Bits of Blue

March in Tampa

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

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Meeting

Blain Barton
From Microsoft

Wednesday, March 12, 2007
6:30 PM
Pepin Distributing Co.
4121 N 50th St
Tampa, Florida

Meeting Preview: Blain Barton from Microsoft will demonstrate Microsoft software. Bob LaFave will conduct the Windows SIG at the beginning of the meeting as usual.

Editor's Comments

By William LaMartin, Editor, Tampa PC Users Group
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I have a bit of space to fill in this month's newsletter, so I suppose I should write something. Many years back we decided to only use articles from our members, and that makes it difficult to fill the newsletter some months. Many groups use articles that appear in other clubs' newsletters, but I feel that if you want to read those you can go to the various clubs' online newsletters, as follows: Go to our web site, http://www.tpcug.org, and click on the Affiliations button and then select APCUG. Once at the APCUG site, click on User Groups at the top of the site and then "Find a UG near you." That will produce a list of states and even countries.

As an example, selecting FL and then looking down the resulting list until you get to Tampa, you might want to look at our sister group, the Greater Tampa Bay PC Users Group. Once on their site, you could then select the Newsletters link

April Meeting: To be announced

Friends of the User Group

We acknowledge

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Minutes of the February Meeting

By Jim Purcell, Secretary, Tampa PC Users Group
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The meeting started at approximately 6:35pm with the opening of the Windows SIG portion of our meeting, led by Bob LaFave. Bob introduced a product called Autoruns, which is one of many utilities originally from the site Sysinternals by a company called Winternals Software that was recently acquired by Microsoft. The program shows what is running on your computer. He recommended going to Microsoft TechNet on the web and reviewing the utilities provided by this recently-acquired company. One utility that is no longer sold is Erd Commander, a program that allowed compromising passwords on personal computers.

As a lead-in to John Witmer's presentation on Turbo Tax, Bob reviewed several alternatives that offered free tax preparation on the web. John Walden and Merle Nicholson asked about the security and storage of the data that was provided to Turbo Tax when filing online. Bob indicated that it was stored with Intuit and is available to you by password for comparison purposes the following year. Bob was asked about his comfort in using "registry cleaners". He said that he was not comfortable using a registry cleaner because the registry has become so complex that he would rather find the problems himself. William LaMartin and Merle Nicholson questioned the need to clean the register unless there is a specific problem. They stated that they felt it involved a miniscule amount of space and you are taking the chance of causing major harm. William, Merle and Bob agreed that "registry cleaners" are dangerous. Bob discussed the need to monitor your cache settings for temporary Internet files and to set a level that is appropriate for you. Multiple users generate their own sets of data, including temporary Internet files.

Virtual Vista

By Ron Weinberg, Member at Large,
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Like most other users, I am well satisfied with XP. The Microsoft Vista Upgrade Advisor reported that most of my hardware was acceptable except for my old scanner. However, my software required numerous patches or upgrades. Accordingly, I saw no compelling reason to upgrade to Vista at this time.

I still do some limited consulting work and am beginning to encounter Vista systems.

In an attempt to become more familiar with Vista and avoid all the required changes to my system, I decided to try installing Vista in a virtual PC. Using Microsoft Virtual PC 2007, I installed my Vista Ultimate Edition with the New Virtual Machine Wizard.

The installation was simple and my Internet connection was immediately available. A large number of Vista updates were then downloaded and installed.

Next, I installed "Virtual PC Additions", which help tie the host and guest (virtual PC) together, such as Drag and Drop, Mouse Control, and Folder Sharing. Then I added a compatible anti-virus program for safety.

I have not actually used the new Windows Mail but was able to explore it and it seems to be operational. Network Printing and File Sharing worked, and I could access files on my host PC and see the Virtual PC as part of my network from my XP host.

Overall this experiment was worthwhile for me but should not be confused with a full non-virtual installation. I have not tried every available feature but can return to the virtual machine to test something else at any time with just a few clicks.

However, there are limitations of Vista with Microsoft's Virtual PC product.
There is no support for the Aero Glass graphics.

Devices are all emulated so the actual drivers are neither needed nor available. I could not directly print from the Virtual PC until I discovered that direct printing works if you turn on LPT1 in Settings of the Virtual PC 2007 Console. Virtual PC is by nature somewhat slower than the host PC.

Support for Virtual PC2007 is at Microsoft's Virtual PC Support 2004 Center. Forums, Blogs and Newsgroups already exist. These include step-by-step installation instructions.

Anyone who hesitates to try this because they fear compromising their host pc should remember that the great feature of this type of virtualization is that it can be deleted with ease, and no harm done.

It should be noted that Microsoft has only recently increased its virtualization technology effort. Several other companies specialize in this technology. VMware makes a free Virtualization Server available. Anyone seriously interested in virtualization is well-advised to check out competitive products. ◆

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

One of the members asked if there were tutorials for the use of "Recovery Console". Merle indicated that Microsoft has some very good tutorials on the details of its use. Bob gave an overview of "Recovery Console" and the many facets of its capabilities.

President John Witmer opened the business portion of our meeting at approximately 7:25pm with a discussion of next month's program. Doug advised that Blain Barton from Microsoft will be the presenter for the March meeting. John reminded the group that the Florida Association of Computer User Groups is having their spring meeting in Zephyrhills on March 7, 8 and 9. John announced that we have three new members: Eric Goldstein, Mark O'Leary and Arthur C. Williams. John mentioned that we have no one scheduled to present a program in April and that if

to view one of a list of newsletters going back to 2006. So, if you have a lot of free time, there should be plenty of articles you can read for free when you consider just a few groups for each state plus the foreign ones.

What to write about this month? I can't write more about my Linux adventure, as I did in last month's newsletter, since I haven't even booted that computer in the past several weeks. But I will probably have some more to say later in the year when I have tried to do a few things still undone, like figuring out how to back up the entire setup to a USB hard drive, as I do my Windows computers.

I can't write about programming with Visual Studio for my Windows Mobile phone, since I have done nothing new in the past couple of months. The same is almost but not quite true for my Windows desktop programming.

Statistics for the TPCUG web site haven't been mentioned in a very long time so there is a topic. A look at the February server log shows we had an average of 463 unique visitors per day with an average of 1.6 pages viewed per visitor. All days of the week seemed to receive about the same amount of traffic, as, surprisingly, did the hours of the day. Traffic was a bit heavier around 4 and 5 in the afternoon, Eastern time zone.

As expected, the home page of the site was by far the most visited. The next most visited page was an article I wrote in 2004 about my new Epson Perfection 3200 Photo scanner (284 visits). Most of these visits were obviously the result of a search engine search. I don't know if they were searching for Epson or for my comments on my previous HP scanners. The next most visited page was our Links page (195 visits) and the third one was an article by Bob LaFave in 2003 on IsoBuster (184 visits), obviously also found via a search engine in most cases.

Google sent 800 people to the site, followed by Yahoo with 442, AskJeeves with 95 and MSN with 56. Of the Spiders that indexed the site, the largest by far was the Inktomi Slurp with 7,784 hits, then the Googlebot with 2,547 and then the MSN Robot with

2,184. There were some 30 more spiders (or crawlers) that indexed the site to a lesser degree.

What computer things this past month might be of interest? I have certainly used my computer to watch my small **investment portfolio decline** in value, along with the interest we receive on our T-Bills, CDs and other such instruments. I am sure many of you are in the same boat, which seems to be leaking. Just this hour I received an email from the Bureau of Public Debt stating that the investment rate on a 182 T-Bill in today's auction was 1.852%. It was above 5% this past summer. I receive most of my financial news from the online Wall Street Journal (there is a yearly charge), the online New York Times Business section or Bloomberg.com. And if I read all that was available in just those three sources, it could take up a good part of the day, which I obviously don't want to do. So I usually just read the more negative articles, since the positive ones will just turn into negative ones in a day or two. However, I need to read something during breakfast, so I scan the printed version of the Tampa Tribune, where it seems most of the articles are ones I have read either at the WSJ or the NYT the day before, unless it is some article about our local government or other local interest. That brings up the question, why do newspapers still carry stock quotes in the business section? Do not 99% of the people interested in such now have computers where they can get this information for free and in large enough type for old eyes to read?

Photography is something that I usually do each month, and the computer and an array of USB external hard drives is where all those digital images are stored and sometimes manipulated. This past month was no exception. There was the annual Gasparilla parade that runs one block from my house, but I believe that was actually at the end of January. However, there were the Gasparilla distance races that also go down Bayshore Boulevard that I can walk down to and photograph. I took photos of this year's parade, selected ones I would like to put at our neighborhood website, used Photoshop to do a bulk resizing of then to a maximum dimension of 800 pixels and then inserted my name in the lower left-hand corner. I started putting my name on photos

Internet Picture of the Month

that I put on the web a few years back after I found some of them showing up on other sites with no attribution. An automated batch resize and name imprint is not what usually comes to mind for Photoshop but it is a very useful and fast feature. Oh, and I also had it rename the files as 1.jpg, 2.jpg,… for an online slide show.

You can see the Gasparalla parade photos at the site http://www.oldhydeparkfl.org under the Hyde Park | Photos link. You will also see some photos of parades in 1962 and 1969. It is interesting to compare these older parades with our modern, more rambunctious ones. Those earlier parades were photographed by TPCUG member Gary Ennis, who loaned me the Kodak slides to be scanned. I did have to do a little Photoshop work on them to remove, as best I could, the effects of aging, e.g., color shift and small spots.

As for the Gasparilla races, I took a few photos, but they were not all that interesting―just people run-

Gasparilla 2008 photo

One Kilo Gold Bar

There are sites all over the web that will sell you gold. This particularly nice image is from the site http://www.taxfreegold.co.uk/index.html. The image is from the page http://www.taxfreegold.co.uk/swissvolksbankgoldbars.html.

A 1 Kilo (32.15 Troy oz) bar like the one above will run you around $31,800 at today's prices―not tomorrow's―based on the prices at http://apmex.com/. Sometimes I feel like the change in my pocket weighs that much. It is a shame that it is not gold.

March's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)	http://www.tpcug.org/
Pinellas Trail Guide	http://www.pinellascounty.org/trailgd/
Appliance Parts, etc.	http://www.searspartsdirect.com
OfficeLive	http://www.officelive.com/
Household Chemical Collection	http://www.epchc.org/household_chem.htm

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.

New $450 Notebook: Compaq F750US

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

Well, I didn't know you could get a full-size notebook for $450, but Staples has them, at least for now. The Staples off of Dale Mabry and Spruce was temporarily out, but we got one of nine left at the store on Dale Mabry and Ehrlich Road. It's a good PC for $450 ($480 in the store and a $30 on-line rebate), but some things are lacking. More about that below.

From the Sunday ad, I was able to look up the specs at the HP/Compaq site, and determined that this was an exceptional deal. It's a Compaq model F750US.

Ok, here's what it has and doesn't have:

WHAT IT HAS:
- AMD Athlon X2 1.9GHz processor
- 1G memory, shared with Video
- 120G Hard Drive, some of which is reserved for system recovery
- Windows Vista Home Premium
- CD/DVD Writer
- WiFi 802.11g
- Card Reader
- 15 inch Bright LCD screen
- Ethernet, modem, 3 USB, AC Charger

WHAT IT DOESN'T HAVE:
- A card slot of any kind – that is, a PCMCIA or Cardslot
- 2G Memory to run Vista really well
- Bluetooth Transmitter/Receiver
- A case of any kind

The attractive part of the deal is the processor. This is a very powerful CPU. Other inexpensive computers in the $500-$700 range will have AMD Semprons or Intel Celerons. I imagine there will be a trade-off in battery life using this processor, but that is not a big concern for me.

The biggest disadvantage for me is the 1G memory and Vista in combination. HP/Compaq does not supply XP drivers for this notebook. This isn't keeping

me from trying, but that's another article for next month.

In my opinion, a $450 notebook computer should stand as is. I would not buy one with the intention of upgrading it, and the reason for that is, in the $500-$700 range you can get everything you need, including 2MB or even 3MB RAM. And you also have to resist the hard sell for a $150 extended warranty.

As a final warning, this computer has a lot of crapware, some of it HP branded, and it's a lot of work to get rid of it. Then, in consideration of the 1G RAM, I started "De-Vista-izing". That is, I've disabled great amounts of graphics and flash and gegaw stuff that slows it down, and the results are pretty striking. A good start is "Tune for Performance", and then restore a few things like ClearType that you will certainly miss. It now certainly behaves no worse than XP, and performs pretty well. More next month.

The laptop is pictured below.◆

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

ning (or walking). I am not much of a sports photographer. What was interesting, though, was the fellow who, along with several others, was taking photos of all the runners he could capture. He said that he worked for a company whose sole purpose was to photograph runners and then to sell them the shots online. He said during that one day alone he would

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 further notice

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. Bob LaFave moderates the discussion.

(Minutes……….Continued from page 3)

any of the members can make a presentation, they should come forth.

John began his presentation of "Turbo Tax" at approximately 7:30pm with an overview of tax preparation software. He discussed some of the more popular tax preparation packages currently available. Tax Cut and Turbo Tax are the two with which most people are familiar. He selected Turbo Tax because he has used it for several years and it is probably the one that is most popular today. He reviewed the four different versions of Turbo Tax and the features of each. Some versions include the ability to prepare your state income tax but of course it is not needed if your state does not have a state income tax. He and William discussed the ability of Turbo Tax to import financial and investment information from Quicken and even import investment information directly from some brokerage accounts. Bob indicated that the online version has the same capability. There was a discussion about the wisdom of placing so much of your personal financial information in one place on an online server. They pointed out the convenience of having all of your information automatically imported versus the inherent dangers of placing all of this information in the hands of a third party over which you have little or no control, or even any knowledge of the measures taken to keep it secure.

John explained the help that is available to you and also the forms that are readily available to you. He showed how easily information could be imported from last year's return if it had been prepared with Turbo Tax (or TaxCut), so that the information

could be used for certain calculations or for comparison purposes. He also showed how the return could be prepared from scratch if this is your first time using a tax preparation package. He pointed out that if you have a simple return, the free online version is easy to use and permits e-filing. If you are receiving a refund, it can be in your bank in 7 to 24 days. Another advantage of the packages is that Intuit provides prompt updates that make changes to keep up with the many revisions to tax laws that are made after the period for filing began. The software provides easy access to all IRS publications that you need. You can view them online or print them. He pointed out that the program will calculate your depreciation of things like rental property. It will allow you to add the cost of things like additions to the property and the program will then recalculate your depreciation.

Help even includes videos to explain topics that are not clear to you. Changes in filing required by new statutes or IRS rulings are usually highlighted and explained in detail.

John worked through returns having different types of circumstances, showing how the software handled the input. He went through numerous transactions and answered questions as they were entered to illustrate the versatility of the software. There is also a feature that calculates your probability of an audit. In addition, they provide audit experts, for a fee, to assist in your audit should one occur. When you have completed the return, you are provided a printed copy of the return to file with the IRS and a PDF document that not only duplicates the return but also provides all of the worksheets that the program generated to calculate your return. The program also generates tax reports provid-

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

(Minutes...........Continued from page 7)

ing useful comparisons with your prior return and with national averages in several categories.

The presentation concluded at approximately 9:00pm. ◆

(Comments...........Continued from page 6)

take from 8,000 to 10,000 images. And you thought you took a lot of photos. I don't think anyone will be using Photoshop on all those images.

On a final note, I see that COMPUSA is reopening two stores locally, the one on S Dale Mabry in Tampa and the one in Brandon. I believe they are now being run by the company that owns Tiger Direct. They both should be open when you receive this newsletter. ◆

to I-275

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56th Street

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Harney Road

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