SEMCO

DATA BUS

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

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING AND ELECTION

The annual meeting of the members of the SouthEastern Michigan Computer Organization, Inc., will be held Sunday, January 13, 2008 at 1:30 pm at ArvinMeritor, 2135 West Maple Rd., Troy, Michigan.
The election of Officers and Members-at-Large of the Board of Directors of the Corporation will take place at the annual meeting.

NOTICE OF NOMINATIONS

Please take notice that under the Bylaws of the SouthEastern Michigan Computer Organization, Inc., nominations for officers will be taken at the general meeting to be held Sunday, December 9, 2007 at 1:30 p.m., with the election of officers to be held at the January general meeting.
The following offices will be open for nominations:
1) President
2) Vice President
3) Secretary
4) Treasurer
5) Two Members-at-Large of the Board of Directors

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

I'm Excited About My New Toys
We wanted a GPS device with a 4.3' screen (diagonally), and a unit with better features. We finally chose the Garmin nuvi 660 because it announces your next turn (street name) well before you will turn, and again just before you actually turn. It has a bright screen and includes traffic reporting capabilities without purchasing an FM traffic adaptor, which is in the DC cord you get with it. 90 days of traffic reporting is activated when you register it, but after that, you must subscribe for that service ($60 per year).

The nuvi 660 includes Bluetooth technology for hands-free use with your Bluetooth cell phone. MP3 file use is also included and it has an SD slot. It will also talk through your car radio. The 4.3" screen is easier to see and it was on sale for $599 at BJ's Wholesale. Yes, I could have done much better on the Web, but I preferred to buy it locally for the ease of returning it if I so desired. A friend returned four before he settled on the Mio he kept. So far, we are satisfied in spite of two curious anomalies in the mapping that we encountered. MapQuest had given us worse in the same areas. I ordered a free CD to update the maps, but I'll have to pay for updates in the future.

Another new toy; a Kwikset Biometric Smart Lock, is for our house door. The last few years we used a Kwikset pushbutton lock that we could press the buttons for a preset code and it automatically unlocks. It's great if you can't find your key. You can also use your key. We were happy with the ease of use, but along came the Kwikset biometric lock. Simply slide your finger across the sensor for it to automatically unlock the deadbolt.

It looks like a conventional lock on the outside, but with a small fingerprint sensor sticking down from the key cylinder housing. It is powered by four AA batteries and the fingerprint data is stored in flash memory. It also works with a key. The interior lock housing is larger, containing the batteries, electronics and the Lock's programming screen. It can store over 50 different fingerprints and the lock administrator can limit the privileges of any fingerprint to a certain time of day, and even a day of the week; and can make another user also an administrator. Any stored fingerprint data can be deleted or neutralized. A great feature of any Kwikset Smart Key lock is that you can "re-key" the lock yourself in about 15 seconds, and without any disassembly. That worked great. It also resists criminal "bump key" methods known to defeat many locks. Many people aren't aware that a clever thief can quickly and easily defeat most door locks using the "bump key" technique. Check: <http://www.toool.nl/bumping.pdf> for info.

If the lock would work as advertised, we would love it for its simplicity, but that hasn't been the case. Often my finger works the first time, but not always and I must rescan several times.

My wife has less success and "often" has to scan her finger several times, sometimes resorting to her key (and a few unkind words). Their telephone tech support was little help, although we couldn't get my wife's finger to unlock it at all until after they walked me through a setting change. Her finger now works, but not consistently. Their on-line tech support feels we aren't scanning correctly, but we have tried the video's approach and some other techniques with no improvement. We purchased it at Home Depot, but it appears they will get this very unreliable item back. Their Web site tech support was a joke and the English part didn't work for me. I asked them to send a new sensor, but they said that would take at least a month. This product really tries your patience. There is an installation and programming video on the Kwikset Web site <http://www.kwikset.com> that makes it seem easy, but we're giving up. The price at Home Depot is $199.95.

And A Good Time Was Had By All!
I attended the fall conference for FACUG (Florida Association of Computer User Groups) and it was nice to see everyone. Attendance was about average for their one-day fall event with 80 attendees from 29 user groups. Central Florida Computer Society (CFCS) was the host and the FACUG conference coincided with the CFCS 2nd annual Tech Fair, a two-day event featuring many great seminars and products with a host of local vendors selling their wares. The conference included breakfast and lunch and they kept you busy for the entire event, ending with a nice drawing for the FACUG event, and another drawing the next day at the Tech Fair. Unfortunately, the CFCS event was not well attended by their membership.

I also met APCUG president Jay Ferron and got some updated information from him. Nobody could be more positive about APCUG's future then Jay.

Help For Cut & Paste

Flashpaste Professional by Softvoile is a utility that lets you type boilerplate text, save it to a mini-database, and paste it automatically into any document, e-mail, Word document, Web page, chat, etc. Just click "CTRL-U" to pop up a dialog box where you pick the auto text you need and paste it into a document. "Click the "New Item" button and type in the name of the item, and then set its type folder to RTF or simple text. Just type the boilerplate text into Flashpaste and fill in all the fields without having to step out of the submission page several times. The record is then added to the tree of items in the Flashpaste main window."

The standard Windows clipboard keeps only the last copied text, but Flashpaste records all recently copied words, numbers and phrases allowing easy reuse and eliminating repeated copying and pasting. Flashpaste Professional helps perform a variety of tasks such as automatically inserting frequently used addresses, e-mail text blocks, HTML code snippets, words, phrases and paragraphs. Flashpaste can also create macros and strings that are either replaced or processed by an application. Using macros, you can paste current time and date, insert commands that emulate pressing the Tab or Enter keys, and more.

Download Flashpaste Professional using this link <http://softvoile.com/download/flashpastepro.exe?s=ng9> (1.1Mb). Use the discount coupon (bcddc) that gives a 25% discount from the $29.95 list price. Offer valid till Feb. 01, 2008. A 30-day evaluation copy can also be downloaded. I'm not sure if it will be a fully-working version or if they will send you a key for the trial version. <http://softvoile.com/> Visit their Web site for more information about Flashpaste features <http://softvoile.com/flashpaste/?s=ng9>.

An Interesting Freeware!

DVDVideoSoft Limited <http://www.dvdvideosoft.com> has updated its free software, Free YouTube to iPod Conversion and Free YouTube to iPhone Conversion. The free software enables users to download a video from YouTube and convert it to MP4 video and MP3 audio format for playing on an Apple iPod, iPhone, Sony PSP or cell phone. With just a few simple steps, users can enjoy their favorite online videos without having to sit in front of the computer.

Users enable Free YouTube to iPod Conversion and Free YouTube to iPhone Conversion by inserting a link into the program interface and clicking the 'download and convert' button. The software downloads a video in MP4 format or audio in MP3, which can then be uploaded to a portable player or mobile phone. The program also converts a Flash video file to MP4 video format.

DVDVideoSoft has already created a line of free tools: Free YouTube to iPod Converter, Free YouTube to MP3 Converter, Free YouTube to iPhone Converter, Free Video to iPod Converter, Free Video to iPhone Converter, Free Video to MP3 Converter, Free YouTube Uploader, Free Fast MPEG Cut, Free 3GP Video Converter and Free Video to Flash Converter. All their programs

are absolutely free and run under Windows, including Vista. They say they respect the user's privacy and there is no spyware or adware. The programs are available in different languages, for example: English, German, French and Japanese.

Besides free downloads, the site provides many tutorials and guides. For more information and free downloads visit DVDVideoSoft at <http://www.dvdvideosoft.com/free-dvd-video-software.htm>. In addition to its software site, DVDVideoSoft runs a free On-Line Video Conversion resource VIDOKY <http://www.vidoky.com>, a popular video download site.

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 month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click <bobclick at bellsouth dot net>. Visit my Web site at <http://www.dealsguy.com>

Saitek Notebook Optical Mouse & Mini UFO Hub By Franz Breidenich

The Saitek Notebook Optical Mouse and the Saitek Mini UFO Hub (their name for it), from Saitek Industries, Ltd., are designed to take up minimal space in the notebook user's carrying bag. They are available in 19 different colors. The units I reviewed are Lime Green and they do stand out.

The mouse is quite a bit smaller than a regular sized mouse but it does have most of the functions of its bigger brothers. The mouse is rated at 800 dpi, and it installs itself when you plug it into a USB port. It has right and left buttons and pushing down on the wheel acts as a third button. The wheel allows you to scroll a document from top to bottom by turning the wheel. When the mouse is moved a red LED comes on inside the mouse illuminating the desk surface. There is also a white LED inside the mouse, which lights up the translucent wheel.

The system requirements to use the Notebook Optical Mouse are a USB 2.0 port on the computer, and a Windows computer running Windows XP (including XP 64bit) or Windows Vista (all versions), or a Mac computer running Mac OS X. The mouse comes with a 4-page manual written in many different languages. Also included is a listing of technical support centers in many different countries of the world. The Notebook Optical Mouse sells for $19.95 at <http://www.saitekusa.com>.

Using The Notebook Optical Mouse while writing this review on my laptop computer, the mouse worked flawlessly

performing all the functions the mouse is required to do, but I am a man with big hands and I had problems operating the left button with my index finger. Instead of hitting the left button, I was hitting the front of the mouse. This mouse would most likely work better, used by a child, a woman, or even a man with smaller hands.

The Mini UFO Hub is a small bus powered USB hub, about 2½ inches in diameter, having four USB 2.0 Hi-Speed ports placed around the edge of the device. The plug that goes into the computer or another hub folds into the base of the hub when not in use. Also included is a 30-inch USB extension cable. The hub looks like a UFO with it's round dome shape with a 5 color LED positioned at the top of the dome. This LED cycles thru its five different colors.

The system requirement for this hub is any computer with a USB port, even ones that do not support USB 2.0. It will work at the fastest speed the computer port allows. The hub comes with a four-page manual written in many different languages, also included is a listing of technical support centers around the world. There is no price listed at <http://www.saitekusa.com> for the Mini UFO Hub, but instead it says to check back for availability.

To test this hub I hooked up three devices to the hub. The Notebook Optical Mouse, a portable scanner that is powered from the USB bus and a digital camera. The mouse worked flawlessly, the scanner was able to scan a document and make a file of it on the computer, and I was able to download pictures from the camera. All three devices were turned on and drawing power at the same time. The Mini UFO Hub was able to handle the load.

The Notebook Optical Mouse and the Mini UFO Hub both performed flawlessly. If I had smaller, hands I would adopt the mouse, to be the mouse I carry with my laptop computer. For most people these devices should do a more than satisfactory job

Franz Breidenich can be reached at <franzb@ameritech.com>..

SIG-IBM Intermediate Meeting Report By Carl Massie, Jr.

Everyone is reminded to update following MS patch Tuesday.

Also use Secunia Software Inspector anytime to find updates for other software. <http://secunia.com/software_inspector/>.

The new Norton, McAfee, etc. security suites that provide protection related to virus, worms, malware, e-mail, firewall, trojans, etc. are sometimes such CPU and memory hogs, that they severely impact the performance of the host computer with limited RAM or processor power. They are clearly designed for the new, more powerful computers.

Use CCleaner to clean your hard drive and registry. Majorgeeks has a download without the Yahoo toolbar. <http://majorgeeks.com/download4191.html>.

For a list of the keyboard shortcuts that are available in Windows XP: <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/301583>.

Rotten Apple: Leopard. See article at <http://www.eweek.com/article2/0,1759,2212976,00.asp>.

In the eye of the Storm worm. See article at <http://www.antirootkit.com/blog/category/wincom32>./

The Malicious Software Removal Tool provided with Windows Update runs automatically. The download version can be run on demand, perhaps as a start at cleaning a computer of malware.<http://www.microsoft.com/security/malwareremove/default.mspx>.

I Googled to learn how to fix an issue that arose when starting Outlook. McAfee had been installed long ago and Outlook was configured for the first time. The problem centered on:'McAfee vsolplg.dll.' For details see: <http://www.mcse.ms/message2088701.html>.

A useful book: 'The Secret Guide to Computers." List $20. 30th edition for 2008. By Russ Walter. <http://SecretFun.com>.

A good book: "Geeks on Call—Security and Privacy 5-Minute Fixes." List $14.99. By J. R. King. Wiley Publishing, Inc.

A good article: "Google Adds Spam, Virus Filtering to Paid Gmail." By Juan Carlos Perez. PC World. December 2007. Pg.70.

One user is particularly interested in this, but I believe too much work for too little gain: "How to Protect E-Mail From Prying Eyes" in "Privacy Watch" by Erik Larkin. PC World. December 2007. Pg 70

If I understood a user's question, then in order to select text from a PDF, in Adobe Reader 8.1, you choose Tool \ Select & Zoom \ Select Tool (make sure Select Tool has the check mark). You can then select text within the PDF and paste elsewhere. If you are trying to do something else with a PDF, you could look at the software listed on this link: <http://forums.whirlpool.net.au/forum-replies-archive.cfm/579042.html>.

Two useful programs are CutePDF and PrimoPDF. CutePDF has a free version that allows you to create PDFs from a Word or other document, and also has a low cost version that allows you to edit PDFs. I merely glanced at the software list on the page, and recognized some but have not used them, so no recommendation or specific advice. You might also want to look in the Adobe Reader 8 help under Keyboard Shortcuts \ Keyboard Shortcuts \ Keys for selecting tools.

The following formats are very similar and there are reasons why a browser selects a different application rather than the one associated with the file extension. I spoke on this previously regarding media files and may revisit the topic in the future: PostScript, EPS, PDF, AI ... ahhhh, what's the difference? See: <http://www.rdpslides.com/psfaq/FAQ00019.htm>.

For information on what's up at the OpenDocument Foundation See:<http://www.linux.com/feature/121034>.

One wily user answered a question about commenting and organizing e-mail. He forwards noteworthy e-mails to a separate account (e.g. Yahoo, Gmail, etc.) and puts comments/notes at the top of the new forwarded message.

Another user correctly provided a method to handle a 550 MB mail file which was in 3,740 fragments which Windows defragmenter didn't compact: (1) Copy the file to a memory stick and check that it is there and of the correct size. (2) Delete the file from the hard drive. (3) Defragment the hard drive to consolidate space. (4) Copy the file back from the memory stick to the correct

location on the hard drive. (5) After verifying functionality, delete the mail file from the memory stick.

'Outlook Express' vs 'Outlook'

Features of Outlook Express: (1) Fundamental e-mail client. (2) Comes with the operating system. (3) Has separate files for each folder

Features of Outlook: (1) Full featured e-mail client. (2) Comes with MS Office or businesses with Exchange Server will use Outlook as e-mail client. (3) All folders and hence e-mails are stored in a single file outlook.pst (pst = personal store). (4) There also may be an .ost file which stands for Offline Store. Note that the the pst file is designed for local file access and will be slower to access if accessed thru a network share or UNC path.

To compact Outlook Express: (1) Be on the Welcome page. (2) Go to File \ Folder \ Compact all folders or right click a folder to compact only that one.

To compact Outlook: This can be done within Outlook but better to do with Outlook closed (1) Go to. Start \ Settings \ Control Panel \ Mail. (2) Go to Data Files...button \ Settings... button \ Compact Now button. Note: Outlook does automatic compaction (different from archiving) but sometimes it is good to manually perform the operation.

Another user mentioned ZoomIt which is an excellent tool that I will try to incorporate into the next meeting. See ZoomIt v1.71 at: <http://www.microsoft.com/technet/sysinternals/utilities/zoomit.mspx>.

Carl Massie, Jr. is chairman of SIG-IBM Intermediate..

Free Software–Part 1 of 2
By Ira Wilsker

Computers and Internet access can be very expensive. Commercial software for our computers can also be very expensive, but fortunately there are alternatives that can save us a lot of money. There are thousands of free software products available, many of which are qualitatively competitive with their expensive commercial counterparts. In this column I will look at but a few of the high-quality free software programs available, several of which I personally use.

Our online security and safety must be a paramount concern. While there are many fine commercial security utilities available, there are also several excellent and free utilities that we can use to secure our computers. We all need security software on our computers, and the free alternatives to commercial software may do a very adequate job in protecting us. At a minimum, we all need antivirus, anti-spyware, and firewall software to provide the protection we need. The most popular free antivirus program is AVG AntiVirus Free Edition, with over 50 million registered users. AVG AntiVirus, and its companion free products, AVG AntiSpyware Free Edition, and AVG Anti-Rootkit Free, are available for download at <http://free.grisoft.com>.

Another enormously popular free antivirus program is avast! 4 Home Edition, from alwil Software, available for download from <http://www.avast.com/eng/avast_4_home.html>. This avast! software has proven itself, and has an excellent reputation, as it has

won several awards and recognitions, including the VirusBulletin 100 Award (detected 100% of viruses when tested in August), WestCoast Labs Checkmark award for quality, and is ICSA Labs certified for antivirus protection.

Some people prefer integrated Internet security suites; commercial Internet security suites often sell for premium prices. At least one company, Comodo <http://www.comodo.com>, a well-known publisher of commercial and corporate security products, offers a family of free integrated personal computer security products, including an antivirus, firewall, anti-malware (anti-spyware), website authentication (anti-phishing, Internet fraud, and identity theft protection), and anti-spam utilities. For those who want an integrated suite, or just individual components, Comodo offers users that excellent option.

Spyware has become a greater threat to our computing safety and security than computer viruses. Two free standing products can provide substantial protection against spyware and many other forms of malware; these two products are Spybot Search & Destroy, and Microsoft's Windows Defender. Personally, I have been using Spybot for many years, and can recommend it. Spybot, now in version 1.5, offers frequent updates, excellent detection and removal of spyware, and some real time protection using its "Immunize" function. Spybot <http://www.safer-networking.org> also offers a series of performance enhancement tools including an excellent startup manager when in its "advanced" mode. To no one's surprise, Microsoft has been sliding into the personal computer security business by offering

a commercial security product, and a full featured freeware anti-spyware product, Windows Defender. This product offers real time protection as well as detection and removal of almost all known spyware threats, and offers frequent updates. It would be a generally good practice not to run two or more anti-spyware products at the same time. It should be noted that there are some documented software conflicts with both of these products and some of the commercial Internet security suites; at least one major commercial suite detects and uninstalls Windows Defender to minimize conflicts. The Spybot "Immunize" function has been shown to degrade the performance of at least one commercial security suite, and should be turned off if performance appears too slow.

The function of a firewall is to restrict illicit online access to the computer from outside sources, and to prevent programs installed on the computer from sending data from the computer to the Internet, without the express approval of the user. A firewall is a very necessary item to have installed and running, especially if on a broadband connection. There are several free firewalls available, such as the Comodo firewall mentioned above, but there is one free firewall that dwarfs all others in popularity. CheckPoint's Zone Alarm Free Edition is by far the most widely used free firewall in the world. As an example of its popularity, the site Download.com currently shows that over 43 million copies of the free version of the Zone Alarm firewall have been downloaded. For those who do not have a firewall but need one (it is a necessity!), the Zone Alarm Free Firewall would be a solid choice.

With use, our computers lose much of the performance they had when new. A company, IOBIT, offers several free (and several commercial) products for download at <http://www.iobit.com>. Two of their very popular products are IOBIT's "Advanced Windows Care Personal Edition," and "SmartDefrag." With over 6 million copies downloaded, Advanced Windows Care Personal Edition is a utility that offers an excellent registry cleaner, and a one-click feature that can detect common computer software problems and repair them. A companion free product, SmartDefrag, can reorganize and optimize the data on a hard drive which will improve the read and write speed and performance of the hard drive. Together, these products can provide significant performance improvements to the PC.

Sometimes we may want to save a document or website such that we, or anyone else, can see exactly what we see. The universally accessible and popular format "PDF" (portable document format) was originally created by Adobe, which publishes an excellent, but expensive PDF writing utility (PDF readers from Adobe and others are usually free). I save a lot of web pages and other documents and use a free alternative PDF writer, CutePDF Writer (Freeware). Available for download from <http://www.cutepdf.com>, CutePDF Writer (Freeware) was rated as one of the 50 best freeware downloads by Computer Shopper magazine. Many users who download CutePDF Writer (Freeware) will also need to download the free GPLGS converter from the CutePDF website. Converting a document to PDF format is a fast and simple process. CutePDF Writer is actually installed as a printer driver, and by simply selecting "print" from the menu, CutePDF is selected as the printer. Rather than printing to paper, CutePDF simply saves the PDF file that it creates to the hard drive or other storage media. It is really that quick and simple. I use CutePDF several times a day, mostly to save web pages that appear unchanged when viewed in a PDF reader.

Almost everyone could sometimes use a good word processor, spreadsheet, and presentation program. Microsoft Office, and Corel Office Suite X3, are expensive, but offer a full-featured office suite. For those who want a freeware alternative, OpenOffice <http://www.openoffice.org> is a full-featured, free, and powerful office suite that can read and write Microsoft Office files, including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. The OpenOffice suite, which has over a hundred million users worldwide, consists of a full-featured word processor, spreadsheet, database program, multimedia presentation program, formula writer, and an integrated drawing and graphic arts program (competitive to Microsoft Publisher). OpenOffice also includes an integral PDF writer to create PDF files from any of its components by simply printing to PDF. OpenOffice has been adopted by major universities, government agencies, public school systems, private businesses and corporations, and countless individuals as their primary office suite. OpenOffice is free for both personal and corporate use, and offers an excellent alternative to the expensive commercial office suites.

There is a lot of free software available, and much of it is of a quality competitive with its expensive

commercial competitors. If you find free software with legitimate good ratings, then you are generally safe to download it and try it. If you like it, that is great. If you do not like it, then uninstall it, and other than a few minutes of time you have lost nothing. Quality free software should be strongly considered by everyone. This is one case where the old cliché "You get what you pay for" does not apply.

WEBSITES:

<http://free.grisoft.com> AVG Free Products.

<http://www.comodo.com> Comodo Free products.

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

<http://www.avast.com/eng/avast_4_home.html>.

<http://www.safer-networking.org> Spybot.

<http://www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/software> Windows Defender.

<http://www.zonealarm.com/store/content/company/products/znalm/freeDownload.jsp>.

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

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

<http://www.openoffice.org>.

Ira Wilsker is an APCUG director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont TX; Program Director of Management Development at the Lamar Institute of Technology, Beaumont TX; and a radio and TV show host. Contact him at <iwilsker@apcug.net>..

Free Software–Part 2 of 2
By Ira Wilsker

I take a lot of digital photos, and periodically scan other photos and documents with my scanner. Sometimes my digital photos and scanned images need some editing, cropping, and other enhancements. An excellent and very popular program used by over 30 million users, Irfanview can do that and much more. It is available for free download from <http://www.irfanview.com>. Irfanview can open, convert, and edit almost every known image format. It offers simple controls for image contrast, color, brightness, and hue that concurrently shows both the original image and the corrected image for comparison. For those who want the simplicity of automation, Irfanview offers a one-click option to sharpen or color correct images. Irfanview has much of the power and features of image editors that cost hundreds of dollars, but is available for free for anyone to use. Irfanview can also run a scanner, with the images brought directly into the program for any necessary editing. An optional Irfanview feature, "All Plugins," can be downloaded and installed, giving the program the ability to play almost all known audio and video formats. I use Irfanview almost exclusively to edit photos and other images, as well as to play any video and audio files. It is an outstanding program, and very worthy to download.

Sometimes it is helpful to know all the facts about the hardware and software installed on a computer. This is often necessary to troubleshoot hardware and software problems, as well as identify

hardware components installed in the computer to locate updated drivers, or replace selected components. An excellent freeware product that can do all of that and more is Belarc Advisor Free Personal PC Audit. In addition to detecting and listing the details of all of the hardware and software installed on a computer, Belarc Advisor can also determine if any Microsoft hotfixes are missing, as well as determine the status of any antivirus software installed. With some Windows operating systems, such as XP Professional (not XP Home), and Windows 2000, Belarc will display its "CIS" (Center for Internet Security) security benchmarks, which show the security status of the computer. Belarc Advisor can be downloaded for free from <http://www.belarc.com/free_download.html>. Belarc Advisor is free for personal use only; use of the free version on multiple corporate or academic computers is prohibited, as Belarc has a commercial version available for that purpose.

Almost everyone with a Windows PC has Microsoft's Internet Explorer installed, and by default, set up as the primary browser. I rarely use Internet Explorer as my browser, choosing to use instead the free Firefox browser, available for download from <http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox>. I am not alone, as over one hundred million other surfers around the world have selected Firefox as their primary or default browser. The excellence of Firefox as a browser has been recognized by the working press, by awarding it recognition as an outstanding choice. Firefox version 2 was the CNET Editors' Choice, and the PC Magazine editors' Choice. In many ways, Firefox is a more advanced and feature-rich browser than

Internet Explorer, and written in tighter code which allows for a smaller, faster loading file, that also loads and displays web pages faster than Internet Explorer. One very nice feature in Firefox is the ability to incorporate literally thousands of free "Add-ons" or extensions that add usability and features to Firefox. I use Firefox almost exclusively as my browser of choice, and can strongly recommend it to others.

Another free program I use frequently is Google Earth, available at <http://earth.google.com>. This is a multi function program that can display high resolution images of almost anywhere on the globe (and also the moon, and soon other planets), track airplanes in flight in real-time, find the best routes between two or more points and display the route on a traditional map or composite photo of the terrain, locate points of interest such as restaurants and hotels, and a myriad of other functions. The detail of the satellite and aerial photos is amazing, and Google periodically improves them. Buildings in major cities, and major landmarks around the world can be viewed in high resolution 3-D. Satellite weather images and real-time weather maps can be overlaid on the images, providing accurate weather information anywhere in the world. In some major cities, Google Earth can display street level 3-D images showing people and cars on the road, and the buildings along the road. The quality of many of the maps and images is nothing short of amazing. The best way I can describe Google Earth is that it is just plain fun to play with and very useful. I have it installed on both my desktop and notebook computers, and use it extensively both at home and when traveling. It is one of

those utilities that you might think that you do not need, but once you have it and use it a few times, you wonder how you did without it. It is a great program; download it, install it, and play with it for a while. One warning; Google Earth can be addictive!

Sometimes we need to find a free program for a specific purpose, and may not know where to look for it. There are two major download services that I frequent regularly, Download.com <http://www.download.com> and TUCOWS. Download.com allows the user to locate desired software by the use of a hierarchal menu, or through the use of a search box. By entering the type of software desired in the search box, and then selecting the "Software" category, hundreds of thousands of software titles will be searched. Once the preliminary search is completed, the terms can be refined by using the pull down menus displayed at the top of the listings to specify the operating system, and type of license. "Free" is one of the license selections, and selecting "Free" will only display software that can be used for free. Many of the titles displayed by Download.com display one or more ratings, an editors' rating, and a users' rating. Some titles are also hyperlinked to published reviews, providing even more information on the title. By primarily selecting software with high ratings, the user can be reasonably assured that he is downloading a quality product.

TUCOWS is another major source of downloaded and free software <http://www.tucows.com>. TUCOWS is an acronym for the archaic original name of the service, "The Ultimate Collection of Winsock Software," and pronounced like "2 cows." Unlike Download.com, TUCOWS files are not stored on a central server, but are instead stored on dozens of frequently updated mirror sites all over the world, which allow for faster localized downloading of software. TUCOWS has software for Windows, Apple, Linux, and PDA's. Software can be located on TUCOWS either by searching, or through the use of a menu. Once a category of software is located, it can be sorted by rating, license (free, trial, demo, etc.), and other characteristics. One cute feature is the rating system used by TUCOWS; it does not use a "star" system like other download sites, but instead uses "cows" to denote the rating of a product, the more cows (five is the best), the better. On TUCOWS, almost all software is "cow" rated, making it easier to select titles to download.

There is a way to legitimately download licensed commercial software, with a few strings attached. The website "GiveAwayofTheDay" at <http://www.giveawayoftheday.com> makes available for download a fully licensed and legal version of a commercial software title each day, but only one title per day, and each title is only available for download for 24 hours. Once downloaded, the commercial software is usable for a typical license term, usually for a year or for whatever the normal duration of the license for that software title. Be sure to follow the included instructions to register and activate the software. While licensed and legal, this commercial software does not offer technical support or updates under the terms of the free license. Every morning I practice the ritual of seeing what is available on this website, and occasionally download the software of the day. Before downloading software

of interest I review the comments and evaluations that are posted; if they are generally positive, then I may download the software; if they are generally negative, then I usually pass on that title. GiveAway has a companion site that gives away fully licensed commercial games, with a different title every day. The games can be downloaded from <http://game.giveawayoftheday.com>.

There is a lot of free software available, and much of it is of a quality competitive with its expensive commercial competitors. If you find free software with legitimate good ratings, then you are generally safe to download it and try it. If you like it, that is great. If you do not like it, then uninstall it, and other than a few minutes of time you have lost nothing. Quality free software should be strongly considered by everyone. This is one case where the old cliché "You get what you pay for" does not apply.

WEBSITES:
<http://www.irfanview.com>.
<http://www.belarc.com/free_download.html>.
<http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox>.
<http://earth.google.com>.
<http://www.download.com>.
<http://www.tucows.com>.
<http://www.giveawayoftheday.com>.
<http://game.giveawayoftheday.com>.

Ira Wilsker is an APCUG director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont TX; Program Director of Management Development at the Lamar Institute of Technology, Beaumont TX; and a radio and TV show host. Contact him at <iwilsker@apcug.net>.
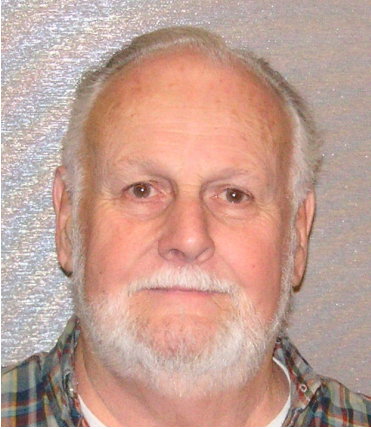
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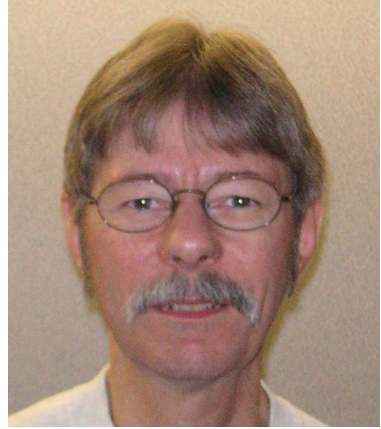
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Happy Holidays

Gary DeNise
President

Richard Jackson
Vice-President
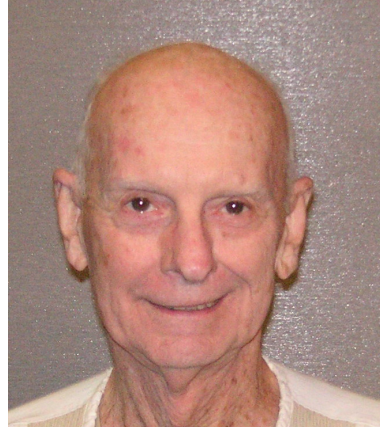

Carol Sanzi
Secretary

Bette Gay
Treasurer

Happy Holidays

Bob Clyne
Member-at-Large

Chuck Moery
Member-at-Large

Tom Callow
Chairman: SIG-IBM

Carl Massie, Jr.
Chairman:
SIG-IBM Intermediate

Happy Holidays

Franz Breidenich
Chairman: SIG-Advanced

BOARD MEETING
11/11/2007
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 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. Also present was Internet Committee Chairman Mike Bader. The meeting was called to order at 12:05 p.m.

OLD BUSINESS
Bette Gay reported that the amount in the treasury equaled $8,477.19 with $3,882.41 in the bank account and $4,594.78 invested in three Certificates of Deposit. SEMCO membership currently stands at 76.

It is time for Barbara Dubrinsky, George Kargillis, and Clarence O'Neal to renew their memberships.

NEW BUSINESS
There was a discussion of SEMCO's declining membership. Board members brought up many questions in an attempt to define the loss. Could the problem be that meetings are held on Sunday? Are the meeting topics not appealing? Are meeting topics too advanced? Should we have more raffles? Is the membership fee too great? Would it help to send a flyer inviting neighborhood businesses to attend meetings? No action was taken at this time.

Nominations for officers will be taken at the December meeting. SEMCO is in need of interested persons who are willing to accept a nomination.

Carl Massie, Jr. stated that in January, he will resign as chair of the SIG-IBM Intermediate.

Carol Sanzi moved to adjourn. Bob Clyne seconded the motion. The motion was carried. The meeting adjourned at 1:02 p.m.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGS)

SIG-IBM
Tom Callow
Warner Mach

December 9: What's New for the Holidays: Richard Tapaninen, from the Micro Center computer store technical support department will discuss new products you may want to have under your tree this holiday season. Also, questions and answers.

NOVICE-IBM GROUP
Rotating Volunteer Hosts

December 9: 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-IBM INTERMEDIATE
Carl Massie, Jr.

December 9: Come and share what you know and would like to know. Gary DeNise will speak about e-mail clients vs. e-mail accounts, with "where its at" shown on screen. Also, building on last month's discussion about Outlook Express vs. Outlook. We will compare them with the Vista Windows mail client. Audience determination and participation is the key, but possible topics include Linux laptops, shopping tips, favorite links, dual boot XP and Ubuntu, 8-year computer cycles, utilities, ability matrix. NDISwrapper, and most importantly, YOU contributing at the meeting. We'll all leave with more than we brought, and you could see your contribution in the next DATA BUS.

SIG-ADVANCED
Franz Breidenich

January 7, 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.**

Jan. 2007 DATA BUS DEADLINE (7th day after 2nd Sunday in month)
SEMCO Input and Members' Ads—Deadline: Sun., Dec. 16, 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 Mach
machw@att.net
(to post monthly computer group info)

**CALENDAR-OF-EVENTS
OTHER GROUPS**

COMP (Computer Operators of Marysville & Port Huron)
Jan. 2, 7 p.m.,(1st Wednesday); St. Clair Couty RESA, 499 Range Rd., Marysville, Admin. Building. Jane Wheatly 810-982-1187 or Pam Raisanen <compinfo(@hughes.net>. <http://www.bwcomp.org>. Topic: 'Microsoft Publisher 2007' by George Hawkins. Next 2/6/08.

DCOM Computer Club
Dec. 14, 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.

MacGroup- Detroit
Dec. 16, 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: 'iLife 08 and iWork 08' by Linda Stein, MacGroup member and Apple Inc. representative.

MacTechnics, (MAC User Group)
Dec. 15, 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: 'Holiday Party/Auction/Raffle.' '

MDLUG (Metro Detroit Linux User Group)
Dec. 8, 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)
Dec. 11, 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: TBA.'

Michigan Apple Computer User Group
Dec. 12, 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)
Jan. 4, 7:30 p.m.; 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: 'Social Networking Sites on the Internet' by Mary Lou Metzger of Sterling Hts Public Library.

Wayne State University Mac User Group
Dec 8, 10:00 a.m.–Noon, (2nd Saturday); at 21042 Laurelwood, Farmington. Information: JoAnn Olsen 248-478-4300. Topic: TBA .

Membership Directory

The SEMCO Membership Directory will be published in the January "DATA BUS." If there are changes to your profile then please notify the treasurer, Bette Gay.—Especially changes to e-mail address or phone number. Bette can be reached at <rgay(at)voyager.net> or (248)-641-7799

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

SEMCO

SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN COMPUTER ORGANIZATION, INC.

SEMCO CALENDAR

ArvinMeritor Building
2135 West Maple Road
Troy, Michigan

December 9–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: What's New for the Holidays:** Richard Tapaninen, from the Micro Center computer store technical support department, will discuss new products you may want to have under your tree this holiday season. Also, questions and answers.

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:** Discussion of e-mail clients and e-mail accounts. Also, 'Outlook Express' vs 'Outlook' vs 'Vista Windows Mail Client.' Also assorted other issues, such as Linux laptops, shopping tips, favorite links, dual boot XP and Ubunto, 8-year computer cycle, utilities, etc.

SIG-ADVANCED, Jan. 7, 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.**
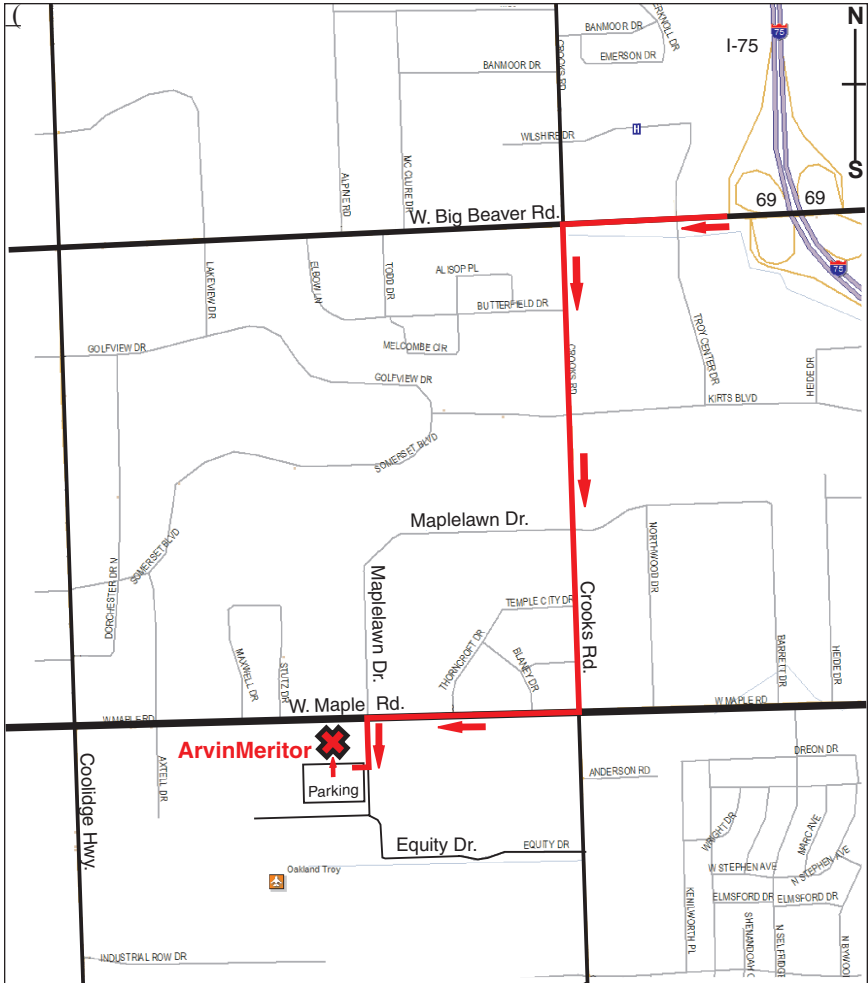
January 13–SEMCO Sunday

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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