

The NCTCUG Journal

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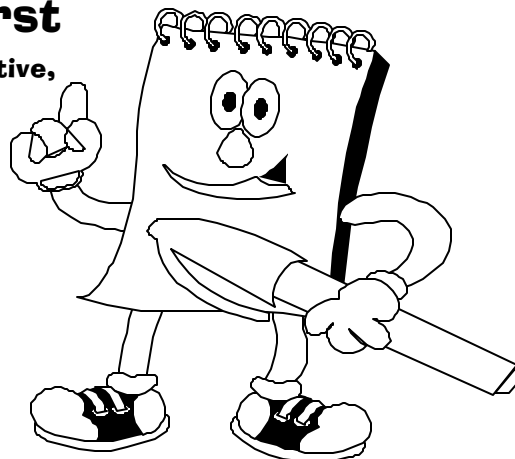
Volume 28 Issue 2

The New, The Best, And The Worst

Collected by Pim Borman, Editor and APCUG Representative, Southwest Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.

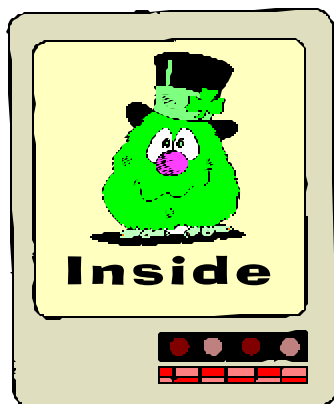
Alternatives

As we all know, Microsoft software is used on 90% of the world's desktop computers. Over the years Microsoft has managed to include Internet Explorer with the Windows OS sold with almost every new computer. Microsoft Works or the more expensive Microsoft Office programs are bundled with most systems, at extra cost, but hidden in the total cost of a new computer. As a result, earlier successful programs such as Netscape, Word Star, Word Perfect, Database II, and Lotus 1-2-3 are still only used by a few dedicated fans. To this date it is almost impossible to buy a computer from a major manufacturer without pre-installed MS software. Most recently Dell has started to sell some computers with Linux-based Linspire pre-installed, but in Europe only. Dell is also offering some computers without any operating system in the US, allowing the buyer to install the OS of his choice. Some small, lesser known manufacturers also sell Microsoft-free computers. Still, it will take years, if ever, to overcome the domination of MS in the desktop computer market.



Microsoft has historically emphasized ease of use (with varying success) and addition of new features to program updates to keep the customers coming back for more. Now that it has become painfully obvious that the programs also should be resistant to tampering by malicious individuals, it is probably too late to correct the many vulnerabilities, given that there are millions of lines of code involved to be critically reviewed. SP2, a major security update for Windows XP, has now become available. Previewers describe it as a major security improvement for Windows XP and Internet Explorer 6, but the virus

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GPS Units

By Joe Schmitt, Tampa Bay Computer Society

This is the second of a three article series on the Global Positioning System. The first discussed what the system is and how it works. The second and third articles will delve into receivers and uses to civilians.

In my last article I discussed how the Global Positioning System (GPS) works and how it has changed navigation. GPS utilizes a set of 24 or more orbiting satellites broadcasting a coded signal that is used by a ground receiver to pinpoint location, speed, and distance while moving. I would like to delve into the numerous receivers available on the market to the civilian user. Essentially there are four types of receivers available.

The first is the military model. This operates on entirely different frequency than their civilian counterparts. The very accurate military units are on what is known as the P-code and Y-code and should be accurate within a foot or so. They include mapping features similar to consumer models.

The second type is surveying/Geographic Information System (GIS) models. Quite a bit larger than consumer models, they can easily be the size of a small briefcase. They are accurate to within one centimeter. This accuracy is obtained after being in the field through post-processing. The data gathered is stored and analyzed in a lab to compensate for atmospheric errors from the satellites.

The third type, for commercial transportation, is used to navigate ships at sea and aircraft. Often these units are tied into an autopilot system used to maneuver the vehicle. The units are quite large and permanently installed in the control panels of the vehicle.

The fourth type, consumer models, will be the focus of this discussion. The consumer model GPS unit can be permanently installed in a car or be handheld. There are units designed for joggers and bikers, those specifically for boating, and hiking models as well.

There are literally hundreds of different models available for you to choose from. The very basic models start at approximately \$100 and go up from there. Some characteristics are common to almost all GPS receivers. They are able to store a *waypoint*, which is

a location defined by its latitude and longitude marked in the unit's memory. All have a display screen that may contain a digital map and a back light. They also are able to tell you the time, location in coordinates, speed, and distance from waypoints. Some are able to connect to a computer to transfer data, and some display altitude.

Beyond these basic functions is where choosing a receiver can be a mind-boggling mess. The activity you want a GPS for will determine which features to look for. There are three major manufacturers of GPS receivers: Garmin (www.garmin.com), Magellan (www.magellangps.com), and Lowrance (www.lowrance.com). All three of these companies make good products. Garmin has the largest market share with Magellan in second place. Often the brand loyalty of the owners is akin to the IBM and Macintosh debate. But regardless of the differences, all the units operate in much the same manner and it comes down to personal preference more than anything else. The manufacturers have similar products to each other and are reliable and rugged. Most of these models that are designed for outdoor use are, as a result of their intended use, built very well. Most handheld models are waterproof and shock proof.



Figure 1

My receiver is made by Garmin. The model is GPSMAP 60c (www.garmin.com/products/gpsmap60c/). It is a bit larger than a cell phone and has a color display. [figure 1]

This model runs on 2 AA batteries – you’ll find that most handheld models run on 2 or 4 AA batteries. With normal usage, I can get about 30 hours of use with my rechargeable batteries. The unit has an external power cord that can be plugged into a cigarette lighter socket to save on those batteries. This model is a mapping unit, so I can upload maps to it and display my location on that map. Additionally, this unit supports auto-routing, which is a feature that allows the unit to give you turn-by-turn directions on the road.

With most units there are some basic features that you should be aware of. First the display screen has several different modes for display. The most common is a satellite page. [figure 2] This displays the satellites in graphical format. As you can see, the satellites are numbered and the ones brightly colored are those the unit is currently receiving a signal from. The bars below show signal strength and status. The higher the bar is the better the signal. The bars that are solidly colored indicate that the unit has locked onto the satellite. The outlined bars indicate the unit

is receiving the signal but has not locked onto it yet. This screen in particular displays the latitude and longitude coordinates. Just to left of those coordinates, the accuracy of the unit is displayed. The gray sphere with a red center shows the direction the unit is currently moving. [just to the left of the N]

The next screen shown is also in most models. [figure 3]It is the waypoint management screen. Waypoints are a location in the real world stored in the unit as latitude and longitude, thus allowing you to locate a place to go or show distance from. This image shows the names of some waypoints I have stored in my unit. They can be listed either alphabetically or by proximity. As you can see by the highlighted point, the unit also displays its direction and distance to the selected point.

After selecting the name and hitting enter, the details of the waypoint are displayed. [figure 4] It shows its coordinates and elevation. The highlighted “CAR” point is located in Grand Canyon National park just as I was beginning a hike. Click on this [link](#) to see a map. This screen displays the symbol I have selected as well as the direction and distance from the current location. I have options to delete the point, display it on the map, and navigate to it.

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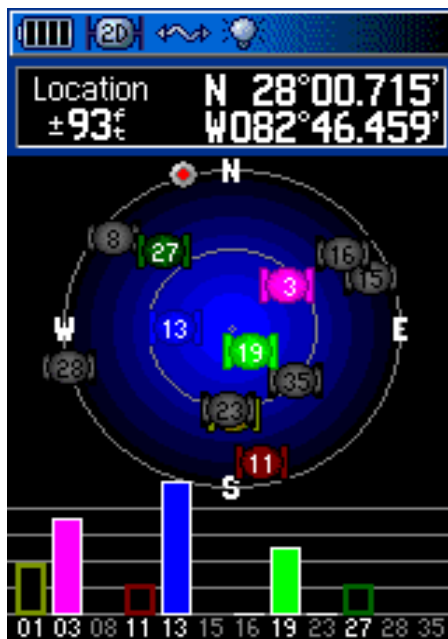


Figure 2

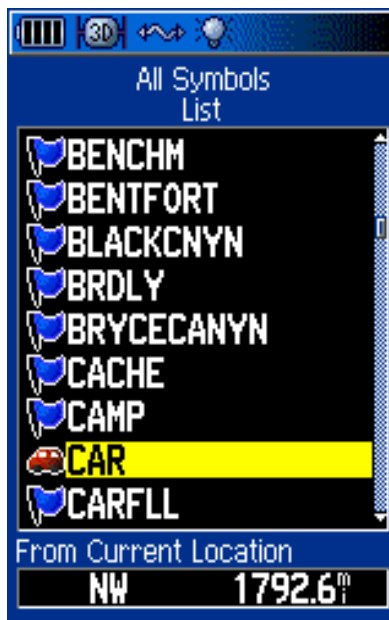


Figure 3

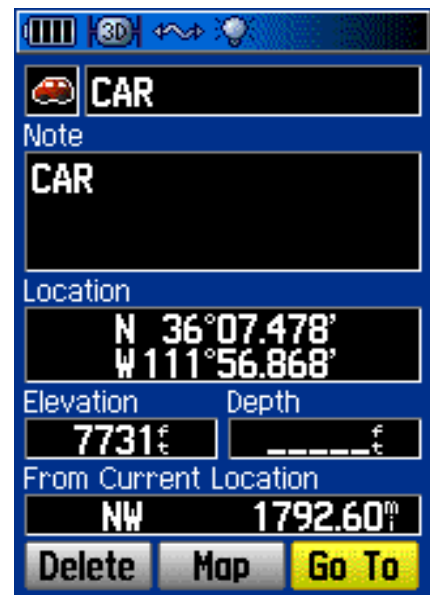


Figure 4

(Continued from page 3)

If I were to navigate to it, I would get this screen. [figure 5] The giant arrow points to the destination and of course the distance is displayed. The new item we see here is the speed. If I was moving when this picture was taken, you would also see the time it would take to reach the waypoint.

Across the top are several icons. These items are from left to right, the battery strength, 3D navigation status, USB connection status, and backlight status. The 3D navigation is particular to this model. It indicates that the receiver is getting a strong enough signal to find altitude as well as latitude and longitude. The arrow and compass move as the unit moves. As it is now, you would have to change your direction to the left a bit to head directly to the CAR waypoint. If you were to be moving away from the waypoint, the arrow would point down and the 12 would be at the top showing your heading as 120°.

The next screen displayed is the map screen. [figure 6] This is showing the current location of the unit with a white arrow. The pink line going in the NW direction is the direction to the waypoint, and the line to the waypoint is a little to the left of where the arrow is pointing. The red line is a track or trail. The track displays where the unit has moved. In this case it came down the street to my home. As you can see, it looks like I was driving in my neighbors' yards. The black lines are the streets and in this case the black blotches are ponds. The accuracy of unit displayed me off the street when in actuality I never left the road until I

pulled in my driveway. In the lower left is the scale of the map. Above the map is data that was shown on the previous screen. The data above the map can be hidden as to provide a bigger map area on the display.

The GPS is also able to keep a travel log. As you look at the next screen, you can really get an idea of what kind of data the unit gathers. [figure 7]

It has a trip meter and odometer. Also it keeps track of moving data. The max speed the unit has read is displayed. The moving time is blank as this data was gathered on a long trip and eventually it surpassed the field's ability to display. The moving average and overall average speed are great features. Before I had the GPS I would often occupy my mind while driving trying to figure out these very same averages. I doubt I ever got this precise. Elevation is also displayed.

Another useful feature of most GPS receivers is routing. Routing is the ability to string together waypoints to form a path. For example look at the next screen shot. [figure 8]

In this route are several points within a preplanned trip. From here in Tampa Bay we are going to St. Louis, Missouri. Each point defines a leg of the trip. When you navigate this route, the first point that the GPS directs you to is Atlanta. When you get to Atlanta, it changes the destination to Chattanooga. This continues until you have arrived at your destination. This is a great feature for driving as it allows you to keep updating the GPS with the correct



Figure 5



Figure 6

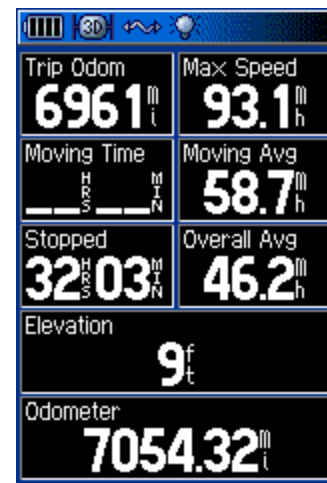


Figure 7

directions but frees you from having to manipulate the GPS while driving. Most receivers show you destinations in a straight line, "as the crow flies." A few of the more expensive units, such as this one, can auto-route. Auto-routing is a feature that navigates along roads loaded into the map as opposed to an as-the-crow-flies path. It displays turn-by-turn directions to your destination so that all you have to do is input the final destination. The unit then tells you which highways to get on and where to get off.

So how do you know what unit to buy? There are literally hundreds of different models to choose from. The unit that is right for you depends entirely on what you're going to use it for. If you primarily want it to navigate a boat, airplane, or car there are large screen models that run off the vehicle's electrical system and permanently mount to the console. If you want it to go hiking there are handheld models that can load topographic maps. The models range from very simple receivers that just stream data to large display models that can talk and direct you to the next exit verbally. Additionally there are other features like removable memory cards that map information can be loaded on. For a good place to find models available take a look to Joe Mehaffey, Jack Yeazel, and Dale Depriest's www.gpsinformation.net site.

If you would like to try a GPS without purchasing a unit, go to Lowrance's www.lowrance.com/software/pcsoftware/demos.asp site for a GPS simulator. They are listed by model and will install software on your machine. Although this will not actually lock onto satellites, it offers a great way to get a feel for their features and how they work.

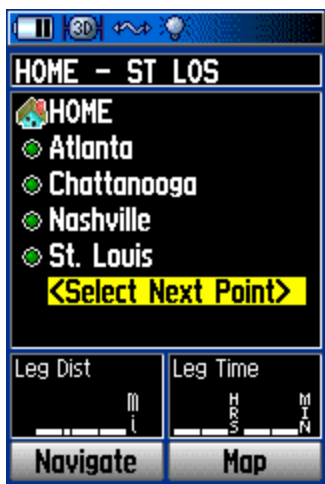


Figure 8

So now you're interested, right? But what would need one these things for? Just to give you an idea of the many uses:

- ☆ Find your exact location on a map
- ☆ Find where you left the car
- ☆ Use to find your way back after getting lost in the woods
- ☆ Tie it to the dog and see where he goes at night
- ☆ Mark that great fishing spot
- ☆ Find out where the cruise ship or airplane you're on is
- ☆ Calibrate your speedometer
- ☆ Tell exactly how long to you get there
- ☆ Use it a trip meter
- ☆ Use it as a compass (when moving)
- ☆ It's fun to use

As you see there are tons of ways to amuse yourself. One of my favorite pastimes with the GPS is Geocaching (www.geocaching.com). This is a scavenger hunt with a GPS. A box is hidden in an interesting location like a city park. Inside a weather-proof box is a logbook and some trinkets. The coordinates of the "cache" are posted on the website providing details on the type of box, terrain, and notes from prior hunters. Because the GPS is only accurate within 10 feet or so, the cache can be quite difficult to locate.

Once found, you sign the logbook and exchange an item inside for one that you brought. The item is often of little monetary value. I often bring matchbox cars or maybe spare batteries for the GPS. Click on the link for the site and enter you're zip code and check out how many are near you!

In addition to the using the receivers as stand-alone units almost all of them can tie into your computer to expand its capabilities. Next month I will show you all the programs that are available to you and some great resources on the web for maps and waypoints.

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IRS and “Free File Alliance” Again Offer FREE Online Tax Preparation and Filing

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Board of Directors

It's that time of year again. Our mailboxes are brimming with W-2's, 1099's, and other ubiquitous indications of our daily financial lives. Preparing our forms 1040, 1040A, and 1040EZ are typically not our favorite annual rite of spring. This year, the fine folks at the IRS and their partners, the “Free File Alliance” are again offering their free online federal income tax preparation and electronic filing services. Unlike past years, where only selected groups of people, such as students or military, could utilize the free services, this year there are free services available for almost all federal tax filers.

The main IRS website at www.irs.gov has at the top: “Free File”

Ever missed a good thing and regretted it? Don't miss Free File. Millions of eligible taxpayers can use Free File — a free online service that lets you prepare and file your tax return electronically. It's smart, free and fast. Don't miss it! According to the IRS, about 6.5 million people took advantage of the opportunity last year.

The process is relatively easy. The first step is to enter the IRS Free File website at www.irs.gov/app/freeFile/jsp/index.jsp where the various filing services offered by the Alliance can be viewed, and eligibility for each can be determined. Eligibility determination for each service is the second step listed. Some of the 15 resources listed have a maximum “AGI” (adjusted gross income) ceiling. Others will only prepare forms 1040A or 1040EZ online, while some others will prepare taxes for residents of specific states. Other members of the Alliance will prepare and e-file taxes for free based on age, often under 25 or over 60, while others (such as H&R Block, TaxAct.com, and TurboTax for the Web) have no restrictions on who can use the free services, and are available to all. After the free preparer is selected, the user will be directed to a non-IRS website to complete the online preparation. The taxes are calculated, and proper forms are electronically filed with the IRS using a secured link. An acknowledgement is auto-

matically generated via email notifying the filer that the return has been accepted or rejected.

The IRS notes that several of these companies also offer a fee-based online preparation service, and the only way to be assured to get these services for free is to link to them directly from the IRS Free File website, and not directly to the company websites. It should also be noted that these companies do not generally prepare state income taxes for free, and that there may be a charge for preparing state income taxes, but users referred from the IRS site are under no obligation to incur any tax preparation expenses for the preparation and filing of federal income taxes, provided they were originally eligible for the services.

Electronic filing by these free resources, or other similar commercial resources, has several advantages, according to the IRS. Some of these benefits are that it takes less time to prepare online than on paper, refunds can be processed much faster, returns are more accurate (provided accurate information is entered), and acknowledgement of receipt is generated so you know the return has been filed, and other tangible and intangible benefits. The IRS also has a statement that the software used by the providers for the free service is “comparable” to the software used by these preparers for their commercial (paid) clients.

The IRS is well aware that not all taxpayers have internet access, so it is arranging for such groups as churches and community associations to provide the internet access so as to promote the widest possible use of the free service. The IRS is also supporting such volunteer groups as Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE).

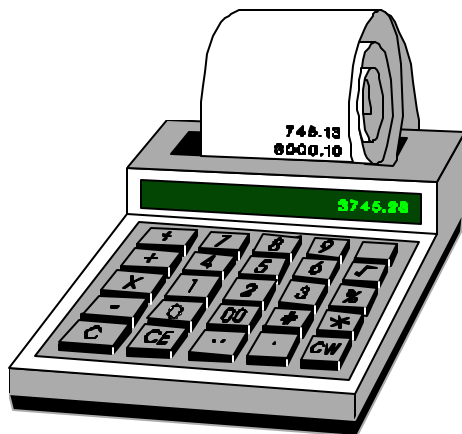
Some individuals will justifiably question their personal privacy when entering this data onto a private company's website. The IRS has approved the security and privacy policies of the participating compa-

nies, and all of the providers must also have a recognized third-party privacy and security certification. Information provided to these companies can only be used for the preparation of income tax forms, and no other purposes not explicitly authorized by the user. The IRS will monitor all of the providers for compliance, and the companies are required to promptly alert the IRS if any privacy or security problems are encountered. The IRS has set up an email address with the Free File Alliance at helpdesk@speedymail.com, where anyone can get technical assistance about the Free File website, or resolve issues with any of the listed providers. Any user who is not satisfied with the selected free provider is free to try another provider that he may qualify for.

The Free File Alliance is a result of the IRS' Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998, which in part has a goal that 80% of all returns are to be filed electronically (e-filed) by 2007, and requires the IRS to make available to taxpayers free online filing options.

Last year (2004) saw 6.5 million e-filed returns, and the IRS hopes to triple the number this year. That still leaves many millions more that will have to e-file in order to reach the 2007 goal. The 15 companies listed that are providing free filing services are a good step on the path of meeting the IRS' goals.

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and worm kiddies will undoubtedly find new ways to bring down the system. SP2 reportedly introduces dozens of potential incompatibilities with your hardware and software. Also, the size of the update is between 100 and 300 MB, depending on the updates already installed on your computer. Such a download is not feasible for those with a telephone modem; it is expected that Microsoft will make the update available on CD, but the question remains: how many users will go to the trouble to get the update and install it? And how long will it take before most of us are up-to-date?

Since MS Windows and its programs are the fat and juicy sitting ducks preferably targeted by virus artists, a good way to protect yourself is to get away from it and to choose alternate software, not susceptible to common worms and viruses, and not targeted by script kiddies. The following are some possible choices.

Since most of the nastiness enters your computer through Internet Explorer and Outlook Express, choose alternate programs. Many users are changing to the free Mozilla Firefox (<http://www.mozilla.org/products/firefox/>), an open source browser and e-mail program for Windows, Linux or the MAC OS. The browser is quite similar to Netscape and receives high praise from most users, who prefer it to Internet Explorer. Version 1.0, now forthcoming, also performs pop-up blocking and protection from spyware.

Another popular choice is Opera for Windows or Linux (www.opera.com), also a free download, although you must pay \$29 to get rid of an advertising banner at the top of the page. I prefer Mozilla in Linux because it is less cluttered.

MS Office programs, especially Outlook, Word and Excel, have also been targets of hackers, making use of their macro features to cause haywire. WordPerfect Office 12 from Corel (www.corel.com) includes a word processor, the Quattro Pro spreadsheet, and the Presentations multimedia slide shows similar to MS PowerPoint. It costs \$300 and is almost fully compatible with MS Word documents.

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Online Footprints Bring Coincidences And Lasting Trails

By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor For Region 2,
And Columnist For The AARP Computers And Technology Web Site

A song written by Peter Mayer [www.blueboat.net], a great singer I've just discovered, is titled "Earth Town Square". Describing how technology and travel have shrunk the world, Peter lyrically observes "Now it's feeling like a small town, with six billion people downtown, at a little sidewalk fair, in Earth Town Square". Even though all six billion of us aren't (yet!) online, the Internet as a meeting place is certainly one of the engines making the Earth seem smaller. While it was once exotic—or alarming—to have a long distance telephone conversation, chatting electronically with people half a world away doesn't raise my pulse.

A decade ago, early in my use of the Internet, I was astonished by its ability to create coincidences—true story! I was consulting for an online service that gave me an email address used only for their work. I received a note at that address with the intriguing subject, "I am you", from another Gabriel Goldberg. (Nowadays, that's the sort of spoofed email I'd likely delete without reading.) He'd checked his entry in the service's directory and found my entry next to his. We exchanged pleasantries, described ourselves, shared wonder at having found each other; he mentioned that he was a music student in Boston.

Later that week, I received another note at my regular email address, from a woman who said that she'd known a Gabe Goldberg years earlier, the last she'd heard from him he was going to Boston to study music, and was I that person. I replied to her, copying the other Gabe, that either they were playing a joke on me or we had a mighty powerful coincidence.

Truth is stranger than joke: they were former high school sweethearts who had drifted apart. In the same week they both found my name and two different email addresses, and for very different reasons, they contacted me. I later heard from her mother, who thanked me for reuniting them! And,

remarking on the coincidence of names, the other Gabe wondered "how guys named Jim Smith handle all the coincidences".

Participating in mailing lists, newsgroups, and Web sites leaves online footprints and makes us visible. The bad news is that's one of the ways spammers find targets, but the good news is that being visible makes it easier for lost friends to track us down. Soon after 9/11 I heard a voice on the phone I hadn't heard for nearly 30 years: my college girlfriend. She'd searched Google (often called "Googling") for me, found me, and called. We've stayed in touch since, have gotten together several times, and have shared news of our respective families. And just recently I used Google to contact an elementary school friend after hearing of her taking a new job in San Francisco.

A friend, Ross Patterson, reports another name collision. Having been online since the 1970s, he never used an alias, has always used his own name for email and his Web site. Everything was fine for about four years, but in 2002, a comedic film called "The New Guy" [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0241760] came out. He notes that it was a critical success, if you count one to one and a half stars a success. A co-starring role was played by (a different) Ross Patterson (http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0666388). A few months later he started to receive emails from young women through his Web site email address. Most assumed he was "that Ross Patterson", although some asked outright. Most said that he was "kewl" and "soooooo HOT!!!!", and often asked for autographs. Being the father of a teenage girl, he wrote back politely to each young lady explaining that he wasn't the fellow they were looking for, and deleted their correspondence. Several responded, all nicely, and he traded a few friendly notes with one girl.

Another coincidence earned me a colleague, client, and friend. After forwarding a meeting notice to a local professional mailing list, I received an earnest



note from someone I didn't know, saying that the topic of the meeting was outrageous and that I should attend representing her and protest what was proposed for discussion. I'd normally simply delete such out-of-the-blue notes, but this one was so well-crafted and so earnest that I couldn't resist cautiously replying, asking whether she really meant to address me. Of course, she hadn't—someone in her company had forwarded the note internally, she'd responded to me by mistake instead of her colleague. But we continued chatting, became friends, and she became a client. If I hadn't forwarded the note, we'd never have met.

Sometimes the Internet simply facilitates synchronicity, related events happening at the same time. A few years ago, two friends independently mentioned online that they had made a New Year's resolution to start new relationships. So I introduced them and arranged a blind date!

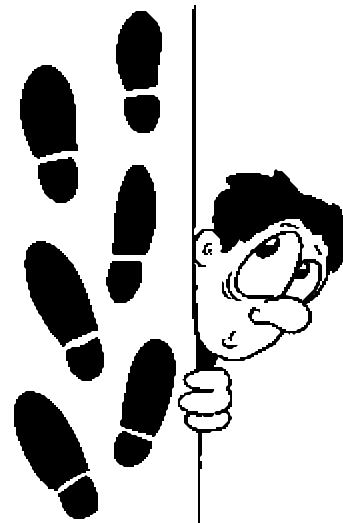
Amidst the fun of unanticipated connections and reestablished friendships, there's a cautionary note: online has a long memory. Web sites like Google cache (retain) Web pages even after they're deleted from their original Web locations. Postings to mailing lists, Web forums, newsgroups, and other online venues are usually retained indefinitely. It can be unnerving to discover that items posted in the heat of the moment or as youthful indiscretions can be retrieved years later by potential employers or new acquaintances—or someone snooping for unpleasant reasons.

Just as it's worth checking your credit report periodically, it's a good idea to occasionally check what online trails you've left. My current favorite surfing tool is Google, so I search for "Gabe Goldberg" and "Gabriel Goldberg". (The quote marks bind the first and last names together so that only Web pages having the exact full name are found. I search on Gabe/Gabriel because I've used both names.) If your name is closer to Jim Smith's—offering 56,000 hits rather than the more manageable 182 for my name—you can tighten the search by adding terms such as a middle initial, state of residence, hobby, employer, etc. But don't make the search too narrow or you may miss genuine references.

It's tedious to erase tracks from an online history; it requires contacting each site that hosts material you'd like to delete, perhaps following instructions and filling out forms. Some mailing list sites refuse as a matter of policy to delete list postings, reasoning that doing so would distort a list's historical record. The government has made serious efforts to sanitize the Web by removing content deemed dangerous, such as plans for water/power system. But the Wayback Machine (<http://www.archive.org/index.html>) archives many years' of Web data. For example, the first image shown of www.whitehouse.gov is from December 1996. Even when successful, scrubbing data off Web sites often doesn't really make it unavailable, it just slows people finding it.

It's much better to avoid saying anything online that might return to haunt you, than try to clear the record after the fact.

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Tech News

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

October 2004

Sony plans to launch a new camcorder in November that can record and play back high-definition video. The device, part of the company's Handycam line, records and plays back video with a resolution of 1,440 pixels by 1,080 lines, the highest in any consumer camcorder. It also features a 3.5-inch, wide-screen LCD display. Sony claims an image in the display can be enlarged up to four times its original size without any loss of resolution. The HDR-FX1 camcorder will sell for about \$3,700.

Intel Corp. President Paul S. Otellini demonstrated new chips scheduled for release next year that simultaneously run tasks such as burning CDs and playing video games. We're not writing video game reviews for kids who play five hours a day. We're writing for the grown-up who may play five hours a week. Hoping to increase the 5-hour adult gaming average, Perpetual Entertainment will develop the first major online game based on Paramount Pictures' 'Star Trek' for a monthly fee.

High-resolution images of 21 original Shakespeare texts, in 93 different versions, are now available on the British Library Web site. Viewers can read the plays in the same format that Shakespeare himself and the actors who performed his plays for the Globe audiences did. <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/homepage.html>

Sun Microsystems and Microsoft next month plan to provide more details on work they are doing to make their products interoperable. The goal is to have an event and to demonstrate interoperability. The settlement ended a bitter legal dispute between the rivals that started in 1997.

A Japanese telecommunications equipment maker has come up with a tricky way to hide audio speakers in houseplants. The Ka-on, which means "flower sound" in Japanese, consists of a magnet and coil at the base of a vase that can be hooked up to a CD player, stereo or television set. When flowers are placed in the vase, the sound vibrations move up through the stems into the petals and leaves, filling the entire room with music. The vases and amplifiers

come in several sizes, priced from \$46 to \$460, and the device has an added bonus—the vibrations discourage insects and make the flowers last longer. Gerberas and sunflowers work especially well as speakers."

Adware company Claria (formerly Gator) has quietly settled litigation brought by Wells Fargo, Quicken Loans and other online businesses, who charged that its pop-up ads violated their trademarks. In recent months, it also has quietly settled with UPS, Hertz, L.L. Bean, Tiger Direct and Six Continents, and still faces a lawsuit from retail florist Teleflora.

WhenU.com has a case pending filed by Wells Fargo and Quicken Loans on the same matter and Google currently involved in two cases lawsuits from American Blind and Wallpaper and Geico.

"Wireless sensors have moved out of the labs," said Intel spokesman Kevin Teixeira. "The technology is being figured out." the battery-powered, wireless sensors sometimes known as "smart dust" are here, and they're making their way into our lives. Some take pictures. Others are sensitive thermometers. There are even tiny sensors that can detect gunmetal and tanks. Analysts and researchers predict that networks of these tiny monitors may eventually link refrigerators, printers, car keys and other everyday objects to the Internet, allowing you to keep track of your stuff remotely.

A U.S. Senate committee approved bills intended to fight computer spyware and to protect wireless phone customers from potential privacy problems associated with a wireless phone number directory. the SPY BLOCK Act would prohibit the covert installation of software on computers and prohibit installing software that automatically collects and transmits information about the user without permission.

Stamps.com is in active discussions with the U.S. Postal Service regarding whether or not to continue its personalized postage stamp pilot program. The stamps cost about twice the price of a regular stamp. The market test was supposed to end Sept. 30. Now the U.S. Postal Service will decide whether to continue with the program or not.

Microsoft US is now charging for a Hotmail feature

that allows users to access their e-mail using the Outlook and Outlook Express e-mail clients. Microsoft is making the change because the feature is being abused by senders of spam.

Vivisimo, founded by three former Carnegie-Mellon computer scientists, is hoping to challenge Google's dominance in the search field with a new search service that clusters results into categories to make them easier to sort through. The launch of Clusty comes on the heels of Amazon's introduction of its A9 search service, which also organizes information as it retrieves it. "Search will look more like the magazine business than the soda market," predicts Oren Etzioni, a computer scientist at the University of Washington who sits on the Vivisimo board. "The competition has shifted from crawling the Web and returning an answer quickly to adding value to the information that has been retrieved."

November 2004

Finally, Software with the updates included! Microsoft last month started the process of swapping out all of the boxed copies of Windows XP with the updated version, with a triangle in the upper corner touting SP2 and its security enhancements. Over the next month, Microsoft hopes to swap out the bulk of all boxed copies worldwide. OfficeMax is offering a free 128MB flash drive and anti-spyware to customers buying an XP upgrade.

The Visible Light Communications Consortium, a group of 15 IT manufacturers is proposing using light emitting diodes—which will increasingly become common for ordinary light fixtures and outdoor equipment like traffic lights—to transmit data traffic by up to 10 meters at high speeds. With the technology, a person trapped in a building could hold up a cell phone to a ceiling light, and rescuers would be able to pinpoint his or her exact location. Similarly, cars could exchange information through headlights and taillights, and car computer systems could tell drivers if there were major stalls ahead.

The Federal Communications Commission is beginning a new consumer-education campaign to support the nationwide switch from analog to digital TV. Announcing a new Web site to answer questions about digital TV, The Consumer Electronics Association estimates that about 10% of U.S. households currently have digital sets. For those who don't have

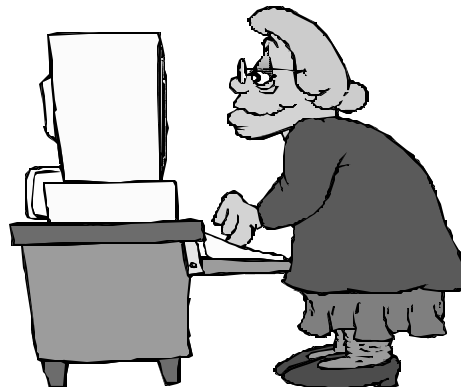
cable or satellite TV a converter box will be available to receive and decode digital signals at a cost about \$200 each. <http://www.dtv.gov/>

You probably know that high quality, low cost digital scanning, copying and printing technologies have been used to counterfeit currency, but did you know that the government is fighting back? When you put a document under the glass of your new photocopier or scanner and push the button, it makes a high resolution copy - unless the document is one of the new style twenty or fifty dollar bills. If you do that, you just might see a message pop up informing you that you should visit the Treasury website to become more educated on counterfeit laws

Schools and libraries nationwide have suddenly stopped receiving any new grants from a federal program that is wrestling with new rules on how it spends \$2.25 billion each year to provide high-speed Internet and telephone service. The moratorium at the E-Rate program <<http://www.fcc.gov/learnnet/>> began two months ago, with no notice, and may last for months, causing significant hardships at schools and libraries.

The FTC is launching an aggressive new strategy to prosecute "spyware" perpetrators, and last week filed a civil lawsuit against former spam-king Sanford Wallace and his companies, Seismic Entertainment Productions and SmartBot. Wallace, who was once dubbed "Spamford" for his earlier misdeeds, operates the PassItOn.com Web site, which requires visitors to click through multiple pop-up windows in order to exit.

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Selections From The DealsGuy

Bob Click, Greater Orlando Computer User Group

Reminder

Don't forget about the Alpha 5 ver.6 special offer that is still good [at least through February; see the Feb. 2005 NCTCUG Journal]. The discount is great and you can order at [brett@alphasoft.com]. You get it for just \$179.00 as compared to MSRP \$349.00.

Announcement of Flash File Recovery 1.3

Below is an announcement I received that includes a discount for user group members.

"Our company, PANTERASoft, would like to announce the release of Flash File Recovery 1.2 for Windows 95/98/ME/2000/XP. We'd like to offer your members and subscribers a 15% discount off the regular price. (Author's note: They included a press release, but I didn't include it. Check their Web site) "Flash Fire Recovery is probably Net's oldest and most powerful flash recovery software created specially for digital cameras. The program brings back deleted images and salvages pictures

from damaged or corrupted digital media, including the camera's built-in memory. It works with virtually all media types, including SmartMedia, CompactFlash, Memory Stick, MicroDrive, xD Picture Card Flash Card, PC Card, Multimedia Card, and SD Card. While this program does not recover mp3 files, it does recover image files like JPEG, TIFF and such, as well as RAW image files - Canon CRW, Nikon NEF, Kodak DCR, among others. Video files - AVI, MOV, MPG/MPEG are supported as well.

"Flash File Recovery is available at [www.panterasoft.com] for free evaluation. Registering the program is \$49.50 US Dollars per copy. Product Page: [http://www.panterasoft.com/file-recovery/index.html]"

I didn't see any code or downloading process in the announcement for getting the discount so I don't know how that works.

What Do You Want?

Joe Bendersky of Computer Club of Palm Shores periodically writes a favorite Web site column and this one took my eye.

[http://www.savvysenior.org] It is said that this site offers everything for seniors including 3000 free goodies.

Tax Time

I forgot to remind you previously about the free version of Tax Act for doing your Federal income tax as well as state tax. Visit

[http://www.taxactsoftware.com]. You can download a program FREE to calculate your Federal Income tax. This is the third year I have played with it and while there are a few things I would like to see improved, you can't beat the price. There is also a pay-version, which I use, for \$12.95 that is well worth the price since it gives you one free E-tax filing. The pay version will import last year's data into the new version, which saves a lot of time. You can also do your tax right



Washington Area Computer User Group (WAC) Meetings

WAC Meetings will be held on March 19 and April 16, 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/>

on the Tax Act Web site if you prefer. All in all, Tax Act is a good deal.

You can also do your tax right on the IRS's own official Web site. I have not tried it, but Ira Wilsker wrote an excellent article [*see p. 6 — ed.*]. I've seen other free options for doing your own income tax calculation, but I don't have that info handy.

Don't forget that AARP has hard working volunteers who will do your tax FREE if its not too complicated, such as if you have rental homes or apartments. Check with your local AARP chapter for the times and places. If you are unsure about whether they will do yours, take it to them and ask. The worst they can do is say "sorry."

Media Catalog Studio Announcement

This was sent to me in November of 2004. They offer a 15% user group discount. Check their Web site for more information.

"For Immediate Release

Catalog and classify your media collection easy!

November 10, 2004 ManiacTools Releases Media Catalog Studio 1.7

"Media Catalog Studio is a handy software application that classifies and tracks media files on hard-drives, floppies, external drives, CDs, DVDs and other storage media. Importantly, the information about the media files does not need to be entered manually. The program automatically detects MP3, WMA, APE, OGG, WAV, AVI, WMV, MPEG, Video and Audio CD files and inputs this information inside a database. Moreover, the software comes with CDDDB support, an online database that exports information about songs (Title, Artist, Album, Year) directly from Internet.

"All data entries can be sorted by artist, album, year, bitrate, frequency, genre, category, rating, or any field/category. The search in the database can be conducted using multiple parameters, like file properties (name, size, etc), tag information or lyrics. Media file lists can be customized to display information in any way or order. As an added perk,

the program features an internal tag reader and editor for audio and video files, duplicates finder, and supports an option for storing pictures. In addition, the application creates Winamp and Windows Media Player play-lists with a few mouse-clicks. The other great features are MS Excel export options and Media Tracker; a feature that shows the user where a necessary media file is located.

"Media Catalog Studio has received over a dozen awards for its usability, including the prestigious Five Cows rating at Tucows.Com, and Editor's Pick at MyMusicTools.com. The program is translated in all major European languages. A free version of Media Catalog Studio Lite 1.7 is available now; [<http://www.maniactools.com>]. The freeware Lite version supports up to 5 disks in database. An upgrade to a Pro version costs \$24.95 US Dollars/Euros for individuals and \$34.95 US Dollars/Euros for businesses and organizations. We offer a 15% discount to members of your user group. The discount coupon code is 4567841341 and is redeemable at [http://www.ManiacTools.com/soft/media_catalog_studio/discount.shtml]. If you have any questions, please contact Alex Pavlenko at [press@maniactools.com].

"Company Website

[<http://www.maniactools.com>]

Product Page:

[http://www.maniactools.com/soft/media_catalog_studio/]

Download:

[http://www.maniactools.com/media_catalog_studio.exe]"



Fontonizer

I received this announcement in November of 2004 and they offer a 15% discount to user group members.

"Our company, Fast Reports Inc., would like to announce the release of Fontonizer for Windows 95/98/ME/NT/2000/XP. To get 15% discount for Fontonizer use Coupon Code 'UserGroupPR-FO' on register here: [<https://secure.element5.com/shareit/checkout.html?productid=168090>].

(Continued on page 14)

(Continued from page 7)

StarOffice 6.0 Office Suite from Sun Microsystems (www.sun.com/software/star/staroffice/6.0/) includes word processing, spreadsheet, graphics, presentation and database programs. It claims full compatibility with MS Office and costs \$75. It is available for Windows, Solaris and Linux operating systems. I tried it several years ago, when it was still free, and didn't like the way it took over my computer, including rearrangement of my desktop.

Finally, a promising newcomer is the free, open-source OpenOffice.org, currently at version 1.1.2, and also from Sun Microsystems (www.openoffice.org/). It is derived from StarOf-

fice, with omission of code licensed by Sun from third-party sources. It is available for Windows, Mac OS, Linux and Solaris operating systems. In addition to the MS Word-compatible OpenOffice Writer it includes spreadsheet, database and presentation programs. I have been using the word processor in Linux and find the compatibility with MS Word formats quite good. It also supports saving and mailing documents in PDF format and supports mobile device formats like AportisDoc (Palm), Pocket Word and Pocket Excel.

The best way to avoid Microsoft-targeted worms and spyware altogether is not to use any Microsoft products at all. Apple Computer's Mac Operating System

(Continued from page 13)

"Fontonizer is making big waves in web-design and publishing industries. While an average PC has about one hundred different fonts installed - marketers, designers, publishers, editors and print professionals often have collections with 5000 different fonts or more. With so many fonts, only very experienced professionals can match font name with its appearance. But Fontonizer is not merely a font viewer, though it comes with this function built-in. Fontonizer is a font organizer.

"With Fontonizer, any professional can easily classify fonts. First, one creates categories - like "Business Letter Body", "Groovy and Hip", "Classy", "Headlines", "Attention Grabbers", "Exotic", "Fine print", "Comments and footnotes", "Hand written", "Miscellaneous". Then, fonts are "placed" in these categories, so they can be easily located when necessary. The best thing about Fontonizer is that it works with fonts that aren't currently installed on a PC. In fact, it works with fonts that are stored not only on hard-drive, but CDs, DVDs, flash-drives and External Drives.

"Even though the fonts may not be installed, you can write a word or sentence to see how it looks. If necessary, Fontonizer will automatically show a list of the same word or phrase visualized with different fonts. This way one can easily compare and find the font that is most appropriate for a certain occasion.

"Finally, Fontonizer comes with even more functions font professionals need. For example, the program performs installation /deletion /restoration of the deleted fonts. Plus, Fontonizer is capable of displaying "symbol table" of any font, even if it was deleted. With Fontonizer, professionals can experiment not only with fonts and sizes, but backgrounds as well. Fontonizer is distributed electronically over the Internet; a free demo version is available at [<http://www.fontonizer.com/>] for evaluation.

The price of a single license is \$29 US Dollars for a single copy.

Company Website [<http://www.fontutilities.com/>]
 Product Page: [<http://www.fontonizer.com/>]
 Download: [<http://www.fontutilities.com/download/fo100.zip>]
 Buy Link: [<http://fontutilities.com/order.htm>]"

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/>]. I have posted Web pages with announcements I received in 2004. Sorry they are not well organized, but what is there was a lot of work, as they all have to be edited. I have received some since then and will also post them one of these days.

is based on Unix and the Macs are therefore immune to PC viruses. The exceptions are MS Office for the Mac programs that are susceptible to the same malicious macros aimed at PCs. The Mac OS does not run on Intel or AMD cpu-based PC clones, so you'll have to buy a new, expensive Apple computer to achieve trouble-free online communications. You may still need your PC for programs and games that are not available on the Mac.

A better alternative is to install one of the new, inexpensive, user-friendly Linux distributions on a separate partition of your hard drive, or on an older computer if you have one. I have used Linspire (www.linspire.com) now for a year on an old laptop. It connects by Wi-Fi wireless via my router to the Internet and to my printer. I use the Mozilla browser and OpenOffice.org Write for browsing and correspondence, and everything works flawlessly. I have transferred genealogy and checkbook data to corresponding Linux programs. I can play more solitaire

programs than I know how to, including two versions of FreeCell. Many other games are available, including the addictive arcade games BreakOut II and Frozen Bubble. I even managed to install a free version of the anti-virus program f-prot (www.f-prot.com/) that protects Linux systems as well as Windows, but for lack of Linux viruses I have no idea if it works or not. There is a harmless virus-like test file on the f-prot Web site that I downloaded to test f prot. It worked as advertised. A longer discussion of my experiences with Linspire can be found in the July-August issue of the P-See UrGent (<http://swipcug.apcug.org/archive/pdfs/.pdf>)

So there you have it. Maybe it is better to switch than fight!

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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 CR 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 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.

Advertisement Policy

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/>

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!

Hex, Binary, Decimal Numbers

By Charlie Paschal, PPGC

Ever wonder what people are talking about when they mention binary and "hex" numbers? It's the way computers "talk" and the language they understand. Our system, of course, is the decimal number system, which is 10 base. Binary is 2-based, while hex is 16-based. The binary is where you get the "1s and 0s" from because that's the only numbers used in that system.

For example, the number 11 in decimal is 1011 in binary and B in hex. Since 1s and 0s can easily show numbers from 0-9, hex is used to represent numbers from 10 through 16, meaning A is 10, B is 11, etc. Because binary numbers can get complex, hex is used because it makes it shorter to write and it's easier for humans to remember.

If you ever want to do some conversions yourself without having to learn the mathematical way of doing it, use Windows calculator. Go to View and select scientific. Plug in a number in decimal and then click on Hex or Bin to see the number in that system. For example, 999 is 3E7 in hex. In binary it's 1111100111. See? You can remember 3E7 but it's not as easy to remember the binary version.

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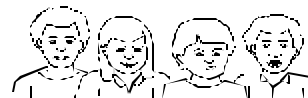


March/April 2005

1st Wed. (3/2, 4/6) **7 p.m.**
Virginia General Meeting

4th Wed (3/23, 4/27) **7 p.m.** Internet SIG

3rd Monday (4/18; none in March)
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.



First Class