Bits of Blue

January in Tampa

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

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Meeting

**Backing up your
Hard Drive
by
Gene Barlow**

**Monday, January 12, 2009
6:30 PM
Pepin Distributing Co.
4121 N 50th St
Tampa, Florida**
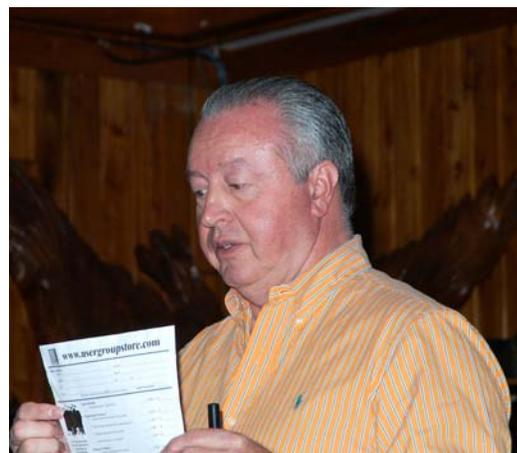
February Meeting: To be announced

Meeting Preview: This meeting is Monday instead of the usual Wednesday. Gene Barlow will be our presenter with the topic "Backing up your hard drive using Acronis True Image." 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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Gene Barlow (pictured at right speaking to us in 2005) will speak to us again regarding backing up data and, in fact, the entire hard drive, using Acronis True Image. Pay attention to him, for if you keep a computer long enough, the hard drive will fail. And

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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 December Meeting

By Jim Purcell, Secretary, Tampa PC Users Group
Edward_J_P@MSN.com

Since this was our annual holiday party meeting, no guest speaker was scheduled. Bob LaFave did conduct a short Windows SIG meeting preceding the business session to cover any holiday related or urgent questions. President John Witmer began the business meeting at about 6:45 pm. The only item on the agenda was the election of officers for calendar year 2009. No new members offered to serve as officers for 2009. Current members all agreed to serve one more year if there were no further nominations from the floor. John then asked for further nominations from the floor before presenting the slate for a vote. Hearing none, the following slate of officers was presented:

- For President: John Witmer
- For Vice President: Kevan Sheridan
- For Treasurer: Doug Mullis
- For Secretary: Jim Purcell
- For Member at Large: Ron Weinberg

A motion was made to accept this slate and to vote. All members present voted in favor. Terms of office begin January 1, 2009.

John then thanked those willing to serve the group as officers. The TPCUG board members decided that the party food should be paid for from the group's funds. Our thanks are also extended to John and Pepin Distributing for accommodating us and providing beverages for the party. John reminded members to make an extra effort to pay their annual dues on time. William LaMartin reminded us of the ease of using PayPal on our web site.

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ASUS Eee PC Netbook

By Merle Nicholson, Tampa PC Users Group
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I recently purchased two ASUS Eee PC Netbooks for my grandchildren (ages 9 and 11) as portable computers to take to school. I was attracted by their very small size, relatively long battery life and wide range of built-in features. So far it has been a success, since the children took them on a Christmas trip and connected wirelessly to the Internet unaided in a hotel.

So what is a netbook? It seems to be a small notebook with a screen size of 10 inches or less and a slightly reduced-in-size keyboard. ASUS looks to be the pioneer in this class of notebooks, but there are competitors now in HP, Dell and MSI. As far as I can tell, though, ASUS still enjoys the highest sales in this category, no doubt attributable to the very wide range of models. I read a sales report that a substantial amount of Christmas notebook sales were in this category.

The ASUS line begins with a model 4G with a 7-inch 800 x 480 screen display, Linux OS, Intel Mobile CPU, 512 MB memory and a 4 GB solid-state hard drive (SSD). It has a LAN (wired) port and wireless b/g, stereo sound, and a 0.3 Megapixel camera. The size is 8.9"x 6.3"x 1.26", it weighs just 2 pounds, and it has a 4-cell battery for 3.5 hours of operation. It comes with a cloth/neoprene slipcase and charger. All for $220 at NewEgg.com.
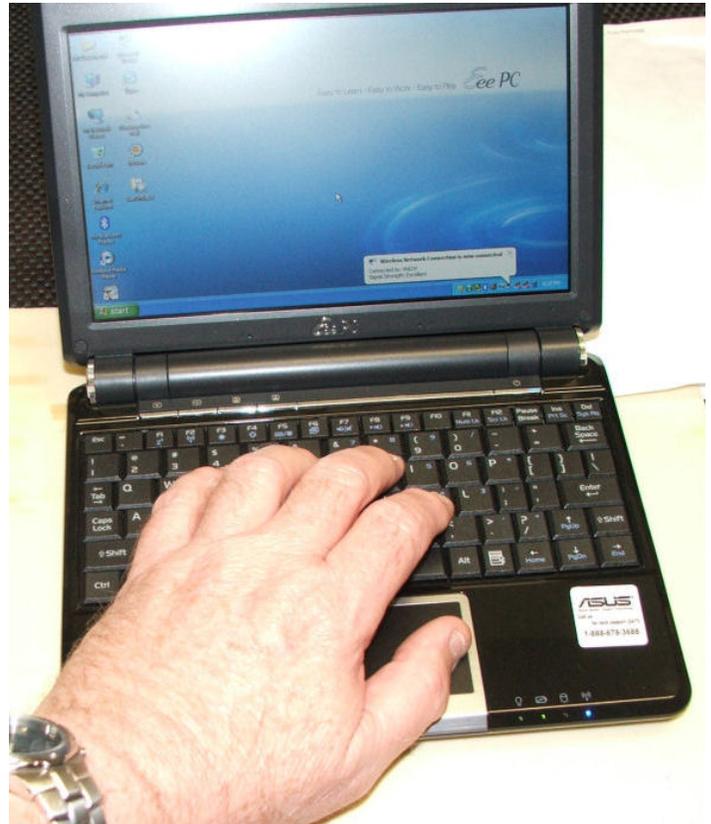
There's an XP Home version, believe it or not, using the same 4G SSD, and depending on a (user-supplied) SD or SDHC card for storage. The Linux OS is a modified Xandros distribution. Some users are installing a version of Ubuntu called Eeebuntu. Many buy the Linux version because it's cheaper and then install their own copy of Windows XP.

By the way, the Eee comes from "Easy to Learn, Easy to Work, Easy to Play".

What these netbooks are (not surprisingly) missing are a CD drive, a floppy drive, serial and parallel

ports and keyboard/mouse ports.

They DO have three USB ports and an external VGA port, an SD/SDHC reader slot, a touchpad, camera, LAN-wired and wireless. Starting with the larger models, 8.9" and 10" screens, wireless N and Bluetooth are added, the camera jumps to 1.3 Megapixels, the battery goes to a 6 cell and the processor changes to the Intel Atom. They're also slightly lar-

ger and heavier, but with a much longer battery life.

The ones I purchased are the Eee PC 901. And let me say right here, I want one for myself. I have absolutely no use for it, but after using them myself for a couple of days, I really like them, and if I could find even a small excuse, I'd buy one for myself.

The Eee PC 901s that I bought are black. They look really well-built and rugged. The black gloss finish collects fingerprints like nobody's business. There's no indication that it's not suitable for a six- or seven-year-old who is already used to using a computer. The screen hinge is especially rugged. There's no latch to hold it closed, but there's plenty of friction

there and it's not really effortless to open.

The features of the 901 (actually there's a 900 series) are a 8.9" 1024 x 600 screen, slightly larger (not much) at 8.9" x 6.9" x 1.5", 2.43 pounds. It has a 1.3 Megapixel camera, 1G of memory, an Intel Atom (1.6 GHz), low-power CPU and 12G SSD storage. The storage is divided into two drives: one 4G and one 8G. It has wireless b/g/n, Ethernet and Bluetooth. The SSD storage and compact design makes it pretty much shock-proof . When you use the SD slot, the card does not project out at all, and, frankly, on a black case it's a little difficult to find. They advertize a 7.8-hour battery life. I paid $600 each for them in early August, 2008. The current (Jan 2009) price is $450 with about $11 shipping.

As for software, it's surprisingly (almost) crap free. They have Windows XP Home installed on the 4G "C" drive. Besides what comes with XP, they include MS Works, OpenOffice and Skype. There was – I've forgotten now – some kind of antivirus that needed a subscription and no anti-spyware. Windows XP firewall was enabled. I installed AVG Free, hoping that it wouldn't bog the CPU down too much (it doesn't). I uninstalled Skype, and went through all installed programs, looking for their usefulness, and uninstalling anything that I felt my grandchildren would not use – like Skype, which is Internet phone and video. I did check out Windows Moviemaker to make sure it would use the camera – it does. I uninstalled Adobe Reader and installed a PDF reader from Haihaisoft, because it is much, much smaller. I felt that the children must have a good photo editor, so I installed Paint.NET, a very good image and photo-editing program. I looked at GIMP (cloned from the Linux world) also, and I think it was a toss-up. I used a good (free) PDF printer, PrimoPDF.

I wound up leaving MS Works on the machine because there was room, but removed OpenOffice. I found an Office 2007 Student, three-license version, for only $90. I custom-installed Word and Power-Point, both of which the children have used before.

I even went through the Services list to see if there was anything running that was not necessary, stopped any I found not worth running, and set them

to manual start.

Then I did a CCleaner, and created a paging file (it had none; a mystery to me) on the D drive, defragged and wiped my handprints off. As an aside, I have since learned that there is no need to defrag an SSD and that doing so regularly may be detrimental to its life.

I was impressed with the power of the computer. I did some Internet surfing, edited a photo, printed and made a short movie of myself. Now, it's not fast, but I really did not expect it to be as fast as it is. My grandson has played a DVD movie from an external CD/DVD drive and he says it played perfectly. It's comfortable, and I'd say I've certainly owned slower notebooks (a last generation, maybe a Pentium III). This particular PC boots very quickly because of the SSD. I have disabled Hibernation because of the SSD also, there being no gain in boot time.

You should expect the models with an SSD to be somewhat faster, and they should boot much quicker. They're obviously much more expensive.

Looking at other models, there are versions that use conventional hard drives to save money. For instance, there's a model 904HA, which is essentially like the 901 except it has a 160G hard drive, for $350, a full $100 cheaper. Strangely, it does not have Bluetooth or wireless N. I think Bluetooth should be considered as an essential part of all notebooks.

Looking on, there's a 10" model (1024 x 600) with a

new hard drives also fail, or perhaps a virus will destroy some of your files. A year or so back, my laptop's hard drive began to exhibit signs of failure. I didn't have an Acronis backup of the laptop, since I didn't consider it important, my real work being done on the desktop computer. However, when I thought of the work involved in installing the operating system, all the programs and all the updates for everything on the laptop after a new hard drive was installed, I saw that I really needed a backup of the current drive if I could still get it. And, luckily, the old hard drive cooperated long enough for me to make a backup of it, using Acronis True Image Home.

So I recommend the Acronis True Image Home program to you. I use it about every two weeks to back up my main computer to an external hard drive. I verify that the backup is valid using the program, and I alternate between two different external drives in doing the backups. Additionally, I disconnect all cables from the external drives when they are not in use. It does no good to backup to external drives, leave them connected and then have lightening strike your computer and possibly also damage the external drive. I backup up the laptop less frequently.

I should comment that I also back up the data for programs such as Word, Excel and my Visual Studio programming, as well as photos downloaded from my digital camera, to a third external hard drive as I make changes to the files. I do this simply by copying the new version to the external drive. So these files are saved in four places—on the computer, on two external drives as part of the Acronis backup and on the third external drive as separate files. You cannot backup enough. ◆

Internet Picture of the Month

Snow in New Orleans

On December 11, 2008, a rare snowfall occurred in New Orleans. And the amount was enough for a fairly good blanket of snow on the grass. Above is a photo of the St. Charles Avenue street car traveling through the falling flakes. The image came from http://www.nola.com/, the site of the Times-Picayune.

January's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)   http://www.tpcug.org/
Gene Barlow (our presenter)   http://www.ugr.com/
Dilbert—animated   http://www.dilbert.com/animation/
The Bible on one page   http://www.jrsbible.info/bible.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.

Stock Allocation with Visual Basic (.Net)

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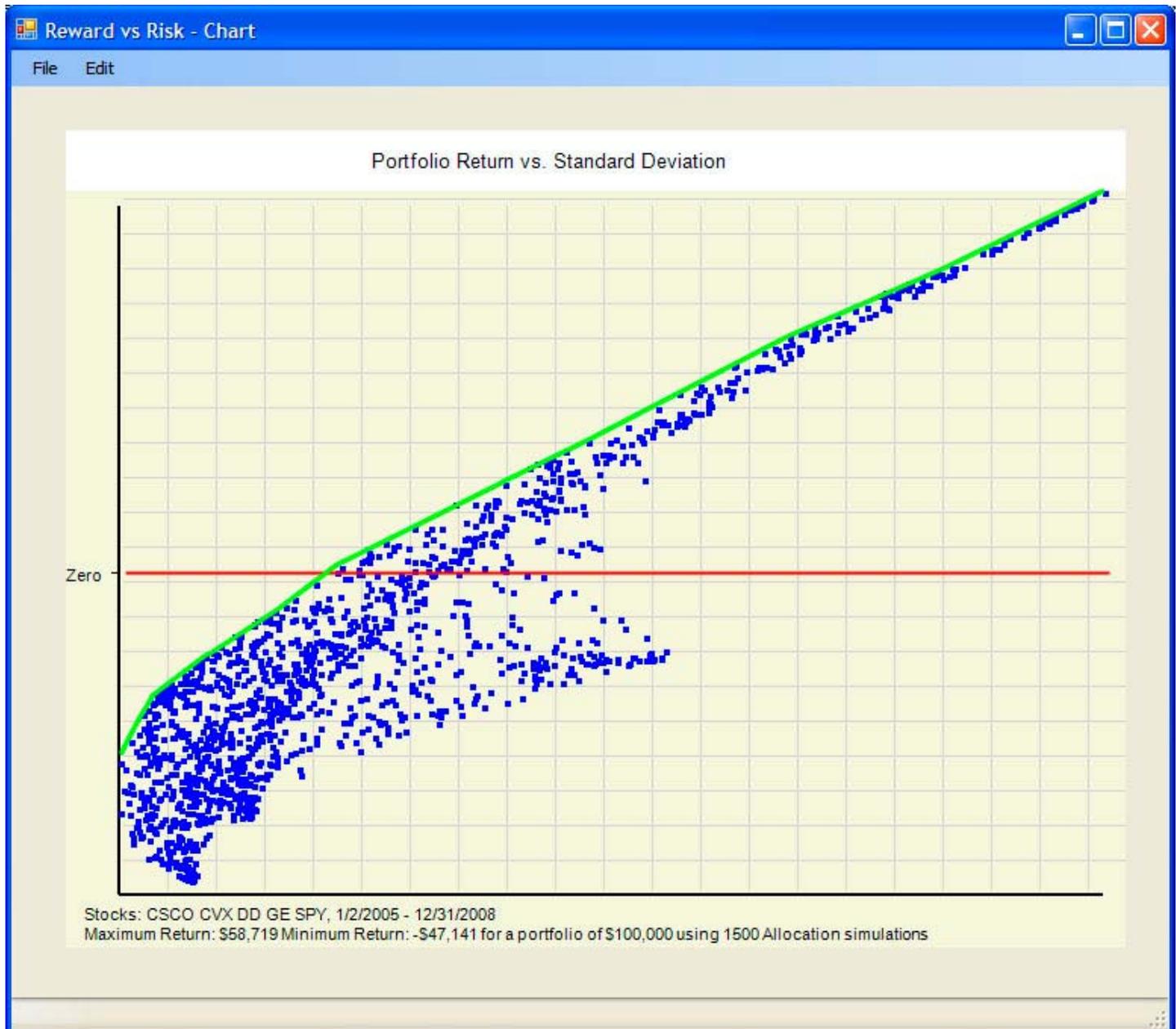lamartin@tampabay.rr.com

I always love a programming challenge. So when I came across the idea of "The Optimal Portfolio" for a collection of stocks, I set to work to see if I could represent the idea in code. Harry M. Markowitz (who, along with William F. Sharpe and Merton Miller, received the Nobel Prize in 1990) first developed the ideas on which all this "Portfolio Selection" is based. The idea is that each collection of stocks would have a level of risk and reward, but that for any given level

of risk, there was only one allocation of those stocks that would return an optimum reward. And, for any given reward, there would be only one allocation of stocks that would minimize the risk.

If you want to read about all this, just do an Internet search for optimal portfolio and Markowitz. The Wikipedia reference is http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_portfolio_theory.

The graph below is the visual representation of the results of my code for five stocks over a four-year period. The blue dots represent the results of a Monte

Portfolio Return vs. Standard Deviation

Stocks: CSCO CVX DD GE SPY, 1/2/2005 - 12/31/2008
Maximum Return: $58,719 Minimum Return: -$47,141 for a portfolio of $100,000 using 1500 Allocation simulations

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

Visual Basic .Net SIG (and sometimes Access 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.

Digital Imaging SIG—Cancelled until further notice

(Stocks..........Continued from page 6)

Carlo simulation of different allocation percentages of the five stocks followed for four years. Obviously, we prefer to have the result with the greatest return. That would appear to be the one represented by the blue dot in the upper right-hand corner (when you view the numerical results of the simulation, you see that it is the one with 95% of the portfolio in CVX). But wait a minute, that result carries a high risk (risk increases to the right along the horizontal axis).

There are really two questions:

1. For a particular risk (a point on the horizontal axis), what is the best return we can expect (a point on the vertical axis)?
2. For a particular return (a point on the vertical axis), what is the result with the least risk (a point on the horizontal axis) that produces it?

An inspection of the graph, shows that the points along the green curve are the results that satisfy our conditions. This set of results is called the efficient frontier.

So how is all this accomplished? Obviously there is not room here to explain that except to say that my program retrieves the historical stock data from Yahoo, as displayed in the screen capture below of the program's main interface. Once the Closing Data is received, I click the Do Simulations button, which performs 1500 simulations. For each simulation, a random assignment of percentages of the portfolio is assigned to each of the five stocks. Then, for each assignment, the program uses the historical data to calculate the return for that assignment. After the 1500 simulations, then means and standard deviations are calculated, and a graph is drawn. And I am out of space, which was the point of this article—to fill up space. ◆

Date	CSCO	CVX	DD	GE	SPY	Weighted Return
1/4/2005	18.56	44.78	41.85	31.48	110.54	
1/5/2005	18.57	45.08	41.3	31.29	109.78	
1/6/2005	18.85	45.83	41.29	31.54	110.33	
1/7/2005	18.72	45.31	41.25	31.35	110.18	
1/10/2005	18.72	45.52	41.31	31.27	110.7	

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

(Netbook..........Continued from page 4)
brushed aluminum case. It weighs but 2.65 pounds, with a two-cell polymer battery with a 5-hour life. It has a wider touchpad and all the options: Bluetooth and Wireless N, 1.3 Megapixel camera. It's $480. The plastic 10" models are, of course, slightly larger at 10.5" x 7.5" x 1.5". The brushed aluminum is but 1" thick.

The most expensive EeePC is $680. It's a 10" model, but with a 16G SSD and XP Home. Most are available in Ebony and Pearl White. I've also seen some models in green, red, graphite and brown. ◆

(Minutes..........Continued from page 2)
Next month we have asked Gene Barlow to give a presentation on "Backing up Your Hard Drive using Acronis True Image". Due to a scheduling problem, we will meet on Monday, January 12th.

The business meeting adjourned about 7:30 pm. The party continued till approx 9:00 pm. ◆

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