IN THIS ISSUE

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

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

Thanks for all your messages about my well-being. Because of somewhat nagging pains in my chest I was very worried that night and decided to send the column out early, just in case. Seven years ago, the doctors told me to get my final affairs in order because of all the artery blockages, but I believe my frequent walks have prevented my wife from spending my insurance money so far. Problem is, I can't walk much right now because of a bone spur. A few editors welcomed the column being early, but I don't usually accomplish that.

Check This Out!
Macon Users Group <http://www.maconusersgroup.org> has an excellent newsletter (MUG Monitor) and their president is one of my favorite writers. Louis Vitale has written "Lou's Views" for ages and he is my kind of writer because he tells it like it is and minces no words. In their August issue, he wrote about the data mining capabilities of Vista, and mentions his source for the information. I never miss reading his monthly column and can't remember ever disagreeing with his view, just cheering for him. I have that article posted on my Web site for your perusal, <http://www.dealsguy.com/Articles_column.html>.

A New APCUG Event In The East
I read that APCUG is considering an eastern event because many eastern members don't want to travel to Las Vegas. That's a great idea, but finding a suitable show to coincide with it and help entice attendees could be a challenge. I liked the event tied to PC Expo a few years ago, but it didn't last. The expensive hotel was one problem. Conflicting views on how to run it also created hurdles. I especially liked the leisurely way they met for the meals though.

There are lots of computer-oriented shows in the east, but nothing as immense as CES. Microsoft has had a large show in Orlando during June the last few years that brings in a lot of big name vendors. The Photo Marketing Assn. (PMA) show that used to be in Orlando would have been excellent, but it moved this year, as has the Home Electronics Show, which would have been smaller, but an interesting one. Finding the right show might be tough. I don't agree that the show must be computer oriented. I have worked plenty of shows that were just as interesting, but most trade shows move around.

Timing also complicates it, but some feel that without a good show it might not attract enough attendees. How about using a cheaper hotel and meeting place, and inviting vendors without making them buy a meal and spend a fortune for the booth, which might bring in more of them if they had a reasonable attendance to talk to. Their absence proves they don't want the expense of the meals. Catered meals are very expensive and attendees should pay for their own meals. Attendees can get their favorite food at a modest price close by or maybe box lunches could be brought in for lunch. Roundtables done by vendors are popular. These ideas might not work well either, but it has never been tried because it is assumed that we are so cheap that we won't show up without free meals. I disagree and overly frugal attendees don't help any event. We don't ask vendors to buy anything when they present at our UG meetings so why do it at our APCUG and regional gatherings. The regional events have only a few vendors, but most are only a two-day event so it's more the camaraderie than the vendors. A five-day event is lengthy and not all stay the full time. Maybe surveys would help provide ideas for arranging such an event. Let APCUG know your opinions and ideas. My views may not be popular, but they are another way to attract vendors.

Be Aware

I have not tried or checked out any of the following products or claims.

Why Not Try File Encryption?

BluestSoft introduces Bluest CryptShield 1.5 that can encrypt files, folders or drives to protect them from unwanted access. CryptShield uses one of three types of encryption algorithms, such as Rijndael (AES), Twofish (AES finalist), or Blowfish (448 bit) to scramble the data and create secure file-based virtual drives or entire storage drives. Once the encrypted drive is created, it becomes completely invisible for other people until it is mounted. The hidden drive can be mounted either manually or automatically (with password authentication) and can even be shared with other network machines. In automatic mode, the drive can be set to mount when you log in, and unmounted when you log off, or when the application is closed, or after a time duration of inactivity. Since the encryption is on-the-fly and has almost no impact on system resources, you will hardly notice the encryption. Restrict the connection of removable devices like USB drives and optical disks by registering only accepted devices. The CryptShield application verifies the validity of the drive and if it sees it's a non-registered device, it is not detected by the system.

There is another layer of security for documents you create on public computers. After copying an important file to the encrypted USB drive, you can shred the original document completely by overwriting it by 0x00. CryptShield renders the file completely unrecoverable even for the most advanced recovery software.

Bluest CryptShield 1.5 runs under Microsoft Windows 2000/XP/Vista and sells for $39.95 (US) for a single-user license. Users group members get 50% off the purchase price of the new Bluest CryptShield until the end of November. Use coupon code: cs50nov. Additional information and a free evaluation copy are available at <http://www.bluestsoft. com>.

Product page link: <http://www.bluestsoft.com/en/products/cryptshield.html>.

Download link: <http://www.bluestsoft.com/en/download/downloadrequest.html>.

Postal address: 2102 Business Center Dr., Suite 130, Irvine, California 92612.

Telephone: 949-253-5763.

Freeware Is Always Nice

A new free all-in-one system utility that helps protect, repair and optimize computers with a single click of the mouse has been introduced. The product is called Advanced WindowsCare V2 Personal. IObit, the software company that developed it, says it's vital that users maintain and optimize their PCs on a regular basis to keep computers free from Adware and Spyware. This freeware is designed to be the first point of call in solving these issues.

Advanced WindowsCare Personal offers four major benefits:

1. Defends Windows: Scan and remove Spyware and Adware with the latest definitions; prevent spyware, hijackers and bad websites from being installed; erase the history of all activities in the computer including traces of online site visit activity.

2. Cleans Windows: Boost system performance by deep scanning and cleaning out all unwanted, obsolete and corrupt registry entries and junk files.

3. Keeps peak performance: Fully optimize Windows for ultimate system performance and top Internet speed, based on how users use the computer and what kind of network they have.

4. Fixes system errors: Repair system configurations, eliminate system bottlenecks and prevent crashes, keeping your PC stable and roaring at peak efficiency.

Advanced WindowsCare Personal works on Windows Vista/ XP/ 2000. It is 100% clean and safe, free of adware and spyware (DealsGuy comment: their words, not mine). For more information, and to download a copy, visit: <http://www.iobit.com/AdvancedWindowsCarePersonal/>.

Keep Those Freebies Coming

ESTsoft Corp. released ALZip v7.0 beta, the full featured zip archiving utility for Windows 98/Me/2000/XP/Vista, with new features for faster extracting, updating, and restoring backups. The new Speed Extractor functionality in ALZip gives users one-click extraction, making ALZip the fastest way to extract files from archives. A second Speed Extractor option gives users a clean and simple menu, free from clutter that gradually creeps into Windows Explorer right-click context menus. Those looking to restore projects/file sets to a previously known good state can now overwrite files on disk with only the older, good files from their backup archives. Well known for its cute "Egghead" characters, ALZip follows up with a robust set of functionality, including support for extracting 36 archive formats and creating 8. ALZip is available in 25 languages.

Free for home users, commercial users can purchase licenses on the honor system for between $20 for a single license and $3 per seat for volume orders. Current licensees can upgrade for free. Free downloads are available at <http://www.altools.net>.

That's it for this month. I'll have more new product announcements on my Web site (most not offering a discount). Meet me here again next

Simple PC Maintenance —Electricity and Cooling
By Ira Wilsker

Most of us are privileged to have desktop and notebook computers that give us a few years of reliable service. Many of us have computers that reach the end of their useful life cycle not because of wear and deterioration, but because of technical obsolescence due to the rapid advances in hardware and software technology. Sitting on the floor adjacent to my computer table, still plugged in and fully functional is a decade old Windows 98 machine that I originally built as a Windows 95 machine. I occasionally (rarely?) turn it on, and it boots fine, but has been technologically eclipsed by my newer machines, rendering it functionally obsolete. One factor which I believe contributed to the longevity of my antique machine was the maintenance and care I lavished upon it. Similar maintenance and care is being provided to my newer machines with the hope that they will last as long.

Computer maintenance is required for both the hardware and software on our machines, and can easily be performed by the all-thumbs novice. Our computers are complex electromechanical machines that tend to run well with minimal care, but do require proper care and feeding to prolong their useful lives.

Our computers consume electricity much the same way as we consume food. Just like our food, our electricity may be clean or dirty, and clean electricity is vital to our computers' health. Too many of us simply plug the power cord from our computer directly into the wall socket; while simple and functional, this is a far from ideal source of electricity for our machines. We may not be aware of it, but much of the electricity coming from our wall outlets may be "dirty," in that it can vary in voltage, and carry power spikes and surges from both manmade and natural sources. At a minimum, the computer and its valuable peripherals should be plugged into a surge suppressor, and not a simple power strip or extension cord. These devices may filter out the surges or spikes in electricity that at a minimum can cause extensive wear to the power supplies in our computers, or in worst case scenarios can "fry" the components in our computers. The ability to resist surges and spikes is measured in "joules," and the rule of thumb is the more joules the better. Surge suppressors should be listed by Underwriter's Laboratories (UL) and have a "1449" rating from the UL. Most surge suppressors also have plugs for phone and fax lines, and coax connectors for cable lines; power surges can enter the computer through these conduits, so they need to be also

protected. Surge suppressors eventually wear out, and occasionally need to be periodically replaced. While arguable, some surge suppressors claim to protect from lightning damage, several even offering an insurance policy against such damage.

Have you ever noticed the power flicker or slight dimming of lights when the air conditioner or major appliances click on? The drop in voltage, however short, may damage the computer and its components. The solution for this potential malady is an uninterruptible power supply, more commonly referred to by its acronym "UPS." Many of the better UPS's offer automatic voltage regulation (AVR), a feature which assures a steady and proper "clean" voltage to the computer despite variations in the power line. UPS's generally offer excellent protection against power spikes and surges, as well as protection and filtering of telephone and cable lines. Many better UPS's also offer some type of guarantee or insurance protection against damage to the computer and its peripherals in the event of power surges or lightning. One warning about UPS's is that they need to have the capacity to provide adequate power to the computer, and generally the larger the capacity the better. UPS's also serve another vital function, and that is the ability to provide stable electrical power to the computer in the event of a power failure or brownout, allowing for the saving of open documents, and the execution of a proper shutdown sequence protecting both hardware and software. Most UPS's come with software to monitor the power consumption and automate the shutdown process in the event of a power outage, and are connected to the computer via a USB cable. Some older UPS's come with a serial cable (DB-9) to control the shutdown process, but most newer computers do not have a serial port, rendering the monitoring and shutdown functions useless. Beware of some wild claims made by some manufacturers as to how long their products will power a computer in the event of a power failure, as they are often exaggerated.

One of the major killers of computers is heat. Many of us are unaware that our computers' power supplies, hard drives, CD and DVD burners, video cards, CPU chips, and other components put out a lot of heat, and this excessive heat must be removed from the computer. As they come from the factory, if properly engineered, most mass produced computers can minimally dissipate the heat generated. At a minimum, computers use the fan in the power supply to draw hot air through the computer, and exhaust it. On older, less powerful computers, this was often adequate, but on newer more powerful computers, which consume more power and generate a lot more heat, this single fan cooling system is often inadequate. Better engineered mass produced computers, and many locally built custom computers, incorporate multiple fans to improve cooling. While we can sometimes easily add aftermarket fans and other cooling methods to improve air circulation, that simple task is often beyond what many of us want to do by ourselves. What we all can easily accomplish is to see to it that the vents on our computers, often slats on the back, sides, or bottom of the case are clear and unobstructed. I have repaired several overheated computers that were placed in a closed drawer or cabinet of a

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computer desk, where exhaust air had no place to go, wrapping the computer in a blanket of heated air, which eventually damaged the components. In one case, with the expressed consent of the owner, I knocked out the rear composite board of the computer desk, opening the computer to the air, and the overheating problem disappeared. Do not place a modern computer in a closed cabinet or drawer of a computer desk; that is an invitation to disaster.

In addition to making sure that the vents in a computer are not externally blocked, we must also assure that the vents are clean and free of dust bunnies and other debris. You may notice all of the dust collected by your furnace filter, and this same dust can be collected inside the computer, blocking the free and proper exchange of cool air. All users should periodically inspect the computer case, possibly with a flashlight, and look for clogged vents, and clear them as appropriate. A very low powered, low suction vacuum can perform this task, and devices for this purpose are often available from computer and electronics stores.

For those who are adventurous, they may want to open the case of the computer for visual inspection. Prior to opening the case, shutdown the computer, and then unplug the power cord. Be sure to ground yourself to remove any static electricity from your body. Always practice maximum safety! Open the case (methods vary by manufacturer) and look for dust bunnies around the power supply, hard drive, video card, mother board, and CPU chip. The low powered vacuum or a can of clean compressed air can be utilized to dislodge and remove the dust bunnies. One area that should be visually inspected is the fan and heat sink around the CPU chip. There is often a small fan integrated with a heat sink fastened on the top of the chip, and the fan and heat sink frequently get clogged with dust and debris, resulting in overheating of the chip and possibly premature demise of the chip. Dust and debris can be removed from the fan and heat sink with the vacuum, canned air, or very carefully with a cotton swab. This would be a good time for the technically savvy user to consider installing additional cooling fans. Fans are generally inexpensive, and come in a variety of formats. The simplest to install can be inserted in an empty PCI slot in the back of the computer, and is powered through the motherboard, not requiring any additional plugs or other connections. More powerful fans may be installed in the extra fan opening common on most computer cases. Other forms of cooling may be installed as well. Supplemental fans can be inexpensively purchased from any computer parts store, and most large electronics stores, or online.

Clean and reliable electricity, and keeping our computers cool, can do much to extend the useful and productive life of our computers. In future columns I will discuss other simple PC maintenance procedures.

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Understanding Your Computer's BIOS
By Brian K. Lewis

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The computer's basic input/output system (BIOS) is really a major key to its proper operation.

The BIOS differs from one computer to another depending on the make of the motherboard and the make of the computer itself. So let's look at what it does and why it is so important for the operation of your computer.

When you wake up your computer by turning on the power, the first component to be activated is the computer processor. The CPU is preprogramed to look for a location in the RAM memory, usually near the end of system memory. This location contains a jump instruction to the location in memory of the BIOS program. On activation the BIOS starts executing a series of diagnostic instructions to verify that the computer is functioning properly. One of the first tests is the power-on self test (POST). If there are any fatal errors the computer will shut down and not proceed further. Some computers have a series of "beep" codes that can help a technician in determining the cause of the failure.

On some computers one of the first indications that the boot process is proceeding normally is the graphics card display on the video screen. This is because the BIOS has found and loaded the video BIOS. Then you will see either a manufacturer's splash screen or the sequence of messages from the BIOS. The BIOS also looks for any other connected devices, such as SCSI or SATA drives, that have a BIOS Read only Memory (ROM) and those instructions will be loaded into memory. If the manufacturer's splash screen isn't hiding the start-up info, you will see the memory count, the floppy, hard drive and CD/DVD drive identification lines appearing on the screen.

The BIOS carries out a system inventory that includes determining the memory timing information, connection of the keyboard, hard drive parameters, plug & play settings, etc. Further it loads the interrupt handlers, initializes the registers and resets the power management. The BIOS also displays a text-based summary screen. This summary includes the CPU and its clock speed, the drives that have been identified, their size and type, system memory size and configuration, video, com ports and parallel ports. Finally the BIOS looks for a boot drive.

Most modern BIOSes can boot from a wide array of devices, not just hard drives. They can boot from CD/DVD, flash drives, or external drives. In every case the BIOS uses the boot sequence information that is stored in the CMOS. This is information that can be changed by the user. The term CMOS stands for Complementary Metal Oxide Semiconductor. Now you see why the name is abbreviated. Once the BIOS identifies the boot drive it searches for the master boot record and starts the operating system boot process on the drive. At that point control of the boot process is taken over by the operating system. Many functions relating to device drivers and plug & play devices handled by the BIOS are now handled directly by the operating system.

All of the processes carried out by the BIOS are required to allow the

hardware to interface with the operating system. Since the basic hardware in a computer can vary widely depending on the make and model, there must be a common interface for it to communicate with the operating system (OS). The OS cannot incorporate all the necessary low level routines for all the possible combinations of computer hardware. The BIOS provides this common interface.

The BIOS programming is usually contained in a chip on the motherboard referred to as an EEPROM chip. This is a programmable chip that can be altered by using software from the motherboard manufacturer. However, anytime you try to change the programming in this chip you can change it in such a way as to prevent your computer from booting. So great care should be taken anytime you need to upgrade your BIOS. It is always advisable to make a copy of the original BIOS on a removable disk so you can restore it if necessary. So when should you need to upgrade your BIOS? In some cases manufacturers will make BIOS upgrades available which will allow you to upgrade your CPU with a newer version. Or they make a change to allow the BIOS to recognize faster system memory or more memory. You must always ensure that the BIOS upgrade you plan on installing is specific for your motherboard. So you need to know the manufacturer and the motherboard model. Just remember, a mistake may make your computer unusable, requiring a major repair such as replacing the motherboard. Unless, of course, you made a backup of the original BIOS.

The CMOS portion of the BIOS is also very important to the proper function of your computer. The settings in the CMOS are retained by use of a low-voltage battery on the motherboard. In some few modern motherboards you can no longer find the battery. That's because it is integrated into another chip and is non-replaceable. Although the battery may have a long life span (more than five years), some computers are still going strong after ten years. Some motherboards may use nonvolatile RAM that doesn't require a battery to keep the information safe. In this case the battery, if one is present, is used only for the real-time clock. So when the battery fails, the computer can still boot.

In order to change any of the CMOS settings you have to use a key stoke, or series of key strokes, during the early part of the boot-up process. The most common keystroke is that of the AMI BIOS that uses just the DEL key to access the setup program. However, some manufacturers use other specific keystrokes and may even vary the combination from one model to another. So it is advisable that you check your owner's manual for specific instructions on how to access the setup program in your computer. This setup may be called the BIOS setup, the CMOS setup or some combination of these terms.

The setup program allows you to change some parameters related to the operation of your computer. Generally you can set the system time and date in the CMOS. As mentioned earlier, you can change the boot sequence in the CMOS to select the order in which the BIOS will look for a bootable drive. The CMOS setup allows you to specify how fast your computer reads from memory, whether your CPU's cache is enabled or disabled and how fast your PCI bus communicates with its adapter

cards. In the advanced settings, you can modify other parameters such as power management, USB settings, and enable or disable I/O ports. You may also be able to set the computer to turn on in response to an incoming call on a modem or a request via a local network. In some motherboards the CMOS settings allow you to "overclock" your system. This means that you can set your CPU and/or system memory to operate at a frequency higher than the standard manufacturer's values. Unless used with great care, changing these values can destabilize the computer operation. The settings in the CMOS will vary depending on the computer manufacturer and the make of the BIOS. Some manufacturers make their own BIOS chips while others purchase them from companies such as AMI, Phoenix or WinBond. Reading your user manual or motherboard manual will give you a better idea of just what is included in your setup program.

The setup program uses a "CMOS checksum" as an error-detecting code. Each time you change the BIOS settings, the checksum is generated by adding all the bytes in the CMOS memory and then storing the lowest byte of the sum. Then, each time the system is booted, the system recomputes the checksum and compares it with the stored value. If they are different, then the system knows that the CMOS has been corrupted somehow and will warn you with an error, typically something like "CMOS Checksum Error." Then you need to enter the setup program and check the settings. Usually, once you save the settings and exit setup, the computer will boot normally.

Most of the preceding information applies when you first start the computer after it has been off for a time. This is called a "cold boot." If you restart your computer from Windows using the "restart" selection, or the "three-finger salute" (CTRL-ALT-Del), or the "reset" button, then this is a "warm boot." Then most of the POST is omitted and the BIOS reloads interrupts, device drivers, checks the CMOS and loads the peripheral BIOSes. Then the memory, drives and summary are displayed on the video screen.

As I hope you now realize, the BIOS and its associated CMOS are essential for the operation of your computer. Always be cautious in making changes in the setup or in updating your BIOS. That way you can ensure continued operation of your system.
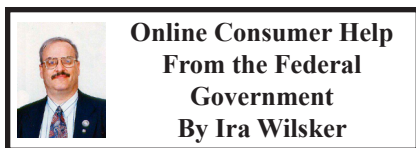
There is another thing I should mention. Use of the BIOS originated with the IBM AT some twenty-five years ago. As computer technology has changed radically in this time span, there is a move afoot to replace the BIOS with what is referred to as "UEFI" or Unified Extensible Firmware Interface. The specifications for this interface were first published in October 2006 and revised in January 2007. The statement of purpose from the UEFI organization is as follows: "The Unified Extensible Firmware Interface (UEFI) specification defines a new model for the interface between operating systems and platform firmware. The interface consists of data tables that contain platform-related information, plus boot and runtime service calls that are available to the operating system and its loader. Together, these provide a standard environment for booting an operating system and running pre-boot applications."

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Currently the companies involved are working on producing motherboards using the UEFI firmware in place of the BIOS. However, there is also some consideration that some users may need to have both a BIOS and the UEFI firmware. Since this process is still in flux, keep tuned for future developments.

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Dr. Lewis is a member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., Florida. <http://www. spcug.org>.

Online Consumer Help From the Federal Government By Ira Wilsker

President Bush has requested that all federal agencies make it easier for consumers (the general public) to locate and utilize information on federal websites. In some cases a variety of federal agencies have pooled their resources and information, and compiled the data in easy to use websites that represent several agencies in one place. Some of these integrated federal websites are <http://www.consumer. gov>, <http://www.recalls.gov>, and <http://www.usa.gov>.

Consumer.gov is probably the premier federal website for comprehensive consumer information. The tabs across the top of the page lead directly to such consumer topics as food, product safety, health, home & community, money, transportation, children, careers & education, and technology. The perimeter of the page contains icons and links which directly connect to specific government services.

One of the icons links to "OnGuardOnline" <http://www. onguardonline.gov> which says, "OnGuardOnline.gov provides practical tips from the federal government and the technology industry to help you be on guard against Internet fraud, secure your computer, and protect your personal information." There is another link for "Consumer Sentinel" which contains comprehensive information on fighting and preventing fraud and identity theft.

One link that I have personally used and strongly recommend leads to the "National Do Not Call Registry" <http://www.donotcall.gov> where you can enter your home and cell phone numbers, and prohibit most telemarketers from calling. After activation, if a telemarketer does call, there is a link to enter a complaint, which may lead to a substantial fine against the telemarketer.

You have probably seen a TV commercial hawking free credit reports, but the fine print and disclaimer advises that the credit report is only free with a paid subscription to a credit monitoring service. It just so happens that congress has required that all Americans are entitled to a genuinely free credit report once a year, without the strings or necessity of paying for a credit monitoring service. This free service is overseen by the Federal Trade

Commission <http://www.ftc.gov>, and linked to the consumer.gov website, or can be reached directly at <http://www.annualcreditreport.com>.

Many of us have had concerns about our children's safety while online, and consumer.gov has a linked resource for that purpose as well. The FTC has created an online child safety website <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/edcams/kidzprivacy> which is a childish looking website that will appeal to kids of all ages. On this site are resources for kids, adults, the media, and teachers.

We are all faced with higher prices at the gas pump, and we generally do not like it. There are scammers out there promoting a variety of miracle products to dramatically improve our gas mileage, but there are also several legitimate tasks we can undertake to save gas. Consumer.gov obliges with an icon linked to a FTC website "Saving Money at the Pump." This is a cute, interactive website with several tips that we may find useful and money saving.

There is a pandemic of identity theft taking place which is costing our society tens of billions of dollars per year, with millions of victims of identity theft annually. Consumer.gov has a link to the central repository of identity theft prevention and information services, which is administered by the FTC at <http://www.ftc.gov/idtheft>. On this site is a link to report identity theft, steps to follow if a victim, information on preventing theft, and other useful resources.

Many of us are inundated with prescreened credit card offers, and invitations to purchase insurance. For those who want to reduce or end this unsolicited and often unwanted mail,

there is a link to "Prescreened Credit Offers." On this site is information on how these prescreened offers work, and how to stop them. For those who want to stop these prescreened offers, the FTC says, "Call toll-free 1-888-5-OPTOUT (1-888-567-8688) or visit <http://www.optoutprescreen.com> for details." That website and phone number are operated by the three major consumer credit reporting agencies, and they will ask for personal information, but promise that it will be treated confidentially.

Hardly a day goes by when we do not hear on the news about some consumer product or food item being recalled for a safety or health reason. Occasionally we also hear about massive automobile recalls to correct some safety deficiency. There is an icon and link on this site to a centralized database on recalls which is continuously updated. This connects to a site <http://www.recalls.gov>, which is a joint venture of several government agencies that are involved in consumer recalls. Categories of recalled products include consumer products, motor vehicles, boats, food, medicines, cosmetics, and environmental products. What I find especially useful and informative on this website is the list of "Recent Recalls." There are six small windows on the recent recalls page that list the latest recalls from the Consumer Product Safety Commission, Food and Drug Administration (FDA), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Coast Guard. Personally, I check this site regularly, and sometimes find that I have a recalled product in my house.

Some of the other useful links on the Consumer.gov website are

to specialized websites such as <http://www.ready.gov> and <http://www.usa.gov>. Ready.gov is a website sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that has resources about home and personal safety in a variety of threatening scenarios. Also included on this DHS website is information for businesses continuity, and child safety during disasters. USA.gov is the central clearing house for all federal agencies. It uses a simple menu hierarchy that eases the location of desired information. Topics are comprehensive, and include such helpful items as government benefits and grants, money and taxes, consumer guides, and many other topics. This site can be a good starting point for someone looking for something to do on the Internet,

Military personnel and families may find the link to "Military Sentinel" a very useful resource. According to the website, <http://www.consumer.gov/military>, "Military Sentinel is a project of the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Defense to identify and target consumer protection issues that affect members of the United States Armed Forces and their families." Included on this website is information on specific identity theft problems faced by military families, financial scams against military personnel, and other military specific information.

Other links on Consumer.gov are to the "Consumer Action Handbook," <http://www.consumeraction.gov>, and information that the disabled may find helpful at <http://www.disabilityinfo.gov>.

The website at Consumer.gov is a goldmine of consumer information that is free for the taking. I suggest that everyone should periodically visit this website and review any informational resources that may be of personal interest and benefit.

WEBSITES:
<http://www.consumer.gov>
<http://www.recalls.gov>
<http://www.usa.gov>
<http://www.ready.gov>
<http://www.annualcreditreport.com>
<http://www.ftc.gov/idtheft>

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Would You Sign This Contract?
By Rob Rice

Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.

Ok, here's the deal; I offer you a big, 56-inch, shiny new Filch Plasma Screen TV and I will sell it to you if you will agree to have a camera installed in your home so I may watch you watching the new television. Sound fair? You also agree that should you disable or inhibit the free operation of the camera in any way, you forfeit the television and your money. Neither am I responsible for any damages to your home from the equipment or its use nor do I guarantee privacy or even that the television will work.

Would you sign such a contract? Many of us, in a sense, have already agreed to something like the above scenario when we clicked on the End User License Agreement (EULA),

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the contract that accompanies most software these days.

It pretty much goes without saying that most of us do not read EULAs. They are often long, dry, and hard to understand documents written in a very small type face and crammed in a tiny window. Even if there is something bad in it, what are the chances it will have any real effect? After all "I'm one among millions."

We may often think of ourselves as just one among many cattle feeding in the pasture, so "The chances of lightning striking me are remote." But lightning did hit hundreds of folks in the form of a Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) lawsuit. Hundreds of persons have been sued for allegedly downloading music illegally. For example, RIAA filed a lawsuit against 12-year-old Brianna LaHara, whose mom had paid a $29.99 service charge to KaZaA for the company's music service, said Brianna, "I got really scared. My stomach is all turning," "I thought it was OK to download music because my mom paid a service fee for it. Out of all people, why did they pick me?" (1)

But what we have learned since Brianna's case came to light is that many intellectual property owners are using eavesdropping techniques to monitor end user compliance. Whether it's intercepting data traffic over an Internet connection or placing spyware on your computer the name of the game seems to be intimidation through litigation. Of course heavy-handed tactics do tend to produce mistakes and bad public feeling, such as RIAA's disastrous lawsuit where they sued a deceased great-grandmother who reportedly had never owned a computer. (2)

But what is interesting is that software that tends to operate in a dubious manner will typically tell you up front, or give you some hints in its EULA. Take for example this classic EULA that was analyzed by Benjamin Edelman back in 2004, he is an assistant professor at the Harvard Business School and a member of the Massachusetts Bar. It is Gator, an advertising pop-up software that often came embedded in weather monitors, organizers and clock synchronizers, (The company changed its name to Claria Corporation. GAIN stands for Gator Advertising Information Network) The EULA, with over 5,900 words of text, informed the user that:

"You agree that you will not use, or encourage others to use, any unauthorized means for the removal of the GAIN AdServer, or any GAIN-Supported Software from a computer."

That includes removing it with Adaware or SpyBot, which listed it as spyware.

"Any use of a packet sniffer or other device to intercept or access communications between GP and the GAIN AdServer is strictly prohibited."

Meaning you cannot monitor what it is doing while it is on your computer!

Mr. Edelman's website is a very good resource for the wary and worth a look, <http://www.benedelman.org/news/112904-1.html>.

Sony has faced some embarrassing headlines as of late with their music CD's EULA and rightly so. Take for example these observations by the Electronic Frontier Foundation regarding the contents of the Sony EULA:

If you file for bankruptcy, you have to delete all the music on your computer.

• The EULA says Sony-BMG will never be liable to you for more than $5.00.

• If your house gets burgled, you have to delete all your music from your laptop when you get home. That's because the EULA says that your rights to any copies terminate as soon as you no longer possess the original CD.

• You must install any and all updates, or else lose the music on your computer. The EULA immediately terminates if you fail to install any update. No more holding out on those hobble-ware downgrades masquerading as updates.

• If you move out of the country, you have to delete all your music. The EULA specifically forbids "export" outside country where you reside. (3)

Most EULAs that I have read place all of the burden and financial responsibility upon you. You pay the money, you take the risk, and you take the liability. The software company decides everything in its favor and takes no responsibility what-so-ever even for the software doing what it claims to do! It would seem that you in effect have given up your legal rights in exchange to use a piece of software.

Ok, so you read the license agreement but the mind numbing experience had you re-reading the same sentence over and over and by the time you were done you felt like the first documented case of someone having actually died from boredom. What is worse, you still don't know what it said! But cheer up, there is help available. For example, The Electronic Frontier Foundation has a helpful article titled, "Dangerous Terms a User's Guide to EULAs" by Annalee Newitz. (4) It describes some of the more dubious terms found in some EULAs and what to look out for. Such as:

1. "Do not criticize this product publicly."

2. "Using this product means you will be monitored."

3. "Do not reverse-engineer this product."

4. "Do not use this product with other vendor's products."

5. "By signing this contract, you also agree to every change in future versions of it. Oh yes, and EULAs are subject to change without notice."

6. "We are not responsible if this product messes up your computer."

You can also use some of the EULA analyzers that are available. While they are not a substitute for carefully reading a user agreement they can be very helpful by flagging suspect sentences, especially when you have an insanely long contract such as the over 32,000 words found at the Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum's web site. Figuring this would bring any EULA analyzer to its knees, I put it through the Spyware Guide's on-line EULA Analyzer. (5) It performed beautifully and flagged areas that the Analyzer thought suspicious, including:

You agree to pay us three thousand dollars per unsolicited e-mail sent, or prohibited comment posted to the CPRR Discussion Group, or telephone call and fifteen thousand dollars per e-mail address added to your commercial mailing list in violation of the foregoing, plus damages. The CPRR Museum participates in Project Honey Pot which allows us to track and help catch spammers who harvest e-mail addresses from our web pages.

One analyzer that I have been using for several months now is the EULAlyzer by Javacool Software LLC, who also publish SpywareBlaster. This is an application that is very simple to use, just click analyze and then drag the application's pointer over the EULA and automatically copies it into the program. Click the "Analyze" button and it gives you its assessment almost instantaneously.

The EULAlyzer personal is free for educational and personal use and a Pro version with added features is also available. (6)

If you are still not convinced of the importance of reading the EULA, you might consider this; the folks over at PC Pitstop <http://pcpitstop.com> decided to see just how many people read the agreement. In their EULA they actually offered monetary compensation for reading the document! It stated:

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION

A special consideration which may include financial compensation will be awarded to a limited number of authorized licensees to read this section of the license agreement and contact PC Pitstop at <consideration@pcpitstop.com>. This offer may be withdrawn at any time.

Unfortunately it took four months before anyone collected. Doug Heckman was the first person to e-mail them in 3000 downloads! For his efforts PC Pitstop gave him $1000. So there you have it, incentive to read the license agreement!

Reading EULAs can actually be quite an interesting experience. Read enough of them and you quickly learn how bold some companies have become in trying to thwart trade laws. But don't take my word for it, take a look at some of the Microsoft, Google, or as the hardware industry attempts to apply the same yoke on its customers, Lexmark EULAs and see what they have to say, you may be amazed!

(1) Fox News, "12-Year-Old Sued for Music Downloading" <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,96797,00.html>.

(2) BetaNews, "RIAA Sues Deceased Grandmother" <http://www.betanews.com/article/RIAA_Sues_Deceased_Grandmother/1107532260>.

(3) Electronic Frontier Foundation, "Now the Legalese Rootkit: Sony-BMG's EULA" <http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/archives/004145.php>.

(4) Electronic Frontier Foundation, "Dangerous Terms A User's Guide to EULAs" <http://www.eff.org/wp/eula.php>.

(5) Spyware Guide's on-line EULA Analyzer, <http://www.spywareguide.com/analyze/analyzer.php>.

(6) EULAlyzer, <http://www.javacoolsoftware.com/index.html>.

WEB SITES

<http://www.spywareguide.com/analyze/analyzer.php>

<http://www.javacoolsoftware.com/index.html>

<http://www.benedelman.org/news/112904-1.html>

<http://www.eff.org/wp/eula.php>

This article has been provided to APCUG by the author solely for publication by APCUG member groups. All other uses require the permission of the author (see e-mail address below).

This article's reference to the Electronic Frontier Foundation should not be construed as an endorsement of the organization by the author. Rob Rice is a computer

specialist living in Anchorage Alaska and a member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City<http://www.ccokc.org>. Rob can be contacted at <articles(at)isp.com>.

**BOARD MEETING
10/14/2007
Carol Sanzi**

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT
President Gary DeNise, Treasurer Bette Gay, Secretary Carol Sanzi, SIG-Advanced Chairman Franz Breidenich, SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow, SIG-IBM Intermediate Chairman Carl Massie, Jr., Publications Committee Chairman Warner Mach and Members-at-Large Bob Clyne and Chuck Moery. Arriving late was Vice President Richard Jackson. The meeting was called to order at 12:04 p.m.

OLD BUSINESS
Bette Gay reported that the amount in the treasury equaled $8,393.48 with $3,811.05 in the bank account and $4,582.43 invested in three Certificates of Deposit. The membership stands at a total of 76.

It is time for Samuel Cheek, Harry Meisner, Wilbur S. Shaffmaster, Wendell Anderson, Jim Vincent, Eddie Durrett, and O. S. Narayanaswamy to renew their memberships.

Bob Clyne moved to reimburse Gary DeNise $5.49 for refreshment purchases. Franz Breidenich seconded the motion and it was carried.

NEW BUSINESS
Bob Clyne stated that an updated membership directory will be included in the DATA BUS in January. If members have any changes to their personal data, they should notify Bette Gay.

A discussion took place about accessing the SEMCO podcasts. Richard Jackson will add directions to the site for downloading. This should avoid the confusion that some people were experiencing.

Bob Clyne moved to renew the creation of the two Members-at-Large board positions for the year 2008. Tom Callow seconded the motion and it was carried.

Carol Sanzi moved to adjourn. Bob Clyne seconded the motion and it was carried. The meeting adjourned at 12:28 p.m.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGS)

SIG-IBM
Tom Callow
Warner Mach

November 11: Computer Tips and Tricks 2007: SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow will present a new batch of things you can do to make your computer operate more smoothly and efficiently.

SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE
Carl Massie, Jr.

November 11: The meeting will open with an audience participation discusssion of computer related buying tips, useful insights, and vexing incidents. A video will be shown thatt describes how humans can be engaged, thru games, to solve problems that are beyond computer capabilities.

NOVICE-IBM GROUP
Rotating Volunteer Hosts

November 11: Help Q & A:
Discussion directed by the audience. No question is too simple! Note: The Novice-IBM Group is 'by request.' If you have special questions for this group then speak to one of the officers to schedule the session..

SIG-ADVANCED
Franz Breidenich

December 3, 2007: . 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.**

Warner Mach
machw@att.net
(to post monthly computer group info)

**CALENDAR-OF-EVENTS
OTHER GROUPS**

COMP (Computer Operators of Marysville & Port Huron)
Dec.5, (1st Wednesday); Angry Bull Steakhouse, 5078 Lapeer Rd. nr. Wadhams Rd. 6p.m.(Dinner at 7 p.m.) Jane Wheatly 810-982-1187 or Pam Raisanen <compinfo(at)hughes.net>. <http://www.bwcomp.org>. Topic: Annual Christmas Party. Next 1/2/08.

DCOM Computer Club
Nov. 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. Topic: TBA. Next 12/14.

MacGroup- Detroit
Nov. 18, 3:00 p.m., Birmingham Temple, 28611 West 12 Mile Rd., Farmington Hills. Info: Terry White, <terry@macgroup.org> or 248-569-4933. <http://www. macgroup.org>. Topic: 'Mac OS X 10.5 Leopard' by Dave Marra, Apple Senior Systems Engineer.

MacTechnics, (MAC User Group)
Nov 17, 11:00 a.m., (3rd Saturday); (SIGs at 9:30); Ann Arbor Open School, 920 Miller Ave., Ann Arbor. <http://www.mactechnics.org>). JoAnn Olson at 248-478-4300. Topic: TBA.'

MDLUG (Metro Detroit Linux User Group)
Nov. 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. Topic: TBA.

MUG (Michigan User Group)
Nov. 13, 6:00 p.m., (2nd Tuesday): MUG meetings are at The Farmington Community Library–Main Branch, 32737 W. 12 Mile Rd., Farminton Hills, MI. 48334. <http://www.mug.org>.Topic: 'One Laptop Per Child (OLPC).'

Michigan Apple Computer User Group
Dec 13, 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>. Topic: TBA.

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

Royal Oak Computer Club
Every Wed., 12:30 to 2:30 PM at Mahany/Meininger Senior Community Center, 3500 Marais Ave., Royal Oak, 48073. Near Crooks & 13 Mile. Guest speakers & regular monthy speakers. <http://www.geocities.com/royaloakcomputerclub/ ourpage.html>

SHCC (Sterling Heights Computer Club)
Dec. 4, 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>. Topic: 'E-mail—Clients on the PC, Making it More Manageable.'

Wayne State University Mac User Group
Nov. 10, 10:00 a.m.–Noon, (2nd Saturday); at 21042 Laurelwood, Farmington. Information: JoAnn Olsen 248-478-4300. Topic: TBA .

OCTOBER REFRESHMENT DONORS
Gary DeNise, Coordinator
Al Bochenek
Gary DeNise
Kaye Johnson
Warner Mach
Betty Mackenzie
Roland Maki
Carol Sanzi

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@mich.com
Comptois, Jerry—248-651-2504, anytime
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

SEMCO CALENDAR

ArvinMeritor Building
2135 West Maple Road
Troy, Michigan

November 11–SUNDAY (Meet 2nd Sunday)

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

SEMCO <u>General</u> Meeting at 1:30 p.m.

<u>Special Interest Groups (SIGs)</u>

SIG-IBM 1:45 p.m. **Program: Computer Tips and Tricks 2007:** SIG-IBM Co-Chairman Tom Callow will present a new batch of things you can do to make your computer 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:** The meeting will open with an audience participation discussion of computer related buying tips, useful insights, and vexing incidents. A video will be shown, that describes how humans can be engaged, thru games, to solve problems that re beyond computer capabilities..

SIG-ADVANCED, Dec. 3, 2007–MONDAY, 6:45 p.m., 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.**
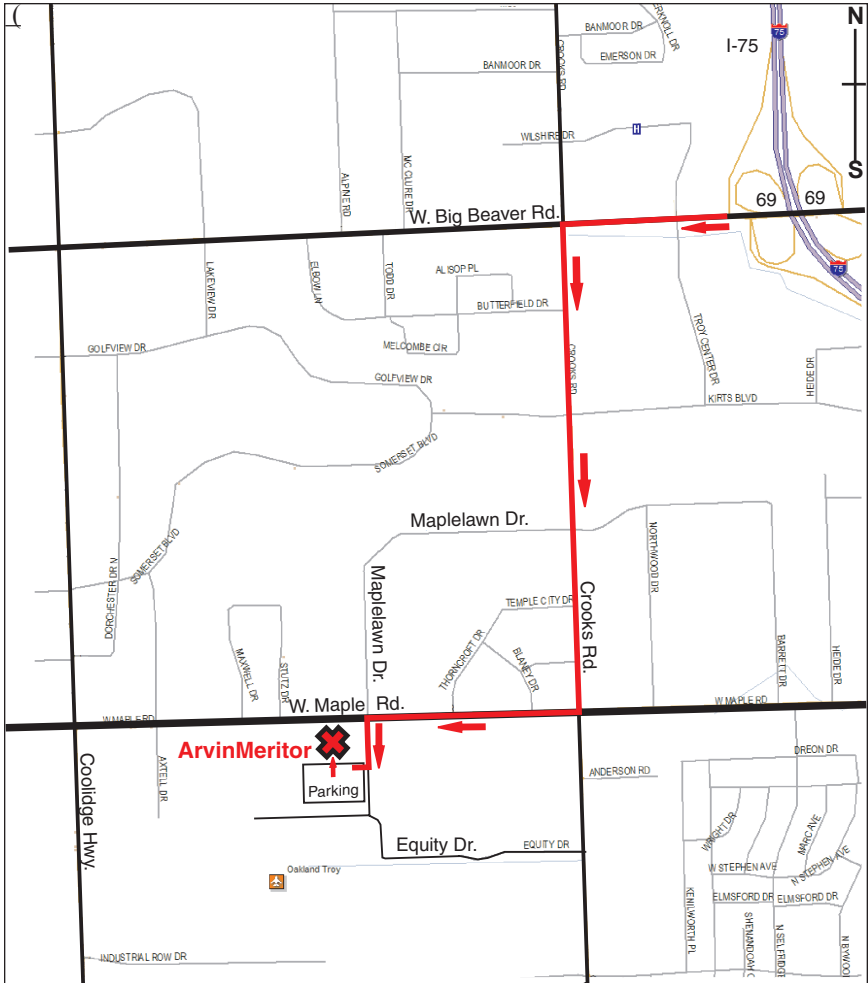
December 9–SEMCO Sunday

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 48084

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.

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P.O. Box 707
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SEMCO (future meetings)
November 11
December 9

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