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SEMCO OFFICERS

President	Gary DeNise	(248) 634-7514
Vice President	Richard Jackson	(248) 546-3694
Secretary	Carol Sanzi	(586) 739-7256
Treasurer	Chester Blechinger	(248) 338-2653
Members at Large of the Board of Directors		
	Bob Clyne	(810) 387-3101
	Chuck Moery	keypounder2@aol.com

NEWSLETTER STAFF

Publications Committee Chair	Bill Agnew	(586) 752-2227
Editor	Bill Agnew	(586) 752-2227
Associate Editor	Bob Clyne	(810) 387-3101
Publisher	Phil "Vic" Charns	(248) 398-4465

SIG (SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP) CHAIRPERSONS

SIG-IBM: CoChairman	Tom Callow	(248) 642-1920 (9-5)
CoChairman	Warner Mach	(313) 326-0733
SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE	Chairmanship Open	
NOVICE-IBM GROUP	Rotating Hosts	
SIG-ADVANCED	Franz Breidenich	(248) 398-3359

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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**

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SEMCO MEETINGS

**Sunday,
May 8, 2005**

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 Cheap skate" Click

Trade Shows

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

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

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

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

Next morning my wife was up before I was, and when I finally did get up, she sheepishly explained that she had washed my shirt without emptying

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

Deals

The Password Vault software for \$15 is still good from Gene Barlow <<http://www.usergroupstore.com>>.

The Bundle Is Back

I received a message from Colleen Toumayan at Executive Software telling me that their bundle pricing is back. If you want to improve your disk defragging and undelete software, here is another chance to save some money on these great products. I have not tried the Home Versions, but their products I tried in the past were impressive. The bundle contains Diskeeper 9, Home Edition, and Undelete 5, Home Edition, for \$39.95 (Download only) To get it, the URL is <<http://consumer.execsoft.com/purchase/purchase.asp?RId=50>>.

Put Your DVD Burner To Work

Here are two products that will help preserve your videotaped memories. They are "CameraMate VideoSafe" and

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

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

They sent me the products to try, but I was up against my deadline, and a friend gave it a quick try. He had a few minor problems, but after tweaking some settings in his Windows operating system, he said it worked fine. He had no problems with the installation. It works with Windows 98SE/Me/2000/XP.

However I didn't have time for some more extensive tests on his part. Video resolution is 720 x 480 for NTSC (the American TV standard). Their URL for more information is <<http://www.easiestvideoever.com>>.

Announcement for Active Screen Lock (Edited)

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

Best regards,

Michael McCarthy

pr@dmvsoft.com

February 8, 2005

"For Immediate Release

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

"When ActiveScreenLock is activated (either by clicking a tray icon or pressing a combination of designated hotkeys), the PC becomes inaccessible. Whenever anybody tries to do anything with the locked computer, the program displays a password-protected window

placed on top of all the others. In order to remove it, a correct password needs to be entered. Key combinations Alt+F4, Ctrl+Alt+Del, Alt+Tab, and WinKey are blocked.

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

"ActiveScreenLock has received dozens of awards, including Editor's Choice at TopShareware and FileHeaven, and 5-star rating at Softpicks, Shareup, FileTransit, SmartDownloads, and UKwares. A free demo version is available at <<http://www.dmvsoft.com/>> for evaluation (30-day free trial period). The price of a single copy is \$25 US Dollars. Registration removes all time limitations and nag screens, gives you free unlimited support, and entitles you to free upgrades and new version updates.

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

System Requirements:

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

Company Website:

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

Product Page:

<http://www.dmvsoft.com/a_screenlock.htm>.

Download:

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

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

Buy Link:

<<http://www.dmvsoft.com/order.htm>>."

That's it for this month. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheap skate) Click <bobclick@mindspring.com>. Visit my Web site at <<http://www.dealsguy.com>>.

Digital Camera Scene Modes - What Are All Those Symbols For? By Larry Horn

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- **Macro:** You would use this setting to take close-up pictures, say a portrait or flowers.

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

I suggest that you pick up a good book on basic photography when you get your camera. Even with the camera’s help, good pictures require the picture taker to understand the basic principles of photography and graphic composition. Digital or Film, it is still photography.

Additional suggestions:

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

- Kodak is an example. Go to <http://www.kodak.com>, then click on the Taking Great Pictures box.

- Olympus also has lessons, which are more geared toward their cameras for examples, but they are still informative. Look for them at <http://olympusdigitalschool.com/photo_lessons/index.html>.

- I like a monthly magazine called PC Photo. Check it at <<http://www.pcphotomag.com>>.

- PC World Magazine <<http://pcworld.com>> has newsletters that are very informative. They can be seen at <<http://www.pcworld.com/resource/newsletters>>.

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

Larry Horn is Editor & Review Coordinator for the PC Users Group of New Jersey <www.pcugsj.org>. Contact him at <pcugsj@comcast.net>.

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Tip: NyQuil costs \$178/gal.; Pepto-Bismol \$123/gal.; Gatorade \$10.19/gal.; Evian Water (naive spelled backward) \$21.19/gal. Gasoline doesn't sound so bad at \$2.19/gal.

“Phishing” More Common As It Gets Nastier

By Ira Wilsker

Today in my e-mail, I received a notice from eBay Security that my account had been suspended because of suspicious activity. In order to reactivate my account, I had to click on the eBay Security link in the e-mail, and reenter my personal data. The link took me to an eBay website that looked authentic, and asked me to enter my username and password. After entering that information, I was asked to enter a lot of personal information, including full name, address, telephone, e-mail address used for the PayPal electronic payments system, PayPal password, social security number, mother's maiden name, driver's license number and state, date of birth, credit or debit card number and security code, checking account number, PIN, bank name, and bank routing number. Since the site looks authentic, and in my unpatched version of Internet Explorer, the URL (internet address) in the address bar says “<http://www.ebay.com/security>,” it must really be authentic, so there is no risk in entering the information.

Unfortunately, this is but one of the thousands of different “Phishing” attempts currently circulating around the internet, with 750 to 1000 new scams appearing every week (source: <www.antiphishing.org>). It is not unusual for millions of each of these frauds to be e-mailed. If I would have fallen for this trick, and entered all of my personal data, I would have likely ended up as one of the millions of

Verification Required To Avoid Account Suspension.

Due to recent activity, we will suspend any activity on your account in order to allow us to investigate this matter further. If you believe that this action may be taken in error, please provide additional information and we will work with you to resolve this issue.

To avoid account suspension you must go to the link below and provide required information:

<https://signin.ebay.com/aw-cq/eBayISAPI.dll?VerifyIdentity&ssPageName>

Please save this fraud alert ID for your reference

Please Note - If you received this notice and you are not the authorized account holder, please be aware that it is in violation of eBay policy to represent oneself as another eBay user. Such action may also be in violation of local, national, and/or international law. eBay is committed to assist law enforcement with any inquiries related to attempts to misappropriate personal information with the intent to commit fraud or theft. Information will be provided at the request of law enforcement agencies to ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Do not respond to this email, as your reply will not be received.

We appreciate your support and understanding, as we work together to keep eBay a safe place to trade.

Thank you for your patience in this matter.

Respectfully,
Trust and Safety Department
eBay Inc.

victims of identity theft, and had my bank account emptied, my credit card charged to its limit, items purchased in my name on eBay and charged to my PayPal account; and a host of other nasty things would have likely happened to me. According to a recent report by the Federal Trade Commission, about 12% of the victims of identity theft last year, or over one million people, fell victim to this type of fraud. This phishing is a form of “human engineering” where a startling e-mail causes the victim to enter his own information such that the crook can capitalize on it.

In today’s eBay e-mail (above), be assured that it did not come from eBay, even though the reply address appeared to be a legitimate eBay address and the URL in the e-mail also appeared authentic. Fortunately, I knew better, and did not fall for this scam. I mostly use Firefox for my browser, and it showed the real URL as an IP address (a series of numbers such as 213.213.192.44), rather than an unpatched Internet Explorer, which would have shown the spoofed address of eBay. Some time ago Microsoft

released an Internet Explorer patch to show the real address, rather than the spoofed URL, but many users have never installed that patch. I did run a quick forensic analysis on the e-mail and found that it did not come from eBay in California, but instead came from Africa, probably Nigeria, a country rampant as a home for many of these scams. Other countries commonly hosting phishing scams are Korea, Pakistan, China, Russia, and other countries in the mid-east, as well as several eastern European countries. It is likely that any money lost to such scams will never be recovered. In 2002, according to the FTC, over \$47 billion was lost to identity theft of all types in the United States.

Phishing attacks typically arrive in an e-mail appearing to be from a financial service company, retailer, popular internet site, or some other source of mass appeal. The “Anti-Phishing Working Group” <<http://www.antiphishing.org>>, Trend Micro <<http://www.trendmicro.com>>, and other security related websites are now compiling information on phishing attacks in order to warn users about

the threats.

Some of the more widespread recent attacks were:

Wells Fargo Bank, Debit Card Theft; Washington Mutual Bank; CharterOne Bank, "Restore Your Account Access;" Regions Bank, "Please Verify Your E-Mail Address;" Bank of the West; Earthlink, "Important Information Regarding Your Account;" Yahoo, "Your Bank Card Linking To @yahoo.com;" Washington Mutual, "WARNING: CONFIRM YOUR ONLINE BANKING RECORDS;" MSN, "Members Support;" Visa, "Notice from Visa" and "Enroll your card with verified by Visa program;" AOL, "Verify your account;" and many others. Other recent attacks targeted PayPal users, BestBuy credit card holders, E-Gold and E-Bullion online payment services, and other such institutions.

Another similar form of identity theft is not dependent on clicking on an e-mail link, but accomplished by means of a spyware program of the key logging type that captures keystrokes, such as account numbers and passwords, and sends that information to persons unknown. Antivirus software and firewalls may not stop this form of attack, but most good anti-spyware products will detect and kill key loggers.

One of the newest types of this scam does not e-mail links or key loggers, but may be much more nefarious. A new type of attack, "DNS Poisoning" actually attacks the DNS, or "Domain Name Server" that converts the typed name, such as the bank name, to the IP address used by internet servers. If the DNS is poisoned, typing the legitimate name of the bank, for example, will connect to the fraud site rather than the

legitimate website. That is scary because the user will likely never know that this happened until it is too late.

BE ADVISED that financial service companies, retailers, and other legitimate companies will never ask for personal information via an e-mail. When in doubt, contact the company directly by its 800 number (NOT an 800 number listed in the scam e-mail), and inquire about the e-mail.

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. He can be reached at <iwilsker@ih2000.net>.

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RSS Feeds

By Greg Lenihan

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

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

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

I started by going to http://reviews.cnet.com/4520-10088_7-5143460.html to read reviews and to gather recommendations. I found more options and more reviews of readers at http://email.about.com/cs/rssfeedreaders/tp/top_rss_windows.htm. There are many different readers; some free, some not, with different goals. Some are standalone, others work with Internet Explorer, and one worked with Outlook. But the one that caught my eye was free and did not require a software

installation. Bloglines <http://www.bloglines.com> is Web-based, which means I can access it from any computer with an Internet connection. I could be at home, at work, on the road, and I could still get my info fix.

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

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

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

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Browser Doohickeys, Doodads, & Gizmos

By Vinny La Bash

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

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

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

Web. You can search, spell-check, block pop-ups, even turn UPS tracking numbers into web links.

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

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

For Google's entire bag of goodies, direct your browser to [<http://www.google.com>](http://www.google.com), and then click on the "more" button. You may need to scroll down the list of other tools to get to it. When you're finished, make a trip to [<http://labs.google.com>](http://labs.google.com) and enjoy the feast. This is Google's technology sandbox. These are prototype projects Google is currently working on, meaning they are not quite finished yet. Even if you're not particularly adventurous, try the new Map feature. You may be so impressed you'll never use Mapquest again.

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

“must have” tool. Get it at <http://www.netsnippts.com>.

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

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

In Windows, Pluck is the most popular RSS add-on. It’s easily downloaded from <http://www.pluck.com>.

If you’re still using the basic plain vanilla browser, try at least one of these tools to boost your web experiences.

Copyright 2005. This article is from the April 2005 issue of the Sarasota PC Monitor, the official monthly publication of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.,

Vinny La Bash can be reached at vlabash@home.com.

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.

An Examination Of Google’s Gmail

By Richard Johnson

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

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

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

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

Spam control

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

Should You Switch?

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

- if you find Web-based e-mail just too slow,

- if you want pictures on your incoming messages, and don’t want to have to bother with Gmail’s one-click instruction (to include graphics) for each such message,

- if you need to be able to compose messages in HTML,

- if you don’t want to have to periodically check the spam folder for legitimate mail or bounced messages,

- if you prefer to read in your inbox all incoming mail, even mail that might be spam, or

- if you’re happy with what you have, and feel it’s not worth the trouble to notify folks of your new address.

You *should* consider switching to Gmail:

- if you’d rather not fuss with setting up folders for messages that you’ve read and want to keep, but still want to be able to retrieve such messages speedily,

- if you like Web-based e-mail such as Yahoo Mail or Hotmail, but are fed

up with the banner ads and popups you encounter,

- if you don’t want to have to decide which incoming messages to keep and which to delete,

- if you’ve ever wanted to view an old incoming message only to realize that you’d permanently deleted it,

- if you presently use a disk-based system like Outlook or Outlook Express, and don’t want the hassle of backing up your messages to protect against their loss in a disk crash,

- if you find your present e-mail filtering scheme too complicated, or

- if you like the idea of grouping related messages in “conversations,” for easier reference.

Gmail Compared to Outlook Express

Nearly all new Windows computers come bundled with Microsoft’s Outlook Express. This fact may explain the overwhelming preponderance of that program among users. Both Gmail and Outlook Express are free. But there are still various reasons for choosing one over the other.

Storage

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

One minus with a Web-based system is that the provider’s server will accommodate only a limited amount of storage—typically much less than will

easily fit on a user's hard drive. So the user may find older messages simply *gone*. This distinction is *turned around* by Gmail—which allows a gigabyte of storage, and in fact discourages the user from deleting *any* messages.

Filing

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

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

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

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

Spam Diversion

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

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

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

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

Further Considerations

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

Gmail out of the box will not notify you when you have a new message. Keeping your Gmail window open won't tell you anything unless you

refresh the page. And even with a fast connection, refreshing can be tediously slow. You can download the Gmail Notifier, but only if you use Windows 2000 or XP (or a later Windows version).

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

Richard Johnson is a member of TUGNET <www.tugnet.org>. Contact him at <theskillspool@dslexreme.com>.

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Tech News

By Sue Crane

Molecular Computer

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

puzzle for building a molecular computer," said Phil Kuekes, senior computer architect and primary inventor at HP's Quantum Science Research (QSR) unit.

New Laser Chip

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

Faster Hard Drives

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

A Cell Phone Could Infect your Car!

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

Bringing Sight to the Blind

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

Edible Origami by Canon?

The Canon i560 inkjet printer doesn't just print menus at the Moto restaurant

in Chicago; it prints menus you can eat. Homaru Cantu, the executive chef, prints menus onto edible starch-based paper. Instead of using the typical CMYK inks—cyan, magenta, yellow, and black—Cantu has filled the cartridges with edible solutions. Think SSBS: sweet, sour, bitter, and salty. Cantu uses combinations of these four liquids on the edible paper to create dishes unlikely to be found anywhere else, such as “baked map of Alaska” and a type of maki sushi that he wraps in flavored paper bearing images of sushi, instead of seaweed.

Antispam Tools Initiate New HIV Vaccines

At the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections in Boston,



Letter From The Editor

On June 11-13 the Intelligent Ground Vehicle Competition will be held again at the Grand Traverse Resort near Traverse City, Michigan. This is the 13th annual competition for college engineering students, and involves small (golfcart size or smaller) vehicles that are controlled autonomously by onboard computers. The vehicles have to follow the white lane markers of an obstacle course over a bridge and through a sand pit, while avoiding construction barrels and other obstacles, all without any human intervention. They also have to find nine waypoints in a one acre unmarked field, using GPS and knowing only the latitudes and longitudes, while again circumventing obstacles.

Oral presentations are made of their design reports on Saturday and Sunday, and the performance events are on Monday. Sunday evening is a pizza party for which the University of Cincinnati students have offered a robotic pizza that delivers itself. Over 35 teams are expected to participate this year.

The public is invited to watch the show and see all the technology at work in the pit area.



Come out and enjoy the fun. I'll be there.

Bill

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

Microsoft Authentication Changes Again

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

Sue Crane is VP/Editor of Bearly Bytes at the Big Bear Computer Club in Big Bear Lake, California <www.bigbearcc.org>. You can reach her at <sue.crane@charter.net>.

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BOARD MEETING

4/10/05

Carol Sanzi

Board Members Present

President Gary DeNise, Secretary Carol Sanzi, SIG-Advanced Chairman Franz Breidenich, SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow, Warner Mach representing SIG-IBM Intermediate Chairman Jack Vander-Schrier, and Members at Large, Bob Clyne and Chuck Moery. Arriving late were Vice President Richard Jackson and Treasurer Chester Blechinger. Also attending was member John Lodden. The meeting was called to order at 12:06 p.m.

Old Business

Bob Clyne reported that SEMCO may continue using the facilities at Oakland University with the projector charge remaining at \$600. There may be a network ID charge, but that is undetermined at this time.

Treasurer Chester Blechinger stated that the balance on hand is \$6315.74. The membership stands at 83. It is time for Thomas Million and Randy Mims to renew their memberships. Tom Callow moved to reimburse Warner Mach \$11.30 for refreshments. Bob Clyne seconded the motion, and it was carried.

New Business

Bob Clyne received an e-mail from Creative Technology in Florida. They appear to be able to print and mail the DATA BUS at a rate less than SEMCO is now paying. After further investigation, a decision will be made whether to try their services.

Warner Mach moved to adjourn. Carol Sanzi seconded the motion, and it was carried. The meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGS)



SIG-IBM
Tom Callow
Warner Mach



SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE
Tom Callow
Interim Chairman

May 8: All-In-One Machines: SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow will demonstrate and discuss devices that combine the functions of printers, scanners, and fax machines into a single device.



Don't worry! SEMCO is here to help you.

May 8: SIG-Intermediate: Making The Most Of Your New (or not-so-new) Computer: Tom Callow will discuss what you need to know to get your computer up and running quickly and effectively, with tricks and tips on setup, backup, and customization of your new computer.

NOVICE-IBM GROUP Rotating Volunteer Hosts

May 8: Help And Q & A: Discussion directed by the audience.



SIG-ADVANCED
Franz Breidenich

June 6: (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.

April Meeting Attendance: 28

June 2005 DATA BUS DEADLINE (7th day after meeting)

SEMCO Input and Members' Ads — Deadline: Sun., May 15, 11:59 p.m.

Members' personal ads are free. To mail, use [Editor address on Page 2](#); e-mail address: agnew@big.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 \(address Page 2\)](#).

AAIICI (American Association of Individual Investors, Computerized Investors)

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

COMP (Computer Operators of Marysville & Port Huron)

June 1–Wednesday, 7pm (1st Wednesday); Rm 201, Clara E. Mackenzie Library-Science Bldg, St. Clair Community College, 323 Erie St., Port Huron. Jane Wheatly 810-982-1187. Web: <<http://www.bwcomp.org>>. Topic: Mark Repp Tips & Tricks.

DCOM Computer Club

May 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)

May 12–Thursday, 7pm (2nd Thursday); Kelly Services Bldg, 999 West Big Beaver, corner Crooks & Big Beaver, Troy. <<http://www.dpug.org>>.

FACE (Flint Area Computer Enthusiasts)

May 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

May 15–Sunday, 3pm–5pm (3rd or 4th Sunday); Holiday Inn Fairlane-Dearborn, Southfield Service Drive at Ford Road. Info: Terry White, <terry@macgroup.org> or 313-571-9817. <<http://www.macgroup.org>>. Topic: Mac OS X Tiger.

MacTechnics, (MAC User Group)

May 21–Saturday (3rd Saturday); 11:00 am main meeting (SIGs at 9:30); Ann Arbor Open School, 920 Miller Ave., Ann Arbor. <<http://www.mactechnics.org>>. Cassie at <cassiemac@yahoo.com> or 313-971-8743. Topic: Mac OS X Tiger (Preview or Not?).

Michigan Apple Computer User Group

May 12–(2nd Thur) 7:30pm, General meeting; Frat. Order of Eagles Hall in Clawson, 174 Bowers St. (one block North of 14-Mile and one block East of Main). Avi Drissman 248-232-7865. Web: <<http://www.themichiganapple.com>>. Topic: Demo of AppleWorks 6.

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)

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

SVCA (Saginaw Valley Computer Assoc.)

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

Wayne State U. Mac User Group

May 14–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.

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shows. See

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or www.a1scs.com

for show schedule.

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 Network: Yuhasz

Quicken: Clyne, Gay

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 scCook48227@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



SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN
COMPUTER ORGANIZATION, INC.

SEMCO CALENDAR—May/June
ELLIOTT HALL, OAKLAND UNIVERSITY
ROCHESTER, MICHIGAN

May 8—SUNDAY (Meet 2nd Sunday)

SEMCO Board Meeting at 12:00 noon, **Room 235**. For Officers and SIG Chairpersons. Other members are invited to attend.

SEMCO General Meeting at 1:30 pm, **Room 235**.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

SIG-IBM 1:45 pm, **Room 235**. **Program: All-In-One Machines:** SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow will demonstrate and discuss devices that combine the functions of printers, scanners, and fax machines into a single device.

SOCIAL PERIOD 3:15 pm, **Room 209, Student Lounge**. Refreshments! (Reminder: We must maintain a neat environment.)

NOVICE-IBM GROUP 3:45 pm, **Room 214**. **Program: Help From An Expert With Discussion Directed By The Audience.**

SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE 3:45 pm, **Room 235**. **Program: Making The Most Of Your New (or not-so-new) Computer:** Tom Callow will discuss what you need to know to get your computer up and running quickly and effectively, with tricks and tips on setup, backup, and customization of your new computer.

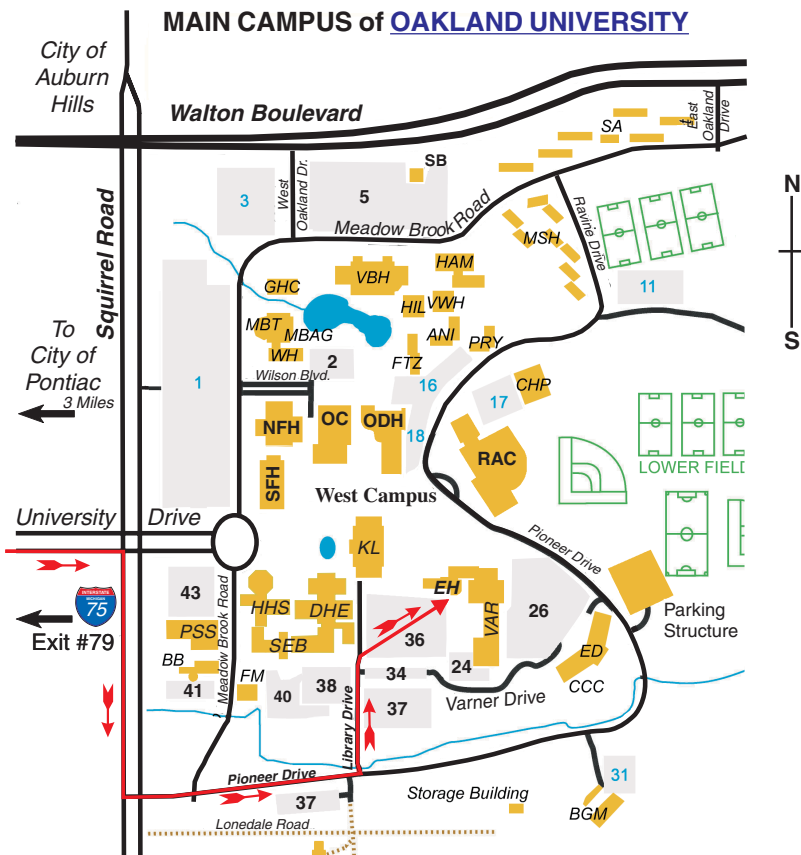
SIG-ADVANCED, **June 6—MONDAY, 6:45 pm**, Oak Park Public Library, 14200 Oak Park Blvd., Oak Park, MI. Phone: (248) 691-7480. Directions: Oak Park Blvd. is 9 1/2 mile Road, located west of Coolidge. Best route from freeway: take I-696 to the Coolidge exit. Head south on Coolidge for 1/2 mile to Oak Park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

June 12—SUNDAY (Meet 2nd Sunday). **SEMCO**, 1:30 pm. **Topics: To Be Announced.**

<http://www.semco.org>

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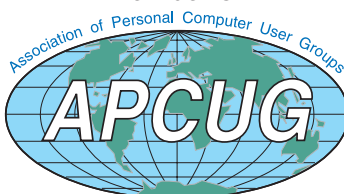
MAP LEGEND

- EH Elliott Hall
- VAR Varner Hall
- DHE Dodge Hall of Engineering
- KL Kresge Library

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 that 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. When you get to parking lot 36, proceed to the far (northeast) corner of the parking lot. After parking, go into the nearest entrance. Follow the "SEMCO" signs.

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
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SEMCO (future meetings)

May 8

June 12

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