Bits of Blue

April in Tampa

Meeting

**George Pilat from Intnet.net
Speaking on DSL**

**April 12, 2000
6:00 PM
Museum of Science
and Industry
4801 E Fowler Ave.**

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Meeting Preview: At the April meeting we will have a presentation by George Pilat from Intnet.net on DSL. 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
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If you missed the March 8th meeting, I'm sorry to tell you, but you missed a lot of fun. We had a tremendous presentation by Jay and Max of CompUSA. The door prizes were exceptionally nice and we beat our record for raffle ticket sales. We even had cookies and juice. A big "thank you" to everyone who contributed to the refreshment fund for the next meeting.

The 3rd, 4th, and 5th of March we were in Orlando for the FACUG Spring Conference. Jenny Olin, Don Patzsch, Kevan Sheridan, Bruce Register, and myself spent the weekend attending round table discussions and learning as much as possible. William LaMartin won 1st Runner Up in the Web Page Contest. Thanks William for making us all look good.

We're still working on a Rummage/Garage Sale Event with the Greater Tampa Bay Computer User Group in Brandon. Al Pesche, our MOSI contact, is looking at possible options for the event. The Brandon people are also trying to see what they can find. The event will be on a Saturday or Sunday in June. If you know of a likely location, please let one of the board members know.

Spring Comdex is coming up soon, April 17th through the 20th in Chicago. Anyone who is interested in attending can go to http://www.zdevents.com/comdex/ and register.

May 10: **Mike Galvin of Office Depot will do a presentation on scanners**

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However, for business concerning this newsletter, Bits of Blue, please contact the Editor, William LaMartin, at 821 S. Boulevard, Tampa, FL 33606-2904; 813-251-3817; lamartin@tampabay.rr.com.

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Minutes of the March Meeting

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

Mary Sheridan started our Windows SIG at 6:00 PM. William LaMartin was presented with a nice award from our group for the fine work he has done with the group's web site. FACUG, the state body that governs users groups, judged our site as second place among all users group sites in the state.

CD recording software became our next topic, with most of the group singing the praises of Adaptec. It was pointed out, though, that you should make the plunge and buy the full "Deluxe" version, as the "Lite" version that ships with most CD burners is too lite.

Hard drive upgrades are always a fun topic, and this time was no exception. When a question was put out on how to move Windows 3.1 programs onto a new computer the obvious response was, "Why?" But, thankfully, someone had a useful response with "Aloha Bob," which allows moving programs from one hard drive directly to another without the original disks.

The general meeting began at 6:30 PM with official business. Sign up sheets were passed out for SIGs and attendance. The Office Depot on Fowler has asked us to display our newsletter at their location. Other users groups have found this a benefit in gaining new members.

Jay Kirth of CompUSA presented a demonstration of digital cameras and video recorders. While setting up, he went over CompUSA's warranty policies. Most work is done on site, but most people aren't aware that Sony requires any system or component be sent back to the manufacturer for warranty work. This can be inconvenient for customers, but it is one of those things out of CompUSA's control. Mr. Kirth also pointed out that CompUSA has an on-line presence for ordering products or ordering can be done by calling 1-800-8-DIRECT.

Jay set up a Sony Viao laptop to demonstrate the different cameras. By plugging the video camera directly into the laptop, the laptop became a large viewfinder, and, with the software included with the camera, movies or still images could be captured to the hard drive for editing. For people looking to add video to web pages, some of the less expensive cameras on the market would be more than sufficient. For high quality movies with a VHS or 8mm clarity, look for as high a megapixel count as you can afford. Also, different cameras handle zoom and stabilization by mechanical or software means. Digital zoom works by cutting out the borders in the view screen and interpolating the magnified pixels between the real pixels. At lower magnifi-

Web Site Design Pitfalls to Avoid

By Cheryl Alexander, Membership Coordinator, Tampa PC Users Group cbear@quadra.net

Remember the image that you want to project with your page or site. You strive for professionalism in your logo, stationery, presentations and other aspects of your business. Don't blow it on your site. Don't put anything up on your site that you wouldn't put in a newspaper advertisement.

There are many reliable services that can construct a simple page for you that will do just fine for a web presence. Always remember that the surfer is looking for information about you and your services. Bells and whistles (animated gifs and midi files) can always be added after solid content is written.

Before you even start writing code, look at several web sites by similar small businesses, the more the better. Write down what you like and what you don't. Use this information as a starting point when designing your site. What features irritate you will probably irritate a surfer.

If you are building your site yourself and are a beginner, there are several books in the stores for learning "how-to". Good ones will explain everything about web site design, including how to name your files. Checking them out of the library will give you a chance to decide which one suits you best before you buy it. Some titles are:

HTML 4 for the World Wide Web, Fourth Edition: Visual Quickstart Guide by Elizabeth Castro, *HTML 4 for Dummies* by Ed Tittler & Stephen Nelson James (includes CD-ROM), *Creating Web Pages for Dummies, Third Edition* by Bud Smith & Arthur Bebak (includes CD-ROM)

There are many pitfalls with designing a web page or site but here are the most common:

Too many animated gif files. Background sound that is slow to download and plays too long. Background image/color that renders text unreadable Pages that look good as HTML but don't print well. Pages that are too long

Animated gifs: A graphic file that contains several images that are displayed in a sequence either as a "slide show" or to approximate motion.

These files add motion and interest to a web page. However, for every such file on the page, time is added for the loading of each frame of the animation. Some animations have several frames, essential for smooth motion. Too many animated gifs take up too much time to load and if there isn't enough content to keep the surfer's interest, they will leave the page before all the gifs load. There are also programs available to help com-press (make smaller) gifs and jpgs.

Background sound: A wav or midi file that downloads to the surfer's computer and plays while the page is being viewed.

Music does add a nice touch to a web site. However, again, it can be a huge file that can take a while to download. And, again, if there isn't enough content, the surfer may leave before the first note even plays. Also, be careful when selecting your file and how many times it is to play. If it's too irritating, the surfer will either disable it or not return to your site.

Background image/color: A tiled (repeated over an area) image or a single color that is used to fill the browser space with the text displayed over it.

Let's face it, gray can be very drab. And we don't like to be drab. Colors and images used for the background are excellent for adding some pizzazz to a site. However, once again, don't forget that information must be legible to be useful. There are background images that look very sharp until you try to read text on them! Choosing a good contrasting color can rescue that really cool image that you are dying to use. Be aware that monitors are getting better. The background that is designed for a 640x480 screen will look good for that resolution but may look odd if not unreadable on a 1024x768 screen. On the other hand, you can only pick a median range of resolution (usually 800x600) and hope for the best.

PDF Downloads: A file that is printable on most printers and is downloaded for that purpose. It can also be viewed with a "reader" program.

This is excellent for a file that you have prepared to be a handout in a word-processing program and decide to save as HTML to display on your site. This method is also good for a page that will make a good information sheet but has features that may not print well straight from the web. It is better to use Adobe Acrobat Distiller to make a Portable Document File (PDF) so that it can be printed on many different printers. Since it is an expensive program, check with your local copy center such as Kinko's or Pro-Copy or other place where computer access or time can be rented. When a PDF file is used, the layout won't be changed by font unavailability, graphics not being the correct resolution for printing (screen resolution: 72 dpi; printing resolution: at least 300 dpi), or the browser window not being fully open.

Page organization: The method of connecting information with hyperlinks.

There is a method of linking from one part of a page to another. This can be convenient. However, again, if your page is too long, it will take a long time to load and interest will be lost. It's better to have many quick loading pages than a single long page. Your web hosting service charges by total amount

Microsoft Office 2000 Part II: Excel & Access

By William LaMartin, Editor,
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Review Last month I looked at Microsoft's Office Suite in general and how it has evolved over the many years I have used it into the number one such product. I then concentrated on Word, its word processor. As noted then, the product seems to be evolving toward the corporate user and the web. There is not really much new in the suite for the casual, individual user in a home or small office environment. How many people do you know involved in web coloration of Office documents?

Of course, there have been refinements and minor additions (like the ability to have tables inside of tables in Word, which I have already discovered can be a useful item). But, for the casual user, I don't think these additions will be noticed or prompt one to upgrade from an older version.

However, I can think of one reason to move up, and that is to get away from having to deal with the less than perfect service packs for Office 97. People fault Microsoft regarding service packs, but as a small-time software developer, I can assure you it is impossible to produce a program that is bug free. And at least Microsoft does produce corrections for their mistakes. Some vendors seem to never get around to doing this. The Office 97 service packs, SR1 and SR2, however, were not always that easy to install, and seemed to keep changing, at least in the case of SR1. An upgrade to 2000 should do away with all of that. Not quite, SR1 is now out for Office 2000. But, as best I can tell, the things corrected by it are far less extensive than those for SR1 for Office 97, and I have no plans to download and install it at this time.

Excel and Access Like Word, Excel doesn't seem to have changed much. Excel looks almost exactly the same when you open up a workbook. Access does have a different look as regards displaying the window with your list of tables, queries, forms, etc. It is more like a two pane Windows Explorer view. And there is a new object in the Access window's left pane, the data access page, which is a form-like object to be published to a web site along with its supporting files for viewing by—and interacting with—other Office 2000 users. More on this later.

Another addition to Access is the Visual Basic Editor for any Visual Basic for Applications code you may wish to use. In Access 97, you could use such code, but the method for editing it was less robust than that provided by the VB Editor which Word and Excel already had in Office 97.

However, again, the VB Editor is a feature, like the data access pages, that, I suppose, at least 90% of Access users will never use. Of course, it could be argued that Access is not meant for the casual user anyway. In fact, it is not part of the standard version of Office, and, indeed, most people can get along fine using Excel to keep their "data." But for more demanding uses of data, a database is indispensable.

Much of my work now with Visual Basic involves interacting with Access databases. When Office 2000 first hit the shelves, it caused me to worry a bit about my VB programming. VB 6 was written to work with Microsoft Access 97 databases, and I worried about what would happen if someone were to update an Access 97 database that provided data to one of my VB applications to Access 2000 format—they are different.

I follow several VB Usenet newsgroups, and I had read about the problem. I had also read that to get a VB 6 application to work with a Microsoft Access 2000 database, you needed to set up your program to use *Microsoft.Jet.OLEDB.4.0* as your data connection provider and have a reference to the Microsoft DAO 3.6 object library in the project. So I started using that setup in my programs even though I was still working with Access 97 databases. And it appears to have worked. If I now take an Access 97 database that is used in one of these VB applications and update it to Access 2000 format, all the database components in the VB program still seem to work properly.

But I have drifted away from the average user who will never use VB with a database. As to this person, I think you are getting the drift that there is not really much in Office 2000 that should make him or her want to move up from Office 97. In fact, Office 97 is overkill for most people, and the Microsoft Works Suite (not just Works but the Suite), consisting of Microsoft Word, the Works spreadsheet and the Works database (really just using one table at a time), is sufficient. To me, it seems Office 2000 is aimed at the corporate computing environment where people will collaborate on documents placed on a company intranet or on the web—and to individuals like me who want to work with the latest software technology.

The Latest Software Technology With Office 2000, there are three ways of putting your documents on the Web: As static pages, as pages with limited interactivity, and as documents with an interactivity just like you would have if the document were on your own computer. Office 97 provided for the creation of static web pages from Word documents, Excel worksheets and Access tables or queries. With Office 2000, we get a good bit more.

(Office………Continued from page 4)

To publish documents to the web for collaboration by different individuals, everyone using it needs to be running Office 2000 and the server where the document is installed needs to be running Microsoft Office Extensions. I haven't been able to test this out, since I don't have access to a server with Office Extensions. However, I have tested publishing both Excel worksheets and Access tables where anyone using Office 2000 can interact with them and make certain changes. To see the results of this, go to http://tpcug.org/office_2000. Of course, nothing will display properly or work if you don't have Office 2000 on your computer with the Web Component option installed.

There are four examples at present. The Excel example is an interactive work sheet that does a loan calculation and displays the first two years of payments. There are two Access examples, which are essentially the same. One is an interactive display of a database of around 2,500 auto body shops in Florida, the name, address, phone number, etc. for each body shop being displayed one at a time on a form that you can scroll through and either filter or order on any of the display fields. The second example is the same, but consists of only Tampa auto body shops. The final example is a chart from Access that graphs the number of body shops in each zip code in Tampa.

For the above to work, nothing special seems to be required of the web site, but, as stated before, the viewer must have the Office 2000 Web Components on his or her computer.

It is all interesting—at least to me—and I can see the use for organizations. And I look forward to being able to place my documents on a Microsoft Office Extensions enabled server. But for most individuals this is not a must-have upgrade. ◆

INTERNET PICTURE OF THE MONTH

Bourbon Street Web Cam, Mardi Gras Day in New Orleans

Having enjoyed the New Orleans Mardi Gras eight times 25 to 30 plus years ago, I like to check back and revive memories. The Bourbon Street web cam at http://www.nolalive.com/bourbocam/classic/ allows me to do that. Mardi Gras is over this year, but the cam is functional 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

April's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)	http://www.tpcug.org/
Bartleby.com – Great Books Online	http://www.bartleby.com/index.html
3COM – networking hardware	http://www.3com.com/
Deja Usenet Newsgroup Search	http://www.deja.com/usenet/
ZIP + 4 Code Look-up	http://www.framed.usps.com/ncsc/lookups/lookup_zip+4.html
Woody's Watch (MS Office products)	http://woodyswatch.com/
The Smoking Gun ("secret" documents)	http://www.thesmokinggun.com/
Betty Crocker (Food)	http://www.bettycrocker.com/
The Creole and Cajun Recipe Page	http://www.webcom.com/~gumbo/recipe-page.html
Wines on the Internet Guide to Wine and Wineries	http://www.wines.com/
The Internet Public Library	http://www.ipl.org/

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.

FACUG in Kissimmee

By Don Patzsch, Tampa PC Users Group
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At Kissimmee, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, March 3, 4 and 5, the FACUG held their spring meeting. President Larry Tyler and all his helpers did a great job of planning and then carrying out the series of meetings. There were well over a hundred enthusiastic people in attendance.

On Friday night, we were registered and all were given a tee shirt courtesy of Visitalk. We were also given a cloth bag containing many goodies and brochures from the vendors. Refreshments and soft drinks were available, and we broke into groups and talked.

On Saturday morning at 8 A.M., a breakfast was served. Larry gave us a talk about the FACUG and what we could expect for the next two days. Bart then put the FACUG web page on the screen and showed much of the very worthwhile information you may obtain by going to that site. It is at http://www.facug.org.

Next we broke into sessions, and the first one I attended was on databases. Each group described what information they put into their database; also they told about who was allowed to view or to use the information. Mailing labels are made from most databases; also, the date each person is to renew their membership and, in some cases, many other details are included there. This was a very interesting session. It is not possible for me to describe the enthusiasm of the people and the interest they express as these sessions progress.

At 12 we broke for lunch, supplied by Adobe. Adobe always gives us CD's and other goodies as they tell us about Adobe. Louise Miller was the host.

After lunch, I attended the Publicity and Public Relations session, then the Web Pages session. Everyone takes part in each session, and you can pick up a great deal of information from each one. At 5:30 we broke for dinner, sponsored by MGI software. We were shown how to use PhotoSuite III, and VideoWave III.

At 7:30 Saturday evening, we were shown the prizes and told the names of the winners of the web page contest. A meeting of the board followed. The winners are: Winner - Southwest Florida PCUG. First runner up - Tampa PCUG. Second runner up - Space Coast PCUG. Third runner up - Tie: PCUG of Jacksonville and Venice Area Computer UG.

All during the three days, the Kissimmee Utility Authority had four computers on the web for us to use. Two were notebooks and two were desktops. I used them to telnet to my two email sources and they are fast! The KUA offers free computer courses, monthly rates starting at $4.50, and other advantages. (http://www.kua.net)

Some of you may not have thought about it, but a utility has rights-of-way all across the country. This means that long electrical lines, natural gas lines and also railroads can install the conduits needed for cross country glass fiber connections to all of the major areas. This is in addition to telephone line rights-of-way. See Boardwatch's "Internet Service Providers" magazine at your local bookstore for the maps of many "backbones" and lots of general information on the www. It is worth the price—$9.95 for the largest amount basic information on the Internet you have ever read.

On Sunday, the morning started with a breakfast sponsored by Microsoft. We were told about such things as how to locate what we want on the Microsoft web site, and also about the events and how to find the dates and times. The Microsoft representative, Mary Sue, introduced herself.

Following that, I attended a real neat session on the Mac. Now this was a real treat. The lady from one of the user groups who led the discussion is very talented and really enthusiastic. Her topic was Vendor Relations. She suggested we meet and get to know the people behind the store. One thing her group did was get to know the CompUSA people and CompUSA keeps a room open after hours now so that the Mac group there in Miami can hold a class! She also told us that she or the others in their group may throw beach balls or other little stuff into the audience as their meetings progress, just to add a little something to the whole meeting night! Rose Lynn is a dynamo. She may add a bunch of Mac people to our FACUG meetings next year. We learned some things about the Mac and the Mac groups.

The final session was on Advertising. Now I did not expect to find so many neat ideas and so much discussion on what and how to place advertisements in your newsletter. You can't help but catch the excitement as everyone tells you what their group does or doesn't do advertising-wise.

At noon, we broke for lunch with Inprise-Borland as the sponsor. Yolanda Davis, our host, gave us a lot of humor and described many uses for the Delphi 5 program. They produce Jbuilder 3 and C programs also.

After lunch, we broke for the Vendors tables. Each of the Vendors people is available for questions and to provide further information about their products. One of the surprises for me at this meeting was Office Depot's people. They give you the names of each store manager, who will work with you to provide a program for your user group. These people were at

the fall meeting also.

Matt, the Intuit speaker provided fabulous humor and a great presentation of his Intuit program, Quicken.

Corel provided an eighteen page White Paper on Linux. Linux is now in use on more than twenty five per cent of the world's servers. The Post Office uses Linux as its operating system, all over the country. Linux is scalable and stable (more so than other operating systems). Businesses are using it more each month. Corel packages a shrink-wrapped LINUX that is easy to install. You know the rest of Corel's programs: WordPerfect, CorelDraw etc.

JASC has its Paint Shop Pro Version 6, and I think we all use that now. Casady and Greene, Corel, and Inprise-Borland provided the carry bags. Visitalk and Laser Perfect were there to answer questions. Kris Canning of Wizcom Technologies showed off their new Quick Link Pen. You have to try it to understand what it will do for you. You can follow a line of print and the scanning takes place. Neat product.

Gene Barlow now represents Caldera Linux as well as the PowerQuest products, Partition Magic, Drive Image, Datakeeper, and Second Chance. Gene and his wife are favorites at these shows.

If you want to know why so many enthusiastic computer people spent the weekend in Kissimmee, come to the fall session that will be hosted by the Tri County PC Users Group in Port St Lucie. Watch for the October announcement on the FACUG web site. ◆

of web space used, not by how many files are using the web space.

A good web site can add to a small business. By considering these possible pitfalls, you can build that web site. ◆

Editor's Comments: Installing Network Cable, USB Network Adapters & e-stamp

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

Network cabling I have had the computers in the house supplied with network cards and a crude sort of Windows Peer to Peer network setup for a couple of years. It was crude because if I wanted to connect any two computers I had to stretch out up to 75 feet of network patch cable through the living room, up the stairs and across the hall. That was for the upstairs computer and the main downstairs computer. To connect other computers I had to transverse other rooms. Then everyone including our bird had to be careful not to get their feet caught in the cable. I include the bird since the cable passed right by her cage, and when we let her out to sit on top of her cage, she sometimes would find the cable irresistible. Luckily she never did more than superficial damage to it.

Finally after getting a new Gateway, I decided something had to be done. After going to Home Depot and purchasing a 500 foot roll of Category 5 network cable, a collection of 8 wire modular jacks, outlet boxes, cover plates, 3/4 inch PVC conduit and necessary fittings, I was ready for the big job. And it was a big job, because any time I have to crawl around under my house and go into the attic in the same day, I have had about as much as I can take.

I ran the conduit from the outside wall of the room where my main computer is, under the house for about 30 feet, then up another outside wall inside the sheet metal channel containing the air conditioner's refrigerant lines into the living room attic. Once in the attic I dispensed with the conduit. Of course, there were wall outlet boxes to be installed on each end of the run and the job of pulling the cable through the conduit from one outlet box to the other. To finish the job, I had to connect the eight wires of the cable to the modular jocks on each end.

I actually pulled three network cables through the conduit at the same time, since I wanted one cable for the Windows network, one for a direct connection to the cable modem which is downstairs, and an extra cable for the future. The total time for the job was six hours. And if you think I am a slow worker, I invite you to come and crawl around under my house and then fish wires from under the roof at the edge of the attic.

USB Network Adapter You might ask why I wanted a separate network cable to connect the upstairs computer to the cable modem when Windows 98 SE allows you to share an Internet connection. That is, if I were running Win 98 SE on the computer attached to the cable modem, I could then set up things so that any other computer on the Windows Peer-to-Peer network could also con-

nect to the Internet using this same connection. Well, I had used proxy server software in the past (see http://www.tpcug. org/reviews/december97.html) and wasn't particular enamored with it and thought that I would simply like to be able to switch the cable modem between different computers by switching the network cable that was plugged into the modem. We rarely have two computers on the Internet at the same time anyway. And in those rare cases, one of the computers can use the regular NetCom dial-up connection.

And this is where I got the idea of using a USB network adapter to provide a second network connection to whatever computer I wanted to connect to the cable modem. Actually I must thank Larry Anders for first bringing my attention to the fact that there were such things as USB network adapters.

Now, in the computer connected to the cable modem I have two network cards installed, one for the cable modem and one for the regular Windows network. In the past if I wanted to connect, say, my laptop to the cable modem, I had to reconfigure the properties of its one network card before connecting it to the cable modem. That worked fine and allowed me to do some large Windows updates to the laptop software, but it was a little trouble. With the installation of the USB modem on the laptop that has all changed. I set the properties of the USB network adapter to what the RoadRunner cable modem wants to see, and, when I desire to use RoadRunner on the laptop, I simply unplug the connection from the cable modem to the desktop computer and connect it to the USB network adapter attached to the laptop. I then only have to run WIPCFG.exe on the laptop to allow RoadRunner to assign an IP address to the USB network adapter, and I am off and running.

I also installed the same USB network adapter on the new Gateway upstairs. My first use of the RoadRunner connection on that computer was to download the newest version of Internet Explorer, IE 5.01. With all of its attendant programs, the full package came to 18,511 KB. To download that on a regular modem would have been several hours. On RoadRunner it took 3 minutes, 52 seconds, which is approximately 4.8 MB per minute.

For those not familiar with USB devices, note that you can simply disconnect them from one computer and move them to different computers. The device I purchased was made by 3COM and cost around $70. It comes with three CDs, so there is much more there than simply driver software. In fact, there is something called Microsoft Home Networking which is supposed to configure your Win 95 and above computers for networking in a hassle-free manner. I am sure some people would be happy to have that happen, since it has been my experience that setting up a network is not always trouble free. However, I already had a network that was working fine, so I didn't take Microsoft up on their offer. The second CD is actually a Win 98 SE upgrade disk for those with Win 98. The software there will upgrade

you to Win 98 SE and additionally lead you through the process of setting up the Internet connection sharing I mentioned earlier. I declined to take advantage of that also. The third CD is some Microsoft game sampler CD. The location at the 3COM site for this device is http://www.3com.com/client/pcd/homeconnect/ homenetworking/products/p34_key.html. The size of this device is about that of a pack of cigarettes.

E-stamp After seeing the e-stamp demonstration at a recent meeting, I couldn't resist the offer at the Microsoft Office web site and the e-stamp site of the e-stamp software and $50 of e-stamp postage for about $55. Unfortunately, the offer had to be acted on by March 31, so by the time you read this newsletter it will be too late. However, I did post it at our discussion forum, so if you follow that, you would have seen it in time.

You order via an Internet site and pay with a credit card. When you place your order it is recommended that you also at that time apply to the Post Office for a license to use the product, which e-stamp conveniently helps you do from their site. As might be expected, this product is highly regulated by the Postal Service. For example, if you move from your present Zip Code area, you must return the small piece of hardware called the vault that attaches between your printer and computer. It apparently is programmed to be used in one originating zip code, 33606 in my case.

The software package arrived in about three days via priority mail, and the program was easy to install. The next thing to be done was to install the electronic vault as close to the printer as is possible in the parallel connection between the printer and computer. (Note there may be other parallel devices like Zip drives in the parallel chain.) During the installation, the program went on the Internet to the e-stamp site to check on my account and, among other things, it credited my account with the $50 in postage that came with the special offer.

After setting everything up, you print out an address to e-stamp in California and a $.33 e-stamp and mail this to e-stamp so that they can be assured of the quality of your printer.

The first thing I noted was that the date of the stamp was that day's date, but the postman had already picked up the mail, and one of the e-stamp requirements (from the Post Office, I am sure) is that the letter be mailed within 24 hours of the date of the stamp. That was fine, since the letter would get mailed the next afternoon and presumably be processed before 12 midnight. But I made a note that in the future if the mail had already gone out, I would set the date of mailing forward one day to avoid any possible problem. You are allowed to move forward up to three days—but you can't go back any.

Email a Phone Call Away

By Larry Anders, Librarian,
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I've been doing this PC stuff so long now that it's been a while since I've found something really interesting. Well, the other day I was doing a routine search for something I can't even remember now and up popped this link: http://evphone. com. I followed the link and read a little about *E-mail Via Phone* (EVP). It sounded good to me so I downloaded their 10MB trial version, which, by the way, on a cable modem only took a couple of minutes.

In a nutshell… EVP will call you and read you your email or you can call your computer and have EVP read your email to you. The keyword here is *read*. EVP uses a text-to-voice engine to translate your email text to an easily understood electronic voice that even seems to put some emotion into it sometimes.

I downloaded, installed, ran setup and it didn't work. I then went back and read the instructions, but evidently not very well because it still did not work. I sent an email to their online support and within an hour I had an answer back. I reread the instructions and help file and it made a little more sense to me then. (As I said above… the keyword was *read*.) It actually did work and quite well.

First of all, you need a voice modem, and make sure you have the latest drivers, to eliminate some problems if your driver is kind of old. Although I installed a cable modem sometime back I still kept my 56K voice modem installed and now I'm glad I did. But that wasn't my problem. You also must have a standard email account (POP3). Although I have RoadRunner installed I continued to use MSN for my email, which I had prior to RoadRunner. I didn't want to change my email address again. But MSN uses a secure server to access their email and EVP doesn't support a secure server. That was my problem! So I activated my RoadRunner email account, which is a standard email account, and soon I was hearing my email, and quite well too. Along with the above you also need Windows 95/98 (NT and Win2K are currently not supported), a 486/66 or better, 8MB of RAM and a sound card.

Some other things you can do with EVP (from their website) are:

Check e-mail automatically.

- Check in pre-defined time intervals.
- Check for E-mail at a pre-defined time using EVP's scheduler.
- Check it daily, weekly, weekdays and more.

It's a phone call away!

- You can call E-mail Via Phone anytime you want.
- Schedule a call to your phone whenever you like.
- EVP's rule system allows you to specify when EVP will call you.

Filter undesired e-mail messages.

- Delete a message based on sender's name.
- Use a keyword in the subject to delete.

Listen to whatever you like from the message.

- Listen only to the subject and/or sender's name.
- Customize what you want to hear.

Browse e-mail messages using your phone.

- Skip to the next message.
- Repeat the current message.
- Listen to the previous message.
- Delete the message.

Supports Modem and Network users.

- Dial-Up networking using a voice modem.
- Network Users, Cable Modem, DSL Connection.

It only costs $29.95 but you can download a fully functioning trial copy and use it for 14 days to try it out for free. They even give you a 30-day money back guarantee after you purchase it. I don't see how you can go wrong with this. If you decide to get it let me know and you'll be *hearing* from me soon! ◆

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The program can print out postage in three ways. On certain sized labels, on several different sizes of envelopes, and from Microsoft Word or Outlook on these same sizes of envelopes. I have printed only on the regular business size envelopes using both printing directly from the program and from Word. The program seems to run more smoothly when it does its own printing than when trying to do things through Word. I have printed two stamps from Word and three without Word. One of the Word stamps went off into limbo land, and I lost my $.33. Furthermore my printer couldn't be used by any program including e-stamp until I rebooted. So I would say that the e-stamp/Word connection may not be bug free.

You have to have selected a mailing address that is then run through the program's address checking software to be matched against correct addresses on a separate CD before you can print out a stamp. There is no printing of postage without a valid address (more Post Office rules, I suppose).

Special Interest Groups

Internet SIG Changing to Microsoft Access SIG

We will tentatively have our first meeting of the new Microsoft Access SIG the first Monday in May.　It will meet at the Gateway 2000 Store on North Dale Mabry (just south of Columbus Drive) at 6 PM.

We will post an announcement at our web site in the discussion forum when the time nears.　For information contact either William LaMartin or Merle Nicholson. See page 2 of this newsletter for email addresses and phone numbers.

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 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.

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Now we come to the main shortcoming of the program from my point of view. The program provides no database to store the addresses you want to use over and over. It expects you to be using certain Microsoft programs like Outlook or Windows Messaging that utilize certain address books, like the Microsoft Personal Address Book. Unfortunately my computer has nothing like this set up. Outlook Express uses the Windows Address Book, and that is not accepted, as are none of the common Personal Information Management programs, like ACT or Lotus Organizer.

So, what I have to do is to either type the mailing address into the e-stamp program each time I use it, or I can have the address stored, say, in Lotus Organizer, copy it from there to the clipboard and paste it into e-stamp, Not ideal but workable. Possibly in a new version of the program they will address this problem.

When you are ready to print the envelope or label, you may do a test print to see if everything is working correctly before committing to a final print at which time the postage used will be deducted from the amount stored in the "vault."

Features I haven't tried yet include the postage calculator and printing postage on labels for express or priority mail. I like the idea of the program, and the price was right. I basically only paid a little over five dollars for shipping. However, future postage purchases will carry a convenience charge of around 10% based on the amounts that I would probably buy.

My general impression is that the software might be a bit buggy. It definitely does not respond very fast. Possibly that is because it has to communicate with the vault. That could be a problem for volume production right now. For home use

it is fine, and I enjoyed using it.

A potential problem is that initially and every two weeks the program needs to connect and upload a usage log file to satisfy another one of those Postal Service requirements. Using my cable modem, the program connected fine to e-stamp, set up my account and even download a software upgrade, so how could uploading this log file be a problem. Well, it was. I could never get the process to finish. Customer support decided that the problem was due to my using a cable modem connection and that the cable provider, RoadRunner, was using some sort of proxy setup. I would need to contact RR and get all sorts of specific information to reconfigure my LAN settings to make the upload work.

That wasn't for me, so while the lady was telling me this, I signed on to my NetCom dial-up account and tried to send the log file again—this time successfully. So the warning is that you may have a problem with a cable modem and this program until certain LAN settings are changed. ◆

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cation this can work well, but higher magnification causes fuzzy or blurry images. Mechanical magnification uses lenses like on your old trusty 35 mm. Digital stabilization works in a similar manner by cutting out the edges of the image in the viewfinder and attempts to keep the remainder of the image in the center of the screen. Mechanical stabilization, like in the Sony cameras, uses servos and optics to provide a clearer, better image. When downloading images from a still camera to a computer, Jay recommends using a card reader instead of

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$25 Individual $35 Family
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MEMBERS' HELP LINE
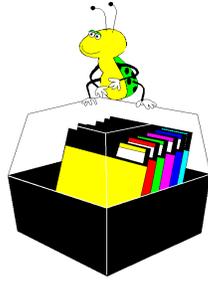
Program	Code
Adobe Acrobat	AA
AOL	AOL
Computer general	CG
Delphi	DE
DOS	DOS
Family Tree Maker	FTM
Hardware general	HG
Hardware Modem	HM
Hardware Printer	HP
HTML coding	HTM
Internet general	IG
Micrografx Graphics Suite	MGS
Microsoft Access	MA
Microsoft Excel	ME
Microsoft FrontPage	FP
Microsoft Office 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
Tampa, FL 33601-3492

☐ Member: Your membership is up for renewal
☐ Vendor: Your product was reviewed on page ___

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plugging directly into the camera. By plugging into the camera, it becomes a removable drive in the eyes of your computer and its batteries will soon die.

Jay brought in an HP970CSP printer for the demo. The colors and resolution on the more expensive Sony cameras was impressive. Jay warned that with printers, though, you get what you pay for. He also pointed out a major difference between HP and Epson printers. HP uses a built in heating unit to warm the ink before printing. This helps prevent clogging of the ink jets if the printer has sat unused for any great length of time.

Mike Hodges won the big prize of the night, a digital camera. Not bad for someone who wasn't supposed to be in town. Clark Evans won a PC tool kit. ◆

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Our next Board meeting will be Thursday, April 6th at BAE (formerly Reflectone). All members are welcome and we'd love to have you attend. Due to security at BAE, you need to contact a board member ahead of time to get your name on the list. We try to start promptly at 6:30 PM and hopefully we're done by 8 PM. ◆

E Fletcher Ave

USF

E Fowler Ave

I - 275

50th St

Parking

Meeting site: MOSI
4801 E Fowler
Main Entrance

To Tampa

N

The map is **not** to scale