

# The NCTCUG Journal

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## Keeping Up

By Paul Howard, NCTCUG

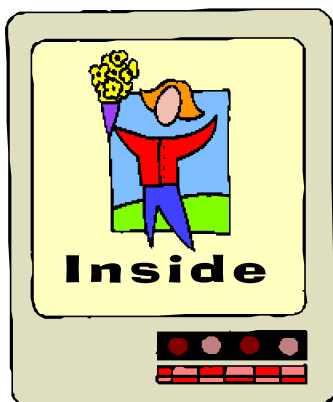
### Software Upgrades

It's the season for updating. About this time of year, when it's time to buy tax software, I usually take advantages of the offers for low or no cost upgrades to my antivirus software. This year I got snookered when I went to Office Depot — lots of tax software, but the combination of Norton Antivirus (NAV) and firewall software packages I desired weren't available. My option was paying for them, leaving my phone number, and hoping they'd call me when their stock arrived.

As a result, I've been getting things in dribs and drabs, and couldn't find the "3 pack" of Norton Antivirus software I wanted before I had to update (read "pay \$24.95 online") the AV definitions subscription on my backup desktop system. Needless to say, the "3 pack" came available, and on sale for \$20 after rebates, a week later. That will give me a spare installation of NAV, should I acquire another computer over the next year.

In the interim, I bought a copy of Norton SystemWorks 2005, which includes NAV, Norton Utilities, GoBack, Checkit Diagnostics, and System Optimizer. Reviewing the manual before installation, (*What a concept!*) I saw that one of the steps was a system scan for viruses. I chose instead to make sure my current NAV installation was updated with the latest definitions, and ran a scan, knowing that any definition files on the installation CD would be months old (in fact, dated to August, '04).

*(Continued on page 14)*




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GPS And Mapping Software .....	page 2
Computer Power Protection .....	page 4
Computers Expanding The Use Of Robots .....	page 6
America The Beautiful — Online .....	page 7
Do You Know How Safe Your Credit Card Number Is?.....	page 8
Problems With Windows XP Service Pack 2.....	page 9
Tech News (January 2005).....	page 10
Understanding USB .....	page 11
Knoppix — A Tool For Everyone.....	page 16
Selections From The Deals Guy .....	page 12

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## GPS And Mapping Software

By Joe Schmitt, Tampa Bay Computer Society

This is the last in a three article series on the Global Positioning System. The first explained what the system is and how it work, the second dealt with GPS units, and the third discusses the various software available to interface with the units.

While out on the road or trail, the GPS can be indispensable for navigating. It tells you where you are, where you're heading, and can track distance and speed. When you arrive at an interesting locale, you can mark it with a waypoint. Now all that is great, but one of the more interesting aspects of GPS ownership is the ability to link it with your computer for additional functionality.

In a unit that displays maps, only the most major roads and surface features are pre-loaded. This is known as the base map. The base map cannot be erased and is particular to the region that the unit is purchased in. For example, my Garmin receiver is loaded with a North American road map that contains US highways and interstates. This is great for a long trip, but doesn't really help you around town. Luckily, additional specialized maps are available.

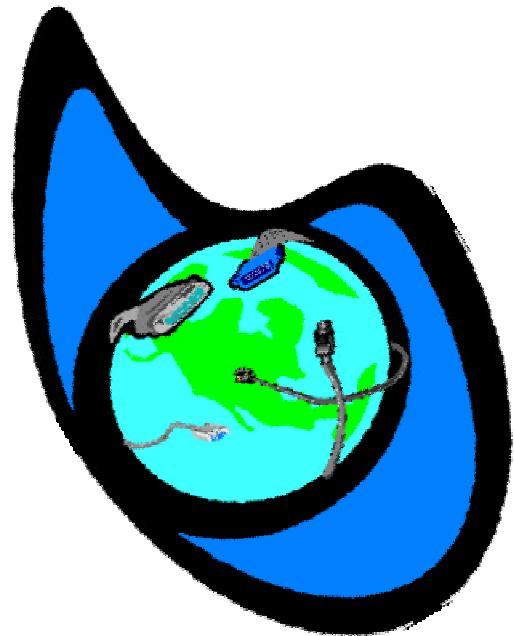
Each of the manufacturers have street level mapping available for purchase; unfortunately, the maps available are almost strictly proprietary. For my Garmin unit, there are instructions on the web to make your own maps, but is a long complex process involving multiple pieces of software. I could dedicate an entire article to that process alone. Another limitation with the mapping software comes with the opening of new roads. None of the software can be updated with the latest roads, so you must purchase the newer version at full price. Be careful though, sometimes it takes a few versions for the newer roads to be displayed at all. If you can live with data that is a couple of years old, places like EBay can be great for getting a deal on some older version.

Even if you do not have a GPS with mapping capability, quite often that receiver can be tied to a computer to process the data it receives. Most units utilize a serial cable to connect to a computer. Although a serial connection is much slower than USB it has been a standard with receivers for a long time and

manufacturers are slowly coming out with USB capable units.

In addition to the proprietary software you can purchase from the manufacturer, there are pieces of software that can transfer waypoints and tracks from a GPS. A great waypoint manager, EasyGPS ([www.easygps.com](http://www.easygps.com)), is a free utility that allows you create, edit, and transfer waypoints from your computer. It works with Garmin, Lowrance, and Magellan receivers. Creating a waypoint with the receiver itself can be a long process since the unit does not have a keypad, and you will have to scroll through menus and numbers to set the coordinates. EasyGPS allows you to do this on your desktop computer with the keyboard.

Its bigger cousin, ExpertGPS ([www.expertgps.com](http://www.expertgps.com)), displays your waypoints and routes on topographic maps and aerial photos. This software is not free, but you can download a demo. ExpertGPS uses an internet connection to retrieve maps as you scroll around.



There are several places you can get maps for free on the internet. You may already be familiar with some internet mapping websites for street cartography. Arguably one of the most popular is MapQuest ([www.mapquest.com](http://www.mapquest.com)), but also popular is Microsoft MapPoint ([mappoint.msn.com](http://mappoint.msn.com)) and Maptech Maps-server ([mapserver.maptech.com](http://mapserver.maptech.com)). In addition to these street map websites, many others offer topographic and aerial photos. Maptech offers topographic, nautical, aeronautical, and aerial photos, though they'll want you to register.

For topographic maps, TopoZone ([www.topozone.com](http://www.topozone.com)), is a great site that displays maps in various resolutions and datum. TopoZone allows you also to search by geographic features such as mountain peak names as well as city names, states, zip codes, and coordinates. Another excellent site that combines topographic and aerial photos is TerraServer USA ([terraserver.microsoft.com](http://terraserver.microsoft.com)). At this site you can flip between maps and photos.

Although these sites are helpful for viewing and printing maps, they do not offer any sort of data transfer with the GPS receiver. For that kind of functionality you must install some software. A great free application available for download is USAPhoto-Maps ([jdmcox.com](http://jdmcox.com)). This program installs on your machine and then uses an Internet connection to download topographic and aerial photos. It can be linked with a GPS to transfer waypoints, tracks, and routes. The maps are compiled from free sites on the web. Be aware, though, that maps are quite large in file size and a slow connection will make getting the maps a long process. Once downloaded, the maps are stored locally on your computer so be sure that you have enough hard drive space.

The next realm in mapping software is independent mapping programs. Two of the most popular stand-alone street mapping programs is Microsoft's Streets & Trips ([www.microsoft.com/streets/default.asp](http://www.microsoft.com/streets/default.asp)) and Delorme's Street Atlas ([www.delorme.com/streetatlasusa/default.asp](http://www.delorme.com/streetatlasusa/default.asp)). Both programs offer detailed street mapping in the US and have the ability to link in various ways to the GPS receiver.

Streets and Trips allows you to link to your GPS and display your position on a map. It does not complete data transfer such as waypoints and routes. It has the ability to import data from Excel and text files, but an intermediate program will be needed to get the data from the GPS unit to the file for import. A bonus with Streets and Trips is that also comes with Pocket Maps that allow you to save maps to a Pocket PC.

Street Atlas allows you the same position display with a GPS. In addition to that function, it also allows you to plan a route and provides turn by turn instructions as you navigate. Of course, to be of any use it needs to be installed on a laptop. Unlike Streets and Trips, you must purchase the pocket mapping software separately. Streets and Trips runs about \$40 and Street Atlas about \$50. I have a copy of Streets and Trips that I got for \$20 after a mail in rebate. Both programs are excellent and selection boils down to personal preference more than anything else.

Delorme also makes a topographic program, Topo USA ([www.delorme.com/topousa/default.asp](http://www.delorme.com/topousa/default.asp)). This program runs about \$99 and includes streets as well topographic contour maps. The topographic maps are at a 1:100,000 resolution. More detailed 1:24,000 maps, more suitable for hiking, are available on a state by state basis. Your GPS will interact in the same manner as Street Atlas.

A more cost effective way to go for a topographic program is National Geographic's Backroads Explorer (<http://maps.nationalgeographic.com/topo/backroads.cfm>) that costs around \$40. Although it lacks some of the features of Delorme's software, it does include street maps as well as topographic information. Backroads Explorer also allows direct connection with a GPS for transfer of waypoints, routes, and tracks. It lacks the 3D topographic mapping the Delorme product offers, but it does have shaded relief to better define contours on the maps displayed.

For those that are into creating their own maps there is a program, called 3DEM ([www.visualizationsoftware.com/3dem.html](http://www.visualizationsoftware.com/3dem.html)), that

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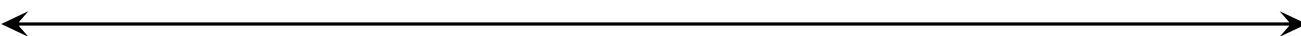
## Computer Power Protection

By Ira Wilsker

Now that summer is upon us, and our air conditioners seem to cycle on and off endlessly, we may have noticed our computer screens flicker or shrink ever-so-slightly for a moment when the AC compressor powers on. With our intermittent yet common summer thunderstorms, we may have noticed our lights flicker, occasionally accompanied by a power outage of varying lengths. While these and similar effects may be an emotional strain upon us personally, they may also be an indication that we may need to protect our computers from unseen electrical damage.

The most basic form of electrical protection for our computers, which should be considered as mandatory for all computers, including notebook computers used away from the home or office, is a surge suppressor. Power surges, also referred to as spikes, are short term increases in voltage, often

occurring when major electrical equipment, such as air conditioners or freezers are turned off. These surges and spikes can damage sensitive electronic devices such as computers, TVs, microwave ovens, and other devices. Surge suppressors to minimize the risk of damage are readily available in a variety of forms and prices, ranging from an inexpensive suppressor in the form of a power strip, to large box shaped devices that provide surge protection with line conditioning and a battery backup function. A recent review of the selection available locally at the office supply, electronics, and discount stores indicated a vast array of power strip type surge suppressors, ranging in price from about \$3 to almost \$100. One caveat is appropriate here; many users have a standard power strip connecting their computers to the wall plug. While almost all power strips offer some form of overload protection, typically with a circuit breaker, standard power strips



*(Continued from page 3)*

allows you load elevation data and generate a 3D terrain image. The terrain image can be overlaid with maps to form a 3D map. The primary data used to generate the terrain models are from radar topography. NASA scanned about 95% of the earth's surface during shuttle missions and there is a wealth of sources available where you can download the data. These models can also accept data from your receiver so that you can see a track of where you've been in a 3D representation.

There is lots of additional software available on the market, too many to discuss them all here. A lot of programs offer various ways of linking with a GPS directly or are a great way to search and print maps before you leave on that next trip.

There are also a number of utilities which can format data so that it can work with a number of programs.

GPS receivers are innovative and fun gadgets that can really be a powerful tool for navigation. Every day people come up with more interesting uses for the receiver. From handheld to vehicle mounted receivers, these devices are changing the way the man moves through the world. Have fun and I'll see you on the road!

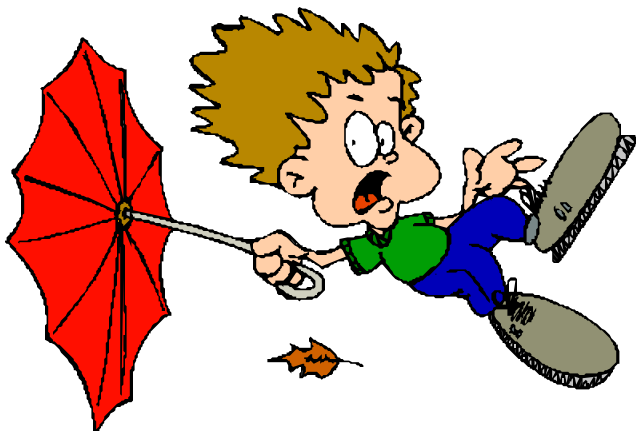
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offer no other protection for power related problems, and need to be replaced with a decent quality power strip that has a surge suppression function with a UL 1449 rating.

The ability of a surge suppressor to dissipate the surge or spike is measured in “joules”, with a higher joules rating indicating a greater ability to absorb and dissipate the excess voltage from the surge. Almost all surge suppressors have a limited life expectancy, and may wear out. Many of the better ones have an LED or other device indicating the proper functioning of the surge protection. It is a good practice to frequently inspect your surge suppressor, and to immediately replace it if there is even a hint or suspicion of malfunction. Power surges are one of the major killers of computers and other electronic devices. In my house, each of my major electronic devices, including TVs, microwaves, stereos, cordless phones, and of course computers, is connected to a functional surge suppressor. I also carry a good quality surge suppressor – power strip in my notebook computer case which is always used whenever my notebook is plugged in.

While the primary function of a surge suppressor is to protect plugged-in electrical devices from surge related damage, many of the suppressors on the market also provide additional functionality. Common in most better suppressors is an electronic noise filter, which reduces the electrical noise, often referred to as “RFI” or “EMI” interference, carried through the power lines. This electronic noise may be thought of as a type of static, and commonly comes from a variety of transmitters, welding devices, printers, lightning, or other sources. This type of



line noise can cause errors in computer programs and data files, and possibly also damage some hardware components. In purchasing a surge suppressor, I recommend that one be purchased that includes electronic noise filtering.

I have repaired countless computers where the modem was “fried”, or destroyed by a power surge. It is widely known in professional circles that power surges and spikes can also come through a phone line, as well as a coax cable, network cable, or other form of data connection. Many surge suppressors also include one or more protected lines explicitly for a phone or fax cable, TV or satellite cable, or other types of network cable. For those of us that still use dialup connections to the internet, or use fax machines, a surge suppressor that has a phone jack should also be a necessity. The phone plug from the wall connects to the jack in the suppressor, and another cable is used to connect the suppressor to the modem or fax machine. Generally, there is no significant degradation of signal while connected to a fax machine, but some 56K modems may suffer a slight degradation of signal or speed. This slight performance is a small price to pay for the added protection provided by the suppressor. All of my phone lines and cable TV coax is connected to the same surge suppressor that protects the device they are connected to.

As an added benefit, many models of surge suppressors also carry some form of insurance coverage to repair or replace devices connected to them from covered perils, often including lightning. The amount of coverage provided is often high, but is sometimes used as a marketing gimmick. As with all types of guarantees and insurance, be sure to read the fine print, and follow explicitly the directions for filing a claim.

***Better safe than sorry.***

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## Computers Expanding The Use Of Robots

Jim Hinwood, Columnist & Program Chair, Monterey Bay Users Group – PC, California

So many articles I've seen lately have been about robotics — it's the newest hot topic. Last month's *Technology Review* and this month's *Wired* magazine have articles on robotics. When I see the Roomba vacuuming a house automatically on TV it reminds me of *The Jetsons* cartoon series where the home of the future is all automated and housework is a thing of the past. Many of the cartoons I remember as a kid were about automated houses that went crazy and started to attack the cat or the dog: its robots would come out and start sweeping or vacuuming at the slightest indication of dirt. As computers become more powerful, who knows what timesaving devices may be invented?

In the *Technology Review* article, the author makes a prediction that robotics will take off the way computers took off ten years ago. The more powerful computers we have today will be the brains for this new class of servants. These robots may not look like the anthropomorphic types we see in movies and TV. Many may just be simple-looking box-shaped machines (like the Roomba) with one specific job. But some will certainly be more complex with a multitude of functions and a human-like shape. Honda has recently been advertising a robot that is complex and can do many things.

Robots have been used in manufacturing for quite a while now. One of the reasons we Americans fell behind the Japanese in the auto industry is because they had the largest number of automobile plant robots in the world. Part of the future mechanization of our manufacturing plants will be heavily dependent on robots. The computing power of the latest CPU chips is in the trillions of operations per second. In ten years we will no doubt have plenty of chip-powered intelligence to drive robots to unprecedented capabilities.

Isaac Asimov wrote *I, Robot* in the 1950s and there is a current film with the same name starring Will Smith. With these stories always comes the fear of artificial intelligence and whether it may someday have the ability to take control from humans.

This is a recurrent theme in everything from *2001: A Space Odyssey* with the computer Hal, to the current *I, Robot*. This fear of our inventions taking over may not be as important as how we feel about the egos of those who use the technology.

I recently read about some robotic legs which could give the wearer the ability to carry a much larger load in battle, similar to a pair of bionic legs from *The Six-Million Dollar Man* TV show. How long will it be before robots fight it out as seen in the movie *The Terminator*? There are probably many battlefield applications for robots and many are probably already in the making.

The real problem is not the artificial intelligence but the human intelligence behind it, directing robots to do good or evil. I hope that like the computer, robots will become powerful tools for the benefit of all mankind.

My first thought after reading many of these articles is that this would be a great time to invest in this fledgling science. In the movie *Frequency*, Dennis Quaid plays a character that goes back in time to change his past. While he is there he mentions one word to his friend. When he gets back to the present he runs into this friend who remembered the word and is now rich and has the word, Yahoo, on the license plate of his Mercedes. How many of us would like to know what the next big investment is going to be?

Maybe in the future, one of us will be driving that Mercedes around with "robots" written on our license plate!

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## America The Beautiful — Online

By Sherry Zorzi, Cajun Clickers Computer Club, Louisiana

Three cheers for the red, white, and blue! July is a perfect time to renew your commitment to civic involvement, and the Internet makes it easy for you to stay informed, to communicate with your leaders, and to get involved in the process of government at the local, state, and national levels.

Every agency of the federal government has a website. The “U.S. Government’s Official Web Portal,” at [www.firstgov.gov](http://www.firstgov.gov), is a great jumping-off spot for finding links to all manner of government offices and information. There are links to various agencies, links to important publications, and links to contact information for federal officials. The site even has links to each individual state site.

You can take a tour of the White House, learn its history, find out about pending presidential appointments, or read transcripts of the President’s speeches at [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov). There’s even a special area for kids ([www.whitehouse.gov/kids](http://www.whitehouse.gov/kids)) with educational quizzes and games and videos of the presidential pets.

Want to let your U.S. Senator or Congressman know your opinion on an issue? Try [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) or [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov). There you’ll find easy links for sending email to your elected representatives. You can also read the text of pending legislation, find the makeup of various legislative committees, or view artwork housed in the U.S. Capitol. You’ll find the full text of the U.S. Constitution here, along with the Congressional Record. You can even read about some of the “urban legends” surrounding the U.S. Congress.

If you’re anxious about your family’s security in light of the global terrorism threat, you might check out [www.fema.gov/areyouready](http://www.fema.gov/areyouready) for A Guide to Citizen’s Preparedness. It has useful information to help you prepare for all manner of events, including natural disasters like hurricanes and floods that affect us here in South Louisiana. I’ve used the information here to prepare a nifty Emergency Kit for my own home which might be helpful in any natural or man-made disaster.

If politics is your cup of tea, all of the major political parties host robust websites, where you can read the party’s platform, volunteer to work on political campaigns, request yard signs, or make a contribution. Visit [www.democrats.org](http://www.democrats.org) (The Democratic Party) or [www.gop.com](http://www.gop.com) (The Republican Party) or go to [www.politics1.com/parties.htm](http://www.politics1.com/parties.htm) for links to some of the “third party” websites.

The main portal for government agencies in Louisiana is [www.louisiana.gov](http://www.louisiana.gov). Here you’ll find links to maps, various state agencies, and government publications. You can renew your driver’s license or vehicle registration, purchase a hunting or fishing license, or search for a job.

Maybe the state of Louisiana owes you some money! Louisiana makes its database of unclaimed property available online at [www.treasury.state.la.us/ucpm/ucp/claim/simplesearch.asp](http://www.treasury.state.la.us/ucpm/ucp/claim/simplesearch.asp). You can type in your last name and find out whether the state is holding unclaimed utility deposits, unclaimed bank balances, unclaimed tax refunds or other funds that belong to you.

Baton Rouge has its own government portal at [www.brgov.com](http://www.brgov.com). You can view our City Council’s meeting live online, pay a traffic ticket, look up maps and property information, or learn how to control the mosquito population on your property. You can also find contact information, including email links, for the Mayor-President and City Council members.

If you’d like to get involved in some grassroots efforts right here at home, check out [www.austin6.com](http://www.austin6.com). Austin 6 is a group of peers who seek to involve regular citizens in pushing our city and region forward. There’s nothing to join, no compulsory meeting attendance, no dues – just groups of citizens volunteering to work on short-term projects to promote the welfare of our region.

*(Continued on page 9)*



## Do You Know How Safe Your Credit Card Number Is?

By **S. Jack Lewtschuk, Monterey Bay Users Group – PC, California Columnist & Immediate Past President; November 2004 mbug-pc newsletter**

How many times have you typed your credit card number or password into your computer? Any idea what happens to it?

When you type in a password, it is stored in random access memory (RAM), where it is held temporarily until other data overwrites it or the computer is turned off. But every so often, the computer copies the contents of its RAM onto hard disk, where it is easy prey for a hacker, who can read it directly or design a worm to e-mail it back. The longer sensitive data is in RAM, the more likely it is to be copied onto the disk, where it stays until it is overwritten – which might not happen for years.

On the other hand, do you know what happens to your credit card number after you hand your card to a clerk in a store or server in a restaurant? He/she has your number *and* your signature.

Are you paranoid yet?

### Securing Your Credit Card Before You Lose It

Keep a record of your credit cards and other contents of your wallet. Place the contents of your wallet on a photocopy machine or scanner; copy both sides of each license, credit card, etc. You will know what you had in your wallet and all of the account numbers and phone numbers to call to report the theft and cancel the cards. Keep the photocopy in a safe place.

If you do lose your wallet, don't forget to call these numbers to report it:

- ☆ Equifax 800.525.6285
- ☆ Experian (formerly TRW) 888.397.3742
- ☆ Trans Union 800.680.7289
- ☆ Social Administration Fraud Line  
800.269.0271
- ☆ Your local police department to file a theft report

### Myths VIII – To Sign Or Not To Sign The Back Of Your Credit Card

By the way, have you heard the idea that it is best *not* to sign the back of your credit cards? That instead of signing, you can print the words: “SEE ID” or “ASK FOR PHOTO ID?”

Here is what major credit card fraud departments had to say:

- ☆ **Mastercard** – To not sign your card is an urban legend that sounds sensible, but is not a good idea.
- ☆ **American Express** – We have warned merchants not to accept your credit cards if they aren't signed.
- ☆ **VISA** – They agree with the other credit card companies and said that merchants are instructed not to finish the transaction until you sign the back of your card.

So, the idea of not signing the back of your credit card is an example of a very popular urban legend that is false. *Sign your credit cards immediately when you receive them.*

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## Problems With Windows Xp Service Pack 2


By Bettie Cummings Cook, Southwest Indiana PC Users Group, Inc

Recently we have been reading about the debate over whether or not to install Windows XP Service Pack 2. The update has some bugs that cause problems in some software.

I am a firm believer in keeping software updated. The update is not created to cause you frustration but to make your software work better. Considering all the hundreds of software programs and hardware drivers, it is amazing updates work as well as they do.

Your software is far more likely to work well if it is kept updated. Most problems are created by structure of the program compilation of non-Microsoft software.

When installing an update, it is important that you must read the update instructions carefully. I'm convinced failure to read and apply the instructions to your computer is the cause of some conflicts.

  
(Continued from page 7)

Finally, for a quick review of that high school civics lesson you may have slept through, visit <http://bensguide.gpo.gov/9-12>. This excellent tutorial explains the structure of our three-branched government, how laws are made, and how the election process works.

Sherry Zorzi is Secretary of Cajun Clickers Computer Club and host of "The Cajun Clickers Computer Show" heard every Saturday morning at 9 a.m. on WJBO Radio. Her consulting company, Zorzi Consulting, provides technology training and technology consulting to businesses and educational institutions throughout the state of Louisiana.

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Ed. Note: a few links for local NCTCUG members to try:  
<http://www.dc.gov/>  
<http://www.maryland.gov>  
<http://www.virginia.gov>  
Try finding your own state!

Microsoft Knowledge Base Article 884130 (<http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?kbid=884130>) provides a list of programs that are known to experience a loss of functionality when they run on a Windows XP Service Pack 2-based computers. If you have downloaded and installed SP2 and are experiencing error messages, this web site is for you.

SP2 includes Microsoft Windows Firewall that updates the firewall and replaces Internet Connection Firewall (ICF). If firewall is blocking a program, Knowledge Base Article 875357 provides the solution to unblock the firewall. Of particular importance to everyone who has updated to Windows XP SP2 is the caution that Norton's Anti-Virus 2003 may not be automatically scanning. You may not be getting an error message about this so it is vital to read the data regarding Norton's. Some of the popular software experiencing problems are the AOL toolbar, BlackICE, Norton's Systemworks 2003 GoBack, OmniPage Pro, Word Perfect Office, Yahoo Instant Messenger, and Zone Alarm. See the list for others not named here.

The web page lists the programs and a link to their maker's web site. Use the link to go to that site and download a patch to allow the software to work with SP2.

While I'm on the subject of Microsoft, did you know there is a Microsoft Products Public Newsgroup web page? (<http://support.Microsoft.com/newsgroups/>) Each product has a forum where one can post questions and answers. Solutions to MS problems may be found here.

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## Tech News, January 2005

**By Sue Crane, Vice President, Big Bear Computer Club, California;  
Editor, Bearly Bytes, Newsletter of the Big Bear Computer Club**

U.S. dictionary publisher Merriam-Webster says “blog” topped the list of most looked-up terms on its Web site during the last 12 months. The word will now appear in the 2005 print version of Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, defined as “a Web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments and often hyperlinks.” However, Oxford University Press says “blog” is already included in some print versions of its Oxford English Dictionary and has entered mainstream usage. According to an Oxford U. Press spokesman. “Now we’re getting words that derive from it such as ‘blogosphere’ and so on.” According to the Pew Internet & American Life project, a blog is created every 5.8 seconds, and blog analysis firm Technorati estimates that the number of blogs in existence now exceeds 4.8 million.

CDW, a national technology solutions provider recently announced that its Tech Twister technology makeover contest. The company’s teaming up with IBM, Intel and Linksys to offer small businesses a chance to win a complete technology makeover. Tech Twister is open to any small business with five to 100 employees. Go to CDW’s Web site and fill out the online application to enter the contest [http://www.cdw.com/Webcontent/land/page/techtwister\\_110804.asp](http://www.cdw.com/Webcontent/land/page/techtwister_110804.asp). All entries must be completed and received by 5pm PST on February 15, 2005. The winners will be chosen during the months of December 2004, January 2005 and February 2005.

In a sign that wearable technology is gaining greater acceptance, the Gap on Thursday introduced a fleece jacket with a built-in radio for kids. The Hoodio has a control keypad located on the sleeve and a hood that conceals the speakers. Xybernaut sells a wearable, 1.9-pound computer with an 8.4-inch touch screen. And MP3 players are now in sunglasses. Oakley’s Thump line is available in seven combinations of lenses and colors. The shades have ear-phones and lenses that flip up and down. Meanwhile, NanoHorizons has developed socks containing silver and gold nanoparticles, which kill foot odor and bacteria.

NanoDynamics has come up with a golf ball that can correct its own flight path so it flies straighter than conventional balls. The design of the ball—and the materials it’s made of—serve to better channel the energy received from the club head and thus correct a wobble or slight drift. The company believes the ball complies with the rules of the United States Golf Association. It will provide samples for testing and USGA approval in January or February. Earlier this year, Easton Sports announced it was developing a set of bike components made from carbon nanotubes that would be stronger and lighter than conventional parts. And other companies have developed nano tennis balls that don’t lose air and golf shafts constructed with nanomaterials.

During the string of hurricanes that hit the U.S. last summer, satellite phones were often the only reliable means of communication, because they use orbiting satellites rather than landlines and cell towers to transmit signals.. “They cover such a broad area, I can use it anywhere,” says one Iridium customer. “The call may get unclear, but if you wait about five or six seconds, it gets better. A cell phone would just drop the call.”

Microsoft’s new small business software gives you financial info at a glance. Looking to offer small businesses an integrated approach to accounting, contact management and general productivity, Microsoft announced that a beta version of its newly announced small business management product is now available for testing

Kawada Industries in Japan, has been putting the final touches on a large biped Robot that can do what no humanoid its size has done before: lie down, get up, and help a human carry light loads, like suitcases and briefcases.

Passwords will soon be a thing of the past according to Microsoft Chairman, Bill Gates. Gates predicted that people will soon rely on other ways of verifying their identity. “A major problem for identity systems

## Understanding USB

By Vinny La Bash, vlabash@home.com, Member Of The Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., Florida

Hail USB! Until a few years ago if you wanted to add an external device to your computer, such as a scanner or a Zip drive, it needed your one and only parallel port. The trouble with this was that your printer had already staked out that territory. One way of getting around the problem was installing an A/B switch. However, if you needed more than one device, you had to install an A/B/C/D switch. Sometimes moving among these devices meant having to turn one off before you could use another, and often you had to reboot before your machine would recognize another device on the switch.

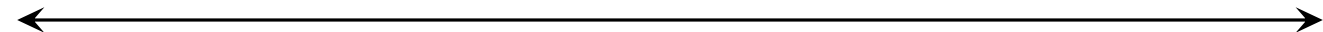
Early Palm Pilots and digital cameras sought your serial port. Computers had, and most still have two serial ports, but they were slow and almost always involved installation of controlling software.

There were also devices that came with their own controller cards. This meant you had to open the case and install the card in an expansion slot, provided you had one available. Things could get crazy quickly, and you had to handle IRQ conflicts, more cables, and additional power cords.

Rescue arrived with the introduction of the USB port (Universal Serial Bus) that lets you attach almost anything to your computer quickly and easily. Windows XP is designed to support USB so device conflicts are gone. The standard allows up to 127 devices on a single USB port. In practice, no one uses that many devices. USB connectors let you attach everything from TV tuners to modems. It's an amazingly flexible technology. If you had a toaster with a USB connection you could hook it up, but it's doubtful you could watch bread turn brown on the screen.

Installing a USB device is incredibly simple. Windows XP senses it through a process called auto-detection, and asks for the driver disk if it's needed. If you have previously installed the device, XP activates it, and it's ready for use. Part of the beauty of USB is that you can connect and disconnect devices at any time without having to reboot your machine or change any options. If a cable is built-in to a USB device it will connect to your computer with its own "A" connector. Otherwise it will connect with a "B" connector. "A" and "B" connectors are of different sizes and shapes so there is never a question of getting them mixed up.

*(Continued on page 13)*



is the weakness of passwords," Gates said. "Moving to biometric and smart cards is a wave that is coming, and we see our leading customers doing this."

Japanese electronics giant TDK has developed a tough new coating named Blu-ray that makes DVDs scratch-proof. In a test conducted by CNET News.com, a DVD treated with TDK's coating survived a determined attack with a screwdriver and a Sharpie permanent marker with no effect on playability.

Researchers at the Toho University School of Medicine in Tokyo have found that long hours spent in front of a computer screen may increase the risk of glaucoma in near-sighted people. The research is based on a study of 10,000 workers in Japan, with

results correlated to data on how many hours were spent on the computer and pre-existing visual problems, such as myopia. Scientists said they believe the optic nerve in myopic people might be more vulnerable to computer-caused stress.

Watch for hefty increases in annual subscription rates for antivirus software as major Security companies encourage subscribers to upgrade to full Internet Security Suites which include firewall, anti-spam and anti-spyware as well as antivirus.

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## Selections From The DealsGuy

Bob Click, Greater Orlando Computer User Group

### Another Deal From Gene and Linda Barlow

User Group Relations has another interesting and helpful product for you. These days our computer life is chuck full of ID and passwords and we are urged to change them frequently. So how do you remember them all? You could write them all down and hide the list under your mouse pad <G>, or you could get smart and use MyPasswordVault by WhiteCanyon Software to store all those IDs and passwords and keep them at your disposal. Linda sent me the product just before deadline so I haven't tried it yet, but I will soon because it has some great features. Make life easier with this unique product and use the discount offered to users group members to buy it for just \$15.00 (MSRP \$25.00). Go to [<http://www.usergroupstore.com>] and use the special code UGDEALS to order.

### Attention Gamers!

NevoSoft announces a new space shooter/puzzler game below: (edited so check their Web site)

“SAINT PETERSBURG, Russia. - January 27, 2005: NevoSoft is proud to announce the release of Zzed, the latest version of an electrifying space shooter mixed with lots of action, adventure and puzzle. Zzed will put the player into the spaceship and take on a tough galactic mission with over 60 levels to win. With superb cartoon graphics, exhilarating gameplay and original music, Zzed will be the ultimate source of enjoyment for kids and parents alike.

“The game comes to life as Zzed, a young and ambitious alien, has been sent on a special mission by his corrupted boss, Mr. Zzapone. There, in the backwoods of the galaxy Zzed will have to protect the space foundries of his boss from vast space garbage fields. However, the real reason of the mission is Zzapone's fear that Zzed will throw him down the corporate throne. Zzed leaves home with a heavy heart as the assignment separates him from his beloved alien sweetheart. To win the ticket back home, Zzed has to remove all space garbage from around the galaxy.”

“Zzed is not all about shooting. The game will also challenge your reaction and thinking, said Alexey Serebrov, CEO of NevoSoft. “As you go from level to level, the speed of garbage fields increases. Therefore, you will have to act fast and smart.

“Availability: Zzed runs under Windows 98/Me/2000/XP and costs \$19.95 (USD). Registered customers are entitled to the unlocked gameplay, free updates and lifetime technical support. An evaluation version of the game limited to the 40-minute gameplay is available for free at: [[http://www.nevosoft.com/zzed/zzed\\_demo.exe](http://www.nevosoft.com/zzed/zzed_demo.exe)]. For more information, visit us at [<http://www.nevosoft.com>]. Use a 10% discount for purchasing the game for



### Washington Area Computer User Group (WAC) Meetings

WAC Meeting will be held on May 21, 2005, 12:30 PM to 3:30 PM, at the Fairfax County Government Center, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, VA.

You do not need to be a member to attend. For more information on WAC meetings and events, call the WAC AnswerLine (voice) at (703) 370-7649. Also see WAC's Web Site at

<http://www.wacug.org/>

(Continued from page 11)

Today, most desktop computers are built with at least four USB ports. That is inadequate, but there are relatively inexpensive USB hubs available that act as expansion devices. The number of ports available on an expansion hub can vary from as few as two to as many as seven, depending on your needs and how much you care to spend. Plug the hub into your computer, and then plug your devices into the hub. You can chain hubs together, and build dozens of available USB ports on a single computer.

The USB standard lets USB connected devices draw their power from their USB connection to the PC. This works well for mice, digital cameras, web cams, and other devices that use small amounts of power. Printers, scanners, and other high power accessories require their own power supply, and they can be plugged into hubs that do not have their own power supply. If you run out of USB sockets and you have a lot of low power devices, get a powered hub so you don't overwhelm the PC bus.

Inside your computer the USB bus lets the computer act as a host to all USB devices attached to it. If you have the up-to-date USB 2.0 standard, data can be transferred at up to 480 megabits per second. If you were moving text, that works out to about 30,000 pages of documents per second. That's a maximum rate, not typical of actual use. Nevertheless, it's impressive.

USB has other advantages. You can plug in or remove USB devices without having to reboot your machine, and the computer can put USB devices into an inactive state when conserving power. XP queries all USB devices when your machine powers on, assigns each one an address, and determines what kind of data it needs to send or receive. XP keeps track of the total bandwidth of all the attached USB devices. If the combined devices reach 90% of the 480 megabit maximum, XP denies access to any additional devices. The remaining 10% is reserved for transmitting control characters, stop and start transmission codes, error checking, and other overhead.

USB 2.0 encourages the development of innovative products that would be impossible to develop with the older standards. It's the solution for all PC users who want an instant, no-hassle way to connect new hardware like digital joysticks, scanners, digital speakers, digital cameras or a PC telephone to their computer.

*Plug and Pray* has truly become *Plug and Play*.

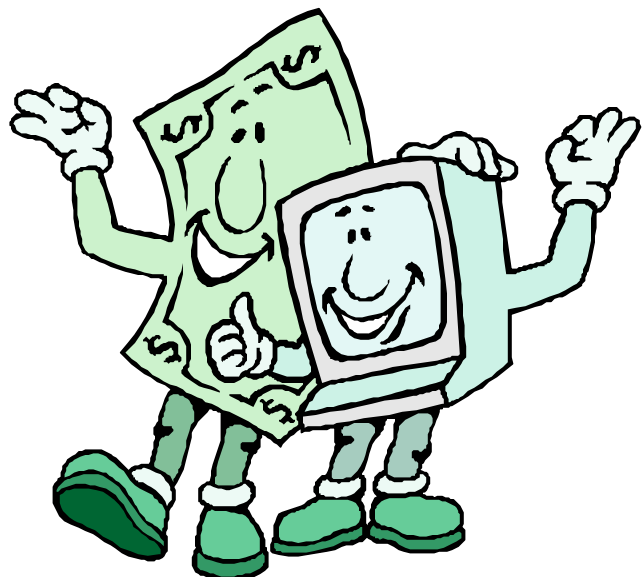
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user group members. Just use coupon - ZZED-3B51 - during ordering process and you get the game only for \$17.95 (instead of \$19.95). Or you may simply order discounted Zzed by clicking on this link:

[[https://www.regnow.com/softsell/nph-softsell.cgi?&ss\\_coupon=ZZED-3B51&item=8323-15](https://www.regnow.com/softsell/nph-softsell.cgi?&ss_coupon=ZZED-3B51&item=8323-15)] We didn't see the discount coupon working yet, so you may have to e-mail them as I had no time to contact them at this point. Sorry!

This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click [[bobclick@mindspring.com](mailto:bobclick@mindspring.com)]. Visit my Web site at [<http://www.dealsguy.com>].



*(Continued from page 1)*

After completing the installation of the System-Works software, checking the “Live Update” feature revealed the need for nearly 9 megs of update downloads. Being “Mr. Dialup,” I let the download proceed while watching TV, and then did another scan of the system to eliminate the annoying flag on the status screen chastising me for not having done a complete scan of the system.

When I started to use the features of the software, I noticed that some of the options were “grayed out” and not available for use. Searching the manual, I discovered that System Information, Clean-Sweep, System Doctor, Optimization Wizard, Registry Editor, Registry Tracker and others are not installed in a “standard” installation. I hadn’t noticed a “custom installation” option, which is what I usually use when installing software.

The manual advises using Windows XP’s “Add or Remove Programs” feature to install the missing items, and I pointed “Add/Remove” at the CD. A Norton window appeared, with Remove and Modify choices, and I selected Modify. The resulting window showed Antivirus, Utilities, and two other choices, with check boxes and checkmarks. Thinking they were already installed, I unchecked the boxes, and clicked “Next”.

The rest is hazy and painful — suffice it to say I uninstalled those programs that were already on my system. I had to get back to the same place, ten minutes later after the uninstall completed, recheck the boxes, and click on the “Customize Norton Utilities” box, where appeared all the programs I wanted access to when I started this exercise. Making sure they were all checked, clicking “Next” got everything installed, or reinstalled. Then I got to download about 3 megs of updates I’d uninstalled with my faulty assumption, and I got to re-scan the hard drive for viruses — again !!

## Video Upgrades

In February 1995, I bought my first Pentium system, and part of the over four thousand dollar package was a 17" CTX monitor that sold for \$685. In September of '98, the monitor needed a \$120 re-

pair, but I continued to use it through two more powerful CPU system replacements. Finally, in February of this year, I decided it was time to move up to a larger monitor. A sale at MicroCenter featured an LG Flatron L1930B for \$430 (after \$150 in rebates), a monitor that got fairly good ratings from PCWorld for 19" flat panels. Needless to say, April brought a review of ten newer models, but I’m happy with my purchase.

I bought a PowerSpec Radeon 9250SE video card (\$53) with the monitor, because my existing MSI card didn’t have a DVI interface. The new card also has 128 MB of onboard memory, vs. 64 Megs on the existing MSI board. However, when I got the new display home, I didn’t have the time or inclination to do all the dismantling necessary to put in the new card. So, I just hooked up the analog cable supplied with the monitor (connectors on both ends) and fired up the monitor, which worked great right out of the box.

Several days later, I moved the phone, CDs, calculator, bull and bear toys to remind me of the vagaries of the market, keyboard, trackball, and assorted pens and pencils, and hoisted the computer tower to desk-top level. First however, I had to uninstall the video drivers from the computer, thanks to a set of instructions from user group colleague Chuck Roberts, who recently had to replace a video card. I had to work thru the process twice, because the drivers that came with my original card only went down to 800x600, and the grand design is to get down to generic windows drivers at 640x480, before installing the new video card.

The toughest part of the new installation wasn’t getting the new card in the computer. Weaving the new DVI video cable through the base of the new monitor and getting it plugged in the appropriate jack proved a challenge, with stiff cables having to make right angle turns in limited space. One of the pluses in the PC World review of this monitor was the clean lines it has for desk use where the back of the monitor is visible.

Not having a bank officer’s desk, with the monitor back visible to the public, this wasn’t a big seller for me — but I can confirm it swivels nicely if you need

to show something to others sitting nearby. That's apparently a big deal, 'cause the replacement LG model has autopivot, automirror software that allows image to change so you can flip it over to display to people on the other side of your desk. "Yessir, our friendly loan rate is a mere three percent per month, compounded daily!"

I got everything hooked up, turned on the computer, and gasp, blackness. I checked cables, cycled the computer on and off several times, made sure the new video card was properly seated in the AGP slot. Finally, turned the monitor on and off (the right an-

swer's always last!) and lo and behold, a picture. Apparently, the monitor was still looking for an analog signal, and ignored the digital one. Several times since, the same thing occurred, but all's been well for the last two weeks.

I popped a DVD movie in the appropriate drive — heaven!! I swear I could see individual raindrops in the movie. The flat panel image was so bright that I've reduced it to 80 percent, to avoid wearing sunglasses. On the other hand, perhaps I should wear the shades and the tropical print shirts I bought last year — for the ultimate "cool geek" image <grin>!!



## NCTCUG Information

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Club Information call: 301-577-7899

Web Site: [www.nctcug.org](http://www.nctcug.org)

### Officers and Directors

All officer terms expire 2003

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JJ Davies	2005	703-379-9222
Sy Fishbein	2005	703-536-5894
Dean Mires	2005	301-931-2400

### Article Submissions

Articles, helpful hints, and other items of interest to readers of the NCTCUG Journal are always welcome and will be published as soon as possible after submission. Priority is given to members' contributions. Items may be submitted via modem to the BBS or on diskette. Submissions to the BBS should be uploaded to the Newsletter Conference and a message left for the Editor. Files should be straight ASCII, unformatted, with C/R only at end of paragraphs; no indents for paragraphs should be used. Preferred format for diskettes is MS-DOS 3 1/2 720k or 1.44Mb. Diskettes in other formats may be submitted but there will be a considerable delay in processing. If absolutely necessary, items may be submitted in hardcopy only but these will also meet with delay.

### Membership Policy

The National Capital Tandy Computer Users Group, Inc. is a non-profit [501-c(3)] organization founded in 1977 to educate users of all Tandy computers and MS-DOS compatible computers. Membership dues are \$25.00 (U.S. Funds) per year, with a \$5 surcharge for international mail. Membership in NCTCUG includes membership in all SIGs, access to the BBS and software libraries, and subscription to the Journal published 10 times per year. Applications may be obtained at any club meeting, by downloading from the BBS, by calling one of the officers or board members, or by writing to the club. A sample newsletter, membership application and related information may be obtained by enclosing \$1 and mailing your request to Jim Rhodes, 201 S. Kensington Street, Arlington VA 22204.

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### COMPUCENTER BBS

Is no longer in operation. It has been replaced by the 'compucenter' mailing list at <http://groups.yahoo.com/>

### If you are moving

Please send your change of address to the club PO box as soon as possible to avoid missing issues.

*Thank You!*



## Knoppix — A Tool For Everyone

By Charlie Paschal, PPCC

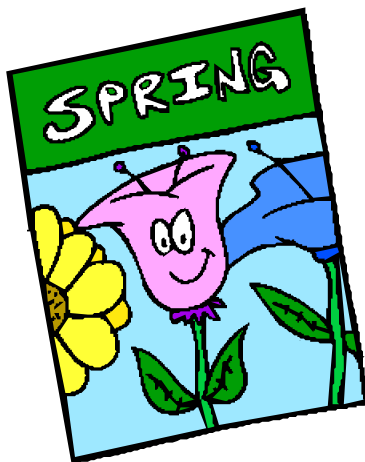
One of the greatest tools a computer technician has over a home user is the access of another computer. A second computer can be used to access the Internet and find answers to problems. When a home user's computer is crippled, it's very difficult to find answers -- except by telephone.

Although it's not another computer, a very useful tool is a Knoppix CD. Knoppix is a version of Linux that runs from a CD. If you've got a broadband connection to the Internet, such as a cable modem, it automatically senses the connection and gives you access to the Internet. It usually finds all your hardware, giving you total access to your files and information. You usually can copy files to CDs, floppies or Zip disks.

Get Knoppix at [www.knoppix.org](http://www.knoppix.org). It's a large download, about 700 megabytes, but it comes in a form that you can use to automatically make a bootable CD. If you don't have this CD, download it (or ask a friend with a broadband connection to do it for you) as a tool for a day when Windows won't start.

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NCTCUG, Inc.  
P.O. Box 949  
Arlington VA 22216



# First Class

### May 2005

1st Wed. ( 5/4) 7 p.m.  
Virginia General Meeting

4th Wed ( 5/25) 7 p.m. Internet SIG

3rd Monday (5/16)  
7 p.m. Board of Directors



All meetings are at **Carlin Hall**, 5711 S. 4th St.,  
Arlington VA: East off of Carlin Springs Rd, just  
south of Arlington Blvd/Route 50.

*It's Spring Cleaning*



*Time to clean all that junk out  
of your hard drive too!*

*And your old e-mail.*

*And...well, you get the idea....*