Bits of Blue

April in Tampa

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

Vol. 19 No. 4   April 2006

Meeting

Michelle Hominsky
How to use eBay

Wednesday, April 12, 2006
6:30 PM
Art Pepin Hospitality Room
Pepin Distributing Co.
4121 N 50th St
Tampa, Florida

Meeting Preview: This month we are to learn about eBay in depth. 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, I have very little space to fill this month. From his article, it appears that almost free phone service is here. Thanks also to our ever-reliable secretary, Doug Mullis, for this month's minutes and to Mike Hodges, our treasurer, for the yearly financial report we are required by our bylaws to put in the newsletter once a year.

For the second time, I have left an old computer sit unused for some time, only to find that when I did boot it, the hard drive had gone bad. This first happened quite a few years ago when I moved on from a Gateway 166 to a newer computer and put the old Gateway in another room and after some time did nothing with it. I thought I had copied everything I might want from it to the new computer but discovered one day that there was this particular very old Visual Basic project that I didn't

May Meeting: Kevan Sheridan on AirSet.com—Share calendars, contacts, lists and more

---

RENEWING YOUR MEMBERSHIP?
WE CERTAINLY HOPE YOU WILL

MAIL YOUR CHECK AND ANY
ADDRESS OR NAME CHANGES TO:

TAMPA PC USERS GROUP
PO BOX 3492
TAMPA, FL 33601-3492

$25 Individual $35 Family
$60 Corporate = 3 employees + $20 each add'l employee

**Go to our web site http://www.tpcug.org and click on the
Join link to fill in an online membership application**

Check the address label for your renewal month

Friends of the User Group

We acknowledge the following for their support

Marshall & Stevens
Pepin Distributing Co.

Minutes of the March Meeting

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

Member at Large Mary Sheridan started the SIG portion of our meeting at 6:40pm. Mary showed us how to make desktop icons transparent and demonstrated Yahoo's see-thru calendar. Get with Mary if you are interested in installing these features on your PC.

Ed White asked why he has lost Calculator and Notepad from his Accessories menu. No one had an immediate answer.

At about 6:55 pm, Mary launched into the business portion of our meeting as President John Witmer was out of the room. Mike Hodges summarized the FACUG Spring Conference held the weekend before (Mar. 4 & 5). TPCUG had six representatives in attendance. Mary got a round of applause for guiding the FACUG over the past year as President. Vendors were few this year but included Microsoft, Smart Computing, Panda Software and Corel, who all sponsored meals. Lapworks provided carry bags and general sponsors were Chronicles Software, Linspire and User Group Relations.

At the conference, Mike headed up a roundtable on "How Friendly Is Your User Group?" The number one suggestion for making your meetings friendlier was to have nametags. The conference spans a two-day period and many sessions are designed to help the officers run their group.

At this point Mary introduced the TPCUG officers. Merle Nicholson asked that we mention the providers of door prizes at each meeting, as vendors do not provide all. We have some generous members and want to recognize them for providing the interest that door prizes add to our meetings. Mike and I will

Member of
The Association of
Personal Computer User Groups

make sure this is done.

At 7:10 pm, our speaker for the evening, Blain Barton of Microsoft, was introduced. His topics were Windows Vista and Office 12; however, he first told us about Microsoft's Campus Connection program. This is a pilot program for going around to Florida colleges to educate students on current computer technologies. It started at USF and quickly caught on at Miami-Dade. Blain is quite excited about this program that has been in existence for about 18 months.

So, why change to Vista? XP has been around for five years, and many improvements have been incorporated into Windows Vista including better performance and security, improved email service, speech recognition, visual folder stacks, full index searches, fewer reboots and "hangs," and the ability to communicate with "smart phones."

Hardware requirements include a 32 or 64 bit processor with a speed of 3 GHz or better, 1 Gig or more of RAM recommended and a PCI Express or equivalent video card for starters. Recently acquired PCs will most likely be compatible with and upgradeable to Vista.

Blain indicated Windows Vista would hit the market around Thanksgiving of this year (Microsoft has since changed the release to early 2007). Two versions will initially be offered: the Basic Edition for budget users not requiring advanced media support (AERO Glass will not be included in this version); and the Ultimate Edition that will include AERO Glass, pod-casting support renamed by Microsoft as "blogcasting", a game performance tweaker, DVD ripping capabilities and possibly online services for downloadable media. This edition is designed for the high end PC user, gamers, multimedia professionals and PC enthusiasts.

Blain then demonstrated Vista so that we could see the improvements and features of Vista turning Glass on and off. Movie Maker was very impressive. Next he demonstrated the voice recognition capabilities of Office 12 by issuing a variety of commands, which were properly interpreted after several repeats. Then

Power Point 2007 was plugged, obviously due for release next year.

Tomorrow's technologies - such as facial recognition, central communications panels, information clustering, collaborative workspaces and radio frequency identification - were mentioned as sneak previews. We watched a short video demonstrating how video conferencing technology of the future could be utilized.

Blain says he will be back in September if we will have him to take up where he left off tonight. Microsoft provided eight door prizes to be raffled off. The winners were:

Adobe Photoshop	won by Gary Ennis
Optical Mouse	won by Todd Grubb
Game Pack	won by Robbie Randall
Game Pack	won by Jim Purcell
X P Book	won by Doug Mullis
Microsoft T Shirt	won by ?
X P Book	won by Bruce Register
Microsoft T Shirt	won by Jim Purcell

We took in $82 on the sale of raffle tickets. Thank you, Microsoft.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm ◆

have. Unfortunately I received some sort of message indicating that the C drive was bad when I booted it, and no amount of Scandisk, etc. would revive it. It turned out that the D drive was also bad.

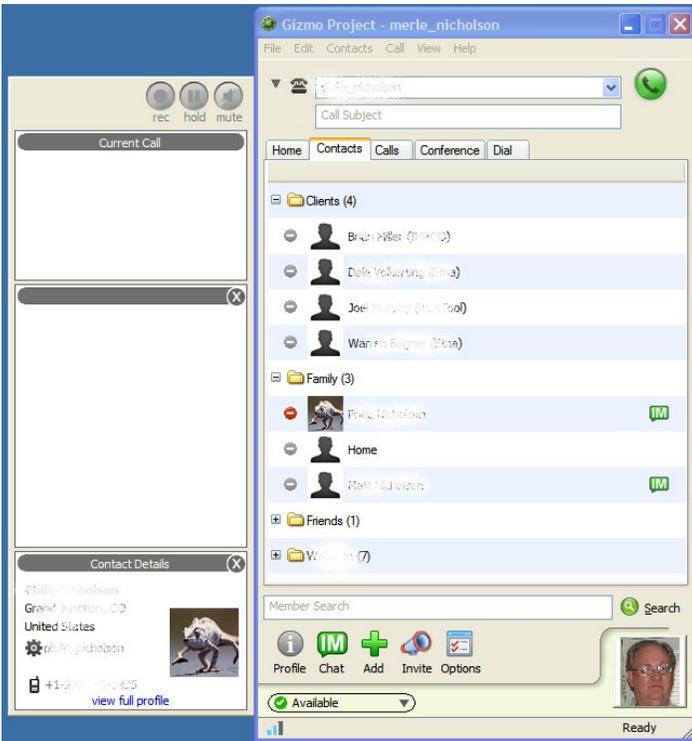Well, it has happened to another one of my older computers — a Compaq 333. I bet you thought no none used such things still. I had only used it for two things in the past four or five years: to keep my contacts in Outlook and my finances in Quicken. It was one of my quirks that I liked to keep those two things on a different computer (to my left in my L-shaped desk setup) from my main computer. Also, this com-

Gizmo Project
VoIP Internet Telephone That Works

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

Gizmo is a software-only device that allows you to make telephone calls at low cost – or free – from

I've been using Gizmo since November, 2005, just five months now, and have gotten a lot of very good use from it. One of my sons and I collaborate on software design. We use Windows Remote Assistance to control from my PC in Tampa to his PC in Colorado and connect voice through Gizmo at no cost for hours at a time, a few days every week.

We both use USB-connected Plantronics DSP-400 headsets with boom microphones. This has been our only expense so far at $40 each. I've averaged $1/ month in "call-out" fees because I use it to call my clients' land-based phones around the country. That's 100 minutes a month, being all short business-related calls. I sometimes call my sons' cell phones briefly if they're away from their offices and I don't want to tie up our land phone.

The application is a 10MB download from the website. It's well-designed and intuitive to use. It works

your PC. You need a computer, broadband internet connection and a headset and microphone. The software is a free download from
http://www.gizmoproject.com.

Calls to and from other gizmo users are free. That's free as in unlimited, talk all you want. You can call out from Gizmo to land or mobile phones for $0.01 per minute. That's one cent per minute. You can purchase a local area telephone number for a renewable fee so that land or mobile-based telephones can call your PC as if the PC were just another land phone.

The last two options are fee-based and are called "Call In" and "Call Out". There's a new program similar to "Call In" called "Area775"

(Gizmo..........Continued from page 4)

very much like an Instant Messenger (IM) application, except without the advertising. You set up a contact list by either manually entering callout numbers or doing a search for Gizmo users. You can also import contacts from your Outlook or Outlook Express. You can attach an Avatar (it's just a picture) to each if you like, and also set up expandable groups of users.

When you click on a name, a side window pops up with contact information, and you can then click on which number for that person to dial if that person has more than one. There is also a dial pad to just make manual calling. Just as in IM, you can choose to hide your identity and block users. When someone calls, you get a ring and a pop-up that tells you who is calling, and an "answer" button.

Just as in IM, you can set your availability as available, away, do not disturb, and your contacts will see that flagged against your name in their own list. The contact list and options are saved on the Gizmo server. That wasn't obvious until I installed it also on my notebook. After logging in with my user name and password, all my contacts appeared from the server, a very pleasant surprise.

When you dial and it goes unanswered, Gizmo will take a voice message, which is emailed to that person as an attached .wav sound file. You can also record

Internet Picture of the Month
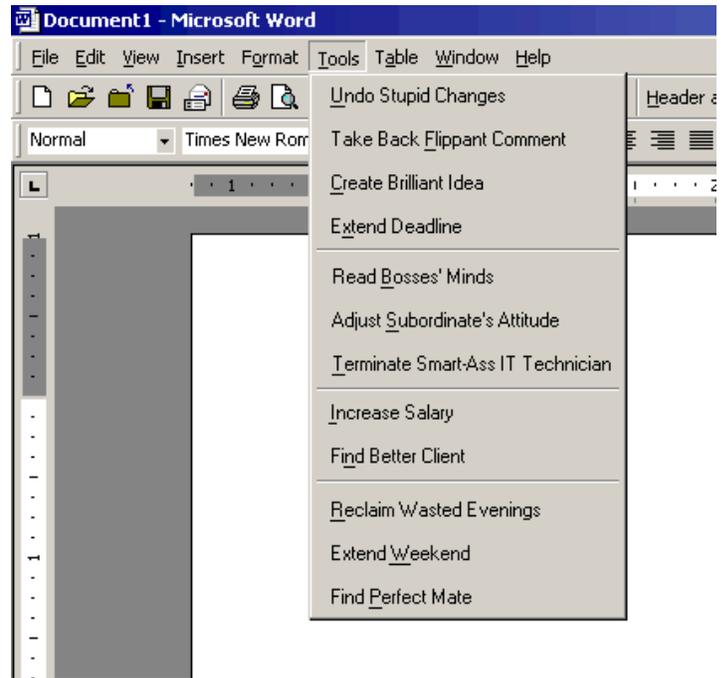
Questionable Word Menu Items

From the http://www.psycho-ward.org we have a Microsoft Word dropdown menu item not seen before. To see more such images, go to the page http://www.psycho-ward.org/funnypix/tech/ at the site.

April's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)   http://www.tpcug.org/
Ask.com - the revamped Ask Jeeves   http://www.ask.com/
This Old House Remodeling   http://www.thisoldhouse.com/toh/
Webmail for your PDA   http://mail2web.com/pda/
YouTube - Broadcast Yourself   http://youtube.com/
Antiqua Medicina From Homer to Vesalius http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/library/historical/
                                         artifacts/antiqua/index.cfm

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.

both sides of a conversation, which is saved as a .wav file. Be careful here; the file can get large in a hurry!

There are options to designate ringtones and all the various sounds it uses and a very effective way to designate the sound device. This is handy for me, because I need to switch from speakers to the headset when I use Gizmo. The whole application is nicely configurable. It's one of the best-designed little programs I've seen.

For calling out – that is to a non-Gizmo phone – you draw from a prepaid account. You prepay through a credit card or PayPal. As you use your minutes, the account balance is continuously updated on the home page. If you purchase a Call In number, the cost is $12 for 3 months or $35 per year.

The Gizmo Project website is pretty complete and easy to navigate through. I was disappointed only once, when I was looking for the reason it permanently installed a service called Bonjour Service. There are references to this to be found on the website, and I've been able to determine that it's owned by Apple, and it helps when networking – as on a network, but it presented no compelling reason to have it. I've disabled Bonjour Service in Control Panel, Administrative Tools, Services, to no detriment that I can perceive. I'd prefer that if a program like this installs a service that it start the service and then stop it when not needed instead of running it continuously, just to help manage the "startup bloat" that plagues everyone.

My youngest son in Seattle set up Gizmo to use while he is in India. He bought a "Call In" Seattle area code number to use so he can be called from within the US. But so far it hasn't worked out. His hotel and workplace are apparently blocking the IP Port it uses. He'll try it other places while he's there. We did try it all out before he left Seattle; I called him by Gizmo, and also his "Call In" number and it worked just fine. He uses a notebook computer, with just some lightweight ear plug speakers, and the notebook has a built-in microphone. I had to remind him not to swivel his head while talking to the fixed-location microphone, but otherwise it worked just fine. As an aside, there is a similar, competing VoIP service called Skype, and he

has called us using it from India from his computer. The results are excellent.

The connection almost all the time is as clear as land-based telephones, and although it does drop out on us sometimes, I consider it more reliable than cell phones. In any case, when a dropout does occur, we disconnect and reestablish in just seconds. As far as communicating, there is somewhat of a lack of "full duplex" where if you both talk at the same time, something is lost. But I think it's still superior to cell phones in that regard, although somewhat less in quality compared to land-based telephones.

All-in-all, I've been very pleased with this and plan to continue to use it. It does save me money, but I think most importantly it provides free voice communication to other people while I'm on my computer. I've never thought of using it for normal conversations, but I can see how it would be especially useful to someone who has "gone mobile" – given up their landlines for exclusive mobile phone use. ◆

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.

TPCUG Calendar Year 2005 Treasurer's Financial Statement

Balance on deposit as of 01 January 2005   **$4,578.71**

Income

Memberships	$ 855.00
Door Prizes	$ 181.00
USPS Refund	$ 40.33
Cookie Donation	$ 35.00
Amazon.com Revenues	$ 11.85
Total Income	$1,123.18

Expenses

Newsletter Mail-outs Postage	$ 147.60
Liability Insurance	$ 339.00
FACUG Conference Registrations	$ 160.00
Web Site Hosting Fee	$ 119.40
Newsletter Paper Costs	$ 57.41
Florida Incorporation Fee	$ 61.25
Association of Personal Computer User Groups Fee	$ 50.00
US Post Office Box Fee	$ 48.00
Florida Association of Computer User Groups Fee	$ 25.00
Misc. Expenses	$ 35.25
Total Expenses	$1,042.91

Net $ 80.27

Balance as of 31 December 2005   **$4,796.23**

Tampa PC Users Group, Inc.
P. O. Box 3492
Tampa, FL 33601-3492
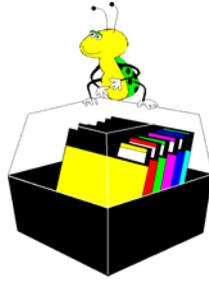
☐ *Member: Your membership is up for renewal*
☐ *Vendor: Your product was reviewed on page ___*

(Comments……….Continued from page 3)

puter had windows Me on it, and that allowed me to use it to answer questions about that operating system when someone occasionally asked.

When I got my recent Merle-built computer, I started using Quicken on it, and several weeks ago I moved all my Outlook data to the new computer, too, and didn't try to start the old Compaq again until yesterday.

Somehow sitting idle for several weeks seems to have trashed the C drive such that there appears to be nothing in the System32 folder of Windows and nothing will repair the problem. I can boot with a startup disk and view all the drive except that directory. The D drive, where I kept my data, is still good so that I can remove it and put it in another computer if needed. Or I can buy one of those USB drive enclosures and put it in there. But I think I had already copied all of the data to two of my other computers long ago. So it appears to be the old story of use it or lose it. ◆

to I-275

Hillsborough Ave

56th Street

TPCUG Meeting Site
Pepin Distributing Co.
4121 N 50th Street

Harney Road

I-4

Martin Luther King Blvd

50th Street

to Tampa

N

Columbus Ave