



Bits of Blue

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



Vol. 22 No. 7

July 2009

July in Tampa

Meeting

Windows 7

by

**Bob LaFave
&
Merle Nicholson**

Wednesday July 8, 2009

6:30 PM

**Pepin Distributing Co.
4121 N 50th Street
Tampa, Florida**

Meeting Preview: For the July monthly meeting, Bob LaFave and Merle Nicholson will demonstrate Windows 7, the newest version that will be in stores on October 22, 2009. They'll be using the Windows 7 Release Candidate that was recently released for testing. It should be interesting, so bring your questions with you, and Bob and Merle will try to answer or find the resource needed.

Editor's Comments

*By William LaMartin, Editor, Tampa PC Users Group
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More on panoramas

Last month I wrote about a panorama viewer program I had written. I have made some changes since then--not in the viewer but in the panorama images themselves. When I first created the panoramas, I used Photoshop CS4 to do the stitching of the collection of images, and I mentioned at the time that it was left to me to crop the resulting image so that the beginning of the left side matched the end of the right side as to content. Furthermore, often the far left side would be exposed differently from the far right side due to Photoshop's blending, which apparently didn't take into consideration what would happen if the two ends were juxtaposed.

Well, all those problems are in the past. I have discovered a free program created by Microsoft Research that surmounts the two problems I encountered with Photoshop mentioned above. The

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August Meeting: To be announced

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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 June Meeting

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

Bob LaFave started the Windows SIG at 6:35 PM. He began by demonstrating how to open PDF files if you are having trouble opening them in Windows Vista. He explained the use of the “Windows Key” on the keyboard and diagnosed a problem that a member was having in the use of the key. Merle Nicholson reported a problem with his cursor jumping forward or backward or even to the next line. Bob believed that it was a bad driver or perhaps the sensitivity adjustment. Bob demonstrated the use of the trouble-shooting wizard.

There was a discussion of several operating system improvements that are being offered in the soon-to-be-released Windows 7. Bob explained how graphic systems can be configured to allow additional monitors to be run from one computer. There was a discussion of the capabilities of cell services’ connections to the web. William LaMartin noted that the speed of the service varied greatly with your proximity to large metropolitan locations. John Witmer reported that Internet service on cruise ships is not only very slow, it is very expensive.

John opened the business portion at approximately 7:10 PM. He briefly discussed the problems opening the gate during the severe thunderstorm that struck just before the prior month’s meeting. John said he would put instructions in the newsletter (see page 7) to outline the procedures to gain entrance when the gate has been disabled through power outages. John described how the raffle procedures will be altered to, hopefully, allow members a chance to select prizes that are useful to them and advised that this information would be in the next newsletter (see page 5).

He stressed the need for articles for the newsletter. John introduced Marty and Michelle Burgess, the local representatives for “SendOutCards,” whose presentation was titled “Creating Cards Online to send by mail.” Marty began by describing the operation and services provided by SendOutCards. It is a

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Vado - Creative Labs' Pocket Video Cam HD

by Larry Anders, Librarian, Tampa PC Users Group
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I have written many reviews for Bits of Blue in the past, but it has been a while since I have written anything due to an illness I have. However, I am feeling more like my old self right now and bought something I had wanted for a while. The price was too good to resist, so I bit, and I am really glad I did. I thought I would tell you about it.

I have a superb Sony video camera from about three years back that was just below a professional model, one of the first to use the mini video tapes. With the video tapes, as many of you probably know, you have to take the video off the tape and convert it to digital in whatever format the program you use to make a movie recognizes. This is not only time-consuming but also cumbersome. My wife is a teacher of adult students, and she takes a lot of videos of her students, which I turn into DVDs for her. She has a later, smaller version HD camcorder, but, like mine, it still has to be taken off a tape and converted to digital on the computer. Enter the Vado...

When I first read the ad, I thought it was too good to be true, but it was an ad from CompUSA.com, which I have purchased several items from, and I knew I could return the article if I was unhappy with it without too much of a hassle. I have purchased several digital cameras in the past and always made sure the lens was of good quality, feeling that a good lens can make a not-so-good camera better. When I saw the picture of the Vado, the lens was this itty bitty thing that didn't look too much bigger than the lens on my last cell phone that had a camera. Plus, as the name infers, it was HD. Maybe I was more curious than anything to see how something that small could be high definition. Well, I am happy to say, "It is."

The Vado records in an HD video resolution of up to 1280x720p. The lens is a wide-angle precision-engineered glass lens, and, believe it or not, it produces near professional-looking videos in a 16:9 aspect ratio.



There is also a 2x digital zoom, which doesn't seem like much, but with a lens that small it does a decent job. There is no flash or light with the camera, but I have used it in pretty dim light, and it adjusts quite well.

The recording starts with a touch of a button and records 8 hours in VGA mode 640x480 (old analog TV), 4 hours in HD mode 1080x720i (interlaced mode) or 2 hours in HD+ 1280x720p (progressive mode) onto 8GB internal memory, progressive mode being the best and

the largest file. I could not tell much difference between HD and HD+ picture-wise except for size.

After the video is taken, simply connect the Vado to your PC with the built-in USB connector and a program called Creative Vado Central will run (from the Vado) that does everything to the recording that you will need to do: View the video, copy it to your PC (in .AVI format), delete it, create a movie and/or edit it, send it to YouTube™, PhotoBucket or Box.net, create a single picture (.jpg) out of one frame or capture a burst of 25 frames. Playback your video on any HDTV by connecting the Vado camcorder to the TV with the included HDMI cable in 1080 quality.

As near as I can figure, the picture is so good because of the H.264 compression technology that provides efficient files sizes for the best possible viewing experience. You can record up to 4 times more videos compared to MPEG-4 encoded ones.

There is a 2" antiglare screen for viewing the videos while you take them and reviewing clips onscreen. Keep the videos you like; delete the ones you don't. It comes with a removable, rechargeable Lithium-ion battery that recharges via USB. An extra battery can

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website which provides a choice of approximately 15,000 cards that can be selected and customized. When you have finished with the design, you email it to SendOutCards and they will print it, address it, stuff the envelope, place a stamp (not a postal meter strip) and mail it. The card is normally mailed the next day, and you can expect it to be delivered within 3 to 7 days. The card looks just like one that you would mail yourself. The one difference is that all cards will have a Salt Lake City postmark. Cards can be sent for a price of about 62 cents and up depending on the complexity and quality of the card. The system starts with the establishment of a prepaid account. The balance of your account is shown in points. The value of the points varies by type of account. There are a variety of business and personal accounts available. They are structured to allow extensive management of your contacts. You can add pictures on the front or inside the card and can even purchase a font of your own handwriting and up to 4 signatures. Gifts or gift cards can be included. There are many ways to personalize the cards that you choose in that you can write your own message and choose the size, color and type of font. The details and answers to frequently asked questions are provided on the Burgess web site, <http://www.MandMCards.com> (case sensitive). They have invited everyone in the group to send two free cards by clicking on the red banner on the web site that says "Click here to send two free cards".

You can also call Marty (813-927-5916) or Michelle (813-310-9518) anytime for more details and instructions on how to set up an account. The presentation ended at approximately 8:50 PM.

The raffle winners were Michelle Burgess, who won a copy of Norton Internet Security; Richard Brooks, who won a screen saver; and Ron Weinberg, who won a TPCUG T-shirt.

The meeting ended at approximately 9:05 PM. ◆

Comments.....Continued from page 1

program is called Image Composition Editor (ICE). You may download the program from <http://research.microsoft.com/en-us/um/redmond/groups/ivm/ICE/>.

Revisit my 360-degree panoramas at <http://www.lamartin.com/HPPanoramas/index.htm>. I challenge you to find the place where the join is made. In the earlier examples, the join was easily found in several of the panoramas if you were looking for it.

What you see there is a jpeg image created by ICE that my software rotates. But you can also make less than 360-degree panoramas with ICE. And, here is what I like, you can make them with a zoom functionality. Go to <http://www.lamartin.com/ZoomImages.aspx> and under Planar Panoramas click on Davis Islands from the West. As usual, you will need the free Microsoft Silverlight browser plug-in installed to view this.

The image was made from 50 photos of the west shore of Davis Islands shot from the Bayshore Boulevard seawall in Tampa with about a six-power telephoto lens (300 mm). Then I let Microsoft ICE do its work of stitching them together and creating a Deep Zoom image that you can zoom in and out and move around.

The closest distance was around 2,000 ft.; the farthest distance was around 1.85 miles. To take the images, I used a tripod to hold a Nikon D200 digital camera with a 400 mm zoom lens set at 300 mm positioned on the Bayshore Boulevard seawall facing Davis Islands. My main problem was focusing. I had made an earlier version where I let the camera do an automatic focus for each image. Unfortunately, since the point of focus sometimes was on the sky, the results were not as sharp as I wanted. So this time I set the camera and lens to manual focus and did a manual focus for the images. I give the Microsoft ICE program most of the credit for the result; I only took the images; it did the magnificent job of stitching them together and creating the ability to zoom.

As a side note, the width of the image saved as one file and not the multiple number that make up the zoom is 67,218 pixels wide by 1431 pixels high. If saved as Tiff file, it is 376 MB. That is quite an image. ◆

TPCUG Meeting Raffle Prizes Update

By John Witmer, President, Tampa PC Users Group
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At the May TPCUG Board Meeting, we discussed our inventory of raffle prizes and what would be the best method to make them available to the attendees at our monthly meetings. We have been lax in the past regarding having raffles at each meeting, and yet we have included this raffle income as part of our budget needs during the year. The raffle income helps offset some of our operating expenses, with the membership dues and Amazon commissions comprising the balance of our income source.

Part of the raffle discussion was devoted to a perceived problem of getting a prize that was useful to the raffle ticket winner. So many times the winner of a nice prize finds it is not something they can or would use, while there may be others in the raffle pot who would have loved to have won and could use the item. One suggestion entertained was to perhaps put the significant items up for auction within the group, thereby assuring that the high bidder/acquirer of the item would put it to good use (no one would bid much for something they did not have a use for). It was felt that, although this may make sense, it would have the potential of cleaning out the prizes in a relatively short time and perhaps take away a part of the meetings that some members enjoy. Another proposal was to only raffle off one item of significant value each meeting, but to let the winning raffle ticket holder select his

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Internet Picture of the Month



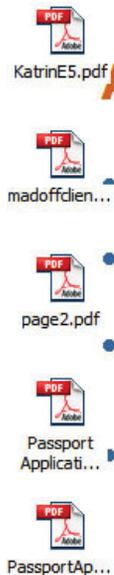
Rodeo Work

A crop of a photo from the Photo journal at the Wall Street Journal's site, <http://www.online.wsj.com>. The text reads, "A steer hit Trevor Knowles, of Mount Vernon, Ore., on Tuesday at the Reno Rodeo in Nevada. (Brad Horn/Nevada Appeal/Associated Press)"

July's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)
 Muckety.com - Exploring the paths of power
 WeedUS - Database of Invasive Plants
 Docstoc – Documents, Templates, Forms, Ebooks
 G.M.'s Road From Prosperity to Crisis

<http://www.tpcug.org/>
<http://news.muckety.com/>
<http://www.invasive.org/weedus/>
<http://www.docstoc.com/>
http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/05/31/business/20090531_GM_TIMELINE.html



Active Desktop Recovery

Microsoft Windows has experienced an unexpected error. As a precaution, your Active Desktop has been turned off. To restore the Active Desktop, use the following troubleshooting tips:

Did your browser stop working, or did you restart your computer without shutting it down first? If so, click:



Did you recently change your background to a web page? If so:

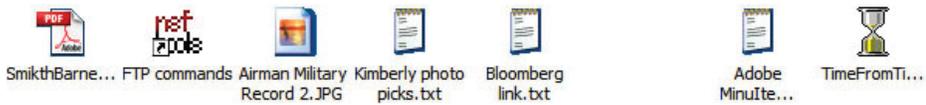
1. Right-click the desktop and then click **Properties**.
2. On the **Desktop** tab, under **Background**, click the background you want.

Did you recently add a new item to your Active Desktop? If so:

1. Right-click the desktop and then click **Properties**.
2. On the **Desktop** tab, click **Customize Desktop**.
3. On the **Web** tab, under **Web pages**, clear the check box for the item that was added last.

Do you want to turn off your Active Desktop? If so:

1. Right-click the desktop and select **Properties**.
2. On the **Desktop** tab, click **Customize Desktop**.
3. On the **Web** tab, under **Web pages**, click to clear all the check boxes.



Active Desktop Problem

By William LaMartin, Editor, Tampa PC Users Group
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The image above is a crop of a screen capture of what I saw on a reboot after my computer froze and I had to manually shut it off. That is not really what I saw. What I really saw was all of that writing with a lot of icons covering up much of the text. So what you see now is the appearance after I moved all of the obscuring icons out of the way.

I had this problem once before, certainly over a year back, but could not remember what I needed to do. A click on the Restore my Active Desktop button shown in the picture (I didn't even know that I had an active desktop) produced an error, so that was out. I opted for the option to turn off my active desktop that I didn't even know I had. But when I got to the web tab mentioned, none of the check boxes were checked. I just clicked OK anyway and things went back to normal. But not quite normal since I didn't have my background back yet—and the background change options were grayed out in the desktop tab of the Display Settings.

A search of the Internet (using Bing for a change) produced:

Open Regedit and navigate to the following two items:
HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Policies\System

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\Software\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Policies\System

Delete the values "Wallpaper" and "WallPaperStyle" in the right-pane.

I only had the one entry, "Wallpaper," in the first item. But deleting it solved the problem of being able to choose a background. But one problem remained: I did not have transparent backgrounds for the desktop icon text, and that is really ugly.

Unfortunately none of the solutions I could find (for example those at <http://www.entity.cc/icon-label-transparent.php>) solved my problem. But researching and talking with Merle Nicholson helped me zero in on the Windows XP Group Policy Editor, which you can bring up by running gpedit.msc. There under User Configuration | Administrative Templates | Desktop Active Desktop, I set Enable Active Desktop to Not Configured and Disable Active Desktop to Enabled. Do you think you can remember all that if you have this problem. I don't think I can.

Special Interest Groups

Visual Basic .Net SIG (and sometimes Access SIG)

This SIG meets the third Wednesday of the month at 6:30 PM. 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.

Raffle.....Continued from page 5

choice from all the available prizes. We could then add a couple of consolation type prizes into the raffle so that we would have multiple tickets/chances available for those entering the raffle process but only one grand prize winner.

The Board elected to go with the latter method to see how this is received by the members. We first implemented this system at the June 10th meeting, and it was very successful for the club as there were many who participated. The winning ticket holder was able to choose from a group of items and was happy to be able to choose the prize she wanted from the available selection.

A list of the remaining prizes to choose from will be available at each meeting, and you can decide if there is something on the list that might make it worthwhile for you to enter the raffle. I am going to list below the main items we still have on hand for a winner to choose from beginning with the July meeting, as well as what we are calling consolation prizes:

- ◇ **Software Items:** Norton Internet Security 2008; Trend Micro Internet Security 2008; System Mechanic PC Tuneup (XP & Vista); Magix Audio Cleaning 12 Lab; Acronis True Image Home 2009; Acronis Disk Director Suite 10.
- ◇ **Hardware item:** Video Xpress from ADS (USB Easy Capture & Movie Creation Device, previously used, but still in good condition).
- ◇ **Subscription:** Smart Computing annual subscription to magazine (4 of these are available for prizes).
- ◇ **Consolation prizes of minimal value:** 4 Large TPCUG T-shirts (size 42-44); 2 Black Norton T-shirts, size large, in shrink wrap cube; twin pack of HP45 Black OEM ink cartridges; miscellaneous older software programs from 2007 or prior; Monitor dust sweep; and mouse pads. ◆

Important Info About Meeting Access At Pepin

*By John Witmer, President, Tampa PC Users Group
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As a result of a bout of really bad weather on our scheduled meeting night at Pepin Distributing Company back in May, I wanted to make sure those of you attending our meetings have information on what to do if this scenario happens again. I have the front gate (on 50th St) programmed to stay open from 5:30 pm until 7:15 pm on TPCUG meeting nights. Unfortunately, the lightning killed the computer-controlled connection to the gate and caused the gate to close in the middle of a horrendous down-pour. Fortunately, the hard-wired phone connection to the gate was still operational, but the only way it could be activated was by using a call button device on the block wall as you enter the gate area (the call button device is on the driver's side of the entrance wall to the left of a grey scan pad).

So, if you arrive for our meeting (rain or shine) and find the gate closed, press the lighted button on the bottom of the call box and you will reach the warehouse office. Identify yourself as attending the Computer Club meeting hosted by John Witmer, and the gate should be opened for you to enter the parking area. I usually have the building front door open until approx 7:15 pm also, so if you should arrive later than this time for our 6:30 pm meeting, you may have to call my cell number to gain access to the building. My cell number is 813-404-4655. I hope this information helps in the unlikely event you should ever run into a problem attending one of our TPCUG Wednesday night meetings. ◆

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First Class Mail

Member: Your membership is up for renewal

Video.....Continued from page 3

be purchased online for less than \$15.

If you're looking for something that is easy to use, provides excellent quality for \$150+/-, you can't go wrong with the Vado Pocket Video Cam. ◆



Desktop.....Continued from page 6

Somehow in my having to hold in the power button to shut down the computer after it froze, something must have gotten corrupted in the Windows settings. And what worked for some people in getting back the transparency of the desktop icon text background would not work for me.

Of course, I could have tried the solution of setting back my computer to an earlier date, but there is satisfaction in solving a problem. Now if I can just remember the solution if it is needed again—or remember to look up this article. ◆

