The NCTCUG Journal

Keeping Up
By Paul Howard, NCTCUG

When I was growing up, my folks had a book of "The Best Cartoons from The New Yorker Magazine." A number of those cartoons featured a guy with a long beard, flowing robes, (looking like a biblical prophet) and carrying a sign that read "The End is Near." Fast forward to 2006, and the guy carrying the sign is wearing Dockers, a pocket protector, and looks hauntingly like Bill Gates. On July 11th, Microsoft ends the support of Windows 98, SE, and ME, thus no more bug fixes and security updates. So, if yours is a Pentium I, II, or AMD K6 vintage machine, it really is time for a new computer running XP or Linux. Details from Microsoft:

http://www.microsoft.com/windows/support/endofsupport.mspx

The good news about upgrading is the computer you'll get today is probably five times as fast as your old one, with ten times the hard drive ca-
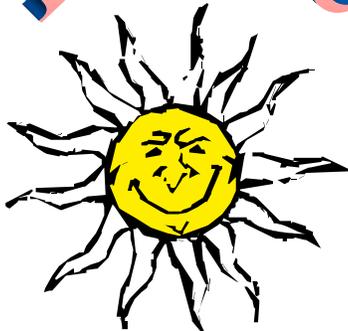
pacity, and four to eight times the RAM. It will include a multi-function optical drive that will read and write DVDs and CDs, a 17 inch, flat screen CRT, and cost 40% of what you paid back in the day. It's time !!

Based on sales figures, more laptops are being sold now than desktop systems, so they're certainly a factor in an upgrade decision. I acquired a personal laptop about two years ago, and used one at work for the last two years before I retired. I love being able to keep up with email using a laptop on vacation — some would argue that it's not

Inside

Google Earth

By Joe Schmitt, Member of the Tampa Bay Computer Society,
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One of the greatest tools of the internet has always been that of maps. From the early days of the Internet www.mapquest.com was a great source for online geography. Now a myriad of new tools is available to home internet users to navigate through the world.

Believe it or not, one of the biggest uses for online maps is not for that big long trip to the Grand Canyon with the kids but for finding local addresses. How many times recently have you used a service such as www.mapquest.com or maps.google.com to find that new restaurant or new store? While the online services available can be used to find the next route cross-country they are more often used locally.

Another popular role that current cartographic sites such as mappoint.msn.com serve is where a particular place is in relation to your current location. There are many times when we are watching the news and someplace like *Jumbo, WV* pops up; there is now a great new tool to let you explore the world virtually.

Google Earth (http://earth.google.com) is a new offering from Google that offers a unique spin on online cartography. While most mapping services try to offer you a straight forward approach to mapping, Google's newest tool takes quite a different tact.

Described by Google as "a globe that sits in your PC," Google Earth offers a new perspective on mapping software. Like all its major competitors, Google Earth will allow you to find addresses, points of interest, or a driving route. What makes Google Earth different is the way in which items are displayed to the user. Google Earth has to install software on your machine, and once installed it needs an internet connection to display its images. Also be advised that Google Earth is resource intensive: it requires a fairly fast machine with 3D graphics capability.

When you first start up Google Earth you see the image [*see figure 1*]

Google Earth generates an image of the planet taken from a mosaic of satellite and aerial photographs. If you enter an address such as your home in the search bar, Google Earth doesn't just pop a map of your neighborhood but actually *flies* to the location. You see the image of the earth get larger and larger as if you were descending on the location from outer space. All the time as the planet moves closer, the program continually generates more detailed pictures of the surface until you are sitting above the location you are searching for. [*see figure 2*]
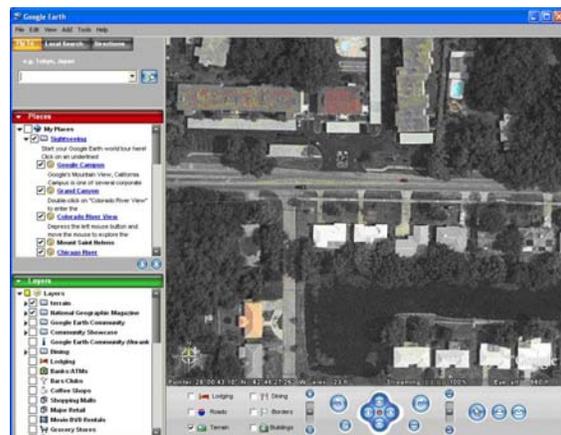

Figure 1

Figure 2

Another great feature of Google Earth is angular display. Not only are dead top center views available but you can also tilt the plane of the viewing area to see things in the distance. Now this sounds like I should be able to tilt the image and see the windows on my house, but that just isn't possible. All the images are from satellite or aerial photographs that are also taken from straight overhead.

Topography is another feature that Google Earth incorporates makes the tilting feature quite impressive. Topography is how the terrain rises and falls in any given location. Google earth uses 3D technology to render the rise and fall of the land based on radar data gathered from multiple space shuttle missions. The images are melded with the topography and you have the impression of seeing mountains rise and canyons fall. [*see figure 3*]

Not only does Google Earth provide these new ways to explore the world but they have also included the ability to include data files of your own. If you choose to upgrade to the "plus" version you can import data from any of the popular GPS (Global Positioning System) receivers currently available. You can import waypoints, routes, and tracks from the unit.

Also, you can import images, such as a topographic map, and orient them as overlays on the satellite images. The application will let you resize and rotate
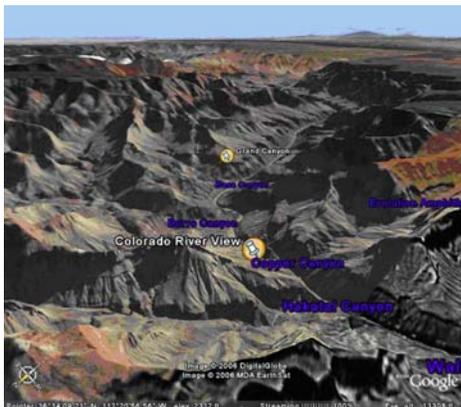
the map until fits. Google Earth will also let you save data in files that can be shared with other users. One interesting aspect is files that can utilize data available on the web for dynamic interaction. Click on this link to see some examples: http://earth.google.com/tour/thanks-win.html . For example there is a link to a file that will track flights around the US live. It displays an icon for the plane and shows it in relation to where it is in the air.

Google Earth offers some new and interesting ways to explore our world. With thousands of user files, it can be customized to any number of needs to suit your tastes. A great resource for new ideas involving Google Earth is the Google Earth blog at: http://www.gearthblog.com/ or at the community: http://bbs.keyhole.com/ubb/ubbthreads.php/Cat/0.

The only limits to Google Earth are what your imagination and determination can achieve.

Joe Schmitt is a computer and technology guru, who also has a love for the outdoors. He can often be found tromping around the woods with his GPS and digital camera.

Figure 3

Pop Quiz: Can you find Carlin Hall in this picture?

Internet Explorer Tips And Tricks

By Richard O. Johnson, TUGNET rj@theskillspool.org

Internet Explorer, despite inroads made by Firefox and other browsers, overwhelmingly remains users' browser of choice (perhaps because it comes bundled with all new Windows computers). The following pointers are designed to help you get the most out of your use of Internet Explorer. They're written with IE6 in mind, although most will apply to earlier versions, and some may apply to other browsers as well.

Use Keyboard Shortcuts

My regular readers will know that to increase efficiency I strongly encourage the use of keyboard shortcuts in preference to the use of the mouse. Here are my favorite IE keyboard shortcuts:

➢ Use Alt-Home to bring up your home page.

➢ Use Ctrl-H to open or close your history pane.

➢ Use Ctrl-I to open or close the Favorites pane.

➢ Use Ctrl-B to organize your Favorites

➢ Use Ctrl-N to duplicate the active page in a new window.

➢ Use Ctrl-F to find a word, partial word, or phrase on the current webpage.

➢ Use Backspace (or Alt-Left) instead of the IE Back button, to navigate back.

➢ Use Alt-Right to navigate forward.

➢ Use F11 to toggle full-screen mode.

➢ Use Alt-D to move to the address bar. (Or use Ctrl-O, and you won't need the address bar! See "Other" Tip 3, below, for details.)

➢ Once in the address bar, use Enter to bring up the specified webpage or Ctrl-Enter to first surround what you've typed with "www." before and ".com" after, and then bring it up.

➢ Use F5 or Ctrl-F5 to refresh a page. It's a good idea when refreshing to routinely hold down Ctrl (whether you're using the keyboard or the mouse), to bypass the IE cache and give you a more effective refresh.

Optimize The Toolbar

Unless you maintain only a dozen or so Favorites, you'll want to take full advantage of the Links option for the IE toolbar, which you activate with the right-click toolbar menu. Drag the Favorites you'll want to have most prominent into the Links section of the toolbar. Using the right-click Properties menu of each "Link," you'll probably want to assign it a unique icon and, to save space, rename it to a shorter form.

Tip: You can save additional space by shortening the "Links" title on the toolbar. Unfortunately, simply renaming the "Links" folder won't work. You'll need to open the Registry Editor, by choosing Run from the Start menu and typing regedit. After press-

ing Enter, drill down to HKEY_CURRENT_USER > Software > Microsoft > Internet Explorer > Toolbar. On the right-hand side you'll see LinksFolderName="Links." Change the word within the quotation marks to a one-character name you'd like to use instead, perhaps "." or "+," and close the Editor. (Use extreme caution, as making a wrong entry in the Registry Editor can have dire consequences!)

You should unclutter the toolbar by instructing it to "Remove" nearly all the toolbar buttons. These not only occupy valuable space but can actually interfere with efficient browsing (by discouraging use of the keyboard shortcuts described above). You get to the Remove command via "Customize," on the right-click menu. Of the built-in IE toolbar buttons, the only ones I recommend displaying are those for Size and Back. All the other button functions can better be facilitated via the keyboard or by other means. (For a complete list of IE keyboard shortcuts, go to http://snipurl.com/bskn. The reason for keeping the Back button is its associated pull-down menu.) [*Ed. note*: the snipped-url is http://support.microsoft.com/?kbid=306832]

Keep IE Secure

It goes without saying that you need to keep IE fully patched, perhaps with the use of Windows Update or Microsoft Update. But what of the Internet Explorer security settings (accessible via Tools > Internet Options > Security)?

In the "Internet Zone"—the default zone for a webpage—it's prudent to be more rather than less restrictive. (Better safe than sorry!) The easiest way to go is simply to move the "Default Level" slider to High. Or you could use the "Custom Level" to make a determination for each setting. In that case you may want to consult a guide such as the one at www.techspot.com/tweaks/ie6/ie-5.shtml.

Remember that if your security restriction interferes with the proper viewing of a page, Windows will let you know—although most often you'll be able to view the page just fine notwithstanding what Windows says. To remove the restriction for a given page, you can add that page to your "Trusted" sites,

against which the restriction won't ordinarily apply. (You may have to refresh the page after adding it.) To simplify moving webpages to your trusted list, a free program is available at www.geeksuperhero.com/zones.shtml.

An alternative method does not require you to move all such sites to the Trusted zone. For this you'll need the laudable Push the Freakin' Button software, available at modest cost at www.tlhouse.co.uk/PTFB.shtml. With PTFB in place, use IE's Custom Level to choose "Prompt" instead of "Disable" for every feature except any that you're absolutely sure you'll never want to use. Then instruct PTFB to push the "No" (disallow) button when the prompt appears. Should you decide to permit the feature in question, you can with a double click disable PTFB, and just as easily re-enable it when done.

A good (free) test to assess your IE vulnerability may be found at http://snipurl.com/ietest.

Other Tips

1) To execute a link in a new window, hold down Shift.

2) Is IE acting strangely? You can often fix it by using the IE Repair utility accessible via Add/Remove Programs (in the Windows Control Panel), upon selecting "Microsoft Internet Explorer" and then "Add/Remove."

3) You can dispense with the address bar, by using Ctrl-O to open a webpage or other location. You can then completely hide the address bar (using the IE toolbar's right-click Customize function) or shrink it down to its title only (having first "unlocked" the toolbar, also with the right-click menu). Losing the address bar will eliminate the temptation to go there with the (less efficient) mouse, and can free up space that may be better put to other use. On the downside, you'll also lose the functionality of the Ctrl-Enter address bar shortcut (see Keyboard Shortcuts, above).

4) You might be able to save considerable time if you bypass your home page (start page) when you don't need to see it. Here's how: Enter "about:blank" [without the quotes] in the IE address bar, to create a blank quasi-webpage. Then use Right Click + F to turn that page into a Favorite, and drag the new Favorite's icon into the Quick Launch section of your Windows task bar, before deleting the Favorite. You may want to assign a different icon to your new IE shortcut with the use of its right-click Properties menu. (You can use this same technique to set up a "secondary home page" instead of a blank page.)

Add-Ons

Useful IE add-ons, free except as noted, include:

➢ Google Toolbar, at http://toolbar.google.com/, which enables too many useful features to even hint at here. Highly recommended.

➢ Favorites Search, at www.dzsoft.com, which lets you speedily locate a Favorite, no matter how many you've stored.

➢ Y!Q DemoBar, at http://yq.search.yahoo.com/splash/demobar.html, which enables context-based searching. This can easily be squeezed onto the same line as the IE address bar.

➢ ieSpell, at www.iespell.com, which will quickly spellcheck all the text you've entered in any Web form.

➢ AddaButton, at www.harmonyhollow.net/aab.shtml, which will let you fit more buttons onto the IE toolbar. These buttons can open documents and applications (not just websites) and don't require space-consuming displayed names. Shareware, $11.95

seems to be an unlikely rumor, do the sender a favor by checking it out at a site like snopes.com [www.snopes.com] and reporting what you find.

The Netiquette Home Page [www.albion.com/netiquette/] is an entertaining and informative reference. It notes that Netiquette covers both common courtesy online and informal cyberspace "rules of the road". The site lists and explains rules with friendly illustrations. It's interesting that not only do the rules all agree with that Golden Rule mentioned earlier, they're often different ways of giving the same advice. For example, using the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life is an easy way to make yourself look good online.

Netiquette Equals Friendly Online Neighborhoods

By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor; Columnist, AARP Computer & Technology Website, www.aarp.org October 2005

Etiquette—proper behavior in various situations—has concerned humans through the ages. Google [www.google.com] turns up references to early telephone manners, proper Medieval-era knightly behavior, and how shells and sharp stones became today's knives and forks (and, of course, which hand to hold them in).

Though the Internet became generally accessible about ten years ago, academics and researchers had used it for decades before that. Just as civilization accommodated sudden widespread automobile and telephone usage, developing common practices (stop for red lights, answer telephones with "Hello"), new online technologies created the need for corresponding innovations in manners.

Called **Netiquette** ('Net + etiquette), the new discipline really just requires using old manners in a new setting. But since going online is like traveling to another country, a guidebook is useful.

The first and simplest chapter is simply "Follow the golden rule" [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethic_of_Reciprocity]: Treat people online with the same courtesy you expect. Without normal conversational cues such as body language, facial expression, and tone of voice, it's easy to misunderstand someone's meaning. You may remember Emily Litella on classic Saturday Night Live television, mishearing the need to reduce TV violence as "eliminating violins". Even stranger miscommunication occurs online, so give others the benefit of the doubt.

Out-of-control ranting is sometimes called "flaming". Before responding angrily, consider how you'd react to receiving the note you're about to send. Remember that once sent, e-mail and other online communications take on a life of their own, being forever retrievable with your name attached. And asking "Did you mean..." can avoid having to give Emily Litella's trademark "Never mind" if your interpretation was off target. Replying calmly often gets a conversation back on track without anyone suffering a "flame war", an unproductive exchange of angry notes.

E-mail is likely the most commonly addressed Netiquette area. Searching Google for email + netiquette provides an encyclopedia of advice, some general, some for personal use, and much for business settings. Common tips are

☆ DON'T USE ALL CAPITAL LETTERS (it's hard to read and is considered "shouting");

☆ Be brief;

☆ Use meaningful subject lines;

☆ Quote just enough from what you're answering to provide useful context;

☆ Don't forward to everyone you know jokes, rumors, hoaxes, chain letters, charity appeals, and such, even if an arriving note tells you to do so;

☆ Don't send "Me too" notes to discussion lists;

☆ Don't send attachments without getting the recipient's permission;

☆ Send plain text e-mail unless all your addressees prefer HTML-format; etc.

Accept and cheerfully answer questions asked by people newly online—remember that we all started with basics. Interesting e-mail tips are available at places like Writers Write [www.writerswrite.com/journal/dec99/pirillo1.htm], Emailreplies.com [www.emailreplies.com/], and Yale University Library [www.library.yale.edu/training/netiquette/].

Not All Tips Are "Don't"!

If you receive multiple replies to a question you ask online, it's advisable—this will make people love you—to summarize answers for everyone else who saw the question. Be careful with humor: what's obvious and sidesplitting to you may baffle or annoy someone else. When appropriate, and sparingly, use "smileys"—symbols like ;-) — to show that you're not serious. And if you receive what
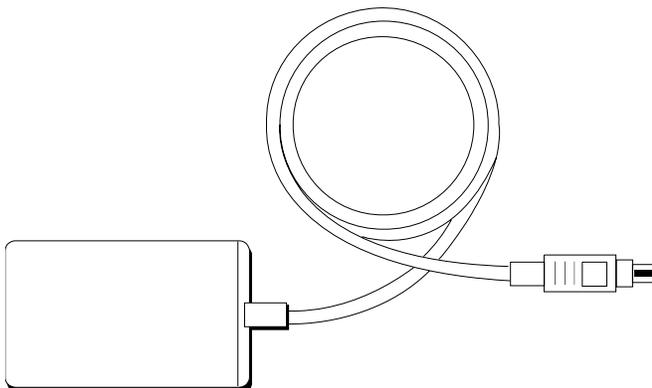
A USB Primer

By Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D., Sarasota PCUG, Florida

By now most computer users are familiar with the term USB or Universal Serial Bus. This connection port on your computer is designed to replace the older serial, parallel and PS2 ports. Probably within a year you won't find any new computers with these older ports. They will have only USB. There are some things you might find useful about USB ports and hubs which could reduce or eliminate problems in dealing with them.

USB ports have a number of advantages over the old system of parallel/serial ports. They do not require I/O memory space or individual IRQ lines. Anyone who has had to work with older computers and operating systems will remember the problems of trying to prevent IRQ conflicts when connecting external devices such as scanners or modems. How many times did the sound card manage to steal IRQ's that you had to have for another device? USB also allows for automatic device configuration and hot-plug capability. The hot-plug or hot-swap function means that you don't have to power down the computer and go through a restart when you want to connect a new device. In instead you simply connect or disconnect the USB cable. The computer will recognize the device and connect to the proper driver. That is assuming this isn't the first time you have used the device and that the driver has already been installed. You commonly have to install drivers for external hard drives, printers, scanners, card readers, etc. You generally don't have to install drivers for mice and keyboards that connect to the USB ports.

Next, consider that USB operates at three possible speeds: low speed or 1.4 megabits/second, full speed or 12 megabits/second, and high speed or 480 megabits/second (mbps). Low speed and high speed can be used with either USB 1.x or USB 2.0 hosts. The high speed can be used only with USB 2.0. The host is the computer that provides the USB connections. For USB 2.0 operation the host computers "root port hubs" must support USB 2.0. That means the computer must have USB 2.0 drivers that are supported by the operating system. Windows XP (service pack 1.0) and Windows 2000 both support USB 2.0. The root port hubs are the USB connectors on your computer and are usually connected to the motherboard. You can also identify them in the Device Manager where they will show under the USB Host Controller.

Although the USB specifications indicate you can daisy-chain up to 127 devices from one port, this is not likely to happen because of the power drop that occurs over long connections. You can get external hubs that allow you to connect 4 – 7 devices to a single root port hub. The external hubs are repeaters that relay transaction information from the computer to a device connected to the hub's port. There is a catch to this as well. Some USB 2.0 hubs will decrease their maximum output if you have a USB 1.x device attached to a port. This means that any USB 2.0 device attached to the hub may not function or will function at a lower speed. I learned this the hard way with an external USB 2.0 hard drive. I thought the problem was the drive, but it was the hub. I had a USB 1.0 card reader attached to the hub and as a result the current output to each port was reduced to the point that it was not sufficient to run the drive. This occurred even though the hub and the drive had external power supplies.

An ample power supply is necessary to operate USB devices. Root hub ports can provide 5 volts and up to 500 milli-Amps (mA) of current. The USB power specifications state the USB ports should provide between 100 mA and 500 mA. Devices connected directly to the computer are able to obtain the maximum current. So let's take a situation where we have

a hub connected to the computer's root port hub. The hub is receiving 500 mA of current at about 5 volts. If only the current received through the connecting cable powers the hub, the output from each of its four hubs will be only 100 mA. This is referred to as a "bus-powered" hub because it receives its current solely from the USB bus in the host computer. However, if the hub has its own power supply and is receiving at least 1.6 Amps from this supply, then it can provide a 500 mA output at each port. In this case, the hub should be able to support high-speed USB 2.0 devices.

On some computers you will find an icon in the system tray that is a "hardware disconnect". In this instance, you need to double click the icon and wait for it to permit you to disconnect the hardware device. This icon does not appear with all USB devices. Since installing SP2, I haven't seen this icon in my system tray. There are some reports of computers with SATA drives showing this icon. Since the SATA drive is supposed to be hot-swappable like USB devices, I'm not surprised that the icon shows up. However, with my Seagate SATA drive, I still don't see this icon. That may be because my motherboard doesn't support the hot-swap function even though it supports SATA drives.

When you plug in a USB device to either a hub or a computer port, there is an initial identification process referred to as the "configuration" step that occurs. During this configuration process the device can not draw more than 100 mA. If it does, the process will fail and it will appear that the device failed to work. The configuration process identifies the device, its drivers, and its power requirements. Only after this process is complete will the device be able to draw more than 100 mA current. Since this process is not instantaneous, some time must be allowed by the user before attempting to use the device. In addition, this configuration may not occur if the device is plugged into the computer before the computer is turned on and booted. In these cases, it may be better to connect the USB device after the computer is fully operational. Most of the time, the computer will identify and configure the device during the bootup.

Microsoft has a knowledge base article on trouble-shooting USB problems (#310575). Typically the problems relate to drivers or power problems. How-

ever, they also point out that high-speed devices should be connected with high-speed cables only. The low speed cables may distort the signal as a result of their reduced amount of shielding. Another really complete source of trouble-shooting information can be found at: http://www.usbman.com/winxpusbguide.htm. This has references for Windows ME as well as XP and Windows 2000. However, anyone who hasn't dumped Windows ME should seriously consider doing so as soon as possible. WinXP is such a tremendous improvement over ME and will really make your computing experience much more enjoyable. My computer hasn't locked up or crashed in more than six months, probably longer. I really don't keep track anymore.

So what devices are typically high speed and require USB 2.0? Let's start with external USB hard drives. Seagate has a very interesting technical paper on external hard drives. In this paper they state that most 2½" external drives require 1000 – 1100 mA during the start-up cycle and then can function at the 500 mA maximum current available from the USB port. They also state that most USB ports can support up to 700 mA on a continuous basis. This is something I have not found elsewhere. Consequently, my recommendation is that when looking for an external drive, pick one with its own power supply. I wouldn't want to depend on one that drew all its power from the USB bus.

Other high-speed devices include laser printers, scanners, and multi-function printers. All of these should have their own power supply. Other devices that operate at full-speed and don't need external power are blue-tooth adapters and card readers. This is only a partial list of what is available in USB devices. Just remember when you are looking at them that the term full-speed does not mean 480 mbps, instead it is the slower 12 mbps.

Digital Cameras Blossom As Popularity Increases

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; radio & TV show host

Website: http://www.casio.com

Much to no one's surprise, the popularity of digital cameras is exploding, as the quality improves even more, and the cameras become more affordable. Digital photography, which was initially slow, grainy, and sometimes difficult to manipulate has matured, and is now nearly universal. With the dramatic improvements in digital camera and storage technology in recent years, much of what early adopters of digital photography experienced has changed for the better.

Sitting in front of me as I type this column are two digital cameras, each of which are representative of the respective technology of the day. One of the cameras is a JVC GC-S1U which is about 5 years old, and when it was new it was considered a technological marvel and state of the art in its day, but by today's standards, while still functional, is technologically obsolete. One of the first digital still cameras available, it has a .3 (that is 3/10) of a megapixel image of 640x480 pixels, which is miniscule by today's standards. It takes 4 AA batteries, which are good for only a few dozen photos before they are exhausted, even less if the integral flash is used. Reviews of the day used the expression that this camera "eats batteries". One of the first cameras on the market to take a memory card, it uses the now large format by current standards CF or Compact Flash card for additional photo storage. Connecting to the computer via a very slow serial connection made photos slow to download, unless an external card reader was used to read the CF card. One feature that this antique camera has, that is still impressive by today's standards is a 10x optical zoom. The processor in the camera is horribly slow by today's standards, with a noticeable lag between pressing the shutter and capturing the image, along with a long delay for a follow up snapshot.

The newer digital cameras on the market clearly show the technological improvements that have become commonplace. New digital cameras come in a wide assortment of prices and features, from tiny key-chain size cameras, to cameras embedded in a ballpoint pen, to inexpensive disposable cameras to pocket size marvels, to SLR (Single Lens Reflex) type cameras with extreme resolution rivaling 35mm film, and using an assortment of available lenses, just like traditional 35mm cameras. Zoom can range from the less expensive and generally inferior digital zoom, to the superior optical zoom. Zoom ranges typically range from 3x to 12x, with some models offering a combination of optical and digital zoom to increase the ability to manipulate the closeness of the image. Many of the newer digital still cameras can also capture video and sound, often in the popular MPEG-4 30fps (30 frames per second) format, the length of the video being only limited by the amount of storage available on the memory card.

The second camera I have in front of me is a new, state of the art Casio EX-S500, one of a series of new cameras Casio is producing in the "Exilim" series. The camera is actually small compared to my older camera, only being about 3.5 inches wide, by about 2.3 inches tall, and about .6 (6/10) of an inch thick, weighing only about 4 ounces. This full featured camera will easily fit in a shirt pocket or purse. It uses the tiny SD memory cards. With an excellent 5 megapixel maximum image size, this camera will take digital photos in six different sizes ranging from an enormous 2560x1920 pixel size (5 megapixels), to

the smaller 640x480 size (3/10 of a megapixel). It should be noted that the smaller the image, the more images that can be stored in the memory card. Also, the smaller images are more appropriate if they are going to be emailed, an important consideration in "netiquette". The larger size images are appropriate if large photos are to be printed in 8x10 inch or 11x14 inch sizes, or even larger.

Zoom is provided by a telescoping 3x optical zoom, which can be coupled with an integral 4x digital zoom, giving a maximum zoom of 12x. The lens produced very bright and sharp images. When the camera is turned off, the telescoping zoom lens is retracted into the body of the camera, making the front of the camera nearly flat. One technological marvel built into this camera an "Anti-Shake DSP" which is a digital signal processor that removes the effect of moving the camera while the image is being recorded; this contributes to an exceptionally sharp image by removing or minimizing the blurring many of us encounter when we move the camera as we take a photo.

Despite the small stature of the camera, it also can record movies and sound in three formats, 640x480 in both high quality and normal mode, and a smaller image 320x240 size for extended play. Video is saved in MPEG-4 format, and the sound is saved in the universal WAV format. With a common and inexpensive 256 megabyte memory card, the camera can capture about 8 minutes of video and sound at the high quality setting, and about 45 minutes at the extended play setting. Simply, available memory and battery power is the limiting factor in the length of the video that can be shot at any given time.

While my old camera ate batteries, having a very short battery life, this new Casio Exilim has a proprietary rechargeable lithium ion battery with a normal capacity of about 200 photos before it needs to be recharged.

The camera has a shutter speed of 1/8 to 1/2000 of a second, rivaling many of the classical 35mm cameras, and includes a multi-mode flash, self timer, bright 2.2 inch LCD screen, and a mini-cradle which simultaneously connects the camera to a USB 2 high speed connection as well as AC power to charge the internal battery. There is also an "AV Out" jack on the cradle. Included with the camera are two CDs of software to download and manage the still images as well as the video. A set of included video cables allows the playing of video direct from the camera when it is docked in the cradle.

The body of the Casio Exilim EX-S500 camera is stainless steel, and available in a typical steel grey color, as well as while or orange toned stainless steel. This camera has a suggested retail price of $350. Locally these cameras are available at Circuit City, CompUSA, Radio Shack, Target, Ritz Camera, Sharper Image, or online from Casio at www.casio,com.

Casio is now marketing some excellent quality digital cameras, and should be strongly considered when shopping for better quality and full featured digital cameras.

Selections From The DealsGuy

Bob Click, Greater Orlando Computer User Group

UGR — A Reminder

Gene and Linda Barlow (User Group Relations) were at the FACUG convention <http://www.facug.org/> and Gene did his usual great job. They have long been user group people's best friends and now offer some 18 outstanding products at great prices. They also have bundles that reduce those prices. Check their secure Web site at <http://www.ugr.com>. Order code is UGFEB06.

I mentioned to Gene my unorthodox backup plan to put certain files on a flash drive and just copy them to my other machines at times to update certain Eudora and other files, and he told me about a product he offers called SmartSync Pro 2.10 that will automatically sync designated files to other machines once you put them on the flash drive. He also stresses his personal tech support for the products along with the vendor support, but sometimes you must be patient. He described their new home location in south Utah, and it sounds like a dream spot. He said they

got tired of "snow" in northern Utah. Their new home is not far from a wealth of beautiful national parks and it rarely snows in St. George.

Name Your Drive

Have you tried putting a label on a flash drive? Good luck keeping it on! Memorex has introduced TravelDrive ID that has a small LCD screen good for eleven characters to name the drive or its contents, and shows how much memory remains <http://www.memorex.com/>. (Click on Travel Drives) Prices start at $80. I only mentioned this product because it is unique.

Automate Your Tasks

Make Any Manual Operation on Your PC A Fun Ride with RoboTask 2.4!

NeoWise Software releases RoboTask 2.4, a Windows-based application that automates routine operations. It now offers new features and enhancements suggested by end users. Set up automations right out of the box without the need to create complex scripts or batch files. RoboTask provides a visual interface and over a hundred actions that can be selected and combined into a task in a point-and-click fashion.

RoboTask has acquired a new plug-in for work with a POP3 server and analysis of email messages, and its actions let you easily organize, for example, a server that will receive commands by email. Also added are "Import Registry" and "Export Registry" actions that expand the backup abilities. Customers will discover new actions to synchronize a task with other tasks and processes called "Wait for File", "Wait for Process."

Washington Area Computer User Group (WAC)Meetings

WACUG Meetings will be held on June 17th, 2006 [Computer Clinic] and July 15, 2006 [Personal Video Editing with your PC] 12:30 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/

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You can automate file operations like copy, move, rename; manage automatic backups; also schedule and run FTP and Web server operations. These jobs may be launched manually, scheduled to run automatically, or can be configured to be triggered by a wide array of changes in your PC.

Read more information at <http://www.robotask.com/forum>.

RoboTask 2.4 runs under Windows 98/Me/2000/XP/2003 and costs $99.95 (USD) for a single-user license. NeoWise will provide a 25% discount to user group members at <http://www.regsoft.net/purchase.php3?productid=75129&pc=7O43J> (3.26 Mb). Registered customers are entitled to free upgrades to minor versions, considerable discounts on upgrades to major versions, and priority technical support. <http://www.robotask.com>.

The following announcement offers a discount on the product, but did not responded to my e-mail asking how to get it. This is the fourth vendor who did not respond and I am at my deadline. Perhaps you'll have better luck than I did if you like the product.

NeoWise Software (Edited)

NeoWise Software has released version 1.8 of Express Thumbnail Creator (ETC), a web photo album creation tool for Microsoft Windows. ETC lets anyone, regardless of their knowledge of HTML or CSS, create a compelling, high impact gallery for sharing digital memories with other people over the Internet. The ETC's wizard-style interface takes you through all the stages of gallery creation in a step-by-step fashion and gives a total control over its every detail. Use default settings or choose from 30 exclusive prebuilt templates to help you jumpstart your project in a couple of minutes.

Simply follow the five steps of gallery building, adding images, selecting and applying a style to your gallery, specifying the look for thumbnails and full-size images. Customize the size of tables on index pages, set titles, colors, links, and captions used on index and image pages and you can generate and

save the gallery project in HTML format. It is then ready for publication online and can be immediately uploaded to your website.

ETC Pricing and Availability

Express Thumbnail Creator 1.8 runs under Windows 98/Me/NT4/2000/XP and costs $39.95 (USD) for a single-user license. Registered customers are entitled to free upgrades to minor versions, considerable discounts on upgrades to major versions, and priority technical support. User group members receive a 25% discount by e-mailing Alexey Surkis <alexey@neowise.com>. Additional information on the product, a set of sample albums, as well as a 30-day fully functional evaluation version of ETC is available from <http://www.neowise.com/etc>. No privacy statement on the Web site, so be careful.

For more information, visit http://www.neowise.com. Direct download link: (4.1 MB) http://www.neowise.com/ftp/etc_setup.exe

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>. Visit my Web site at <http://www.dealsguy.com>.

What Comes After You Have Your Pictures In Tip Top Shape?

By Donald Cummins, APCUG Representative,
Fresno Personal Computer Users Group, California

Paper and ink are a team — one without the other is just paper or ink. Paper is one of the least understood or overlooked items.

Paper should be used with care. A wedding picture may be a total loss if you put it on the incorrect type of paper. If the picture is taken on the soft side (not very sharp) and printed on very glossy paper, it will make it look out of focus. It would be much better if it is printed on less glossy paper or, even better, on a matte-finish paper. Many of the wedding photos may need to be printed on a number of different types of paper to find the best results. At the same time, the ink cartridges may need to be changed from one group of photos to another.
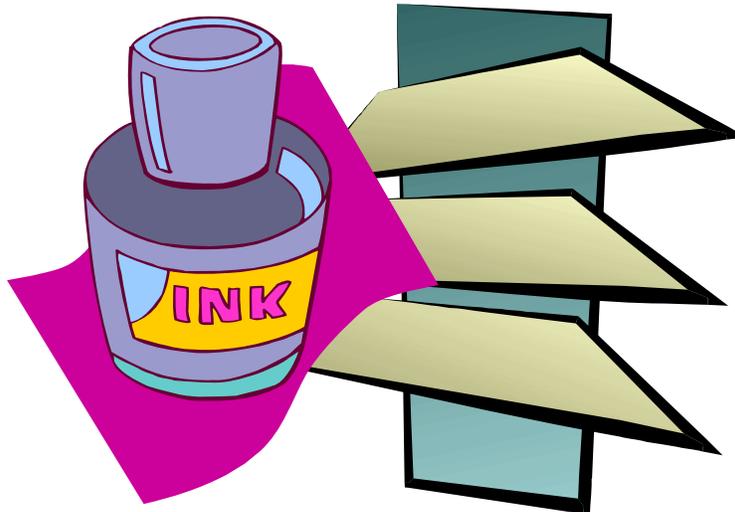
Some people feel you should use only one brand of paper that is made for your brand of printer; e.g. Epson printer should only use Epson paper and Epson original ink cartridges. They say do not "mix and match." Others say stick with one brand of paper or ink and know everything about them. This can be a huge effort at the beginning but may pay off later. Each photo should be and must be looked upon as being unique unto itself.

Now this is where ink comes into play. There are two types of ink: dye and pigment. Dye inks produce somewhat brighter colors and are prone to fading. They now may last 10 years or longer. Pigment inks are less bright and last longer than dye ink on photos.

Some feel that the larger number of dots per inch is one of the biggest things that will enhance the finished photo. The other side says 1440 dpi is all you really need. The droplet size may be the finishing touch to the photo if your printer can put down a droplet size of four picoliters and/or smaller; this is too small for our eyes to see. Some printers are even putting down droplets as small as 1.5 picoliters.

Does the ink bleed through or run or take forever to dry and cause the paper to cup up? Some will lay down the ink in a number of passes and others may lay the ink down in one pass. One may require the paper to move through a number of rollers and others will pass straight through.

One item which can affect the finished photo is how thick the paper is. You need to check how the paper moves through the printer because the way it moves will control how thick the paper can be.

Printers now have many more capabilities than four or five years ago. They have more ink colors, ink placement size, and speed than ever before.

For detailed printer information, check the following websites for their information on printers, ink and paper information:

Epson — www.epson.com
Canon — www.canon.com
Hewlett-Packard — www.hp.com

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context with proper credit given the author. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you. November 2005
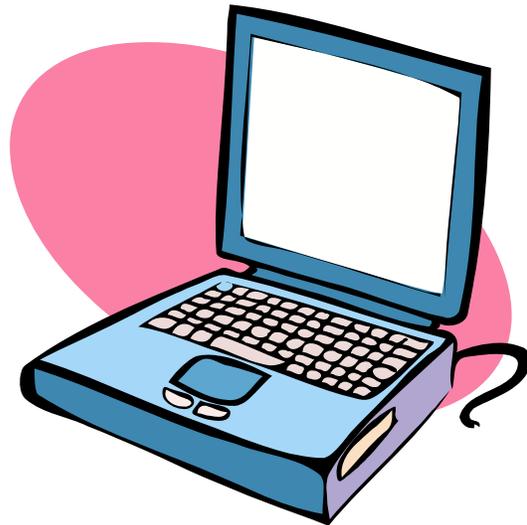
(Continued from page 1)

vacation if you're going to drag your digital life along. However, unless you plan to spend north of two grand, your laptop will probably be heavy or underpowered.

My work laptop had a quality case, with sufficient room to serve as a briefcase, and a nice shoulder strap — but… I was getting neck and back pain from carrying it to and from work, and wound up buying a rolling case for it. Some of the other considerations about using a laptop as a primary computer include hard drive speed. Laptops generally use drives with lower speeds than desktop systems because lower rotational speed equates to longer battery life. RPM matters! I've found the drive speed on my laptop, 5400 rpm vs. 7200 on my desktop systems, highly frustrating.

If your laptop is your primary system, and you use it for traveling frequently, you'll probably want to avoid disconnecting all your cables every time you move the computer, so you'll need to invest in a

port replicator or docking station ($100 - $300), and extra power supply ($90 and up). Laptop batteries are expensive ($130 and up), and have a limitation to how many times they can be recharged, generally about 500 charge cycles. You can lengthen battery life, if your laptop is left mostly in one place, by pop-

NCTCUG Information

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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 3½ 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 1978 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 8 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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Members' advertisements: Ads are accepted from members for non-commercial purposes at no charge. Copy should be sent to the Editor in the same format as article submissions. Commercial Advertisements: Ads are accepted from commercial advertisers at the rate of $60 per full page, per appearance, with discounts for multiple insertions. Smaller ads are priced accordingly. Payment for ads must be made in advance of appearance. Advertisers must supply a permanent address and telephone number to the editor.

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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/

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/compucenter/

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!

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ping out the battery and running off the power supply/ charger. However, you then need to remember to replace and recharge the battery before you "go portable."

Another serious consideration with laptops is the data contained in them. If you use a laptop as your primary computer, and carry it on vacation, what will the computer reveal if it's stolen or lost? Is your financial life on the computer — access to banking, brokerage, retirement, and credit card accounts, or Quicken/Money files? Data like this needs to be left secured at home, or locked down with encryption — and the encryption key must not be on a Post It note stuck to the case. This week Aetna Insurance revealed that a laptop stolen from an employee's car contained the names, addresses, and Social Security numbers of 38,000 customers. Several user group members and I have been notified of similar data thefts affecting our personal information. Fortunately, with these notices have come several years' coverage from credit reporting agencies for identity theft problems. You really need to protect the data on a laptop!
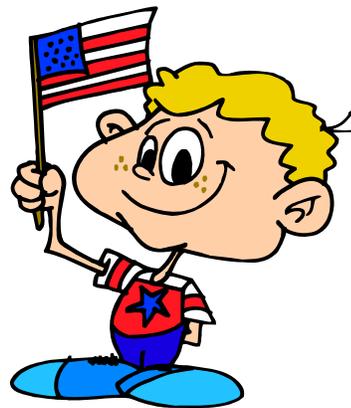
June/July 2006

1st Wed. (6/7, 7/5)
7 p.m. General Meeting

4th Wed (6/28, 7/26)
7 p.m. Internet SIG

3rd Monday (7/17, none in June)
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.

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