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SEMCO MEETINGS Sunday, February 8, 2004

Board Meeting	12:00pm
General Meeting	1:30pm
SIG-IBM Meeting	1:45pm
Social Period	3:15pm
IBM Novice Group	3:45pm
SIG-IBM Intermediate	3:45pm



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

The Beginning Of The End

I am just about ready to put the DealsGuy column to bed permanently because of the lack of new content availability. Lately, much of what I publish is taken from user group newsletters because vendors often ignore my requests and leave me with nothing for the column at deadline time. I may yet have a couple things that are not something you would buy, but mixing those with some other things from newsletters that I read will keep it going briefly. These will probably not be items suitable for many of my readers, but they may find them interesting anyway. Even with limited sales potential I liked them because they are unique.

On the other hand, I often get announcements for new products that are from unknown companies (several per month), and perhaps you would like to know about those. I assumed that most user groups have somebody who gets the same announcements and may, or may not, make it known to their

members. Let me know, since it would be something to write about rather than nothing.

Interesting Trade Show

I recently worked the "International Training and Simulator Association" trade show. This was a military show, and mostly defense contractors had displays there. There was just about any type of simulator you could imagine, including training for a fire situation. In another booth I saw a concave mirror about five feet wide by three feet high (costing about \$12,000) that made me look larger but inverted when I looked at it. Everything also looked 3-D when I approached it. Another large mirror costing about \$7,000 was flatter and enlarged everything, even my money, but the numbers on it were still the same. Bummer! One of the uses was in a training simulator for mid-air refueling, so the pilot could see the nozzle when trying to connect it to the fill tube, although I understand it is not necessary for the real experience.

Another interesting item was a visor you wear on your head that has attached lenses to look through. Above the lenses at a 90-degree angle were mini screens, and you could feed TV or whatever you wanted into them. The lenses would not only let you see what was projected on the mini screens above them, but you could also see right through the lenses. It was an interesting item at about \$32,000. I'm not sure what its uses are.

Another interesting exhibit was a semi-transparent world globe about six feet in diameter on a pedestal that seemed to be illuminated and had lines projecting all around it that moved all the time. I wondered if it was for a tactical planning room. There were even

tanks and some of the latest guns being shown in the show, and I am not at liberty to talk about much of what I saw and asked questions about. After all, I was part of their security. The displays took about 500,000 square feet of exhibit space and attracted about 12,000 attendees. It was interesting that several people were caught during show hours around the show floor trying to film the exhibits with hidden cameras. There was lots of security around the show.

A Ho-Hum Column

I was unable to get a couple of things that I am working on to come together by deadline time, but I'm still working on them. Most of you won't need them, but will like them. The holidays presented a problem for the people I am dealing with, so I hope to have something next month. But for this month I have some items you may already know about.

Dear IRS, Please Take It Easy On Me – Yeah Right!

I should have written about Tax Act last month, but it's still not too late. It's a free product to use for your personal income tax. You can go to <http://www.taxact.com> and do your taxes at no cost in two ways. If you have a dialup connection, you may like the method where you do not have to download anything, but instead, do your taxes right on their web site for free as you answer questions for the information. You can also download their free software and fill it in at home. It interviews you as you go through it, asking you questions of all types, trying to get the information for computing your income tax. It takes a bit of getting used to, and I made mistakes last year that I had to go back and fix because of assumptions, but it does work.

I used it last year and was a bit agitated by its constantly bugging me to buy their better version. Actually, I did eventually purchase the \$9.95 upgrade, but mostly because it included one free electronic tax filing. Taking that into consideration, the upgrade also has some comparison features included, among other things, and would actually only cost me \$2.00 after doing the e-file, since an e-file costs you \$7.95 using the free version. One shortcoming I felt it had was if you had any complicated stock transactions. I finished mine after a couple of e-mails back and forth with the tech people at Tax Act. They answered my questions the next day and didn't quite understand my question the first time. When I finally was satisfied and sent my e-filing, they responded by telling me it had been received and letting me know the approximate date my refund would be deposited to my account. They were correct; it took ten days. I sent them a complaint, and they may have improved the stock transaction part. It's free, so what could it hurt if you don't like it. Remember that my review for Tax Act on my Web site is a year old, and I assume there are improvements by now.

Free Antivirus Software

AVG antivirus software by Grisoft has a free version, and I understand it is pretty good. I have seen it recommended in several user group newsletters, but I've not tried it myself. You can get it at <http://www.grisoft.com>. A word of warning though—don't try to have more than one antivirus program working at the same time, because they often tend to clash.

Print Your Screen, Or Any Part, OK?

PrintScreen by Gadwin lets you capture any part, or your entire screen for

printing, copying to the clipboard, or saving it into a file. This is a very handy utility and can be had at <<http://www.gadwin.com/download>>. You can choose from six different image formats, and they can be resized. Their Web site says PrintScreen 2.0 is an easy-to-use FREEWARE utility.

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 and many interesting articles I have taken from various users group newsletters.

Cooking on the Web

By Ira Wilsker

No, this is not about using the Internet to cook your food, but instead as a resource for culinary information. Whether you are looking for some novel way to re-serve your abundant holiday leftovers, or some novel new meal, the internet may be a valuable resource.

A quick review of the Yahoo cooking directory at <[dir.yahoo.com/Society and Culture/Food and Drink/Cooking](http://dir.yahoo.com/Society_and_Culture/Food_and_Drink/Cooking)> reveals over 3000 websites with recipes and thousands of other websites with related topics. The directory is divided into subdirectories with headings such as "By Ingredient," Cookbooks, Cooking Methods, Drinks, Ethnic and Regional, Holidays and

Occasions, Humor, Name Brands, Special Dietary Needs, Specific Courses and Dishes, and Web Directories. My oldest daughter recently called asking for help for a housewarming she was hosting at her new condo in Miami. She had special requests for vegetarian, low carbohydrate, Kosher, and other specialty dishes. Not being a gourmand herself, she needed help. This Yahoo directory provided the resources that she needed to meet the needs of all of her guests.

A brief review of the ten most popular recipe sites as determined by Yahoo shows the diversity of tastes that can be satisfied by using the web as a resource. The most popular recipe site, according to Yahoo, is <allrecipes.com>. This site is self-described as "Your home for great recipes, meal ideas, and cooking advice." At this single website, in addition to thousands of recipes being directly available, are recipes and links to other well known resources and brands, such as Hershey, Borden, Keebler, Kellogg, McCormick, Nestle, Crisco, Herb-Ox, and Smuckers. Recipes from popular magazines, including Southern Living, Cooking Light, Sunset, and other magazines and periodicals, are also available or linked directly from this site. Additional resources are also available for special dietary needs. With the information on this site, one could feed his family for years without duplicating a menu.

The website <topsecretrecipes.com> has a secret recipe of the week, which is only on the site for a week, with a new "secret recipe" appearing every Monday. As I type this, the weekly secret recipe is Olive Garden's excellent Tiramisu, described on the site as "A delicious combination of

mascarpone cheese, cream cheese, lady fingers, espresso and Kahlua.” I am getting hungry just reading the page!

Where would our kitchens be today if it were not for the ubiquitous Betty Crocker? <Bettycrocker.com> has an outstanding and large selection of recipes for every taste. Recipes can be easily browsed by categories, such as appetizers and snacks, breakfast and brunch, lunches, dinners, desserts, beverages, breads, side dishes, and other scrumptious and delectable choices. For those interested in what others are cooking, there is also an updated list of the most popular dishes selected from the site. <Bettycrocker.com> also offers a convenient free online service (registration required), “Your recipe Clippings,” and an electronic file of individually selected recipes. By using this service, a customized web based cookbook can be created. Buried deep in my kitchen are several small file boxes with rough edged clippings from a variety of sources collected over decades. With the online clippings service, these old boxes are approaching obsolescence.

I have frequently been at a restaurant and liked what I had to eat. I had wondered if these dishes could be easily duplicated at home. A site <copyKat.com>, which proclaims on its banner “You’ve tried it in the restaurant; now make it at home,” offers this opportunity. As I opened up this site I was greeted with the recipe of the day, “Cracker Barrel Old Country Store Hash Brown Casserole.” One of my coworkers is a faithful Luby’s patron and frequently brags about the fine meals she and her family have at Luby’s. <CopyKat.com> has several Luby’s recipes, including Hawaiian Pie,

Butternut Brownie Pie, Italian Chicken Breast, Macaroni and Cheese, and many others. Nearby in the list under “L” are Luther’s BBQ sauce and Lindy’s Famous Cheesecake. A quick look at the “O” category revealed a multitude of recipes from Olive Garden, Outback, Otis Spunkmeyer, and other highly recognizable names. The site is easy to navigate and a pleasure to browse, except for the popup ads, which I found annoying.

A most interesting and extensive site is <www.recipesource.com>, where there is an outstanding collection of ethnic and national foods listed both by region and by type of dish. I have traveled extensively, both domestically and internationally, and it is on this site that I found many of the unusual dishes that I enjoyed. Persian, Indian, and Vietnamese dishes are but a few of the many listed. With Chinese food being very popular, this site has 899 recipes for both authentic and Americanized Chinese foods. French, Greek, Swiss, Mexican, and Italian are but a few of the nationality based directories on <recipesource.com>. In addition to the ethnic listings, this site also offers a cross-reference based on the type of dish. What I found especially interesting was the section for restricted and specialty diets, including baby food, diabetic, gluten free, and vegetarian. Of the many websites I reviewed for this column, this one was my personal favorite. I think I gained 10 pounds just fantasizing about the delights I found. And so, bon appetite!

Ira Wilsker is the APCUG Representative & Bylaws Chair for the Golden Triangle PC Club, a columnist for The Examiner in Beaumont, Texas, and has two radio shows.

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UPS or Oops?

By Lee Besing

Just the other day I learned that one of my Uninterruptible Power Supplies was an “Oops” instead of an “UPS.” First, let me explain for those who still think that “UPS” is the name of a large parcel delivery service, that I’m referring to that little battery box down on the floor under your desk that keeps your computer running when the AC power isn’t. Or at least that is what the theory is supposed to be.

Now you might be asking why I’m using this column to tell you about the need to own one or more Uninterruptible Power Supplies (UPS). When I had a recent power failure during a nasty storm that hit all of San Antonio the first week of September, one of my UPS units failed to kick in, and my equipment shut down. I took it over to a battery store that tested the internal battery and recommended replacement with a new internal battery for much less cost than buying a new comparable unit.

Windows, and even the new Mac OSX operating system, does not like to be turned off without following the normal shut down process. I’ve made a lot of service calls over the past few years as a direct result of a Windows

system losing power one too many times. One particular system was at a ranch out in west Texas with unreliable power. However, the primary threat to his computer was not the power company, it was his 3 year old son who had just figured out how to jerk power cords out of the wall. Dad had to learn how to buy those restrainers to protect little fingers from high voltage and, in the process, protect his computer from frequent power outages. He also went to town and bought a large UPS to protect his system during outages caused by storms or other reasons. My trip out there to reinstall his Windows operating system plus applications cost him much more than the cost of the UPS in the end.

When deciding what size UPS to purchase, bear in mind this simple guideline. The smaller units will keep a system up for a few minutes, and the larger ones obviously keep a system up for longer times. The larger the rating, the longer it is supposed to support your equipment. The actual length of time your system can be supported by a UPS depends upon how much power your system will draw from it when running on the battery. Yes, these little puppies have sealed gel cell batteries inside them, with circuits to convert the AC power to DC power and back again to AC power for your computer.

The larger units (read that more \$\$) will typically have more AC plugs on the back side and will include free software to interface with your PC computer via a serial cable to allow your computer to be shut down normally should the software detect that the battery in the UPS is nearing the end. Larger units normally have voltage regulation to protect against power fluctuations (up or down). Some have

built in surge protectors, but I still use an external surge protector at the input of my UPS, and I use other surge protector strips if I have too many plugs. These batteries have an expected life span of 2-3 years, depending upon size, use, and other factors. They should be tested periodically by unplugging from the wall to see if they keep operating (using non-critical items plugged into the unit).

I'm not going to get into all of the math involved with calculating how many amps your computer system is using. There are websites for the various UPS manufacturers (APC, Triplite, etc.) with that helpful information available. Instead, I'm going to recommend that you simply buy the largest UPS that you can afford at the time, and to shop around to compare pricing before purchasing one or more. I will tell you that laser printers will typically drain or overload a UPS even under normal AC use, much less while under emergency operations, so don't connect them. Large monitors will also draw higher amps unless you have the newer LCD screens.

I personally run several different sizes, each with their own assignment of what to protect. My smallest UPS protects my telephone, answering machine, and other low power items. I use a slightly larger sized UPS to protect my Amateur Radio (Ham) equipment during normal operations so that I don't risk losing power during storms while running emergency nets via Ham Radio. My largest UPS is the 1100va Back-UPS Pro from American Power Conversion (APC), which I bought at the bargain basement price of around \$120 at the local Sam's Club. This unit protects my cable modem, routers, hubs, monitor, and primary computer. I don't

back up unessential equipment like my speakers, scanner, or printers.

I hope that this column provided enough information to convince you to go out and buy a UPS to protect your computer. Think of this as a bit of insurance to keep from having to call the computer technician to visit your house after every major storm. There is much more I could go into about this topic, but space limitations prevent me from detailing all the technical details and gory examples from true stories to convince you to install a UPS tomorrow.

And don't forget...if you haven't updated your anti-virus program, you are at risk of catching some of the newer viruses that have been released just this month.

Lee Besing is the owner of Computer Solution Experts, a consulting firm that provides on-site service and support for PC computers and networks.

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To Upgrade or Not to Upgrade!

By Timothy Everingham

To upgrade or not to upgrade, that is the question. Whether it is nobler to upgrade the computer you have or to put aside the invested fortune of your current computer and get a new one? Or yet do you even need to put your cash into computer hardware? Even Shakespeare didn't have to deal with these questions, which in recent years have become even more complicated to answer.

Where you should start is by determining what your present and future needs and wants are going to be. Don't try to project over five years. I am not talking about what hardware you may drool over, but what you will want or need to do with your computer. Will it be word processing; web surfing; email; burning CD and DVDs; database or list management; software development; photo, graphics, video editing and creation; or something else? Then you look at the application software that will accomplish those tasks. Also look at how long will your current application software and operating system(s) be supported by the manufacturer (Microsoft recently threatened to end support for Windows 98). Also, if you have software that is known to be troublesome, like Windows ME, the need or desire to upgrade it should be considered. Then you look at the system requirements to run your applications: hardware, operating system, and other supporting software (software that is required to be installed on your system in order for your application to run).

Remember that the companies want to sell you the software or hardware, so the minimum software requirements listed are as low as possible and may not reflect real world conditions. If you have a system that is exactly listed as the minimum system requirements (it is the minimum system requirements if only one is listed) consider that this product will run extremely slowly and crash at times. Some manufacturers list both minimum and recommended system requirements, and you do not want to be too far below the recommended requirements. Also, some system requirements listed do not

change the RAM requirements for different operating systems. They list as minimum RAM the one for the oldest operating system. A program may run on Windows 95, 98, 98 SE, ME, 2000, and XP; but the amount of RAM needed in reality is more for Windows 98, 98 SE, and ME than for Windows 95, and more for Windows 2000 and XP than Windows 98, 98 SE, and ME.

There are some general guidelines. If you have a Pentium II computer, AMD equivalent or older and are doing anything other than word processing, simple web surfing, and e-mail, you are looking at having too many things needed to upgrade for it to be worthwhile. With Macintosh or notebook computers, upgrade options are more limited than desktop PCs, so unless it is fairly new, you should be looking at getting a new computer. Also, you have to look at how many of your computer's components are close to or past their expected lifetimes. If your computer's components are five years or older, your computer is living on borrowed time. Where the upgrade option looks better is with Pentium 3, Pentium 4, or Athlon-based desktop computers. However, software activation has made this more complicated. With activation the software takes a snapshot of your computer's hardware configuration. If you try to run it after doing too many upgrades, the software decides that it is not the same computer, thus violating the software license, and shuts itself down. You then have to go to the software manufacturer and try to convince them that the computer you upgraded is not a new computer. The most famous of the programs that includes this feature is Windows XP,

but there are a growing number of application software packages that also have this feature.

Of course this has bred a lot of fear, uncertainty, and doubt (FUD) about upgrading computers, which the people who sell new computers are happy to take advantage of. If you do a combination motherboard (main circuit board) and processor replacement, activation will probably be a problem for you.

If your current computer fits your system's requirements of your expected needs and wants, congratulations; you are done without having to spend any money.

However, if you still are considering upgrading, the next thing you want to do is get out your motherboard manual (may be contained in computer manual). It will tell you what components can be installed on it. If you can't find your manual, there is likely to be a PDF of it on the manufacturer's website. While you are there check to see if there are any BIOS updates available that may give the motherboard new features that you may need. If the motherboard does not support the processor; type, speed or amount of RAM; or the type of plug-in card (AGP, PCI, EISA, ISA) you want to install, you will have to install a new motherboard that will. For drive (IDE, ATA, SATA, SCSI), IEEE 1394 (Firewire), and USB interfaces you can get plug-in cards instead of getting a new motherboard.

Upgrading your RAM is probably the thing that can be most effective in putting off the need to buy a new computer. The others would be a new video card and a new hard drive.

Installing a CD or DVD R/RW drive is also a good option in order to backup

things on you hard drives and enable taking data and media files off your drives that you use infrequently.

Don't forget to calculate your power requirements and have the case be able to fit the motherboard. After you make up a list of your proposed upgrade parts, add up the cost of them. Then compare this cost to the cost of a new computer similar to what your upgraded system would be. If you are doing a lot of upgrading, you will find that the totally new computer will be close to or cost less than the cost of upgrading (there is a discount for buying an entirely new computer rather than just the parts of one). If you find yourself in this position, you should lean toward buying a new computer. With this type of consideration you should also be looking at how you will transfer data and applications from your old computer to your new one (remember software activation issues).

With AMD releasing their Athlon 64 bit desktop processors, one of the issues in upgrading or buying a new computer is "will I need a 64 bit processor?" For most people the answer is not until the latter part of this decade. To get the most out of a 64 bit processor you need 64 bit applications running on top of a 64 bit operating system. Of course, if you have a Mac G5 system running Panther (Mac OS 10.3) and some of the recent versions of the high level Apple content creation applications, you are already there, but for the PC world, the only 64 bit applications programs now are very high level server based or scientific applications.

There is 64 bit Linux, but the Windows XP version is still in beta and won't be out until spring 2004. There

will be 64 bit versions of some games in 2004, but do not look until 2005 for a significant amount of 64 bit software for Windows XP. Because there will be a lot of 32 bit computers around for a while, there should be plenty of 32 bit software. The 64 bit Athlons, and what rumors say Intel is developing as a 64 bit desktop processor, will be able to run 32 bit applications well, which should also keep the 32 bit software market healthy for quite a while. So unless you are a high level gamer, run high-level scientific or content creation applications, or run Macs, you should wait on getting a 64 bit processor computer.

Making the decision on whether to upgrade your current computer or buy a new computer has become more complex than it was a few years ago. A systematic step-by-step approach is appropriate. First determine your needs, then what will support filling those needs, and then weigh the costs of upgrading or buying new. May the wisdom of the Great Elizabethan Bard be upon you, resulting in a fruitful bounty of computer buying.

Timothy Everingham, a member of TUGNET, is CEO of Timothy Everingham Consulting in Azusa, CA. You can contact him at <teveringham@acm.org>. Further information can be found at <<http://home.earthlink.net/~teveringham>>.

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CES 2004

By Bob Clyne

Associate Editor

The Consumer Electronics Show (CES) <<http://www.cesweb.org>> in Las Vegas was huge. It occupied the entire Las Vegas Convention Center (LVCC), including the North Hall, Central Hall (formerly the South Hall), and both floors of the new South Hall. In addition, it used the Las Vegas Hilton, and the high-end audio exhibits were in the Alexis Park hotel. It had 1.38 million net square feet of exhibit space, and the early figures indicate about 129,000 attendees. All of the CES hotel rooms were sold out well in advance of the show, and I heard that hotel rooms were hard to get even at non-CES hotels. There were over 200 buses used in the official CES shuttle bus operation. The shuttle buses take attendees to and from the official CES hotels and around the LVCC area. The vast majority of these buses were the big over-the-road type buses.

DVD Hardware

The fight goes on between the DVD+R and DVD-R camps. Benjamin Disraeli, was reported by Mark Twain to have said: "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damn lies, and statistics." Nowhere (except in government and politics) is this more applicable than in the presentations by these two groups. Each had carefully-chosen statistics to show that its format was better or the most popular. There is no winner yet, and there probably won't be for quite a while. Two points on this that I think need to be made are that after the discs are written, either format will play/read on most DVD players or drives, and there are many drives available that will

write both formats. DVD-RAM, which I had thought was essentially dead, seems to be making something of a comeback, most frequently in combination with DVD-R. There were several digital video recorders that recorded initially to DVD-RAM. You could then edit on the DVD-RAM and either leave the material on the DVD-RAM or transfer it to DVD-R.

Verbatim has announced that they expect to have dual layer DVD+R discs on the market in April, and several drive makers, including Phillips, intend to bring dual layer drives to market at the same time. The dual layer drives will hold 8.5 GB of material, not quite double the 4.7 GB that the single layer discs hold. The dual layer drives coming out in April will have a recording speed of 2.4x. Hopefully, faster drives will come later but I did not hear anything about that. Pioneer said that they expect to have a dual layer DVD-R drive on the market in the third quarter of this year.

Meanwhile, Plextor <<http://www.plextor.com>> said they will have a 12x DVD+R drive out in March that will also write DVD-R at 8x. Liteon <<http://www.liteon.com>> said they will have a 12x DVD+R drive on the market soon and a 16x drive in June. This is a very competitive market, so I would expect other manufacturers to have similar drives out very soon. The -R drives seem to be lagging the +R a bit in coming out with higher speeds and dual layers.

Video Editing Software

Pinnacle <<http://www.pinnaclesys.com>> has announced that Studio 9 is available. Among the new features in Studio 9 are image stabilization to take the shakes out of home videos; automatic color

correction, which corrects both color and brightness; analog cleaning; and audio noise reduction. It also has the myriad transitions and a number of other effects that I see no use for other than to show-off that the user can do them. The image stabilization looked very good in the Pinnacle demo at the show, as did the automatic color correction. If these features work as well for users, this program could be very worthwhile. I should note though that Pinnacle has had a serious problem with audio/video synchronization in things like captured TV shows, and they have a reputation for buggy first releases of a new version of their software. But this may be the time they got it right on the first try. I requested a review copy of Studio 9, so I may be able to tell you more about it later.

Blu-Ray™ & HD-DVD

While this battle is still a while off, it promises to have more serious consequences for the consumer than the DVD+R/-R battle. This is another standards battle, but in this case it does not appear that the discs will all be playable in the same player/reader. Both Blu-Ray and HD-DVD use a blue-violet laser to read and write the disks, and neither is compatible with current DVDs, though NEC has demonstrated a HD-DVD drive with just one head but two lasers that will also read DVDs. Blu-Ray drives are already shipping in Japan, but some details of the standard are still being worked out. I asked several of the Blu-Ray group manufacturers when we could expect to see Blu-Ray drives in the U.S., and they indicated that it would be in 2005 or 2006. I could not get any answers as to why it should take that long, but I suspect it is a matter of them wanting to

wait until there is more HDTV to increase demand. The HD-DVD group seems to be emphasizing that pressed discs for their format could be produced on the same equipment that is used to produce current DVD discs. The current Blu-Ray discs hold about 25 GB of information, and it appears that the HD-DVD discs will be 20-30 GB depending on the type of disc. The higher capacities are needed for HDTV video, which current DVDs will not handle. Only time will tell how this plays out.

PC Cases & Cooling

Zalman <<http://www.zalmanusa.com>> was showing two interesting products for those looking for a quieter PC. The most intriguing was a completely fanless case, which uses heatpipes to cool the components by transferring the heat to the case sides, which were giant heatsinks. Even the power supply does not have a fan. However, you will have to pay for this silence. The case costs about \$1,000, and that is just the case with power supply; you still have to buy the motherboard, processor, drives, etc. If that is too steep for you, they also have a water-cooling setup that uses no fan for the radiator though there is a pump to circulate the water. The radiator is tall and cylindrical with vertical fins for convection cooling. This costs about \$250 for the water-cooling components. You have to furnish the rest of the computer.

Computer Accessories

For those who use inkjet printers, Inke Pte. Ltd. <<http://www.inke.com.sg>> has an inkjet cartridge refilling machine. You just insert your inkjet cartridge and a tank of new ink, close the device, and press a button. The unit refills your cartridge through the ink nozzle without making any new holes in the cartridge.

The whole operation only takes a few minutes with no muss, no fuss. The demo in their booth at CES was impressive. They recommend that you refill an ink cartridge no more than six times. It will, initially, only be available for certain HP printers and only for black ink cartridges. They expect to have models for other printers soon. The device is expected to be available in the U.S. in the second quarter of this year for \$50-\$70.

The FlexUSB™ device <<http://www.flexusb.com>> from Ideative, Inc. is a neat little gadget for those experiencing overcrowding in the vicinity of their USB ports. The FlexUSB plugs into your USB port and swivels right or left, up or down, to allow you to clear other devices or place your device in a more convenient orientation. This should be especially handy if you have two USB ports close together, and a device, such as a flash drive, plugged into one port is in the way to plug a device into the other port. The FlexUSB is not currently USB certified, but they say they are in the process of certifying it. I was so impressed with this product that I actually bought one. The FlexUSB is available directly from their web site or from Micro Center and other stores. It has been on CES special for \$8.99, but that special will probably have ended by the time you read this. You might also look at their QuickPinch™ cable-labeling product.

HDTV/DVR

HDTVs and DVRs (Digital Video Recorder) were two of the areas that received a lot of attention and display space at CES. The HDTVs came in all types, shapes, and sizes. There were a lot of plasma HDTVs in all sizes. The

LCD HDTVs were generally smaller and more expensive than the plasma units, but there were some there big enough for almost anybody. Almost all the LCD and plasma displays used the 16:9 aspect ratio. Then there were the rear projection HDTVs. Most of the projection units seemed to be based on either DLP or LCD technology rather than CRT technology. Thomson/RCA had some large screen rear projection 16:9 DLP HDTVs that were only 6.85 inches deep. They called this line Scenium. Some of the larger ones may not be available until later in the year. However, I thought they were impressive.

If you are going shopping for a HDTV set, do your homework and check the specifications carefully. There are a lot of things that carry the HDTV label, and some have better resolution than others. Also check the number and type of inputs and outputs. VGA and DVI inputs might be handy in case you want to connect your computer to the TV, and optical digital audio output will allow you to use a high grade audio system for the sound.

HD DVRs were another ubiquitous item at CES. These came in many flavors with most incorporating a hard disk and some adding a DVD recorder and other features. Some included a DirecTV or EchoStar satellite receiver and/or a broadcast receiver or digital cable interface. The variations of features were virtually infinite.

Audio and video distribution systems and components were also in evidence in great numbers. The audio only products were more common and used wireless, Ethernet, coax, optical cable, or powerline wiring for transmission. The video units generally

used wire or optical cable for transmission. I gathered that even 802.11g is not fast enough to transmit even the standard definition data reliably without quality degradation. HD video requires much higher bandwidth and generally used coax. Even then I think they had to degrade the quality somewhat. This is an area that is becoming more popular each year, and I expect that there will be some really impressive products in another year or two.

Pricegrabber.com

I talked to representatives of the Pricegrabber.com site <<http://www.pricegrabber.com>>, one of the better price comparison sites on the Internet, about how products got listed on their site. The vendor has to sign a contract with Pricegrabber.com, and then Pricegrabber.com gets paid every time a user clicks through from the Pricegrabber.com site to the vendor's site, whether the user buys anything or not. The vendors decide which of their products get listed on Pricegrabber.com.

Vehicles

Both Microsoft and Visteon had demonstration vehicles at CES. The Microsoft vehicle was a Hummer H2 and was fitted with a unit in the dash/center console that did a nice job of navigation (although, since the vehicle was stationary it was a bit artificial). You could tell it orally to find the next gas station, or just about anything else, and it would give you the location, brand, and directions and map to get there. You could also specify the brand of gas.

One of the Visteon vehicles had tablet PCs in the back of the seats, which could be used where they were or removed and used anywhere in the vehicle, since they communicated

wirelessly with a Windows server in the back. There was also a pad where you could place a cell phone, PDA, or other device, and it would be charged without having to be actually connected. The device had to be fitted with some internal hardware to accomplish this. The charging is done inductively, but they said that you could place a floppy disk on the pad without damaging it.

Both of these vehicles had many more features than I have described above. The Windows computers did not control any of the critical vehicle functions such as accelerator, steering, or brakes. A Windows system that was able to influence any critical vehicle function could bring a whole new meaning to the phrase “blue screen of death.”

Inhuman Computers **By Elizabeth B. Wright**

Computers have no soul, no compassion, and no desire to please. The computer is amoral (not immoral, except in the hands of some people), totally insensitive to invective or other forms of oral communication, cannot be humiliated by ridicule or strengthened by praise, and most certainly doesn't respond to human reasoning. The occasional kick only makes them more intransigent (and they break easily).

But your computer can sometimes be tricked. Since they have no sense of humor or sense of belonging, they do not understand that they can be replaced easily, usually by a superior, yet cheaper, machine. So they are not really trying to cooperate when you succeed in outsmarting them, they just honestly don't know any better.

Computers crash in ways that lead you to believe there is absolutely no way to recover any of your most valuable information. But one of the best tricks of the trade is to just “turn the d__n thing off.” Given an overnight rest, many computer crashes can be mitigated, at least for the short term, long enough to move your stored data to some other media, or even to another computer. Along with giving the machine an overnight rest, it is often advisable to unplug it from the electrical outlet after turning it off, to further enhance the rest period. I am not suggesting that this is an infallible procedure, but I personally have had it help more than once, and have talked with a lot of other people who have had similar luck.

Another trick, and this one is rather obvious, is to have more than one hard drive. Storing your important documents on both drives helps with recovery should one drive fail. Again, the computer doesn't care whether it has one hard drive or a dozen. As long as it knows the drives are there, you can pretty much do your own thing. You wouldn't necessarily have two engines in your car, but two or more hard drives is a good idea. Help is there to recover your data if one of the drives is still functioning, even if it isn't the boot drive.

Trick number three: Although the computer doesn't tell you so, it does like a cool and hopefully dust-free environment. It doesn't know it needs this, but when it decides to roll over and play dead, it is often because it is suffering from heat exhaustion. The newer the computer, the hotter it will get while it is on. Since many people now leave their machines running 24/7, the heat problem can become critical.

Internal fans are the beginning, but keeping the computer in a relatively cool part of the room is also important. Keeping it in the vicinity of the heat ducts is not a good idea. That just might cause the internal cooling equipment to not be able to handle the job adequately.

Trick number four: Dirt and other stuff (bugs for example) can get into the computer case; it doesn't hurt to have someone who knows how to do it clean out the inside of the shell. I don't advise doing this if you aren't really technically adept as those small parts are so sensitive that you could do a lot more damage than just leaving it dirty.

Trick number five: In spite of how you might think you are communicating with your computer with fancy screen icons, word commands, and pictures, the computer only knows two commands. They are "on" and "off." Most of the on/off switches are in those tiny chips, but the more you can think in terms of how little the computer actually understands, the more you can see why confusing it with conflicting programs can overwhelm its ability to function. More and more of us want to use the latest and most sophisticated programs on the market. Just be aware that each new addition can cause your computer to become unstable. PLAN AHEAD!! BACK UP YOUR WORK!!

Elizabeth Wright is a member of the OKCPCUG and a regular writer for the eMonitor. There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context with proper credit given the author. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

Steve's Rules For Writing

By Steve Bass

Pasadena IBM Users Group

[Steve Bass has long experience as a journalist and has some freewheeling suggestions for perking up your writing that are not included in most English textbooks.—Ed.]

Many of you don't enjoy writing, yet need to do it for work. So I thought I'd supply a few tips, things that will help make you sound better in letters, e-mail, and reports.

1. Talk into print: When I write, I try to take what I imagine I'd say to you and put it into words. I do it by quickly typing what I think, trying not to filter anything. (Filtering—or editing—comes later when I look over what I wrote.)

2. Write like you talk: You've probably noticed that I use lots of contractions—for instance, you'll, we've, let's. It's pretty casual and the way I speak. My guess is that many of you do the same. I can visualize Joe Bohannon saying, "well, sure, but I'm not going to do that." And that's the point—that's exactly how he sounds, and it'd sound ideal in print. Get the idea?

3. Write short sentences. I think readers have an easier time digesting short chunks of info. They'll also be more inclined to read—and understand—what you say. If you can't do it, write longer sentences, and later, when you review your work, divide the long sentences into two or three short ones.

4. Write short paragraphs: They're the toughest thing for me to plow through. One trick is to stop every five,

six, or seven sentences, take a breath, and start another paragraph.

5. Be active: For the longest time I couldn't figure out passive from active voice. Once I had it, writing became easier. If no one's taking responsibility, it's passive. "Mistakes were made" is passive. "We all made a few mistakes," is an active voice. It's almost impossible to write in the passive voice if you follow the next rule.

6. Stay first. I write from the first person. It's always my viewpoint (yeah,

I know, it's always about me). And that first person tone is the one you oughta consider using whenever you can. The reason is I can visualize you when I write, and you can see me while you're reading.

Steve Bass is a Contributing Editor with PC World. He's also a founding member of APCUG. Check PCW's current edition at www.pcworld.com/resource/toc/index.asp and sign up for the Steve Bass online newsletter at www.pcworld.com/bass_letter.



Letter From The Editor

While watching TV football over the holidays my son and I puzzled over how they draw the yellow "first down" line on the screen so that it appears painted on the grass under the players. A little Googling turned up the answer at www.sportsvision.com. That is the company that developed and patented the "1st and 10 marker." It wasn't easy.

It takes 8 computers, three sets of encoders, lots of wiring, and 4 technicians. One technician is in the stadium in communication with a computer operator outside; their job is to communicate where the real line should be. A 3D model creates a virtual football field before the game, and this virtual field is synchronized with the 3 play-by-play cameras that relay their tilt, pan, zoom, focus, and extender 30 times per second to the central computer in Sportvision's broadcast truck.

The central computer examines each video frame and decides which pixels to turn yellow. There is a color palette for the field (mostly green and white) and a color palette for the action on the field (all other colors). The computer turns all green and white pixels in the line position to yellow except those pixels that come from the action color palette. This makes the virtual line visible wherever a player or referee is not over it. All this takes time, so there is two-thirds of a second delay in the broadcast, which doesn't seem to bother the fans.

Sportvision is also the developer of the tracking hockey pucks (which was annoying to fans) and the "strike zone" in baseball. In NASCAR races, using GPS, they attach virtual flags to individual cars, showing who is driving, speed, acceleration, braking, and position relative to the leader. There are also analytic aids for golf, tennis, and "jump height" in basketball and aerial skiing in the Olympics.

Aren't computers amazing!

Bill

SEMCO ELECTION RESULTS

The January vote for SEMCO Officers was as follows (winners in bold):

President:

Gary DeNise 27

Vice President:

Richard Jackson 17

Phil Charns 10

Secretary:

Carol Sanzi 28

Treasurer:

Roger Gay 28

Members at Large of the Board:

Bob Clyne 20

Chuck Moery 13

Betty MacKenzie 12

Chester Blechinger 9



BOARD MEETING

1/11/04

Carol Sanzi

Board Members Present

President Gary DeNise, Treasurer Roger Gay, Secretary Carol Sanzi, SIG-Advanced Chairman Franz Breidenich, SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow, Warner Mach representing SIG-IBM Intermediate Chairman Jack Vander-Schrier, Publications Committee Chairman Bill Agnew, and Member at Large Chuck Moery. The meeting was called to order at 12:08 p.m.

Old Business

Treasurer Roger Gay reported that the bank balance is \$5872.58. SEMCO's membership is at 85 with renewals due from Gary Grzebienik, Robert J. Hoffmann, Arthur L. Laramie, Carol Sanzi, Jack Vander-Schrier, and Leo H. Voelkle.

Tom Callow moved to reimburse Warner Mach \$7.10 for refreshments. Franz Breidenich seconded the motion, and it was carried.

Roger Gay reported that it is time for the audit. Gary DeNise will seek volunteers to make up the audit committee at the General Meeting.

New Business

After an investigation of which organizations reciprocate with copies of their publications, Bill Agnew reported that the Amateur Computer Group of New Jersey was the only group not reciprocating publications. Roger Gay moved to drop them from our DATA BUS mailing list. Tom Callow seconded the motion, and it was carried.

Tom Callow reported that the SEMCO Volunteer Party will be hosted by Beth Fordyce on January 17, 2004.

Roger Gay reported that Bob Clyne's printer, used to print the DATA BUS, needed a feed mechanism replaced at a cost of \$587.40. Since 80% of this printer's time is used for SEMCO purposes, Chuck Moery moved to reimburse Bob Clyne \$470 for such expenditures. Tom Callow seconded the motion, and it was carried.

Roger Gay reported that mailing tabs are available that would expedite the DATA BUS mailings. Tom Callow moved to purchase such tabs for \$20. Franz Breidenich seconded the motion, and it was carried.

Tom Callow moved to adjourn. Chuck Moery seconded the motion, and it was carried. The meeting adjourned at 12:43 p.m.



GENERAL MEETING

1/11/04

Carol Sanzi

President Gary DeNise asked for volunteers for the audit committee. Jerry Comptois, Mort Stocker, and Dick Gach volunteered. It was recommended that Bob Clyne also join this committee.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGs)



SIG-IBM
Tom Callow
Warner Mach



Feb. 8: Networking Without Wires: SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow will demonstrate setting up a wireless network for your home and discuss the latest advances in wireless networking.



January Meeting Attendance: 39
(3 asleep)

TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS

Beth Fordyce is accepting Macintosh computers, components, peripherals, manuals, and software (working or broken) for St. Gerard School PreK–8th grade, 175-200 students for computer science classes.

Contact Beth
734/453-0349 10am–10pm or
bfordyce@sbcglobal.net

You may also contact the school
W-Th-F, 1-4 pm: Maurice Roberts
19900 Evergreen, Detroit
(Just south of 8 Mile Road)
313/533-4353



SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE
Jack Vander-Schrier

Feb. 8: General Q & A: SIG-IBM Intermediate Chairman Jack Vander-Schrier will conduct a general question and answer session about your computer, Windows XP, and the Internet.

NOVICE-IBM GROUP Rotating Volunteer Hosts

Feb. 8: Q&A: Discussion directed by the Audience.



SIG-ADVANCED
Franz Breidenich

Mar. 1: 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.**

March 2004 DATA BUS DEADLINE (7th day after meeting)

SEMCO Input and Members' Ads — Deadline: Sun, Feb. 15, 11:59pm.

Members' personal ads are free. To mail, use Editor address on Page 2; e-mail address: [<agnew@bignet.net>](mailto:agnew@bignet.net). PLEASE send to arrive sooner than deadline.

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)

Feb. 28–Saturday, 10am-noon (4th Saturday); W. Bloomfield Twp. Library, 4600 Walnut Lake Rd., 1 mile west of Orchard Lk Rd., Info: Jack Lockman at thunder@tir.com or 313-341-8855.

COMP (Computer Operators of Marysville & Port Huron)

Mar. 3–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: Search Engines & Phraseology for Searches.

DCOM Computer Club

Feb. 13–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)

Feb. 12–Thursday, 7pm (2nd Thursday); Kelly Services Building, 999 West Big Beaver, corner Crooks & Big Beaver Rds, Troy, MI. <http://www.dpug.org>. **Free membership.**

FACE (Flint Area Computer Enthusiasts)

Feb. 10–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

Feb.15–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: My Favorite Utilities.

MacTechnics, (MAC User Group)

Feb. 21–Saturday, (3rd Saturday); 11:00am main meeting (SIGs at 9:30); Mack Open School, 920 Miller Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48103. <http://www.mactechnics.org>. Info: Cassie at cassiemic@yahoo.com or 313-971-8743.

MCUG (Michigan Computer Users Group)

Feb. 19–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

Feb. 12–(2nd Thur), MAC SIG; Feb. 12–(2nd Thur), Golden Masters SIG; Feb. 19–(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)

Mar. 2–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.)

Feb. 12–(2nd Thursday), 6:30-9:00pm; Zauel Library, Shattuck & Center Rds., Saginaw. Web: <http://www.svca.org>.

Wayne State U. Mac User Group

Feb. 14–(2nd Saturday), 10:00am-Noon (2nd Saturday); at Mich.com, 21042 Laurelwood, Farmington. Info: Lorn/JoAnn Olsen 248/478-4300 or Denny McLampy 248-477-0190.

**SPECIAL
MEMBER BENEFIT**

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Contact SEMCO member John Lodden or Customer Service <service@telesthetic.com> or 1-800-807-4515.

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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

AutoCAD: Comptois, Gay

Genealogy: Cook

IBM PC Hardware Issues: Clyne, Gay, Yuhasz

Operating Systems: Callow, Clyne, Yuhasz

MAC Hardware and OS Issues: Yuhasz

MS Office for Windows: Callow

MS Word: Clyne

Networking: Callow

Novell Netware: Yuhasz

Quicken: Clyne, Gay

Geocaching: Cook

- Clyne, Bob—810-387-3101, 9am-10pm clyne@lodden.com
- Callow, Tom—248-642-1920 9am-5pm tcallow@vmdllaw.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

**JANUARY
REFRESHMENT
DONORS**

Warner Mach, Coordinator
Betty MacKenzie
Roland Maki
Tom Callow
Carol Sanzi
Chuck Moery

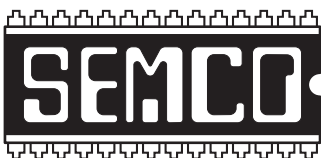
Your **SEMCO** membership card is good for a **\$1 discount** (not valid with any other offer) on admission to

A1-Super Computer Sales shows. See

www.a1-supercomputersales.com

or www.a1scs.com

for show schedule.



SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN
COMPUTER ORGANIZATION, INC.

SEMCO CALENDAR—February/March

**SCIENCE & ENGINEERING BUILDING, OAKLAND UNIVERSITY,
ROCHESTER, MICHIGAN**

FEBRUARY 8—SUNDAY (Meet 2nd Sunday)

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

SEMCO General Meeting at 1:30 pm, **Room 164**.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

SIG-IBM 1:45 pm, **Room 164**. **Program: Networking Without Wires:** SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow will demonstrate setting up a wireless network for your home and discuss the latest advances in wireless networking.

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: General Q & A:** SIG-IBM Intermediate Chairman Jack Vander-Schrier will conduct a general question and answer session about your computer, Windows XP, and the Internet.

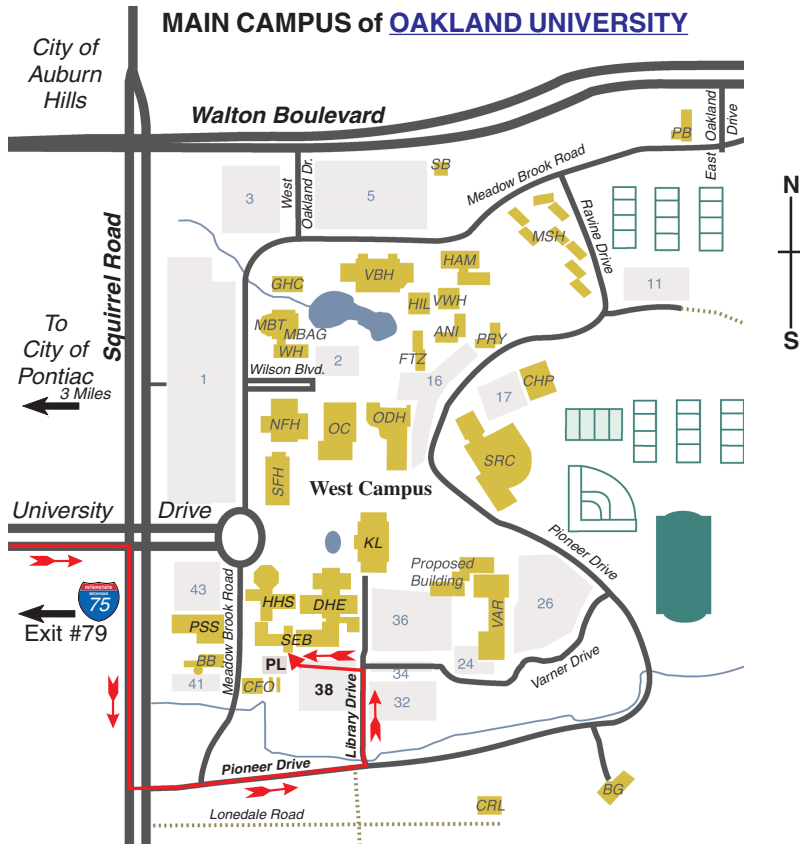
Mar. 1—MONDAY, 6:45 pm (Meets first Monday), SIG-ADVANCED Oak Park Public Library, 14200 Oak Park Blvd., Oak Park, MI. Phone: (248) 691-7480. Directions: Oak Park Blvd. is 9 1/2 mile Road, located west of Coolidge. Best route from freeway: take I-696 to the Coolidge exit. Head south on Coolidge for 1/2 mile to Oak Park Blvd., and turn right. Info: Franz Breidenich 248-398-3359. **TOPIC: Wide-Ranging Discussion Of Computers & Computing.**

Mar.14—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)



MAP LEGEND

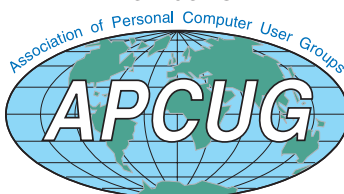
- SEB** Science and Engineering Building
- DHE** Dodge Hall of Engineering
- KL** Kresge Library

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.

**SouthEastern Michigan
Computer Organization, Inc.
P.O. Box 707
Bloomfield Hills, MI 48303-0707**

**SEMCO (future meetings)
February 8
March 14**

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