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IN THIS ISSUE

Deals Column, by Bob (The Cheapskate) Click	3
Improve PC Performance—Clean Your Startup, by Ira Wilsker	6
64-bit Computing—Pros and Cons, by Brian K Lewis.....	8
The New, the Best, and the Worst, by Pim Borman	11
Free VideoSpin Software For Your PC, by Ira Wilsker	14
Meeting Pictures.....	16
Board Meeting Minutes, by Carol Sanzi	18
Penguicon 6.0	18
SIGS: IBM, IBM Intermediate, Advanced, & Novice IBM Group	19
DATA BUS Deadline.....	19
Other Groups Calendar of Events.....	20
Computer Resource People	21
SEMCO Calendar	22
Map & Directions to SEMCO Meeting at ArvinMeritor Building	23

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

Great Shows!

The International Builders Show came to town again this year and I worked in it several days. It's the largest show in the amount of freight (thirteen million pounds) of any show that has been held here, and close to the largest in area. The dock basin was piled high with crates of all kinds. There were five beautiful modular homes set up on blocks in the parking lot for people to tour. The modules arrived a week before the show opened, but all the homes were assembled with the finishing touches in time for show days. One was a three-story 2700 square foot model worth over a million dollars, which was actually sold during the show. One home featured technology of the future such as calling you or sending you an e-mail at work if something goes wrong. I'll write a separate article about that which will be available on my Web site soon. Kohler had their million-dollar computer controlled waterfall again this year, and it was fascinating to watch it making letters, words, ad phrases and other decorative things to fall, all completely out of water. Mr. Kohler himself flew in to look over the display.

Another show we worked was the Orgill Show <<http://www.orgill.com>>. That is like a giant hardware store, but is a trade show (about 500,000 square feet of display area) with exhibitors showing their latest wares. Orgill is a large independent hardware distributor. Many exhibitors prefer not to take their booth's displayed products back home

so some dealers come with large trailers and purchase as many products from vendor booths as they can carry after the show closes. Some booths just leave their products, and volunteers from Habitat for Humanity collect as much as they can for that organization's projects. "Pallet pricing" and "coupon specials" are featured for dealers attending and the Orgill reps wear different colored blazers signifying their sales volume.

A coworker said an attendee was looking for me, saying he reads my column all the time, but my coworker unknowingly gave him incorrect location information and he never found me. I was very disappointed. It's not the first time someone has looked for me at a show, but they are often large areas and unless you know who to ask, getting together is difficult because most of us don't know much about where others were assigned to work, and my wife and I don't work all of the shows here.

March will bring the Electronic House Expo <<http://www.ehxweb.com>>, one of my favorites. I won't be working it, but hope to look around. Central Florida Computer Society <<http://www.cfcs.org>> has already made arrangements for their membership to attend at no cost. I recommend that one if you are in the area.

Are You Ready To Tax Your Brain?

AlbyMedia has released version 1.1 of PIQE: Chain of Puzzles. It contains different types of challenging puzzles, has three difficulty levels and allows comparing your results with other players. It's a set of engaging puzzles giving you a real challenge. The game has progress check and result comparison features to provide you with detailed information on your development. The game has three

difficulties, offering more sophisticated puzzles after you beat the easier ones. Please visit <<http://piqe.albymedia.com>> for a free trial of the product.

PIQE: Chain of Puzzles runs under Microsoft Windows and costs \$14.95 (USD) for a single-user license. AlbyMedia offers user group members 15% discount on the PIQE: Chain of Puzzles. Use the coupon code ALBY-JMGJ at <<https://www.regnow.com/softsell/nph-softsell.cgi?item=15534-3>>. Licensed customers get free technical support and free upgrades.

Direct download link: <<http://www.albymedia.com/downloads/piqe.setup.exe>>

Company web-site: <<http://www.albymedia.com>>

Here's Another Freebie!

DVDVideoSoft, an Internet resource dedicated to free software, multimedia software guides and tutorials has just updated Free Video to Flash Converter. The new version features 30+ player skins and new easy-to-use web integration, just copy and paste html code to the site or blog. Convert video files to flash (SWF and FLV). Convert the whole movie or just a portion. Free Video to Flash Converter is available at <<http://www.dvdvideosoft.com/products/dvd/Free-Video-to-Flash-Converter.htm>> for free download. The program contains no spyware or adware. No activation or registration is required. Just download and use it.

Video to Flash Converter is already the 15th free program developed by DVDVideoSoft and has developed a line of free tools: Free Video Dun, Free YouTube to iPod Converter, Free YouTube to MP3 Converter, Free YouTube to iPhone Converter, Free Video to iPod Converter, Free Video to

iPhone Converter, Free Video to MP3 Converter, Free YouTube Uploader, Free Audio Dub, Free YouTube to MP3 Converter, Free 3GP Video Converter, Free Video Flip and Rotate, Free Video to JPG Converter and finally Free YouTube Download <<http://www.dvdvideosoft.com/products/dvd/Free-YouTube-Download.htm>>.

All titles are available at <<http://www.dvdvideosoft.com/free-dvd-video-software.htm>> for immediate download. Also, there are lots of guides and tutorials related to different video tasks like burning and ripping DVDs, making DVD copies, converting between all video formats and more. All programs run under Windows Vista/XP/2000. They respect users' privacy and there is no spyware or adware.

Comfort Should Be The Golden Rule!

Comfort Software Group announces Comfort Keys 3.0, a successor to the popular hotkey management tool. The new version supports non-standard keyboard types (Ergonomic and Dell Inspiron 6000); speaks two new languages (Hungarian and simplified Chinese); has adjustable sensitivity for fast input of capital letters, spaces and other characters; has the option of hiding in the system tray and features an enhanced hotkey management window with a full list of hotkeys and new groups.

Comfort Keys is a multifunctional hotkey manager for Windows Vista, XP and 2000. The integrated clipboard manager extends the capabilities of the standard Windows clipboard allowing you to save an unlimited number of copied objects and reuse them as much as you want; and makes sure your clipboard data is saved in

case of a power failure or hardware crash. It also features an advanced task switcher, sound control tools and a virtual keyboard that facilitates the choice and configuration of your hotkey combinations. You can quickly switch languages, convert the selected fragment of text into another language (or case), run keystroke macros, easily manage a window and even restart the computer using the keyboard.

Comfort Keys supports Windows Vista/2000/XP operating systems. A personal license costs only \$29.95. A multi-user license ranges from \$21.95 to \$6.95. The company offers a 30-day money back guarantee on all orders. More information on Comfort Keys, as well as its free trial version, is available at <<http://www.comfort-software.com/hotkey-manager.html>>.

Products can be purchased from Plimus, the official reseller of Comfort Software Group products. Major credit cards (VISA, MasterCard, Amex and Discover) are accepted. User Group members get 30% discount at: <<https://secure.plimus.com/jsp/buynow.jsp?contractId=1711308&couponCode=dealsguy>>.

Wow! What a Clock!

ALSEDI Group announces version 2.6 of PerfectClock. It delivers any number of realistic clocks onto the desktop or replaces your wallpaper with clock wallpaper. PerfectClock lets you know the time in the most convenient way by looking at stylish analog or digital clocks. Enjoy having as many clocks on the desktop as you need, each displaying the time for the defined time zone. You can use the wallpaper clock as a screensaver. PerfectClock supports scaling. You can set a label to a clock and customize fonts, color, position

and other parameters. The Reminder feature is also customizable. On the official website are dozens of clock and wallpaper clock skins. It allows you to adjust hue, saturation, brightness and contrast to reach optimal appearance of the clock.

You can manually create a unique skin without being a programmer. ALSEDI Group has prepared a special offer for all new customers. Everyone purchasing PerfectClock can order a Personal Family Photo Clock Skin at no cost. It only requires selecting a frame pattern, sending a photo or two, and the skin will be delivered to you in three days. This skin makes a great present for family events. Visit <<http://www.perfect-clock.com>> to get the trial version of the program.

PerfectClock runs under Windows Vista/XP/2000. The Standard Edition costs \$16.95 (USD) for a single-user license and the Professional Edition, supporting the Wallpaper Clock feature, costs \$23.95 (USD). Licensed customers are entitled to the fully functional version of the product, free technical support and free upgrades. Further information on PerfectClock, as well as a free trial copy is available from <<http://www.perfect-clock.com>>.

Get a 20% discount on the registered Professional version by visiting: <<https://www.plimus.com/jsp/buynow.jsp?contractId=1717144&couponCode=GROUP20PERCENT>> and 20% discount on the Standard Edition at: <<https://www.plimus.com/jsp/buynow.jsp?contractId=1695221&couponCode=GROUP20PERCENT>>. Company web-site: <<http://www.alsedi.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>>.



**Improve PC
Performance—Clean your
Startup
By Ira Wilsker**

One of the most common questions called in on my weekly radio show (KLVI 560AM, 6-7pm Mondays, also streaming live over the net at <<http://www.klvi.com>> is a question about degraded performance of Windows XP. Typically, one of my first responses is to answer the question with a question, “Do you have a lot of icons in the corner of your screen near the clock?” Almost without fail, the answer is “yes,” the caller has a lot of icons adjacent to the clock. My usual response is, “...you have too many programs loaded when you boot up your computer, and they are stealing your system resources. You need to clean up your startup.”

Many of us seem to always want to install new or upgraded software on our computers, and it is common for newly installed software to want to load itself whenever the computer is booted. This software adds a line in the startup that ensures that it is loaded. Only a few programs are required to load at boot, and the others have decided for you that it is more important for them to load

and degrade performance, then have you load them only when needed. Also, having more programs loading at boot slows down the boot (and shutdown) process, because more programs are being loaded (or shutdown). Some software products, thinking that you will want to use them frequently, argue that pre-loading the software at every boot will make the full program load quicker whenever you need it. This may be a good choice for programs used very frequently, but is a poor choice most of the time as software (or kernels of software) thus loaded take up valuable memory and consume some processing cycles of your CPU ship. Since there is less memory and computing power available for your desired applications, they tend to load and execute slower. Fortunately for us, there are several simple solutions that we can implement to clean up our startup, and restore the performance that we had when the computer was new, and less cluttered than it is now.

Built into almost all contemporary versions of Windows is an internal management function called the “System Configuration Utility,” commonly referred to as MSCONFIG. This Microsoft utility allows the user to control several aspects of computer operations, including manually managing the startup process. MSCONFIG can be loaded in XP by clicking on Start – Run – and then typing in the box MSCONFIG – and then clicking on OK. This will open the System Configuration Utility. By clicking on the “Startup” tab on the top of the window, the checked boxes will show what programs are loading at system startup. By unchecking any desired boxes, programs can be stopped from

starting the next time the computer is booted. After unchecking any undesired boxes, clicking on “Apply” will incorporate the desired changes. While the System Configuration Utility is free and included as an integral part of XP, it does have a major disadvantage; that is that it does not adequately describe what each program is. There is a website, Paul Collins’ “Startup Applications List” <<http://www.sysinfo.org/startuplist.php>> that lists over 15,000 startup items, a description of what each is, and a key describing whether the item is necessary or not. When used with MSCONFIG, this Startup Applications List can be a big help to those who want to control their startup manually.

Many users may want to control their startup, but prefer to have some help with the process. There are several programs, some free, that can be used to manage and control their startup functions, and provide detailed information on what each item is. Some utilities clearly indicate what is and is not necessary, easing the management process. One of my personal favorites, which is better known for another worthwhile purpose, is Spybot Search & Destroy, available for free download from <<http://www.safer-networking.org>>. Once downloaded, installed, and opened, the user should click on “Mode” on the toolbar, and select “Advanced mode.” A series of icons will appear on the left side; click on “Tools,” and another column will open on the left side. Click on “System Startup,” and checkboxes will appear that show what is loading at boot (current startup items will be checked). With a simple interface, safe and necessary items will be highlighted in green (leave them alone!), personal choice items will be

in yellow or white, and dangerous or useless items (like viruses, worms, and Trojans) will be highlighted in red and should be unchecked or clicked upon and then deleted. It should be noted that any item unchecked can be rechecked at a later date if ever desired. On the right side of the Spybot window are two little triangles on a gray stripe; clicking on this will alternatively open and close an information window; when this right window is open, clicking on an item will display a detailed description of the item from the Paul Collins list.

Another very good startup manager is incorporated in both the free (Personal Edition) and paid (Professional Edition) of IObit’s Advanced Windows Care. Both of these versions are available for download from <<http://www.iobit.com>>. On the free Personal Edition, simply click on the Startup Manager on the main window; on the paid Professional Edition, click on Tools – Startup Manager. Once loaded, the startup manager will show the programs loaded at boot with a rating that indicates the degree of necessity of a program in the right column. Clicking on an item will display a description in the bottom left corner of the window, again using the Paul Collins database as a resource. Simply unchecking an item and then clicking “Apply” will implement the desired changes, and stop the unwanted programs from loading at boot. If they are ever desired later, re-checking the box will restore the items to the start process. Right clicking an item will display a context sensitive menu, one of the choices being to delete the item from the startup. Many users I have spoken with have been very satisfied with the use of the IObit products to manage their startup.

Another commercial program, the \$30 “The Ultimate Troubleshooter” (TUT), is a British program widely respected for its ability to diagnose software problems on computers, and offer solutions. With a limited free trial version available, or the paid version, available for download at <<http://www.answerthatwork.com>>, this program contains what may be one of the best startup managers available, along with a host of other useful utilities. While very comprehensive with a wealth of information presented, the TUT Startup Manager is accessed by clicking on the “Startups” tab on the top of the window. For those who want decisions made for them, TUT shows each known startup entry with a red, yellow, or green icon directly adjacent to the now ubiquitous check box. Red means kill it, yellow is “users’ choice,” green means safe and leave it alone. Unknown items do not show a colored icon, but the abundant information presented to the user will allow him to decide if an item is necessary. Clicking on an item opens a window on the bottom of the screen that explains the item in detail. Right clicking on an item provides the user with a lengthy list of options for the user, including deleting the item. Simply placing the cursor over an item for a few seconds opens a context sensitive window which displays a summary of details about the item. For those who want to control their startup functions, plus almost all other functions on their computer, TUT is a very viable choice.

Do you want your computer to run better? Try one or more of the utilities presented here and take control of your startup. You may be happily amazed at how much better your computer performs.

WEBSITES

<<http://www.sysinfo.org/startuplist.php>>.

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

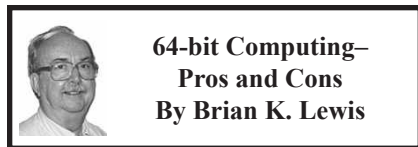
– Spybot.

<<http://www.iobit.com>>–Advanced Windows Care.

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

–The Ultimate Troubleshooter

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In July 2005 I wrote an article for the Monitor on using the 64-bit version of Windows XP. My conclusions at that time were that most users should wait the arrival of Microsoft’s next operating system before leaping into 64-bit computing. So Vista’s 64-bit version (Vista x64) has now been here for about a year, should you be considering a change from your 32-bit processor to a 64-bit processor? I’ll lay out some of the pros and cons of this so you can make a decision.

First, let’s consider why 64-bit processing is in the future of computing. To do this we need to consider some very basic information on how computers function. As most of you are well aware, computers process information as either a 0 or a 1. Or in the really old days of

computing, these were switches that were either “on” or “off.” Each value constitutes one one binary “bit” or instruction. A central processor with a 32-bit instruction set can process 32-bits per clock cycle. Thus if you have a CPU that runs with a 2 GHz (2 billion cycles per second) clock cycle, it is processing 64 billion bits per cycle. That’s the theory, in practice there are limitations which may reduce the actual processing speed. Anyway, a 64-bit processor could handle twice the number of bits per second as a 32-bit processor. Again, because of other limitations, the actual processing speed advantage is less.

There is another major advantage to 64-bit computing and that is the size of the address space or the amount of memory that can be used. For a 32-bit processor, working memory is limited to 2 raised to the 32nd power (2^{32}) or 4 GB of memory. A 64-bit processor can address 16 Exabytes of Ram. That’s, 2 to the 64th power (2^{64}) or 16 Million Gigabytes! At the present there are no machines that support this much RAM. For one thing the cost of that much memory would be excessive. So manufacturers are generally limiting motherboards and chipsets to 128 GB of RAM or less as Vista x64 can only address up to 128 GB of RAM. The maximum RAM is usually greater than the 4 GB limitation of the motherboards designed for 32-bit processors.

So the question becomes, why do computers need any amount of memory even close to any of these figures? The answer relates to how people use their computers. A lot of users, and I’m one of them, open more than one application at a time. This can have a definite effect on the speed of operation of the computer. When you open an

application in either Windows XP or Vista, the operating system sets aside a 4 GB memory space for the application, drivers and other required information. So each application that is open has its own 4 GB memory space. It is a rare personal computer that has 4GB or more of RAM. In fact, Windows XP can not address more than 4 GB of RAM and it uses almost one GB for its own components. So how is this handled?

The solution to the requirement for very large RAM space for each application is called “Virtual Memory.” The computer stores much of the required information for an application on the hard drive. It then moves data back and forth between RAM and the hard drive as it is needed. A paging table is used to track the locations of data on the hard drive and in RAM. So, even when you open only a single application, a large part of it will be stored on the hard drive or in “virtual memory.” When information on the hard drive is needed, the paging table remaps it to RAM memory and also moves data from memory to the hard drive. Because read/write access to the hard drive is much slower than read/write access to RAM, the overall processing time is much slower. If you are simply doing word processing or writing e-mail, then the speed difference is not really noticeable. If you were doing calculations using a large spreadsheet while setting up a Power Point presentation with complex graphics, then you would probably notice a slight slow down in the overall operation of your system.

So the primary advantage of 64-bit computing is the tremendous increase in address space. This advantage is also present when running 32-bit software on a true 64-bit machine. Running 32-bit

software on Vista x64 is referred to as running on the Windows on Windows64 or WoW64. By utilizing the added address space of x64, the time required for loading, unloading and switching processes can be greatly reduced or eliminated. This can also eliminate the frequent hard drive cycling that is referred to as “thrashing,” which can occur in a 32-bit system.

If you decide to move to a 64-bit system, just be sure to add plenty of RAM. Certainly you should have a minimum of 8 GB. The motherboard should also have a system bus designed to work with a 64-bit processor. Otherwise the bus can become a major bottleneck. In fact, you really should not try to upgrade a 32-bit machine by installing Vista x64. To really be successful, you should buy a machine which is designed from the ground up to run Vista x64. Also, the upgrade version of Vista x64 will only upgrade the 64-bit version of Windows XP.

That brings us to the “cons” about Vista x64 and 64-bit computing in general. 64-bit processors have been available for four or five years for desktop computers. However, when we relate this to machines with Windows operating systems, the big problem is slowness of the adoption of 64-bit hardware and software by manufacturers. One example is the lack of device drivers for peripheral hardware. So just what do you need drivers for? The one that affects most people is the printer driver. Operating systems don’t always include a printer driver because of the great variety of makes and models. Although I know that many HP printer drivers are delivered along with the 32-bit Windows OS. However, this is not true for the 64-bit version. If a 64-

bit driver is available for your printer you may have to download and install it yourself.

With Windows Vista, you not only must have a 64-bit driver, it must be a “signed” driver or Vista will reject it. A signed driver contains a digital signature or a certificate in the program code which meets Microsoft’s requirements and is from a company that has a license (Publishers Identity Certificate) from Microsoft. You may have already encountered an “unsigned driver” message when you tried to install software or drivers. In Windows XP and 32-bit Vista you were able to continue the installation in spite of the lack of the signed driver. In Vista x64 this is not possible. Vista will discontinue the installation after advising you of the lack of the signed certificate. This procedure was implemented to try to stop “rootkit” malware from installing itself in the heart of the operating system – the kernel. Rootkits are able to hide within the computer by altering register keys and processes. By blocking the installation of unsigned device drivers Microsoft is hoping to reduce the rootkit problem.

A driver is also needed for your graphics cards. Both ATI and NVidia released 64-bit drivers for their newest cards in December, 2007. There is considerable doubt that they will produce 64-bit drivers for any of their older cards. Another reason why you have to consider new hardware when you are thinking of transitioning to a 64-bit OS. Other hardware that needs 64-bit drivers include scanners, sound cards, modems, serial ATA (SATA) / RAID and just about any other hardware peripheral. So you may need to update all of your hardware in order to get

64-bit drivers. Also, since the graphics drivers have only appeared almost a year after Vista's debut, other hardware manufacturers may still be working on drivers. You definitely need to do your homework if you are considering the purchase of an x64 system.

Software is another area that is slow to take advantage of the extra processing capacity of Vista x64. Although, as I mentioned earlier, x64 can run 32-bit software it is done in an emulation mode. The 32-bit application can not take advantage of the wider data path that is available in x64. Although there is some advantage due to the added memory in an x64 machine, the software is not using the hardware to full advantage. Just as happened when computers shifted from 16-bit processors to 32-bit processors, there was considerable delay before manufacturers moved solidly into the 32-bit realm.

So what applications are currently most likely to have 64-bit applications that can use the full capacity of x64?

- Applications for creating digital content in computer-aided design and digital video editing.
- Applications that require mathematical precision and floating-point performance.
- Applications that involve large, high-performance databases.
- Vision acquisition and analysis applications with large amounts of data moving directly into memory at rapid rates.

I suspect it will still be several years before 64-bit computing will be the mainstream for personal computers. So, unless your requirements are similar to the above list, I would suggest you stick with 32-bit systems for a while longer.

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.

Dr. Lewis is a member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc, Florida. Web: <<http://www.spcug.org>>. E-mail: <[bwsail at yahoo.com](mailto:bwsail@yahoo.com)>.

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

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Do You Ubuntu (yet)?—A Linux Update

In February of 2002 I wrote here:

“It has been said that Windows XP is less buggy than its Windows 95, 98, and Me predecessors; damnation by faint praise. XP is also more expensive, can only be used on a single computer, and presents many incompatibilities with existing hardware and software. It hogs resources. That led me to wonder how Linux is coming along.”

Replace “XP” with “Vista” and history repeats itself. Furthermore, add that online security has dramatically worsened and that the security of Windows Vista is at best only marginally improved.

At the time I got a copy of the Red Hat Linux 7.2 distribution (list price \$60), included in a 1000+ pages “Linux Bible” and proceeded to evaluate it. I found that the limited software included in the distribution was nice and useful, but trying to install additional programs from the Internet was a nightmare.

Six years later desktop Linux has matured beyond recognition. Lindows, later renamed Linspire, was the first distribution making it a one-click operation to download and install software from a large online library. Originally the cost of acquiring Linspire and a one-year subscription to the library was \$100, but more recently the service has been available for free. I am still using an older version of Linspire daily, mostly for Web browsing, accessing e-mail, and playing Freecell, Yukon or Mahjong.

In 2004 Marc Shuttleworth, a South African by birth, started a free new Linux distribution called Ubuntu (“humanity towards others”). In 1999 he sold Internet security software he had developed to Verisign for about \$575 million. He spent \$20 million of that on an 8-day trip by Soyuz to the Space Station and had plenty left over for a free software project. By now Ubuntu has become the most advanced and popular desktop Linux distribution, with the help of numerous volunteer contributors.

Ubuntu undergoes continuous upgrades as new and improved software is being developed and tested. Twice a year, in April and October, a new version is released. The latest version is numbered 7.10, for October of 2007, and is nicknamed “Gutsy Gibbon.” (The next issue in April, version 8.4,

will be named “Hardy Hero.” You get the drift).

I installed Ubuntu side-by-side with Windows XP on my desktop computer, equipped with an AMD Athlon64 X2 4800+ dual core processor, 1 GB of RAM and an nVidia GeForce 7600 graphics card. I put it in a separate Linux partition on my hard drive previously used for Linspire. Before committing to the installation I ran Ubuntu off the CD to verify that it was compatible with my hardware.

Once installed, Ubuntu was ready to go. It automatically set up my connection to the Internet with Firefox, and with my permission downloaded a large number of updates and additions released since October. The <OpenOffice.org> suite of programs, comparable to MS Office, was ready to go. I already had been using the Windows version of OpenOffice Writer so there was no learning curve whatsoever. The Gimp, an advanced graphics program similar to Adobe Photoshop Elements and with comparable features, came preinstalled. I also found drivers for my HP 812C printer and my Epson Perfection 3490 Photo Scanner. With all the necessary tools at hand I had no difficulty producing the January newsletter, including typing the articles, downloading articles from other user groups, and designing the layout and the new masthead. I printed the newsletter ready for Xeroxing and used OpenOffice Writer to save a separate version (omitting treasury data) to PDF format for distribution on the Internet.

Ubuntu provides many additional Linux programs:

- Thunderbird, well-known program.

- Pidgin, a Messenger graphical multi-protocol instant messaging client, capable of using AIM/ICQ, Yahoo!, MSN, IRC, Jabber, Napster, Zephyr, Gadu-Gadu, Bonjour, Groupwise, Sametime, SILC, and SIMPLE all at once.

- GRAMPS, genealogy program capable of GEDCOM files that are used in such programs as FamilyTree Maker for Windows. It can produce reports in various formats, such as text, HTML and PDF.

- GnuCash can track finances in multiple accounts, keeping running and reconciled balances. It has a graphical user interface, double entry, a hierarchy of accounts, expense accounts (categories), and can import Quicken QIF files and OFX files.

- Multiple sound and video programs for burning and reading CDs and DVDs, ripping and creating audio CDs, recording sound clips, playing movies, etc.

- Popular games, including aisleriot (anagram of solitaire), a large collection of card games, including Freecell. Also blackjack, glchess, gnome-sudoku, gnometriss (Tetris), gnomine (minesweeper), mahjong, and many others.

Additional programs can be installed with the Add/Remove function. Some powerful Linux programs that are not (yet) specifically adapted for Ubuntu can be retrieved with the Synaptic package manager, an easy-to-use graphical program to download applications from the Internet. I used it to download and install Scribus, an advanced desktop page layout manager capable of producing commercial grade output in PDF and Postscript.

Difficult to use for a non-professional, but it worked just fine.

Installation

It is easy to install Ubuntu and Windows on the same computer in separate partitions. Previously that required manually repartitioning your computer with a program such as Partition Manager, but the latest Ubuntu version, Gutsy Gibbon, includes its own Linux-based partition manager, GParted, and automatically uses it to scan your computer for available space and to reconfigure that space (with your approval) to install itself. During boot-up the computer displays a menu of startup options, including Windows or Ubuntu.

I evaluated the ease of installation on an old Dell Inspiron 3800 laptop computer, with a 600 MHz Celeron CPU, 320 MB RAM and 880MB free disk space. Installation alongside the existing Windows Me went flawlessly. The computer didn't have a network card, but Ubuntu recognized the PCMCIA wireless network card and connected to the Internet after I provided the router parameters.

“Sounds Great, But Why Bother?”

For the same reasons people move out of the city to the suburbs: security and cost-of-living. To enjoy the best of both worlds, install Ubuntu side-by-side with a basic Windows program. No need for expensive MS Office or Adobe programs. Use Ubuntu for safe online access, and keep Windows for those few occasions where Linux does not (yet) provide the means. As time goes by, it will probably be possible to abandon Windows altogether. Give it a try!

*Collected by Pim Borman,
Webmaster, SW Indiana PC Users
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Web:<<http://swipcug.apcug.org/>>.

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

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**Free VideoSpin Software
For Your PC
By Ira Wilsker**

Many of us routinely perform the tasks of taking digital videos, and then editing them, converting them to a multitude of formats, and uploading them to one or more video hosting websites. While Windows XP users can download and install the free Windows Movie Maker 2.1 from Microsoft (it may already be installed on many machines with Service Pack 2 installed), and Windows Vista users have the Vista version of Movie Maker built in, there are also other superior, free video utilities available.

One of the best free and fully functional video editing utilities is Pinnacle's VideoSpin, available for free download (150 Meg) from <<http://www.videospin.com>> (free registration required). VideoSpin enables the user to easily mix videos, photos and music together, add titles to the images, and enable smooth transitions from scene to scene. Once the editing is completed, VideoSpin supports direct upload to the web, including to YouTube. VideoSpin is compatible with both Windows XP and Vista.

Once downloaded and installed, VideoSpin can either use videos and images already on the hard drive, or can

import them directly from the digital video camera, CD, DVD (DivX or MPEG-2 formats), memory card, USB flash drive, tape, or other device. On the left side of the screen is the "Album" which contains video transitions, titles, photos, sound effects, and music. The user can simply drag and drop any desired items on the timeline at the bottom of the screen, and VideoSpin will do the integration. This very simple process creates the personalized video, which can be viewed at anytime with the video viewer in the top right corner of the window. The length of each selected scene can be edited by placing the "play head" over the desired beginning or end of a scene, and using the digital "razor blade" to trim the scene. Transitions, of which over six dozen are included, can be placed between scenes by dragging and dropping the selected transition to the desired place on the timeline. Clicking on the "T" icon displays 18 title selections that can be easily edited, and dragged on to the center row of the timeline to display the title at the proper time. Double clicking on the title opens an editing window that allows the user to select a color and font for the title. A photo or video can be used as a background for the title if desired. Photos can be loaded either from the hard drive or directly from a digital camera, by clicking on the still camera icon. Once a photo is selected, it is simply dragged onto the timeline, and stretched to appear for the desired length of time.

VideoSpin also includes a collection of music and sound effects which can be incorporated in the presentation. Clicking on the speaker icon displays the sound effects menu, which included several categories including animal

sounds, backgrounds, crowds, squeaks, vehicle sounds, and a miscellaneous group, which included about 30 more sound effects ranging from a typewriter (remember those?), telephone ringing, jack hammer, glass breaking, and many others. To insert music into the video, click on the quarter-note icon, which will then display the music selection. Music can be downloaded from the Internet, use existing play lists already on the computer, or other digital music resources.

Once all of the desired content is placed on the timeline, the video can be reviewed by clicking on the play button on the viewer on the top right of the screen. If the video appears satisfactory, then the user clicks on the “Make Movie” tab on the top of the screen. The user can select the desired format of the movie, including AVI, DivX, iPod, MPEG (1, 2, 4), RealMedia, Sony PSP format, and Windows Media formats (additional Codecs may be required). The screen size of the video can then be selected (WARNING! The bigger the image the larger the file!), including full screen DV (720x480), full screen MJPEG, medium (352x240), small (176x120), or a custom display size. Once the video is created in the size and format desired it can be saved to the hard drive to be burned to CD or DVD if desired (separate DVD burning software required). If the user desires to upload the video, clicking on the “globe” icon will display the built-in upload sites, which include Yahoo! Videos and YouTube. Clicking on one will convert the image to the requisite image size, and allow the user to select an image quality of “Best” (480x480 on Yahoo!, 320x240 on YouTube) or “Fast Upload” (352x240 on Yahoo!), which

creates a smaller file of slightly lower video quality.

Pinnacle has hit a home run by offering VideoSpin as a free download for anyone who wishes to use it. For those who are novices at video editing, an integral tutorial is built into the software, or can be viewed online at <<http://www.videospin.com/tutorial.asp>>. Additional information and help about the program can be viewed at <<http://www.videospin.com/faq.asp>>. For those who would like to read a manual, free manuals are available online in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Dutch. For basic video editing, VideoSpin is about the best that you can get for free. Pinnacle apparently hopes that users will eventually upgrade to its commercial editing utilities, such as its premier Pinnacle Studio 11 series, but for most people, VideoSpin will do just fine.

WEBSITES

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

<<http://www.videospin.com/tutorial.asp>>.

<<http://www.videospin.com/faq.asp>>.

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>.



Meeting Pictures



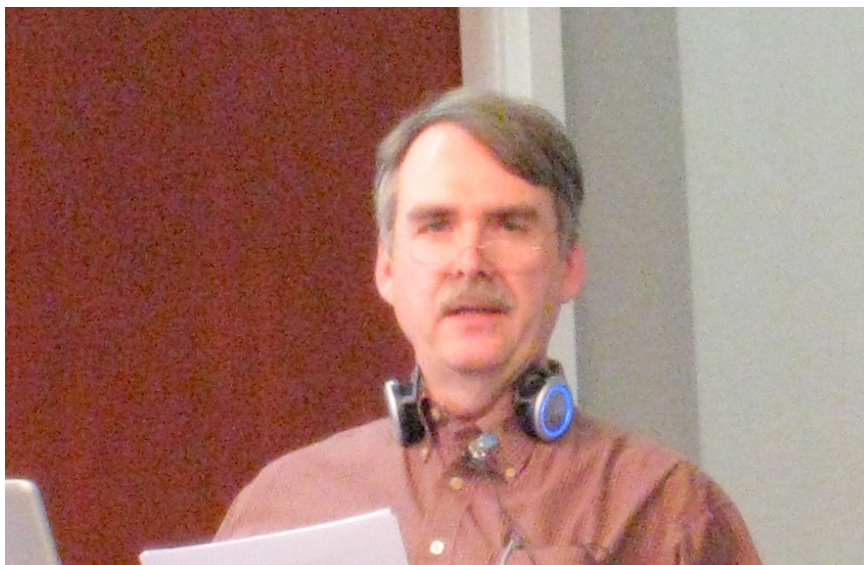
(Above) Discussion at the podium. Left to right: Mike Bader, Richard Jackson, Tom Callow, Chad Keesling. (Below) Chad Keesling, of Adobe, speaking at the SIG-IBM session of the March 9 SEMCO meeting.



Meeting Pictures



(Above) Members join in the social period. (Below) Tom Callow discusses voice recognition during SIG-IBM Intermediate session of the March 9 SEMCO meeting.





BOARD MEETING
3/9/2008
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. The meeting was called to order at 12:02 p.m.

OLD BUSINESS

Bette Gay reported that the amount in the treasury equaled \$9,060.59 with \$4,411.18 in the bank account and \$4,649.41 invested in three Certificates of Deposit. The membership stands at 78.

It is time for M. Mike Choly, Dr. William L. Landrum, Harold Langberg D.D.S., Randy Mims, and John Samarian to renew their memberships.

NEW BUSINESS

Mike Bader reported that the Yahoo on-line user group has grown to 41 members. Activity continues to grow.

Bob Clyne reported that the audit committee plans to meet next Saturday.

Mike Bader reported that he delivered the appreciation plaque to ArvinMeritor. SEMCO's use of the facilities is working out nicely.

Bob Clyne moved to adjourn. Warner Mach seconded the motion and it was carried. The meeting adjourned at 12:11 p.m.



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.

Tips and Tricks

Reported on

<<http://www.apcug.net>>.

What Happened to the Back Button?

Pikes Peak Computer Application Society, Colorado Springs, CO.

Ever visit a Website, and find that the browser's Back button was disabled? Some Websites disable your back button to keep you on their site. If this happens, right click on the back button. You'll see a list of pages that you have visited. Click something on that list to move back. This works for the Forward button, too.



SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGS)



SIG-IBM
Tom Callow

April 13: 1:45 p.m.: VOIP: Lorn Olsen, of DynaComm Corporation, will discuss VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol). VOIP is a technology that can be used to lower your phone bills. By the end of 2008 there is expected to be 24 million subscribers and 55 million by 2009. Mr. Olsen has extensive background in the telecommunications field. He currently works as a consultant for DynaCom Corporation which provides VOIP services. Mr. Olson is the founder and former President of a local telephone company, MichTel Communications, which is now providing wireless access for Oakland County.

SIG-IBM INTERMEDIATE

April 13: 3:45 p.m.: Back to Basics: Larry Kulp of Kulp Computers will discuss how to maintain your computers, how to find updated drivers, how to be an educated computer shopper with leverage, and the big "gotcha's" in Windows XP updates. Mr. Kulp is a computer consultant serving individuals, schools and small businesses, and is a familiar speaker at the Royal Oak Computer Club and the Old Persons Commission Computer Club.

NOVICE-IBM GROUP Rotating Volunteer Hosts

April 13: 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

May 5, 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., April 20, 11:59 p.m. Members' personal ads are free. To mail, use Editor address on Page 2; e-mail address: <machw@att.net>. PLEASE send to arrive sooner than deadline.

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

Warner Machmachw@att.net

(to post monthly computer group info)

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

May 7, 7 p.m., (1st Wednesday); St. Clair County RESA, 499 Range Rd., Marysville, Admin. Building. Jane Wheatly 810-982-1187 or Pam Raisanen <[compinfo\(@hughes.net\)](mailto:compinfo(@hughes.net))>. <<http://www.bwcomp.org>>. Topic: "Open Source Software" with Ann Carrier from <ConnecTech.org>.

DCOM Computer Club

April 11, 6:30–8:30 p.m., (2nd Friday); Henry Ford C.C., Patterson Tech Bldg, Ford Rd/Evergreen, Rm T143, Parking Lot C. Info: Doug Piazza 313-582-2602. Topic: TBA.

HUG (Holly User Group)

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

MacGroup- Detroit

April 20, 3:00 p.m., Birmingham Temple, 28611 West 12 Mile Rd., Farmington Hills. Info: Terry White, <terry@macgroup.org> or 248-569-4933. <<http://www.macgroup.org>>. Topic: "Apple's Logic Studio" by Charlie Grover of Macprofessionals.

MacTechnics. (MAC User Group)

April 19, 11:00 a.m., (3rd Saturday); (SIGs at 9:30); This month: U of M, College of Architecture. 2000 Bonisteel, Ann Arbor 48109. <<http://www.mactechnics.org>>. JoAnn Olson at 248-478-4300. Topic: "Expression Media" by Don Burnett

MDLUG (Metro Detroit Linux User Group)

April 19, 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.

MUG (Michigan User Group)

April 8, 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

April 10, 7:30 p.m., (2nd Thur.); General meeting; Fraternal Order of Eagles Hall in Clawson, 174 Bowers St. (one block North of 14-Mile and one block East of Main). Avi Drissman 248-232-7865. Web: <<http://www.themichiganapple.com>>. Topic: TBA.

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)

May 6, 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: "Windows Vista, the Rest of the Story" by Rich Schummer of SHCC.

Wayne State University Mac User Group

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



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**

April 13—SUNDAY (Meet 2nd Sunday)

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

SEMCO General Meeting at 1:30 p.m.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

SIG-IBM 1:45 p.m. **Program: VOIP:** Lorn Olsen, of DynaComm Corporation, will discuss VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol). VOIP is a technology that can be used to lower your phone bills. Mr. Olsen has extensive background in the telecommunications field. He currently works for DynaCom Corporation which provides VOIP services.

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: Back to Basics:** Larry Kulp, of Kulp Computers, will discuss how to maintain your computers, how to find updated drivers, how to be an educated computer shopper with leverage, and the big "gotcha's" in Windows XP updates. Mr. Kulp is a computer consultant serving individuals, schools, and small businesses.

SIG-ADVANCED, May 5, 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.

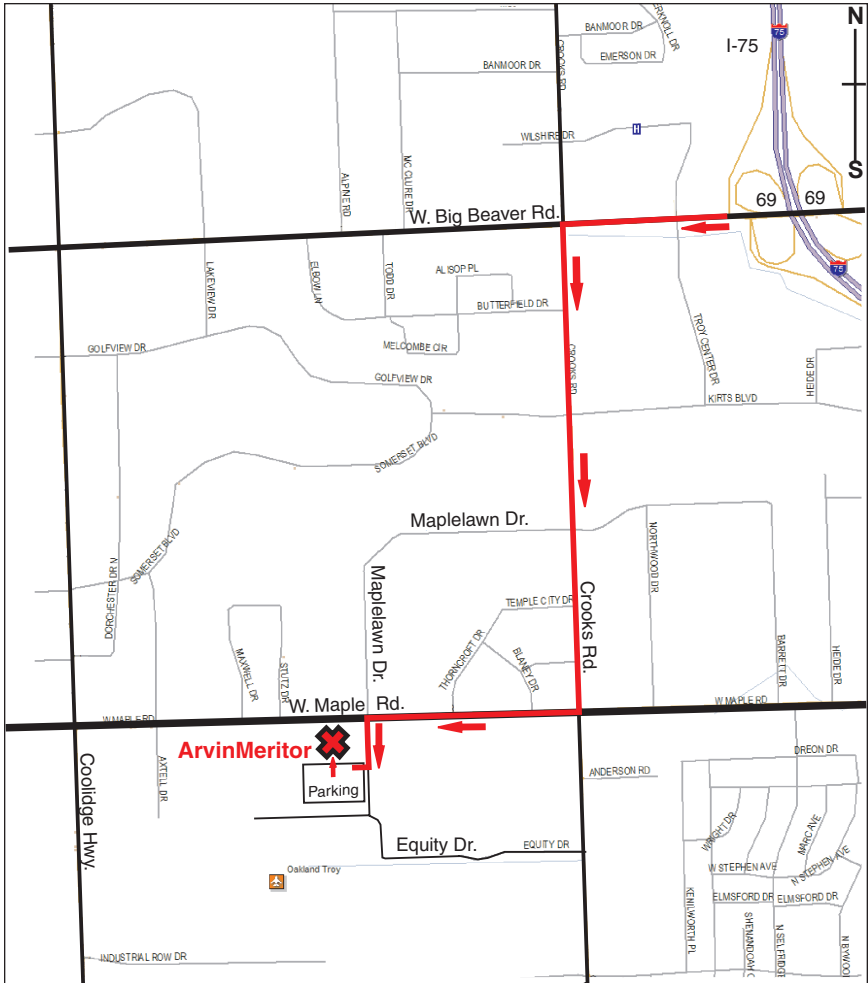
May 11—SEMCO Sunday

<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)

April 13

May 11

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