Bits of Blue

March in Tampa

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

Vol. 19 No. 3   March 2006

Meeting

**Microsoft Presents
Windows Vista**

**Wednesday, March 8, 2006
6:30 PM
Art Pepin Hospitality Room
Pepin Distributing Co.
4121 N 50th St
Tampa, Florida**

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Meeting Preview: This month we are privileged to have Microsoft giving a presentation on Windows Vista. We will also have the usual half-hour Windows SIG.

Editor's Comments

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

Thanks to Merle Nicholson and Jim Purcell, I have only this small amount of space to fill this month. Keep those articles coming. Mary Sheridan also sent in a short comment about preparing for the recent FACUG meeting for which I had no room. Perhaps she can expand it to include a description of what happened at the meeting for the next newsletter.

It will be nice to hear from Microsoft about the future of Windows. Much of my time at the computer is spent using Microsoft products—mainly Visual Studio 2005 and Office Professional 2003. Most of the rest is devoted to digital photography and Adobe Photoshop CS and Illustrator CS. And when in the future there is space needing to be filled in the newsletter, I will probably be writing about these products. ◆

April Meeting: Michelle Hominsky presenting "How to use eBay"

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We acknowledge the following for their support

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Minutes of the February Meeting

By Doug Mullis, Secretary, Tampa PC Users Group
dmullis@tampabay.rr.com

Vice President Kevan Sheridan called the meeting to
order at 6:35 pm, in the absence of President John
Witmer. We had two guests, Rex Miller and Sam
Christy, who were welcomed to our meeting. Bruce
Register once again assumed the duties of our vacant
Membership Chairperson position, handing out name
badges and greeting members and guests. Again, we
need someone to formally step forward to fill this
voluntary position.

Kevan familiarized everyone with the Art Pepin fa-
cilities. William LaMartin announced that D. J. Elli-
ott, who spoke to us last October, had passed away.
We had planned to have him back to do a follow-up
presentation about the history of the Internet. Kevan
then turned the meeting over to Member at Large
Mary Sheridan to conduct the Windows SIG portion
of our meeting.

Mary brought up her desktop on her laptop com-
puter, which she had in tow this evening. Icons filled
the screen to Merle's chagrin; however, Mary uses
all these programs. Mary's wallpaper, a scene of
Mystic, Connecticut, taken by her while on vacation
last fall, impressed us, as well as the choice of pro-
grams.

Mary went on to call attention to Microsoft's Power
Toys for Windows XP, SyncToy and Image Resizer
to name a few, and then demonstrated programs.
Kevan commented on the value of Google's Gmail,
which can only be had by invitation, an offer he ex-
tended to members. Kevan would be willing to do
another presentation on Gmail at a future meeting.

At 7:05 pm, Kevan started the business portion of

TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

By Jim Purcell, Tampa PC Users Group
edward_j_p@msn.com

The *National Geographic Traveler Magazine* scheduled one-day seminars in ten locations in the United States. The seminars are designed to help attendees improve their "travel digital photographs". I attended the first seminar, conducted in the Grosvener Auditorium next to National Geographic Museum in Washington, DC. Dan Westergen[1], the Senior Photo Editor for the *National Geographic Traveler Magazine*, and Ralph Lee Hopkins[2], a contributing photographer, conducted the seminar.

The following are some of the topics that were covered:

WELCOME TO THE DIGITAL WORLD

There was a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of switching to digital photography. Among the advantages is the ability to have instant feedback instead of waiting for film to be developed. The ability to change the ISO[3] gives you the ability to, in effect, change film at any time you choose. It is easier and more practical to experiment since you can snap as many pictures as you choose with little or no additional expense. The digital darkroom and digital printing offer even more opportunities for experimentation after the picture is taken.

The disadvantages are the cords, cables, memory cards, chargers and batteries that you have to have available. Also there is the need to download your images to a computer or other memory device. Since you normally snap more photos than you did on film, there is the requirement to review and decide whether to print, store or delete. You must decide the resolution needed to meet the requirements of your intended use of the photo. There is a big difference in the resolution and file size required to display on a monitor or TV and that required for prints and enlargements.

CHOOSING AND USING YOUR NEW DIGITAL CAMERA

In their discussion of choosing a digital camera, they divided the selection into luxury point and shoot cameras, compact cameras, bridge cameras and digital single lens reflex cameras.

The luxury point and shoot cameras do have many of the advantages of digital over film but they also have their limitations. Most have a slow lens and limited zoom capability. The slow lens necessitates high ISO, which can create "noise" in the pictures. In summary, the cameras in this category are convenient but limit the capabilities of a serious photographer.

The obvious advantage of the compact camera is that you can easily carry it in a shirt pocket or purse. It provides the ability to always have an affordable camera capable of taking quality photos with you. These cameras, however, have a limited zoom power and small sensing chips. The small chip provides poor high ISO performance.

The bridge camera is more expensive. It can be as expensive as some of the lower end SLR cameras. They have lots of shooting modes, manual overrides, quality lenses; they are easy to carry and have a better zoom capability than the lower cost cameras. Unlike the SLR, the lens is permanently attached so there is no sensor dust. The disadvantages are that the zoom range is limited to the attached lens and the small sensing chip means poor high ISO performance. There was some discussion that Sony has made progress in improving this performance with its new chip.

The digital SLR has all of the advantages of the bridge camera except small size and absence of dust on the sensor. In addition, you can use any lens that you want, which gives you the capability of greater zoom and faster lenses. The larger sensing chip means great high ISO performance. The interchangeable lenses do create a dust problem on the sensor so it does require cleaning. It was clear that, in spite of any disadvantages, the SLR provides far

(Photography……….Continued from page 3)
more capabilities than any of the other type cameras.

CREATIVE TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR TRAVEL IMAGES

The following tips were given. You might agree or disagree because we all have our own opinions, but I think that they are all worth thinking about:

- Use program icons instead of AUTO for exposure. Use Aperture priority to control depth-of-field. Go deep (F/11 or higher) for depth in landscapes and shallow (F/5.6 or lower) to isolate subjects. Use Shutter priority to control motion blur.
- Switch the ISO setting "Auto" off and preset ISO to 100 or 200. Push to 400 or higher only in low light.
- Preset White Balance to Daylight most of the time. Change to Cloudy for warmer scenes. Experiment with other settings.
- Use the largest JPEG file setting (FINE – LARGE – BEST) with the lowest compression rate, or medium if you don't need the resolution. Use the RAW format for your highest quality projects.
- RAW will not erase your mistakes and is not for everybody (it takes more computer time). JPEG is best for most photographers.
- A good size for a memory card is 512 since all images will fit on a CD. Use multiple cards and protect cards in a protective case or wallet.
- Downloading direct from camera to computer is the slowest. Downloading from a card reader to computer is the fastest.
- To minimize sensor dust when changing lenses, turn the camera power off, point camera body down, avoid windy or dusty conditions and keep caps and camera bag clean.

Workflow, sharing digital travel images, and the digital photographer's camera bag were also covered. Additional information on these seminars can be found at http://www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler/photos/photosem0509/ps.html .

Additional Santa Fe Workshops in photography are conducted at Santa Fe, New Mexico; Tuscany; and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. Details can be found at http://www.santafeworkshops.com/ .

Footnotes:

1 Dan Westergren
As Senior Photo Editor for *National Geographic Traveler Magazine*, Dan Westergren is responsible for the magazine's photographic vision, which has claimed numerous awards for photography. Dan has also photographed a variety of stories for the magazine. He particularly enjoys cold, high places, having photographed the summits of Mt. Kilimanjaro, Mt. Blanc and the Matterhorn for the pages of *Traveler*. He is also an experienced teacher, having led workshops for National Geographic Expeditions workshops in both Santa Fe and Tuscany. As editorial magazine photography rapidly converts from film-based to digital, Dan is amused to realize that he can edit twice as fast with a computer. But since the photographers tend to shoot twice as many images digitally it all evens out in the end.

2 Ralph Lee Hopkins
Ralph Lee Hopkins travels to the world's wild places as photographer and expedition leader with Lindblad Expeditions, which operates six ships worldwide, including the *National Geographic Endeavour*. He is also the Director of Photo Expeditions for the Lindblad Expeditions/National Geographic alliance. His images are represented by the National Geographic Image Collection and have been published in numerous National Geographic books and special publications. Ralph teaches photography workshops for National Geographic Expeditions, Arizona Highways, and the Santa Fe Workshops. He is also author of the popular guidebooks *Hiking the Southwest's Geology* and *Hiking Colorado's Geology*.

3 The international standard to identify film speed. It has been carried over to digital photography.◆

(minutes……….Continued from page 2)

our meeting by reminding us of the FACUG Spring Conference in Kissimmee Mar 3rd thru 5th. At our last meeting, Bob LaFave presented Intel's "Build Your Own Computer" and offered his assistance to anyone interested in doing so. Bob suggested we check component prices at a couple of Internet sites and determine what we want in a system. P C Club brochures were handed out advertising the packages they offer. Please let us know what you want to do.

At 7:15 pm, Kevan asked Program Director Doug Mullis to introduce our speaker for the evening, Gary Robertson with Metro Crime Prevention of Florida. Gary is a retired police officer from the City of Tampa. He first made us aware that we live in a high crime area and presented some startling statistics to attest to this. The purpose of his talk was to tell us what we can do to avoid being victimized.

Gary addressed three areas for us to take safeguards in, and I have organized them as follows:

Home Security: Make it look like you're home. Use 7-day timers to control lights, radio or TV. Make it difficult for a burglar to get in. Lock windows and doors even when home. Use double deadbolt locks on doors and secondary locks to limit how far a window can be opened. Most break-ins occur during work hours. Post "Beware of Dog" signs even if you don't have a dog. A large water bowl and a conspicu-
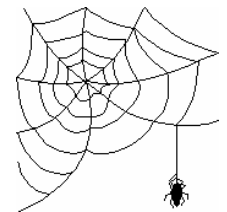
Internet Picture of the Month

Mardi Gras Masker

From the Nola.Com site, http://www.nola.com/, we have a certain person fiddling while New Orleans floods. The URL for the photos of the 2006 New Orleans Mardi Gras is http://www.nola.com/mardigras/photos/. Many of the costumes satirized government officials and agencies.

March's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)   http://www.tpcug.org/
Nola.Com - Everything New Orleans   http://www.nola.com/
Gas Prices - MSN Autos   http://autos.msn.com/everyday/gasstations.aspx
Zillow.com - Your Edge in Real Estate   http://www.zillow.com/
Parts Store - Over 7 million parts   http://www.partstore.com/
Consumer Electronics Parts   http://www.wehaveparts.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.

Plantronics DSP-400 Foldable PC Headset DSP-400

By Merle Nicholson, Tampa PC Users Group
merle@merlenicholson.com

The Plantronics DSP-400 is a digitally-enhanced foldable stereo headset with microphone with a USB connection for your PC. I bought it to replace two headsets that I was using because the idea of a USB connected headset kind of intrigued me. So I bought one for my son in Colorado, following Doctor Furst's theory of scientific testing. (His full name was Yugo Furst). After a period of testing, I then bought one for myself.

My son and I have been using Gizmo Project for a couple of months to talk over the Internet. Gizmo Project is a VOIP (Voice over IP) all-software telephone using PCs, and a comfortable microphone and headset are needed for extended conversations. I was using an inexpensive mono headset/microphone that connected to the audio in-outs on the PC, and I was also using a good stereo headphone when I wanted to listen to music at my PC without disturbing my spouse. This turned out to be an excellent choice for both purposes.

FIRST, THE CONS: Well, look at the picture. There is an unbelievable amount of cord attached to this thing. About a half meter down from the headset is the volume control, then the USB connector is 2-1/2 meters from the control. You'll notice that there are two bundles of cord where I've used the cable twists (supplied) to gather the excess. The only other improvement I would make is to have the cord come out one side instead of both in the "Y" iPod-style. That may not be possible with a folding set, but with all this cord bulk, and no way to detach any of it, I'm not sure why it's foldable in the first place.

Everything else is good. The aforementioned control down from the headset contains a volume rocker switch and also a very useful microphone mute button. The control has a neat clothing clip and also tends to keep the weight of the rest of the cord off your head.

The sound quality is simply excellent. You have two software controls – an Automatic Gain Control (AGC) and a Bass Boost with Windows XP. The microphone is lightweight and unobtrusive. My son says he talks with the microphone pointing straight up, and I didn't know the difference on my end. I can see why he does this because it gets the microphone completely out of his vision.

Windows doesn't know if you've plugged in a normal headset or speakers to audio connectors, right? It would be nice if it did, but audio is just, well, audio! A USB connected device is automatically detected, and the Operating System should know what your intentions are. This is the case with this headset.

To install this in Windows XP, just plug it in. Win XP (SP2) detects it and, while it's plugged in, kills your normal speaker output and sets your input to this microphone. So there's no software needed. There are no installation instructions – or instructions of any kind that come with this. For the adventuresome or the completely ignorant, no instruction is needed. The rest of us would like to have a one line instruction: "On Windows XP, no installation is needed."

There is an application available from the Plantronics website called "PerSono". It's a small download (5MB) and is yet another system tray application. With it, you can control volume, bass, treble and balance, and it has a speaker test and a button to switch from headset to speakers. For the microphone, it has a mute and a volume control. I've removed the program from the system tray and left the program installed. The user interface is too fussy to suit me. I'd rather have a straight, easy to

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

Microsoft Access SIG

This SIG meets the **first Tuesday** of the month at 6:30 PM. The meeting location varies. For information contact William LaMartin at *lamartin@tampabay.rr.com,* or Merle Nicholson at *merle@merlenicholson.com.*

Digital Imaging SIG

This SIG meets the **fourth Monday** of the month at Pepin Distributors at 6:30 PM. For information contact Mary Sheridan at *mcpease@mindspring.com.*

Visual Basic for Applications SIG

This SIG meets the **third Wednesday** of the month at 6:30 PM. The meeting location varies. For information contact William LaMartin at *lamartin@tampabay.rr.com.*
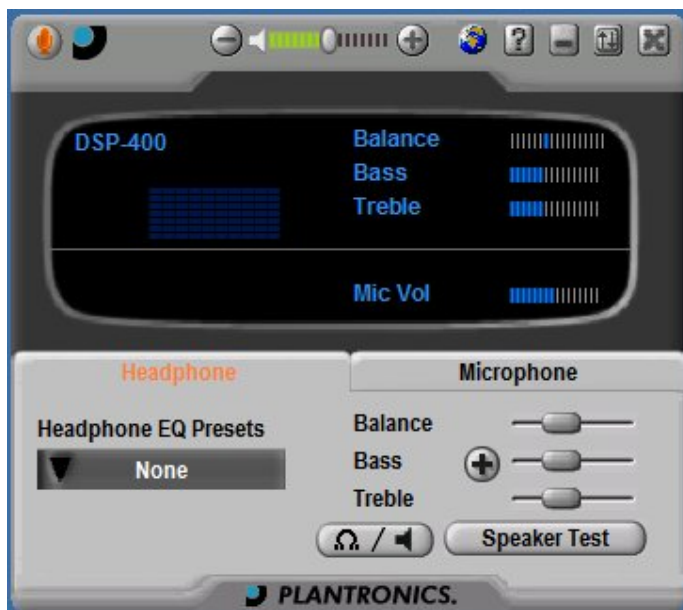
Windows SIG

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

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understand Windows application. I really don't intend to use it. I found the application while browsing their website for information on this article. Otherwise I'd never known of it.

CONCLUSION: I'm glad I bought it. It combines excellent stereo sound with a quality microphone in a lightweight unit. It connects using USB, a far more convenient connection, and one that is detectable by Windows.

Plantronics DSP-400. $40 from BUY.COM, $79 from Plantronics. ◆

ous heavy leash hanging nearby add to the illusion. Never hide a key anywhere near your door. Secure sliding doors so they cannot be lifted from their track. Use pin locks that cannot be jarred out. Install a security system with an audible alarm on all windows and doors. The alarm needs to be loud enough to wake you and be heard by your neighbors. Interact with your neighbors so you watch each other's house and call the police when suspicious activity is observed.
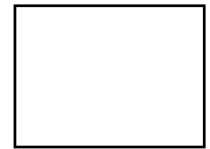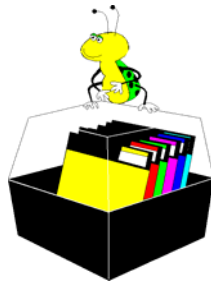
Personal Safety: We are most vulnerable when on foot in public parking areas. Be observant but display an air of confidence. Take precautions if things look suspicious to you. "N'er-do-goods" don't like anything that draws attention. Have keys ready before reaching your car. Carry valuables on your person, not in a handbag. This will make it easier to give up a handbag without a struggle if confronted. Carry pepper spray and be ready to use it. Forget mace or stun guns.

Automobile: Never leave your keys in the car even to gas up. Always engage your alarm system. Even if you have an alarm, use "The Club" as the second deterrent. Consider buying an automobile with a manual transmission. Besides getting better gas mileage, most teenagers can't drive them.

Gary concluded his presentation by displaying locks

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

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and alarm systems and offering pepper spray for purchase at wholesale price. We then broke for the purchase of door prize chances. William LaMartin donated the prizes this evening.

Winners were as follows:

John Waldon—Alpha 5 Data Base software
Kevan Sheridan—Adobe Premier 4.2 software

Thank you, William! The group took in $21 on the sale of door prize tickets. ◆

to I-275

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56th Street

Harney Road

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Martin Luther King Blvd

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