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DATA BUS

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

It was with sadness that I read the final issue of Blue Chip News, newsletter of the Saginaw Valley Computer Organization <<http://www.svca.org>>. Describing the end must have been tough for their long time editor Lynn Kauer to write since he has long been one of the faithful for the benefit of the members. I thought I even detected a tearstain on that page. The final bell rang when four long time volunteers moved away and nobody would step forward to replace any of them, and the same problem for some other long time volunteers who wanted to relax for a while. With too few members willing to help with the work, it became necessary to determine the group's future, and only 13 members bothered to show up for the final meeting. I feel that the no-shows were actually the real losers. Two SIGs will continue to run independently. I hope the members who couldn't find the time realize the error of their ways and revive the group. I had occasion to visit that group several years ago and it was a fun night. My meeting badge still hangs in my office; my name written on a 5 1/4" floppy.

This is not the first user group to shut down recently for the same reason, and the abundance of free-riders assures that it won't be the last. Some groups are still doing well even though they also have some long time workers who cannot get replaced. I have long heard the refrain about the Internet replacing user groups because it has every thing a computer user needs to know, but I don't buy that statement. Nobody from

the Internet is going to stand in front of you trying to explain something so you can better understand it, and answer your questions in the process. Nor will anybody from the Internet stop by and help fix your problem computer for free. Yes, there are some people who could read the answers on a Web page and know exactly what to do, but I am not one of them and many other people are not that capable either without friends to help. Most important though, the friendship and camaraderie of a user group is irreplaceable.

I know my opinion will be mostly ignored because freeloader members are what they are, but that type of member should think about all the answers and information they get at a meeting or presentation, and consider giving back instead of just taking. Try it, you might enjoy it, and there are lots of ways to give back.

Be Aware!

I now use mostly new product announcements and have not tried any of them. These are their own words, but I have severely edited them to fit, and reworded a few places, so do check for better information on their Web sites. Hopefully you already knew that. Check for policy statements.

New Dictionary For Pocket PC

LingvoSoft has released the new LingvoSoft Dictionary 2007 for Pocket PC. The latest dictionaries are available to provide instant bi-directional translations between English and French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Turkish and Russian, and are faster than before. The 2007 dictionaries are fully compatible with the most popular MS Office application letting users translate any word found in an Internet Explorer webpage. Speaking versions speak

their translations aloud using the most sophisticated TTS (text-to-speech) technology available. A synonym search and full usage information for every translation that includes part of the speech, gender, comment, transcription and sentence examples rounds out the improvements.

User group members get a 25% discount on any LingvoSoft software title at <<http://www.lingvosoft.com>>.. Simply enter certificate code “MY8UZPF7M4” in the ‘Add Gift’ field of the shopping cart and click the “Add Gift” button. (Deal good until March 2007)

Find out more about the new and improved LingvoSoft Dictionary 2007 for Pocket PC here:<<http://www.lingvosoft.com/info/software/Pocket-2007/?refid=16179>>

LingvoSoft Dictionary 2007 is a core component of a complete language solution called LingvoSoft Suite <<http://www.lingvosoft.com/info/software/Suites/?refid=16179>>. <<http://www.lingvosoft.com/?refid=16179>>.

A New CD/DVD Label Maker

Acoustica Inc. has released Acoustica CD/DVD Label Maker Version 3.x, which now supports LightScribe Direct Disk Technology™. LightScribe Direct Disc Labeling is a new technology that offers users a simple, no-hassle way to burn professional, silkscreen-quality labels on their CDs and DVDs. Using the same laser that burns data in their disc drives, users burn their data as always, flip the disc over, reinsert it into the drive and burn a precise, iridescent label with their desired text and graphics using the same laser that burns the data. No printer, permanent marker or adhesive labeling is required.

Acoustica CD Label Maker can automatically import track information directly from iTunes play lists, or from dozens of play list file types, can import track information from CD-Text, FreeDB, and MusicBrainz, and can directly read track/file information from MP3 or data CDs and DVDs. Its auto-track formatting allows you to format your tracks layout in a variety of styles, including circular and spiral text, with a single click. You can also hide and show specific tracks fields (title, artist, genre, etc.) or hide/show tracks listings altogether with a single button click or menu selection. It prints on over 500 stock sticker labels and CD jewel case templates. Acoustica CD/DVD Label Maker also supports direct-to-CD printing on more than 70 printers.

A free 7-day trial of Acoustica CD/DVD Label Maker is available for download at <<http://www.acoustica.com/cd-label-maker/download.htm>> System Requirements: PentiumII-400, Win 98/NT/2K/ME/XP, 128 MB Ram, Printer. Requires less than 250 MB of hard disk space

LightScribe Requirements: LightScribe-enabled drives and LightScribe media

Pricing: US Price \$21.95, but computer club members receive a 20% discount when they enter COMPUTERCLUB in the coupon box. All versions include lifetime support.

Remote Administration And Monitoring Software

V.A.P. Software has released version 6.0 of Net Control 2, remote administration and monitoring software for classroom, office, and home networks. Starting at only \$45 for the Home Edition, Net Control 2 enables you to control networking machines remotely using the

keyboard and mouse, manage files, send messages (text, graphics, sound), and share any desktop with users. Version 6.0 introduces Desktop Recorder. It lets users record a sequence of actions taking place on the desktop and adds voice instructions to the record.

Users can transfer large files (above 1MB) much faster because version 6.0 has a special mode of transferring files. The 'Remote Desktop' feature is extended in the 'View One Control All' mode so you can view screenshots of all remote machines. Click on a screenshot and it will activate a Remote Desktop session for the selected machine. When 'Autoconnect at startup' mode is selected, Net Control 2 Client opens the connection automatically at startup. Check our site at <<http://www.netcontrol2.com/nc2.html>> to learn about other new and enhanced features.

Net Control 2 v.6.0 runs under all versions of Windows (95-2003) and costs \$99 (US) for a Standard Edition license that allows the installation of administrator components on 1 machine and user components on up to 10 user machines. User group members get a 20% discount on Net Control 2 by using the coupon code: VADI-63DT. For other types of licenses, please refer to <<http://www.netcontrol2.com/fulllist.html>>. Licensed customers are entitled to premium technical support by e-mail. Further information is available from <www.netcontrol2.com>.

Direct download link: <<http://www.netcontrol2.com/getfile.php?id=232600.exe>> E-mail: <support@netcontrol2.com>

***Protect Your Images With Your Own Watermark**
Watermark Factory announces version

2.53 of image protection tool, packed with new effects and image processing technologies. This update allows you to use a Vista-compatible product version as soon as you migrate to the new operating system. New features allow working with EXIF and IPTC information. Watermark Factory v2.53 helps you create a visible protection without destroying the overall aesthetic impression of an image. You can create a smart-looking text or a logo watermark and integrate it into your image. Once your watermark is created and saved, easily retrieve it and use it again with just a couple of mouse clicks.

Watermark Factory allows adjusting opacity and offers shadow, embossing and engraving effects. As for a logo, you can emboss the image and make it opaque to different degrees. The anti-aliasing technology implemented in the program will render your watermark crystal-clear quality. Three modes of positioning allow the user to tune the watermark placement to the image size and margins, and set a desired tilt angle.

Availability and Pricing

Watermark Factory v2.53 runs under Windows 95/98/XP/NT/2003/VISTA platforms and costs \$69 USD for a single user license and \$149 USD for a business license. User group members receive a 30% discount on the new version of Watermark Factory v2.53 by using the discount coupon SBE-KX6U. Free technical support and minor upgrades are extended to all registered users. A free trial version is available for download at <http://www.watermarkfactory.com/download/WatermarkFactory_setup.EXE>.

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That's it for this month. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. I'll have other new announcements on my Web site page. 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 <<http://www.dealsguy.com>>.



CES 2007
By Bob Clyne
Associate Editor

CES, the Consumer Electronics Show, celebrated its fortieth anniversary this year. CES takes place in Las Vegas, Nevada, and uses the entire Las Vegas Convention Center, one floor of the Sands Expo Center, and parts of the Hilton and Venetian hotels. Various vendors also have suites in other hotels. The show is so big that you haven't a chance to really see everything in the four days that the show runs.

Microsoft Vista

Microsoft was hyping Windows Vista, of course, and I found out a bit about ReadyBoost. ReadyBoost is the feature that allows Vista to use a USB drive for all or part of the paging file. The paging file, also known as virtual memory, is where Windows stores material that won't fit in RAM and is usually a portion of the hard disk. Since the flash memory in a USB drive is faster than

the hard disk, there is a potential speed advantage in using a flash drive for the paging file. However, all flash drives are not created equal in speed and Microsoft has created a speed requirement for a drive to be used for ReadyBoost. Most older, and some new USB drives, will not be accepted by Vista for ReadyBoost. The speed specification is based on random read and write access to relatively small data blocks which is not the way vendors have rated their flash drive speeds in the past. Some vendors are advertising some of their drives as ReadyBoost compatible. Vista will tell you whether or not a drive is acceptable for ReadyBoost when you try it. Beyond that, check <<http://www.grantgibson.co.uk/misc/readyboost/?status=all>> for a list of what users have found regarding compatibility, and <<http://www.anandtech.com/showdoc.aspx?i=2549&p=24>> for some additional information about flash drive speeds. I do not guarantee the accuracy of these sources.

Most USB flash drives will probably work with Vista as storage media for files you transfer to them, even if they won't work as ReadyBoost drives.

If you have the choice, adding an equal amount of RAM should produce better performance than ReadyBoost. But be sure your motherboard and Windows will accept the additional RAM. The 32-bit versions of Vista will support 4 GiB of RAM and the 64-bit versions will support the following amounts of RAM: Home Basic, 8 GiB; Home Premium, 16 GiB; and all the others 128 GiB.

Microsoft recommends that a ReadyBoost drive be three times the size of your RAM.

Corel

Corel seems to be on an acquisition rampage. Corel previously bought JASC and has now added Ulead, InterVideo, and WinZip Computing. I have lost track of their acquisitions so some of those may be old news. Some of their video products now support HD DVD and Blu-ray.

DirectTV

DirectTV says it will offer 100 national HD channels in 2007, but the majority of them will not be available until the third quarter. DirectTV's other 'big' news was that it is launching the Championship Gaming Series, an international video gaming league. In my opinion this is something the world does not need, but undoubtedly, millions will be glued to their television sets for it.

DISH Network

DISH Network, which claims to have 30 national HD channels plus HD local channels, announced a new HD DVR (High Definition Digital Video Recorder), the ViP622, that will hold 30 hours of HD programs internally, but which will also accept one or more external USB drives to allow almost unlimited program storage. The unit is expected to ship in February. The bad news is that the external drive is married to the recorder, so you can't take it to your computer and copy and watch the programs; at least you can't unless and until someone comes up with a crack for the encryption.

Hitachi Terabyte Hard Drive

Hitachi announced a terabyte, that's 1000 gigabytes, 3.5-inch hard disk drive, model Deskstar 7K1000. The drive uses perpendicular magnetic recording technology. The drive will come in three versions, desktop, consumer, and RAID. It will come in versions with

SATA 3 Gigabits per second, and PATA 133 interfaces. The desktop version is expected to ship in February with a MSRP of about \$399. The consumer version is supposed to be quieter and is designed to be married to a DVR. Maybe you could put one of these in a USB case and connect it to one of the DISH DVRs mentioned above and create a good-sized High Definition video library. Or maybe DISH will provide a SATA connection on their DVR in the future. For more information, see <<http://www.HitachiGST.com/CES2007>>.

Blu-ray vs. HD DVD

The format war goes on. The Blu-ray group claims that victory is in sight, but the HD DVD camp disagrees. Blu-ray has higher data capacity and java support for interactivity, while HD DVD has a different approach to interactivity, including some features that Blu-ray doesn't have. Blu-ray claims more players in homes, but a lot of those are PlayStation 3 units. Blu-ray players are generally more expensive than HD DVD players. Blu-ray also claims support from more movie studios. In my opinion, the battle is Blu-ray's to win or lose, but they will have to get the price of their players down. I think both groups will have to get the cost of their players down if they expect to get great mass-market penetration.

LG HD Super Multi Blue

LG Electronics announced a player that will play both Blu-ray and HD DVD discs and DVD discs. The player should be available the first week of February for just under \$1200. The player will play 1080p content. Drawbacks: while the player can use all of the Blu-ray interactivity features, it will only play HD DVD discs without any interactivity features and the player uses the HDMI

1.2 interface rather than the latest HDMI 1.3 interface which offers higher bandwidth and some other features.

LG also announced a Super Multi Blue computer drive that is expected to sell for under \$1000. It will read and write Blu-ray and read HD DVD discs.

Time Warner Multi-Format Disc

Warner Brothers announced plans for a hybrid high-definition disc that will contain both Blu-ray and HD DVD versions of the content. The disc is capable of also carrying DVD format but they will not initially put the DVD format on the discs. The discs will be double sided with Blu-ray on one side and HD DVD on the other side and each side will be capable of carrying dual layers.

Sanyo eneloop batteries

Sanyo was displaying their eneloop nickel metal hydride (NiMH) batteries. The big feature of the eneloop batteries is that they are usable right out of the package, without the need to charge them first. They retain 85% of their capacity after one year of storage as opposed to other NiMH batteries, which would be completely discharged after a year. This makes them useful in applications where other NiMH batteries would discharge more from self-discharge than from the actual electrical load. Sanyo says the eneloop batteries can be recharged 1000 times. They seem to be promoting them more as a replacement for alkaline cells than as a replacement for other NiMH batteries. Sanyo says the eneloop batteries have several times the performance of an alkaline battery in applications like digital cameras and other appliances and superior performance compared to alkaline batteries in cold temperatures.

The eneloop batteries are recyclable and so is the packaging which is made of recycled PET material rather than PVC. The AA eneloop batteries have a capacity of 2000 mAh compared to 2700 mAh for Sanyo's other AA NiMH batteries.

HDTV

High Definition Television (HDTV) still comes in three main types, projection (front and rear), plasma, and LCD. The projection units are further divided into DLP, LCD, and LCoS (liquid crystal on silicon). There are several new light sources being used or developed for rear projection HDTVs. Panasonic displayed a new light source for rear projection televisions, which they call LIFI. They claim the LIFI lamp may never need replacing as opposed to other bulbs which typically have a life of only a few hundred hours. Panasonic will use the LIFI lamps in 3 LCD rear projection HDTVs. They also claim that the sets with the LIFI bulbs power up in one sixth the time of conventional sets. Samsung is using LEDs as the light source for some of its DLP rear projection HDTVs. Mitsubishi is working on a laser lit DLP HDTV that they hope to market this year. I think rear projection is an approach that is on the way out, though it may take a few years. Front projection will probably stay around for really big screens.

The battle between plasma and LCD goes on but I think LCD is becoming the favored technology, though a couple of heavy hitters, Panasonic and Pioneer, appear to be betting the farm on plasma. Plasma has a reputation for using more power and producing more heat, but some in the plasma camp claim this is overrated because plasma power consumption is dependent on how

bright the picture is and is almost always less than the rated power. I have not seen any real tests of the actual in-use power consumption of the HDTV sets though. Plasma also has a reputation of producing deeper blacks. LCD has a reputation for blurring on fast motion. In all cases, I think the gap is narrowing.

Pioneer has a 1080p plasma display that will display Blu-ray video using a 3:3 pulldown rather than the 3:2 pulldown used on other displays to render movie film video. Movies are normally mastered at 24 frames per second (fps) and in order to match the approximately 30 fps of U.S. television they are usually displayed so that one frame is displayed 3 times and the next frame 2 times. With Pioneer's unit, each frame is displayed 3 times. Pioneer says that on a HD display, the 3:2 pulldown may produce a slight "jutter" which their unit eliminates.

There were no SED displays at the show this year, though Toshiba plans to release one in Japan this year. Samsung had a LED backlit LCD prototype TV, about 40-inch, on display that they hope to have on the market in the third quarter. They also had a 20-inch LED backlit computer monitor that costs about \$2000. Sony had a 70-inch LCD display with LED backlight with a price of about \$33k. That is the only LED backlit TV they have out now, but they may have some smaller ones out this summer.

Several of the LCD HDTV makers are using a 120 Hz refresh rate to reduce the fast motion blurring. This seems to produce a response time of approximately 4 milliseconds.

Sharp expects to ship a 108-inch LCD display by the end of August. You'll probably need that long to figure

out where to put it, how to get it into your house, and how to pay for it. The price has not been set, but you can bet it won't be cheap.

I have seen that some people in the consumer electronics industry are urging retailers not to "confuse" customers with information about whether a display is plasma or LCD or other technical "details," and at CES several times I had to ask whether displays were LCD or plasma because they weren't labeled. I think you should find out what technology is used in a display you are looking at. You should also know the resolution of the display you are looking at or considering buying. In some cases displays are labeled 1080 or 1080p because they will display a 1080p signal even though the actual display resolution is less than 1080. For a display to show 1080 material at full resolution, the display resolution must be 1920 by 1080. If it is less than that, you will not be seeing the full resolution. An "i" at the end of the resolution number indicates that the display will be interlaced, i.e., the odd number scan lines will be done first and then the even numbered scan lines will be done on the next pass. That is the way that television is done now. A "p" at the end of the resolution number means that the display lines will be done progressively, in numeric sequence. The highest resolution specified for broadcast material is 1080i but Blu-ray and HD DVD players are usually capable of outputting 1080p signals.

A progressively scanned picture will probably look better when the video consists of action since the succeeding lines will not be offset. My first computer monitor used an interlaced display and the display sure looked

better when I got a monitor that could handle progressive display.

Be sure to get a display that has enough HDMI input connectors to handle, not only the other equipment you want to connect to it now, but also what you might want to connect in the future. DVI, component video, VGA, S-Video, and composite video ports might be nice now but will probably be less important as time goes on.

Be aware that many stores have the displays out in a brightly lit area, and, therefore, have the display brightness turned way higher than you will at home, so the display will look different. Try to see the display in a lighting environment closer to what you have where you will put it.

You may well decide that you don't want the very highest resolution picture and, indeed, in smaller screen sizes you may not be able to tell the difference, but know what you are getting before you make your decision.

Make sure that the equipment you buy supports HDCP (High-bandwidth Digital Content Protection) or you may find that you aren't able to view material at its full resolution or even to view it at all. HDCP is done in hardware and cannot be added on later. Its purpose is to allow content owners to restrict your use of the programs and other material. All components in the data stream from the source to the display must handle, or pass on, the HDCP material or the display won't be able to display the video. It has been inflicted on us by the entertainment industry with the blessing of the FCC, and this sort of nonsense will continue until enough of the American citizens let the entertainment companies know that they will not continue to buy their products that contain this and let

their congress critters know that they will be seeking other employment if they don't put a stop to this.

HDMI

HDMI <<http://www.hdmi.org>> is the preferred interface between HD video equipment. The current level of the standard is 1.3. Version 1.3 of the standard has added the following benefits over version 1.2: higher speed i.e. more bandwidth; Deep Color™, 30, 36 & 48 bit color as opposed to 24 bit color in version 1.2; broader color space; lip sync, provision to maintain lip sync as the audio and video signals go through various components; new HD lossless audio formats, such as Dolby True HD, DTS-HD, and Master Audio™.

Automobile Diagnostics

Two companies were displaying devices to diagnose problems with automobiles. Both involved plugging into the vehicle's own diagnostic connection plug, on all cars, light trucks, SUVs, and minivans since 1996. The CarMD unit won a 2007 CES Innovations award. You plug the unit into the vehicle's diagnostic port and it will then show a green, OK, light; a yellow, possible problem, light; or a red, service required, light. You can then take the unit to your computer and plug it into a USB port, install the CarMD software, and log into their Web site <<http://www.carmd.com>> for a more detailed report of what is wrong and how much they think a mechanic in your area should charge to fix it.

The fixDAT <<http://www.fixdat.com>> unit connects to any Bluetooth device to provide information from the diagnostic port and allow the user to reset the "Check Engine" light.

I wonder if the automobile error codes and messages are any more

useful than the ones that PCs provide. The last time, some years ago, I had a car provide me with an error code, it was totally useless and didn't give a clue to the real problem, though it did convince the dealer's repair shop that there indeed was a problem.



SHOPPING FOR FREE AND OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE

By Bill Wayson

By the time you read this, the holiday shopping season will be over and many of you will be trying to figure out what to put on your new computer. It seems fitting, then, to make a few suggestions of programs you will find in your Web browser-based shopping center, the Mall of Free and Open Source Software, or the Mall of FOSS. All of the suggestions made here are suitable not only for users of Linux and BSD, but also for Windows diehards. In some cases, other operating systems, such as the Mac and Solaris are supported. So fire up your computer and head on out to the Internet highway. Oh, and you can leave your credit card at home, for the goods at the Mall of FOSS are priced most attractively: free.

Screensavers

The holidays are really meant for the child that resides in all of us, and all children want to have fun. So spice up your PC with some fun items. Start by stopping at the Really Slick Screensavers Web site at <<http://www.reallyslick.com/>>. Here you will find out-of-this-world, mesmerizing screen savers that range from "psychedelic" to "nauseating." One includes great sound effects. They all perform best with hardware-based video acceleration, but that should not be a problem with recent

hardware. Once you see these, you'll never go back to the flying Windows or pipes again.

Web browsers

Is your gift recipient still using Internet Explorer? Head on over to <<http://www.mozilla.com/>> to get Firefox for him or her. Firefox is a great Web browser with such features as tabbed browsing, configurable security, extensions that provide additional features, and themes that change the look and feel. Firefox version 2.0 was released Oct. 24. Or you can shop for a newer browser, Flock, at <<http://www.flock.com/>>. Flock is based on the same page rendering engine, Gecko, that the Mozilla family of browsers is built around. But Flock focuses on sharing and connecting with other people online, with enhanced support for blog posting, RSS feed integration, photo posting on Yahoo Flickr, and saving your bookmarks on the Internet for sharing between all the computers you use.

Instant messaging

Maybe your giftee spends time in the world of instant messaging. If so, get Gaim, a multi-protocol instant messaging (IM) client, from <<http://gaim.sourceforge.net/win32>>. Gaim will work with several different protocols, including AIM, MSN, Yahoo!, Jabber, ICQ and others, so it could become the only IM client anyone needs. If someone prefers the more traditional Internet Relay Chat (IRC), consider getting Xchat <<http://xchat.org/windows/>> or Kvirc <<http://www.kvirc.net/>> for them.

Juice Receiver

Has someone on your holiday giving list complained about using iTunes on Windows? That person may enjoy receiving an open source replacement,

Juice Receiver, available at <<http://juicereceiver.sourceforge.net/>>. It has access to many of the same podcast indexes that iTunes provides, as well as a number of indexes that it does not.

BitTorrent for file swapping

If you have diehard computer geeks on your list, they most likely share files with their friends. The standard file-swapping protocol is BitTorrent, and you will find BitTorrent clients for them at <<http://www.bittorrent.com>> and <<http://www.getazureus.com/>>. Perhaps they have always wanted to create their own dynamic Web site but have balked at the price of commercial Web server software for Windows or the Mac. If so, head over to the XAMPP for Windows store at <<http://www.apachefriends.org/en/xampp-windows.html>>. XAMPP for Windows will give them everything they need to build a robust, full-featured, dynamic Web site, and it is ready to go out of the box.

CLAMAV

Does anyone on your list need or want to try a different virus scanner? The shop at <<http://www.clamwin.com/>> has the open source scanner, CLAMAV for Windows, available for you to give. They'll be getting a GUI-based virus scanner, free and automatic signature updates, and scheduled virus scanning.

Outlook alternatives

The shops at <<http://www.mozilla.com/thunderbird/>> and <<http://shellter.sourceforge.net/evolution/>> offer alternatives to the Outlook e-mail client. The former site has Thunderbird, an easy-to-use product of the Mozilla project, while the latter provides Evolution, which sports additional support for calendaring and Microsoft Exchange e-mail servers

GIMP

Moving on to applications, if there is one on your gift list who does any sort of work with images, ranging from doctoring photographs to graphics for a Web site, you owe it to them to stop off at <<http://www.gimp.org/windows/>> and pick up a copy of the GIMP. Somewhat mischaracterized as the "Poor Man's Photoshop," the GIMP provides a large range of image processing tools and plugins, as well as a framework for writing custom plugins. With the GIMP, they'll be able to do just about anything they'd ever want to do to their pictures.

Audacity

Or maybe you are looking for something for someone who is into sound recording, someone who perhaps was a Mr. or Miss A/V in high school? They undoubtedly would really enjoy receiving the Audacity sound recorder, editor, and writer. Look for it at <<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>>. This powerful program literally will turn a PC into a full-featured sound recording and production studio. Pair it with a professional-quality sound card, and it is hard to beat at any price.

DVD-capable media players

Many of those on your gift list also want to be entertained, and maybe they'd like to watch a DVD while working at their computers. A couple of DVD-capable media players they would like can be found at <<http://www.mplayerhq.hu/>>—which offers the MPlayer media player—and <<http://www.videolan.org/>>—which offers the VideoLAN VLC player.

Office applications

Chances are the computer users on your holiday gift list use traditional applications such as word processing,

spreadsheets, presentations, and the like. There are several gifts in this category that you cannot go wrong with. OpenOffice.org is possibly the most popular open source office application suite available. The latest version, which can be found at <<http://www.openoffice.org/>>, is highly compatible with Microsoft's Word, Excel, and Powerpoint formats, and all but the most complex of documents can be shared in both directions. OpenOffice.org also supports out-of-the-box export to PDF and Flash formats.

OpenOffice.org is certainly not the only option in this arena. The Abiword word processor from <<http://www.abisource.com/>> is a mature product offering a range of features. Since it is a lightweight user of computer resources, it runs well on older hardware that might bog down under OpenOffice.org, Microsoft Office, and Vista.

GNUmeric, from <<http://www.gnome.org/projects/gnumeric/>>, is a nice, mature spreadsheet program that has all the options and features your giftee wants for the spreadsheet work. If someone would like something to help create pretty, Visio-like organizational and flow charts, stop over at <<http://dia-installer.sourceforge.net/>> and pick them up a copy of DIA, a diagramming tool.

PDFCreator, Scribus

Do your giftees need to produce PDF documents? If so, they'll be grateful to receive PDFCreator, which is available at <<http://www.pdfforge.org/>>. PDFCreator works with any application that prints to the Windows printing system, making it easy to create not only PDF documents, but PNG, JPG, TIFF, BMP, PCX, PS, and EPS as well. Or maybe they want to create

professional-looking documents like brochures, booklets, or newsletters. For them, take a trip to <<http://www.scribus.net/>> and get them Scribus, a desktop publishing system with many of the same page layout and formatting features you expect to find in the more expensive commercial systems. Scribus also runs on the Mac.

Web page design

Do you have a Web designer on your giving list? He or she might like to receive Nvu (pronounced n-view, and found at <<http://www.nvu.com/>>), a WYSIWYG Web page editor that will remind you of Dreamweaver. With its integrated FTP client, it may be all an e-designer would need. Perhaps they prefer to develop their Web pages from scratch (or someone on your list might like to get an advanced text editor). If so, stop off at <<http://notepad-plus.sourceforge.net/uk/site.htm>> and pick them up a copy of Notepad++, which is what Windows' Notepad might be if it consumed strong steroids. It will give your recipient syntax highlighting, auto-completion, WYSIWYG markup, bookmarking, zooming, multi-document viewing, and much more.

Do not forget the most important person on your holiday gift list: you! If anything here looks interesting as you read about it, make sure to get yourself a copy. The great thing about all the stores offering FOSS software gifts is that they always have a great two-for-the-price-of-one sale going on, the perfect holiday sale.

Bill Wayson is a member of the Channel Islands PC Users Group, California

<<http://www.cipcug.org>><[bwayson\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:bwayson(at)gmail.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 organizationf which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

TRAVELING WITH COMPUTERS

By Diane George

My husband and I have taken several cruises and both of us do some other traveling for business and pleasure that keeps us in a hotel for several days at a time. Being addicted to using our computers, it's impossible to travel without our notebook computers. We both take our own notebook computers. As a result we need to do a little additional planning to take what we need to connect and use both computers.

First item is a small power strip. We found some lightweight ones with a short power cord and four outlets that are easy to fit into a computer bag. Because we also take digital cameras, it helps to be able to plug in several devices at once, computers and chargers. While most hotels have multiple outlets, cruise ships typically have one outlet so the strip is doubly important.

Did I mention that we use bags on wheels that can be carried on an airplane? The basics need to fit into that bag. Usually there is enough space for some personal items (e.g., toothbrush, underwear, medications).

We take lots of spare batteries—neither one of us can stand to use the touch pads on our notebooks so we use

cordless mice. The cameras also use batteries. Plan to bring the used batteries back with you as most places don't provide for disposal of spent batteries.

When we are going to be staying in a hotel, we take a small wireless access point—it's designed for travel and comes with a carrying case that includes the Ethernet cable that is needed. The one we have is made by Linksys and is slightly larger than a deck of cards. For some hotels, this will allow us to simultaneously use an Internet connection. This will usually work where hotels provide free Internet access—it doesn't help when there is a charge because they track the user's IP address for billing purposes.

Expect to pay about \$10.00 a day for Internet access at those hotels that charge—they may have wireless access, but be sure to pack an Ethernet cable in your computer bag in case they don't. There are still some hotels that only offer a modem connection, but in general most hotels now offer some type of Internet access.

On board ship, connections are provided via satellite and the cost is fairly high. On our most recent cruise, the basic charge was 75 cents per minute on a pay as you go basis. You could also purchase longer time periods for a lower rate per minute, e.g., 100 minutes for \$55.00. Connections suffer from some lack of reliability due to weather and satellite positions. The ship offered wireless access in a few locations for people with their own computers. The charges applied whether you used the ship's computers or your own. We opted not to use the on board access because the cost did not seem reasonable. On other trips, we used on-shore Internet cafes to review e-mail, in Mexico,

Costa Rica and the Caribbean. This trip (Hawaii) we did not find any that were near the port.

One of the conveniences of having Internet access on board was the ability to check-in online for our flights while we were still at sea. Southwest Airlines, in particular, allows you to check in 24 hours before your flight time. If you check in online within the first couple of hours, you will usually be assigned to the A group—first in line to board. The ship offered a short (30 minutes) package for \$12.95. I was able to check in four people at Southwest and had a few minutes to spare—nobody said it was fast!

Online check in requires you to print your boarding passes. At many hotels, you can get the concierge to print your boarding pass—you give them the confirmation number and they will do it for you. On the ship, we could have paid for the Internet access and to have the passes printed, but instead we took a printer with us so we were able to print our own. I saved the passes as PDF files and then took them back to our stateroom for printing.

In prior years, we took a small photo printer with us, but found that to be too limiting. We bought an HP 460, an inkjet printer, which prints photos and 8 ½ x 11 pages as well. It was designed to be mobile, so is fairly compact and lightweight. It can be tucked into a suitcase among your clothes. The printer has an AC adapter and a USB connection. We took a small supply of paper, both plain and photo paper tucked in the bottom of a suitcase.

Aside from printing boarding passes, we also used the printer to print photos to give to some of the friends we made

during the cruise, passengers and staff. The pictures were much appreciated.

This leads to the main reason for taking the computers—we take a lot of pictures with two digital cameras. On cruises, in particular, we have to download the images in order to recover space on the memory cards. Even with multiple cards for the cameras, we would never have enough storage space without off-loading the images. We get pictures from our in-laws who travel with us and spend some time on the trip organizing the images before we get home. On the last cruise we had five days at sea before we got home, so there was plenty of time to work on them.

Another item that has been useful is a small external drive. We have a 40 gigabyte drive that is about 6 inches by 3 inches and ¾ inch thick. It connects via USB and does not require a power supply if you connect it to your computer directly. This allows us to back up the photos and to share them with each other or our traveling companions. You may also want to take a card reader if your notebook doesn't have a built-in card reader. A USB hub may also be useful.

We take a small scanner (about 1 inch thick) and a folding table. Because there is usually one desk in hotel rooms or in staterooms, the second notebook user has to resort to using the coffee table, a chair or the bed. It's really inconvenient and hard on the back, so we have a small plastic table that comes apart and is easy to reassemble. It folds to less than 2 inches thick and fits in a medium size suitcase. You can work with a notebook and have room for a mouse. It weighs about two pounds so it's not a big burden to include it and it saves fighting over who gets the desk.

Before you leave, double check to make sure you have all the USB cables that you need, as well as the adapters for your devices. If you take a printer, be sure to include extra ink cartridges. Depending on where you travel, you may or may not be able to find what you need.

Diane George is Webmaster, PC Community, Hayward, California.

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**XP DISK MAINTENANCE
TOOLS
By Dick Maybach**

Windows disk operations have improved greatly over the years to the extent that we seldom have problems with XP. However, XP does include tools to inform you about your disks, to improve their operation, and, if needed, to repair the data on them.

For general information on your drives, use the Disk Management tool—right-click on My Computer; select Manage; and select Disk Management (under Storage). You will see a table showing the properties of all your partitions as well as a graphical summary. Select a volume in the table or on the graphic, click on the Action menu item, and then click on All Tasks to see a list of the actions you can perform.

Be careful, as some of these are drastic and irreversible, e.g., format and delete the volume.

If you suspect that a hard disk is corrupted, double-click on My Computer, right-click on the desired drive, select Properties, select the Tools tab, click the Check Now... button in the Error-checking section, and click the Start button. This will run an updated version of the old chkdsk. Don't select either of the options. If you do find problems, run the program again, but before you click Start, select Automatically fix file system errors. You may have to reboot for the operation to complete. Also, be aware that this may result in the loss of some files. If there are still errors, run the program again, but select both options. (You can also run this program from the command line; type "chkdsk /?" in a Command Prompt window to see the options. I prefer the command-line version, because it's more informative.)

With time, Windows collects many unneeded temporary files. To clean these up, double-click on My Computer, right click on the desired disk, select Properties, and click the Disk Cleanup button under the General tab. Windows will take a few minutes to analyze your disk, and then will display a list of actions and how much space each will recover. You can single-click on each name to see its description. I select everything except the last two (Compress old files and Catalog files for the Content Indexer). Clicking the More Options tab shows other ways to recover space by removing Windows components, removing installed programs, or deleting old system restore points. Under the General tab, you will see two check boxes, Compress drive to

save space and Allow Indexing Service to index this drive for fast file searching. By default, the first is not checked and the second is; don't change these. Large disks are very cheap, and if you are running low on space, a much better solution is to install a second disk and keep your user data on it. Compression adds complexity, and I've seen it cause serious problems.

With use, a disk gradually becomes fragmented. That is; long files are broken into parts and scattered over the disk. You can correct much (but usually not all) of this with XP's disk defragmenter. Double-click on My Computer; right-click on the desired drive; select Properties; select the Tools tab; click on the Defragment now... button in the Defragmentation area; and click the Analyze button. Usually, you will be told that there is no need to defragment the volume. If so, take the advice. If you do decide to defragment the disk, bear in mind that there is a small risk of destroying its contents, since many files will be deleted and rewritten—a power failure could be catastrophic. Before you defrag a disk, run chkdsk or, even better, back it up.

A little-known command-line utility is fsutil. To run this first open a Command Prompt window (found in the Accessories group), then type "fsutil" to produce a list of fsutil commands. Usually, you will have to stack up several fsutil commands to do anything useful. For example, typing "fsutil dirty query c:" will show you whether you need to run chkdsk on C:. It can be worthwhile to explore the other features of this command, being careful of course that you don't make any changes to your file system.

The recover command will make undamaged portions of a damaged file readable. For example, to recover the damaged file c:\n2nd\junk, open a Command Prompt window and type "recover c:\n2nd\junk". Like most command-line programs, you should be careful when using recover.

A very powerful command-line program is debug, but you can do a lot of damage with it if you are not an expert; I recommend that you avoid it. If you are curious, type "debug /?" in a Command Prompt window to find out more about what it can do.

The NTFS file system is superior to the older FAT32 one. If you are still using FAT32, seriously consider converting it to the NTFS format. For example, to convert your C: drive to NTFS, open a Command Prompt window and type "convert c: /fs: ntfs". There are two caveats: (1) the conversion is not reversible unless you buy third-party software, and (2) if you dual-boot both XP and an earlier version Windows on the same PC, the old version can't read NTFS volumes.

Dick Maybach is a member of the Brookdale Computer User Group, New Jersey

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BOARD MEETING
01/14/2007
Carol Sanzi

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

President Gary DeNise, Vice President Richard Jackson, Treasurer Bette Gay, Secretary Carol Sanzi, SIG-Advanced Chairman Franz Breidenich, SIG-IBM Intermediate Chairman Carl Massie, Jr., and SIG-IBM Co-Chairmen Tom Callow and Warner Mach. Also present was Internet Committee Chairman Mike Bader. Arriving late was Member-at-Large Chester Blechinger. The meeting was called to order at 12:09 p.m.

OLD BUSINESS

Bette Gay reported that there is \$7,887.98 in the treasury. The membership stands at 83. It is time for Pat Kreiling and Lary Smith to renew their memberships. Carol Sanzi moved to reimburse Gary DeNise \$23.03 for refreshments. Richard Jackson seconded the motion and it was carried.

Bette Gay reported that with board approval SEMCO will transfer \$4,500 into three CD accounts. Each account will earn between 3.20% to 3.68% interest. Splitting the funds into different accounts allows for monies to be more easily accessible should it be needed. Chester Blechinger moved to accept the money transfers as stated by Bette Gay. Richard Jackson seconded the motion and it was carried.

NEW BUSINESS

Mike Bader reported that the online SEMCO User Group's membership stands at 29. He stated that the activity and interest is increasing.

Bette Gay reported that the bank manager is donating a computer and 5 monitors. Gary DeNise will arrange for

a pick-up and donate the equipment to a charitable organization.

Chester Blechinger led a discussion of possibly streamlining the SEMCO meeting times. It was suggested that the 1:00 p.m. time slot be used as a social period where members could get questions answered on a personal level. Since this time is usually open and all members are invited to attend the board meeting, members are always free to socialize at this time. No action was taken to change meeting times.

Chester moved that the SEMCO April meeting be cancelled as it will be Easter Sunday. Franz Breidenich seconded the motion and it was carried. Carol Sanzi will alert Bill Edwards and Jerry Shanek of this change in scheduling.

Richard Jackson led a discussion of the possibility of donating monies to a charitable organization. Should this be done, it must meet the 501(c)(3) guidelines. No action was taken at this time.

Chester Blechinger moved to adjourn. Franz Breidenich seconded the motion and it was carried. The meeting adjourned at 12:54 p.m.

2007 ELECTION
RESULTS
By Carol Sanzi

Office-Name-Vote Count:

President-Gary DeNise-22

Vice President-Richard Jackson-22

Secretary-Carol Sanzi-22

Treasurer-Bette Gay-22

Board of Directors-Members at Large:

Bob Clyne-21

Chuck Moery-20

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGS)



SIG-IBM
Tom Callow
Warner Mach



February 11: Windows XP Tips and Tricks: SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow will discuss and demonstrate things you can do to make Windows operate more smoothly and efficiently.



SIG-ADVANCED
Franz Breidenich

March 5, 2007: (First Monday), 6:45 p.m, 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.

NOVICE-IBM GROUP **Rotating Volunteer Hosts**

February 11: Help Q & A:
Discussion directed by the audience.
No question is too simple!



SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE
Carl Massie, Jr.

February 11: SIG-IBM Intermediate Chairman Carl Massie, Jr., discusses sources for free utilities.

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

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

<<http://nirsoft.net>>

Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 which supports an enterprise's intranet, extranet, and Web applications. It provides electronic forms and workflow processes that utilize familiar Microsoft Office applications, e-mail, and a Web browser.

REQUEST MEMBER **INPUT**

The SEMCO Board has been discussing how to best serve the membership. This includes the best use of treasury funds in line with the educational and service goals of the organization. If you have some ideas along these lines please share your thoughts with Gary DeNise or one of the other officers.

March 2007 DATA BUS DEADLINE (7th day after meeting)
SEMCO Input and Members' Ads — Deadline: Sun., February 18, 11:59 p.m.
Members' personal ads are free. To mail, use [Editor address on Page 2](#); e-mail address: <machw@att.net>. PLEASE send to arrive sooner than deadline.
Business Ads - Deadline: Second Friday monthly. Contact [Editor \(address Page 2\)](#).

Warner Machmachw@att.net

(to post monthly computer group info)

**CALENDAR-OF-EVENTS
OTHER GROUPS****COMP (Computer Operators of Marysville & Port Huron)**

March 7, 7 p.m., (1st Wednesday); St. Clair County RESA, 499 Range Rd., Marysville, Admin. Building. Jane Wheatly 810-982-1187 <<http://www.bwcomp.org>>. Mac OS X Demo

DCOM Computer Club

February 9, 6:30–8:30 p.m., (2nd Friday); Henry Ford C.C., Patterson Tech Bldg, Ford Rd/Evergreen, Rm T143, Parking Lot C. Info: Doug Piazza 313-582-2602.

MacGroup- Detroit

February 18, 2:15 p.m.–5 p.m., (3rd Sunday): Birmingham Temple, 28611 West 12 Mile Rd., Farmington Hills. Info: Terry White, <terry@macgroup.org> or 313-571-9817. <<http://www.macgroup.org>>. Topic: Member Showcase: MacGroup Members showing what they do or produce with their Macs.

MacTechnics, (MAC User Group)

February 17, 11:00 a.m., (3rd Saturday); (SIGs at 9:30); Ann Arbor Open School, 920 Miller Ave., Ann Arbor. <<http://www.mactechnics.org>>. Cassie at <cassiemacs@yahoo.com> or 313-971-8743.

MDLUG (Metro Detroit Linux User Group)

February 10, 12:30–2:30 p.m., (2nd Saturday); MDLUG meetings will be at The Gaudior Academy located at 27100 Avondale Avenue in Inkster. Web: <<http://www.mdlug.org>>. Info: Raymond McLaughlin 248-960-1864.

Michigan Apple Computer User Group

February 8, 7:30 p.m., (2nd Thur.); General meeting; Fraternal 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>>.

Oak Park Computer Club

Every Fri., 10:15 a.m. at Oak Park Recreation Bldg, Oak Park Blvd. west of Coolidge.

SHCC (Sterling Heights Computer Club)

March 6, 7:30 p.m., (1st Tuesday); Macomb Community College South Campus, Bldg. K, 14500 E. 12 Mile Rd. Don VanSyckel <Don@VanSyckel.net>, 586-731-9232; Web: <<http://www.SterlingHeightsComputerClub.org>>.

Wayne State University Mac User Group

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

SEMCO Is Recruiting a New Refreshments Coordinator

Duties of a Refreshments Coordinator:

Transport:

Store and transport refreshment gear, including coffee pot, punch dispenser, plates, eating utensils, etc. (Note: The storage and transportation duties could be separated from the other duties if this part was a significant problem).

Set up:

Setting up for refreshment service. Making coffee and punch. Put out sheet for food donators to sign. Put out can for money donations.

Clean up:

Including cleaning the equipment and cleaning the area at ArvinMeritor. Also, assuring that chairs and tables are rearranged after the serving period.

Purchase:

Check inventory before meetings to assure adequate coffee, punch, plates, etc. Buy anything that is in short supply.

Save receipts and present to SEMCO board for reimbursement.

Accelerate Your Life:

If you would like to be of service to SEMCO then please talk to Gary DeNise, or one of the other organization officers.



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

Genealogy: Cook

IBM PC Hardware Issues: Clyne, Yuhasz

Operating Systems: Callow, Clyne, Yuhasz

MAC Hardware and OS Issues: Yuhasz

Security: Bader

MS Office for Windows: Callow

MS Word: Clyne

Networking: Callow

Novell Netware: Yuhasz

Quicken: Clyne

Geocaching: Cook

Bader, Mike—586-573-7330, 9am–8pm.....	mdbader@flash.net
Callow, Tom—248-642-5770 9am–5pm.....	tcallow@monaghanpc.com
Clyne, Bob—810-387-3101, 9am–10pm.....	clyne@lodden.com
Comptois, Jerry—248-651-2504, anytime.....	jerry@connectmich.com
Cook, Stephen—313-272-7594, eves.....	scook48227@ameritech.net
Vander-Schrier, Jack—586-739-7720, 12–8pm.....	jvanders@myself.com
Yuhasz, Steve.....	Help@yuhasz.org



**SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN
COMPUTER ORGANIZATION, INC.**

SEMCO CALENDAR—February/March

ArvinMeritor Building

2135 West Maple Road

Troy, Michigan

February 11—SUNDAY (Meet 2nd Sunday)

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

SEMCO General Meeting at 1:30 p.m.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

SIG-IBM 1:45 p.m. Program: Windows XP Tips and Tricks: SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow will discuss and demonstrate things you can do to make Windows operate more smoothly and efficiently.

SOCIAL PERIOD 3:15 p.m. Refreshments! (Reminder: We must continue to maintain a neat environment.)

**NOVICE-IBM GROUP 3:45 p.m. Program: Help From An Expert With
Discussion Directed By The Audience.**

SIG-IBM Intermediate 3:45 p.m. Program: Sources For Free Utilities. <<http://www.snapfiles.com>>. <<http://www.betanews.com>>. <<http://www.nirsoft.net>>. Also, Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 which supports an enterprise's intranet, extranet, and Web applications. It provides electronic forms and workflow processes that utilize familiar Microsoft Office applications, e-mail, and a Web browser.

SIG-ADVANCED, March 5, 2007—MONDAY, 6:45 p.m., (First Monday), 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; library is west of Coolidge. Info: Franz Breidenich 248-398-3359. **TOPIC: Wide-Ranging Discussion Of Computers & Computing.**

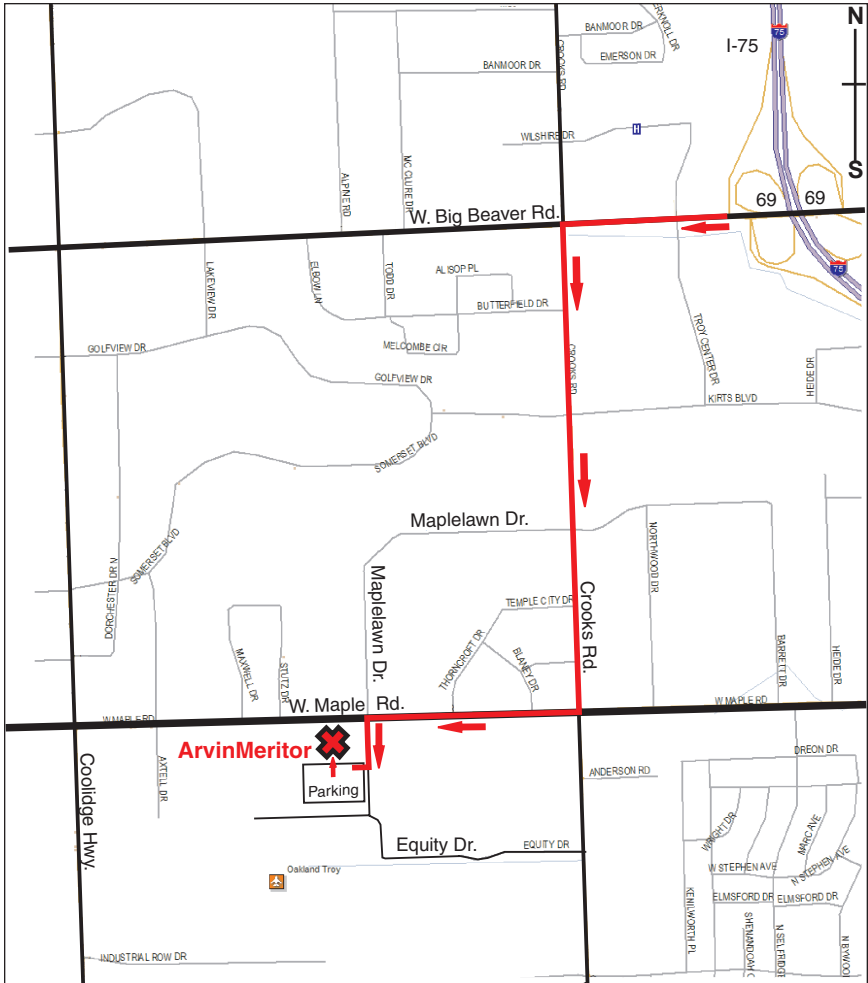
March 11—SEMCO SUNDAY

<http://www.semco.org>

PUBLIC INVITED

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

**SEMCO Meetings at [ArvinMeritor](#)
2135 West Maple Road, Troy, MI 48064**



DIRECTIONS

From I-75, take Exit 69 to westbound Big Beaver Rd. (16 Mile). Turn left (South) on Crooks Rd. Turn right (West) on Maple Rd. (15 Mile). Turn left (South) on Maplelawn Dr. Turn right into the parking lot at the rear of the ArvinMeritor building. The building is shaped like an X. Enter the building thru the South entrance at the center of the rear of the building. Follow the SEMCO signs.

SEMCO thanks the [ArvinMeritor](#) Corporation for their hospitality in providing their facility for our meetings.



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

SEMCO (future meetings)

February 11

March 11

FIRST CLASS MAIL
Dated Material

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