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

Last month I asked the editors for their experiences with dizziness and I heard from more than I thought I would. Almost all of their dizziness experiences were a bit different, as well as the cures, but a few people said they ended up not needing the cure because their problem eventually went away. Mine has improved some, but no thanks to any medication; it made things much worse. I read an article that I'll share with you and it's about an often-misdiagnosed type of dizziness. You may find it interesting <<http://www.ericsontribune.com/Home/HealthSecrets/tabid/71/newsid410/5386/Spinning-out-of-control/Default.aspx>>.

While I'm at it, here are a few more articles I found interesting.

New Take On Returns

I saw this interesting article about Lowe's new system to handle customer returns. Even if you can't find your receipt, they can help you, but this new system also discovered 8,665 fraudulent return attempts in a six-month period <<http://www.informationweek.com/showArticle.jhtml;jsessionid=GRKIQWOE4P0V2QSNLPSKH0CJUNN2JVN?articleID=201806189>>.

This One Concerns The Rapid Development of Linux

<<http://www.informationweek.com/news/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=202404635>> It had an accompanying article about seven features coming soon, but I couldn't find it on the Information Week Web site.

From Spinning Platters to No Moving Parts

Are you tired of having a cup of coffee while your computer boots up? Read this article about the future development of computer hard drives that will speed things up. Just switch on the computer and start using it. <<http://www.informationweek.com/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=202404347>>.

Below are more announcements that I received, but I have not tried them. Do your homework if you are interested in any of them.

Are All Your Simple Projects Organized? They Will Be Now!

SimpleProjectToDo.com announces the availability of SimpleProjectToDo 1.26, the newest version of its tool for keeping track of a small project. The software is aimed at individuals and small project teams.

When you launch SimpleProjectToDo you see a tabbed window listing the tasks to do along with the summary and notes for the currently chosen task. Clicking on any of the tabs opens the window that displays its tasks. Clicking on the Now tab lets you see the tasks that you need to take action on now and clicking on the Later tab shows those that can be done soon. Finally, the Much Later tab tells you about the tasks that can be completed much later.

To add a new task, click on the Add Task button, set its priority (Now, Later, Much Later), category

See (Problem, Improvement, Other), and choose the status which can be Open or Closed. If you have ideas or technical details relevant to the task, you can add them too. Important tasks can be highlighted to look more prominent. Now the task is displayed in its assigned tab. Type in the keyword

and the program quickly returns the results. Narrow your search for the tasks by enabling only those filters you are interested in. If you need to view or show the tasks list to someone else, you can print the tasks on paper.

It offers multi-user support, making it easy to collaborate within a team. When teammates make changes to the tasks on another computer, those files can be merged together. Changed tasks are marked in red and the new tasks in blue.

SimpleProjectToDo 1.26 runs under Windows Vista, XP and 2000. It is available for \$49.95 (US) through the SimpleProjectToDo store. User group members get a 30% discount by using the coupon code “XW-7812-DEALS” when you download the product. The coupon is valid for single user licenses until January 31, 2008. Licensed customers get free upgrades and e-mail technical support for 12 months from the date of purchase. More information and its free trial copy, are available at [<http://SimpleProjectToDo.com>](http://SimpleProjectToDo.com)

Direct download link: [<http://simpleprojecttodo.com/uploads/file/SimpleProjectSetup.exe>](http://simpleprojecttodo.com/uploads/file/SimpleProjectSetup.exe)

Do You Keep Track Of Your Own Finances? Try This, And Its Portable

Alzex announces the release of Personal Finances Portable 2.1. When you get a pay raise, you might start considering a major purchase, or perhaps saving money for your child’s education, based on the fact that you will have some spare money. But the month with a pay increase comes to an end and you realize that, actually, you’ve ended up with no extra money because, somehow, you spent it all. In that case, Personal Finances may come to your rescue. It’ll

record all expenses and help you see where your money goes. It shows the total sum and percentage structure for categories, overall balance and balance on accounts.

Personal Finances has a user-friendly multilingual interface, scheduler, password protection and a very useful expense addition ability with one click. It can import/export data from/to .txt or .csv files. The application has a multiple database support and allows you to create an unlimited number of databases. Detailed information on all transactions is available for any time period. There is also an unlimited number of sections, subsections, categories, etc. Besides the basic ones, the application allows users to add more currencies upon inserting the exchange rate. Personal Finances allows you to sort by fields and group names, or by transaction. The program has the capability of logging regular transactions automatically.

If you are an active and mobile businessman, or just a globetrotter, why keep a record of expenses in an ordinary notebook and copy those notes into your home PCs after returning home. The feature making Personal Finances Portable unique in its category is that you can install and run the application from a USB flash drive; consequently, your “personal accountant” will be portable and always at hand.

Personal Finances Portable 2.1 runs under Windows 98/Me/2000/XP/2003/Vista and costs \$24.95 (USD) for a single-user license. User group members get a 20% discount on the purchase of Personal Finances Portable by using the coupon code “pf43M5G,” valid from now until March 2008. Licensed customers are entitled to priority technical support and a year of

free upgrades. Your purchase is secured by a 30-day money-back guarantee. Additional information on Personal Finances Portable 2.1, as well as its evaluation copy with a 30-day trial period, is available at <<http://www.financesoftware.com>>.

Download link: <www.financesoftware.com/downloads/PersonalFinances_v2.1.exe> (2,73 MB)

Another Portable Application For Road Warriors

Smart PC Solutions, Inc. announced Reach-a-Mail 3.0, a portable flash drive e-mail client which lets you use another computer to send and receive e-mails without leaving any traces behind. There is no need to install any additional software, or fear that someone may steal your login and password if you send an e-mail through the online mailing service at an Internet café. This utility supports 10 languages and includes a collection of artistic smiley faces. Reach-a-Mail is a small program that you download to your desktop computer and install onto almost any kind of portable memory device, such as a USB flash drive. The program comes with its own default configuration. All you need to get started is to set up your e-mail accounts and import your contact lists.

This program has a straightforward import feature that lets you import, not only accounts from your desktop Outlook Express, but also e-mail messages and contacts so you don't have to tediously copy-and-paste the data or perform extensive typing. You can also import account settings from another Reach-a-Mail installation. Reach-a-Mail allows you to export e-mail messages and contacts, as well as save attachments. Importing takes only

a short time depending on the volume of information you are loading.

Once you have everything in the flash drive, you're free to travel around the world! Simply go to an Internet café or some other place where you can find a computer with access to the Internet, plug the flash drive into the USB port to run Reach-a-Mail and go about sending and receiving messages as you normally would. When you're finished, remove the drive and that's it. No traces are left on the computer and your e-mail correspondence is safe.

Reach-a-Mail 3.0 runs under Windows 95/98/ME/NT/2000/XP/2003/Vista. It is freeware and is available immediately from <www.smartpctools.com>. A commercial professional version of Reach-a-Mail with RSS reader functionality, no ad attachments in messages and better speed is also available for \$29.95 USD at <<http://www.smartpctools.com/order.html>>.

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 Cheap skate) Click <[bobclick at bellsouth dot net](mailto:bobclick@bellsouth.net)>. Visit my Web site at <<http://www.dealsguy.com>>





Intelligent Ground Vehicle Competition

By Bill Agnew

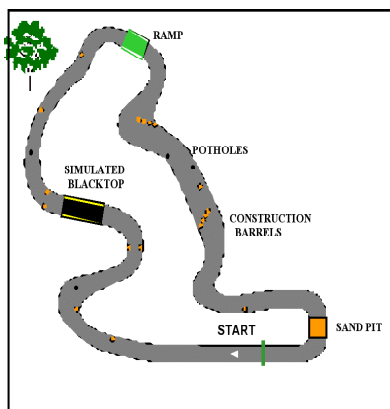
In 1994 I first got connected to the Intelligent Ground Vehicle Competition (IGVC). It is a competition in which college engineering student teams design and build small (golf cart size or smaller) computer controlled autonomous vehicles (robots with no remote control, if you will) which then compete in an open field in various challenges.

When I joined the organizers the event was one year old, invented by several engineers from the Army's Tank Automotive Command (TACOM) and carried out on a field at Oakland University. The only challenge event was the "Autonomous Challenge," an obstacle course with white-line stripes painted on the grass for lane markers and construction barrels located along the route as obstacles. The winner was the vehicle that traveled farthest without going outside the lane markers or striking an obstacle (See the first graphic at right).

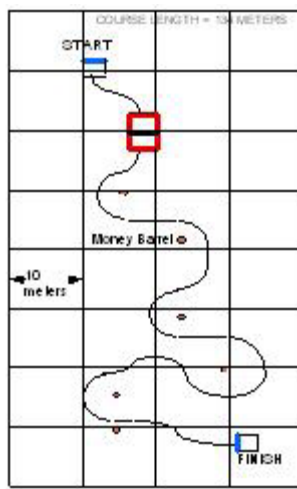
I decided it would be good to have a design competition along with the Autonomous Challenge in which the students had to submit a written design report and make an oral presentation of their design. That would greatly advance the educational aspect of the competition. I put together a set of requirements for the design competition and a score sheet for the judges with a list of criteria. It has been used every year since then.

A few years later I devised a Follow-the-Leader Challenge, in which the competing vehicles had to follow a lead

vehicle around an unmarked course, in and out among obstacles, while maintaining a distance of 2 meters behind the lead vehicle. If the vehicle fell farther behind the leader than 2 meters it risked striking an obstacle as the pair went around a sharp curve.



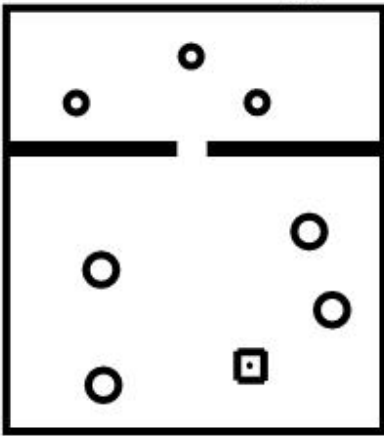
The vehicle that followed the farthest without striking an obstacle or was closest to 2 meters when it stopped at



the end of the course was the winner. After three years the Follow-the-Leader Challenge was abandoned by the

other IGVC organizers, much to my disappointment.

Finally, after several more years I created a Navigation Challenge, in which 8 or 9 waypoints were scattered around a 2-acre field among obstacles. The latitudes and longitudes of the waypoints were given to the teams the day before the competition, and they had to use GPS instruments on-board the vehicles to search out the waypoints. The vehicle that reached the most waypoints in the shortest time was the winner. The vehicles' runs started and ended in the square Start/Finish box. The waypoints below the dividing fence were 4 meters in diameter; those above the fence were 2 meters in diameter, and the opening in the fence was 4 meters wide. The obstacles, construction barrels, etc., were randomly scattered



in the field, and some of the waypoints were also hidden behind short fences.

Each year since the start of the Navigation Challenge, I have redesigned the course layout and then taken a very accurate Differential GPS instrument (loaned to me by CSI-Wireless in Calgary) out in the field and spent two

full days recording the latitudes and longitudes of the waypoints which I had previously laid out with a tape measure. I would set up my GPS instrument and laptop computer for averaging readings, and sit at each waypoint for ten minutes recording the data. I would then repeat all the averaging three times over the two days. The averaging was done by a statistical program, StatSpy, also given to me by CSI-Wireless.

I figured that it was mandatory that my accuracy was at least as good as what any of the competitors could do (Some of them had much more expensive instruments than mine, but they couldn't average during a run.)

I used either a portable battery charger or the cigarette lighter in my car to power the computer and the GPS instrument. It was a sort of lonely two days sitting in the middle of a field with my instruments; there was no need for help. But being basically a loner anyway, it wasn't bad.

The IGVC, in its first year had only about a half dozen vehicle entries, but the number has increased each year to about 35 in 2007. Engineering schools from all over the U.S. and Canada, and teams from Japan and India have participated. Interestingly, the teams are not all from the big research universities. Most are small schools, some of which I never heard of before.

The technologies required for these vehicles are cutting edge. The students use a variety of sensors, including cameras, sonar, laser rangefinders, GPS, inertial measurement units, odometers, and compasses. They need to use systems engineering to integrate the outputs of these sensors and to create electrical power distributions, and sophisticated computer software

to turn the sensor data into maps of the territory in front of the vehicles, and then plan a path for the vehicle to follow. Mechanical engineering disciplines are required to design and build the vehicle chassis.

The IGVC has provided several satisfactions for me. First of all, it has been an engineering challenge for me, an exciting problem-solving exercise in my beloved engineering discipline. These engineering students are so bright that it is very difficult to keep ahead of them, making the Challenges more difficult each year, as they learn to beat the system.

It has been an intense learning experience; I had to buy several books on GPS technology and figure out how to use the differential GPS instrument loaned to me (and later donated) by the CSI-Wireless Company of Calgary, Alberta.

I have had a chance to work with a fine bunch of engineers from TACOM, Oakland University, GM, Ford, and others, along with faculty advisors from the participating schools.

And finally, I and others agree that the IGVC is an excellent educational experience for student engineers. Many schools offer credit in senior design courses for participation on IGVC teams. I am therefore proud of my contribution to education, one of my fields for trying to make the world better.

Dr. Bill Agnew is a former DATA BUS editor. He now resides in New Mexico.

Computer History

1995: Microsoft Bob appears for Windows 3.1.

Articulated 4-Bar Linkage



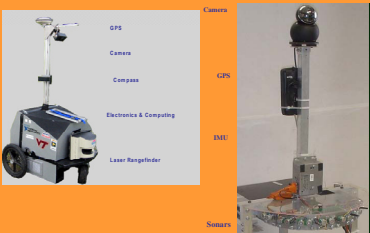
Tracked Vehicles



The Engineer's Wet Bar



Sensor Mounting



**Need a Sticky Note? Put it on
Your Computer
By Linda Gonse**

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

Sticky note programs for your PC, as you might imagine, are a utility that takes the place of paper Post-It notes that we all stick to our monitors!

But, sticky note programs I've researched this year discouraged me from even trying them out. Sometimes they didn't have enough features, or if they did, they were expensive.

Then, someone recommended a program called Stickies, created by Tom Revell, at <<http://www.zhornsoftware.co.uk/>>. So, I looked at Stickies on the web page, liked what I saw, and downloaded the program.

My first discovery about the program is that it is small, 953Kb, and doesn't interfere with system files and doesn't write to the registry. In fact, Stickies stores all its information in a single text-based ini file. When was the last time you had a program on your computer as well-mannered as this one?

An icon in your system tray will allow you quick access to Stickies' features and options. From this dropdown list you can manage your Stickies notes, configure them, get help, and download new skins. When you do make a Sticky, it won't disappear unless you tell it to, and it stays where it is placed. You can edit, format, and print them. Make as many as you want, or as many as your screen space will permit. But, to save room and keep Stickies organized, they will snap to each other and to the sides of the screen where they can be neatly

lined up. You can even "hide" them from view.

Besides viewing Stickies on your screen, you can attach them to a website, a document, or a folder, so they only appear when the objects they are attached to are on the screen.

Stickies are portable, too. You can transfer Stickies from one computer to another over your TCP/IP network connection, to your PDA and back again, or send to friends in e-mail.

They can be set to "sleep" and appear on a specified date and time, as announcements or reminders. They can even play a sound alarm so they get your attention when they "awaken"!

What's fun is being able to customize the notes with various fonts, colors and buttons. You can even download customized skins from a big selection to change the outward appearance of the notes—plain, borderless, simple border, etc. The notes can be resized, just like the sticky notes in Acrobat.

Stickies are located in five categories within the application so you can see and manage them. You can search for information in Stickies, wake sleeping Stickies, restore closed Stickies and detach Stickies.

What else? Oh, yes! Another attractive feature of Stickies is...the program is free!

What are you waiting for? Try it out and see if you like this little program as much as I do!

Linda Gonse is Editor & Webmaster of Orange County IBM PC User's Group. She can be reached at <[editor\(at\)orcopug.org](mailto:editor(at)orcopug.org)>. <<http://www.orcopug.org>>.

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Weird Windows Behavior

By Sandy Berger

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

Have you ever been completely dismayed by your computer? Does it seem to do unusual things that you can't trace back to any of your actions? Well, you are not alone. This happens to all computer users. In the computer world, unusual things sometimes happen. Here is a list of some weird computer behavior and how to combat it.

Icons disappear

Right-click on any open area of the computer desktop, then choose Arrange Icons By. If your icons have accidentally become hidden there will be no checkmark in front of Show Desktop Icons. Just click that option and your icons will reappear.

Unusual windows appear

Windows has a lot of keyboard shortcuts that can be accidentally accessed. For instance, when I started this column, I wanted to hit the Shift key and the letter "h" for the word Have. However, my finger slipped and I hit the Ctrl key and the letter "h" instead. A window popped up asking what I wanted to Find and Replace, which is not at all what I intended. If this ever happens to you you can usually just close the pop up window, but occasionally you have to look a little further into what happened. For instance, when working in Microsoft Word, if you accidentally

hit Ctrl+N, a new window will appear making it look like you just lost your entire document. If you look closely you will be able to figure out that all you have to do is close the new window and the document you were working on will reappear.

If you can't figure out what happened or you get caught in a loop, restarting your computer will usually bring you back to normal.

Lost toolbars

As noted before, an errant key press can cause a problem. This time the culprit is one of the F keys. Accidentally pressing the F11 key can make the toolbars disappear. This is often used as a feature when you want to show something in what they call "full screen mode." If this happens to you, just press F11 again to make the toolbars return.

The toolbar moves

Have you ever had the toolbar that usually appears on the bottom of the screen show up on the side or top of the screen? There is an easy way to get it back where it belongs. Just place your cursor right next to, but not on, the Start button. Then hold the mouse button down and drag the toolbar back where it belongs.

Dramatic slowdown

A dramatic slowdown can mean that your hard disk is filling up. The computer uses the hard disk as sort of a scratch pad when it computes, so when your hard drive starts to fill up, it can slow the computer down significantly. Click on My Computer and highlight the drive called Local Disk (C:). Look at the Details area to see how much space is free. You should have at least 10% of your hard drive free. If you don't, a hard drive cleanup is in order. Delete unnecessary programs and backup old

files and photos to an external drive or CD so you can delete them from the hard disk. You can use the Disk Cleanup utility to empty the recycle bin and delete unnecessary temporary files. To access it, click on Start, choose All Programs, then click on System Tools where you will find Disk Cleanup listed. It will walk you through the cleanup. Once your hard disk has more free space, your computer will perk up considerably. You might also consider defragging your computer to speed it up. The Disk Defragmenter utility is in the System Tools area. Remember there are other things like viruses and spyware that can also slow down your computer.

No sound

Sometimes the sound gets muted by mistake. Look at the taskbar at bottom of the screen. In the right hand side you will see a small icon that looks like a speaker. If it has a red X on it, the sound has been muted. Click on the icon, then click to remove the checkmark in front of the word Mute. If you don't see this icon, go to the Control Panel and choose Sounds or Sounds and Audio Devices where you will find a place to uncheck the Mute option. Many laptops and some desktops also have a volume button on the keyboard which you can use to mute and unmute the speaker.

Mouse shutters

If your mouse is hard to control or acting erratic, it may need a cleaning. An optical mouse with a flat bottom just needs a cleaning with a damp cloth. If your mouse has a roller ball on the bottom, remove the ball and clean the rollers inside the mouse with a Q-tip soaked with isopropyl alcohol.

Hope this gets you through some of those weird Windows moments in your life.

Sandy Berger is webmaster at <<http://www.compukiss.com>>. E-mail <[Sandy\(at\)compukiss.com](mailto:Sandy(at)compukiss.com)>.

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**Online Consumer Help
From the Federal
Government
By Ira Wilsker**

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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” 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” (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 “Kidz Privacy” 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 where 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 ready.gov and 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>>

<<http://www.consumer.gov/military>>

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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**Actiontec MegaPlug
By Terry Currier**

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

I do like the idea of networking through the power lines. Setting up an Ethernet network is not too difficult, but running the wires throughout the house can be. Setting up a wireless network is also not too bad (the latest hardware setup makes it easy), and the signal can go through the walls. At least up to a certain degree, governed by how many walls and the distance. Ethernet is also the fastest network connection, but what if you can not just run a cable to where you may want to connect, or you get no wireless signal? Powerline networking is perfect for these situations.

The old maximum powerline speed was 14Mbps, the MegaPlug from Actiontec is now up to 85Mbps. Using the MegaPlug 4-Port Hub with the MegaPlug Ethernet Adapter makes it easy to extend your network wherever you need to connect. A USB hub extends the range of your USB ports and adds more ports. That is kind of what the MegaPlug 4-Port Hub does. You run one Ethernet cable to it from your

router to it's WAN plug. This gives you more Ethernet ports, and allows you to use the already hidden electrical wires to connect to your network. This is especially great if you are constantly short one cable slot on your present router.

According to some reviews with a wireless network you can effectively connect up to about 150 feet. I don't have one myself. I always wonder what the neighbor can pick up even with firewalls. With a powerline network I don't have to worry about that. The signal can cross circuit breakers (wall plugs), but not circuit boxes. So no one outside of my home can steal information. If I do need to secure my computer Actiontec includes software for 56-bit DES Data Encryption.

The only software I had to install was for the computer using the wall plug connection. If a computer is hooked up to the MegaPlug Hub then software would have to be installed for it. Using the powerline network, I downloaded a file from the Internet and achieved a speed of 438Kps which is really good. Below is a comparison of copying a file:

Copy a 415KB file from main compute

- With Ethernet connection to laptop took 56 seconds.
- With Powerline to laptop took 3 minutes 48 seconds.
- With Powerline to laptop through two surge protectors took 5 minutes 10 seconds.

They tell you not to use a surge protector with it, but with their error correcting software I had no problems. In fact, I connected it from one surge protector through another and it worked. However, it did slow it down.

Powerline networking says it is good up to 990 feet. I could not test it for that far, I didn't have enough cord. What I can say is that it worked perfectly in all of my electrical outlets. Plugging it into my garage outlet about 70 feet away, the connection still had no problems. I then plugged in a 100-foot power cord, and two 50-foot power cords. These three cords were good quality power cords. I still had one more 50-foot power cord of which the gauge was not a high quality; it was made for light duty work. It did still work though. It was fun stringing the cords down the street just to see how far I could get (my neighbor came out asking what I was doing). It took me four houses down and the connection was still pretty good. I could get e-mail and do things on-line with no problems. However, testing the same file download with the lower quality power cord it would have taken 77 minutes to finish. Taking it off so I would still be 270 feet from the network, the same file took 22 minutes to download.

Conclusion

When you need to connect to a network and your wireless router is not enough, this is the perfect answer. More than that it's secure. Their support is very good, with a toll free number to call. Best price I found was at [Newegg.com](http://www.newegg.com) with the MegaPlug 4-Port Hub at \$70, and the wall plug adapter at \$47. <http://www.actiontec.com>.

Minimum System Requirements

Router, Gateway, or other device with HomePlug capability

Microsoft Windows 98SE, Me, 2000 or XP

TCP/IP Network Protocol Installed

Browser: Internet Explorer 4.0+ or Netscape 4.0.+.

Terry Currier is President of WINNERS of Fountain Valley California. E-mail <[tcurrier\(at\)aol.com](mailto:tcurrier(at)aol.com). <<http://www.windowsusers.org>>.

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HOW TO BEST ERASE HARD DRIVES!

Bob Clyne points out an interesting article at <<http://blogs.zdnet.com/storage/?p=129&tag=nl.e540>>.

In this article, written by Robin Harris of ZDNet, there is detailed a little-known fact about ATA drives. Most of these drives (since 2001) have a built-in facility to completely erase the drive, called 'Secure Erase.' In most cases this facility has been disabled (by BIOS). The article outlines how to take advantage of 'Secure Erase.'

Candidate Profile By Mike Bader

As I was nominated for President, I guess I better introduce myself:

I own my own computer consulting business.

I also do several online/Internet and homebased businesses.

I have been a member over 30 years.

[Continued on Page17](#)



BOARD MEETING
12/9/07
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. Also present was Internet Committee Chairman Mike Bader. Arriving late was Vice President Richard Jackson. The meeting was called to order at 12:05 p.m.

OLD BUSINESS

Bette Gay reported that the amount in the treasury equaled \$8,649.32 with \$4049.48 in the bank account and \$4,599.84 invested in three Certificates of Deposit. The current membership stands at 79.

It is time for Tom Burns, Carl Massie, Jr., Robert & Dorothy Schultz, and Robert A. Zukosky to renew their memberships.

Gary DeNise reported that ArvinMeritor has adopted a new management system. On Sundays, they will now have only one guard on duty. Therefore a volunteer is needed to pass out badges at the door. To make this process easier, the badges of the occasional attendees will be placed in a "visitor bag."

NEW BUSINESS

Bob Clyne moved to reimburse Gary DeNise \$18.47 for the purchase of refreshment supplies. Tom Callow seconded the motion and it was carried.

Bob Clyne moved to renew Gary Shanek's honorary membership for 2008. Richard Jackson seconded the motion and it was carried.

Bette Gay requested that the board review the list of those receiving complimentary copies of the DATA BUS. It was agreed to keep the list without changes.

Carl Massie, Jr. presented a petition to the board to organize an "Ultimate Friendly Open (UFO) Linux Special Interest Group (SIG)". Tom Callow moved to recognize the petition. Bob Clyne seconded the motion and it was carried. After much discussion, Carl Massie, Jr., proposed that the Linux SIG meet in the Michigan Room at 3:45 to 5:15 p.m. Tom Callow stated that he sees the addition of a new SIG as being helpful in meeting the interests of SEMCO's members.

Mike Bader suggested that SEMCO present ArvinMeritor a plaque thanking them for their support. Warner Mach moved that a plaque should be purchased for an amount not exceeding \$100. Chuck Moery seconded the motion and it was carried. Carol Sanzi will help with the wording for the inscription. Gary DeNise will make the purchase.

Richard Jackson would like feedback on the value of the SEMCO podcasts. Maybe it is time SEMCO purchase recording equipment if the podcasts are to continue. It was suggested he research the costs of the needed equipment before a decision is made.

Warner Mach moved to adjourn. Bob Clyne seconded the motion and it was carried. The meeting adjourned at 1:20 p.m.

Computer History
1988: IBM & Sears start Prodigy.



GENERAL MEETING
12/9/07
Carol Sanzi

The General Meeting was called to order at 1:36 p.m.

President Gary DeNise asked for nominations for officers and board members for the year 2008.

Carol Sanzi nominated Gary DeNise for President. Gary DeNise declined the nomination. Gary DeNise nominated Mike Bader for President. He accepted and Charles Moery seconded the nomination.

Gary DeNise nominated Richard Jackson for Vice-President. He accepted and Chester Blechinger seconded the nomination. There were no other nominations for Vice President.

Warner Mach nominated Carol Sanzi for Secretary. She accepted and Bob Clyne seconded the nomination. There were no other nominations for Secretary.

Bob Clyne nominated Bette Gay for Treasurer. She accepted and Chester Blechinger seconded the nomination. There were no other nominations for Treasurer.

Franz Breidenich nominated Bob Clyne for Member-at-Large. He accepted and Warner Mach seconded the nomination.

Bob Clyne nominated Charles Moery for Member-at-Large. He accepted and Carol Sanzi seconded the nomination. There were no other nominations for Member-at-Large of the Board of Directors.



**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.

[Continued from Page 15](#)

I have been in computers for 40 years.

I am active in several areas -

Volunteer and Resource (see DATA BUS for my e-mail and phone number)

Internet Committee Chairman

I started the online yahoo group for SEMCO (semcoug)

In years past I assisted with the newsletter and ran the SEMCO BBS (Bulletin Board System - before the Internet took off).

Hobbies:

I dabble in electronics and have a ham (amateur) radio license.

[Continued on Page21](#)

Cool Code Corner

Introducing a section of the DATA BUS for short (not more than 25 lines or so) useful utility programs. These programs might be .BAT files or .CMD files using DOS commands or XP commands. The programs might also be Excel macros, etc. They should relate to something that the average user would have access to, rather than a language compiler such as 'C' or 'Visual Basic. Ideally, it would be a general program that could be built upon.

If you have such a handy program then submit it to the editor at e-mail address machw@att.net.

A variation of the BAT file below is now being used for production. We needed a command that could periodically be used to back up documentation files to a flash drive. We wanted new files, or updated files, on the hard drive to overlay existing files on the flash drive. If the directory on the hard drive had sub directories then they should be copied also.

The command is entered by saying "copydoc e:" (for example) if "e:" is the designation of the flash drive.

The check that says "IF !%1==" (two = signs) is to check if no parameter was entered (ie: "copydoc").

It appeared that, in some instances, the source directory could be specified as "doc dir 1," but this did not always work. Using "doc dir 1*.*" always worked.

The single passed parameter is represented as "%1."

The first time the bat file is executed you will be asked (for each first-level directory):

Does E:\doc dir 1 specify a file name or directory name on the target
(F=file, D=directory)

The correct reply is "d"

The following file is created on the hard drive as "copydoc.bat."

ECHO OFF

REM BAT file to copy documentation to flash drive

REM Say copydoc n: where 'n:' is the flash drive designation

REM note that '/e' says copy all sub directories

REM note that '/y' says replace existing files

IF !%1==! GOTO EXIT1

ECHO COPYING TO FLASH DRIVE %1

XCOPY c:\doc dir 1*.* /e /y %1\doc dir 1"

XCOPY C:\doc dir 2*.* /e /y %1\doc dir 2"

GOTO EXIT2

:EXIT1

ECHO ERROR! SAY COPYDOC N: WHERE N: SHOWS FLASH DRIVE!

:EXIT2

ECHO END COPYDOC

This month's entry from editor, Warner Mach.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGS)



SIG-IBM
Tom Callow
Warner Mach



SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE

January 13: 1:45 p.m.: Making Pictures as Opposed to Taking Pictures: G. William Buchanan, FPSA, FGDC, will discuss the use of composition, lighting and camera flash in taking digital photographs as well as saving and organizing digital images on your computer.

Mr. Buchanan is Chairman of the Electronic Imaging Division of Detroit's Photographic Guild

Also: News, Questions and Answers.

January 13: 3:45 p.m.: SIG-IBM Chairman Tom Callow, as guest speaker, will demonstrate how to move your old records, music cassettes and audiobooks to CDs by digitizing them to the computer and burning them to a CD.

NOVICE-IBM GROUP Rotating Volunteer Hosts

December 9: 3:45 p.m.: 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

January 7, 2008: . 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.

Feb. 2008 DATABUS DEADLINE (7th day after 2nd Sunday in month)
SEMCO Input and Members' Ads—Deadline: Sun., Jan. 20, 11:59 p.m.
Members' personal ads are free. To mail, use [Editor address on Page 2](#); e-mail address: [<machw@att.net>](mailto:machw@att.net). PLEASE send to arrive sooner than deadline.
Business Ads - Deadline: Second Friday monthly. Contact [Editor \(address Page 2\)](#).

Warner Machmachw@att.net

(to post monthly computer group info)

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

Feb. 6, 7 p.m., (1st Wednesday); St. Clair County RESA, 499 Range Rd., Marysville, Admin. Building. Jane Wheatly 810-982-1187 or Pam Raisanen <[compinfo\(@hughes.net\)](mailto:compinfo(@hughes.net))>. <<http://www.bwcomp.org>>. Topic: 'Microsoft Publisher 2007' by George Hawkins. Next 3/5/08.

DCOM Computer Club

Jan. 11, 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.

HUG (Holly User Group)

Jan 12, 9:00 a.m., (2nd Sat.); Groveland Twp. Fire Hall, 3085 Grange Hall Rd. & Dixie Hwy., Ortonville. Topic: TBA.

MacGroup- Detroit

Jan. 20, 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: 'Blender' by Paul Reznik. Also, other topics.

MacTechnics, (MAC User Group)

Jan. 19, 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)

Jan. 12, 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)

Feb 12, 11, 6:00 p.m., (2nd Tuesday); MUG meetings are at The Farmington Community Library–Main Branch, 32737 W. 12 Mile Rd., Farmington Hills, MI. 48334. <<http://www.mug.org>>. Topic: TBA.'

Michigan Apple Computer User Group

Jan 10, 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. Next 2/14.

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 monthly speakers. <<http://www.geocities.com/royaloakcomputerclub/ourpage.html>>

SHCC (Sterling Heights Computer Club)

Feb. 5, 7:30 p.m. (1st Tues); 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: 'Where are OS's Headed: What is on the Horizon?' by Eric Blomberg from Apple Inc.

Wayne State University Mac User Group

Jan 12, 10:00 a.m.–Noon, (2nd Saturday); at 21042 Laurelwood, Farmington. Information: JoAnn Olsen 248-478-4300. Topic: TBA.

Continued from Page 17

I have been running SETI@home, a distributed computing project for over 8 years.

I formed a large international team, called Spot_E.T., that is doing quite well.

I do 30+ more distributed computing projects.

Watch for an article in the DATA BUS.

I also believe in the value of computer groups and am a member of Royal Oak Computer Club, and MacGroup Detroit, and Linux-MDLUG, and Linux-MUG. I also attend a few others as time permits.

I like cars of any kind. So I attend a lot of car shows, cruises and other events.

I am into recycling. I own and have managed several recycle groups for about 4 years. The largest three are Royal Oak, Warren, and Madison Heights

Platform? No not talking about Windows or Linux operating system platform.

I would like to see more current members at the meetings. I would like to grow the group. That is not a simple job, for several reasons I won't go into here.

Mike Bader

<<http://www.boinc.us>>



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



**SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN
COMPUTER ORGANIZATION, INC.**

SEMCO CALENDAR

**ArvinMeritor Building
2135 West Maple Road
Troy, Michigan**

January 13–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. Including officer elections.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

SIG-IBM 1:45 p.m. Program: Making Pictures as Opposed to Taking Pictures.
G. William Buchanan, FPSA, FGDC, will discuss the use of composition, lighting and camera flash in taking digital photographs as well as saving and organizing digital images on your computer.

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: SIG-IBM Chairman Tom Callow, as guest speaker, will demonstrate how to move your old records, music cassettes and audiobooks to CDs by digitizing them to the computer and burning them to a CD.

SIG-ADVANCED, Jan. 7, 2008–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.

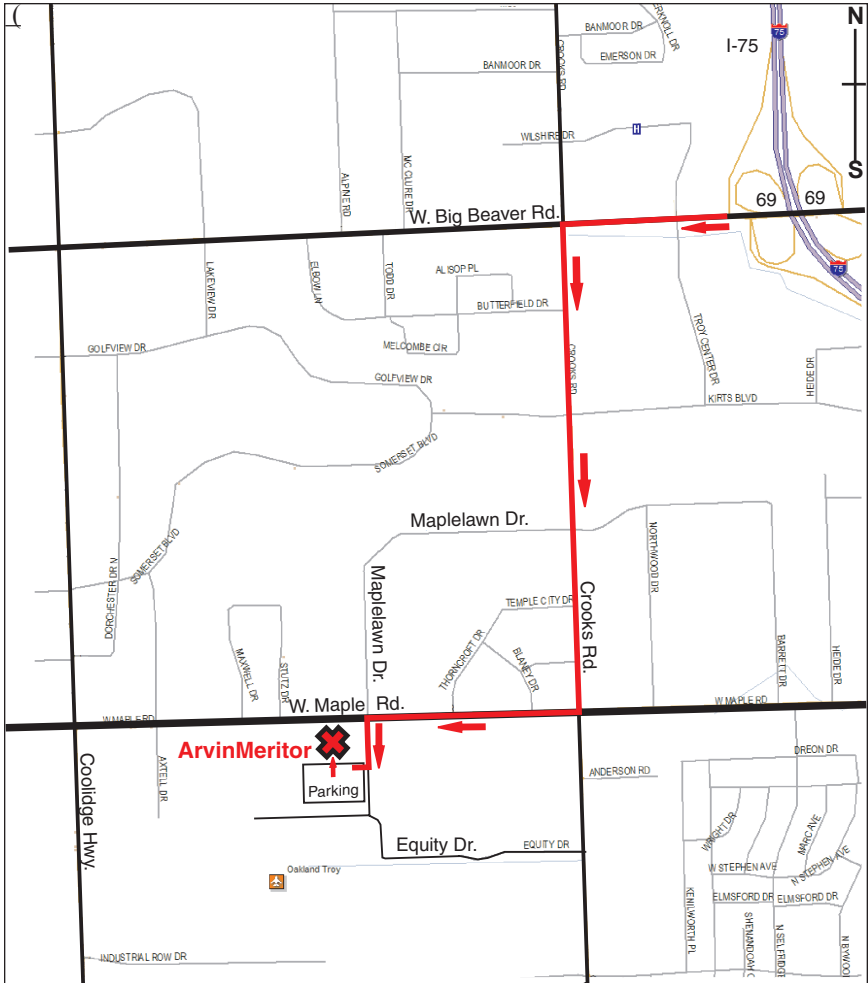
February 10–SEMCO Sunday

<http://www.semco.org>

PUBLIC INVITED

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

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



DIRECTIONS

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

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



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

SEMCO (future meetings)

January 13

February 10

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Helping People for the 21st Century**