Bits of Blue

February in Tampa

A Monthly Publication of the Tampa PC Users Group, Inc.

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Meeting

**Glen Gasbarro from
E-Stamps**

**February 9, 2000
6:00 PM
Museum of Science
and Industry**

Meeting Preview: At the January meeting we will have a presentation by Glen Gasboro of E-Stamps. Mary Sheridan, as usual, will conduct a 30-minute Windows discussion at the beginning of the meeting.

President's Message

By Mary Sheridan, President, Tampa PC Users Group
mcpease@aol.com

We're already a month into the "brand new year". Where does the time go? For those of you who weren't able to attend our last meeting, you really missed an outstanding presentation. Steve Singer of RDI showed us some new motherboards and CPU's. His information was easy to understand and I, for one, learned things I didn't know I didn't know.

The Florida Association of Computer Users Groups is having their Spring Conference in Kissimmee Florida, March 5th and 6th. The conference is for officers of Florida user groups to get together and exchange ideas on ways to make their groups better. Anyone who is interested in attending can be given temporary officer status. The conference is $35.00, and the food in previous years has been wonderful. If you want to go, let me or any of the other officers know.

The Greater Tampa Bay Computer Users Group has gotten a date from Microsoft of April 4th for a presentation. They don't have enough people to meet Microsoft's 100-person minimum, and neither do we. They are currently trying to find a place to hold the event and have invited us to participate. I'll keep you informed as information becomes available. All those who want to attend need to mark that date on their calendars.

March 8: **Dan Pfeiffer from Comp USA**

Member of
The Association of
Personal Computer User Groups

Minutes of the January Meeting

By James Weber, Secretary, Tampa PC Users Group *jlweber9@mindspring.com*

Our new president, Mary Sheridan, started the Windows SIG at 6:00 p.m. She began with some new shortcut commands for Windows 95/98. We also discussed how all the new devices like PDAs or cameras have their own special battery and how six months from now no one will carry that battery because an "Improved" device is on store shelves. This brought up a local company called "Batteries Plus". Batteries Plus makes it a point to carry any battery from any device imaginable, and they have been able to custom make batteries not in stock, for a price.

Mary also announced we may be having a swap meet with the Brandon Users Group. No definite date has been set at this time, but there was considerable interest among the members present. Mike Hodges made a plea to anyone with an older system they would like to donate to a needy family. Mike will post a request on our discussion page for anyone interested.

The general meeting started at 6:30 p.m. with Mary introducing the new officers. She also announced a tentative schedule for upcoming presentations.

Steve Singer of RDI was our guest speaker. He gave a presentation of current and upcoming computer hardware. Mr. Singer started with motherboards by passing out an Intel and an AMD motherboard for everyone to inspect while he pointed out and described the function of all the slots and ports. He then briefly described the types of memory likely to be encountered in your machine. Mr. Singer even passed out a new AMD Athlon processor for our enjoyment, but he didn't let it get too far out of sight. Steve also made us aware of a new development with Intel's new P-III processors: They will do away with the cartridge based Slot 1 and enhance the socket 370 that current Celeron based systems are built around. A bit of bad news for Celeron owners is current 370 boards won't accept the new P-III "Flip Chips," as they will be called.

With the February release of Windows 2000 upon us, Steve warned that all DOS code has been fully and finally removed from the Windows kernel. For most people this is not a problem, as Windows 2000 will probably be shipped to them on a new system, but if you are going to use hardware or software that has been around awhile you may find yourself out of luck.

Y2K Glitch with Outlook

By Tom Cone, Tampa PC Users Group
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Some of you may use Microsoft's Outlook application to manage your calendar, contact lists, e-mail mailboxes, and so on. I've bumped into a Y2K problem with Outlook's import and translation utility which you should know about. Even if you don't use Outlook, you might find this interesting, because it illustrates a type of problem you might encounter in other contexts.

I learned during the first week of January that Outlook 97 was unable to recognize dBase tables so that data within those tables could no longer be imported into contact lists inside Outlook. When the import process was started, Outlook returned an error message saying that the source file was either corrupt, or possibly that it wasn't a dBase file in the first place. dBase3 and dBase3+ tables have been around a long time, I daresay since before 1985, possibly longer. These are database files in which each individual record has the same overall length. This particular kind of fixed length format is well understood and is often included in the import routines of other commercial programs. For example, both Microsoft Word and Corel WordPerfect can easily read and import dBase files. Spreadsheet programs like Excel and Quattro Pro can, too. Prior to 1/1/2000, so could Outlook. But not afterwards.

I was asked to troubleshoot the problem to see if the problem could be identified. My first guess was that the dBase files had, in fact, become corrupted, possibly with a virus. Testing disproved the presence of any viruses, however. I then tested the integrity of the dBase files by importing them into a variety of other programs. All worked as expected, except for Outlook. I then speculated that perhaps Outlook 2000, the latest release from MicroSoft, might not have the problem, so I tried it. Oops. Same problem. Both Outlook 97 and Outlook 2000 are unable to import dBase files created after 12/31/1999.

Interestingly, Outlook contains an "export" engine which permits one to export data from contact lists and store them in external files. One of the file types supported by the export routine was dBase, so I exported some into files of this format to see if they could then be immediately imported back into Outlook. Oops. The export routine works, but the import engine continued to complain that it could not recognize the source file as a dBase file, stopping the import process dead in its tracks.

dBase files and early versions of FoxPro tables employ the same file format, so I tried to import some FoxPro DBF files.

Oops, again. Outlook cannot import FoxPro files created after 12/31/1999 either.

At this point I was stumped. Testing revealed that if I dialed back the system date on my PC to a date earlier than 1/1/2000 I could create dBase or FoxPro files that Outlook would recognize and import. This confirmed for me at last that I was dealing with a Y2K problem.

I posted some inquiries in relevant newsgroups on the internet and received a helpful response reminding me that, in addition to the data, each dBase file contains a variable length header record which precedes the data itself. When the file is created on disk, the header is written first, and then the records containing actual data follow. The respondent mentioned that one of the elements stored in the header of each dBase file is the date the file was last modified.

Doing a bit of research, I discovered that the second, third and fourth bytes of each dBase file contain numbers representing the year, month and day, respectively, on which the file was last modified. Using a disk editor utility, I opened a few dBase files and examined the values stored in the second, third and fourth bytes at the top of each file. I found that there were numbers present in each position and that these numbers are stored as hexadecimal values. For you non-programmer types, this means that each numeric value was stored as a number using base 16 notation. I compared the "year last modified" byte in files created in 1999 against files created in 2000. It turns out that 1999 is represented as hexadecimal 63 or 63h. This is the same as a decimal 99 or 99d. The "year last modified" byte is stored as 64h if the file was created in the year 2000. The value 64h is the same as 100 decimal.

Using the disk editor I was able to modify the second byte of some dBase files, changing the stored value from 64h to 63h (i.e. from 100 to 99 expressed in decimal notation). When I did this, the files would then be recognized by Outlook as valid dBase files and could be imported without incident, even when the system file date for the dBase file was itself 1/1/2000 or later. This confirmed for me that Outlook was not using the system file date of the DBF file to reject the files. Instead, it suggests strongly that Outlook's import utility was designed to check for "valid" values in the "year last modified" byte in the header of dBase and FoxPro files, using routines which stumble when the value there equates to decimal values greater than 99. The internal logic declares the source file invalid and does not recognize it as a valid dBase or FoxPro file unless the value in the second byte of the DBF file equates to 99 or less.

I mentioned this to one of our members, who asked a pertinent question. Whose fault is this glitch? One might argue that the original dBase file format is flawed by using only

one hexadecimal byte value to represent the "year last modified". With only one byte to use, values are limited to a range from zero to 255. The designers of dBase (and FoxPro) must have decided to simply subtract 1900 from the current year and store the resulting difference value in this field. For files last modified in 1985, an 85 would be stored there (55h). For files last modified in 2001, a 101 would be stored there (65h). This design covers all the way to the year 2155 without requiring an additional byte to distinguish the century. It's true that if the designers had dedicated two bytes of storage to express the year last modified, they would have been able to save the decimal equivalent of both the century and the year. However, it's hard to argue that their design is flawed when it reliably covers all years from 1900 to 2155. Remember, this is not data. These values are simply a record of the year the file itself was last modified. Covering file modifications over such a long period of time seems a generous and reasonable approach to me.

So I lay the blame at Microsoft's doorstep. The Outlook import engine is flawed and fails to adequately deal with dBase and FoxPro format files. Its internal "technique" of recognizing dBase and FoxPro files mishandles the second byte of the source file, improperly rejecting it when values there equate to decimal 100 or higher. Whether this is a problem in Outlook, per se, or possibly in the ODBC interface between Outlook and the source tables, I don't know, but it's clear to me that the problem exists and is found within the import routines employed by Outlook.

Fortunately, it was relatively easy for me to write a BASIC program which opens DBF files and resets the second byte to 99 decimal, thereby making the file "visible" to Outlook again. This work around will be awkward but it's fast and reliable. Unfortunately, it's going to be necessary until Microsoft releases a patch which corrects Outlook. ◆

Mr. Singer then covered some of the newer peripherals available, such as AGP, USB, Fire Wire, and UDMA 66. AGP is a new video card standard that greatly increases the speed at which images are drawn to your screen. USB and Fire Wire are plug-ins for external devices that will replace the old serial and parallel ports. USB offers the ability to add or remove devices like printers or scanners without shutting down the computer and rebooting. The USB port can address up to 127 devices at a time, with the help of powered hubs. Fire Wire is a faster data transfer technology that has seen a lot of use in the digital camera/camcorder industry. UDMA 66 is the newest connection for IDE hard drives that offers twice the speed of the previous stan-

Editor's Comments: Scan Disk, Defrag, Scuzzies, and More

By William LaMartin, Editor, Tampa PC Users Group lamartin@tampabay.rr.com

Scan Disk and Defrag This past month I encountered a couple of problems with hard disk maintenance. I have Scan Disk and Defrag set up to run at certain scheduled times. The last couple of times that the defragmentation program ran, for my F drive it gave the message:

> *Windows cannot finish defragmenting this drive because it has encountered a problem. Click Help and carry out the instructions for running Scan Disk, and then try defragmenting again.*
>
> *ID No:DEFRAG00205*

I had run Scan Disk several times to no avail over a period of a couple of weeks. F still could not be defragged, and I began to get a bit worried that a hard drive problem was developing. So I ran SpinRite (see the November 1999 newsletter for a review) to check the drive for surface errors. After a three-hour check, SpinRite declared that F was in perfect shape. Of course, SpinRite doesn't check the logical file structure of the drive.

Time to turn to http://search.microsoft.com. I typed in the first eight or so words of the error message and did a search. I was rewarded with an article stating the following:

> *This issue can occur if the Applog file in the hidden C: \Windows\Applog folder is damaged. ....*

It then instructed me to find the folder, select all entries in the folder and delete them. After doing this I was able to successfully run defrag on the F drive. Now, how long do you think that it would have taken me to figure this out without Microsoft's help? Forever! What would be the normal response of a computer technician or help desk person to the question? I think they would probably tell you to either live with not being able to defrag the drive or to do their favorite fix-- reformatting the drive and starting over. But this would not have solved anything, since the problem was on the C drive.

A few days later Scan Disk gave me trouble on the C drive. I received a message from Windows concerning incorrect file information on the C drive. Windows said to run Scan Disk and have it repair the error. The only problem was that Scan Disk would hang and never finish with the drive. I solved this problem myself without any help from the Internet by dropping to DOS and running the DOS version of Scan Disk. It found a

(Comments..........Continued from page 4)

discrepancy in the amount of free disk space being reported on the C drive and corrected it.

Since I don't have enough computer problems of my own, I help others solve theirs. My most recent such endeavor was setting up a client's new Dell computer: Moving data from the old computer; installing all the old programs on the new computer; setting up printers, a tape drive and a scanner; importing the old Windows address book, mail messages, Internet Explorer Favorites, etc. There is a lot more to do than you would think—that is, until you actually start to do it. Once you start the process, you see how much is to be done--and some of it doesn't go smoothly. Added to the list above, there is still the Internet connection to configure, the email program to configure, and many other simple but necessary tasks. Then you need to check that all the programs you have reinstalled work correctly with their data. There are always minor problems to be worked out: You forget to bring over the data for a particular program, or, one you wouldn't think of, a particular document needs a special font that the new computer setup doesn't have. So it's back to the old computer to collect some of those old fonts.

With all this going back and forth it is nice to have a network setup. Of course with the Road Runner cable modem connected to the network card in the new computer, each time I want to set up a network connection to the old computer, I need to change the network settings, shut down, disconnect from the

Internet picture of the month
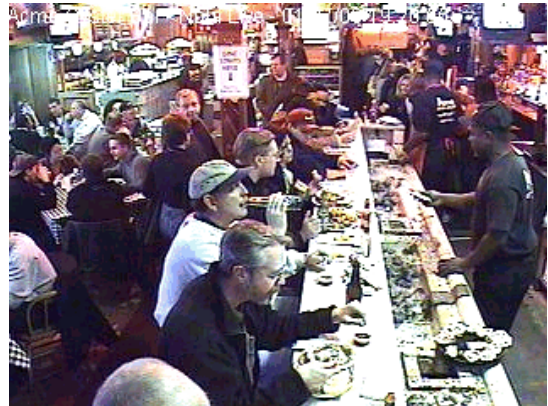
The oyster bar at the Acme Oyster House, New Orleans, LA, as seen on the Oyster CAM
http://www.nola.com/oystercam/

This image is from the live web cam, known as the Oyster Cam, located in the Acme Oyster House in New Orleans. It updates every 20 seconds, so you can see how fast the oyster shucker is filling an order. It is a place dear to my heart from my time in New Orleans. The picture quality suffers from the usual web cam limitations.

February's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)	http://www.tpcug.org/
Williams-Sonoma (kitchen supplies)	http://www.williams-sonoma.com/
NOLA Live OysterCAM (Acme Oyster House CAM)	http://www.nolalive.com/oystercam/
About.com - The network of sites led by expert guides	http://www.about.com/
Windows Magazine	http://www.winmag.com/
Forms And Publications - IRS	http://www.irs.ustreas.gov/prod/forms_pubs/
Inflation Calculator	http://www.westegg.com/inflation/
Emergency Medicine at NCEMI	http://www.ncemi.org/
FAST Search All the Web, All the Time	http://www.alltheweb.com/
eComplaints.com - The Complaint Registry	http://ecomplaints.com/
Eckerd Pharmacy Online	http://www.eckerd.com/
Walgreens Online Pharmacy	http://www.walgreens.com/
CVS Online Pharmacy Store	http://cvs.com/

Some of these links will join the many already on the Links page at our web site, where you need only click on the name.

Microsoft Cordless Phone

By Merle Nicholson, Member at Large,
Tampa PC Users Group
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Microsoft makes a telephone? Are they keeping it a secret? Well, in some ways maybe they should keep it a secret, but overall it's a computer geeks' telephone, tailor-made for people like me!

I first heard of it from Kevan and Mary Sheridan at our December board dinner, and a few weeks later I started looking for prices on the Internet and got this baby delivered to my door for less than $65. I'd been looking for a cordless phone for some time and hadn't found one that suited me for any price, until now.

Briefly, it's a cordless phone in two parts. One is a base station connected to your computer. The second part is the handset and charger base. This is exactly what I'd been looking for – the handset never has to return to the base station to be recharged. I don't understand why all cordless phones don't do this. You need to locate the base near a telephone outlet, and the phone itself anywhere you want! Good concept.

So as you may have guessed by now, the system provides you with an answering system facilitated by the computer connection. The connection is by way of a serial port, and the base is actually a voice modem with a 900 MHz radio transmitter/receiver to communicate with the handset. The entire setup is done on the computer in software. It has full voicemail capability, allowing you to set up mailboxes and corresponding announcements.

The handset looks pretty standard except for a number of extra keys. You use the handset to play messages, store and delete them. You can speed dial from a speed dial directory you create on the computer, and you can use its voice recognition capability to speed dial. Yep, it has voice recognition, and it also has computer voice speech, again enabled by the power of your computer. You can use voice commands at the handset to handle messages if you wish. I find it kind of clunky to do that, but I can certainly see an impaired person doing it, and indeed there's some disability enabling built in and it's pretty well documented, too.

The handset has a speaker on the back so that you can hear the recorded messages from nearby like a normal recording machine works, but is also used to broadcast announcements when incoming calls come in. It uses caller ID to announce the caller. It looks up the incoming call in the address book for an entry, uses any special announcement you've built in for that person and alternately will read the name if it's transmitted by caller ID, and also announce if the caller ID is blocked or unavailable.

On the computer side, there's a Call Manager that needs installing. It uses the Address book from Outlook Express for the database, and adds a couple of tabs in the Address book for announcement and also custom greetings. A custom greeting can be made for any person in the address book. It stores all messages as .WAV files and since it goes to the hard drive you don't have any serious limitations on length and number, although you can choose to limit the length if you wish.

The Call Manager saves all incoming and outgoing calls in a log, saving the number called (if called from the handset) and all numbers received, date, time and duration of each call. You can retrieve messages from the Call Manager, and make calls using speakers and microphone plugged into the sound card. In my case I use a headset and attached microphone. This works for me because I use a networked PC that also is my Internet sharing on my network and don't care about sound otherwise. This PC is always on anyway and is on a UPS.

There's much more that this puppy does. It even reads your incoming Internet mail to you if you remotely call in for messages. There's more, but you can do more research on the Internet if you're interested.

The downside – there always are some aren't there? First – the obvious. You have to have your computer on all the time. And it has to be able to run some pretty intensive software at the same time. Speech synthesis and voice recognition (as a separate, concurrent application).

And the criticisms. The handset speaker is cheesy, and that's a kind description. The telephone is a single line (that's ok with me). The software isn't totally reliable, although it's good in my opinion. I have had a couple of lockups in the last couple of months. The voice command features are slow. (I don't use them anyway.) The phone is good for a geek like me, but I can't see it being sold at Best Buy until some more development is done.

Still, I like it and as long as I'm willing to do the care and feeding, my spouse likes it, too. We especially like the voice announcement of incoming calls, and the ease of managing the recorded messages both from the handset and from a remote call, which is excellent.

Microsoft Cordless Phone, PC Phone System MP-900 $199 retail, but $59 and up at many on-line outlets. http://www.microsoft.com/phone/ ◆

(Comments..........Continued from page 5)

cable modem, connect to the other computer and boot up again. Then I can find the old computer on the network and transfer the necessary files. To keep from doing the above again when I needed a particular directory I had missed getting from the old computer, I decided to do a Direct Cable Connection between the two computers parallel ports. First, I had to install the Direct Cable connection feature on the new machine. It seems no computer manufacture ever enables this Windows feature. Doing such a connection is never a sure thing in my experience. Sometimes I have had to reach into my bag of tricks and spend some time with the network settings to get it to work, but this time the two computers found each other fine. What I noticed, though, was how slow the Direct Cable Connection between parallel ports was when compared with a network connection between network cards.

Well, I had saved what I dreaded until toward the end-- installing the HP 3c scanner. Moving an older SCSI scanner to a new Windows 98 computer can be difficult. You have two problems right off. You need new software and you need a new SCSI interface card, since the old Deskscan II software will not work in Win 98 and the old ISA HP SCSI card must be replaced by a PCI plug and play SCSI card. I knew this because HP tells you this at their site. When I installed Win 98 on my computer some time back, I had to pay for the new software for my HP ScanJet IIcx, but now you can download it for free.

What I didn't realize was the difficulty I was going to have in getting the new computer to give the SCSI card an IRQ with no conflicts. I installed the SCSI card, booted the computer, and when I opened up the Windows Device Manager, my heart sank. The Adaptec SCSI adapter had the dreaded yellow tag next to it. A check showed that it was sharing IRQ 3 with several other devices. Now, IRQ 5 appeared to be free, so why was the computer assigning IRQ 3 to the Adaptec card? A check of the BIOS showed that IRQ 5 was reserved for legacy devices and was not available. I changed the setting, making it available, and assumed that when I rebooted everything would be fine. It wasn't. The SCSI card had indeed jumped to IRQ5, but so had the sound card, and the SCSI card still had its yellow tag.

I tried the usual trick of switching the PCI cards in the computer to different slots to no avail. Next, I disabled COM 1, freeing IRQ 4, but for some reason none of the devices would use this interrupt. And there is no way in the BIOS of this computer to make them. Time to call Dell, where, after a 30 plus minute wait, I was advised that, since they didn't sell or install the SCSI card, they couldn't help me. Well, I asked, couldn't they then tell me how to make a card—any card— use a free IRQ. No, not really was the answer, since the computer determined all of that. So much for Dell's help. I was on my own. So I called Merle Nicholson, our hardware ex-

pert. He had some suggestions, some of which I had already tried, and one that I hadn't. He suggested switching from a PS2 mouse to a serial mouse, freeing IRQ 12. Since I didn't have such a mouse available at the moment, I continued with my efforts.

I discovered that if I took the sound card out, the SCSI card and scanner installed fine, with the SCSI card using IRQ 5. But put the sound card back, and the yellow tag came back to the SCSI card. Somehow, the sound card got preference. But that gave me an idea: Create two hardware profiles, one in which you had a scanner but no sound and the other in which you had sound but no scanner. I did that, and it worked. When you booted the computer, you were given a choice as to which profile you were going to operate under. You could either listen to sounds or you could scan in photographs and documents. My client didn't think much of my solution. And, really, I didn't either. It was just a temporary solution until I could produce the real one.

A good night's sleep and a bit of Internet research produced the fact that of the several sound components listed in the Windows Device Manager, the one called "Sound Blaster 16 Emulation" was only used for sound in DOS programs. Well, I could do away with that. So the next morning, I went into the Scanner only Hardware Profile and added back all the sound components except the Sound Blaster 16 Emulation one. And to my relief, I now had both sound and a scanner working. Both the SCSI card and the sound card were happily sharing IRQ 5. I then removed the other profile and re-named the remaining one "Original Configuration". To test things out, I scanned a few photographs and put in a DVD disk and listened to a surround-sound sound track. Yes, this computer has a surround-sound system. And I didn't have to try the serial mouse that I had brought along at Merle's suggestion.

Now, why couldn't that Dell fellow have suggested that I disable SoundBlaster 16 Emulation? IRQ conflicts must be a common problem they encounter all the time.

There was one major hurdle left--moving the HP Colorado 8 GB tape drive from the old computer to Dell. Of course, physically removing the drive from the old computer and installing it in the new computer is no problem. You just make sure that the CD drive on the new computer is set to master and the tape drive is set to slave, since the IDE tape drive is attached to the empty connection on the secondary IDE controller cable where the CD drive is already attached. The tape drive appeared in the computer's BIOS and in the Windows Device Manager (although it might have been only identified as tape drive there). You are then supposed to run a little HP utility that determines if the installation is correct—at least that is what you did in Win 95. It said no deal--

Killer Collection of Software

By Larry Anders, Librarian,
Tampa PC Users Group larry.anders@gtemail.net

Anyone that has read any of my articles in the past knows that I have kind of an addiction to software. I guess that's why I've been the librarian for our users group for over 10 years now. Originally my job as librarian was to collect shareware software, copy it to diskette, catalog it and bring it all to the monthly meetings so that our members could make copies. With the advent of the Internet, sites such as http://www.Download.com and http:///www.Tucows.com have replaced my original duties as librarian. There was no reason for me to continue to collect the files when these online databanks of Shareware (and Freeware) have it all right there just for the downloading.

To start your own collection of software just jump onto the Internet and do a search for Shareware or Freeware and you'll have enough places to visit to keep you busy for several days. If you're not into searching for software, there are plenty of Internet sites like ZDNet.com that will send you daily or weekly updates of the hottest software on the market. And it is all usually free for the downloading.

So, what's a librarian for a users group do these days? Try to keep you informed of some of the good software that's out there that everyone should have in their collection. So here goes (but not necessarily in any order…)

- **ICQ** - This is one of the most popular Internet instant messaging tools, and it's free. I use it every day for direct contact and exchanging files with certain individuals over the Internet. It's fast, easy and free, which meets my criteria for good software. Similar to **AOL's Instant Messenger** but does not have to go through a server which, I think gives greater privacy and security.
- **Copernic 2000** - Another freebee that is one powerful search tool for the Internet. It's easy to use and you get great results. (As a side note, there are also two Internet based search agents located at http://google.com and http://alltheweb.com that are also extremely fast.)
- **Go!Zilla** or **GetRigh**t – If you're into downloading software from the Internet, as I am, these two download managers are a must. They both have familiar Explorer style interfaces and work similar to what you're already used to. I personally use GetRight that automatically uses my virus scanning program to check for viruses on each file I download, which we all know is a must! Just select the files you want to download and you choose when the download will take place. There are too many benefits of each to list here. Go!Zilla is free and GetRight is Share-

ware. Also out there is **NetZip** and **Download Demon**.
- **Paint Shop Pro** – I couldn't begin to compute without this one. It's now up to version 6 and I've used it since version 1. I've reviewed it a couple of times in the past in this newsletter, and it just keeps getting better. It will stack up against any of your professional graphics programs that cost several times Paint Shop's $79 cost. They've recently added an animator program to the mix that most of the big boys don't come with.
- **WinZip** – I'm not sure if there is anyone who doesn't know about this one, but, just in case, I thought I'd better mention it. A utility that makes it very easy to compress and uncompress one or several files together, which is especially useful for sending files over the Internet.
- **Homesite** – If you haven't created your own web site yet, you will eventually. Homesite makes it real easy with its WYSIWYG design component. No more code to learn. Just jump right in and create. Homesite has consistently gotten high honors and is worth its Shareware price tag. But try it. If you like it… buy it for $89. If you don't like it… don't buy it. That's what Shareware is all about.
- **RealJukebox** – Another excellent free program that lets you create and play your own collection of digital music in several formats, one of the most popular being MP3, which takes up much less space than the standard audio file on your music CD. The difference with RealJukebox and most of the other "ripper" programs is that you can listen to your CDs while you rip (copy) the tracks off of them. I've used this program to take my favorite songs off different CDs and make one CD with all my favorites. (Yes, it's legal!) There is also support for automatically downloading the names and songs from your CDs off the Internet (CDDC) to create a database of your music. To go along with this program, check out **WinAmp** and **Sonique**, two free music players with a lot of bells and whistles.
- **ClipMate for Windows** – One thing Windows has always lacked is the built-in ability to manage your clipboard. It's always been *first in – first out* (FIFO). You can copy just about anything and paste it just about anywhere but as soon as you copy something else the last thing copied is gone. Enter ClipMate. Now you can clip text, bitmaps, pictures, etc., and paste them whenever you like. ClipMate allows thumbnail views of Clipboard contents, lists, content editing, printing, magnification, and more. It's Shareware but well worth the $20.
- **iHarvest** – If you use the Internet to search for information, like most of us do, then you should really have iHarvest in your collection. It is advertiser-funded freeware that collects data of your choosing, whether it be whole pages or selected text and graphics, and adds it to your "WebBase," which iHarvest lets you categorize to your liking. You can also add other content, such as

(Software……….Continued from page 8)

emails, spreadsheets, or shortcuts and set up agents to categorize information you collect automatically. This is a great idea.

I've only mentioned a few of the thousands of programs that are available on the Internet, and I really only mentioned application and utility type software. If you're into games, business, education, development, Internet, graphics or whatever, it's out there, and not just Windows based stuff either. You can also find software for Unix, Linux, Palm-computing and other operating systems, too. What's the catch?… Nothing… and if you think it's probably not as good as the software you can buy off the shelf, I can tell you this. Typically, the only difference is the price, and a lot of it is **FREE!** You make the choice. ◆

(Comments……….Continued from page 7)

the drive was not installed. Well, I knew that it was and that all the cables were connected and the jumpers were set correctly. So after checking everything again, I went ahead and installed the Colorado Backup software. Well, it ran but could find no tape drive to work with. Time to call HP.

From HP, I received excellent service--at no charge--on this year old drive. There were two problems. First, the drive needed a firmware update, which I was instructed to download from the HP web site and to run. I did that, and the downloaded program updated the tape drive's firmware. At one point in the update, you get the warning that you are now past the point of no return. If you stop the process now before it is finished, your drive will probably be rendered useless. I didn't plan on stopping the process, but what about Tampa Electric. Just the day before, the power had flicked off momentarily, causing the computer to reboot while I was luckily doing nothing crucial with it. These are the times you wish you had a battery backup system.

Second, with the firmware update finished, I was instructed to uninstall the HP Colorado Backup Software since it wouldn't work correctly in Windows 98. The new software could not be downloaded via the Internet but would have to be ordered from HP at a total cost of around $30. The technician transferred me to the software order person, where I was informed that the software was on back order. So until the new software arrives, the tape drive will be useless.

Dell versus Gateway In the past month I have had an opportunity of dealing with both a new computer from Dell and one from Gateway. Which computer or company is better? I really can't answer that. The answer probably depends on the prob-

lems an individual encounters in using the new computer—and the way we use our computers is quite varied. You may never encounter the problems that I might run into the first day. You would then be happier with your choice than I.

I bought my new computer from Gateway since I have been very happy with them since 1991. Their machines are a good value and the support is good. They also have a store in Tampa where I can bring my machine for service if needed. However, this last item proved to be a stumbling block for the individual who bought the Dell. She said that in the Gateway warranty was a clause to the effect that if you lived near a Gateway store, you might be required to bring the computer in to the store for service during the usual first year of on site service. That, along with a perceived better price on the Dell computer, pushed her to Dell. (It is not that easy to compare two systems from different manufacturers, since they don't offer the exact same setups.)

You will not go wrong buying from either Dell or Gateway. Of course, you will not get the best possible price, either. There will always be better bargains elsewhere.

As to phone help, I have to give Gateway the nod. You usually have a technician on the phone within five minutes who will do their best to help you. In two calls made to Dell, a technician was never available in less than 30 minutes. And, as indicated above, one of them refused to help with the SCSI card installation since the card wasn't bought from Dell. I suppose they expect you to buy new scanners and other peripherals from them when you buy your computer. The second technician at Dell was quite willing to spend a lot of time trying to figure out how to make the Dell supplied modem hang up after a specific interval of inactivity. There is usually a setting for this in the modem setting in Control Panel, but for this modem it was grayed out. After about an hour we agreed that this modem probably didn't support this feature.

Regarding the Gateway technicians, with whom I have had much more contact over time, I have found some of the them very thin on knowledge about my particular problem. In fact, some simply gave incorrect information. Of course, there are those among them who know the solution right off the bat. What I have never found with a Gateway helper, though, is the refusal to help you on a problem.

Second in importance to phone help is online help at the company's web site. And here I have to give the nod to Dell. Their support site seems better than Gateway's. For a new computer, when you go there for the first time and enter the identification of your computer, you can look at all the specifications of your computer at the site. When you return to the site, they recognize you (by a cookie, I suppose) and take you directly to your machine's information. Additionally there are many documents on how to solve various problems. ◆

Special **I**nterest **G**roups

Internet SIG

This SIG meets the first Monday of the month at 6 PM at the Reflectone Building, off West Waters Ave. You must sign up to get on the list and to get by security. *Contact Mike Hodges at hodges@reflectone.com.* For directions, see the map at our web site or contact Mike Hodges**.**

We consider all topics concerned with creating web sites. We study sites of interest from the web and those created by members of the SIG. And, in general, we consider anything of interest concerning the Internet.

Genealogy SIG

To be included on the TPCUG genealogy mailing list, contact Jenny Lind Olin at 960-5723 or jlolin@aol.com

Visual Basic SIG

This SIG meets the third Tuesday of the month, at the Gateway 2000 Store on North Dale Mabry (just south of Columbus Drive) at 6 PM. For information, *contact Merle Nicholson at merlenic@tampabay.rr.com.*

Windows SIG

This SIG occupies the first 30 minutes of our monthly, regular meeting at MOSI and is devoted to a general Windows and computing discussion. Mary Sheridan moderates the discussion.

More On My Dell Warranty

By Merrill Friend, Tampa PC Users Group
mfriendtampa@worldnet.att.net

Back in December, Dell Computer replaced my hard drive under my parts warranty. That was the worst of my problems. I had been living with another deficiency in my computer for many months, so I decided to get it repaired also before the warranty expired.

This other "deficiency," as I have called it, seemed quite minor. The On/Off button on the front of the computer had ceased to function. I had removed the front plate to see if I could repair the problem and learned that a small plastic part had broken and a piece of it was missing. I thought if I could find the missing piece I could possibly glue it back together and be almost as good as new. I looked everywhere and the missing broken part could not be located. Lacking a proper switch I had removed the front panel so I could get to the On/Off button, which I activated with the rubber eraser of a number 2 pencil.

Frankly, I was tiring of this procedure, so Dell was again called, and the technician said he would have the replacement part sent me by Airborne. Days passed and no shipment. I called again and spoke to a different technician who found my reference number but could not find anything on the status of the shipment. This technician offered to put through a priority request to his parts department. Another week passed by, and, as I was about the put in another call to Dell, I heard a vehicle door shut in my drive, and there was the Airborne delivery truck.

In his hands he held two items. One was a letter sized sign off sheet for me to sign accepting delivery. The other was a box about two feet square. Now I wondered why was I getting such a large package. All was looking for was a small plastic switch about the size of a silver dollar. So I opened the box like a kid wondering what kind of Christmas present the box contained. Well, I was really surprised.

The box contained an entire replacement front panel. It appears that Dell has changed the appearance of the front panel or no longer has the one which originally came with my computer. Also, the little switch behind my old front panel was no longer used. Now the replacement front panel has a heavier duty switch built into the panel itself.

Anxiously, I attempted to install the new panel. Unfortunately, it fits too closely to my 3 ½" floppy drive which now makes that drive unusable.   At this point I go back into the big box and find another smaller box and darned if it didn't contain another floppy drive which I was to learn fit more deeply into the front slot meshing perfectly with the new front panel. All I have to do now is return my old 3 ½" floppy to Dell as credit for the replacement one they sent.

I certainly got more than I bargained for in this exchange and wanted to share this experience with everyone. ◆

Friends of the User Group

We acknowledge the following firms for their support

Museum of Science and Industry
Gateway 2000   Marshall & Stevens
Reflectone   BCD

And these software and hardware vendors for their demon-strations and review software and contributions of evaluation software to our group

Adobe Systems   Micrografx
Broderbund   Microsoft
Corel Systems   PowerQuest
Grolier   RDI, Inc.
Intuit   SoftKey International
Knowledge Adventure   Symantec

MEMBERS' HELP LINE

Program	Code
Adobe Acrobat	AA
AOL	AOL
Computer general	CG
Delphi	DE
DOS	DOS
Family Tree Maker	FTM
Hardware general	HG
Hardware Modem	HM
Hardware Printer	HP
HTML coding	HTM
Internet general	IG
Micrografx Graphics Suite	MGS
Microsoft Access	MA
Microsoft Excel	ME
Microsoft FrontPage	FP
Microsoft Office Suite	MOS
Microsoft Publisher	MP
Microsoft Visual Basic	VB
Microsoft Word	MW
Networking	N
PAF	PAF
PaintShop PRO	PSP
Quicken	Q
Windows 3.1	W3
Windows 95/98	W95/98
Windows NT	WNT
WordPerfect	WP

Name	Time	Phone	Codes
Cheryl Alexander	10:00am - 9:00pm M - F	914-0008	HTM,PSP,WP
Larry Anders	Mon - Sun 6:00pm - 10:00pm	989-9119	AOL, ME, MW, FP, PSP
Warren Fuss	10am - 9:30pm	949-6844	CG, WNT, N
Bob LaFave	8:00pm-10:00pm	248-3379	W95/W98, MOS
William LaMartin	Mon - Fri 9:00am - 9:00pm	251-3817	AA, FTM, IG, MOS, MP, VB, W95
Merle Nicholson	Mon - Fri 7:30pm - 9:30pm; weekends	879-3602	CG, DE, DOS, HG, HM, HP, VB
Jenny Lind Olin	Mon - Sun 8:00am - 10:00pm	960-5723	ME, MW, PAF, Q, WP
Don Patzsch		689-8662	CG
Mary Sheridan	9:30am - 9:00pm	988-6480	AOL, CG, DOS, HG, IG, MW, Q, W95, W98

We encourage other members to add their names to the list of those willing to assist fellow members with their computer problems. Contact William LaMartin to add your name to the list.

Tampa PC Users Group, Inc.

P. O. Box 3492
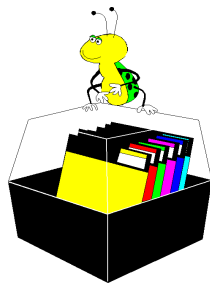
☐ Member: Your membership is up for renewal
☐ Vendor: Your product was reviewed on page ___

(Minutes..........Continued from page 4)

dard. For those of us with older systems or those who don't want to deal with a complete system upgrade, add-in cards for UDMA 66, Fire Wire, and USB are available.

With the proliferation of high speed, always on Internet connections, network security is becoming more important. A web site called Gibson Research Corporation (http://WWW.GRC.COM) has a service available called Shields Up! It will automatically probe your computer for security holes, then walk you through their suggestions on how to fix the problem.

Mr. Singer then went over networking. Most of us were at least familiar with network cards and hubs, but Steve pointed out the difference between hubs and switches. A hub, which most people tend to use, shares its bandwidth with each connection. The more machines on, the slower the network. Hubs are also half duplex, meaning they only communicate one way at a time. Switches give full bandwidth to each connection and run at a full duplex. ◆

(President..........Continued from page 1)

In case you haven't noticed, our presentations calendar for 2000 is almost empty. If you have experience with a specific program, please share your talents with the group. If you aren't comfortable standing up and giving a presentation, then write down what you know and submit it to William LaMartin for the newsletter. The strength of the group is based on the efforts of each individual. ◆

E Fletcher Ave

USF

E Fowler Ave

I - 275

Parking

50th St

Meeting site: MOSI
4801 E Fowler
Main Entrance

To Tampa

N

The map is **not** to scale