# *The Cursor*

## *Monthly Newsletter of the*
### *Washington Area Computer User Group*

**Meeting Location**
**OLLI , 4210 Roberts Road,**
**Fairax, VA**

apcug
Member of

**Next Meeting:**
**February 21, 2009**

## Presidential Bits
### January 2009 Meeting
by Paul Howard

Our January meeting, held jointly with the computer club of the Osher Life-long Learning Institute on Roberts Road in Fairfax, was a great success, with an enthusiastic crowd of fifty one folks in attendance. WAC's annual meeting and election of officers was held, with the four incumbents returned to office. If you'd like to serve the group as a member of the board of directors, please contact Geof Goodrum or myself.

Jim Brueggeman's presentation on AOL's email program inaugurated "Learn 30" sessions - thirty minutes of topics to help novice users get up to speed, and help more experienced folks polish techniques. We'll be experimenting with basic topics and the sequencing of meeting agendas for several months, in an effort to find a winning formula. Please help us with your suggestions and comments.

Lorrin Garson fascinated the group with a presentation about Amazon's Kindle Electronic Book Reader. Lorrin's presentation is available as a PDF file, for download on the web site's "recent meetings" page. http://www.wacug.org/recmtgs.html

Our Saturday, February 21st joint meeting with OPCUG will feature a video presentation and commentary by Geof Goodrum and Bob Rott about the 2009 Consumer Electronics Show. For several years, WACUG's intrepid Las Vegas convention center explorers have braved the wilds of one of the largest trade shows in the world. Once again, Geof and Bob will present video and images they captured at the show, and tell us what's on the Tech horizon that they think will be so cool we'll have to have at least one in every color!

Digital Converter Box: Now What - How do I hook it up? Presented by Paul Howard, this session will feature a live demonstration of connecting Digital TV converter boxes. While many folks have their primary televisions served by satellite, cable, or FiOS service, what about those TV sets in spare bedrooms, home office, etc.? You don't have to spend $300+ on a new set, or have new cable runs and additional subscription fees to get a better picture than you ever received before over-the-air. Learn about converter box choices, antennas, and more. Bring your flash drive (thumb drive, keychain drive) to get copies of an ex-

# Lloyd's Web Sites for February, 2009

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

*February's Sites:*

1. Microsoft: Windows Defender a free program that helps protect your computer against pop-ups, slow performance, and security threats caused by spyware – www.microsoft.com/athome/security/spyware/software/default.mspx

2. Fast Food Calorie Counter – www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/flash/health/caloriecounter/caloriecounter.html

3. Something Store.  For ten bucks Something Store will send you something – You don't get to pick. **–** www.somethingstore.com

4. If you have stuff to rent connect with people who need to rent stuff – http://us.zilok.com

5. Bridge Tracker: Check the Safety of Bridges You Cross – www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21840954

6. Encyclopedia Smithsonian: The Smithsonian from A to Z – www.si.edu/Encyclopedia_SI

7. Fact Monster.  Get homework help, sports facts, geography,etc. **–** www.factmonster.com

8. Illinois Has Long Legacy of Public Corruption **–** www.msnbc.msn.com/id/28141995

9. Today's Front Pages – www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages – The Newseum displays these daily newspaper front pages in their original, unedited form. Some front pages may contain material that is objectionable to some visitors. Viewer discretion is advised.

10. FedMoney.org: Guide to U. S. Government Grants/Loans Benefiting Students – www.fedmoney.org – FedMoney.org is the most comprehensive FREE full-text online resource on all U.S. government grants and student financial aid programs. Here you will find detailed and up-to-date information about (1) who can apply, (2) how to apply, (3) full contact info, and much more... for over 130 government grants and loans (scholarships, fellowships, traineeships) related to education.

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## 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

**Washington Area User Group Partners Working Together For Our Members**

**CPCUG**

**NCTCUG**

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**OPCUG**

# GNU/Linux SIG

By Geof Goodrum, WAC

## 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 December 29, 2008 – February 2, 2009.

| Distribution |
| --- |
| Absolute Linux 12.2.1 |
| ALT Linux 4.1.1 |
| Berry Linux 0.94 |
| Clonezilla Live 1.2.1-37 |
| CrunchBang Linux 8.10.02 |
| GeeXboX 1.2 |
| Gentoox 7.0 "Home", 5.0 "Pro" |
| gnuLinEx 0.5-2 |
| Granular Linux 1.0 |
| KNOPPIX 6.0 |
| MoLinux 4.2 |
| MOPSLinux 6.2 |
| MythDora 10.21 |
| Network Security Toolkit 1.8.1 |
| PapugLinux 09.1 |
| Pardus Linux 2008.2 |
| Parted Magic 3.5 |
| Red Hat Enterprise Linux 5.3 |
| Sabayon Linux 4 "LiteMCE" |
| Slamd64 Linux 12.2 |
| StartCom Enterprise Linux 5.0.3 |
| SystemRescueCd 1.1.4 |
| Topologilinux 7.0.1 |
| Ubuntu 8.04.2 |

## Linux Software of the Month

The software described below is downloadable at the links provided or may be requested on CD, or copied onto a USB flash drive at the WAC meeting. In addition, 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 (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 multiple CD-Rs or single DVD±R are available with a $6 donation.

### February 2009

**GNU Typist** – v2.8.2. http://www.gnu.org/software/gtypist/. Free GNU General Public License C source code by Michael Opdenacker and the GNU Project. GNU Typist (also called gtypist) is a universal typing tutor. You can learn correct typing and improve your skills by practicing its exercises on a regular basis through drills and speed tests. It comes with several typing tutorials: in Czech, English (Qwerty and Dvorak keyboard), Russian and Spanish, as well as simpler exercises in German, French and Norwegian. It interprets a simple and intuitive scripting language that describes typing tutorials. You can easily modify existing tutorials or create new ones according to your needs. Thanks to its execution in text mode with the curses library, it can be compiled and used on several operating systems.

**haXe** – v2.02. http://haxe.org/. Free GNU General Public License, Berkley Software Distribution (BSD) license, and Lesser GPL (LGPL) installer and source code by Nicolas Cannasse and others. haXe (pronounced as hex) is an open source programming language. While most of the other languages are bound to their own platform (Java to the JVM, C# to .Net, ActionScript to the Flash Player), haXe is a multiplatform language. haXe code can be compiled into Javascript (.js), Flash (.swf) versions 6 thru 10, PHP, NekoVM bytecode for dynamic web pages, and C++ source code complete with makefiles. The idea behind haXe is to let the developer choose the best platform to do a given job. In general, this is not easy to do because every new platform comes with its own programming language. What haXe provides to you is:

- *a standardized language with many good features*
- *a standard library (including Date, Xml, Math...) that works the same on all platforms*
- *platform-specific libraries: the full APIs for a given platform are accessible from haXe*

**LinCity-NG** – v2.0. http://lincity-ng.berlios.de/wiki/index.php/Main_Page. Free GNU General Public License source code and executable installer by WolfgangB. LinCity-NG is a city simulation game. It is a polished and improved version of the classic LinCity game.

In the game, you are required to build and maintain a city. You can win the game either by building a sustainable economy or by evacuating all citizens with spaceships. This re-lease includes water as a resource and building bridges across rivers.

**Kernel Source** – http://www.kernel.org/. 2.6 kernel source code for all platforms (stable 2.6.28).



# Screen Shot of LinCity

# Consumer Electronics Show 2009

Joe Nuvolini, President, Pikes Peak Computer Application Society, CO
http//ppcompas.apcug.org
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The trip to Las Vegas was uneventful. The line to get a cab was about 20–25 minutes long as many were arriving for the show. The Somerset House Motel was surprisingly pleasant. The room had two beds, lots of closet space, a nice bathroom, and a kitchenette with a frig, sink, and stove. The walk from the motel to the press room in South Hall was about 15 minutes.

Wednesday evening, I attended the Sony press conference at the LVCC. The presentation lasted about 30 minutes and was about all the "new toys" they would be showing at CES. One was the Sony Vaio P series. It is an Ultra Mobile PC (UMPC) weighing 1.4 lbs with wireless WAN/LAN, an 8" hi res screen and built in GPS. It runs about $900. They showed some of their Bravia LDC HDTV's in the 26" to 56" range. Other Sony items were their 10–12 Mp digital cameras and digital picture frames. It was a nice affair with wine, beer, cheese and crackers, and fruit.

The press room featured sweet rolls and Starbucks coffee for breakfast. Chatted with member Frank Fraser on my ASUS using Skype. It worked fine. While checking out Skype, I found my daughter, Marie, in Portland online so I got to see her and my granddaughter, Sara.

The South Hall opened early the first day so I hit the floor at the opening gun. Stopped at the SDCA (that's an FLA for SD Card Association). They reported that the next generation of SD cards (SDXC) will hold up to two terabytes of data and will have read/write speeds of 104 Mb per second with a road map to 300 Mb per second. Hopefully we will see them later this year. At that rate you could buy a camera for a newborn with one of these cards and take photos his/her whole life and never erase any. Imagine, one's whole life on an SD card. UMPCs were everywhere at this show. I had no idea how popular they had become. I spent some time in the morning of the first day in the South Hall, Central Hall, and North Hall (automotive area). I was working my way over to Piero's for Lunch@Piero's sponsored by Pat Meier Johnson. I missed this event last year and wanted to make sure to get there first thing this year. Pat was as lovely and gracious as ever. They did not serve lunch this year, but I had planned to have lunch at the Press Room.

I attended the Sandisk press briefing. They announced several new items. The first was their line of SSDs (Solid State Drives). They now have them in sizes up to 240 GB. Prices range from $149 for a 60 GB to $499 for a 240 GB; still a bit pricey. Next was Slot Music. These are devices that play pre-loaded micro SD cards. We all were given a slot player. It will have to wait until I get home to report on it. They also have a slot radio that plays the micro SDs and is also an FM radio. It will sell for about $99.99. Slot radio cards will run about $39.99 but will be loaded with music. A couple of other items of news: iTunes will change their pricing structure with songs going from $.69 to $1.39, depending on the popularity of the song. They will also no longer be protected.

While at CES, I watched the BCS football championship; first half at the Riviera and the second half in my room. Was glad to see Florida win and also to see that Utah was rated #2! At lunch on Thursday, I sat next to a gentleman from Rome whose family had relatives in Civita di Bagnoregio, one of my favorite spots in Italy. I saw him again at the Victorinox press conference. More on that later.

The Central Hall was loaded with big screen LCD panels from an assortment of vendors with spectacular high definition displays. I spent some time wandering around there. As mentioned earlier, Victorinox, makers of Swiss Army knives, held an affair for the press at the end of the third day. Their big news item was the announcement of Presentation Pro. Many of you have seen their knives. Well, Presentation Pro lets you load a presentation on their flash drive which is part of a Swiss Army knife. The presentation data is encrypted when loaded on the drive using an algorithm based on your finger print so it is totally secure. The unit also has an LED pointer for use during the presentation. The button to advance the slides is also on the unit, using bluetooth technology. Victorinox has been in the business of making Swiss Army knives for close to 125 years and has always tried to stay on the cutting edge of technology. It was quite an impressive presentation which, by the way, was made using their new device. The attendees received a device which looks like a pocket knife but, in fact, contains a flash drive, pen and flashlight. The flash drive contained their press kit.

On Saturday I went over to the Sands/Venetian area to see what all was in that venue. It was home for many gadget devices as well as the home for the Asian vendors' displays. One really neat device I saw was by Pogoplug. This unit is about the size of the electrical conversion transformer I take to Italy with me each year. It plugs into an AC wall outlet. There are two jacks on the other side. Into one you plug your external USB hard drive. Into the second, you plug an RG45 CAT5 cable from your router. You log into the vendor's Web site and register the units registration number, your e-mail address, and password. Once registered, you can access the drive from anywhere in the world. It then appears as a local drive on the computer you are using until you log off. Pretty neat. It runs about $79.

Speaking of remote access, I have been writing daily reports from my home desktop computer using logmein.com, which I wrote about a few months ago. It works great. I even downloaded Windows 7 beta onto my home desktop when it was released that weekend. It was about 2.5 GB so it took a while. However, the ISO file was sitting there for me when I got home. I plan to borrow an unused computer from the office to run it on. I'm sure I will have to add a bit of RAM.

By Sunday, the last day, many of the attendees had departed so there was not a lot of activity. The effects of the recession were obvious at this year's show. There were fewer vendors. Attendance was down 23% from last year (110,000 versus 140,000). Hopefully, if the economy improves a bit this year, next year the show will return to its old robust size.

That's it for CES 2009. I look forward to CES 2010!

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tensive collection of digital TV information.

Wrapping up the meeting will be a "Learn 30" Session on Email - Basics and More, including an Extended Q&A session presented by Paul Howard & WAC experts. Expanding on last month's session, we'll try and cover some of the many questions our previous meeting generated. Bring your email "trials" and queries - we'll try to help with answers or approaches to help you solve those nagging issues.

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# Performing Better Searches

By Sharon Housley, VP, NotePage
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Performing and perfecting search engine results can save web surfers lots of time and energy. Understanding the nuances of searching allows researchers to immediately drill down and locate the information they are seeking, without having to wade through a myriad of irrelevant search results in the process. The increasing complexity of search engines has made understanding search engines a necessity for those who spend any amount of time online. The following search tips are standards that will work in most of the major search engines.

## How To Find What You Are Looking For?

As the popularity of the Internet grows, more and more results are returned for even the most obscure search phrases. In order to save time, web surfers need to increase their search relevancy. It is advisable to use multiple search terms to produce better search results. Searchers should use specific words and phrases to find what they're are looking for, while filtering out irrelevant and unwanted results.

In searching, more usually means less. Using more keywords in a search will help qualify the search and make it more specific to what you are looking for. It is all about striking a balance; more search terms will reduce the number of search results, but those results will be more accurate. Remember that you can always refine the search further if there are too many results returned in the initial search.

### Capitalization Is Irrelevant

The major search engines ignore capitalization. Upper case and lower case search phrases will deliver the same results.

### Order Matters

Keep in mind that the order in which the terms are entered into the search box will affect the search results. The most important terms should appear first in the list of search words.

### Word Stemming

Major search engines will provide

results that use word stemming. Word stemming includes variants of the terms that were searched for. For example, searching on the term fish in a major search engine will generate organic search results that also contain the terms fishing, fishes, and fisher.

### Exact

Using quotations around a search phrase will generate search results that contain only that specific search phrase, exactly as it was entered. For example, searching on the exact phrase "rocking horse" in a major search engine will only generate search results that contain the phrase rocking horse. The results will not include any results that contain "horse rocking" -- even though both terms appear, they do not appear in the proper order for an exact match.

### Do Not Include

Adding a (-) negative/minus sign before a search term will filter the results so that they contain the first term but not the negated word. For example, entering the search phrase horses -rocking into a major search engine will return search results about horses but not about rocking horses.

### Must Include

If you want search results that only include a specific word, just type a (+) plus sign in front of a search term. The results produced will always contain that term. For example, conducting a search horse + carousel will result in all search results that contain carousel, and may include horse as well.

### Similar Words

Adding a (~) tilde character in front of a search word will generate search

results that not only include the specified search term, but will also include all words considered to be related to the original search term. For example, using the search term ~soda will result in organic search engine results that not only include soda, but also include pepsi, pop, cola, coke, bottle, and soft drink.

### Either Or

Adding an OR parameter between two search terms will result in search listings that include either the first or the second word in the search results. For example, searching on the terms soda OR bottle will generate search results that may contain both terms soda bottle or it will produce results that contain either soda or bottle but not both in the same search listings.

### Advanced Searches And Segmented Searches

Many search engines allow you to specify the type of content you wish to search in. For example, you can often search just news articles, just blogs, or just images. If you are looking for a specific type of media, segmenting your search can be helpful. Searches can be conducted to locate webpages that contain a specific language, or a specific file type (ie. pdf, rss, etc). Simply use the search engine's advanced search option and select the content, language, file type, etc to filter your search results.

### Search Meta Words

Meta keyword searches give search engines special instructions. When the meta search words are used, a specific type of search is conducted. Here are some of the most common meta search terms...

**define:** When define: is used at the beginning of a search word or phrase, the search engine results

will be a definition of the word or phrase.

**site:** When site: is entered in the search box, followed by a domain, the search engine locates all documents within a specific domain and all of its subdomains. This is an easy way to get a rough idea of the number of pages indexed on a domain.

**link:** When link: is used and followed by a URL, the search results will include all the web pages that are indexed by the search engine which contain links to the specified URL.

**inurl:** When inurl: is used, followed by a keyword or phrase, the search results will include links to web pages that contain the specific keyword or phrase in the urls themselves.

**intitle:** When intitle: is searched on in conjunction with a keyword or phrase, the search engine locates search results that contain the specified keyword or phrase in the web page title.

Web surfers can save large amounts of time and energy by optimizing their search techniques with these helpful tips.

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Sharon Housley manages marketing for FeedForAll http://www.feedforall.com software for creating, editing, publishing RSS feeds and podcasts. In addition Sharon manages marketing for RecordForAll http://www.recordforall.com audio recording and editing software.

# How can I keep my PC clean and tidy?

by Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc. tiplet (at) gabegold.com

Like changing your car's oil or replacing your home's air conditioner filter, a little PC cleaning pays off with a faster, more reliable, and longer-lasting computer.

Although nothing suggested here is either rocket science or inherently dangerous, always follow the medical adage, "First, do no harm". So don't do anything that makes you uncomfortable (perhaps have a more experienced person clean up while you watch and learn), and back up your system and data. Then reboot, to get a clean start, and don't open any programs,

Before starting, to measure what your cleanup deletes, determine how full your hard drive is. Open My Computer, Right Click your hard drive (usually labeled "Local Disk (C:)"), and click Properties. Note how much space is used and free, then close the dialogue box.

Next, use Windows' built-in disk cleaning tool. Click Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Cleanup, and the drive to clean, likely C. Choose what to clean; default selections are usually what you need. To be extra thorough, if your system has been running problem free, click the More Options tab and then Clean Up System

Restore. Confirm your choice and click OK.

Delete Web browser temporary files. Using Internet Explorer, click Tools on the Menu Bar, Internet Options, and Delete Files under the General tab. Other browsers provide similar functions, sometimes using "cache" to refer to the collection of temporary files.

Delete unneeded personal files, items outdated and no longer used. While most Microsoft Office programs (Word, Excel, etc.) store their files in the My Documents folder, you may have changed this default location. And other apps likely have their own favorite places to stash files. Look around, since cluttered files make Windows work harder to get things done and waste time and resources when they're backed up. If you collect photos, music and such, delete those you no longer want or need, perhaps saving them on CD/DVD or USB drive. Sorting files by size or date helps find deletion candidates.

If you run PC-based email software, it's worth periodically purging Sent and Trash folders, perhaps pitching material older than a certain date. Then look for a Compact Folders option, sometimes on the File pull-down menu, which squeezes out unused space from email folders.

Weed out software no longer used or useful by uninstalling applications with Window's Control Panel Add/Remove Software tool.

The Recycle Bin, which preserves erased files for recovery until it's emptied, has likely grown during this cleanup process. To empty it, Right Click its Windows desktop icon and click Empty Recycle Bin. Note that programs such as Norton Utilities may offer other cleanup options for the Recycle Bin and other Windows components.

Finally, remember that when writing to your hard drive, Windows places bits of each file in the next available open space on the hard drive.

While Windows can reassemble them, having many files fragmented slows access to them. So, to store all files as single entities, periodically defragment the hard drive. To do this, click Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Defragmenter, select a drive, and click Defragment.

When finished, compare the amount of hard drive space used and free to what you saw initially. If this is the first cleanup you've done in a while, the amount of space recovered may surprise you.
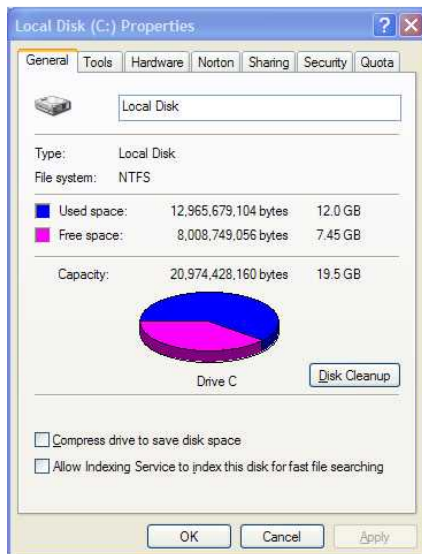
Many books give much more detailed instructions for PC cleanups. Search Amazon.com for "degunking windows" and "cleaning windows" to see choices (but don't be distracted by instructions for cleaning house, office, and car windows!).

**Screen shot showing the resultant free disk space on Drive C:**

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# How To Send An Email Message To Any Cell Phone

by Ken Peters, Product Review / Special Interests, Hilton Head Island Computer Club, SC
www.hhicc.org
product.review (at) hhicc.org

Impress your kids, grandkids and friends with your ability to text. Send a text message to their cell phone by email from your computer.

Most cell phones have the ability to send and receive short text messages. This is called short message service (SMS) or text paging. This service can take email

sent over the internet and deliver them to a cell phone as a text message. Each carrier has its own email address extension i.e. @tmomail.net for T Mobile carrier.

The two things you need to know to send a message are the person's cell phone number and their carrier's email extension. So to send to

a T Mobile phone, enter the phone number and add the extension - 8433216549@tmomail.net

Some of the common cell phone emails are:

**Alltel AT&T** (formerly Cingular)

10-digit phone number@message. alltel.com 10-digit phone number@ txt.att.net

Example: 2125551212@message. alltel.com Example: 2125551212@ txt.att.net

**Boost Mobile Nextel** (now part of Sprint Nextel)

10-digit phone number@myboost-mobile.com 10-digit telephone number@messag

Example: 2125551212@myboost-mobile.com ing.nextel.com

Example: 7035551234@messaging. nextel.com

**T-Mobile Verizon**

10-digit phone number@tmomail. net 10-digit phone number@vtext. com

Example: 4251234567@tmomail. net Example: 5552223333@vtext. com

Virgin Mobile USA US Cellular

10-digit phone number@vmobl. com 10digitphonenumber@email. uscc.net

Example: 2622341256r@vmobl. com Example: 2125551212@ email. uscc.net

Sprint PCS (now Sprint Nextel)

10-digit phone number@messag-ing.sprintpcs.com

Example: 2125551234@messaging. sprintpcs.com

If you can't find the email address for the carrier, check the carrier's website (Links above) or call their customer service.

The one receiving the message may be charged 10 to 15 cents per message unless they have a plan that includes text messaging. Your kids and grandkids most probably do have a text plan. There is a 160 character limit per message including the email address and the subject line. Some carriers will split the message into two messages if it is longer.
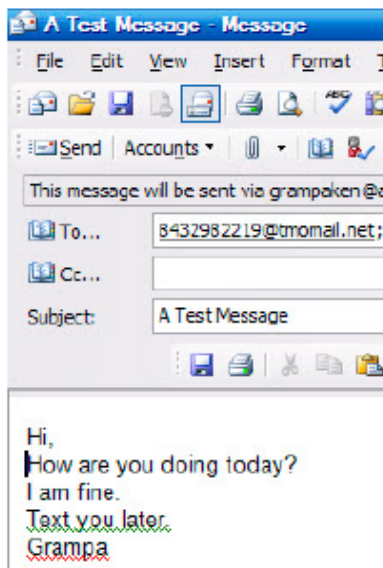
The person receiving the email text message can reply to you from their phone and sometime later you'll receive their reply in your email inbox. If you don't like texting from a cell phone or hate trying to type a message with those small phone keys, give this a try. It's fun.

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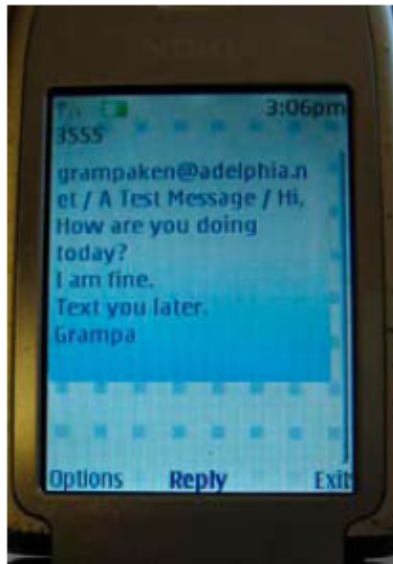
The message will look similar to this.
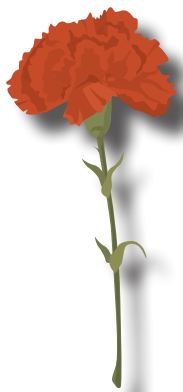
Screen shot on next page

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The email message



Appears on cell phone

**How the message sent at the beginning of the article appears during creation / addressing and on the cell received on the cellphone**



*Please be my valentine*

# The Cursor

## The 2008 WAC Board of Directors, SIG Leaders and other Volunteers

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**Web Site Team:** ............................................ Paul Howard and Chuck Roberts
**Meeting Setup/APCUG Liaison:** ............... Bill Walsh, 703-241-8141, bill.walsh(at)cox.net

**Send membership inquiries and address changes to: membership@wacug.org**
**Send article submission and reprint requests to the Editor: cursor@wacug.org**

## WAC Membership/Renewal Application

Dues are collected on an Annual basis and includes: downloadable links for WACUG Selected Software (formeraly DOM), and WAC's monthly newsletter, *The Cursor*, in PDF format

Individual/Corporate/Family Dues: $25.00
$5 annual surcharge for delivery of the Cursor by 1st Class mail

Remit payment in person at the WAC Membership table on meeting day, or by mail to:
**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!*
Complete if you name and address do not appear on the reverse side. Include E-mail Address
Name: _____
Street: _____
City: _____
State: _____ Zip: _____
Phone: ( ) – _____

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
Digital Photography    Internet Access    Education   Music
Graphics/Animation    Genealogy    Video   Finance
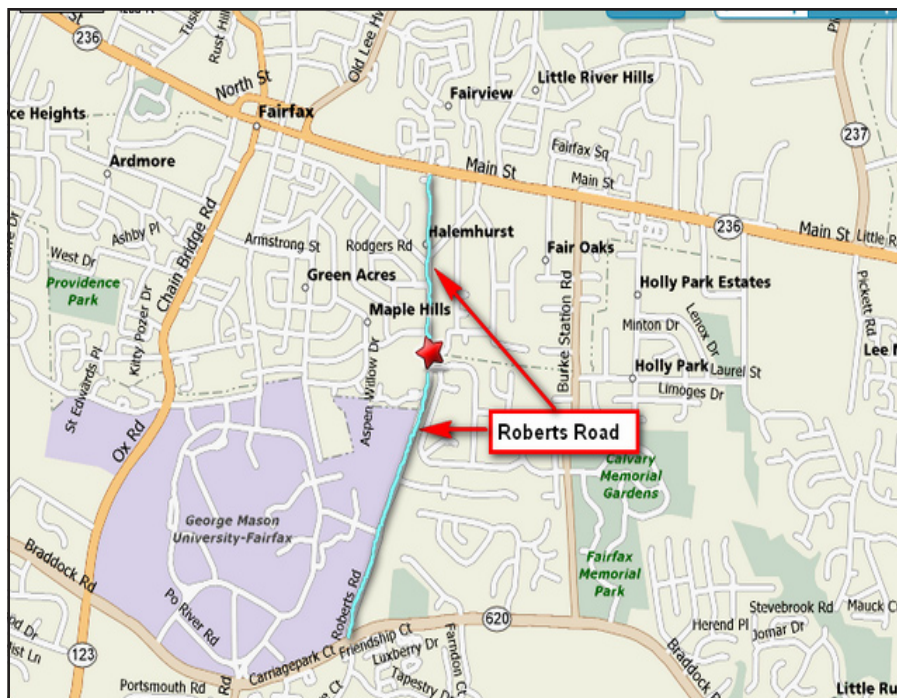Programming Language(s) _____
Hardware Upgrades/Repair      List others below

Next WAC Meetings:   • Mar 21      •April 18    • May 9      • Jun 20      • Jul 18

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

February Meeting will be held at the *Osher Lifelong Learning Institute* Fairfax, VA. Detailed directions were provided in the January Cursor on page 5

FREE ADMISSION

BRING A FRIEND!

Service Desks Open at 12:30 Meeting Starts at 1:00 PM
FREE ADMISSION
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Washington Area Computer User Group
30 Fendall Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22304-6300
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Label
_____

# Keeping Up

Paul Howard, WACUG

## FiOS Foibles

Verizon's fiber optic communications offering, FiOS, was connected at my home on March 7th of last year. I'm using the Internet offering with 15 Mbit download speed, 2 Mbit upload; and the FiOS Premier TV option, which provides seemingly hundreds of TV channels, including a wide assortment of music programming.

Since installation, I've had very few problems. Late one morning, returning from some errands, I found the Internet not functioning. A call to the repair number announced a general service failure, due to be repaired within four hours. By the time Linda and I returned from lunch, two hours later, everything was back to normal. I also had to call the repair number, and have the customer tech send the "reset" signal to the three digital adapters (low end set top boxes) I have serving three TVs, when Verizon eliminated analog RF service with an all-digital upgrade on the FiOS TV system in September. This enabled the adapters to receive the full lineup of channels in the Premier TV service tier. Previously, only the local tier of TV service had been provided via digital adapters.

Several weeks ago, the digital adapter for the bedroom TV stopped displaying the channel number when changing channels. Amazing how hooked we've become on that piece of technology. So, after checking the other adapters, which were working fine, and looking in the FiOS manuals, and power cycling the adapter several times, I called the service number. I started down the calling tree for FiOS TV service, and identified the problem with a single adapter. The voice response system asked for the serial number of the digital adapter with the problem.

In juggling the tiny portable wireless phone handset, while looking for the tag with the serial number on the bottom of the unit, I managed to disconnect from the Verizon service number. When I called back, the system recognized that I'd called in recently, and passed me to a service tech before I'd gotten very far down the response tree. I gave him the 12 digit alphanumeric serial number for the digital adapter, he sent the reset signal, and the time and channel logo box re-appeared on the screen. Four minutes from "broke" to "fixed!"

Apparently, the same digital bug invaded the FiOS DVR, but with different symptoms. A couple of shows we'd recorded were nowhere to be found. I figured I fat-fingered something. Same result on some others - this was serious! About two nights a week, we watch two or three shows, and record two or three more. Missing episodes of "24" or "Lost" can seriously impair finding the next clue!

We sat down with the manual, and went through the suggested recording procedure. Nothing would get the DVR to indicate it was going to record the designated show, when looking at the recording schedule. Upsetting, but at least I had some vindication - I hadn't blown the recording setup for those shows - the box just didn't follow instructions! Call the service number, slide down the response tree to "problems with DVR." Voice response says, "Hold on while we send the reset signal." Badda Bing! Back in business in three minutes!

The most surreal FiOS foible occurred last week on "Don't call me, it's Tuesday" evening, when Linda and I generally have a full lineup of cop shows to keep us entertained. We got up from supper at a commercial break, as Jethro Gibbs and the NCIS team chased another killer of Naval officers. But the living room TV is showing "Entertainment Tonight" - What the hey?" Switch to the antenna input, and watch channel 9 the old fashioned way - over the air. With every commercial break, it's back to the FiOS input - it's running maybe 47 minutes behind. What gives? The family room TV's ok; also the computer with the TV tuner card behind the FiOS digital adapter's getting NCIS on channel 9 just fine.

At nine o'clock, the next show in our usual viewing lineup was a repeat, so I jumped on the phone, and dialed the FiOS service number. I only got one step down the voice response chain, and the channel 9 stream adjusted itself to the correct program in the proper time frame. With my fourth call to the service number in three weeks, did the system just sent the TV reset signal? More magic computer stuff, perhaps?

*Full Disclosure: The author worked for Verizon and various Bell System predecessor companies for 31 years. As a retiree, he enjoys a modest employee discount on several Verizon services.*

# Juice Your Broadband Speed

Written by Vinny La Bash, a member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., FL
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People prefer broadband internet connections because of the obvious speed advantages over dial-up and satellite links. Then why is it that broadband never seems to be fast enough? Are you getting the speed promised by your ISP? Broadband can cost $100 a month or more, but does the provider really provide the advertised speed? Is the connection reliable or does the modem need a reboot several times a day? Fortunately, there are ways to achieve high, reliable throughput without having to have an engineering degree. Here are some suggestions to get every bit per second possible from your modem without any technical hiccups or interruptions in service.

Start with your computer and TV equipment. A common source of line noise can be traced to improper grounding of anything that plugs into household electrical circuits. This can seriously degrade performance of cable equipment. Every electrical device, especially those in the same room as the cable modem, should be plugged into properly grounded outlets. The best connections are with polarized plugs oriented in the correct direction, and please don't use any three prong to two prong adapters. Get up-to-date gear. Electric outlet testers are cheap. Buy one and use it to test for excess voltage on your cable wiring. Any problem could indicate a serious safety hazard. Engage a licensed electrician to fix it.

Almost anything manufactured today in the consumer electronics world is light years ahead of its predecessors manufactured only two or three years ago. Cable modems are no exception, so if yours is more than three years old get a new one from your provider. Most providers will make a free exchange, but some will require an extension of your contract. You want to do this because the latest modems conform to the DOCSIS 2.0 standard. This offers higher upload and download capabilities and supports other advanced broadband applications, including online gaming and peer-to-peer computing.

Ask your ISP if they automatically update firmware for the modem. If they don't, have them supply the website address of your modem's manufacturer so you can download the most recent firmware. Check the website about twice a year for new updates.

Next, go to a test site such as PC Pitstop, and check your upload and download speeds to see if they match the terms of your service contract. If they don't, give your ISP a call and have them reset the modem's settings. While you're at it, have them check the signal-to-noise ratio. Too much noise can cause interference, and your modem will then have to resend information cutting down on your throughput.

It's possible that your cable wiring may contain too many splices or simply be too long. That can be fixed by a visit from your ISP technician. Have the technician check the line quality leading to your house. If the signal is good and you're having problems, the house wiring may be the culprit. The definitive answer for cable modems is to create a split directly after the junction box and

then run a new cable directly to your modem. The other side of the split will take care of your television sets which aren't nearly as sensitive to line noise.

After you've done everything from a hardware and firmware standpoint, and your cable connection is as clean as possible, you're ready to fine tune the system for best performance. Vista users don't have to do much of anything to optimize the operating system since Vista does TCP stack tuning dynamically. Any internet performance adjustments can be made through the browser. Firefox users may want to try Firetune or Fasterfox. They are both free utilities and allow adjustment to cache memory, capacity and other settings such as pipelining.

If you do a lot of downloading, you can save time by installing a download manager like Flashget. This widely used utility claims the highest number of users on the internet. It uses MHT (Multi-server Hyper-threading Transportation) technique. It's very easy to use and comes with exceptional document management features. Best of all, it's free.

After all this work, it would be a tragedy if you didn't keep in mind that sometimes the simplest solutions are the best ones. Most cable modems and routers have reset features. Many a mysterious internet ailment has been corrected simply by resetting the equipment. Turn off the computer and the modem. Unplug the modem for a few minutes and then power everything back on. You may be pleasantly surprised.

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## Tech News Tidbits

Written by Terry Robert, Program
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My intention in writing this article each month is to help us understand technology's emerging trends that affect our everyday lives. While researching material for this month's submission, I felt compelled to share these alarming trends with the rest of you.

Sophos, a leading U.K.-based IT security and control firm, just published their "Security Threat Report 2009", which examined the "threat landscape" over the last 12 months, and predicted the emerging cyber-crime trends for 2009. Two major points in the report are very alarming:

• American computers are making a disturbingly large contribution to the problems of viruses and spam affecting all of us today."

• American websites host more malware and relay more spam than any other country

Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant for Sophos, said "Too many American computers have been compromised and are under the control of hackers, and nationally, the U.S. is carrying the most malicious Web pages. When an American Internet company, accused of collaborating with spam-

mers and hackers, was disconnected from the net in November, the amount of spam was immediately reduced by 75%.

Sophos's research reveals that in 2008, organized criminal gangs tripled their attacks against innocent websites, injecting malicious code to infect visiting home users and businesses. They also documented an average of five new scareware websites (hackers posing as legitimate anti-virus vendors) each day, with the intention of scaring users into believing that their computers have been compromised.

By the end of 2008, Sophos was also tracking five times more malicious attacks arriving through e-mail attachments than at the start of the year, proving that hacking has become mainstream among organized crime.

As the Internet has matured into the foremost information resource on the planet, cyber criminals have refined their methods. Hackers are using automated systems to break into vulnerable websites and/or generate new variants of their malware throughout the world!

According to Sophos's findings, China was responsible for hosting more than 50 percent of all web-based malware in 2007, but this position was taken over by the U.S. in 2008. Their breakdown of the top malware hosting countries follows:

1. 1U.S. 37.0 percent

2. 2China (including Hong Kong) 27.7 percent

3. 3Russia 9.1 percent

4. 4the rest of the connected world 26.2%

Symantec also found the U.S. to host the most malware of all nations, but with lower percentages, and did not include Russia in their results.

We haven't devoted a lot of time to security issues recently, but if you've participated in some of the discussions we have had, you know there are numerous effective strategies for protecting yourself from attacks.

Avoid being connected to the Internet unless protected by:

• Dependable antivirus software (with current updates)

    Products include Avast, AVG, Norton, and McAfee

• Malware detection and removal software

    Products include Spybot, Search and Destroy, Adaware Spyware Blaster, and Advanced WindowsCare

• Software firewall

    Products include Windows Firewall (protects only against incoming threats in XP), Zone Alarm, and Kerio

• A healthy dose of common sense

If you receive a popup telling you that your computer has been compromised, advising you to: "Click here to correct the problem"... DON'T TAKE THE BAIT!

f you have no strategy, do yourself (and the rest of us) a favor, learn to protect yourself. Maybe you should attend more ICON functions?!

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# Moving on to Vista – Part 13

by Neil Stahfest, Librarian, Tacoma
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The chances are the first peripheral device you purchased for your computer was a printer. You may have even received a "free" printer when you purchased your computer. Vista makes it easier than ever to connect a new printer to your computer than ever before. The Plug-and-Play feature really works (unless, like me, you have an old laser printer that Windows Vista does not support. :-( ).

So you connect your printer, follow the Printer Wizard's directions, it works and you're happy. But wait. Have you examined your printer to discover all of its functions? Did you know that many modern printers, even the inexpensive models, can print on both sides of the paper, print sideways on the paper (called landscape mode), print in gray scale as well as in color and allows you to control print quality (to save ink when you don't need high quality print). Here's how to find out what you can do and manage it.

Create or open a document using your favorite word processing program or WordPad. At the top of your screen, click on "File" and then scroll down to "Printer Settings" and click again. When the "Printer Setup" window opens, click on the "Properties" button. At this point what you see depends largely on your individual printer.

In the case of my HP printer, I see a window with tab labeled "Paper/Quality", "Finishing", "Effects", "Basics", "Color" and "Services".

Selecting the appropriate tab allows me to select print quality (Normal, Draft, Enhanced, etc.), Portrait or Landscape mode , page order, color, single or two sided paper printing and many other options. In the case of my HP printer, when I select two sided paper printer, the printer prints on one side of the paper and then an on-screen message shows me how to reinsert the printed sheet in the paper tray to print of the other side. These print options are actually determined by the printer, not Windows. Windows just provides the means to control the printers features.

Windows frequently provides more than one way to do the same thing. Desktop icons provide a shortcut to run programs listed in the Start Menu. You can easily create new desktop icons my opening the the Programs section of the Start Menu, Selecting a program, right clicking on it and drag it to a blank area on your desktop. When you release the right mouse button a short menu appears with the option to "Create Shortcuts Here" . Select it, and left-click once to create the icon. You can rename this icon to anything you wish.

If you right-click on a desktop icon, one of the menu option is "Properties". Select Properties and left-click once. Under the "Shortcut" tab notice the entry line labeled "Shortcut key". It probably contains the entry "None". By selecting a suitable key (letter or number), you can create a key combination shortcut to your program. It's a convenient way to access frequently used programs, spreadsheets and documents.

Before we leave this menu, notice the button labeled "Change Icon". When you left-click on this button you'll see an array of icons that you can use to substitute for your default icon. Pick an icon, click on the "Okay" button and then click on "Okay" again. Your new icon will appear on the desktop.