



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



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March 2010

March in Tampa

Meeting

Michelle Burgess

will demonstrate

FaceBook & Twitter

Wednesday March 10, 2010

6:30 PM

Pepin Distributing Co.

4121 N 50th Street

Tampa, Florida

Meeting Preview: Member Michelle Burgess will tell us about Facebook and Twitter. Member Bob LaFave will do the usual Windows SIG meeting.

Editor's Comments

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

In my article in this newsletter, I describe two problems with my desktop computer I had this past month that took about four days of my life to solve. The first involved an Acronis full system backup that would freeze the computer, although such a backup worked fine several weeks previous.

The second problem was that I discovered any email sent from my computer or any other computer on the LAN in my house was being labeled as spam by at least two important Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and deposited in the recipients SPAM folder, which they never saw. The ISPs were EarthLink and Verizon. I was particularly galled by Earthlink's labeling me as a spammer since I have had an EarthLink email account for 15 years – before there even was an EarthLink. It was with Net-Com, which was absorbed by EarthLink many years back.

My only guess as to how I got labeled a spammer is that several times a week I send about 300 emails to residents of my neighborhood who have provided their emails for that purpose. Read the article for details. ♦

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April Meeting: To be announced

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Bits of Blue is published by the Tampa PC Users Group, Inc., a State of Florida registered non-profit corporation, to provide educational information about personal computer systems to its members. Our mailing address is P. O. Box 3492, Tampa, FL 33601-3492.

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 February Meeting

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

John Witmer, our president, opened the meeting at 6:40 PM. He reported on a discussion that we had at our last Board meeting concerning the content of presentations at our monthly meetings. It remains difficult to attract outside presentations on subjects that are of interest, or that we think are of interest, to our members. He said that our Board members' discussion led us to believe that it would be productive to learn members' exact interests so that we can better concentrate our efforts. He asked the members to complete a survey that Member-at-Large Ron Weinberg had designed to gather their interests. John announced that we had no presentation at present for March but Blain Barton from Microsoft is scheduled to be at the April meeting and a genealogy expert will discuss the latest available genealogy software at the May meeting. He announced that the rest of the February meeting would be devoted to the Windows SIG and a follow-on discussion led by Bob LaFave, Merle Nicholson and Steve Singer.

Bob LaFave opened the Windows SIG at 6:45 PM. A member began the discussion with a remote mouse problem. The discussion included possible cause of the problem, such as a need for a line of sight between the mouse and the wireless or Bluetooth source on the computer, the class of the Bluetooth device and also the number of devices that are competing for space on the channel. There was an extended discussion of problems with sound on video recordings, and their solutions. Ron Weinberg had a problem with MSN Mail's not allowing attachments with pictures to be opened. The problem was suspected of being related to the selection of security options, but no one was able to locate the specific setting. There was a discussion of crashed external drives and how to check the various conditions that may have caused the problem. One member asked for advice on reformatting her "C" drive. The discussion of methods included advice on the use of SATA drives. Merle Nicholson suggested that she should buy a new hard drive and use it as the "C" drive. The advantages and disadvantages of "Solid

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SSDs – Solid State Drives

By Merle Nicholson, Tampa PC Users Group
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Newer and faster hard drives are developing rapidly with the use of Solid State Drives (SSD) in various forms for the end consumer. You may find it worthwhile to investigate these for your own use.

SSDs use a technology similar to memory in flash drives. The on-board program is different, however, to allow for faster, larger and more efficient storage of data.

There are notebooks and high-end desktop computers available right now with SSDs already installed. The most prominent ones are the Eee PCs from ASUS. Most of the early ones have drives mounted on an internal card and are very small, sometimes only 8 GB, just barely enough space to install an operating system. They've gotten larger, of course, as the cost/size ratio gets smaller.

There are several reasons to consider SSDs. First, they are fast. Very fast - like Spaceball One's ludicrous speed in the movie Spaceball. I've seen some claims that have OS load times down to ten or twenty seconds. Second, they use very little power, an important feature for notebooks, and, third, they're shock resistant, in case you're prone to dropping your notebook.

SSDs are sold in several forms. The most common by far is a device that is exactly the size of a notebook SATA drive (2-1/2" size). If you want to install this in a desktop machine, there are several adapters that will allow inexpensive mounting in a 3-1/2" standard mounting bay. The connectors and placement of the connectors are identical to notebook hard drives, so installing them in a docking station or enclosure made for notebook drives is no problem.

Forms and typical prices (2010) are:

- Mini PCIe – For netbooks, mostly, like Eee PC, 64 GB \$165
- ZIF Socket – a 1" notebook drive (I'd never

heard of this myself) 16 GB \$55

- PCIe - For internal desktop systems. 250G \$1,275, 512 GB \$2,000, 1 TB \$4,000. This type is by far the fastest – more than four times faster than notebook drives.
- USB and SATA – 120 GB \$350
- Express Card (Notebook Slot) – 16 GB \$65 (relatively very slow)
- SATA II Notebook internal drive – 30 GB \$130, 120 GB \$365, 250 GB \$700, 500 GB 3-1/2" \$1700.
- PATA – For older notebooks made before SATA became widespread. 64 GB \$195, 128 GB \$400. Again – relatively slow.

Except for the price, there really is no downside to these devices. Even the slowest of these – and there's quite a range of data speeds – are faster than mechanical drives. There were some initial problems when they first came out: a "stuttering" problem and a dwindling available space. There were (are) some problems with earlier operating systems. All of these have been fixed now for Windows 7. Windows 7 came out recognizing SSDs and utilizing them optimally. There are solutions to problems with XP and Vista on manufacturers' forums, but they should probably be left to experts – if you can find one. Best thing is to simply use Windows 7.

Interestingly, you should never defrag an SSD. I've read that Windows 7 turns off defragging for SSDs, but there's probably nothing keeping you from using other defraggers. But if you do, you'll shorten the life of the drive. Basically, there is no such thing as a fragmented SSD. It's all equally fast all across the drive, and defragging just moves the data back over the most-used part, the very last thing you want in an SSD. Its total life depends on spreading the data out and using the unused parts as much as possible.

And while we're at it, let's address lifespan. I've looked at many of these to see what the MTBF rating is. (Mean Time Between Failures – See Wikipedia for MTBF). A few are rated for greater than 500,000 hours, but many – or most – are rated greater than 1,000,000 to greater than 1,500,000 hours. Well, that's

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Two Computer Problems and Four Days

By William LaMartin, Editor, Tampa PC Users Group
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The last week of February was a real rough computer week for me. First, it appeared that my desktop computer's hard drive was going bad. Then, after that was sorted out, I discovered that email I sent to people using Verizon and EarthLink was being labeled as SPAM. It basically took two days to solve each problem. Of course, every cloud has a silver lining in that I learned a bit and I have something to write about in this newsletter.

That something might be amiss with my computer's hard drive surfaced when I went to bed with the computer doing an Acronis True Image backup and woke the next morning to find my computer frozen with a blank desktop. I rebooted the computer and checked the external drive where the backup was to be and noted it was only 39 GB instead of the usual 300 GB. Oddly, Acronis had marked it as a successful backup on its calendar but did not recognize it when I tried to open the file. So I deleted that file and that evening ran the backup process again. Next morning, the result was the same.

To try to isolate the problem, I then had Acronis do a backup of just my data files. Now, this is not a simple copy and paste but rather the creation of the type of image that Acronis does. I kept an eye on what Acronis was doing. After less than an hour, when I tried to move the mouse, it wouldn't move and the computer was again frozen although everything looked OK on the screen.

Time to see if a little housekeeping on the computer would fix things. On the computer's C drive and the external drive, I did both a `chkdsk /f` and a defrag. While good things to do, they didn't solve the problem. I then began to worry about my data. Although I had been copying the most recent versions of many of the data files I used to a different external drive, the computer had not had an Acronis image made of the entire C drive in almost a month. That meant there were a fair number of photos from my camera on the

hard drive and in my email correspondence for the past month that hadn't been backed up. Then there were the changes I had made to the local versions of my web sites. So I needed to get these things on some of my external drives if my hard drive was going bad, as it seemed to be. What other reason for all of a sudden not being able to do an Acronis image.

My first action was to find the location of my Outlook folder containing the pst file and copy that folder to an external drive. That meant that I had all my emails, contacts and calendar saved. Then I copied my Nikon temp folder to the external drive. The Nikon temp folder is where I accumulate the most recent images I have downloaded from my camera. Finally, I decided to just copy all of the My Documents folder to the external drive since I was not really sure what files in it had not been backed up recently.

Well, the copying process started and went along for less than an hour and then came to a halt. I don't recall the exact error message other than it could not continue the copy. To get to the root of the problem, I deleted all the files on the external drive that it had copied there and then started the copying over. This time I copied just a few sub folders of My Documents at a time so as to get my data copied and to catch where the problem occurred. Eventually I reproduced the error message. I then found that one particular folder couldn't be copied. I discovered I could copy everything in that folder to another folder on the C drive, or to the external drive, so I got all of its data copied. I then deleted the folder on the C drive and proceeded to copy everything else in My Documents to the external drive with no problem. As best I could figure, something must have been wrong with the drive's file allocation table information for that folder.

That discovery opened the possibility that, with the bad folder removed, I could now do an Acronis backup. And that was the case. I ran Acronis and after 4.5 hours I had a completed Acronis backup. My hard drive is apparently fine, and the computer was working well except for the Acronis backup problem. It would be nice if Acronis had some way to indicate at exactly what point a backup goes wrong and then gracefully exit the backup process instead of freezing

**CITY OF TAMPA
HOUSEHOLD CHEMICAL &
ELECTRONICS COLLECTION**

Held twice a year on the last Saturday
in April and October.
Saturday, April 24, 2010
9 a.m. – 2 p.m.

In the Vacant parking lot on the South side of Bird
Street (exit I-275 N @ Bird Street)

Materials accepted include:

- *Paints and solvents
- *Used motor oil
- *Automotive products
- *Pool chemicals
- *Mercury containing devices, such as
fluorescent light bulbs & thermometers
- *Lawn, garden and household chemicals
- *Electronics, including computer monitors,
printers, CPU's, keyboards, and televisions

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Internet Picture of the Month



Kluge House

From the Wall Street Journal's online real estate section at <http://www.online.wsj.com>, we have a nice home owned by a lady named Kluge with 300 acres near Charlottesville, Virginia, that has been reduced 52% in price to 48 million dollars from the original asking price of 100 million dollars. It is 23,500 sq. feet with eight bedrooms and 13 baths. Now is the time to buy while prices are low.

March's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)
The Spamhaus Project
Computer Power User
PC Magazine
Maximum PC
Smart Computing
Bank Routing Numbers

<http://www.tpcug.org/>
<http://www.spamhaus.org/sbl/index.lasso>
<http://www.computerpoweruser.com>
<http://www.pcmag.com/>
<http://www.maximumpc.com/>
<http://www.smartcomputing.com>
<http://www.gregthatcher.com/Financial/Default.aspx>

Problems.....Continued from page 4
the computer.

Now to my second problem of the month – disappearing emails. I am sure all of us have been told that emails we were sure we had sent were not received by the intended recipient, so we just resend the email, they receive it and all is fine. Or we tell the person to look in their junk email folder, and it is found there because we put some combination of words in the email that turned it to junk. Recently though things got a bit more serious with email at our house.

My wife mentioned to our son an email she had sent him, and he said he had not received it. She sent a couple more, and he didn't receive them. A little investigation showed that the emails from my main Road Runner (RR) account to his MindSpring account, which is now part of EarthLink, were being put in his known SPAM folder at EarthLink webmail and being immediately deleted since that is the default setting. As soon as he changed the setting, emails from our house started accumulating in the known SPAM folder and were not deleted.

Although my wife was using my main RR account, what was especially interesting was that I couldn't even send him an email using my NetCom account, which I have had for 15 years and which is now part of EarthLink. In fact, I couldn't even send from my NetCom account to itself without the message being deposited in my EarthLink known SPAM folder. EarthLink suggested that my son mark my emails to him as not SPAM and this should clear up the problem – which it didn't. Neither did my so marking my emails allow me to send a message to myself.

I also found that any messages from my computer to anyone on Verizon would not appear in their Inbox. I had a serious problem. Over two days, I spoke on the phone with EarthLink and my ISP, RR. I also corresponded with them via online chats. In addition, I corresponded with the web-hosting company for my neighborhood's web site, which I manage and through which I send email messages to all in the neighborhood for whom we have emails (around 300), since I also discovered I couldn't use the email account I had through their email server to send messages. It was even worse at the neighborhood's webmail site.

Any message I sent simply disappeared – not even ending up in anyone's known SPAM folder. None of these providers had a solution. I asked them if they were blocking my messages, and the answer was no, if messages were blocked, I'd receive a bounce-back message to that effect. So some of my messages were being treated as SPAM and some just disappeared.

I decided that the IP address that RR provided to me, just like your ISP provides you when you connect to the Internet, was on some SPAM list. I had the same IP address for as long as I can recall. Years back, when I first used RR, I would keep the same address for just a few days and then receive a new one. That apparently changed at some point. More than a year ago, to send a message to a friend at a German university I had to switch to sending his mail through the email server at one of my web sites. Thus, I could have had the same address for well over a year, and that could have been when the problem really began.

What I needed was a new IP assigned to me by RR. Of course, the RR help fellow was not sure how to make that happen. He did suggest that I take power away from the cable modem and then repower it. But I knew that wouldn't work, since I had done that many times to reset the modem when there had been problems. It always came back with the same IP. Then I got an idea – I disconnected the cable modem from the router and connected it directly to my computer. I then checked to see what my wan IP address was – and it was a new one – and I could send emails to EarthLink and they arrived correctly. Unfortunately, when I reconnected my computer to the router and the router to the cable modem, I had that old problem IP address back. The cable modem had a memory.

Thanks to a web search, I found that I should go into the router's setup and change the MAC number by one digit while the cable modem was powered down and then to power the cable modem back up. The modem would think a new device was attached and assign a new IP, which it did. And I could again send emails. Problem solved!

Now that the problem is solved for me, what about anyone who might be assigned my old IP address by RR. Perhaps they will do an Internet search and find this article. ◆

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.

FOR THE YEAR 2009

TPCUG STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENSES AND BANK BALANCE

2009 INCOME

MEMBERSHIPS	\$840.00
DOOR PRIZES	\$166.00
AMAZON & MISC	\$268.40
TOTAL INCOME:	\$1,274.40

2009 EXPENSES

NEWSLETTER POSTAGE	\$281.60
NEWSLETTER PAPER	\$74.88
WEBSITE DOMAIN REG-3 YRS	\$86.97
FACUG DUES	\$25.00
APCUG DUES	\$50.00
FLA INCORPORATION FEE	\$61.25
WEB SITE HOSTING FEE	\$225.23
PO BOX RENTAL	\$118.00
DEC HOLIDAY PARTY	\$186.23
REFRESHMENTS - COOKIES	\$52.84
PAYPAL FEES	\$5.95
MISCELLANEOUS	\$0.00
TOTAL EXPENSES:	\$1,167.95

NET INCOME FOR 2009 \$106.45

CASH BALANCE PER BOOKS BEGINNING OF 2009 \$5,989.85

CASH BALANCE PER BOOKS END OF 2009 \$6,096.30

RECONCILIATION OF BANK STATEMENT TO BOOK BALANCE:

Balance per BANK STMT at 12-31-09	\$6,159.63
Deduct: Outstanding checks written as of 12/31/09	
Check #810 to William LaMartin	\$(63.33)

Balance per BOOKS at 12-31-09 is this amount: \$6,096.30

SSDs.....Continued from page 3

not forever. But mechanical hard drives are good for about three years, and there's no reason to think SSDs have a shorter life. Indeed, think of this: When your computer is on, that mechanical drive is probably spinning when idle, wearing out the motor and bearings. There's no equivalent to that in SSDs.

One more observation. An SSD mostly reads blazingly fast. So you should expect dramatic changes in the time it takes to read in the Operating System on startup, or read a large video for editing, or pull from a large database, or edit JPEGs. But the write times are usually much less, especially in small writes. So, while loading programs and data is fast, it may not be so noticeable while you're working with your software. It probably will not do a thing for cruising the Internet or editing a document. Overriding that, though, is a longer battery operation for notebooks, but not a dramatic improvement because the hard drive is only one of the heavy use components in a notebook.

And please, do not consider an SSD for a system with limited RAM installed. Address the RAM problem first – at least 2 GB, but 4 GB or 6 GB is even better, depending on where your interest lies regarding software. ◆

Tampa PC Users Group, Inc.

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Minutes.....Continued from page 2

State” hard drives were discussed. The deliberation on Windows 7’s advantages and disadvantages began at 7:50 PM. Bob opened the session by showing some of the features that he has gained by installing Windows 7. Steve Singer recommends installing one of the 64-bit versions if your PC supports a virtual installation. The Virtual XP Mode that you can download at no cost is very flexible and will probably allow you to use older versions of software and older peripherals that won’t work on a 64-bit system. You also must have either Windows 7 Professional or Ultimate to use the Virtual XP Mode. There is a procedure called “God Mode” that makes most features accessible in one folder. There are many features in Windows 7 that have not been publicized by Microsoft. Bob closed the Windows 7 session at 8:45 PM.

John Witmer, in closing, mentioned that some of the Smart Computing subscriptions are still available for half price (\$15.00). The meeting ended at 8:50 PM. ◆

