



June in Tampa

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

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June 2006

Meeting

The Anatomy of a Modern Computer by Merle Nicholson

Wednesday, June 14, 2006
6:30 PM
Art Pepin Hospitality Room
Pepin Distributing Co.
4121 N 50th St
Tampa, Florida

Meeting Preview: This month Merle Nicholson will explain the inside of our computers to us. We will also have the usual half-hour Windows SIG.

Editor's Comments

By William LaMartin, Editor, Tampa PC Users Group
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With the arrival of hurricane season this month, I have some thoughts prompted by a recent trip to New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. In 2004, each of four hurricanes at one time was predicted to pass right over Tampa. Our luck was that two missed us completely and the other two only slightly brushed Tampa. Even though our house is less than two blocks from Hillsborough Bay, we did not evacuate for any of the storms. After seeing the Mississippi Gulf Coast, if anything approaching the size of Katrina heads this way, you will probably find us heading for the hills, wherever that is in Florida.

I drove about 35 miles along the coast, from a dot on the map called Lakeshore to Biloxi—a distance of about 35 miles, not counting the detour to the interstate and back to the coast road

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July Meeting: Microsoft Digital Imaging Suite by Mary Sheridan

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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 May Meeting

By Doug Mullis, Secretary, Tampa PC Users Group
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Member at Large, Mary Sheridan started the Windows SIG portion of our meeting at 6:35 p.m. in the Pepin Training Room. Mary asked how she could stop Corel from auto playing pictures when she loads her CD ROM? Merle suggested she go to My Computer, click CD ROM drive, then right click Properties, then reset Auto Play.

Mary went on to tell us if you ever have to reinstall Windows XP, you normally have to reactivate Service Pack 2. Now you can just copy WPA.dbl in Windows System 32. Also you can get a screen keyboard by clicking START, RUN and type OSK. Both are useful little things to know.

Mary introduced our guests, Sam Christy and Deborah Whittaker, then our group officers. She turned the meeting over to our president, John Witmer, for the business portion.

John announced that the Digital Imaging SIG would be taking a break for the summer and will reconvene in September. We still have openings for presenters at our July and October meetings. John asked the audience what they would be interested in having presented. Two suggestions were Macromedia Flash and Power Point. We will attempt to find presenters for these programs.

Programs already set up for presentation this year include: In June Merle Nicholson will present "The Anatomy of a Modern Computer". In August Liz Mueller will tell us what is available at the Public Library System. In September Blain Barton will be back to tell us more about Windows Vista. In November Steve Singer of RDI will tell us about the latest computer hardware to hit the market. December will be our Christmas party AND Marcy Gunn of Smart Computing will be back.

John announced that our web master, William LaMartin, distinguished himself and our group by placing second with our website in the FACUG competition this year.

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Mapping Programs: Street Atlas 2006 and Streets & Trips 2006

By William LaMartin, Editor,
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I recently purchased Delorme's Street Atlas USA 2006. And I recently received a free copy of Microsoft Streets & Trips 2006 with GPS Locator. I want to compare the programs as best I can. It will be a bit hard to do a fair comparison, since I have owned Street Atlas USA since version 1, which, I think, was before 1993. I wrote an article for the newsletter about version 5 in 1998 (http://www.tpcug.org/newsletter/nl_1998/January1998/street_atlas_5.html). And this is my first use of Streets and Trips.

As to prices, Street Atlas USA 2006 is \$34.99 from Amazon, and Streets & Trips is \$35.99 from Amazon. If you want a GPS unit with your program, Microsoft Streets and Trips 2006 with GPS locator is \$99.99 from Amazon, and Delorme is selling its Earthmate GPS LT-20 with Street Atlas USA 2006 for \$99.95. The Delorme products used to be more expensive, but now appear to be about equal in price to those from Microsoft. However, I have seen the Streets & Trips with GPS locator on sale for as low as \$79.99.

I think this sort of software serves three purposes:

- Planning a trip by finding the best route before you ever leave the house
- With the use of a GPS unit, tracking your route in real time accompanied by directional instructions ("turn left at the next intersection")
- Just simple browsing of maps to familiarize yourself with an area.

Both programs do these things quite well. The differences are in the interfaces and the depth and accuracy of the information provided — for example, businesses, points of interest, etc. along a route or on a street.

As to the mapping data, I personally found no streets I looked for missing in either program. I have read

where other individuals found things missing and had routes planned that sent them along dirt roads out West for parts of their trips when they asked for the shortest route. I am sure with all the roads in the US that things like that will occasionally happen. In fact, I am amazed at how well all of this mapping stuff works—especially the routing part along with the GPS.

What I did find lacking was up-to-date construction information. Streets & Trips has a feature under Routing that allows you to download the latest road construction information. Street Atlas used to have this feature, but I can no longer find it in the program or mention of it in their product description. They do provide phone numbers and websites for the various individual state sources of such information, which is not all that useful.

To check out the accuracy of the construction information I had just downloaded from Streets & Trips, I asked for a route between Bay St. Louis and Pass Christian, Mississippi, two towns just across a Hwy 90 bridge from each other. The bridge has not been there since Katrina. But, as I suspected, Streets & Trips routed me right across the missing bridge. Of course, Street Atlas did the same since it didn't have any possibility of incorporating up-to-date information.

Then there are the points of interest (POI). Both programs give you the ability to display certain types of POIs: restaurants, lodging, landmarks, parks, various businesses, etc. If you zoom in close enough, they will automatically display on each program's maps. Or if you select a location, you can find all of such a type within a certain distance of some central point. Streets & Trips gives you more choice in the type of things to display, even going so far as to break the restaurants down as to type—seafood, Chinese, etc. What I did find strange, though, was that in Streets & Trips, there were no churches displayed on the map and no POI item to check to put them there. They do have an item to show all casinos. In Street Atlas, under minor POI, you get the churches displayed. Neither of the items are usually important to me, since I don't attend church or gamble, but in recording the

(Mapping.....Continued on page 4)

(Mapping.....Continued from page 3)

location of my photos on the Gulf Coast recently, it was important to know the location of certain churches I had photographed.

Street Atlas and Streets & Trips both marked restaurants and lodgings well, but only Streets & Trips marked the gas stations.

In starting off, Street Atlas had the edge in ease of use since I had used it for so many years. I might add that I have never liked its interface. For example, if I want to copy a map to the clipboard, I have to click on the Print tab and then click on an icon in the lower right-hand corner of that window at the bottom of the screen. In contrast, the Street & Trips interface is like a usual Microsoft Windows program. To copy the map to the clipboard, you click on the Edit menu item and then click on Copy Map—just as in any other Windows program.

However, for scrolling the map, I prefer Street Atlas, where to move to the right you simply click near the right-hand edge, the cursor turns into a hand and you pull the map to the left. In Streets & Trips, you again position your cursor close to the right edge, the cursor turns into an arrow, and when you click, your position moves to the right. Not difficult but allowing less control than the hand method of Street Atlas.

Another feature I like in Street Atlas is that when you hover the cursor over a map item, you get a description in a status bar near the bottom. To get the same sort of information in Streets & trips, you need to actually click on the spot.

As a test of routing, I had both programs create a route from my home in Tampa to my hotel in New Orleans, and both came up with the same route and the same length within four tenths of a mile at around 657 miles. As to driving times, that all depends on what preferences you have set in each program. It was 11 hours and 18 minutes using the default settings for Street Atlas and 11 hours and 4 minutes using the default settings for Streets & Trips.

Both programs allow you to create maps for the Pocket PC. But here is where the Microsoft program I have, Streets & Trips 2006 with GPS Locator,

comes out ahead. The PDA version of the program, Pocket Streets, is provided free with it. As best I can tell, to get the Delorme PDA program, Street Atlas USA Handheld, you have to purchase it separately for \$39.00.

Needless to say, I am using Pocket Streets on my HP iPaq Pocket PC. In addition to creating maps in the regular version of the program for the Pocket PC, you can go to a Microsoft website for such and download maps of popular areas, e.g., Manhattan. But if you want one of Manhattan above 79th St., the Bronx or Queens, you will have to create it in the regular version of the program and export it to your handheld device. However, this is very easy to do.

So now I have a map of any part of the USA I choose on my Pocket PC. I can browse the map, zoom out or zoom into street level. I can also search for places or by address. But what if I want to use that GPS unit that also came with the program. It came only with a USB cable, and that won't connect to a Pocket PC. The solution—spend \$99 for what is called a Bluetooth cradle for the GPS unit. It increases the total size of the unit very little and has a battery life of about six hours. The GPS partially inserted into the Bluetooth cradle is pictured below.

The programs are basically equivalent, unless you also need the Pocket PC version. ◆



(Comments.....Continued from page 1)

because of a missing bridge at Bay St Louis. And there was essentially nothing two to three blocks in from the Gulf—nothing. The slate had been wiped clean except for the remaining trees, a few foundations, steel or concrete frames of buildings, and less than a dozen heavily damaged structures. No homes, restaurants, gas stations, or hotels. Near Biloxi there was a bit more to see. The large casino hotels (in various states of repair) were still standing, along with the heavily damaged Jefferson Davis home and a few other structures. That is what 30 feet of tidal waves will do.

New Orleans is a different matter. In general, anything in the city within a mile or so of the river was OK for this was naturally “high” land. But the rest of the city up to within a few blocks of Lake Ponchartrain (again “high” land) flooded anywhere from one foot to 15 feet. Being fairly familiar with the city, I drove around for quite a few hours over a couple of days and saw mile upon mile of deserted houses. The houses were still standing but abandoned, with dead shrubbery and waist-high weeds in the yards. This could be anywhere from 25% to 50% of the city.

What does this have to do with computers? Well, if your computer data was within a few blocks of the Gulf and you didn’t take it with you—it is gone. Similarly for much of New Orleans, if it was on the first floor of your house, it is also gone.

I took 600 digital photos with my Nikon D100 on this trip, and, since there were no other contributions to the newsletter this month besides the minutes, in another article in this newsletter I will describe how I used mapping with GPS and some programming to record the positions of the photographs. ◆

Internet Picture of the Month



Florida Airplant

Tillandsia x floridana, commonly known as the Florida Airplant, from the Institute of Systematic Botany at USF’s site, <http://www.plantatlas.usf.edu/>. A wonderful site if you are interested in Florida plants. I grew up with this plant, as it was all over the property my family owned in South Central Florida.

June’s Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that’s us)
The Internet Movie Database
Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants
A Year in the life of New Orleans

<http://www.tpcug.org/>
<http://www.imdb.com/>
<http://www.plantatlas.usf.edu/>
<http://varleypix.com/gall/neworleansyear0506/>



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.

Photography, GPS Mapping and Programming

By William LaMartin, Editor,
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I have longed wished for an easy way to record data about a photo when I take it. Digital cameras now record all the technical stuff—shutter speed, f/stop, lens focal length, the date and time and much more. But they do not tell you the location. With Pocket Streets on my Pocket PC and my Bluetooth enabled GPS unit, I could sort of do this. Every time I took a photo, I could then pause and put a push pin where the GPS indicated I was on the map. I could even enter in text for the pin. This would create a map with a collection of push pins at the photo locations with perhaps numbers associated with each pin to tell the order of their creation. In practice, this can be quite challenging with the sun shining on the screen and the general difficulty of writing anything on the Pocket PC under less than perfect conditions.

What I really wanted was a program that would, with the push of a button on the Pocket PC, record the current Date/Time, latitude and longitude to a file. How to get such a program? Write one, of course, using Visual Studio 2005. I had already written a number of programs for this device, so this shouldn't be too big of a problem once I figured out how to communicate with the Bluetooth GPS from my program.

Well, it turns out that the Bluetooth connection between the Pocket PC and a Bluetooth device is made via a pseudo serial port on the Pocket PC. In the case of my GPS unit, it was comm 6. After determining that, things got a bit more difficult since Visual Basic for the compact framework (what

you use to program for things like the Pocket PC or smart phones) has no built-in ability to program against serial ports, unlike Visual Basic for the .Net framework used for writing programs for regular Windows devices such as your desktop computer. Not desiring to try to figure out serial communication, I did a search on Google and found one fellow who had written a component (a DLL) that I could drop into my program for free that would do the serial communication for me. With that component, I could now access the stream of data the GPS unit was receiving from the satellites.

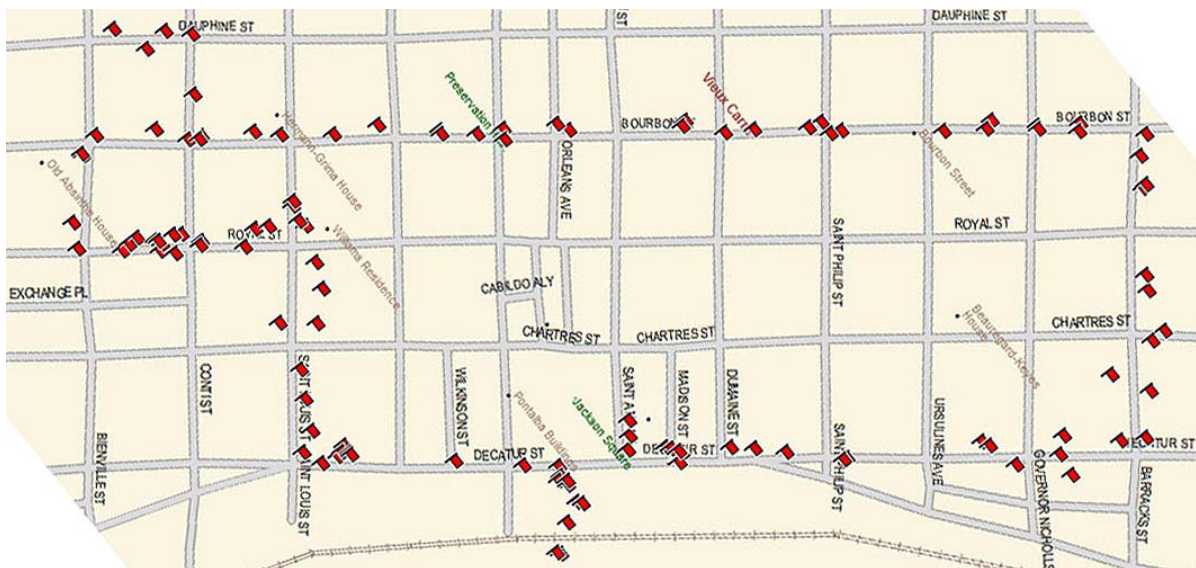
The data coming in over the port looks like this:

```
,87,0*4F
$GPGSV,3,3,10,1,23,276,0,135,26,248,25*41
$GPRMC,205054.672,A,2756.1063,N,08228.1373,W,0.073
604,64.79,100506.,*28
$GPGGA,205055.672,2756.1061,N,08228.1371,W,2,04,2.1,
-21.1,M,-29.7,M,2.3,0000*5B
$GPGLL,2756.1061,N,08228.1371,W,205055.672,A*26
```

If you look at the GPS specification, all those “sentences” that begin with \$ signs have a meaning. You can get various GPS information from different ones with an overlap in the information. In particular I am interested in either the \$GPGGA sentence or the \$GPGLL sentence. In our particular example, the \$GPGLL sentence yields: 2756.1061,N,08228.1371,W,205055.672,A*26, which parses out as 27 degrees, 56.1016 minutes N Latitude, 82 degrees, 28.1371 minutes W Longitude and 20 hours, 50 minutes and 55.672 seconds UTC time

My program stores this sort of information in a text file each time I press a button on the Pocket PC. When I get back to my computer, I can retrieve the file from the Pocket PC and then import the latitude and longitude part of the information into either Street Atlas or Streets & Trips to produce a map like the one here.

I also note that the time information in the file can be correlated with time information recorded by the camera for



(Photography.....Continued on page 8)

Special Interest Groups

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—Cancelled until the Fall

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.

(Minutes.....Continued from page 2)

The prize was Microsoft Streets and Trips software that can interface with a GPS system through a USB or Blue tooth connection to your laptop. The unit works well, giving a location update every second or so.

Longstanding member Bruce Register announced that on May 22nd, he and his wife, Marie, would relocate to Dothan, Alabama. The Group offers our best wishes to them in their new home, and thanks Bruce for 15 years of service and support to our group. I remember the warm reception you gave me at my first meeting three years ago. Thanks for being our “Greeter” at recent meetings. We will surely miss your presence at our meetings, and we look forward to future visits when you are back in the Tampa area.

At the inquiry of a member regarding computer security, Merle recommended that we protect our PC’s with a single good firewall and anti virus program, but supplement them with other types of “free ware” offered (Ad aware, spybot, windows Defender).

Next month your secretary will be in Lido Beach at meeting time. We need someone to take meeting minutes for the record.

At 7:30 p.m., John introduced our own Kevan Sheridan to tell us about the benefits of using a shareable online calendar to keep our busy schedules organized and available to those who need to know. There are several online calendars, including Google and Yahoo Group but Kevan prefers Air Set at <http://www.AirSet.com/public/> calendars.

It is free, and there is no advertising. Air Set also has an

“announcements” feature and can “sync” with other public calendar events. For \$5 per month you can “browse” online calendars with your Bluetooth cell phone.

Kevan demonstrated his office calendar and the SWAMP (Southwestern Association of Mountain Bike Peddlers) calendar. At the office you can coordinate vacation schedules in conjunction with important meetings/events, limiting access as needed. Events are blocked in half-hour intervals. Public calendars are excellent where the general public would be welcomed to association events.

Kevan went on to answer many attendee questions about administering/using shared calendars. Thank you, Kevan, for the informative presentation.

At 8:35 p.m., we broke for cookies and the distribution of door prize tickets. Group member subscriptions to Smart Computing Magazine had earned the prizes. William LaMartin also donated a copy of Drive Image and eight CD’s as “giveaways”.

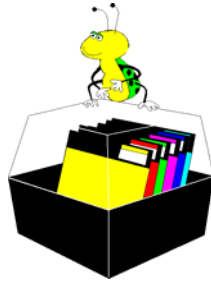
Door Prize winners were:

- John Witmer — A Smart Computing Magazine subscription
- Bob Davis — A publication from Smart Computing
- Jim Purcell — A publication from Smart Computing
- Ron Weinburg — A publication from Smart Computing

We thank Smart Computing for the prizes; the Group earned \$19 as a result of the prizes.

The meeting concluded at 8:45pm. ◆

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First Class Mail

- Member: Your membership is up for renewal*
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(Photography.....Continued from page 6)

each photo—if you think ahead and synchronize your camera’s and your Pocket PC’s time.

The previous map is of one of my photo-taking walks around the French Quarter in New Orleans.

Once I have the location information, I can then use the File Browser feature of Adobe Photoshop to enter a description into the metadata of the file such as “balcony in the 1100 block of Decatur.” This information is now part of the jpeg file.

Suppose I now want to create a slide show of a selection of these photos. To accomplish that, I wrote another Visual Basic .Net program to extract this description metadata from each file and then place each file name, description, and data/time in a database. Next the photo files and the database (really an XML file) are uploaded to my web site, where previously developed ASP.Net code is used to display the photos in a slide show with a description under each photo.

To see the results of all this, go to <http://www.lamartin.com/katrina.htm>. ◆

