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SEMCO OFFICERS

President	Gary DeNise	(248) 634-7514
Vice-President	Richard Jackson	(248) 546-3694
Secretary	Carol Sanzi	(586) 739-7256
Treasurer	Bette Gay	(248) 641-7799
Members-at-Large of the Board of Directors	Bob Clyne	(810) 387-3101
	Charles Moery E-Mail	< keypounder2@aol.com >

NEWSLETTER STAFF

Publications Committee Chair	Warner Mach	(734) 326-0733
Editor	Warner Mach	(734) 326-0733
Associate Editor	Bob Clyne	(810) 387-3101
Proofreader	Beth Fordyce	(734) 453-0349

SIG (SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP) CHAIRPERSONS

SIG-IBM:	Tom Callow	(248) 642-5770 (9-5)
SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE		
NOVICE-IBM GROUP	Rotating Hosts	
SIG-ADVANCED	Franz Breidenich	(248) 398-3359

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All SEMCO correspondence should be addressed to

SEMCO - P.O. Box 707 - Bloomfield Hills, MI 48303-0707

Web site: <http://www.semco.org>

E-mail: semco@semco.org

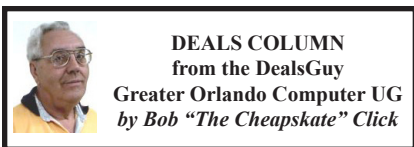
General information: (voice) answering device in Royal Oak **(248) 398-7560**

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I've used FedEx twice and it was a complete disaster. The first time, a few months ago, they delivered the packages I sent my son to the wrong house, which was actually unoccupied, but the tracking said it was delivered. Luckily he found them three days later when checking that house (he owns it).

I recently sent two more packages to my son's home. I tracked the packages on the Web site and when it showed the packages on the truck for delivery, I called to make sure their gate was open that day. They live a quarter-mile back from the road with a gate at the entrance. The package was not delivered that day, but at 6:46 PM the tracking showed it would be delivered the next day. At 8:30 PM the next night and no change with the Web site tracking, I called FedEx to see why it was not there and was told they had no way to communicate with the driver, but the package would not be delivered that late. My son closed the gate.

FedEx called me the next morning to give an approximate delivery time, but discovered that the delivery was actually made the night before at 9:06 PM. My son hurried to look, but the packages couldn't be found. My son's house is not visible from the gate at night because it's back down the drive, so obviously with the gate closed, the packages were left beside the road, but there is a large sign on the gate with the address and phone number to call. Why can't they communicate with their driver? They said that because I didn't request a signature, I am out of luck.

Actually, they are out of luck from now on with my money. I submitted a claim anyway.

No Operating system? What's a Hypervisor?

I saw this article <<http://www.informationweek.com/news/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=202401578>> about using servers without operating systems. This doesn't affect home users, but could it in the future? I found it interesting.

I severely edited the items below so thoroughly check their Web sites for full information. I have not tried them.

A Firefox Add-on

iMacros for Firefox was designed to automate online activities within the Firefox web browser. With iMacros, users can create macros to automatically check the same sites every day, remember passwords, complete web forms, and upload or download files, among other activities. They say, "Whatever you do with Firefox, iMacros can automate it." Notable examples include stockbrokers who create macros to extract online stock quotes, shoppers who use them to automatically compare prices at online stores and website owners who use them to get daily downloads of their page rankings.

iMacros for Firefox allows users to share macros and scripts in a way similar to how they share bookmarks on the many social book marking websites. After creating a new macro, users can use just one click to share it with their friends as a link, or by distributing the link via e-mail and social book marking websites. Also, by embedding it in a website or by blog for public access. Script sharing is now so popular that iOpus has even created a special site for script-sharing on <del.icio.us>.

The iMacros for Firefox software is free for personal and commercial use. Users may opt to upgrade to the business version with guaranteed response times and advanced features. Additional information and the software download link are available online at <<http://www.iopus.com/imacros/firefox>>. Alternatively, the software may be downloaded directly from the official Mozilla site for extensions at <<https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/3863>>.

Help For Your Video File Conversion

Video Mobile Converter v1.0 supports digital video files in the following formats: .AVI (audio video interleave), .ASF (advanced systems format), .MOV (QuickTime movie), .MPG/.MPEG/.MP4 (moving pictures experts group) and .WMV (Windows media video). Once you choose a video, Video Mobile Converter loads the video and lets you define how much video to convert. Users also have control over the video and audio quality during the conversion process. Users control the height and width of the video, its frame and bit rate as well as its overall quality. Users also control the sample rate, bit rate and overall quality of the video's converted audio, along with the option of splitting video files during the conversion process enabling very large video files to become smaller and more easily managed.

Lastly, Video Mobile Converter can output the converted video in the following formats: .3GP and .3G2 (for use on 3G network mobile devices that use GSM or CDMA network protocols), .MP4 (for use on mobile devices, such as iPods classic, iPod nano, iPod touch, iPhones, cellular phones and other

mobile devices), and .PSP (for use on Sony PlayStation Portables).

Video Mobile Converter v1.0 runs under all versions of Microsoft Windows, including Vista and costs \$29.95 (USD) for a single-user license. User group members get a 20% discount. For some reason they didn't respond to my request for the special ordering procedures so, you can e-mail Michael Kaba <<mailto:sales@geovid.com>>. Could be because of the holidays. Licensed users are entitled to the fully functional copy of the software, and free updates. Further information, as well as a free, fully functional evaluation copy is available from <<http://www.videomobileconverter.com>>.

For more information: <<http://www.geovid.com>>.

Download link: <<http://www.videomobileconverter.com/download/videomobileconverter.exe>> (9.3 MB)

Help For Your Web Site

The software package, SeoAdministrator, is a popular professional tool for webmasters and SEO specialists. We released a new module called "Site Analyzer" that will be of interest to all webmasters including those who look after personal websites. The new module helps you to keep a website free of errors such as broken links. Regular use of Site Analyzer will ensure that problems are quickly and easily spotted so they can be fixed. Download a free demonstration of our easy-to-use tool from <<http://www.seoadministrator.com/seoadministrator.exe>>

Site Analyzer, Developed by FlamingoSoft of Vancouver, BC, is designed to automate the vital web management task of monitoring and improving web site performance.

Site Analyzer performs comprehensive scans of a specified website and alerts web managers to a range of common problems including broken links, faulty image links, errors in HTML code and missing meta tags using a variety of report formats. Site Analyzer can also create sitemaps in both human and machine formats ready for uploading. The link vendor will be able to see which pages are “overloaded” with external links and perhaps suspend link sales on those pages. System Requirements: Windows 95/98/ME/2000/XP/Vista

Priced from \$70 (Standard) to \$150 for Expert edition, we are offering this great software to user group members at a 50% discount (\$75 instead of usual price of \$150) which includes lifetime support and free upgrades. Use this link <https://usd.swreg.org/cgi-bin/s.cgi?s=1613&p=1613seo&v=3&d=0&q=1&t=>=>> for the 50% discount. Check their Website URL for full info. <http://www.seoadministrator.com/>.

Pacific Business Centre, Attn: FlamingoSoft #101 – 1001 W. Broadway, Suite 381, Vancouver, BC V6H 4E4, Canada

Easier Way To Remove USB Devices

USB Safely Remove enhances the native Safely Remove function in Windows and enables you to remove and unplug any USB removable device in one mouse click or hotkey. It can give correct names to the devices, lets you rename them and find out what application or process is locking the USB device, preventing it from safe removal. It's easy to unplug the wrong one by mistake because many of them have the same name. Unlike the native Windows option, USB Safely Remove shows all USB devices currently

plugged into the computer and lets you remove any of them and the program gives correct names to the devices on its menu. The software is primarily aimed at those users who have more than one USB device

USB Safely Remove 3.2 runs under Windows 2000, XP, 2003, Vista and is available immediately for \$20 (US) from SafelyRemove.com. User Group members can purchase the program at a 25% discount. Use the coupon code: CUG25 on the Buy Now page. Licensed users get unlimited functionality without nag screens, free technical support by e-mail and free lifetime upgrades. More information on the product, as well as a free trial copy is available from <http://safelyremove.com/ug>. Download link: <http://safelyremove.com/usbsafelyremovesetupug.exe>

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





One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) By Warner Mach

The ‘One Laptop Per Child’ (OLPC) initiative is an effort to bring a laptop learning device to kids in third-world countries. The original hope of the OLPC Foundation was that they could produce a laptop for under \$100 in order to reach this audience. The \$100 price depended on producing many millions of the devices, and economics of scale.

Currently, the price of the machines is just under \$200. In order to get the effort off the ground, the organization offered to sell to Americans, a pair of laptops for \$400 (Actually \$428 after postage, etc); one laptop to go to a third world country and one to the contributing American. This offer was good until December 31, 2007.

My laptop arrived just before Christmas. The only documentation was some instructions for opening the machine. There had been much discussion of various electricity generators that might be used in conjunction with the laptop, on the assumption that kids in third world countries might not have access to electrical outlets. There had been discussion of crank generators and pull generators and solar panel devices. However, the XO machine (such is its name) that went to Americans had a standard plug with converter.

One of the notions that the XO machine is based on is that the kids who get the devices will play around with the machine and figure it out. This may be so, but hopefully they are smarter than me, because I spent a considerable

amount of time on the web trying to figure out how to make things work.

There is a WIKI with some basic instructions at <http://wiki.laptop.org/go/Simplified_User_Guide> and <http://wiki.laptop.org/go/Getting_Started>, but it is still necessary to search around the web to get basic information.

The keyboard is small, for children, and is sealed in plastic, to keep out dirt. It is not designed for touch-typing. There is no hard drive. Instead, there is 256 KB of RAM and 1 GB of internal flash memory. There are three USB ports and one memory card port.

Connectivity is a big part of the design, to encourage students to interact with each other, and with the Internet. Since I only had one machine, I was not able to interact with another machine using the ‘mesh’ system. However, I did go to Panera Bread, where they have free Internet access, and I was able to get on the Internet. Since the AMD chip is relatively slow, the Internet access tends to be slower than one is used to, but it does work, using the cut-down version of Firefox browser that comes with the machine.

The busboy at Panera Bread was intensely curious about what I was doing, since the appearance of the green and white toy-like XO laptop is distinctly different from the laptops that surrounded me.

Some of the other software applications that come with the machine: (1) Calculator. (2) Pippy: A Python language interpreter. I would have voted to provide BASIC as a language, rather than Python, but BASIC is non object-orientated and is unfashionable. (3) TurtleArt: This allows you to snap together instructions to control a ‘turtle.’

The turtle leaves a trail; so you can produce drawings. (4) Etoys: Various games to help in learning about the machine. (5) Record: Allows you to take a picture or make a movie or record a voice. (6) Write: To write text. (7) Paint: To produce drawings. The drawings can incorporate text and pictures.

There are also facilities to compose music and make music and record music.

In order to use a USB port, you go to the “journal.” In the journal you can see the various kinds of files that are in memory and can copy files to and from the flash drive in the USB port.

There is a “terminal” application for entering Linux commands.

One other application is the “book reader.” To use this, I copied a PDF document to a flash drive. I copied the document from the flash drive to the XO journal. I could then rotate the display panel and flatten it over the keyboard, against the rest of the unit. Arrow keys in the display allowed me to move through the document.

The XO machine is a great engineering achievement. It will be interesting to see if it is able to fulfill its potential on the economic and social and educational level. Will third world countries see this unit as important to their future?



Warner Mach is DATA BUS Editor.



Check Alternative Travel Site for Deals By Ira Wilsker

We have all seen the TV commercials with the gnome fretting over travel problems, and have seen the black clad inspectors prancing all over a hotel snooping in every nook and cranny. One thing the Internet is not short of is travel websites that offer airline tickets, hotel rooms, cruises, rental cars, and package deals combining all of the above. Many of the proprietary airline and hotel sites, such as <<http://www.Continental.com>> and <<http://www.Hilton.com>> themselves guarantee the lowest rates, but neglect to show what the competition is offering. One advantage to the direct sale proprietary travel sites is that they generally do not add a service fee for online bookings, unlike the fees charged by the independent commercial travel websites. On the other hand, the commercial travel sites can show the rates and fares from multiple providers, allowing for comparison shopping for both cost and schedule. While there are many well advertised mega-travel sites like [Expedia](http://www.Expedia.com), [Hotels.com](http://www.Hotels.com), [Orbitz](http://www.Orbitz.com), and [Travelocity](http://www.Travelocity.com), there are also some lesser known web sites that offer a service that some of the mega sites are lacking.

One such site that I recently learned about from a professional acquaintance is Ultimate Fares, at <<http://www.ultimatefares.com>>. While similar to the mega travel sites in appearance and function it had some different travel results when I compared it to some of the mega sites and proprietary web sites in a side by side comparison. In one example, I was looking for the lowest possible airfare from Beaumont

to Las Vegas on some specific peak travel dates. Travelocity and Expedia displayed a nearly identical selection of flights and airfares, many of which were duplicated on Ultimate Fares. What was unusual on the Ultimate Fares website was the ability of the user to choose from some unusual indirect routings where the user had the choice to choose between a lower fare (not offered on the mega sites) and a longer flight time, including connections. If, for the traveler, at his personal choice, it is worth saving in some cases over a hundred dollars in airfare, in exchange for a two or three hour longer total flight time, the user at least has that choice. One specific example was on the Beaumont BPT–Las Vegas LAS example on some peak travel days in the Christmas–New Years time period, when the airlines were extremely busy and heavily booked. While the traveler could select a direct Beaumont–Houston IAH–Las Vegas route from one carrier, or a combination of carriers, both by changing planes in Houston, Ultimate Fares had some lower fares listed with some unusual city pair combinations. When I ran the comparison for this column, Ultimate Fares showed several lower fares than the mega sites, but with the longer flight times by about two hours by going from Houston IAH to the Orange County, California John Wayne airport, another change of airlines, and then a short direct flight back to Las Vegas. If the traveler is on a tight budget, and the difference in cost (savings) is worth more than the hours of additional time each way and inconvenience, then this could be a good alternative. My only concern would be for the timely arrival of the baggage after being on three different

airlines! Ultimate Fares will e-mail two confirmations to the traveler, the first the purchase confirmation, and the second will be the airline confirmation number and itinerary. This second e-mail is the document that will be required to pick up boarding passes at the airport, so be sure to save it and print several copies, and bring the printout with the airline confirmation number to the airport!

Another area of travel deals where Ultimate Fares had rates as good or in some cases even better than the competing mega sites was cruise deals. I randomly selected some dates, and compared the featured cruises on each of the websites, and then found the comparable cruise on the other sites. In many of the cruises compared, Ultimate Fares had lower rates and larger discounts than the mega sites. In one specific example, I selected next September for a date range, and compared Caribbean cruises. Ultimate Fares showed rates for interior, ocean view, balcony, and suite cabins that were very competitive with the mega sites, and in some cases, better deals. According to Ultimate Fares, some of the best deals offered savings off of the published cruise line brochures of “up to” 77%, 75%, and 72%! Remember that on almost all travel sites, taxes and fees will be added to the quoted price, and should be included in any final comparison.

Hotel rooms and airline seats are considered as perishable commodities if not booked, and go unused. Hotels often have some last minute unsold rooms, airlines have unsold seats, and rental car companies have cars left in the lot. Ultimate Fares offers “Last Minute Deals” which offer combinations of flight, hotel, and car deals which can

be booked up to 14 days in advance, and offer package discounts of up to 70%. These last minute deals would be ideal for the person or family who has the flexibility of date and location, and will accept a smaller combination of offerings in exchange for deep discounts. The smaller combination of possible offerings is not a sparse offering; as I type this in late December, Ultimate Fares has a lengthy list of last minute deals from Houston, including 230 last minute flight and hotel deals (double occupancy, car optional), 115 flight and car deals, and 47 hotel and car deals, all at package prices of up to 70% off retail rates.

Many of us rent cars at our destination when we fly to distant cities. As an example, I compared rental car rates for an upcoming week at DFW airport. Ultimate Fares listed the rates for 10 different car companies, ranging from no-name deep discount companies, to the major national rental car companies. Ultimate Fares quoted rates up to 40% less than the mega travel sites for the same cars on the same dates! Just remember to include taxes and fees, which are quoted by the website prior to actual booking, in any comparison.

Now, I always heard that if a deal is too good to be true, it probably is. Ultimate Fares, while not well known, has privacy certificates from Verisign, and Trust-E, and is a member of the ASTA (American Society of Travel Agents). I looked up some of the online reviews of Ultimate Fares and they were a mixed bag of positive and negative reviews. One often repeated warning in the online reviews of Ultimate Fares (that also applies to all other travel sites as well) is to be fully cognizant that the original price quoted does not include

all taxes and fees; fees and taxes can substantially increase the total cost of the trip! To be fair, Ultimate Fares, just like almost all other travel websites, does indeed disclose the taxes, fees and total price prior to the traveler entering any credit card information. I did find when comparing taxes and fees on some sample airfares between Ultimate Fares, the mega sites, and the airline websites directly, that the Ultimate Fares taxes and fees were about \$10 to \$30 a ticket higher than the airline site which only charges taxes and mandatory fees (but no surcharges), but competitive with the mega sites that have the same taxes and mandatory fees, but also add on some type of surcharge.

Before buying any travel services from anyone online, checkout the reputation of the seller, and use a major credit card that is likely to side with you in the event of a dispute. Be emphatically sure to review the itinerary and any taxes and fees prior to entering credit card information and finalizing the booking process, as many fares and deals are rigid and non-refundable, or have hefty fees to change an itinerary

WEBSITE

[<http://www.ultimatefares.com>.](http://www.ultimatefares.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>.](mailto:iwilsker@apcug.net)





Bot-Nets

By Brian K. Lewis

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

Keeping your computer safe while connected to the Internet is becoming more and more difficult. The “attackers” are becoming more sophisticated and are sharing more ways to get their software into your computer. Business Week recently ran an article on the major security problems expected in 2008. Unfortunately, most of them arrived long before the new year started. We have been warned for years that it was possible to recruit unprotected computers into networks that could be controlled by an external source. This recruitment network problem has gotten much worse over the past few years. It is estimated that 7% of the computers connected to the Internet have been infected with a Botnet program. So what is a “Botnet?”

A robot or “bot” software program allows a computer to be remotely controlled without the knowledge of the computer’s owner. When you have a number of “bot” controlled computers it is referred to as a “botnet.” All of the computers in the botnet carry out commands issued by the network controller. Just one example of what can be done with a botnet is the sending of spam. The controller can easily have 100,000 computers in its network. So the botmaster will contract to send out one million e-mail messages. The network can then send ten messages from each of the compromised computers. With the constant connection to the Internet

using cable or DSL the computer owner will have no idea that his/her computer has been the source for ten spam messages.

Now you might say that the idea that someone can control 100,000 computers in a botnet is ridiculous. However, as of October 2007 a major Internet security service had the IP addresses of over 12 million computers that were infected with bot software. There is also a newer threat called the Storm Worm botnet that has infected millions of computers just this year. In addition to its computer recruiting ability, it has built-in defenses that are preventing security services from analyzing it. In an E-Week article it was noted that “... Storm worm is sending DDoS attacks to not only the researchers looking into it but to anybody on their subnet, within 5 seconds of (their) initiating efforts to fight it or examine it.” A DDoS attack is a “distributed denial of service” which can bring down a computer system or network by overwhelming it with messages. A very large volume of messages are sent by the botnet in a very short period of time. It is estimated that the Storm net controls over one million computers. This would make it the most powerful supercomputer in the world, exceeding the computing power of all previous computers.

People frequently wonder why anyone would want to produce viruses, worms and other kinds of Internet attacks. Years ago it was primarily because “they could do it.” Today, it has become a real source of financial gain. Let’s take a look at one financial resource created by controllers of botnets. On many web pages you find ads of various types that are sponsored by Google. When these ads are clicked,

the advertiser pays Google who, in turn, pays the owner of a web page, usually 80% of the fee. So the botmaster sets up a web page and contracts with Google to display ads. Then, using the botnet, sends commands to the computers in its net to click on the ads. This results in payments to the botmaster. So even with a small botnet of say 5-10,000 computers, the botmaster can easily obtain \$15,000-\$20,000 per month in fraudulent payments. When you consider that the known botnets all have more than 100,000 compromised systems, you get a better idea of the scale of the fraud involved. This type of click fraud has been estimated to make up 5–20% of the payments made by search companies.

Another use of large botnets is extortion. The botmaster can send an e-mail to a corporation warning that a DDoS will take place at a specific time unless a payment is made. As I mentioned earlier, spam e-mail contracts are also a source of revenue for botmasters. As these networks proliferate, the sale of the IP addresses of robotically controlled computers is also favored as an income source.

So far it would appear that the only persons affected by botnets would be corporations. However, if your computer is infected, everything you do can be reported to the botmaster. Bots can incorporate “keylogger” software. That will record keystrokes, especially any related to passwords, user names or other desirable information. Another function of bot software is screen capture. It can record an entire screen and transmit the data to the botmaster. A compromised computer can also be used as a base for finding other unprotected computers to be recruited into the net.

Another consideration is that the largest number of computers are those in the hands of private individuals. So you may be a major part of the problem if your computer is infected by a bot.

Once a computer has been compromised, the bot software is usually designed to hide and protect itself. For example it will search for and disable any other malware located on the computer or its associated network. It may also hide itself by means of a rootkit. It may also block updates of any anti-virus or anti-spyware software. It may even fake the process so the user believes that an update has taken place. One of the most common modifications involves changes to the Windows host file or by changing the location of the host file and altering the registry.

There are also some traps on the Internet that can lead a user to download bot (Trojan) software without realizing it. Phishing e-mail can lead to web pages that have automatic download links for bot software. Web pages can be hijacked and links added to lead the viewer to web sites that contain “free” software links that are actually hidden bot programs. Bot programs are incorporating “social engineering” functions which serve to entice users to unknowingly download malware. People are the weakest link in the security chain. E-mail, web pages, instant messaging, social contact web sites are all used by bot malware as a means of collecting information and linking to compromised computers.

Many times the actions of a computer user are governed by visual clues. An attacker may take advantage of this by providing false visual clues on a web page or a pop-up. If the dialog box or pop-up is intrusive the user may click inappropriately just to get rid of the

intruder. This can lead to the download of a bot.

So how do you know if you've been infected? The easiest way to tell is related to how you have been protecting your computer from infection. Do you have all of the following?

- a. hardware firewall.
- b. software firewall that checks both incoming and outgoing messages.
- c. anti-virus software that is updated at least daily.
- d. anti-spyware software that you either run weekly or that runs in RAM constantly.
- e. keep your Windows software patches up to date.

If you don't use any of these safety mechanisms, then your machine is almost 100% guaranteed to be compromised. Even if you have taken all of these precautions, you can still be infected. However, the most effective mechanism for dealing with bots is to prevent their getting into your computer. So you have to keep the software up to date and you have to use it.

Ideally, your firewall hardware/software combination should keep you invisible on the Internet. Bot programs are constantly searching for unprotected computers with open ports. You may not be aware that your computer has over 64,000 ports that can be used for communication. The most common usage are the ports in the lower range, under 1,024. However, some bots use high end ports (>60,000) for transmission of commands. One place you can check your computers ports and its invisibility on the Internet is www.GRC.com. The Gibson Research site provides a free port scan and much good information on interpreting the findings as well as how to protect your system.

Ideally the anti-virus and anti-spyware software would be able to find and remove any bot software that made its way onto your computer. However, this software needs to know the "signature" of the malware in order to identify it. So the producers of the malware are always a step ahead of the good guys. The security services have to find and disassemble the new malware before they can devise the protection against it. So it is up to the user to keep the security software as current as possible to reduce the chances of infection. Like it or not, security on the Internet is a never ending battle.

Dr. Lewis is a former university and medical school professor of physiology. He has been working with personal computers for over thirty years, developing software and assembling systems.

E-mail: <bwsail@yahoo.com>.

Web: <<http://www.spcug.org>>.

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CES 2008
By Bob Clyne
Associate Editor

CES is the Consumer Electronics Show, which is produced by the Consumer Electronics Association. It takes place in Las Vegas every January. The exhibit space for CES covers more than 1.7 million net square feet of space. That's a lot of space.

Eye-Fi

One of the more interesting new items at CES was a SD (Secure Digital) card

with built-in WiFi from Eye-Fi, Inc. <<http://www.eye.fi>>. With this card, you do not have to remove the card from the camera or connect any cables to transfer your pictures from the camera to the computer. If you just have the camera near the WiFi equipped computer, or WiFi router or access point, and the camera is not being used for a few minutes, the camera will automatically transfer the pictures to the computer. I was told that the cards will work with a properly secured wireless network. The cards can also upload the pictures to some of the photo sharing services such as Facebook, Flickr, and Kodak Gallery. The cards are available from Wal-Mart, Costco, Amazon and other stores. The cards are currently only available with a 2 GB capacity under the Eye-Fi brand name and cost just under \$100, but Eye-Fi has a licensing agreement with Lexar Media <<http://www.lexar.com>> and the cards should soon be available under the Lexar, Crucial and Kodak brand names. Lexar also expects to produce 4 and 8 GB cards.

Digital photo frames

There were a lot of digital photo frames on display. They were in all sizes from some that would fit unobtrusively on a desk or small table to some that would hang nicely on a wall (though, as I recall, that one cost upwards of \$600). Many would automatically adjust to portrait or landscape position. Most would accept one variety or another of memory cards and a few could wirelessly accept pictures. They could either display one picture continuously or cycle through a series of pictures. Some also had sound, but I don't think I would like a picture that continuously played music. Though, if one had their vacation pictures, or something similar

set to cycle through, had a description recorded, and the description could be set to synchronize with the pictures and play once on demand that could have possibilities.

Pinnacle Video-Spin

Pinnacle Systems, a division of Avid Technologies, has a new video editing application called VideoSpin and it is free. VideoSpin is a slimmed down version of Pinnacle Studio. It has many of the editing features of Studio and will do menus, and transitions. It is a 148 MB download. So, what is the catch? There are several. You cannot use it to create a DVD; it will only create files. You have to buy the optional codec pack in order to import or export MPEG-2, MPEG-4, or DivX files after the first 15 days. Capture is basically non-existent. It will import MPEG-1, DV AVI, MJPEG, and WMV and export those plus Flash Video. If you want to try video editing, you might start with this; then if you want to go further, you can buy Studio. The URL is <<http://www.videospin.com>>.

Gibson Robot Guitar

The Gibson Robot Guitar can automatically tune itself. This seems to me like a clever idea. Now if it could just make my fingers manipulate the strings properly, I might take up the guitar, but that would require a miracle rather than just technology.

Digital TV is coming

We are only one year from the end of analog television transmission, but you knew that, I hope. The change will directly affect only those who are receiving TV over-the-air. Satellite customers will probably not notice the difference unless you switch to high definition service since all the satellite signals are already digital. Cable users

are at the mercy of their cable companies and may be affected in different ways and at different times.

For those receiving over-the-air broadcasts, if you are using an analog TV set, you will need a converter in order to continue receiving over-the-air broadcasts. The U.S. government has set up a program to provide every household with two coupons worth \$40 each toward the purchase of approved converters. There were several companies at CES who were announcing \$39.95 converters and I expect there will be many more as the deadline approaches. I will provide a few warnings about the program though. Not all converters will be eligible for the coupons and after you get the coupons, you have a fairly short period to use them. If you let them expire, you lose. There is, currently no provision to replace them.

Another thing to remember is that not all digital TV is high definition, though all high definition TV is digital. If your TV is old, this year might be a good time to consider getting a new digital flat panel display. Not all displays contain a tuner. This may not matter if you only use cable or satellite but if you want to receive over-the-air TV, ask and make sure the display has a tuner built-in or that you get a separate tuner.

Blu-ray vs. HD DVD

Just before the start of CES Warner Brothers announced that they would become a Blu-ray-only studio at the end of May. This was a serious blow to the HD DVD group headed by Toshiba. Still, Toshiba vowed to fight on. Blu-ray seems to have the support of most of the major movie studios and is reportedly outselling HD DVD by a wide margin in the world outside the U.S. The results

in the U.S. vary depending on whose numbers you use and exactly how they chose their data, but I think Blu-ray is ahead. With the cost of players for both formats coming down, I think Blu-ray will be the winner, but it may take some time. Hopefully, the issue will be decided soon. Second generation Blu-ray players are coming out with more features, especially interactive features, which have been the strong point of the HD DVD players. If you want to hedge your bets on the battle, there are combo HD DVD and Blu-ray players on the market, but it is cheaper to buy a dedicated player for each format than it is to buy a combo player, and that way you can upgrade one player at a time if you choose. I think, that as the digital TV conversion date in February of 2009 approaches, more people will buy high definition displays and interest in high definition disc players will increase.

OLED

Sony made a big splash by showing off the 11-inch XEL-1, which will be the first OLED (Organic Light Emitting Diode) HDTV available in the United States when it hits the market in the next few months. It will cost \$2,500 so I doubt if many will be sold, but the first models of any technology are always expensive. Sony also had a 27-inch OLED prototype display but no plans for production as yet. Samsung had a 31-inch prototype OLED on display. The viewing angle was very good and it looked great. OLED technology is promising: very thin screens, low power consumption and an excellent contrast ratio. I have been a fan of this technology for several years.

LED backlit LCD

LG had a 47-inch LED backlit LCD display which is expected to ship in the

3rd quarter of 2008. It had both 60 Hz and 120 Hz refresh rates and also had a film mode for 24 frame-per-second material. It seemed to have a good viewing angle and looked very good. Toshiba had a 52-inch LED backlit LCD display, but has no plans for production. It also had an excellent viewing angle and looked very good. I would love to have one.

USB

Wireless USB has about the same range as Bluetooth, about 15 meters, but much higher speed. Like Bluetooth, the devices have to be “associated” with each other before they can communicate. Wireless USB is backward compatible with wired USB, allows users to theoretically connect up to 127 devices and currently delivers a bandwidth of up to 480Mb/s at 3 meters and 110Mb/s at 10 meters. The current standard is 1.0. The Wireless USB 1.1 Specification is expected be finalized in the first half of 2008. Its advancements include new options for first-time association of devices, improved power efficiency, and support for UWB (Ultra Wide Band) frequencies above 6 GHz. So soon, you will be able to have a third wireless technology competing with WiFi, and Bluetooth (and your cordless phones, home automation devices, etc.) for the radio spectrum in your home and office.

Wired USB is also advancing, with version 3.0 of the standard expected to be approved in the first half of 2008. USB 3.0 devices are expected to deliver 10 times the 480 Mbs speed of today’s High-Speed devices. The new speed will be called SuperSpeed.

Lightscribe

Hewlett-Packard, which owns the LightScribe patents, said that, while

different colored backgrounds on LightScribe discs are available now, full color LightScribe printing will probably never be brought to market. They said that they have the technology to do it, but they believe that the cost of the drives and media would be more than consumers would be willing to pay. Verbatim said that they have no plans to make double layer LightScribe discs.

SentrySafe

As you probably know, most safes will not protect your data stored on CDs, DVDs, flash drives, or hard drives very well from fire. Unless a safe is rated for media, its fire rating is based on the ignition point of paper, which is much higher than your media can stand. SentrySafe <<http://www.sentrysafe.com>> had several models of safes that are intended for computer media and even have a USB connection so you can access a flash or hard drive inside the safe with the safe locked. Some of these safes are rated for 2-hour fire protection up to 1850 degrees Fahrenheit and water resistance up to 8-inches for up to 24 hours. Since there is only a USB connection through the safe, any drive inside would have to be capable of being powered via the USB port. Also, while water resistance up to 8-inches would probably be adequate for a fire, it would not likely be adequate for a flood. The 2 cu. ft. capacity model has a MSRP of \$519.99. They have smaller models, including one that comes with a Maxtor hard drive installed, but that one only has a half-hour fire rating.

There was much, much more, but that is all I have time and space for.

Computer History

1941: World's first operational computer, the Zuse Z3.

Let's Clean "Start-Up" By Bob Elgines

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

Does your computer boot-up or run slow? Maybe there are too many programs running in the back-ground. Let us do the following check first.

Hold your CTRL & ALT buttons and press the DELETE button.

Click on the PERFORMANCE tab, is your CPU Usage running more than 10% or is all your Physical Memory in use?

Go to START then RUN, type in "msconfig" which stands for Microsoft System Configuration. In Windows VISTA you can find RUN in the ACCESSORY folder under PROGRAMS.

The System Configuration Utility window will come up.

First go to the upper right tab labeled STARTUP, here you will see the list of items that load during startup. Of course some you want, some you don't. In the first column labeled STARTUP ITEM gives a very rough idea to what it is referenced to, but the second column labeled COMMAND, is much more useful. To read it better, widen the column out by holding your mouse symbol over the vertical line located before the next column label. A double arrow will appear, then hold down left mouse button and move it to the right. This information tells you where it is located and in some cases which program is using it. Uncheck those in question, you can put them back in later

if you need to. Do not uncheck your Antivirus or Spyware programs.

Next go to the tab on top labeled SERVICES, this show all of the programs running now. You do not want to uncheck those labeled Microsoft under the MANUFACTURER column, so to start off, let's put a check mark in the box below labeled "Hide all Microsoft Services."

Now while you are reviewing the other programs running in the background note the fourth column labeled STATUS. If it says STOPPED, then don't worry about it. We just want to stop the strange ones that are RUNNING. You can uncheck those that you are not familiar with, here again you may bring them back in later.

After un-checking all those items under tabs STARTUP & SERVICES, then click on APPLY and CLOSE.

The System Configuration Utility will now ask you to RESTART (or Boot) your computer.

After restarting, a window will come up stating System Configuration Utility has been changed, be sure to put a check mark in the bottom left (labeled "Don't show this message on launch ...") before clicking OK.

If you improved the operation of your computer, you can put back in the items one at a time until you find the program that was slowing you down.

Bob Elgines is editor of The Colorado River Computer Club Newsletter. <<http://www.crccaz.com>>, e-mail: <[elginesz\(at\)rraz.net](mailto:elginesz(at)rraz.net)>.

Computer History
1958: AT&T develops first
modem..

Meeting Pictures



(Above) January guest speaker and photography expert G. William Buchanan with Tom Callow and Richard Jackson (hidden) and ballot box. (Below) Tom Callow, with impressive amounts of gear, talks about digitizing recordings. Meeting of January 13, 2008.





BOARD MEETING
1/13/08
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 Chairman Tom Callow, Publications Committee Chairman Warner Mach. Also present was Internet Committee Chairman Mike Bader and member Bill Margolin. The meeting was called to order at 12:15 p.m.

OLD BUSINESS—\$4170.05 in the bank account and \$4,599.84 invested in three Certificates of Deposit. The membership stands at 86.

It is time for Gary Grzeblenik, Robert J. Hoffmann, and John Marko to renew their memberships.

Franz Breidenich moved to reimburse Bob Clyne \$50 for SEMCO's 2008 APCUG dues. Carol Sanzi seconded the motion and it was carried.

NEW BUSINESS

Mike Bader reported that the Yahoo on-line user group has grown by two members. Activity is increasing.

Carol Sanzi moved to adjourn. Franz Breidenich seconded the motion and it was carried. The meeting adjourned at 1:28 p.m.

Meeting Notes:

Note: Mike Bader has created a link to Tom Callow's meeting notes from the January meeting, on the subject of 'How to move your old records, music cassettes and audiobooks to CDs': <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/semcoug/files/speaker%20notes/sigibm.doc>>.

2008 ELECTION
RESULTS
By Carol Sanzie

Office—Name—Vote Count:

President—Mike Bader—20

Vice President—Richard Jackson—21

Secretary—Carol Sanzi—21

Treasurer—Bette Gay—21

Board of Directors Members-at-Large:

Bob Clyne—21

Chuck Moery—21

Penguicon 6.0

Penguicon 6.0 will be held at the Troy Hilton (Michigan) April 18-20. This is a "Science Fiction and Open Source Software Convention." The convention features topics related to computers and the Internet as well as science fiction topics, anime, and games. The web site is <<http://www.penguicon.org>>. At the web site you will find videos and pictures from previous Penguicons, as well as a preliminary list of topics, a list of 'Tech Guest of Honor' and 'Author Guest of Honor' and 'Hack of Honor.' The Hack of Honor is the Giant Singing Tesla Coils. There is a video of the coils at the web site..

Vintage Computers?

If you regularly use an older computer, such as an Altair or Commodore-64 or an older operating system such as DOS or Windows 3.1, or if you emulate older hardware on a modern computer, I would like to interview you. E-mail DATA BUS editor: <machw@att.net>..

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGS)



SIG-IBM
Tom Callow

February 10: 1:45 p.m.: My 40 Years In Computers: New SEMCO President Mike Bader will talk about his 40 years in computers and how he uses computers for profit and pleasure. There will be a little history of computers as he used them as a hobby, then as a career. Mr. Bader will show some links and web sites that he uses for his main business, and his homebased and Internet businesses, as well as for fun. He will reveal some of his favorite utilities that he loads onto every computer. Also, a show-'n-tell concerning VoIP Internet phones. Handouts of speaker notes and links, as well as surprise 'free samples,' will be distributed.

SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE

February 10: 3:45 p.m.: Weird Computer Behavior: SIG-IBM Chairman Tom Callow, as guest speaker, will look at weird computer behavior: Mr. Callow, will talk about some of the unusual things that can happen to your computer and what you can do about it.

NOVICE-IBM GROUP Rotating Volunteer Hosts

February 10: 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

March 3, 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.

March 2008 DATABUS DEADLINE (7th day after 2nd Sunday in month)
SEMCO Input and Members' Ads—Deadline: Sun., Feb 17, 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 \(address Page 2\)](#).

COMP (Computer Operators of Marysville & Port Huron)

March 5, 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.

DCOM Computer Club

Feb.8, 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)

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

MacGroup- Detroit

Feb 17, 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: "PDAs with Mac, iPhone, VoIP.". Also, other topics.

MacTechnics, (MAC User Group)

Feb 16, 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)

Feb 9, 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

Feb 14, 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 monthly speakers. <<http://www.geocities.com/royaloakcomputerclub/ourpage.html>>

SHCC (Sterling Heights Computer Club)

March 4, 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: "Wireless and Other Wonders of Home Networking" by TDB from SHCC.

Wayne State University Mac User Group

Feb 9, 10:00 a.m.–Noon, (2nd Saturday); at 21042 Laurelwood, Farmington. Information: JoAnn Olsen 248-478-4300. Topic: TBA.

Special Offer from Peachpit Press

Peachpit Press represents a collection of the world's leading computer books specializing in graphics and design including New Riders, Adobe Press, and Apple Certified, among others. They are offering user group members a 30% discount off the list price of any of their books. Go to <<http://www.peachpit.com/store/>> to examine their book list. Place purchases in your shopping cart. Then, at checkout, right before you put your credit card number in, you must enter the user group coupon code UE-23AA-PEUF (case-sensitive)

This coupon code is an exclusive offer that may not be used in conjunction with any other coupon codes.



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 Network: 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**

February 10–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: My 40 Years In Computers:** New SEMCO President Mike Bader will talk about his 40 years in computers and his use of computers in business and as a hobby. He will discuss some of his favorite utilities and will demonstrate VoIP. Handouts of speaker notes and surprise 'free samples' will be distributed.

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: Weird Computer Behavior:** SIG-IBM Chairman Tom Callow, as guest speaker, will look at weird computer behaviour. Mr. Callow will talk about some of the unusual things that can happen to your computer and what you can do about it.

SIG-ADVANCED, March 3, 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.

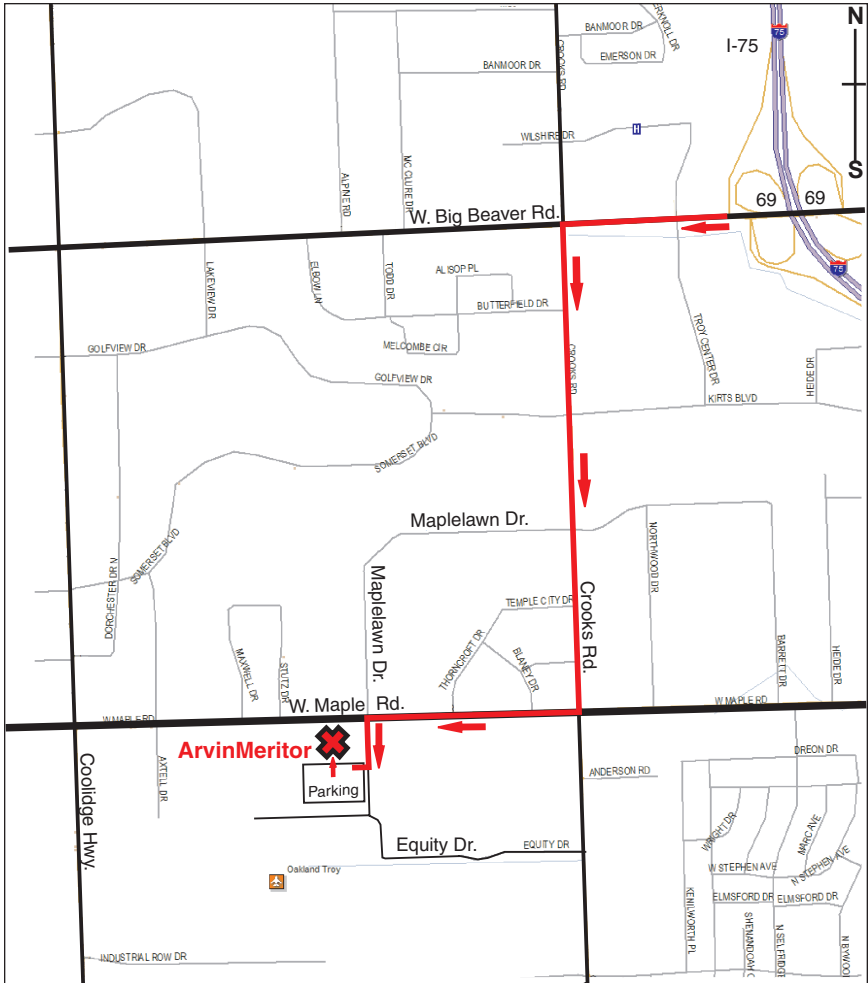
March 9–SEMCO Sunday

<http://www.semco.org>

PUBLIC INVITED

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

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

February 10

March 9

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