SEMCO

DATA BUS

| Volume 28 | October, 2003 | Number 10 |

IN THIS ISSUE

The SouthEastern Michigan Computer Organization, Inc. (SEMCO) is a non-profit, 501(c)(3), group dedicated to providing information, education and a forum to computer users (professional and amateur) and other interested individuals. Membership in SEMCO is open to all individuals 18 years or older. Persons under 18 years may become members through the sponsorship of a parent or guardian. Dues of $30/year include monthly DATA BUS and free personal ads.

All SEMCO correspondence should be addressed to

SEMCO - P.O. Box 707 - Bloomfield Hills, MI 48303-0707
Website: **http://www.semco.org**
E-mail: **semco@semco.org**
General information: (voice) answering device in Royal Oak **(248) 398-7560**

DATA BUS is published monthly by SEMCO as its official newsletter. **Mail DATA BUS newsletter copy to: Bill Agnew, 3450 31 Mile Road, Washington, MI 48095; or e-mail to: agnew@bignet.net.** Editor is responsible for contents and control of the DATA BUS. Materials published herein may be used for non-commercial purposes only, without further permission of SEMCO or the authors, except as noted, providing credit is given to the author and source, i.e. DATA BUS, and issue date. Entire contents copyright © 2003 SouthEastern Michigan Computer Organization, Inc.

SEMCO does not condone in any way the illegal copying of copyrighted material and will not tolerate such practice at any SEMCO function.

Your mailing label and membership cards list the month and year your membership expires. Newsletters will not be sent after the month of expiration. Back issues may not be available. Renew your membership as early as possible to avoid missing any newsletters.

This publication was created using Adobe PageMaker 6.5 Plus, donated by Adobe Systems, Inc.

DEALS COLUMN
from the DealsGuy
Greater Orlando Computer UG
by Bob "The Cheapskate" Click

Reminders

Russ Walter's book "The Secret Guide To Computers" (get it at <http://www.secretfun.com>) was not a special, but user groups can always use it as a fundraiser by purchasing at the volume discounts and reselling them to members. Masque Publishing's "A Computerized One Armed Bandit" game (<http://www.masque.com>) for the discounted price of $19.95 is still good this month. They might even give us a special on another of their games next month. I'll ask.

Our Friend Dave is Baaaack

Dave Whittle was kind enough to remember the DealsGuy and his readers. He sent this message the other day that I will include. Many of you know Dave very well, since he has presented to your users groups.

"I seem to have been fortunate enough to survive the high-tech downturn. My current clients (replacing MGI) are Intel, iSeeMedia, 3D Album, muvee, and Alpha Software. Each of my client software companies has agreed to let me offer some great deals to user group members, and, as always, we limit our offerings to those products that are of almost universal appeal and adhere to our high standards of quality and usability. We've earned your trust over many years of helping user group members find the best software from hot new categories, just as you've earned their trust by ferreting out great deals. Here are some great deals on great software you can offer your readers:

"3D Album PLUS DVD Converter (Animation Capture) <www.3d-album.com>. Create beautiful, eye-popping 3D slide shows from your digital photos. Share by saving the show and music as an executable file or a folder containing everything you need to burn an auto-run CD. You can also convert the slide shows to movie formats for use with a DVD authoring program such as VideoWave 5.

Low Internet Price: $39.95 + $24.95 + $7.70 S&H = $72.60.

User Group Price: ONLY $35!

"muvee autoProducer DVD Edition <www.muvee.com>. Process any raw video footage (such as your home movies) quickly and easily, converting it into a fascinating movie or music video in one of over a dozen different styles, automatically! Save it as an .AVI, .MPEG, .MPG2, or a variety of other formats. This software is the perfect complement to any video editor or DVD authoring software. Includes manual and CD that are not available when you order direct from the muvee web site.

Low Internet Price: $59.95 + $14.95 for CD + S&H = $74.90.

User Group Price: ONLY $35!

"iSeeMedia PhotoVista Panorama 3.0 <www.iseemedia.com>. Create fully immersive, interactive, 3D panoramas automatically from a series of digital

photos. Upgrade to Version 3.0 to get improved workflow and the ability to stitch an additional layer vertically.

Low Internet Price: $59.95 + $9.95 S&H = $69.90.

User Group Price: ONLY $35!

"ALL THREE OF THE ABOVE: ONLY $95! INCLUDING Shipping and Handling FREE if your readers say they saw the offer in your Deals Guy column. Save over $114! Offer expires October 30, 2003.

"To order, simply provide us with the following:

-Name.

-Shipping address (and billing address if different).

-Credit card # and expiration date (VISA or MasterCard only).

-Which product(s) you want.

"You can e-mail the above information to the following address <orders@webworkingservices.com>, or mail it with a check to Webworking Services Corporation, 653 N 600 E, Springville, UT 84663, or fax it to (801) 489-0609."

DealsGuy note: While I have not heard of any problems, be aware that sending a credit card number by e-mail may not be the most secure method. If you are unsure about any pricing or S&H, contact Dave for clarification.

Do Much Long Distance Calling?
A long time ago I wrote about <http://www.bigzoo.com>, which I thought was a good deal, and it still is. The rate is 2.9 and 3.9 cents for calls in the US with various rates for other countries, all very good. It's also good in motels, etc. when you are away from home. Just go on line and sign up by using your credit card to put some money into an account. I don't normally find dialing Bigzoo a problem unless it was busy and I have to keep

trying. I simply use a speed dialer for the access number and the PIN number. According to Kiplinger, here are some other options:

<http://www.onesuite.com> has two versions. Dialing one of its local access numbers gives you domestic long distance calling for 24/7 at just 2.5 cents per minute. If you prefer toll-free access numbers, the price goes to 2.9 cents per minute.

If you prefer the convenience of just dialing 1 (doing it the old fashioned way), try <http://www.gtctelecom.com>, and LD calling will cost you just 5 cents per minute 24/7, and no monthly charges. For that, they require you be billed online and use a credit card. This one won't include Alaska or Hawaii at that price. A paper bill would cost $1.95 per month. (If you check your phone bill now, you are probably already paying a hefty fee for having your long distance calls included on your phone bill). In the article I read they also included some URLs for doing comparisons, <http://www.tollchaser.com>, <http://www.SaveOnPhone.com>, and <http://www.getconnected.com>, which also includes wireless.

That's it for this month. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound.

Bob (The Cheapskate) Click <Bobclick@mindspring.com>. Visit my Web site at <http://www.dealsguy.com> for past columns. I have also been busy putting up some interesting new articles on my Web site, so take a look.

Attack of the WORMS Did We Learn Anything?

By Ira Wilsker
iwilsker@ih2000.net

Recent weeks have seen the most prolific spread of computer viruses and worms in history. While computer viruses and worms have been around for years, the recent attacks of Blaster and Sobig-F, broke all records for the speed of dissemination and the number of computers infected. Fortunately, the payloads carried by these programs was quickly identified and neutralized before they could wreak more havoc on our cyber infrastructure. While annoying and troublesome, they apparently did not carry a very dangerous payload.

My first indication of the Blaster attack was a cryptic call I received asking about some bizarre error statement that appeared in a window that popped up; she had opened no suspicious e-mails, and had updated antivirus software installed. A quick search turned up a warning from Microsoft dated mid-July that there was an identified vulnerability in Windows NT, 2000, and XP, and that Microsoft had released a "Critical Update" patch. Users were advised to download and install this patch immediately. Other references, also from mid-July, were news stories on computer security that there was this vulnerability in some version of Windows, and that Microsoft had released a patch to eliminate the threat. Some pundits also speculated that it was only a matter of time until someone took illicit advantage of the vulnerability. I told her to download and install the patch, to see if that resolved the problem. Minutes later my daughter called from Miami and said that she just had this weird window open on her computer, and a cryptic statement appeared, identical to the other caller's. Likewise, she had opened no e-mail attachments, and had updated antivirus software installed. Two strange but identical symptoms within a matter of minutes, on two XP computers, hundreds of miles apart, seemed to be more than a coincidence, but was likely some type of new virus. I posted a request on the restricted "High Tech Cybercrime Consortium" mail list to see if anyone else had encountered such a strange occurrence. Within minutes I received several replies indicating that others had similar inquiries, but other than a suspicion that it was some type of new virus, no one had any other information. A search of the major antivirus sites turned up no new alerts. Within the next hour, I had received several more phone calls and e-mails appealing for help. By that time the first security alerts traversed the net that a new computer worm named "Blaster" or "LoveSan" had been identified. Blaster was transmitted directly from computer to computer over the internet or networks without the traditional vector of e-mail, by using a sophisticated utility that searched for other vulnerable computers to infect, and then infected them. The victim had no warning other than to find that his computer was compromised. Carrying a denial-of-service payload, Blaster would have all infected computers attack the Microsoft Windows Update server at predetermined times, in a coordinated attack. Most of the antivirus software publishers promptly updated their detection files, and provided a free

downloadable utility to detect and remove Blaster from infected computers. Microsoft launched a media blitz encouraging users to download and install the security patch which had been released a month earlier, and published instructions on removing the worm. Microsoft took down the server that was the target of the attack. While there are many computers still infected with Blaster, it can no longer shut down Microsoft.

Before we had a chance to catch our breath following the Blaster attack, inboxes were flooded with a variety of e-mails with the topics "Details," "Thank You," "Your Application," "Approved," "That Movie," "Wicked Screensaver," or some variation, possibly using "Re:" as a prefix. That first morning of the Sobig-F assault, I turned on my computer, updated my antivirus software, and was greeted with an over-filled e-mail box containing over 700 e-mails with suspicious topics. I use a free program, Mailwasher <www.mailwasher.net>, to screen my e-mail, and allow me to delete spam and viruses before they can get on my computer. Even though I was then not aware of Sobig-F, I knew better than to open suspicious e-mails, and to delete them. As with the Blaster attack, a similar sequence of notifications, antivirus updates, patches, and other fixes were made available in the hours following the onslaught. By that evening, I had received over 1200 copies of Sobig-F; the following day, I turned on my computer and found over 2000 infected e-mails, with additional e-mails arriving at the rate of several per minute; by the time I shut down that evening, I deleted several thousand more e-mails. Sobig-F hijacks the address books of infected computers and repeatedly sends out e-mails with randomly selected "From:" lines concealing the source. Many servers automatically bounced infected e-mails, contributing to the avalanche. Containing a payload that could launch a denial of service attack on multiple servers, as well as connect to a porn site, Sobig-F is scheduled to self-destruct on September 10.

So, what have we learned from this double-barreled attack? First, no matter how good it is, antivirus software may not protect us from rapidly spreading viruses and worms that become endemic before the publishers can respond; still, there is no excuse for not having frequently updated antivirus software installed. While Blaster spread through stealth, Sobig-F was a suspicious e-mail attachment that often came from an acquaintance. Practicing "safe hex" would prevent Sobig-F infections. Also, we had better pay attention when Microsoft announces critical security updates, and install them. We must frequently check for these patches at <windowsupdate.microsoft.com> and install them.

It was bad enough to become a victim of these insidious attacks. It will be even worse if we do not learn from them, and act appropriately. More such attacks will inevitably follow.

Ira Wilsker is a Past President of the Golden Triangle PC Club in Beaumont, TX. He is a police officer and an instructor of business, law, and computers at the Lamar University Institute of Technology. He hosts a weekly radio show on KLVI, and is a contributing writer for The Examiner Weekly in Beaumont, where his articles often appear.

Money 2003:
The Real Monopoly
A Review

By Arpad Kovaks
Rochester Computer
Society, Inc.

After taking one look at the box I knew this was a classic Microsoft product, but don't take that the wrong way. Microsoft Money 2003 is a solid product with lots of options and neat tools that help you manage your money in real time.

Money comes in three flavors: Standard, Deluxe, and Deluxe Small Business. The version used in this review is the Deluxe edition. The install is simple and speedy with modest drive space taken (around 300 Mb). When you first open the program you are presented with a splash screen assistant that walks you through the creation of a new Money profile. The first question asked is whether you wish use the Internet and Microsoft's security system Passport. One of the major selling points of Money is the ability to connect directly to one's bank or brokerage to manage accounts and do online transactions. Typical of Microsoft, Money has inherent limitations with third party ISP AOL (as it states in the setup) due to Money's heavy reliance on MSN and Passport. In fact, the entire interface is one big MSN browser. This doesn't prevent you from using AOL or other Dial-ups; just keep in mind that some things that should be automatic will now be manual.

Once you have completed the setup, you come to the welcome screen, which has numerous subject panes containing links to banks, online brokerage firms, credit card vendors, and general financial news and information. Everything in Money can be customized, from the home page to what toolbars are shown. The default welcome page can also be organized into categories, allowing the user to jump from page to page using a drop down menu.

One of the biggest issues I have with Microsoft products is their lack of documentation. For the cost of Microsoft software, you'd think they could to at least throw in a "Getting Started" guide. Even the Readme.txt has been struck from the CD. However, Microsoft makes up for this by having step by step audio and video walkthroughs on each feature of Money. While informative, the walkthroughs are long, and there's no option to fast forward, meaning you could be stuck just setting up your accounts for hours. Once you do set up your account though, you will have all the tools you will need to manage your finances.

Don't think Money is just another bill-pay software. It's a complete financial manager. Besides paying bills and keeping a daily budget, it can calculate resources needed for building a summer home or retirement to a beachside cottage. It can put those calculations to work by dynamically managing assets to reach goals. You can use Money to pay bills and taxes online and manage bank and checking accounts directly. It has a robust set of tools for day trading or market monitoring. You can roll over assets to other accounts and manage your IRA, CD, bond, mutual fund, 401k, and other tax deferred accounts, all in real time. Your entire portfolio is literally at your fingertips.

Overall, Money is a solid application for financial management. Full of features and special offers, it will replace the need to have your broker on speed dial. If you have AOL and/or use a Palm OS device, I recommend that you look carefully at the box; you may want to seek an alternative, such as Quicken. Microsoft's handheld version, included with the desktop version, Pocket Money, works only (and no surprise) with pocket PC. Quicken fills the gap by making their version for Palm OS only. Either way, Money gets a thumbs up from me.

Arpad Kovaks is the President of the Rochester Computer Society, in Rochester, NY, and can be reached at <podman@rochester.rr.com>.

The Windows Registry
Another Opinion
By Bob Clyne
Associate Editor

Many have called for the abolition of the Windows Registry, though I do not recall any who said what to use in its place. I think these people are ignoring the first law of wing walking and mountain climbing, which is, "Don't let go of what you have a-hold of until you have a-hold of something else." The Registry is a major part of what lets programs cooperate with each other and lets the Operating System (OS) know where to find programs and components and retain the user's settings.

In the days of Windows 3.1 the registry was used for very little. Most of the settings were kept in the win.ini and system.ini files, and most programs had their own .ini files. Programs had no way of knowing what other programs were installed or what their settings were. Seldom did programs cooperate with each other. You were lucky to get a graphic file to go into a word processing document. Inserting a spreadsheet or graphic in another document and being able to change it in the program that created it and have the result appear in the document it was inserted in was just a dream. If you changed anything in the original document, you had to save the file as a graphic and then re-import it into the other program and hope it was at least recognizable when imported. A mail merge, at best, meant manually exporting a carefully formatted text file and then using that, as a source for another program, but mostly mail merge did not exist.

Another problem with eliminating the registry is that everyone would have to replace almost all of their old programs at the same time they replaced the OS with one without the registry. Remember that almost all of your current programs depend heavily on the registry and would cease working without it. (If you don't believe that, try deleting your registry and see what happens, but don't blame me for the result.) If that were to happen, there would be howls of anger from both individual and corporate users. Allegations against Microsoft would abound, and very few, including those currently calling for abolishing the registry, would buy the new product.

Much of the above would also be a danger in a major redesign of the registry. Microsoft has a tiger by the tail here. They must be careful that any changes they make to the registry are backward compatible.

The Windows Registry does need improvement though; it is far too fragile. Microsoft has made some improvements in the registry from its beginnings, but there is still a desperate need for improvement. Many times when Windows has to be reinstalled it is because of a corrupted registry. The registry needs to be made much more robust.

The boot time "Last known good" option is a step in the right direction, and the "System restore points" are a significant improvement, but they don't go far enough. I think most users, including myself, forget to create a system restore point before installing a program. The program installers should either automatically create a system restore point or prompt the user to create one and allow it to be done from the installer. There should also be a message put on the screen telling the user that the system restore point is being created and how to restore the system if the installation causes problems. Microsoft may not be able to enforce this for programs that do not carry the "designed for…" or similar logo, but it could make an effort to encourage it. Other vendors should implement this whether Microsoft encourages it or not.

Registry editing tends to bring trepidation to even the stout-of-heart, and yet many of us have to do it, sometimes under the direction of some tech support, sometimes from a printed article, and sometimes on our own. The Windows Registry editing facilities could certainly use some improvement. Almost every other editor has Undo capability, and many automatically make a backup copy of the file being edited. They also allow you to exit without saving the changes. But here is

regedit, editing one of the most critical files on the whole system, which provides none of these. A change made in the registry takes effect immediately and is essentially irreversible. One little slip and you are in for a lot of grief. Even an "oops I wish I hadn't done that," recognized immediately, is irreversible. There must be a way that Microsoft can make registry editing more forgiving, and they should implement it forthwith. I don't advocate recreational registry editing, but when you have to edit the registry it should not be as nerve wracking and disaster prone as it is.

Too many times, when programs are uninstalled, they leave registry entries. Sometimes this is to prevent the user from uninstalling then reinstalling a trial program to get another trial period, but I think most of the time it is just sloppy uninstall procedures. Whatever causes it, it needs desperately to be fixed. Orphaned registry entries cause the registry to grow needlessly, but they can also cause uninstalling a program to not correct a conflict caused by installing the program. It can also cause a reinstalled program to not work correctly because it finds the left over earlier instances of its registry entries rather than the newer ones from the reinstallation. Some improvements have been made in uninstallers, but there is much more room for improvement. This is another area where Microsoft does not have control over programs other than the ones that carry the "designed for…" or similar logo, but the industry needs to get its act together on this.

Users should not be in a hurry to call for the abolition of the registry, but they should insist on significant improvements in it.

To Linux Or Not

By Nancy J. Cristolear

The Dayton Microcomputer Association, Inc.

njc@dmapub.dma.org

Should you take the plunge? Well that depends on several things. Let's go over some of the things you should consider.

First, what are your expectations? Are you a person who has been working with a Windows or a Macintosh and expect Linux to be the same thing? I can guarantee you will be disappointed.

Unlike Windows or Macintosh, the Linux distributions are not as refined. What do I mean? Well, if you are familiar with Windows, then you are also probably familiar with applications like WordPad, NotePad, Calculator, Paint to name a few. Many of the Linux applications have names like GIMP, an acronym that stands for Graphics Image Manipulation Program. It would not jump out at you that this is a Photoshop clone would it? So, you will have to invest time into exploring the applications to see what they do. The good news is there will be LOTS of them. Ultimately, you may have to tweak the menu system so that you can find what you want.

OK, the next thing we will consider is your skill level. If you are the kind of user who expects to be able to buy something off the shelf and have it work, then Linux is not for you. Linux often requires a number of tweaks to make it work. However, if you are the kind of user who would throw the manual away and click a link to see what it would do, or take your box apart to see what's in it, then Linux might be for you.

It will help if you are comfortable working with a DOS prompt. Most of the things Linux can do are more easily done from a prompt. In fact, most of the people I know have XWindows installed just to get a terminal window. (XWindow is a windowing system developed at MIT, which runs under UNIX and all major operating systems. It lets users run applications on other computers in the network and view the output on their own screen. XWindow generates a rudimentary window that can be enhanced with GUIs—Graphical User Interfaces.)

Then there are the Unix commands. They are the kind of commands that only a geek would love. Consider some of the names: grep, ls, mv, cp, ps, vi.

Lastly, what is your goal for your Linux system? Do you want to replace your Windows system? Or perhaps you just want to play around a bit. This last is where we lose the folks who are more Windows oriented. If you do not have a commitment to Linux, you won't be inclined to wade through the setup and will just forget about it.

Are you ready to take the plunge? OK then, there are still a few things to consider. Do you buy one of the packaged distributions, or do you take advantage of the free software available. What kind of machine will you be using and what do you want it to do? How old is that machine? Do you have enough hardware? Memory? Processor?

Linux is famous for being "free." However, you may want to invest in one of the packaged distributions. They run around $75. What is the difference? Well, often the commercial distributions will include tools and software that are not available for free. For instance, you might get StarOffice with all its templates and art, as opposed to OpenOffice. It may come with special

tools that will help with the installation and upgrade. Most important, the boxed distributions come with HELP! This help is in the form of a manual and on-call technical support. This may be worth the money right here.

That doesn't mean you can't make things work with the available free distributions. They often come with a large amount of Open Source software. If you are willing to regularly attend SIG Linux meetings, you can learn all you may need to know (or at least where to find it). In the long run though, you would probably be more motivated to work with something that you have money invested in.

Next we will consider some of the choices you may want to make about what to install Linux on. Linux was originally written to run on a 386 machine with 4 Meg of memory, and you can still run it on that kind of machine, in theory. However, just like Windows, as ability has been added, so has the level of machine that Linux runs best on. Most of the package distributions require at least a Pentium level machine with 64 Meg of memory. If you want to be able to install and run with a minimum of tweaking, you should have standard hardware, known components, and as much memory as you can afford (Linux is a memory hog). You can get by with about 6 Gig of disk space for everything that comes with your distribution.

Next, will you run Linux on a standalone machine, or will it share a system with Windows. The ideal system will run Linux and only Linux. However, many cannot afford a whole system for Linux, so they share the machine with Windows. OK, do you use removable hard disks and swap them

(ideal), or must you have both Windows and Linux on the same hard disk? Windows just does not do well with other operating systems on the same machine. That doesn't mean you can't do it; it just means you may have to work harder. If your skill level is lower, you will probably do better at installing Linux on a standalone or swappable disk. If you must install everything on one disk, do your Windows install first; then install Linux. Linux comes with a couple of tools to manage and partition drives, or you may want to invest in programs like System Commander or Partition Magic. Oh, if this is your regular production machine, BACK UP YOUR EXISTING DATA! Some people have tried to install Linux and ended up wiping out the entire disk. BACK UP EVERYTHING!!!!!!!!

What? You thought you could just use your 386, with a 40 Meg hard drive and 4 Megs of RAM, that's sitting in the bottom of your closet? Well, don't throw it away. You can install a bare bones Linux OS with no bells and whistles. What you can't do is install XWindows and pretty graphics. You can still do a lot with it. Consider using it as a print server, mail server, or a firewall. (A 486 might be a better choice though.)

You just bought the latest and greatest thing? Well, it may be a good idea to wait a couple of months. Linux developers have to wait for hardware to be released for drivers to be written for it. So you may find that Linux is a little behind the state of the art.

Want to make sure you can install Linux on your machine? Or maybe you are just not sure you want to take the plunge completely yet. Consider getting a KNOPPIX CD. KNOPPIX is a single

CD distribution that runs on the CD drive and doesn't touch your hard drive. If your hardware is all detected by KNOPPIX, then you can be confident that the Linux installs will find your hardware. You will also know if you have the patience to deal with some of Linux's idiosyncrasies. You can download KNOPPIX at <http://www.knopper.net/knoppix/index-old-en.html>. Choose the Order/Download link. Download sites are at the bottom of the page.

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context, with proper credit given to the author. This article is brought to you by the Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups.

Win XP Tips
By Chris Pirillo
Chief Lockergnome
chris@lockergnome.com

Windows Update Transfer Details
Windows Update hasn't been faring too well lately; it's caused a few users some unnecessary headaches. It'll say something along the lines of: "Here, I think you need this patch," when, in fact, you don't. Here's an interesting tip for those of us who want to know what's happening when we're using this particular Microsoft tool.

This tweak has been confirmed with Windows XP and 2000 systems, although it may work in earlier versions of Windows as well. What we're going to do is set the transfer dialog to "debug" mode. This way, we can keep an eye on what's happening at each stage in the process. Fire up the Registry editor and fly to HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE \

SOFTWARE \ Microsoft \ Active Setup. Enter a new String Value and label it: "SteppingMode" (sans quotes). Edit the String and give it a value of Y. The next time you use Windows Update, its actions should be a little more descriptive. If you ever wish to disable the verbosity, simply switch this value to N. If you want another way to grab these downloads, consider using the Corporate version of Windows Update (a quick search on Google will provide the appropriate URL).

Driver Queries and Wasted Space
What's the quickest way (in Windows XP) to get a list of the currently loaded drivers, including module names and descriptions? Get out of the GUI; you're better off at the command line for this tip. Browse to your desktop folder for simplicity's sake, usually found at C:\ Documents and Settings \ [Username] \ Desktop. Now, at the command line, enter: "driverquery /V > drivers.txt" (sans quotes). That /V provides a more "verbose" output. Other notable switches include /FO (which formats the output as a table, list, or comma separated values) and /SI (which provides details about any signed driver). Open that freshly-created drivers.txt file, and you'll be in business.

On a more entertaining note, do you remember the music that played when you first started Windows XP? Ya know, the one that sounded like an Enigma tune? If you wanna hear it again, you can find it at C:\WINDOWS\system32\ oobe\images\title.wma. Of course, if you want to free up 3 MB worth of space, you can delete it and the intro.wmv file sitting next to it.

Built-in Spell Checker
Typos were frequent in the days of the typewriter; misspellings were common

in the handwritten letter era. And now, there's virtually no quick way to spell check a word when you're in anything other than a "Microsoft Office Spell Checker" supported application. Nevertheless, quite honestly, there's no excuse for spelling errors anymore.

Lockergnomie Tom Maenner had issues with the feature in Outlook Express after he upgraded to Windows XP. "I had to locate 'csapi3t1.dl_' on the Windows XP CD and expand it as 'csapi3t1.dll' in this directory: C:\Program Files\Common Files\ Microsoft Shared\Proof. Worked like a charm."

I'm not certain this will work on every machine, but it's worth trying if the tool isn't operational for you. If you dork up words every other minute, consider turning on the "Spell Check before Sending" feature in your default e-mail client. It's and its, than and then, their and they're, or any other homophone may slip through the cracks. Butt at least you won't look like a total fool—just a parshal one. Even online, credibility counts.

CompactFlash Formatting

Digital Media (the non-Lockergnome kind) is wonderful when it works. Most people use it in their digital camera or PDA (as do I). Transferring data from a portable device to the PC is relatively painless. Lockergnomie Glen Fabian pointed out something recently posted to COMPACTFLASH.ORG (the CompactFlash Association): "By default, Windows XP will format any CompactFlash card of 64MB or more with FAT32 format. Digital cameras and other devices use the FAT (FAT16) format and cannot operate with a FAT32 formatted card. Either format your CompactFlash card in your camera, or select FAT format to format your CompactFlash card in a Windows XP PC."

Even if you don't use CF media or Windows XP, this is something to keep in mind. And do you need another reason to own a laptop? My Pocket PC is a Walkman of sorts; I put new MP3s on it every day. However, transferring them via any USB (1.1) connection is slow as molasses.

I picked up a PCMCIA CF adapter for under five bucks a few weeks ago (they're inexpensive to begin with). That will speed up the process. Visit PCMCIA.ORG for more information.

Media Access Control

It's no secret that 802.11b networks are not very secure; we've discussed this point at length in the past. When you enable wireless connectivity through your access point, you should filter out non-registered MAC (Media Access Control) addresses if your WAP supports this feature. A MAC address is unique to every network card on the market. Any Wi-Fi device may see your wireless access point, but it won't be able to use the WAP unless its MAC address matches the (manually entered) filter. Nice, huh?

Okay, so how do you determine a network card's MAC address? Either use WINIPCFG or IPCONFIG. You're looking for a hexadecimal string— twelve digits long (six sections of two hex characters each). This is easy to find when you're on your own machine, but what about those connected to your network?

As your home network expands, this information will become increasingly important. You could use your router's DHCP table to view the addresses, or you could use Windows XP's GETMAC command line utility (also

available as a free Windows 2000 Resource Kit download).

Thinking Of Trying E-Postage?
Before You Sign Up Read This
By "Mac" McWethy

Why E-Postage Anyway?

I wonder how many of the on-line-postage vendors (such as Stamps.com, Estamp, P-B "ClickStamp," etc.) realize that they are already out of business, and as soon as their customers discover the latest offering from the United States Postal Service they can go ahead and close their electronic doors and liquidate inventory (or would that be "e-nventory"?).

Since its advent, there have been two principal advantages to e-postage over conventional stamps that have made the additional cost worthwhile for many. First, there was the obvious advantage of being able to buy "stamps" 24/7 regardless of the weather or whether it was a holiday. True, what was produced was not really a stamp—it was typically an adhesive label made on your computer's printer. But the fact that it was considered to be "metered postage" by the USPS yields the second—and for some, much bigger—advantage: avoiding the lines at the post office.

Conventional wisdom holds that if you want to mail a parcel weighing over a pound, you must physically hand it to a postal clerk at a post office. You cannot mail it from your home (unless you're well-known to your mail carrier), nor can you drop it in a free-standing mail box located right outside the post office (no matter who you know). You must get in line and hand it to a clerk at a retail postal counter during normal business hours.

And few things can be as exasperating as a slow-moving post office line that one is standing in for no reason other than to hand a package—which may have already been weighed and stamped—to a clerk. Renewing your car tag may come in a close second, except during the Thanksgiving-to-Christmas season when the line at the post office stretches from here clear over to there. There's no close second, third, or fourth when that happens.

Meter Me This, Batman

Well, the conventional wisdom is wrong, because according to the USPS's "Bible"—the Domestic Mail Manual—only packages weighing more than 16 ounces and bearing (adhesive) stamps must be handed to a clerk. Postage lawfully printed by your PC is "metered postage," and packages bearing same can be mailed by dropping them in any collection box or by having your mail carrier take them away.

Citation: Mail "weighing 16 ounces or more must be presented at a post

14

office retail counter if postage is paid with adhesive stamps" [DMM Section D100.2.6], but in the case of metered mail "…First-Class Mail, Express Mail, and Priority Mail may be deposited in any street collection box or post office" [DMM Section P030.11]. Both references are available on-line at the Postal Explorer Web Edition <http://pe.usps.gov/>.

For many, that convenience alone has been worth the extra cost of e-postage. Stamps.com, for example, has a monthly fee of 10% of the face amount of the postage printed with a $4.49 minimum; you buy the right to print postage by means of charging an amount of money you select—$10, $25, etc.—to your credit card, and then you draw down on this amount when you subsequently print postage.

Clickity Click

However: Now comes the USPS with "Click-N-Ship" (its own brand of on-line e-postage, available at <www.usps.com>), which allows anyone, after proper registration and establishment of a username and password, to not only print regular postage but also:

(1) allows shipping labels with e-postage affixed on.

(2) allows either full-sheet adhesive labels or just plain 'ol paper which is attached to the package with spray adhesive or tape, if you use this method for Priority Mail postage.

Additional Benefits

The USPS will throw in Delivery Confirmation for free as well as give you Priority Mail shipping boxes and tape at no cost. And, as icing on the cake, there's no registration fee or minimum monthly cost for these services! Outstanding!

So tell me again why I would want to maintain my Stamps.com account? Sometimes, when the moon is right, it seems like maybe the government is there to help.

Be Careful

One final cautionary note: if you choose to terminate your account with one of the free-market internet postage providers, you would do well to first confirm the date when the next billing cycle begins; learn when the account would be de-activated; and find out how long the account would remain accessible (for purposes of copying the address book, purchased-postage records for tax purposes, etc.) after the close-account instructions are given. Logically, it should remain available to you for as long a time period as you are required to pay for.

Not following this advice (and thereby gaining the wisdom that qualifies me to offer it), I terminated my Stamps.com account on Monday, February 3—the first business day in February. Although my account was deactivated immediately (making it impossible to access it for the purposes mentioned above), I was nevertheless charged the full minimum monthly fee for the month of February. Had I known that this would have been the effect I still would have closed the account—I just would have made sure that I got all the data I needed from it and shut it down three days earlier. Be sure you don't make the same mistake.

Copyright © 2003 by "Mac" McWethy. Reproduced with permission. Prior to relocating to that gray area between "retirement" and "unemployment", Mac was an Assistant City Manager for 13 years and a Facilities Manager for a

15

community mental health system for 10 years. He has a Masters in Public Administration. Article reproduction coordinated by Steve Bass <stevebass@earthlink.net>, author of PC Annoyances: How to Fix the Most Annoying Things about Your Personal Computer, O'Reilly Press <http:// snurl.com/annoyances>.

━━━━━━━━━━━━━

ContextConvert Pro 1.1 Update
By Bob Clyne
Associate Editor

This is an update to my review of ContextConvert Pro 1.1, which appeared in the September, 2003 issue of the DATA BUS.

There is no change in the problem converting MPEG-2 videos. I could not get it to work at all.

The lack of color or a preview image in EPS files created by ContextConvert Pro is a design limitation according to Mystik Media. The preview image makes a graphic much more easily usable, since without it you will not be able to see the graphic on screen in many applications, though it will print on a Postscript printer. I would consider the lack of color an even more serious limitation though; if you are printing to a monochrome printer, it may not matter.

Conversions from EPS to other formats would only work on files created by ContextConvert Pro itself. With all the other EPS files I tried it on, including some that came with Adobe Live Motion, it generated errors. Most of the errors were Access Violation errors, which crashed the program.

Since it is unlikely that you would want to convert an EPS file that you had just created by converting something else, for all practical purposes conversions from EPS do not work.

Mystik Media is working on the next update to ContextConvert Pro.

━━━━━━━━━━━━━

The Big Debate: Fire Wire Vs. USB 2.0
By Cade Metz
Manatee Computer News

Shopping for a new DVD burner, external hard drive, or scanner (or just about any computer peripheral, for that matter) just got more complicated. That's because of the emergence of USB 2.0, a high-speed connection technology that is competing with Fire Wire as a way to connect peripherals to your computer. Both are rated at comparable speeds—480 Mbps for USB 2.0 and 400 Mbps for FireWire.

So which one should you use? We'll give you the answer to this and other burning questions about the two interfaces. Is upgrading your desktop from USB 1.1 to USB 2.0 with an add-in card worth the extra cost? Will a FireWire card deliver faster speeds for your peripherals? Or is a combo card your best bet? Which interface is faster for external hard drives, and which plays back video the best?

Life used to be simpler. Macs had fast FireWire ports that could handle the fun stuff like camcorders, which need speedy data transfers; PC users, however, were limited to much slower USB ports that poked along at 12 Mbps and could handle only run-of-the-mill gadgets like mice, printers, and

scanners. But FireWire has crossed the divide, available via add-on cards for desktops, PC Cards for notebooks, and built-in ports with some new PCs. And the latest version of USB—USB 2.0—pumps up transfer speeds significantly, making it a viable competitor to FireWire (though you still can't buy a USB 2.0 camcorder).

The Big Decision

Deciding which standard to use depends largely on the peripheral you want to connect. In many cases, the peripheral will make the decision for you, since most devices have only one type of port. But you may have a choice as interface options broaden and multi-connection devices become more popular. So we ran tests to determine the best interface for many types of peripherals. We timed external hard drives, printers, scanners, DVD burners, and CD-RW drives over both USB 2.0 and FireWire. The results are surprising.

Though USB 2.0 is rated at a higher throughput speed, FireWire delivered faster performance on external hard drives when connected to a desktop. Still, an upgrade from a USB 1.1 to a USB 2.0 hard drive is definitely worthwhile. And since nearly all new mainstream desktop PCs have USB 2.0 ports, USB hard drives will be the market winners.

For CD-RWs, test results were a mixed bag, though USB 2.0 showed a slight edge. For printing and most scanning work, USB 1.1 is fast enough for most users. We also compared the performance of USB 1.1 against USB 2.0 peripherals. Our tests showed that
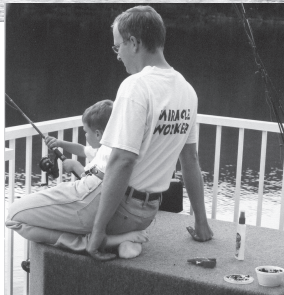
Letter From The Editor

Several people said they wished there was a photo with last month's Letter From The Editor about the houseboat vacation. So here are a few, including my son teaching his son to fish and our surprise shipboard birthday party for my 81 year old sister.

USB 2.0 was generally only 2 to 13 times faster than USB 1.1—not the promised 40 times faster. But even a doubling in performance is obviously significant. Once you've chosen a peripheral, it's time to upgrade your computer, which likely has USB 1.1 ports.

Notebooks Forge Ahead

We expect to see notebooks move to USB 2.0 with the debut of the Intel Odem and Montero chipsets in the first half of 2003. FireWire is built-in only on some high-end PCs, all Apple systems, and most Sony computers. In this study, we explored five types of devices that add high-speed ports to your desktop or notebook: FireWire add-in cards, USB 2.0 add-in cards, combo cards, hubs, and PC Cards. We also looked at a handful of the many products available.

Over the next few years, both high-speed data transfer standards will continue to coexist. This may complicate your buying decisions but will also improve the ties that bind your PC and its peripherals. If you want to be the first on your block with a FireWire-enabled PC, you have a few options: Buy a new motherboard, buy a new computer, or—the cheapest and easiest answer— buy an upgrade card.

We didn't see much variation in performance among these three-port PCI cards, but the products include very different cables, drivers, and software.

Reprinted from PC Register, March 2003, the Official Journal of the East Tennessee Computer Society. Article reproduction coordinated by Steve Bass, author of PC Annoyances: How to Fix the Most Annoying Things about Your Personal Computer, O'Reilly Press. <http://snurl.com/annoyances>.

BOARD MEETING
9/14/2003
Carol Sanzi

Board Members Present:

President Gary DeNise, Treasurer Roger Gay, Secretary Carol Sanzi, SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow, Warner Mach representing SIG-IBM Intermediate Chairman Jack Vander-Schrier, Publications Committee Chairman Bill Agnew, and Members at Large Bob Clyne and Chuck Moery. The meeting was called to order at 12:01 p.m.

Old Business:

Treasurer Roger Gay reported that the bank balance is $4929.80 with $30 not deposited. SEMCO's membership stands at 85 with renewals due from Anita MacSorley and Stephen Cook.

Bob Clyne reported that SEMCO's telephone answering machine's message was old until this past week. Since this phone number is given as a SEMCO contact number, the message should be kept current. Tom Callow agreed to keep the message updated.

New Business:

Roger Gay reported that he has a heavy steel cash box with a broken handle that belongs to SEMCO. Tom Callow moved for Roger Gay to dispose of said box. Roger Gay seconded the motion, and it was carried, with Bob Clyne opposing the motion.

Adjournment:

Roger Gay moved to adjourn. Tom Callow seconded the motion, and it was carried. The meeting then adjourned at 12:18 p.m.

Tip: Bring your computer problems to SEMCO. We have experts who are anxious to help.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGs)

SIG-IBM
Tom Callow
Warner Mach

Oct. 12: Creating PDF files at a Fraction of the Price: SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow will demonstrate ActivePdf, an inexpensive alternative to Adobe Acrobat, allowing users to create files compatible with Acrobat Portable Document Format (PDF).

Tip: E-Mail Spelling Lesson
E-mail teaches us that there are many ways to spell viagra: viagara, v1agra, v1agara, v*i*a*g*r*a, v-i-a-g-r-a, Vviagra, v.i.a.g.r.a, viagraa, viagr@, vi@gr@, viagra+, viagr-a, v,i.a,g.r,a.—or spam.

SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE
Jack Vander-Schrier

Oct 12: Tips and Tricks for MS Word and MS Excel: SIG Intermediate Chairman Jack Vander-Schrier will discuss the things you can do with MS Word and MS Excel that you might not have seen in, or remembered from, the manuals.

NOVICE-IBM GROUP
Rotating Volunteer Hosts

Oct. 12: Q&A: Discussion directed by the Audience.

SIG-ADVANCED
Franz Breidenich

Nov. 3: Meetings held first Monday, 6:45 pm, at the Oak Park Library. The library is located at 14200 Oak Park Blvd., Oak Park, MI. Phone: (248) 691-7480. **Topic: Wide ranging discussion of computers and computing.**

November 2003 DATA BUS DEADLINE (7th day after meeting)
SEMCO Input and Members' Ads — Deadline: Sun, Oct. 19, 11:59pm.
Members' personal ads are free. To mail, use Editor address on Page 2; e-mail address: <agnew@bignet.net>. PLEASE send to arrive sooner than deadline if possible.
Business Ads - Deadline: Second Friday monthly. Mail **unfolded** camera-ready copy; payment in full made out to SEMCO, to the Editor (address Pg 2).

Bill Agnew
agnew@bignet.net
(to post monthly computer group info)

**CALENDAR-OF-EVENTS
OTHER GROUPS**

AAIICI (American Association of Individual Investors, Computerized Investors)
Oct. 25–Saturday, 10am-noon (4th Saturday); W. Bloomfield Huntington Bank, Orchard Lk Rd., S.of Maple Rd. Info: Jack Lockman at 313-341-8855 or <thunder@tir.com .

COMP (Computer Operators of Marysville & Port Huron)
Nov. 5–Wednesday, 7 p.m. (1st Wednesday): Rm 201, Clara E. Mackenzie Library-Science Bldg, St. Clair Community College, 323 Erie St., Port Huron. Ron Walters, 810-679-4144. Web: <http://www.bwcomp.org>. Topic: Microsoft Office 2003 Preview, by Microsoft.

DCOM Computer Club
Oct. 10–Friday, 6:30 - 8:30pm (2nd Friday); Henry Ford C.C., Patterson Tech Bldg, Ford Rd/ Evergreen, Rm T143, Parking Lot C. Info: Doug Piazza 313-582-2602.

DPUG (Detroit Palm Users Group)
Oct. 9–Thursday, 7pm (2nd Thursday); Kelly Services Building, 999 West Big Beaver, corner Crooks & Big Beaver Rds, Troy, MI. <http://www.dpug.org>. Topic: Palm vs. Pocket PC, members will compare. **Free membership.**

FACE (Flint Area Computer Enthusiasts)
Oct. 14–Tuesday, 6:30pm (2nd Tuesday); Kettering Univ. Academic Bldg. Rm I-817 (enter Security Door, back of building by parking lot). <http://www.gfn/FACE/index.html>.

MacGroup Detroit
Oct. 19–Sunday, 3pm-5pm (3rd Sunday); Bloomfield Twp. Library, 1099 Lone Pine Rd. (corner of Telegraph Rd.). Info: Terry White, <terry@macgroup.org> or 313-571-9817. <http://www.macgroup.org>. Topic: Print Publishing with Adobe Solutions.

MacTechnics, (MAC User Group)
Oct. 18–Saturday, (3rd Saturday); Coffee 9:00am, SIGs 9:30am, Main meeting 11:00am. Mack Open School, 920 Miller Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48103. <http://www.mactechnics.org>). Info: Cassie at <cassiemac@yahoo.com> or 313-971-8743. Topic: FileMaker with the Stars.

MCUG (Michigan Computer Users Group)
Oct. 16–Thursday, 7pm (3rd Thursday); 35271 Rockingham Dr, Sterling Hts., MI 48310-4917; Info: Jerry Zinger, Pres., <kahuna15@comcast.net> 810-792-3394.

Michigan Apple Computer User Group
Nov. 13–(2nd Thur), MAC SIG; Nov. 13–(2nd Thur), Golden Masters SIG; Oct. 16–(3rd Thur), Green Apple SIG; Eagles Hall in Clawson, 174 Bowers St (one block North of 14-Mile and one block East of Main). Carl Pendracki 248-647-8871 or <carlpen@aol.com>. Web: <http://www.themichiganapple.com>.

Oak Park Computer Club
Meets every Friday, 10:15am at Oak Park Recreation Bldg., Oak Park Blvd. west of Coolidge.

SHCC (Sterling Heights Computer Club)
Nov. 4–Tuesday, 7:30pm (1st Tuesday); Carpathia Club, 38000 Utica Rd, Sterling Hts, Pres. Don VanSyckel at <Don@VanSyckel.net>, 586-731-9232; Web: <http://www.SterlingHeightsComputerClub.org>.

SVCA (Saginaw Valley Computer Assoc.)
Nov. 13–(2nd Thursday), 6:30-9:00pm; Zauel Library, Shattuck & Center Rds., Saginaw. Web: <http://www.svca.org>.

Wayne State U. Mac User Group
Oct. 11–(2nd Saturday), 10:00am-Noon (2nd Saturday); at Mich.com, 21042 Laurelwood, Farmington. Info: Lorn/JoAnn Olsen 248/478-4300 or Denny MeLampy 248-477-0190.

**SEPTEMBER
REFRESHMENT
DONORS**
Warner Mach, Coordinator
Betty MacKenzie
Carol Sanzi
Roland Maki
Monica Cote

COMPUTER RESOURCE PEOPLE

This is a list of members willing to be resources for other members to call when they have hardware or software questions.
Are you willing to help members learn?
Which software programs are you familiar enough with?
It is not necessary to be an expert, but just have some familiarity with the program and be willing to help someone starting to learn it. Please give this some thought and volunteer at the next group meeting.

Almost Anything: Vander-Schrier	**MS Office for Windows:** Callow
AutoCAD: Comptois, Gay	**MS Word:** Clyne
Genealogy: Cook	**Networking:** Callow
IBM PC Hardware Issues: Clyne, Gay, Yuhasz	**Novell Netware:** Yuhasz
Operating Systems: Callow, Clyne, Yuhasz	**Quicken:** Clyne, Gay
MAC Hardware and OS Issues: Yuhasz	**Geocaching:** Cook

Clyne, Bob—810-387-3101, 9am-10pm .... clyne@lodden.com
Callow, Tom—248-642-1920 9am–5pm .... tcallow@vmddlaw.com
Comptois, Jerry—248-651-2504, anytime .... jerrycandotoo@juno.com
Cook, Stephen—313-272-7594, eves .... scook48227@ameritech.net
Gay, Roger—248-641-7799, 9am-10pm .... rgay@voyager.net
Vander-Schrier, Jack—586-739-7720, 12-8pm .... jvanders@myself.com
Yuhasz, Steve .... Help@yuhasz.org

SEMCO CALENDAR—October/November

SCIENCE & ENGINEERING BUILDING, OAKLAND UNIVERSITY, ROCHESTER, MICHIGAN

October 12–SUNDAY (Meet 2nd Sunday)

SEMCO <u>Board</u> Meeting at 12:00 noon, **Room 164.** For Officers and SIG Chairpersons. Other members are invited to attend.

SEMCO <u>General</u> Meeting at 1:30 pm, **Room 164.**

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

SIG-IBM 1:45 pm, **Room 164. Program: Creating PDF files at a Fraction of the Price:** SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow will demonstrate ActivePdf, an inexpensive alternative to Adobe Acrobat, allowing users to create files compatible with Acrobat Portable Document Format (PDF).

SOCIAL PERIOD 3:15 pm, **Room 172.** Refreshments! (Reminder: We must maintain a neat environment.)

NOVICE-IBM GROUP 3:45 pm, **Room 168. Program: Q&A: Discussion Directed by the Audience.**

SIG-IBM Intermediate 3:45 pm, **Room 164. Program: Tips and Tricks for MS Word and MS Excel:** SIG Intermediate Chairman Jack Vander-Schrier will discuss the things you can do with MS Word and MS Excel that you might not have seen in, or remembered from, the manuals.

Nov. 3–MONDAY , 6:45 pm (Meets first Monday), SIG-ADVANCED Oak Park Public Library, 14200 Oak Park Blvd.,Oak Park, MI. Phone: (248) 691-7480. Directions: Oak Park Blvd. is 9 1/2 mile Road, located west of Coolidge. Best route from freeway: take I-696 to the Coolidge exit. Head south on Coolidge for 1/2 mile to Oak Park Blvd., and turn right. Info: Franz Breidenich 248-398-3359. **TOPIC: Wide-ranging discussion of computers & computing.**
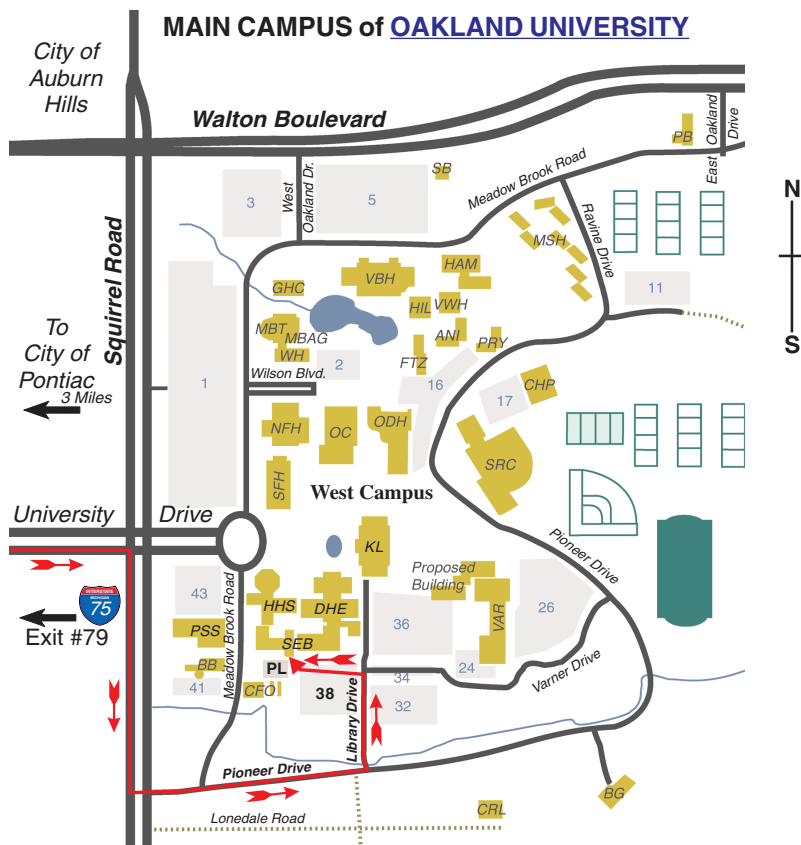
Nov. 9–SUNDAY (Meet 2nd Sunday). SEMCO, 1:30 pm. **Topics: To be announced.**

http://www.semco.org

PUBLIC INVITED

(Please copy this and the next page to post on your bulletin board)

MAIN CAMPUS of OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

MAP LEGEND

SEB	**Science and Engineering Building**
DHE	**Dodge Hall of Engineering**
KL	**Kresge Library**

Note: SEMCO meetings are in the **Science** (west) wing of the **Science and Engineering Building**.

DIRECTIONS

Driving north on I-75 (from Detroit and suburbs), take Exit 79 (University Drive), stay to the right on University Drive to campus entrance. Turn right (south) on Squirrel Road (at traffic light which is just outside campus); turn left on Pioneer Drive (next street to left). Turn left off Pioneer Drive onto Library Drive (second left) toward Kresge Library. Turn left before you get to the buildings, into parking lot 38 on the left. Proceed to the far end of the parking lot and up to the next lot. After parking, enter the first set of glass doors (at the SE corner of the building).

Member of
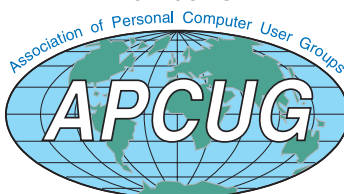
The meetings at Oakland University are sponsored by the University's Academic Computer Services (ACS).
SEMCO thanks Oakland University and ACS for their assistance.

FIRST CLASS MAIL
Dated Material

SEMCO: A Community Organization
Helping People for the 21st Century