pack 2 is available on CD for free, and has been since August. The CD order form may be found here [http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/updates/sp2/cdorder/en\\_us/default.mspx](http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/downloads/updates/sp2/cdorder/en_us/default.mspx)."* Microsoft's issuance of XP-SP2 to correct weaknesses in Windows XP was not unlike a car company issuing a recall – for free - for a potentially dangerous brake design. Later in 2004 we received a supply of the CDs from the Mindshare program that we distributed to our members who asked for them.

Quote: *"Also, you may not know that Microsoft provides free technical support for Service Pack 2 should a user have any problems installing."* That is good to know.

Quote: *"Finally, you mention various incompatibilities with SP2. This isn't actually quite true. As you may know, Microsoft eliminated certain ways programs may access various resources throughout the operating system; we did this to tighten security and close loopholes that aren't officially supported programming functions. As a result, some programs which aren't designed to run under the tighter security protocols of SP2 may not function correctly (or at all) until the program is updated to a more recent version. There is a list of about 35 known incompatibilities on Microsoft's help site here*

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<http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?kbid=884130&product=windowsxpsp2> .” It is a point well taken, although it doesn’t help if your peripheral or program suddenly doesn’t work any longer.

Mr. Coldiron appended a copy of a letter he wrote earlier in response to a review of OpenOffice. In it he writes: *“For instance, we created the Works Suite of applications for consumers who don’t need to do spreadsheet functions and can use the free Outlook Express. Works 2005 can be bought for as little as \$69 major internet shopping sites.”* Well, yes, but OpenOffice is free, and in addition to its MS Word-compatible word processor it includes an Excel-compatible spreadsheet, a PowerPoint-compatible presentation manager, and simple database and drawing features. And as far as compatibility is concerned, I notice that Word 2002 needs a conversion utility to display older versions of Word, including some available in Works.

Also: *“Microsoft Office is the gold standard in interoperability. I’m sure you could think of a long list of features you love given a few minutes. Here’s a few of the one’s I like. As I type this I’m using Word as my email editor, allowing me to use advanced word processing functions if I want. Icons appear next to names in the “to” bar telling me if they are on or offline and allowing me to instant message them. I use OneNote which allows me to drop in meeting dates and times directly into my note files. I can also send my scribbles from OneNote as the text of an email – in my own handwriting if I want. I can copy and paste PowerPoint Slides whole into other applications like email. For that matter, I can drop Excel spreadsheets into PowerPoint and even link them so that the PPT file updates automatically if I change the spreadsheet in Excel.”* Impressive, but few of us need that sort of software acrobatics.

Furthermore: *“Several studies have shown that Microsoft Office has a lower total cost of ownership than its free or open source competitors. It has a higher up front cost, but the additional productivity and lower support cost more than offset the higher up front cost.”* Maybe for a corporate office, but not for individuals.

Finally: *“I really hope that consumers choose the suite that best fits their needs, whether it is MS Office 2003, Works 2005, or one of our competitors’ products. I just wanted to point out that it isn’t just a case of the price out of the box. There are a lot more factors to consider.”* I agree.

### **The Bottom Line**

Few will argue that Microsoft Windows with its built-in Internet features is the Cadillac of operating systems. Not everyone needs or can afford a Cadillac and a less expensive brand may be preferable, maybe even a foreign make. The customer has the choice, based on his pocketbook and his needs. When shopping for a computer from a major manufacturer, other than Apple, it is impossible to avoid having to pay for the installation of the Microsoft Windows operating system and usually at least one of its software suites. Last September I wrote that Dell would start selling computers, in Europe only, without an operating system, leaving it to the buyer to add his own. It never happened. According to rumor, Microsoft threatened Dell that it would no longer



make Windows available at an especially low, OEM price. That may, or may not, be true.

Currently only a few minor, obscure computer manufacturers, often outside the US, sell systems with one of the Linux distributions pre-installed, or nothing at all. You can order one on the Wal-Mart web site and find others through links on the Linspire or Xandros Web sites. Of course, you can also go to a local computer builder, or build your own.

It may take a long time to break the Microsoft monopoly in the US, where the Microsoft Windows and Office programs are deeply entrenched and anti-trust laws seem to be a quaint footnote to history. But overseas, and especially in rapidly developing countries such as China, there is greater open-mindedness toward new ideas, and Linux is making rapid inroads. It also helps that the open source nature of Linux allows foreign governments to make sure the software doesn't contain backdoors for access by spy organizations.



I own three Wi-Fi connected computers. The newest, a 3.1GHz Dell Inspiron laptop uses Windows XP PRO. I update the operating system, MS Office, spyware, virus, and firewall programs with great regularity. I use it mostly for photo editing and financial programs, as well as to maintain the SWIPCUG Web site, because I am familiar with the programs. My older desktop, a 600 MHz Dell Dimension runs Windows ME but is mostly used to evaluate various Linux distributions on a dual boot basis.

The computer I use most is an old 600 MHz Celeron Inspiron laptop running Linspire 4.5 – Linux laptop edition. It sits on a small roll-around desk stand next to the La-Z-Boy in my den. It connects wirelessly with the router on the other end of the house. At any time I can check e-mail, get the latest news from all over the world, look up crossword puzzle clues with Google, maintain my checkbook file, and play FreeCell or BreakOut. All of that without fear of being attacked by worms and viruses. Seeing is believing – I add a photo taken by my wife Pat.

*This article represents only the opinions of the author and not necessarily those of the*

*Southwestern Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.*

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## **Bringing Home Baby - Getting Started with a New PC**

**By Gabe Goldberg**, APCUG Advisor and Columnist, AARP Computers and Technology Website, [ggoldberg@apcug.net](mailto:ggoldberg@apcug.net)

Most purchases provide instant gratification -- you buy, you bring home (or have delivered), you enjoy. Groceries, clothes, toaster, furniture, etc., don't involve study, burdensome chores, or required add-ons for safe use. While it's worth reading a new car's owners manual, and installing home electronics sometimes requires assembly and cabling, no other burden matches that of a personal computer.

Wait, you might say: Plug it in, turn it on -- simple. But reality isn't so simple. There's a lot to do before a PC can safely be used on the Internet, and still more is required to ensure long-term problem-free operation. This article outlines what to do; more info is available on this site and by Googling for specific terms used.

No matter where you buy your PC -- brand-name Web site, electronics store, custom builder -- get all CDs, manuals, registration cards, and warranty material for hardware/software that's installed. You may need this material to purchase discounted upgrade versions or to apply fixes.

Similarly, warranty material facilitates getting hardware/software support if you can't get satisfaction from your system's vendor. You may pay a little extra for software installation CDs or an image restore CD (which restores your hard drive's delivery-date contents); this is a worthwhile expense.

Assemble and turn on the system, but don't go online. Make sure the system boots properly and that all components operate. There's often a short "no questions asked" period during which dead or defective systems can be returned or exchanged easily. You may have trouble later getting problems resolved, and the vendor may insist on repairing the system instead of replacing it.

Note terms of rebates your purchase includes and submit them promptly. Many vendors won't pay rebate claims submitted even one day late.

Record hardware model and serial numbers for your PC and components. My PC builder provided all boxes and packing material, since it often contains useful information. Submit product registration material; though it may generate junk mail, it lets vendors notify you of problems or new updates/versions available.

At this point you may feel the need to get organized. Good idea! Just as you've likely organized files for auto repairs, health records, and such, your PC deserves a filing system. You can pick the structure -- file cabinet folders, PC-specific storage containers, whatever -- filing everything makes things much pleasanter later.

Part of my system -- optional but valuable -- is recording changes I make to my PC, software I install, upgrades I download, problems I have, configuration settings, and communications with vendors. So I can later refer to the log and be sure what happened. Some people print screen shots -- image captures -- of important configuration settings, for reference in case they must be recreated.

Plan how to separate data from software, to simplify backing up and restoring what's most valuable and hardest to recreate. This can be as simple as establishing a directory or folder in which you store all applications' data, or it may involve dividing your hard drive into data and software partitions. If you're replacing a PC, copy data you're migrating onto the hard drive and ensure that it's complete and readable. Don't discard the old PC until you're sure you copied everything you need. Plan and implement a backup scheme and test it occasionally by restoring files.

A standard PC likely included a "software bundle". If you're lucky, this includes applications you want. In most cases, bundles are apps you'll never use. To remove clutter, consider deleting what you're sure you won't need, using application-specific uninstall tools or Windows' built-in Add/Remove Software tool.

If hard drive partitions have meaningless labels (e.g., "IBM Preload") you can set them to useful values ("Dad's PC", "C:", etc.). Run scandisk and disk defragmentation tools to ensure you're getting a clean start.

If you're working on a Windows XP system, install Service Pack 2 before going online. You can order this on CD from Microsoft or borrow a copy. This large set of fixes will protect you against many -- but not all! -- online risks by (among other things) upgrading and enabling Microsoft's software firewall.

If you're on a broadband (cable or DSL) connection, install a router between your ISP connection and your PC and configure it to be secure.

**Now install/update/run anti-virus and anti-spyware software.**

Run Windows Update (click Start, then All Programs) to download and install recent fixes. This may require repetitions and reboots until no additional fixes are available. Run this periodically -- at least monthly.

You can ensure that device drivers (software links for hardware components) are current by visiting Web sites for your PC manufacturer and hardware components.

Install your applications one at a time with a "cooling off" period in between. This ensures that each works properly and helps identify problems. A good rule when working on PCs is to change one thing at a time, else you can't pinpoint what effects changes cause. After each installation, run any "check for updates" functions.

Consider downloading a Web browser to use instead of the built-in but insecure Internet Explorer. Many alternatives such as Mozilla Firefox improve security and provide better browsing functions. If you use IE, set options to be more secure than default values.

I'm not sure whether it's good or bad news that Windows is infinitely customizable. As you use different Windows functions and applications, browse their Options/Tools/Settings/Customization menus. You'll likely find simple changes that accommodate your preferences.

Finally -- and in spite of warnings about risks -- don't be afraid: enjoy your PC and the Internet it brings to you. But be careful and sensible. Don't open unexpected attachments; don't answer e-mailed requests for personal information; be cautious about installing software from unknown vendors.

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## ACPCUG Club News

**NEW VENUE!** AKRON MAIN Library

Maps & Description on ACPCUG Website, [www.acpcug.org](http://www.acpcug.org)

**NOTE TIME is 6:15PM!** This is because free parking starts after 6:00 PM. If you're parked at 5:59 PM, you'll be charged for the *WHOLE TIME!* (Policy stinks, but that's what it is!)

FROM North or South on Rt. 8 freeway: Exit West on Perkins Street going down the hill to a third light on High Street (one-way going South, left).

Cross E. Market and *immediately* look for parking building entrance on your right. Go down to lower level for indoor connection to library.

### Upcoming Computer Shows:

No Peter Trapp Shows in 2005 announced yet.

Club Officers area code 330, unless noted otherwise			
<b>President</b>	Frank Ramsey (2007)	699-4711	<a href="mailto:aframsey@yahoo.com">aframsey@yahoo.com</a>
<b>VP, Community Liaison</b>	Rick Lubinski (2005)	928-7179	<a href="mailto:lubinski@bright.net">lubinski@bright.net</a>
<b>Secretary</b>	Walt Ruthenburg (2006)	283-7867	<a href="mailto:wruthenburg@usa.net">wruthenburg@usa.net</a>
<b>Assistant Treasurer</b>	Murray Davis (2006)	440-248-0021	<a href="mailto:murray5050@yahoo.com">murray5050@yahoo.com</a>
<b>Treasurer</b>	Jim Albright (2005)	923-8686	<a href="mailto:jra823a@netscape.net">jra823a@netscape.net</a>
<b>Newsletter Editor</b>	Art McRowe	666-3189	<a href="mailto:acpcugnews@yahoo.com">acpcugnews@yahoo.com</a>
<b>VP, Software Evaluation</b>	Dave Bohm (2007)	762-6745	<a href="mailto:boh320@aol.com">boh320@aol.com</a>