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SEMCO OFFICERS

President	Mike Bader	(586) 573-7330
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: Chairman	Tom Callow	(248) 642-5770 (9-5)
SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE	Open Position	
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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DEALS COLUMN
from the DealsGuy
Greater Orlando Computer UG
by Bob "The Cheapskate" Click

Looking Back

Time sure passes quickly. I wrote my first DealsGuy column in November 1994 and have never missed a month since. I am not a journalist by trade, nor do I pretend to be one, but I am flattered that this column has stayed popular as long as it has. Editors sometimes forward complimentary comments from their members about the DealsGuy column. Two groups print only part of it in the newsletters they place around their community to attract new members, and readers must become a member to get the entire column. I am also grateful for the many friends I made over the years through the column. I have been offered places to stay just about anywhere in the US.

Years ago, I received a request from a professional journalist to be added to my e-mail list for the column, and I told him I was honored by the request from him. He told me something that I have thought about a few times since. He said I had blazed a trail with the syndication of my DealsGuy column to user groups and that others would probably follow. At that time, most articles written were from the editor and the group's own members, mostly reviews, but some of the better ones were reprinted selectively in other newsletters. However, the DealsGuy column certainly has its hard-line critics. Some editors strongly dislike my column, and other editors feel I write too much about myself. In fact, I'm still reeling from one editor's strong comments at a conference. People sometimes request they be put

on my e-mail list because their editor refuses to carry the DealsGuy column. A few editors only carry the product parts of the column because they say their members have no interest in my personal comments at the beginning, but I sometimes hear from UG members asking how to see the entire DealsGuy column.

In the early days of the column, it was not uncommon for user group people I met at conventions to ask how they could get into writing a monthly column as I was doing. I tried giving them tips, but how can a guy who began writing a column accidentally offer helpful tips when he himself doesn't really know what he is doing. Nowadays it's great to see so many authors writing interesting monthly columns that help provide a packed newsletter for any editor and there are many user groups with regular material from their own members. I guess that I'll stick with it a while longer since nobody else wants this job.

Tax Tips

If you haven't done your 2007 income tax yet, don't forget about Tax Act <<http://www.2ndstorysoftware.com>> for computing your income tax for free, although I use the pay version because it brings forward information from last year's tax return (if you used it last year) along with some comparison features. You can even e-file with the free version. If you would rather someone else did the work, check when and where the AARP volunteers are working to help seniors out. There are other free ways to do your taxes on the Government site.

Goodbye FedEx, Good Riddance

Remember my bad experience with FedEx delivery last month? They refused my claim saying that according

to their log the packages were delivered to the address and that's all they were required to do since no signature was requested. Actually, they could simply throw them out the window as they were driving by, throw them away if they were running late and enter "delivered" in the log, or even just set them beside the road, as they would have had to do in our case, at 9:06 PM according to their log. When I was told it wouldn't be delivered after 8:00 PM, my son closed the driveway gate. They don't seem to have my conversation with the Phoenix office in their log, yet they called me back the next morning to offer a delivery time because the packages had been in the truck for two days. No packages were ever found at the address and their letter denying the claim says they hope they can count on my continued business. After another bad experience, not a chance!

They Claim To Simplify Launching

This is designed to replace the standard Quick Launch. The program emulates the standard features of Quick Launch while including lots of grouping and menu options, many useful plug-ins and some skinning abilities. True Launch Bar helps clear your desktop working space by removing randomly placed shortcuts and organizing them in convenient groups and menus. True Launch Bar provides users with a brand-new functionality enabling ultra-fast access to any of your PC contents!

True Launch Bar stores shortcuts in the same folder as Windows Quick Launch. All the icons installed into QuickLaunch are automatically installed for True Launch Bar. True Launch Bar can be docked into the taskbar. You can simply drag your shortcuts onto the toolbar or menu by pressing any of the

mouse buttons. Right button dragging activates a Context menu, grouping links into popup menus. The Virtual Folders feature allows you to add any folder as a menu and control it through Windows Explorer-like context menus. It can be any folder on your disk or on a local network (Favorites, Programs, Recent, etc.), as well as file system folders such as My Computer, Control Panel, Printers, etc. Toolbar buttons will not only launch the applications, but also act like small applets. If you add a Media Control plug-in onto the True Launch Bar, the button will become a real control center of the media player with Stop, Play, Pause and Volume adjusting options.

True Launch Bar runs under Windows 9x, NT, 2K, XP, 2003 and Windows Vista. A 25% discount makes the cost \$14.90 (USD) for a single-user license. Links to purchase with the discount are: Personal License (one person, one or more computers) (\$14.90); <<http://www.regsoft.net/purchase.php3?productid=51538&pc=7L0L7>> and Home license (one copy on multiple computers and multiple users) (\$35); <<http://www.regsoft.net/purchase.php3?productid=53346&pc=7U0I4>>.

Licensed customers are entitled to lifetime technical support and free updates. Additional information on True Launch Bar, as well as its fully functional evaluation version with a 30-day trial period is available from <<http://www.truelaunchbar.com>>.

Download link: 32-bit version: <<http://download.truelaunchbar.com/install/truelaunchbar42.exe>> (4,30MB). 64-bit version: <<http://download.truelaunchbar.com/install64/truelaunchbar64v42.msi>> (4,69MB).

Company website: <<http://www.tordex.com>> E-mail: <info@tordex.com>

Another Free PDF Maker

Patrick Sullivan reads the DealsGuy column in The DataBus, a great newsletter from The Dayton Microcomputer Association Inc. <<http://www.dma.org>>, and he sent his favorite application for converting a file to PDF. He said a friend needed a free one and his search found PrimoPDF at <<http://www.primopdf.com>>. He says its PDF file is not as small as Adobe Distiller creates, but he is well satisfied with it and has not found it to implant ads for itself. There is now a new release on their Web site, but he has not tried it because his version works fine.

This Product Offers Canned Replies

IT-Services Thomas Holz announces the release of version 1.0 of Textmodules for Software Support, a set of ready-to-use replies to quickly answer typical software-related questions by e-mails. The product is absolutely free and comes as an add-on to the new version of ReplyButler for Outlook. Enlarge the assortment of reply patterns and make your reply on the fly.

With a proper set of text modules, you can answer your e-mail quickly. In Textmodules for Software Support, you'll find 55 new text modules properly sorted into 18 folders. The modules include typical phrases, answers to common problems, questions for details and more. In addition, there are many reply patterns related to office work and journalism. It uses the correct name and gender in the addressing phrase by itself, securing against any typos.

You can get Textmodules for Software Support free of charge, as well as the trial version of ReplyButler for Outlook at <<http://www.replybutler.com/en/produkte/replybutler.php>>.

<<http://www.replybutler.com/en/produkte/replybutler.php>>.

ReplyButler for Outlook runs under Windows 98/ME/NT/2000/XP/2003/Vista and under Outlook 2000/2002/2003/XP/2007, and costs 15 USD for a single-user license. The company offers user group members 25% discount on the purchase of ReplyButler Business Edition. Licensed customers get the fully-functional version of the product, free technical support and free upgrades.

Further information on ReplyButler for Outlook is available at the Web site. (DealsGuy note: I included this item for the free part of it, but was unable to get through using their e-mail address for information about using the discount on their business version. Try a contact from their Web site.).

Product page: <<http://replybutler.com/en/produkte/replybutler.php>>. Product download link: <http://replybutler.com/download/getfile.php?file=ReplyButlerE_Freeware.exe>. Free add-on link: <http://replybutler.com/download/getfile.php?file=ReplyButler_TextLib_SoftwareSupport.exe>. E-mail: <presscontact@itsth.com>

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>>.



IRS Again Offers Free Online Tax Preparation and “e-Filing”

By Ira Wilsker

Whether we like it or not, April 15 is fast approaching. It does not matter if we are due a refund, or owe Uncle Sam a bundle of money, we still must complete our income tax forms and file them appropriately with the IRS. This is a task that very few enjoy, and many more do not relish. While preparing our tax returns becomes more complex and time consuming, the IRS has once again contracted with a number of tax services to prepare our taxes online for free, if we are eligible. According to the IRS, the goal of the free file program is to enable 70% of taxpayers (97 million people, according to the IRS) to take advantage of the free online service; for calendar year 2007 (taxes due April 15, 2008), the calculated ceiling on eligibility for the free service is an adjusted gross income (AGI) of \$54,000. In addition to preparing federal tax returns for those eligible, the providers will also “e-file” (electronically file) the returns at no charge to the taxpayer. It should be noted that the IRS does not charge for receiving e-filed returns, but does not currently accept e-filed returns directly from individuals without first going through a third party service, for which a fee may be charged. There is no e-file fee for taxes prepared by the free preparers who participate in the IRS free file program.

The free filing service was created in 2002, and renewed again in 2005, when the IRS created a public – private partnership called the “File Free Alliance, LLC” where the IRS contracted with several tax preparation companies

to offer free online tax preparation and filing. The Free File Alliance evolved from a “President’s Management Agenda,” which created a series of 24 “e-government” initiatives designed to improve government to citizen electronic capabilities. Originally, the program was limited to 60% of taxpayers, but the 2005 contract expanded the eligibility to 70% of taxpayers. The current agreement between the IRS and the preparation companies expires in October, 2009. The income eligibility ceiling, currently at an AGI of \$54,000, is adjusted annually such that 70% of taxpayers will remain eligible. Members of the Free File Alliance must conform to strict IRS established security and privacy requirements which insure the sanctity of the free filing service.

According to the IRS, there are several advantages and reasons for using the free tax services provided. The IRS claims that users can get their refunds in as little as 10 days, if they opt for direct deposit. Unlike commercial tax preparation offices, the online services are available 24/7, and taxes can be completed and filed at any time of the day prior to April 15. The IRS also claims that the service is environmentally friendly, in that it saves mountains of paper. Users of the free online services will benefit through the automatic checks for accuracy, and will receive a confirmation within 48 hours that the return was received by the IRS.

Users of the free filing service must start at the IRS website, <<http://www.irs.gov>>, and initially access the free tax services through the IRS website. Many of the companies that are a part of the Free File Alliance also offer paid commercial tax preparation services,

and the only way to get the service for free is to initialize the process through the IRS website. The list of participating companies, 19 of them, includes such well known companies as H&R Block, and software companies such as TurboTax. It is the responsibility of the user to verify his eligibility both for the program (up to \$54,000 AGI), and for the Free Alliance partner selected, as many of the partners have additional eligibility requirements for the free service. The user can either browse the list of individual companies <<http://www.irs.gov/app/freeFile/jsp/index.jsp>>, or can use the button "Guide Me To A Company" to narrow down the choices of free tax preparers.

Several of the companies, such as H&R Block's "TaxCut Free File," "TaxSimple Deluxe Version," and "eSmart Tax by Liberty Tax Service" are available to anyone with an AGI of less than \$54,000, and who are also aged 50 or less. "TaxSlayer Free Returns" is available to anyone aged 25 to 68, or active military who meet the income requirements. "TurboTax Freedom Edition" is free to anyone with an AGI of less than \$30,000, or active duty military with an AGI of up to \$54,000. "Complete Tax" will do any age with an AGI of \$12,000 to \$54,000, while "Free TaxAct" will do anyone aged 19 to 54 who has an eligible AGI. Other free preparers have different eligibility requirements, including several that will prepare taxes for people for any age, but have geographic restrictions, in that they only prepare taxes for residents of specific states. Some of the preparers, such as "Online Tax Pros" specify that they also prepare taxes in Spanish. While not a requirement covered in the agreement with the IRS,

many of the preparers listed will also prepare and file state income tax returns for residents of states that have a state income tax (Texas does not have a state income tax). While a few will prepare state income taxes for free, most have a nominal charge to prepare and e-file state taxes.

Once the taxes are prepared and completed online through one of the free providers, the returns are electronically checked for accuracy, and then e-filed directly with the IRS. The preparer will receive an electronic confirmation from the IRS that the return was received, and forward that confirmation to the taxpayer, typically within 48 hours of filing. If the taxpayer is due a federal refund, and selects direct deposit, the refund is deposited to the taxpayer's specified account in as little as 10 days.

The IRS is to be commended for coordinating this service, available to nearly 100 million taxpayers. One improvement to the service that I would like to see is to allow those of us who prepare our taxes ourselves with commercial software, to be able to upload our returns directly to the IRS without having to go through a third party. That would be a great service to the millions of us who choose not to use, or who are not eligible for, the free filing programs, but would like the convenience of e-filing without sending our personal and private information to a third party.

For the eligible 70% of taxpayers who can utilize the free service, there are few good reasons not to use the service. The price can not be beat.

WEBSITES

<<http://www.irs.gov>>.

<<http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=118986,00.html>>—Free File page.

<<http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=118992,00.html>>—Free File Instructions.

<<http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=118993,00.html>>—Information.

<<http://www.irs.gov/app/freeFile/jsp/index.jsp>>—List of participating Companies.

<http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-efile/free_file_agreement.pdf>—Free File Alliance Agreement.

<<http://www.irs.gov/espanol/article/0,,id=163297,00.html>>—Free File in Spanish.

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>..



**The New, the Best, and
the Worst
By Pim Borman**

Needles, Haystacks and Processing

Finding the needle in a haystack is the proverbial example of an impossible task. Wrongly so. Spread the contents of the haystack out over a large area and get 1000 helpers to each check a small amount of hay. The needle will be found in less than no time. It is a basic example of parallel processing.

According to WIKIPEDIA <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SETI>>, as far back as 1960 astronomers were speculating that any intelligent life forms present in the Universe might be detected by electromagnetic signals reaching us

from space. Some astronomers started a Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI) on a limited scale that over the years grew to include multiple radio-telescopes searching more and more radio bands for significant signals.

It soon became clear that looking for intelligent signals amongst the enormous volume of recorded data was even worse than finding a needle in a haystack. Parallel processing to the rescue! With an untold number of personal computers worldwide, capable of Internet access and sitting idle most of the time, an enormous amount of potential processing power was going untapped. The University of California at Berkeley (UCB), with sponsorship of The Planetary Society, started project SETI@home in 1999 to put many of those computers to work. They found many volunteers willing to download a small program on their computers, running in the background, to analyze small chunks of radio-telescope data for signs of intelligence and return the results. As of now there are some 3 million contributors, but nary a sign of intelligent life yet. In any case, the enormous amount of computer processing by this project far surpasses what the best supercomputer might be able to do, at least until quantum computers will have been perfected.

The success of SETI@home inspired many other volunteer computing projects supporting worthwhile scientific causes. According to The Economist (12-8-2007) these include design of drugs against AIDS, search for new prime numbers, climate modeling and many others. It requires some snappy programming skills to send small chunks of a large problem to thousands of computers, provide them with the

means to perform a set task, return the results, and combine the results for final evaluation before sending out a new crop of queries. That task has been made easier with a dedicated program, [BOINC](#) (Berkeley Open Infrastructure for Network Computing), made available by UCB. Over 40 BOINC projects are in operation, including many life sciences, Help Conquer Cancer, and Discover Dengue Drugs.

Impressive as the computer power may be that is being exerted on these projects, there is still room for significant improvement. The short history of the PC not only includes a dramatic improvement in CPU processing speed, but also in auxiliary components that speed up graphics performance. In response to the extreme image rendition requirements of computer games, fast graphics cards have become available that use special processing chips and hardware to relieve the load on the Central Processing Unit. Rendering the millions of pixels that make up a screen image is perfectly suited to parallel processing, a task for which the graphics chips are optimized. Further adapting these chips to participate in general purpose programming may be a way to increase the parallel processing power of a desktop computer anywhere from 10- to 50-fold. NVIDIA and AMD, the largest graphics-card manufacturers, are working on it. Nvidia has already set up a product line for non-graphics applications and is developing a specialized programming language to go with it.

Next time you hear complaints that something is like finding a needle in a haystack, tell them it's easy: many hands make light work.

Foxit Reader for PDF Files

Acrobat Reader is now at version 8 and has been getting more powerful but also more cumbersome with each successive iteration. Steve Bass (PC World, January 2008) found a free program, Foxit Reader and Printer, that is compact, fast, and includes some nice extra features. I especially like that it allows searching all the PDF files in a directory for keywords. I tried that on a directory where I keep all the newsletter files since 2000 and got almost instantaneous results. Impressive! The print function works just fine. Foxit also has more sophisticated tools for annotating and writing PDF files and forms, but adds evaluation marks to the output unless you buy the Foxit Pro version (\$39). You may not need that, since there are several other (free) ways to create PDF files, including openoffice.org Writer and MS Office 2007 (with a special download from Microsoft). My Epson scanner can scan images and also output them as PDF files. But at \$39 Foxit is a bargain compared to Acrobat 8 Standard at \$299.

Download Foxit Reader and Printer free from <<http://www.foxitsoftware.com/>>. Linux versions are also available.

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Collected by Pim Borman, Webmaster, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.

<<http://swipcug.apcug.org>>

E-mail: <[swipcug\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:swipcug(at)gmail.com)>

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**Straight Talk on Switch
to Digital TV
By Ira Wilsker**

I have a small battery operated black & white TV that has served me well during blackouts, hurricanes, ice storms, and other events when we were without power. I also have several small battery powered radios that have a TV band, which have allowed me to listen to broadcast TV when the power is out. In the car, we sometimes listen to the audio of channel 6 on the FM radio at 87.7 MHz. Countless people in the area still choose to receive free local television service over the air using the ubiquitous rabbit ears, or a roof mounted antenna. Starting at midnight, February 17, 2009, all of these will cease to function as they presently do as all full power television stations in the United States must cease their current analog TV transmissions, and switch to all digital broadcasting. Low power TV stations will be phasing in digital service, but likely at a later date. Those of us who currently receive over the air local TV will be unable to receive the new digital broadcasts unless we purchase a digital-to-analog converter box, purchase a TV with a digital tuner, or subscribe to a cable or satellite TV service. Without exercising one of those three choices, we will be

without television service in a year. I will be personally affected because my battery TV is analog, and all of the converter boxes I have looked at require a power connection, and will not run on batteries. My radios will no longer pick up the audio broadcasts from the television stations, as they will no longer be broadcast in analog.

Congress and the FCC have required television broadcasters to transition to a digital signal to both provide additional benefits to consumers, but to also free up the radio spectrum to provide for additional emergency frequencies. These frequencies will be used by police and fire departments, with the balance of the spectrum thus freed to be auctioned off by the FCC for other wireless services, with the proceeds going to the federal government. Digital TV will provide a clearer picture for the consumer and more programming options to the TV stations, while freeing up valuable bandwidth.

While they will not (presently) work on batteries for emergency use, or convert the digital to analog signal for radios, the first of the digital to analog converters are now on the market at almost all electronics retailers, discounters, and big box stores. These converters allow current owners of television sets that are analog to receive the digital signals, and view TV on their analog TV sets. Many owners of recently purchased TV sets may not need the converter box, as most TVs produced over the past few years also incorporate a digital tuner. Current cable or satellite subscribers will not need a third party converter to continue to receive television as the cable or satellite system should handle the conversion.

A quick review of the websites of several local stores shows that the converters to convert digital to analog signals are already available, and priced from under \$50 to about \$70. In order to ease the financial burden that may occur to those purchasing converter boxes for older analog TVs, congress created the “TV Converter Box Coupon Program” which allows households to get for free, up to two \$40 coupons which can be applied towards the purchase price of up to two converters (limit 1 coupon per box). Since at least one local big box store I found has the eligible converter boxes in stock for less than \$50, that would result in an after coupon net cost (less taxes) of under \$10 per box. It should be noted that coupons expire 90 days after they are mailed, so they must be utilized in a timely manner.

Applications for the coupon are currently available online, and may be either filled out online at <<https://www.dtv2009.gov/ApplyCoupon.aspx>>, or downloaded and printed from <https://www.dtv2009.gov/docs/Coupon_Program_App_en.pdf>; printed applications can be mailed to P.O. Box 2000, Portland, OR 97208-2000 . Printed applications that have been completed can be faxed to 1-877-DTV-4ME2. While the applications are available online, they cannot be printed online and will not be available from retailers. The \$40 coupons look like the common plastic gift card, and are used in the same way. The coupon cards are non-transferable, and are encoded to be used only for the purchase of an eligible converter box. Coupon cards will be mailed to eligible applicants in the order received. Applications can also be made over the phone to 1-888-DTV-2009 (1-888-388-2009). Hearing-

impaired consumers can apply via TTY service by calling 1-877-530-2634. Applications and instructions are also available in Spanish, French, Russian, Tagalog (Philippine), Vietnamese, and Chinese (on my browser the Chinese link looks like “?????”, but the PDF files are clearly in Chinese). The coupon program ends on March 31, 2009.

The converter boxes are supposed to be easy to install, and will easily plug into the TV set. The existing TV antenna connects to the converter box, and the converter box is connected to the TV (and a power source). There is an online “Quick Start Guide” available at <<http://www.digitaltips.org>> .

Some analog TV users may not need a converter box, as many TVs manufactured since 2004 have a digital tuner installed. Users should look in their owner’s manual, or manufacturer’s website to see if it is already digital compatible. Users may also determine digital compatibility by visual inspection, and look for an input (probably on the back of the set) that is labeled as “Digital Input” or “ATSC,” which is the digital format. Some of the newer TVs labeled as “HD-Ready” or “HDTV Monitor” may require either a cable or satellite connection with a box supplied by the TV provider, or a special converter box.

Remember that this technological switch will only impact TV viewers who get their TV over the air by antenna, and not satellite and cable users. Also be advised that many newer TVs, mostly manufactured since 2004, already have a digital tuner and will not require a converter box to view digital TV over the air.

WEBSITES

<<http://www.dtv2009.gov>>.

<<https://www.dtv2009.gov/ApplyCoupon.aspx>>—Online \$40 Coupon Application.

<https://www.dtv2009.gov/docs/Coupon_Program_App_en.pdf>—Downloadable Coupon.

<<http://www.digitaltips.org>>—Help in connecting converter boxes and other electronics.

<<http://content.ce.org/dtv/converterQSG.pdf>>—Converter “Quick Start Guide.”

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>..

**New Gadgets for 2008
By Sandy Berger**

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

Every year my husband and I attend the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas to see the latest and greatest high tech gadgets. This year didn't disappoint. We found everything from a Leggett & Platt's \$20,000 Starry Night bed with an HDTV projector, pop-up speakers, snoring sensors, iPod dock, automatic lighting system, and breathing pattern monitor to a General Motors Chevy Tahoe prototype car that drove itself. While I don't expect this GM prototype to make it to market anytime soon, some of the technology that it is built in will evolve and is sure to find its way into our future automobiles.

We also found a few more down-to-earth gadgets and gizmos. In fact, there were several devices that you may want to check out for your own gaggle of high tech products. For instance, if you hate cleaning the gutters, the iRobot Looj has you covered. This robotic gutter cleaner cleans a 60-foot section of gutter in just 10 minutes. Yes, you must use a ladder to place it in position, but you don't have to move the ladder multiple times as you do in regular gutter cleaning. The demos looked marvelous. iRobot also has robotic vacuum cleaners and floor scrubbers.

Although we have been hearing about wireless technologies for what seems to be eons, this year some of that wireless technology became mainstream. Wireless speakers, which up to now were feeble and erratic, have finally found their voice. The Griffin Evolve is a great example. It is a compact speaker system for an iPod. It has two wireless speaker cubes that can be placed in any room in the house. It sounds great and is also easy to use. At about \$300, this is a great solution to distribute music from your iPod throughout the house.

While prices of technology gadgets continue to drop, it seems that ink for that inexpensive ink jet printer often costs more than the printer itself. Well, thanks to Kodak, this trend may be coming to an end. The new Kodak printers are said to use 50% less ink and ink cartridges are reasonably priced at \$15 for color and \$10 for black.

Polaroid, another well-known name in photography has also released a breakthrough product. Their new inkless printer is made for printing pictures from a cell phone or digital camera. Not only does the printer use

Bluetooth wireless technology, but it uses special paper that is embedded with 100 billion colored dye crystals. The colors appear when the printer applies heat pulses to the paper. This ink-less technology is called Zink, for zero ink. The 2-inch-by-3-inch prints cost about 30 cents each and the printer sells for \$150, which is not bad for cutting-edge technology.

Although computers are not the focus of the CES show, there were many computer manufacturers showing their wares. Lenovo, the Chinese company who bought IBM's PC division three years ago has previously focused on their ThinkPad business laptops, but this year they introduced a line of consumer laptops called IdeaPads. These include facial recognition technology. Lenovo, Sony, and others will follow Dell's lead with the introduction of laptops in a variety of bright colors.

Bright colors were the norm at the show. There were MP3 players, cell phone, and gadget covers in every color imaginable. There were red and blue ladybug-shaped iPod speakers and speakers that pulsed to the beat in vibrating, changing colors. There was even pink CAT-5 networking cable, whose purchase supports the National Breast Cancer Foundation.

Oh, and you can expect to be even more confused by television display technologies in the future. Sony's \$2500, 11-inch Organic light Emitting Diode (OLED) was small but clearly better than anything else on the market today... And it was only as thick as 3 credit cards. Mitsubishi's laser television was also a dramatic improvement. Samsung and Sharp announced backlit LCD televisions. While these technologies may take awhile to go mainstream, other

manufacturers announced Internet-enabled televisions that are sure to appear quite quickly. For instance, the Sharp Aquos Net television displays small icons called widgets that showed news, weather, and traffic data from the Internet right on the television screen. Also next year, when digital television goes mainstream you will see digital TV broadcasting in a variety of devices including cell phones, cars, buses, and anything else they can possibly think of. One car at the show already had TVs in every door and drop-down television screens for every passenger.

While we may not all be interested in watching television all the time, we will find some of these new technologies making our lives just a little more pleasurable in the future.

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

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Look Ma No Hands
By Bruce Jacobs

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

This article was not typed. I dictated it using the speech recognition feature in Windows Vista Ultimate.

I have been using this feature on and off for certain applications for a while and it has its good points and its bad points. The intent of the software is

to allow the user to speak words into the computer and for the computer to recognize those words, understand that some of them are commands, and also understand that some of them are input to programs. In other words, when I say the words "please save me," the computer must decide whether to add the words to the document I am editing as if I had typed them, or add the word "please" to the document, and then bring up the save dialog box to save the document with the name "me."

The program that is attempting to do this has two major hurdles to conquer. It has to recognize the spoken words correctly. This is helped by the training exercises. But it has its limitations.

It must also understand "in context" which of those words are commands and which of those words are to be part of my document. As time goes on, you learn to pause before speaking a command. So in the above example of "please save me," I would say the words altogether relatively quickly in order to enter them in my document. If I wanted to add the word "please" to my document then save the document, I would speak the word "please," then pause for a few seconds, then save the word " save." This would bring up the save dialog box and I could continue as if it was a command.

As far as the good points are concerned: If I'm working from a printed list or when I know for sure what I want to say clearly, it can be a much faster way of inputting text than for me to type it. Some of that is due to my typing speed being somewhat slow. I am a faster typist than most hunt and peck folks, but I would never be able to keep a job as a secretary. It is also much better at spelling than I am.

If I don't know what I'm going to say in advance the program does not facilitate me speaking what I want to say and then recomposing it later. Some of this may be my fault. I find that I can type up an article by hand and maintain enough control so that in the end I have something coherent. When I just speak out what I want it does not always make sense. I spend way too much time revising it.

One of the disadvantages is that you need to spend a little bit of time training the voice recognition system. The system works best when you are running a very simple application such as WordPad or Notepad. It can even be used to some extent in Microsoft Word. However when using an application such as PowerPoint, the program spends so much time trying to figure out what possible commands you might be wanting to perform and not enough time actually realizing that you are trying to enter words.

Another problem is homonyms. These are words that sound the same but they have different meanings in English except for the possibility of some contextual clues. There is no way for the speech recognition software to know whether I want "2," "two," "to," or "too." During setup the program asks you if they can look at the contents of documents on your hard drive to help you determine what word you used most often and in what context. This does help it guess which homonym you want.

The final problem I wish to discuss is the editing features. Whenever I create a text document I will want to fix mistakes. There are some commands in the software that will help fix mistakes, but they are limited and clumsy. Some of

them will even (in theory) help prevent mistakes by the voice recognition software in the future. All that being said, I find that editing documents using the voice recognition software is very frustrating. I always resort to using the arrow keys and the mouse to navigate through the document.

Vista speech recognition is a helpful tool when transcribing printed text or when words have been spoken into a tape recorder. However for initial composition of documents or editing I do not find it useful. I do not believe that I could ever learn to use it as a complete 100% substitute for the keyboard and mouse. I would not consider it a replacement if I was disabled.

Bruce Jacobs is newsletter editor for Phoenix PCUG. <<http://www.phoenixpcug.org>>. E-mail: <[editor\(at\)pcug.org](mailto:editor(at)pcug.org)>.

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**President's Meeting Notes
By Mike Bader**

Note: Following meeting notes were posted on 2/11/2008 on SEMCOUG, the Yahoo Groups site, by Mike Bader.

We had about 30 people attend.

Gary DeNise turned over the official president's gavel to me, and I took the oath of office :-).

I presented him with a small token thank you gift for his past efforts: A handmade wooden pen, thanks to Tom McNorton (disclaimer: no SEMCO funds were used).

We also have a wooden plaque for ArvinMeritor, to thank them for providing the excellent facilities. Our current plans are to present it to them a week from Wednesday.

The meeting ended exactly on time, I think we made history <grin>.

There were enough door prizes so that everyone got a prize, and we still had a few left for next month. These prizes were thanks to Bob Clyne who brought them back from CES (Computer Electronics Show in Vegas). Other items were from PeachPit, as well as other things from our product reviews.

Refreshments were great. But speaking of that we are looking for volunteers:

- 1) To help with refreshments.
- 2) To monitor the door as people arrive for the meeting.
- 3) Chair the IBM Intermediate SIG (Special Interest Group).
- 4) Presentations to the group. Short or long.

Contact a board member for more details.

Our next meeting is Sunday March 9th. This is two days after my birthday (hint hint).

Someone asked if we were allowed to connect to the Internet. The answer is yes, as long as we respect our host as well as our presenters.

Another question was whether wireless access was available. At this time no. But it is something we can look into.

Continued on Page 21

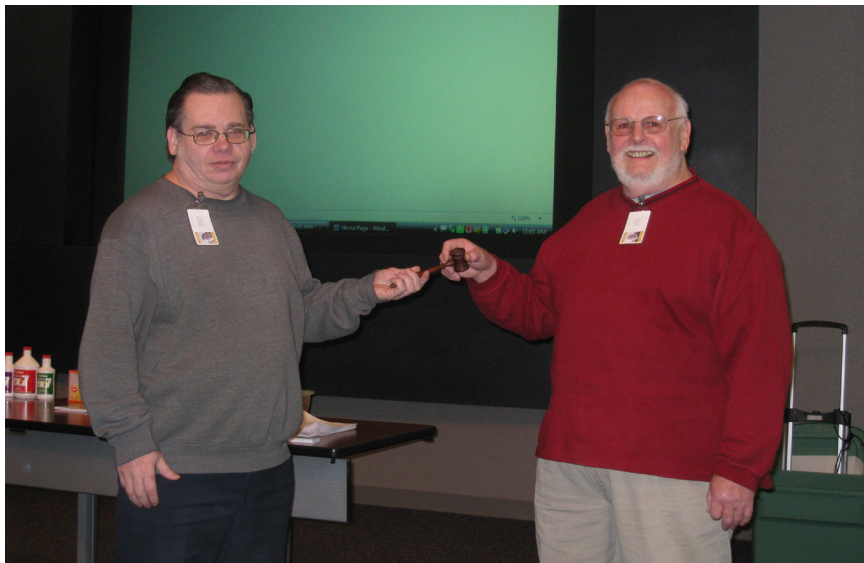
Meeting Pictures



(Above) SEMCO Volunteer Party on January 27, 2008, at the home of Beth Fordyce. Left to right: Bob Clyne, Steve Yuhasz, Tom Callow, Franz Breidenich, Beth Fordyce, Warner Mach, Bette Gay, Richard Jackson, Mike Bader. (Below) Mike Bader speaking at the February SEMCO meeting.



Meeting Pictures



(Above) Former President Gary DeNise (right) presents the gavel to new President Mike Bader (left). (Below) Plaque which is to be presented to representative of ArvinMeritor in appreciation of SEMCO use of ArvinMeritor meeting facilities.





BOARD MEETING
2/10/08
Carol Sanzi

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

President Mike Bader, Treasurer Bette Gay, Secretary Carol Sanzi, SIG-Advanced Chairman Franz Breidenich, SIG-IBM Chairman Tom Callow, Publications Committee Chairman Warner Mach, and Members-at-Large Bob Clyne and Chuck Moery. Also present was former President Gary DeNise. Arriving late was Vice President Richard Jackson. The meeting was called to order at 12:02 p.m.

OLD BUSINESS

Bette Gay reported that the amount in the treasury equaled \$9025.99 with \$4376.58 in the bank account and \$4,649.41 invested in three Certificates of Deposit. The membership currently stands at 77.

It is time for Julie Comptois, Robert Hightower, and David R. Smikle to renew their memberships.

Carol Sanzi moved to reimburse Gary DeNise \$85.16 for the ArvinMeritor plaque and \$11.00 for refreshment supplies. Chuck Moery seconded the motion and it was carried.

Bette reported that the Post Office Box rent is due. She will make the \$96 payment.

NEW BUSINESS

Gary DeNise led a discussion of the security procedures that must be followed for the SEMCO meetings. He will write out the steps that should be taken in the event that he is not here to do the job.

Bob Clyne presented an unbalanced draft of the 2008 budget. This was followed by a long discussion of

SEMCO's mission as a 501(c)(3) organization. The ideas discussed included the distribution of used computers to the needy, paying for speakers, raffling gift certificates at meetings, and donating monies to APCUG. To balance the draft budget, Richard Jackson moved to increase the refreshment allotment to \$200 and advertising allotment to \$300. Franz Breidenich seconded the motion and it was carried. This left a \$135 surplus. Tom Callow moved to increase the allotment for administrative expenses to \$435. Bob Clyne seconded the motion and it was carried. Bob Clyne moved to adopt the 2008 balanced budget as amended. Tom Callow seconded the motion and it was carried.

Mike Bader reported that the Yahoo on-line user group has grown to 38 members. Activity is increasing.

Bob Clyne moved to appoint Bob Clyne, Richard Jackson, Morton Stockler, Randy Mims, and Jerry Comptois to the audit committee. This is subject to their agreement to serve on the stated committee. Tom Callow seconded the motion and it was carried.

Tom Callow moved to give Gary DeNise the authority to dispose of the broken coffee pot. Franz Breidenich seconded the motion and it was carried.

Tom Callow moved to adjourn. Bob Clyne seconded the motion and it was carried. The meeting adjourned at 1:06 p.m.

Penguicon 6.0

Penguicon 6.0 will be held at the Troy Hilton (Michigan) April 18-20. <<http://www.penguicon.org>>..

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGS)



SIG-IBM
Tom Callow

March 9: 1:45 p.m.: Adobe presentation: Chad Keesling of Adobe will cover the following topics: (1) Intelligent Documents with Adobe Acrobat and LiveCycle. (2) Engaging Interfaces through Rich Internet Applications (Flex and Flash). (3) Next Generation Web 2.0 Applications with Adobe Integrated Runtime (AIR)

SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE

March 9: 3:45 p.m.: Voice Recognition: Talking to your computer (and getting it to listen to you): Tom Callow, as guest speaker, will discuss the state of voice recognition software for computers and demonstrate Dragon's NaturallySpeaking 9.0, the latest version of the voice recognition program that actually works.

FEB. SIG-IBM

Notes from Mike Bader's talk at February SEMCO meeting. Topic: "My 40 Years in Computers."
<<http://tinyurl.com/3dkovw>>.
<<http://www.seniorfreebees.com>>.
<<http://www.siliconalleyrecyclers.us>>..

FEB. SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE

Notes from Tom Callow's talk at February SEMCO meeting. Topic: "Weird Computer Behavior."
<<http://tinyurl.com/2m6tu2>>.(Note: this file is in DOCX format)..

NOVICE-IBM GROUP Rotating Volunteer Hosts

March 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

April 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.

April 2008 DATABUS DEADLINE (7th day after 2nd Sunday in month)

SEMCO Input and Members' Ads—Deadline: Sun., March 16, 11:59 p.m. Members' personal ads are free. To mail, use Editor address on Page 2; e-mail address: <machw@att.net>. PLEASE send to arrive sooner than deadline.

Business Ads - Deadline: Second Friday monthly. Contact Editor (address Page 2).

COMP (Computer Operators of Marysville & Port Huron)

April 2, 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>. <<http://www.bwcomp.org>>. Topic: "Microsoft Publisher 2007" by George Hawkins.

DCOM Computer Club

March 14, 6:30–8:30 p.m., (2nd Friday); Henry Ford C.C., Patterson Tech Bldg, Ford Rd/Evergreen, Rm T143, Parking Lot C. Info: Doug Piazza 313-582-2602. Topic: TBA.

HUG (Holly User Group)

March 8, 9:00 a.m., (2nd Sat.); Groveland Twp. Fire Hall, 3085 Grange Hall Rd. & Dixie Hwy., Ortonville. Topic: TBA.

MacGroup- Detroit

March 16, 3:00 p.m., Birmingham Temple, 28611 West 12 Mile Rd., Farmington Hills. Info: Terry White, <terry@macgroup.org> or 248-569-4933. <<http://www.macgroup.org>>. Topic: "Adobe Photoshop Elements 6."

MacTechnics, (MAC User Group)

March 15, 11:00 a.m., (3rd Saturday); (SIGs at 9:30); Ann Arbor Open School, 920 Miller Ave., Ann Arbor. <<http://www.mactechnics.org>>. JoAnn Olson at 248-478-4300. Topic: "Adobe Photoshop Elements 6."

MDLUG (Metro Detroit Linux User Group)

March 17, 12:30–2:30 p.m., (3rd 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. (Looking for Presenter).

MUG (Michigan User Group)

March 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

March 13, 7:30 p.m., (2nd Thur.); General meeting; Fraternal Order of Eagles Hall in Clawson, 174 Bowers St. (one block North of 14-Mile and one block East of Main). Avi Drissman 248-232-7865. Web: <<http://www.themichiganapple.com>>. Topic: TBA.

Oak Park Computer Club

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

Royal Oak Computer Club

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

SHCC (Sterling Heights Computer Club)

April 1, 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."

Wayne State University Mac User Group

March 8, 10:00 a.m.–Noon, (2nd Saturday); at 21042 Laurelwood, Farmington. Information: JoAnn Olsen 248-478-4300. Topic: Q&A .

Continued from Page 15

Other computer groups usually bring a wireless router for their meetings.

Another reminder, at the meeting when asking a question, try and use the microphones at the seats. It helps everyone hear as well as helps our recording for the podcasts.



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**

March 9—SUNDAY (Meet 2nd Sunday)

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

SEMCO General Meeting at 1:30 p.m.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

SIG-IBM 1:45 p.m. **Program: Adobe Presentation:** Chad Keesling of Adobe will cover the following topics: (1) Intelligent Documents with Adobe Acrobat and LiveCycle. (2) Engaging Interfaces through Rich Internet Applications (Flex and Flash). (3) Next Generation Web 2.0 Applications with Adobe Integrated Runtime (AIR).

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: Voice Recognition:** Talking to your computer (and getting it to listen to you): Tom Callow, as guest speaker, will discuss the state of voice recognition software for computers and demonstrate Dragon's NaturallySpeaking 9.0, the latest version of the voice recognition program that actually works.

SIG-ADVANCED, April 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.

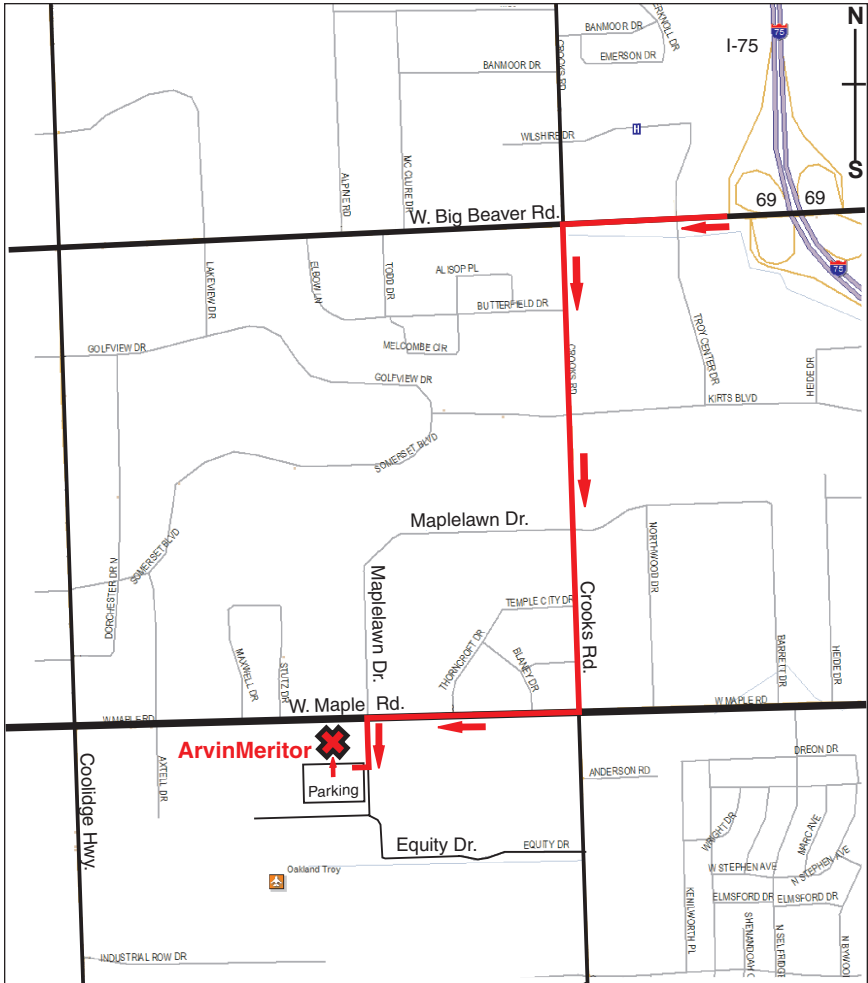
April 13—SEMCO Sunday

<http://www.semco.org>

PUBLIC INVITED

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

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

March 9

April 13

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