



The Cursor



Monthly Newsletter of the
Washington Area Computer User Group

Meeting Location
Fairfax County
Government Center



Next Meeting:
October 13, 2007



Presidential Bits

October, 2007 Meeting

By Paul Howard

Following up on a security theme from August, Lorrin Garson kicked off September's meeting with a brief discussion and demonstration of Cryptainer, software for encrypting all kinds of files, including a function to send encrypted e-mail. A basic version is available for free. See <http://www.cypherix.com/cryptainerle/>. The company offers products with greater capacities for a price; see <http://cypherix.com/store.htm?eventid=3>.

Chuck Roberts then presented an approach for organizing and cataloging digital photographs, using Adobe's Photoshop Elements, version 5. His presentation and notes are available on the Recent Meetings page of the WAC web site, at: <http://www.wacug.org/recmtgs.html>

This month's meeting will be held on the second Saturday of the month - October 13th, at our usual venue in the Fairfax County Government Center. Our speaker this month will be Gabe Goldberg, Regional Representative for the Association of Personal Computer User Groups, or which WAC is a member. Gabe

has written on computer and technology topics for the AARP web site, and is a long-time member and volunteer for the Capital PC User Group.

He'll be presenting Gabe's Gadget Grabbag, an extensive "show and tell" session on more than two dozen technology gizmos and gadgets, many of which plug into a PC's USB ports. This is a long list of "trinkets and toys" that are hard to characterize. Check the list for yourself on the Recent Meetings page of the web site, at: <http://www.wacug.org/recmtgs.html>

WACUG's annual elections are coming up in January. Members interested in running for an officer position, or serving as a director, should contact Geof Goodrum, chair of the nominating committee.



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Lloyd's Web Sites for October, 2007

by Lloyd Johnson, WACUG Member

<http://www.wacug.org/> is the URL for the Washington Area Computer User Group. Visit it for past issues of Web Sites with hyperlinks

October 2007 Sites

1. **Vanderbilt Television News Archive** — <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/>
The Television News Archive collection at Vanderbilt University is the world's most extensive and complete archive of television news. The collection holds more than 30,000 individual network evening news broadcasts from the major U.S. national broadcast networks: ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN, and more than 9,000 hours of special news-related programming including ABC's Nightline since 1989.
2. **Astronomy Picture of the Day** — <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html>
Discover the cosmos! Each day a different image or photograph of our fascinating universe is featured by this NASA web site, along with a brief explanation written by a professional astronomer
3. **Tennis Players.** Perfect your form, and do exercises to strengthen your wrist and forearm. For information and exercises go to: http://www.nismat.org/ptcor/tennis_elbow/
4. **Fone Finder** — <http://www.fonefinder.net/>
Fone Finder is a free, public search engine that finds the geographic location of any phone number in the world. You key in a phone number, and it will give you the city, state, country, a flag, map, and links to the area. Fone Finder can also find the country code, area code, and prefix given the city name. You can always find the international country given a phone number. For a growing list of countries, including the USA, Mexico and Canada, Fone Finder will also find the city.
5. **Online Conversion** — Convert just about anything to anything else. Over 5,000 units, and 50,000 conversions. Related sites: [www Unit Converter](http://www.UnitConverter.com) | XE.com [Currency Rates and Converter](http://CurrencyRates.com).
6. **American FactFinder** — <http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html>
Your source for population, housing, economic, and geographic data, from the U.S. Census Bureau. Related sites: [Population Reference Bureau](http://PopulationReferenceBureau.com) | [NationMaster](http://NationMaster.com) | [StateMaster](http://StateMaster.com).
7. **Omnibiography.com** — www.omnibiography.com/ OmniBiography.com is the largest directory of biographies available on the Web containing information on more than 110,000 important people from antiquity to the present time. It includes biographies from the most important sites on the web in all languages.. Related sites: [Columbia Encyclopedia: Index to Biographical Entries](http://ColumbiaEncyclopedia.com) | Who2.com.
8. **Ellis Island** — www.ellislandrecords.org/default.asp More than 22 million passengers and members of ships' crews entered the United States through Ellis Island and the Port of New York between 1892 and 1924. Information about each person was written down in ships' passenger lists, known as 'manifests.' Manifests were used to examine immigrants upon arrival in the United States. Now you can search these millions of records for information on individual Ellis Island passengers
9. **Urban Legends** — www.snopes.com The definitive Internet reference source for urban legends, folklore, myths, rumors, and misinformation.
10. **The Library of Congress** provides online Information concerning Congress and the legislative process. This web site is an easy to use tool to track bills in which you are interested. — <http://thomas.loc.gov>





GNU/Linux SIG

By Geof Goodrum, WAC

One Laptop Per Child Project

Nicholas Negroponte, Founder and Director of the Media Center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, had an idea that computers can help children in developing nations to “learn learning,” thus improving education, sharing of ideas, and creativity more effectively than books and building schools. The result was the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) Project (<http://www.laptop.org/>) with the goal of providing low-cost “XO” laptop computers to children who would never be able to afford a computer themselves. The project, backed by Advisors and a Board of Directors made up of education, industry, and Open Source leaders, is largely funded by developing nations that placed advanced orders for the laptops and donations; the status of OLPC by country is on the project wiki at http://wiki.laptop.org/go/OLPC_Status_by_Country. The mission statement for the project clearly states that OLPC is fundamentally not a technology project, but a global education project.

The XO laptop began design in June 2005, and was put into production in summer 2007. The original design goal was to keep the unit price

at \$100, be sized for children and localized (local language and conventions), durable, networked, and have low-power consumption with battery capable of recharging from AC adapter, solar panel or hand crank (an original design with integrated hand crank was dropped).

While the unit cost ended up closer to \$150, the laptop has very unique capabilities. The operating system is built on Fedora Core 6 Linux components, but has an innovative user interface called “SUGAR” that allows the child to zoom into their work, or zoom out a view to view other XO laptop users in the area. In addition to traditional 802.11b/g wireless network support, the laptop has a built-in wireless “mesh” 802.11s network that detects and communicates with nearby XO laptops. Each laptop can route traffic from the others – if one laptop has access to the Internet, all other laptops have Internet access. The laptop screen is a 7.5” Thin Film Transistor (TFT) LCD with 1200x900 pixel/200 DPI resolution, and transmissive (color) and reflective (low power) modes. Through use of 1 GB flash memory instead of a hard disk and advanced power saving features, the XO needs less than 2 watts of power. The XO has a built-in video camera and USB ports. Applications include a web browser, word processor, RSS reader, document viewer, e-mail client, chat client, a VOIP client, wiki journal with WYSIWG editing, a music composition toolkit, graphics tools, games, command shell, and debugger. Input is via a membrane keyboard or touchpad.

The complete specifications are posted on the OLPC web site, as are links to videos of the laptop in action.

Although the XO laptop was never intended for commercial sale to individuals, OLPC recently announced a limited time availability through a Give 1, Get 1 program. Beginning on November 12 (and reportedly only available in the US for a two week period), OLPC will ship an XO laptop to you and ship another to a child in a developing country for \$399. OLPC also accepts donations. More information on this program and donations is at the website <http://www.xogiving.org/>.

FLAC: Free Lossless Audio Codec

I recently began experimenting with ways to preserve music from my vinyl records and concert video laserdiscs (remember these predecessors to the DVD?) on digital media.

Most people are familiar with the MP3 (Motion Picture Experts Group Audio Layer III, developed by Fraunhofer IIS) and WMA (Windows Media Audio, developed by Microsoft) digital music file formats, which are licensed, commercial music compressor/decompressor (codec) formats. The disadvantage of these formats is that they are lossy – sound data is selectively thrown away during compression to make the file smaller; selecting higher bit rates during compression results in higher quality sound (128 kilobits per second, or kbps, is a typical bit rate), but also larger music files. I prefer the Ogg Vorbis (OGG) music codec developed by the Xiph.org community, as it provides superior sound quality at equivalent bit rates/file sizes, is free to use (MP3 and WMA license fees are built into the cost of their players), and does not build in Digital Rights/Restrictions Management (DRM) to prevent or

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limit copying the media files. MP3, WMA, and OGG can also contain metadata tags containing information such as the album name, music title, and performer. However, OGG is still a lossy music format. Lossy formats are best for casual listening on portable music devices with relatively limited storage capacity.

To preserve recordings, it is better to use a lossless digital music format that retains the full quality of the source material. Compact Discs (CDs) use Pulse Code Modulation (PCM) that takes digital samples of sound at a rate of 44,100 times per second (44.1 kHz) and a resolution of 16 bits (65,536 levels) per channel (2 channels for stereo), resulting in a constant bit rate of 1,141 kbps (44.1 x 16 x 2). A common lossless, uncompressed file format for CD quality sound is WAV, developed by Microsoft and IBM. This results in large files, and the added disadvantage that WAV does not support metadata tags.

Xiph.org again came to the rescue by developing the Free Lossless Audio Codec (FLAC). FLAC is optimized to compress music without losing sound quality.



I recorded more than 30 minutes of music from a concert video laserdisc into a WAV file, then compressed the file with different utilities for comparison.

WAV uncompressed file size:
483,230,216 bytes

Zipcompressedfile size:440,351,859
bytes

Bzip2 compressed file size:
413,740,208 bytes

FLAC compressed file size:
279,441,467 bytes

Obviously, FLAC is much better at compressing the WAV file. And, while the bzip2 and zip files must be decompressed to extract the original WAV file before playing, FLAC files can be played directly. FLAC files can also be converted back to the original WAV file format with no loss of quality. Also, like OGG, FLAC is non-proprietary and free to use. FLAC also features cue sheets, plain text files that define index points in the music file such as individual tracks in a continuous recording (e.g., album side). The cue sheets are converted to metadata tags that can be used to directly access the individual tracks in the file or break a single FLAC file into separate track files. FLAC files can have up to 128 different metadata tag types.

My current plan is to record all of my vinyl records and concert laserdiscs with the free, Open Source GramoFile program (<http://www.opensourcepartners.nl/~costar/gramofile/>) into WAV files, compress them with FLAC, and add cue sheets. I will burn the FLAC files onto recordable DVD media. GramoFile has optional filters to remove pops and ticks from noisy vinyl recordings, but my philosophy is to preserve the recordings “as is”

and only filter out noise when making Ogg Vorbis files.

More information about the FLAC codec, including software and hardware that support it, is at the project web site <http://flac.sourceforge.net/>.

Xiph.org also has free, Open Source codecs optimized for speech (speex) and video (Theora) applications. More information about the Xiph community and multimedia codecs are on the web site at <http://www.xiph.org/>.

GNU/Linux Distribution Releases

GNU/Linux distributions are complete GNU/Linux operating system and application software collections. Many are freely downloadable or can be ordered on CDs or DVD at low cost. DistroWatch.com lists the following distribution release announcements for the period August 27-September 27, 2007. *See DistroWatch table next page.*

Linux Software of the Month

The software described below is downloadable at the links provided or may be requested on the monthly CD. In addition to the monthly CD described below, WAC can provide CD-R and DVD±R media for any downloadable GNU/Linux operating system distribution (e.g. Fedora, Mandriva, Ubuntu, Debian, Knoppix). Please note that download versions of commercial distributions do not include official technical support nor printed documentation.

Discs are available only by pre-order. Contact Geof Goodrum by e-mail [g\(linux@wacug.org\)](mailto:g(linux@wacug.org)) at least 48 hours before meeting day to order or for more information. Single CD-R discs are available with a \$3 donation; GNU/Linux distributions on

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multiple CD-Rs or single DVD±R are available with a \$6 donation.

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AstroMenace – v1.2. http://www.viewizard.com/astromenace/index_linux.php. Free GNU General Public License source code and executable by Michael Kurinnoy (donations appreciated). AstroMenace is a modern 3D scrolling space shooter with ship upgrade possibilities. You can improve your ship configuration by installing new weapons, defensive systems, power stations and much more. To improve your ship, you must earn money by destroying throngs of enemies on every level. A friendly interface, easy controls, and fancy 3D graphics will bring you straight into the heart of galactic war. AstroMenace requires a Pentium 1 GHz or faster CPU, 128 MB RAM, 3D video accelerator with 32+ MB on board, and Ogg, Vorbis and SDL libraries (included in major distributions).

OpenOffice.org – v2.3.0. <http://www.openoffice.org/>. Free GNU Lesser General Public License source code and executable by the OpenOffice.org community. OpenOffice.org is a multi-platform and multilingual office suite (spreadsheet, word processor, presentation manager, database manager, graphic editor) and an open-source project. Compatible with all other major office suites, the product is free to download, use, and distribute. OpenOffice.org 2.3 is a major release that incorporates an extensive array of new features and enhancements to all its core components, and protects users from newly discovered security vulnerabilities. It is only with 2.3 that users can make full use of our growing extensions

library.

Ruport – v1.2.1. <http://rubyreports.org/>. Free GNU General Public License Ruby code by Gregory Brown. Ruport (Ruby Reports) is a software library that aims to make the task of reporting less tedious and painful. It provides tools for data acquisition, database interaction, formatting, and parsing/munging. Designed to be extensible, it is possible to use Ruport for quick specific tasks as well as to build robust reporting applications.

TaskJuggler – v2.4.0. <http://www.taskjuggler.org/>. Free GNU General Public License source code by Chris Schlaeger. TaskJuggler is a modern and powerful project management tool. Its new approach to

project planning and tracking is far superior to the commonly used Gantt chart editing tools. It has already been successfully used in many projects and scales easily to projects with hundreds of resources and thousands of tasks. It covers the complete spectrum of project management tasks from the first idea to the completion of the project. It assists you during project scoping, resource assignment, cost and revenue planning, and risk and communication management.

Kernel Source – <http://www.kernel.org/>. 2.6 kernel source code for all platforms (stable 2.6.22.9 and testing 2.6.23-rc8).



Distribution	DistroWatch Information
Absolute Linux 12.0.4	http://distrowatch.com/absolute
AliXe 0.11	http://distrowatch.com/alixe
ALT Linux 4.0 “Personal Desktop”	http://distrowatch.com/alt
Asianux 3.0	http://distrowatch.com/asianux
BOSS GNU/Linux 2.0	http://distrowatch.com/boss
dyne:bolic 2.5	http://distrowatch.com/dynebolic
Foresight Linux 1.4	http://distrowatch.com/foresight
Freespire 2.0.3	http://distrowatch.com/freespire
Gibraltar Firewall 2.5	http://distrowatch.com/gibraltar
JackLab Audio Distribution 1.0	http://distrowatch.com/jacklab
Kaella 3.2	http://distrowatch.com/kaella
KateOS 3.6	http://distrowatch.com/kate
KnoppMyth R5F27	http://distrowatch.com/knoppmyth
Linux From Scratch 6.3	http://distrowatch.com/lfs
Linux Mint 3.1	http://distrowatch.com/mint
Pioneer Basic Linux 3.0	http://distrowatch.com/pioneer
Pioneer Explorer 1.1	http://distrowatch.com/pioneer
Pioneer Explorer 1.1 Server	http://distrowatch.com/pioneer
Sabayon Linux 3.4 “miniEdition”	http://distrowatch.com/sabayon
Sabayon Linux 3.4f	http://distrowatch.com/sabayon
SystemRescueCd 0.3.8	http://distrowatch.com/systemrescue
Tilix 2.1	http://distrowatch.com/tilix
Vyatta 2.2	http://distrowatch.com/vyatta
X/OS Linux 5.0	http://distrowatch.com/xos

Attack Of The Clone

by Mick Topping, a member of the ICON (Interactive Computer Owners Network), Missouri
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I have been dragging my feet on Vista. I really don't see much in it that I think I need. However, it is getting time for a new laptop, the hard drive on the old one is getting a little crowded, and a little busy, and slow on startup. What I really needed was a way to distract myself from how much I wanted a new LT, and maybe delay getting a new one until Vista gets a little more debugged.

Here we go—a really good deal at a local store on a laptop hard drive, I never could resist a good deal. The staff guy had a hard time finding the special.

A bit of confusion on the sale circular was the reason. But finally found it. Then he says “you are not going to install that by yourself?!?”

NCTCUG

Visit our “sister” user group. The National Capital Technology and Computer User's Group meets the first and fourth Wednesday of the month. They meet in Carlin Hall in Arlington at 5711 South 4th Street. Visit their web site for more information, a map and directions:

<http://www.nctcug.org/>
Meetings start at 7:00 PM

We have a fine technical staff that can do that sort of thing for a small fee”. I had done a similar install before, and did not remember much of a problem, so I politely declined.

The first surprise on opening the box was, right on top, a big yellow card, with bold print: READ THIS! Q. Can I install this drive myself? A. This kit is designed for professional installation ONLY! None of the temporary storage devices, hardware, software, specialized tools, or instructions that may be needed to install this drive is included in this kit.

All right, a challenge—the only thing I love more than a good deal, is a technical challenge. I then worked about 4 hours on studying, preparing and executing stuff like partitioning, formatting, managing, drive-imaging, copying, followed by several more hours of FIXMBR, FIXBOOT C:, copying NTLDR...and generally suffering extreme frustration. Things that worked in years past seemed to no longer work.

After I slept on it, I realized, there may be an easier way. This new drive is a Seagate Hard Drive, a product of the most advanced HD company on earth! (says so right on the box) They must know that they could sell more HDs if they make it easy to transfer stuff to the new HD! Off I go, to <http://www.seagate.com/www/en-us/support/downloads/> after a bit of poking around, I find MaxBlast 5, a Maxtor program. (Maxtor is

now a Seagate subsidiary) However, MaxBlast looks really promising. It is a free download; it is a product of Acronis who makes several high quality disk cloning and data-back-up products.

Now we are making progress. I download and install Maxblast 5, Maxblast has a 60 page manual on line, which I read thoroughly (OK, maybe 10 minutes) then run it. One of the choices is Bootable Media Builder. This allows the creation of a CD that is “bootable”. Flash or other USB also supported—but your BIOS must support USB booting to use it. Note that Windows is ALWAYS using the disk it is booted from, making this disk hard to copy, but by using a bootable CD it is possible to start the computer while the existing hard drive is not in-use by Windows, so it can be more easily copied. Maxblast has two modes for Bootable Media Builder: The Full version, and the Safe version. The “full” version seems more appropriate for using USB devices, which I will need to use, (for externally attached USB drive) so that is what I choose. And since I wish to make a bootable CD, I choose the ISO image, which is the standard format for this capability.

About ready to make a clone of my hard drive. Since the laptop has no capability to add additional internal drives, the new drive is connected externally through a USB-IDE cable (under \$20 for a cable that will interface with 2.5 and 3.5 internal



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drives).

After the bootable CD is created, Power off the computer, then connect the cable to the computer, and the new drive. Put on your good glasses, and examine the large end of the cable closely. There is a set of holes that match the pins on the disk drive, and where is one pin missing on the drive, there is one hole that is plugged on the adapter. If you have an adapter for 3.5 as well as 2.5 drives, there will be one set of holes for either type of drive. Some (about 4) of the pins will remain exposed. (no holes)



In theory, this setup should work when plugged in after the power is on, but with a weak USB power, there have been reports of the drive not spinning-up fast enough and the drive logic indicating a bad drive. Turn on power, and quickly insert the CD. If the computer boots to Windows, you can shut down and retry. Note that you may have to change the BIOS set-up to boot from the CD before the HD. BIOS setup procedures are different on every machine, but are usually accessed by hitting F2 or Delete while booting, but before windows starts. (Check your user's manual)

The Clone Disk is the choice, and if you are happy with your existing disk setup (no partitions, or like the existing proportions) the default may be best. I was able to increase several of my partitions for some slack, and have room for a 20GB spare.

After you have finished the cloning process, it is time to swap the internal hard drive with the external drive.

Remember that laptops have a battery—don't do ANY work on the inside of the laptop without first removing the battery. In fact don't do anything without reading the appropriate sections of your particular laptop's user manual. They are all a little different.

Laptop HDs are usually in a small slide-out tray, my tray was held in place by two screws. The drive is held in the tray by two more screws. If you try really hard, the removal

and replace process can be extended to 10 minutes, but most folks will finish the task in about 5. Note that these screws are frequently tiny, so it is a good idea to do this work on a light-colored surface, in a well lit work area.

In addition to the screws holding the drive in place, there will likely be a small adapter that fits over the pins on the IDE drive and makes it compatible with the connector inside the laptop's tray holder. This figure shows the HD naked connector pins, on the left, and the pins with the adapter installed on the right. This adapter has the same hole pattern as the USB-IDE cable adapter. Note that there are two groups of pins, the 4 pins (on the right) separated from the larger group (on the left), and the 4-pin group is not used in this application, either for the internal drive adapter, or the USB-IDE connection.

Be careful when handling the drive to avoid static discharge. Hardwood floors and leather soled shoes are preferred over carpets and sneakers in the work area. Also, the drives should never be squeezed on their flat surface—when inserting the pins in either the USB-IDE connector, or the internal adapter, grasp the drive by the edges to avoid placing too much pressure on the flat surfaces of the drives.

The ability to easily replace a a HD is very valuable. This gives you a way to do risky experiments, such as using questionable or incompatible software, or perhaps editing the registry while minimizing the risk of having to do a total system reinstall.

The MaxBlast program, system requirements states: At least one Seagate Technology or Maxtor disc drive, as well as several other pretty easy-to-meet requirements. I did not try to see if it would work on other drive brands, and I don't know if it checks. It is a pretty nice feature though, particularly for laptops, where there is no space to add a HD, only to replace a HD.

I would personally not recommend this as a primary data backup, as it is a little tedious, and backups should be as easy as possible. So, HD replacement could be thought of as a way to upgrade the system, as well as a sort of super system-restore. If your laptop is seriously important, such as work related, for a business, get it set-up well, functioning smoothly, and then (after making a separate back-up of your data) create a clone of your hard drive, and swap it to make sure it is a good copy. Then, if the worst happens, your hard drive dies, just swap in

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the the original. Maybe even take the spare with you on trips, along with a little screw driver...

Just don't loose it!

References:

<http://www.harddriveupgrade.com/>
http://www.fonerbooks.com/laptop_1.htm
http://www.seagate.com/support/maxblast/mb_ug_en.pdf

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Hasta la Vista - Gadgets and the Windows Sidebar

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I'm told the literal meaning of "hasta la vista" in Spanish is "until the seeing." Or maybe a more adequate translation is "see you later." But in this column, I'm using that phrase to invite you to take a look at Microsoft's latest version of Windows: Vista.

Devotees of the Apple Mac have for some time had available, in their OS X Tiger operating system, something called Dashboard, which allows them to have what are called Widgets (mini-applications that provide a very simple, tightly focused interface for common tasks) available for instant use. Now Windows Vista introduces something similar in its Windows Sidebar. This

is a narrow strip of "Gadgets" that can be parked along either the right or the left side of your Desktop. You can also drag the Gadgets off the Sidebar and place them somewhere on the Desktop. You can configure the Sidebar to start either every time when Windows starts, or only when you want it to appear. It is available on the Start Menu under All Programs -> Accessories -> Windows Sidebar.

There are a number of ways you can configure the Sidebar after you right click it and select Properties from the context menu. For example, you can set it so that Sidebar is always on top of other windows; you can hide or unhide it from view (unhide it by right clicking the small Sidebar icon in the Notification Area of the Taskbar and select Open); if you have multiple monitors connected to your pc, then you can configure which one the Sidebar is displayed on. You can add and remove Gadgets from the Sidebar (perhaps the easiest way is to right click the small plus (+) sign above the Gadgets and select Add Gadgets from the context menu), and detach them from or reattach them to the Sidebar. You can have multiple copies of the same Gadget open in the Sidebar if you want (which might be convenient for clocks or weather gadgets, for example), and you can drag them to different positions up and down in the Sidebar.

The built-in Gadgets for Windows Vista include: an onscreen Calen-

dar, a clock that can show the time in any time zone or city, a Gadget-based version of your email Windows Contacts, a CPU meter which consists of two gauges that show the load on your computer's microprocessor and RAM, a simple currency converter, a notepad for jotting down reminders, a photo slideshow, a weather Gadget, and others. In addition, there are dozens of other Gadgets you can choose from if you aim your web browser at:

<http://microsoftgadgets.com/>

You can even design your own Gadgets and submit them to Microsoft at one of the links on the above page.

With each Gadget, you can choose from a right click menu which allows you to close the Gadget or adjust the opacity of the display, among other options. When you move your mouse over a Gadget, you will see a little "X" icon and one that looks like the head of a wrench. The X icon can be used to close the Gadget, while the wrench icon accesses that Gadget's property page. With the right click menu of the Windows Sidebar icon in the Notification Area, you can choose to Open the Sidebar if it has been closed, Move Gadgets to the Front, access the Property page for the Sidebar, Add Gadgets, get Help, or Exit the entire Sidebar application.

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**Washington Area User Group Partners
Working Together For Our Members**
CPCUG NCTCUG WACUG

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Portable Data

By Corinne Goeke, a member of the Computer Club of Green Valley, Arizona
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Which of the following is an item for storing computer data?

- A) Thumb Drive
- B) Jump Drive
- C) Flash Drive
- D) Key Drive
- D) Memory Stick
- E) USB Stick
- F) UFD
- G) All of the above

If you guessed “G,” good for you. All of the above names refer to UFDs or “USB Flash Drives.” USB, of course, refers to those little rectangular ports you can find (although there never seems to be enough of them) on the back and front of most computers.

So what is a UFD? You see them connected to people’s key chains, hanging around necks on a cord and stuck in pockets and purses! Simply put, a UFD is a really convenient data storage device. Think of a one-gigabyte UFD as being 694 floppy disks all packed into a two-inch long by 1/2-inch wide package.

UFDs are data storage devices that have replaced CDs, floppies and other methods of carrying data from computer to computer. Plug one into a USB port on any computer,

and you can read and write files on it. It is now the method of choice for transporting data that you need often.

In fact, there is a special class of UFDs called U3 that can also store applications. Plug one of these UFDs into a computer, and you can run Mozilla Firefox, Open Office, or even utilize an operating system such Linux.

The cost of a UFD depends upon the number of bytes it can hold. A 64 megabyte UFD used to be considered more than enough storage. But as the size of data files has increased, so has the size of UFDs. Fortunately, the prices for large storage have dropped considerably. You can pick up a 1 Gigabyte UFD for around \$15. A large UFD currently available is a 16 Gigabyte that sells for \$133 at www.newegg.com.



like twigs <http://inhabitat.com/2006/02/08/ooms-twig-usb-drive/> or even animal characters <http://lab.mimoco.com/>.

So, if you find you need to transport data files from computer to computer, a UFD is an easy solution. They are available anywhere you can buy electronics.

A word of caution. To avoid losing data, be sure to eject a UFD before removing it from the USB port. You can go to My Computer, right click on the UFD device and select eject. Or you can use the Safely Remove Icon on the lower right corner of your desktop.

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The New, the Best, and the Worst

Collected by Pim Borman,
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E-mail Reliability Woes

Banks, mutual funds, credit card companies, utilities, they all want to send me my monthly statements in electronic form over the Internet, “for my convenience,” and incidentally to save on the cost of mailing them out the traditional way. Do I go along with that? No way, José! Just think of all the things that can go wrong.

Security. I already receive regular emails, mostly delegated to spam folders, from fake financial organizations such as PayPal, E-Bay, and banks all over the world. How am I going to distinguish the fishes from the phishes? I do have online access to some of my financial accounts, but I use them strictly one-way: I access them directly by typing in the URL. Some financial institutions have expanded security beyond the usual user name and password check, to let me verify that I’m dealing with the genuine institution. Before I present my user name and password, I am shown a prearranged word and an image to make sure that I am dealing with
See *New, Best and Worst* page 10

the genuine Web site, not some phisher in Nigeria. Such two-way passwords are a good idea, and using an image instead of a word adds additional security.

More security. I still have to worry about key grabber viruses that record what I type. An up-to-date reliable anti-virus program may prevent that, or not. Making payments online can also be hazardous, especially if I can't be absolutely certain I'm not addressing a phisher. I have a Citibank credit card account that will provide me online with a one-time credit card number to be used for a single transaction. That minimizes the risk of fraud. But how am I going to archive online statements securely for years to come unless I print them out first? If necessary, does my own printout provide the same level of proof as an original bank statement?

Reliability. Because spam now makes up the largest part of email crossing the Internet, Internet Service Providers increasingly install spam filters to remove the chaff from the wheat. The problem arises when the spam filter removes legitimate messages without notifying the sender, or even worse, the recipient. It seems to happen all the time and not only because it is easy to misspell an address. Recently I used my local provider, Sigecom.net, to respond to an email from a niece who uses myway.com. Fortunately I was notified by "blackhole.myway.com," that the response bounced, with an error message indicating that there was a mismatch between sender addresses somewhere along the way. Since Sigecom forwards email via another email provider (Mira-something-or-other), that could have been the problem. I sent

the response again, using Google email that time, and all was well.

A week later I sent a SWIPCUG e-mail message to 49 addressees using my Google e-mail account. Two of the mailings, both addressed to members @att.com, were blocked because "it was sent by a system that we have reason to think has sent high levels of spam to our customers in the past." Maybe other members did not receive the message either but I wasn't notified. Again using Google Mail, I resent the message without trouble to just the two blocked recipients. Maybe att.com balked at the fairly long list (49) of addressees?

One of our members, associate director at the local Public Library that hosts our meetings, was unwittingly deprived of messages sent to him and about 10 other members who informally constitute our planning committee. The Library has its own email system, guarded by a properly-named "barracuda" to swallow anything smelling of spam. The system administrator managed to retrieve the messages, belatedly, once he was aware of the problem, and loosened the rules to get our member back in the loop.

It goes to show that even if you are not personally plagued by spam woes, your email communications are still affected. Its security and reliability must be paramount if we are to trust it to replace snail mail in delivering important notices. At the least the sender should be notified, and blocked email should be made available to the recipient in a special folder to allow quick verification of its status. Yahoo and Google mail deposit at least some suspected spam in a separate folder. It takes only seconds to check that folder and remove all the spam while being able to save a genuine message.

More Reliability Issues. When an email address is changed, it is difficult to let all the correspondents know, and chances are that some of them will forget to change all their email address folders. Contrary to good old snail mail, there is no friendly post office that forwards email. Also, the slightest typo will make email undeliverable. Add to that the times that the Internet is inaccessible because of hardware, software or network problems and it is clear that email can not be counted on for the timely and secure delivery of financial and billing statements.

Once Upon A Time...

in a far away land, when I was still a young lad, clocks sat on mantel pieces and had to be wound every so often. They didn't keep very accurate time, and we kept them running at least five minutes fast so we wouldn't miss the train. You see, trains left the station on the exact second in the schedule and the best place in town to find the accurate time was from the big clock at the railroad station.

Now we have clocks and watches that listen at night to the shortwave radio and adjust their time to the nearest second by synchronizing with an atomic clock in Colorado. As a good nerd, I regularly compare the time shown by the atomic clock on the wall with my atomic watch to make sure they agree to the second. And now we travel by planes that sometimes manage to leave the gate within an hour of the scheduled departure time. Or not at all, as the case may be. Progress...

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Dues are collected on an Annual basis and includes three coupons redeemable for WACUG Software Disks, and WAC's monthly newsletter, *The Cursor*, in PDF format

Individual/Corporate/Family Dues: \$25.00
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**Washington Area Computer User Group
 30 Fendall Ave.
 Alexandria, VA 22304-6300**

Make checks payable to WAC. Please do not send cash by mail. *Thank you for joining WAC!*

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E-mail: _____
Membership Survey: Help us to help you by completing this survey.
 List the computer systems you own / use (in order of preference)

Operating System(s): _____

Modem(s): _____

Printer(s): _____

Other Hardware: _____

Favorite Software: _____

Connection: (circle one) Dial-up or Broadband

Circle Your Interests: Photo Printing Investing Games
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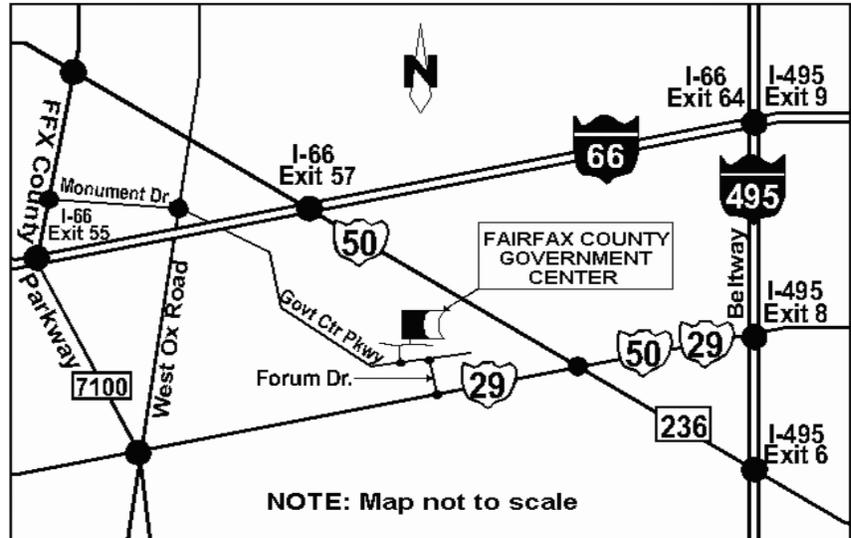
Next WAC Meetings: • Oct 13 • Nov 17 • Dec 15 • Jan 12 • Feb 23

Call (703) 370-7649 for the latest meeting information or Visit our Web Site at:
<http://www.wacug.org>

October Meeting will be held at the Fairfax County Government Center
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Open Source Software – Mostly Free to Use and Modify

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director;
Columnist, The Examiner,
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WEBSITES:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open-source_software

<http://mashable.com/2007/09/23/open-source>

<http://openoffice.org>

<http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/thunderbird>

Wikipedia defines Open Source Software as, "... computer software which source code is available under a license (or arrangement such as the public domain) that meets the Open source definition. This permits users to use, change, and improve the software, and to redistribute it in modified or unmodified form. It is often developed in a public, collaborative manner." Open Source software has been around in its current context since 1998, and hundreds of titles are available for almost any computing need. As a general rule, Open Source software is free to use, modify, and redistribute as the user sees fit. For this reason it has evolved from products that only a geek could love to software that it widely used in corporate, academic, and home environments. Some Open Source software, such as the comprehensive and free office suite, Open Office, has in some places taken a substantial market share from its pricey commercial competitors with hundreds of millions of users. Much of the Open Source software is now in the mainstream, and is no longer in

the exclusive realm of nerds.

Open Source software should be seriously considered as an alternative to commercial software. One website that lists almost 500 categorized Open Source products is online at mashable.com/2007/09/23/open-source. This website contains a wealth of resources that are mostly free for the taking. All businesses, and many households, need some type of accounting software, and Open Source is a viable choice. Some of the accounting programs listed provide budgeting help, personal finance assistance, point of sale (POS) applications that work with barcode readers, inventory control, and other fiscal functions.

Many businesses are now dependant on "Customer Relationship Management" software, known in the industry as CRM. About 20 CRM titles are listed on the mashable.com site listed above. Generally, these titles allow for the recording and utilizing of customer data. One product intended for charitable or religious use, is listed as "CiviCRM - The world's first downloadable constituent relationship management system; fund raising software that allows users to manage information about donors, volunteers, etc." CRM software generally allows for the creation and maintenance of mailing lists, client tracking, project management, and other customer related information.

Many of us would like the opportunity to customize what we see on our Windows desktops, and not be forced to utilize what Bill Gates provides us. Open Source obliges by providing about a dozen "Desktop Environments and Shell Replacements". Some of the functionality added to Windows by these programs includes enhancements

like minimizing windows to floating icons, freeing the taskbar, controlling wallpaper and icons, real-time wallpaper effects, and other customizable functions. For those who like to tinker with Windows, these desktop environments and shell replacements can be a lot of fun to play with.

One computing function that almost all of us deal with on a daily basis is email. While the industry leader, Microsoft's Outlook Express is free (bundled with Internet Explorer), and its commercial big brother Outlook is commonly bundled with Microsoft Office, there are some excellent alternatives in Open Source software. One of the most popular Open Source email clients is Mozilla's Thunderbird, which is a very full featured email client with millions of users. Thunderbird can be downloaded (free) from www.mozilla.com/en-US/thunderbird. Thunderbird has much of the look and feel of Outlook, but provides many advanced features not available in Outlook. Thunderbird is compatible with almost all email services, and is easy and quick to configure. Thunderbird generally provides better security than Outlook, and includes some protection from phishing (identity theft) scams. Spam email is the bane of email, and Thunderbird offers active spam filtering which routes suspicious email to a junk mail folder for quick review and deletion, if desired. It is also a universal email client in that it can run on Windows, Mac OS-X, and Linux, and is currently available in over 30 languages. Thunderbird would be a great alternative for those who want to get away from Microsoft products. Thunderbird, as popular

See *Open Source* next page

as it is, is not the only Open Source email client listed; there are about a dozen email clients listed. The selection is good, and the price can not be beat.

Another computing function that many of us partake in is ripping music, and converting it to formats that can be utilized by our portable music players. Some of us edit videos, such as the ones we take with our camcorders. The Open Source website at mashable.com/2007/09/23/open-source lists over three dozen ripping, music editing, and video editing utilities. Formats supported by some of these Open Source utilities include MP3, MPEG, MPEG1, MPEG2, DivX, WAV and several other formats. Some of the software will edit and repair damaged audio and video files, while others allow for the conversion of DVDs to other video formats. There is an impressive selection of audio and video utilities available as Open Source, and they are worthy of consideration. Once media is available in digital formats, some means of playing it may be necessary, and this website lists several dozen media players.

Another popular computing task is file sharing and “FTP” (File Transfer Protocol), and there are about three dozen free utilities listed. While some are for traditional file swapping, others allow for the remote access and synchronization of computers.

Many of us are artistic and graphically inclined, but the major commercial graphics design programs are often expensive. Open Source can come to the rescue with about 40 titles to choose from, allowing for an excellent selection. Some

Open Source graphics utilities are simple photo editors, while others include 2D and 3D animation. Other Open Source utilities provide sophisticated webpage authoring tools where a novice can produce a professional appearing webpage.

Adobe’s PDF (Portable Document Format) has become the de-facto standard for saving and distributing documents in “What you see is what you get” (WYSIWYG) format. While Adobe Acrobat (writer) is an expensive utility, there are about a dozen Open Source programs that can perform a similar task for free.

A lot of busy individuals need a “PIM” (Personal Information Manager) to keep track of their personal information, appointments, calendars, address books, to-do lists, and other daily mundane tasks. About a dozen “Personal Information and Task Managers” are available as Open Source, which may provide some help in controlling our often hectic lives.

There are several other categories of Open Source software listed, including project managers, reporting tools, RSS (news) feeds, system utilities, office suites, office programs, and web browsers such as Firefox. Open Source is here to stay and may be a key player in the future of software. It is definitely worthy of a serious look and consideration.

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This and That

By Elizabeth B. Wright, a member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City
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Have you accessed the WindowsXP “Restore” option to reset your computer to an earlier time? We often need to do this when things go haywire after installing some new software. Fiddling around with old programs or offbeat wares can sometimes land you in hot water operating wise. I found myself in just such a mess not long ago. Fortunately I had made a restore point prior to installing the renegade software, so I was able to use it to get things back to normal. Well, almost.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT:

One of my oldest and most valued programs is CorelPaint. Suddenly, after going through the restore procedure, I began getting an error message plus having the program refuse to open when I double clicked on the desktop shortcut icon. This applied to CorelDraw as well. The error message said something about trying to install the program, then it would go through some strange digital machinations before rolling everything back and giving up. Strangely enough though, if I double clicked on a .jpg or .tif file in Explorer, the files would open the program with no difficulty. Several days were spent opening graphic files in this manner when it suddenly dawned on me that perhaps the programs might open from the executable files directly. Sure enough, when I went to them, again in Explorer, they both opened like clockwork. So why did it take me

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This and That from previous page

several more days to figure out that the icons on my desktop had some way become corrupted? I don't want to know the answer to that one.

Anyway, after deleting the icons, new ones were put in place by right clicking on the executable files in Explorer and double clicking the "Send to desktop" option from the menu. Usually the names given icons made in this way are not the best, so they usually get changed to something more useful on my computer. Often part of the name is "shortcut". Who needs that? It's fairly simple to change the name. Just click once on the icon, wait long enough so that the computer doesn't interpret the next click as a double click, then the icon text will be in "Edit" mode. You may have to experiment with the timing for this since not all "mice" are set for the same response time. The two clicks need to be fairly close together, but not close enough for a double click. Once in "Edit" mode you can type in whatever name that makes better sense to you.

We should all know by now that if there is a curved arrow in the lower left corner of the icon then the icon is a shortcut to the executable file, not the program or file itself. Be very careful. Sometimes there actually are icons for executable programs placed on your desktop when the programs are installed. Those icons will not have the curved arrow. Don't delete them unless you want to get rid of the program itself. This applies also to other things you might have placed on the desktop yourself, such as graphic or document files. It might be wise to leave those names in their original form. It might also be a good idea to examine the icons on your computer

to see how many, if any, DO NOT have the curved arrow. Chances are there won't be many, possibly none. It is helpful to know if there are any that reflect actual programs or files, just to keep yourself informed about your own computer system.

It always pays to figure out what your computer is up to. Since it lives a life separate from yours it is often not possible to tell just what it has been doing in your absence. With the new powerful operating systems, many, many things go on in the background when the machine is powered on, whether you are there or not. Super nerds probably have eliminated many of the automatic actions, but most of us just muddle on, thankful that the computer runs at all.

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Windows Calendar

by Lynn Page, Editor, Crystal River Users Group, Florida
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newsletter(at)crug.com

Windows Calendar, built into Windows Vista, helps you plan your activities and coordinate your plans with those of others. With Windows calendar you can set up multiple calendars and view a single or multiple calendars at a time. This makes it easy to compare the calendars and look for conflicts in scheduling.

I personally use the calendar in Outlook for my scheduling but if you don't have Office the Windows Calendar is a great planning tool. It is especially useful if you need to handle a variety of different schedules. Set up a calendar for everyone in the family or group. Then use Windows Calendar to integrate them to compare daily activities. I quickly set up the three calendars for display in this combined view.

Appointments

With Windows Calendar, you can create appointments and set up an alert to remind you when the appointment is approaching. Set Windows Calendar to alert you minutes, hours, or days ahead of time. I set my reminders in Outlook for 2 days notice.

If you attend regular meetings, like the CRUG membership meeting, set up recurring appointments. In Windows Calendar create one appointment and then have the calendar set up a series of similar appointments at the selected intervals.

Tasks

See *Outlook Express* next page

Windows Calendar includes a personal task list. For each task, describe what is required, set a completion deadline, choose a priority ranking, and then track of your progress right in the calendar. You can set reminders like those for appointments. As a task is completed, simply check it off the list.

Sharing Calendars

With Windows Calendar, you can set up individual calendars for multiple people. This makes it easy for people using the same computer to coordinate their personal schedules. They can quickly compare information from any or all of the calendars, side-by-side in a single view. Each person can manage their own schedule and view the others' calendars, selectively or all at once.

Set Up a Calendar

To set up a calendar in Windows Vista click Start and type Calendar in the Start Search box. In the results, click Windows Calendar under Programs to select it. A calendar opens with the name assigned to the computer. You can generate this calendar or in the File drop down menu select New Calendar and start fresh.

In the new calendar type in a name in the Calendars task pane and click Enter. This calendar and any others appear in the Calendars task pane. Clicking to add checks in the boxes next to the calendar lets you see those selected together. In the Details pane, select a color to help identify each calendar.

Add Appointments and Tasks

Once the calendars are set up you can add appointments and tasks. Click New Appointment or New Task on the toolbar and add the information.

You can even publish your calendar to your web site and send invitations and appointments by email.

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