Bits of Blue

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

November in Tampa

Meeting

William LaMartin
on
Writing Windows 8 Applications

Wednesday, November 14, 2012

6:30 PM

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Meeting Preview: William LaMartin will demonstrate how to write Windows 8 applications. Bob LaFave will conduct the Windows SIG at the beginning of the meeting.

Editor's Comments

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

This is pretty much a Merle Nicholson newsletter, for which I am extremely grateful, but he did leave me a little space to fill. I hope those of you who don't have Windows 8 installed on anything will not tire of all the Win 8 coverage. But that is mostly what is happening at the moment, and the material can also serve as a guide and reference for the future. So with that hope I will write here about installing Win 8 and other software on the new computer I wrote about in the previous newsletter.

Microsoft finally got my MSDN subscription straightened out, and I was able to download Windows 8 Professional and install it on both my new desktop computer and on a virtual hard disk on my main laptop. Both installations went quickly and flawlessly. However, the virtual hard disk setup on the laptop is always a scary situation for me in that once while doing such I wiped out my Win 7 installation and had to use Acronis to bring it back. I will be using the laptop to do the Windows 8 presentation to the group this month.

December Meeting: Holiday Party

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 813-251-3817, or william@lamartin.com.

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Minutes of the October Meeting

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

The Windows Special Interest Group (SIG) opens our monthly meeting. The meeting began as usual at 6:30 PM. The SIG is devoted to a discussion of all aspects of the Windows Operating Systems and of computer-related subjects in general. The SIG moderator, Bob LaFave, introduces new or little-known products and technological developments for discussion by the group. He accepts questions and requests for help in solving problems from attendees.

This month Bob touched on a variety of subjects – the main discussion was about Windows 8 and performance, Windows 8 Recovery and partitions. Then Bob touched on the subject of the GoFlex external hard drive, which connects to a router.

John Witmer, President, led a discussion on the December annual dinner/meeting and food. Then he brought up the question about meeting locations after March 31, 2013; asked for volunteers for officer positions for 2013; and noted the need for a program topic for November.

The presentation this month was given by Steven Singer, who did his annual hardware presentation. He brought in a large variety of interesting gadgets and computer components. He started with USB fast-charging devices that will output more than the standard USB 500mA for faster charging. Bluetooth was the next subject with Bluetooth speakers, headphones and headsets and also Bluetooth handsfree.

Steve also brought in some mini-computer components in the way of mini-ITX motherboards, ITX computers and USB WiFi dongle. He then spoke of a passion of his – movies, and talked about the website moviesneaks.com. He suggested software called JV16 Powertools, which claims to fix a variety of computer problems with cleanup software. ◆

Windows 8 Start Menu

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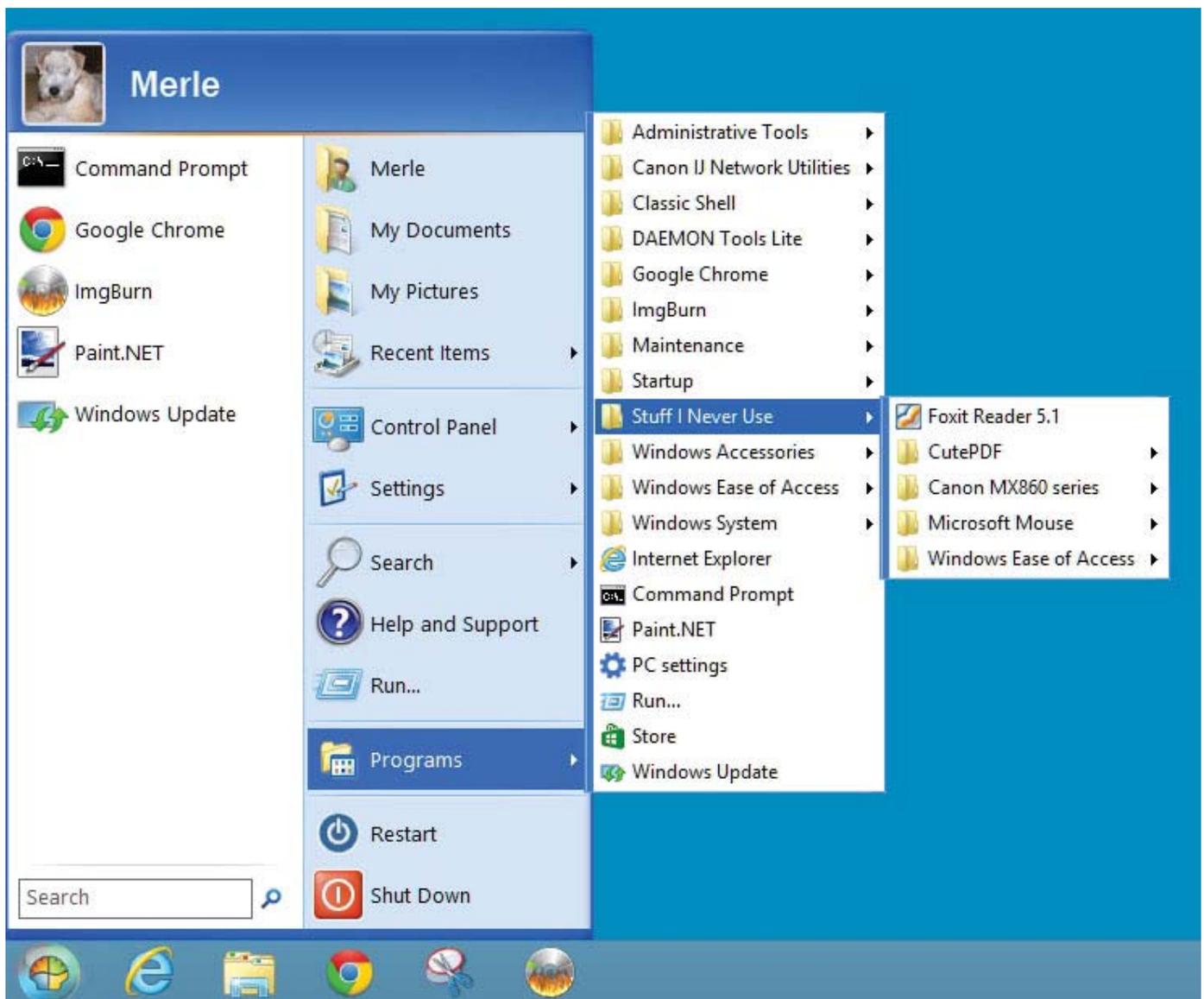*Tampa PC Users Group*
merle@merlenicholson.com

The picture with this article is a screen capture of my Windows 8 computer with the Start Menu expanded. We've all been reading about the loss of the Windows 8 Start Menu and having to return to the Tiled Interface to select a program. That switching between the desktop and the tiled interface (* – see footnote, page 4) to me is confusing and will take a lot of learning because the actions are designed for a touchscreen(# – see footnote, page 4). There are keyboard and mouse equivalents, and they are be-

ing well-documented now in blogs, but I don't see a Win+h key combination as being intuitive; it's something that must be learned instead.

The alternative is to change the interface so that you deal with the AUFL (*) as little as possible, and I've been working off and on to make it so. My objective is to use the improvements inherent in Win 8 and keep it Win 7 as much as suits me. Also I must test my Windows 7 applications in Windows 8 because one of my customers will surely buy a Windows 8 computer and THEN ask me if my application will work.

There are a surprising number of replacement Start Menu systems that work in varying degrees on Win-

dows 8. The one I have chosen for now has existed since before anyone ever heard of Windows 8. I looked at this several years ago as I was trying to get used to the Vista menu. I found it wanting and went on to other things, but they obviously have been developing and improving this product and I'm very pleased with it now. It's called Classic Shell, available for free at http://classicshell.sourceforge.net/

The interesting thing about Classic Shell is that they have "skins" – that is ways to customize the appearance. They have three basic styles, called "Windows Classic", "Windows XP", and "Windows Vista/Windows 7." It has a basic settings mode and a HUGE amount of customization in "All Settings".

The "Windows Vista/Windows 7" version lacks what the real thing lacks – a cascading menu system. Instead it uses the Windows 7 tree view, where the menu items keep getting taller, to see everything instead of branching (cascading) to the right. It has everything I have always hated AND liked about the Windows 7 menu.

The Windows Classic is what you get on Windows XP as an alternative "classic" menu; it's minimalist and doesn't have the column for "most used shortcuts." It's ok, but needs more.

The Windows XP version is – for me – almost perfect. It has cascading menus and a column for displaying most recently used shortcuts and a way to pin those permanently. To my great surprise, it is customizable to fix the most annoying thing about the original – the location of the Programs button. In the picture on page 3, I have moved it to the right-hand column. It traditionally is at bottom left, and when you expand from there – the left – the menu expands and hides other items on the menu. I have made other changes – like Shutdown; it did have a menu with – you know – Reset, Sleep, Hibernate; I don't need that. Everything I wanted to improve is improvable. I love this product.

There are several Windows 8-specific changes to make, like disabling the hotspot corners and changing it to go directly to the desktop instead of the AUFL

when booting.

I like it so much I'm going to use it on my Windows 7 computers.

Classic Shell, available for free at http://classicshell.sourceforge.net/

Footnote:
(*) the tiled interface doesn't have a name – we need to invent one. I tend to think of it as "Annoying Useless Fluff, Lite" (AUFL, pronounced AUFL).

(#) To be fair, it seems to work well on a touch-enabled device if you don't mind going back to doing one thing at a time. I already have a touchscreen – a 7" tablet, and I don't mind doing one thing at a time on it, but it isn't my primary computer. ◆

Once Win 8 was installed on the new computer, I had to then install whatever programs I wanted to use. That included Microsoft Office 2007 Ultimate, Adobe Design Standard CS6, Microsoft Expression Studio, and Visual Studio 2012 as the main programs, along with less important ones like the FTP program FilZilla, the mapping program ArcGisExplorer and another mapping program Microsoft MapCruncher, Firefox and Google Chrome.

Of the programs, I tried to install, only one gave me trouble: Family Tree Maker 2010. The installation started and got a long way into the process and then just stopped progressing at the point where it was installing some background image named Arch de Triomphe.jpg. Later I decided to do a search on that file and Family Tree Maker and found all sorts of people with the same problem going back long before Win 8. But while I was searching I was also trying to do the installation again, and all of a sudden the installation started moving forward and did indeed finally complete. However, the first time I tried to open a Family Tree Maker file, it crashed. But on my second try everything worked fine and has continued to work

Internet Picture of the Month

Flooded taxis in Hoboken

From the New York Times Hurricane Sandy photographic coverage,
http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/11/01/us/sandy-POD-index.html?hp, Day 1, slide # 25.

Comments..........Continued from page 4

the few times I have tried the program. Based on the Internet search information, this is not a Win 8 problem but a Family Tree Maker problem, which I have luckily surmounted without doing anything other than waiting a little longer for the installation. I am sure there will be a number of additional programs that I will still load, but these are the ones I use most often.

The next job was to load all of my data: Word files, Excel files, etc. I did that over several days, along with copying all of my photos. When finished, I had moved a lot of data: 117 GB of files in My Documents and 183 GB of files in My Pictures. With that, the new computer was ready to be used, which I have been doing for the past month. ◆

November's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)   http://www.tpcug.org/
The Oyster Guide   http://www.oysterguide.com/
Hurricane Sandy Photos   http://news.yahoo.com/photos/hurricane-sandy-1351517288-slideshow/
Microsoft Visual Studio Express   http://www.microsoft.com/visualstudio/eng/products/visual-studio-express-
                                    products

Saving FIOS DVR Recordings

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

Saving FIOS DVR recordings: We've had two one-hour DVR recordings on the FIOS Set Top DVR device for more than a year that we – my wife Val and I – want to save. Two reasons – one – we now use a Media computer running Windows 7 and Windows Media Center, along with a cable tuner card for all our TV, and no longer use any Verizon FIOS Set Top Box (STB). Second – I have friends who have had the hard drive in the STB go bad. That's not a problem to Verizon, they will willingly replace it, but, of course, anything you want to save is lost.

Our DVR STB is still in place and connected but rarely gets used because the Windows Media Center (WMC) is far superior to any STB available. I have 2 TB of recording space, and that allows us to never watch live television. Honestly, we never do. We record everything we want and watch it when we want and just fast forward through commercials, pledge drives and anything else unpleasant.

Microsoft WMC is a jewel of a computer program. The remote control is well designed (and inexpensive), the menus are well organized; the advanced scheduling for recordings is a pleasure to use, and guess what – it's free in Windows 7, but uncertain in Windows 8.

The advantages of WMC over the FIOS DVR are apparent from the beginning. The FIOS STB is just painfully slow to respond to anything. Press a button and wait, press a button and wait. And there is so little real information on the screen. They keep changing the menus, improving the appearance, I'll admit, but slowing it down to just painfully slow.

Back on subject now. We wanted to get two Discovery Channel Sunrise Earths off of the DVR and saved. Lots of research had led us to one fact; there are a lot of excellent Sunrise Earth programs that Discovery has not made available on DVD; the two that we like the most are not. We have bought one 3-set DVD collection from them and will buy more if they made them available. The STB is just a black box – no way to read anything from it. But we can play those programs for as long as we want until the hard drive fails.

I've had a solution sitting and collecting dust for some time now in a Samsung VCR-to-DVD recorder. It's a model DVD-VR335. It's designed to make VCR to DVD conversion easy, and it does a pretty good job of that. What I realized was that it also has a video input and can record anything from a video source to either DVD or tape. I don't want to make it sound too easy; I made a half dozen DVD coasters in the process, but it does work. The video input is composite or S-Video. Composite takes three RCA connectors: one Video and two for Stereo. For DVD output I used Component – the best choice for my older 19" flatscreen Monitor/TV. So I had three devices sitting on my workbench; a DVR, VCR to DVD recorder and the monitor/TV. So after recording I had a playable DVD. The recording program ALWAYS puts a menu at the beginning, so when you load the DVD, you must select the only menu item and it starts playing.

OK so far. But I want the videos on the WMC hard drive in the video library.

I now have a DVD with some kind of movie with a .VOB file type. WMC will play it as a DVD, but it will not appear in the WMC video library. I have a large set of media programs by a company called NCH Software Suite. There's a module called "Prism Video File Converter Plus" at www.nchsoftware.com. I'm certain there are other video format converter programs. This one works, but you purchase the modules a la carte, and it can get expensive if you want many of the 17 modules available. In addition it wants to install a crapware toolbar. Fortunately it's optional, but you have to be careful. It created a .wmv file in short order, but for the two large videos, they play in a smaller window with the black bands where the DVDs do not project. So I'm still looking for the solution to that. In any case I have the DVDs and they play fine in WMC as long as I drop the DVD in the PC. If anyone knows of a good conversion program from .VOB to .wmv let me know. Update – well, I should have thought
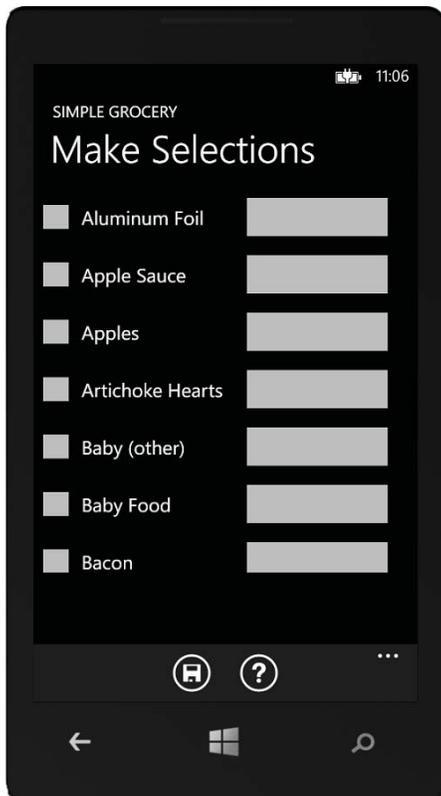
Writing Win 8 Applications

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

I have been writing Windows desktop applications for years, Windows Phone 7 applications for a little over a year and now Windows 8 applications for a few months. And with the launch of the Windows Phone 8 SDK, I plan on looking at Windows Phone 8 applications. I will be using the recently released Visual Studio 2102, but you can download the free Visual Studio 2012 Express and do the same thing.

In the presentation at our monthly meeting this month, I hope to give you a taste of what programming for a Win 8 phone application and a Win 8 desktop or tablet application is like.

Below you see a phone app for creating a grocery list, where you check the items wanted and enter any additional text. On other pages in the app, you can add extra items to the list and put the list in walking order of a particular store (assuming you have previously ordered the categories of items in that store: for example, bakery, deli, dairy, cereal,...).

Of course, all of this requires coding both for the interface you see here and for the code underneath that carries out whatever is necessary to record your choices and to then put them in order.

A small selection of the code, called xaml, that creates the visual part of the page is listed next. You don't need to understand it. Just be-lieve that Visual Studio turns the xaml containing that text into the screen you see in the previous column.

```
<StackPanel x:Name="TitlePanel" Grid.Row="0" Mar-
gin="12,13,0,12">
  <StackPanel Orientation="Horizontal">
   <TextBlock x:Name="ApplicationTitle" Text="SIMPLE
GROCERY" Style="{StaticResource PhoneTextNormalStyle}"
HorizontalAlignment="Left"/>
  </StackPanel>
<TextBlock x:Name="PageTitle" Text="Make Selections"
Margin="9,0,0,0" Style="{StaticResource PhoneTextTitle-
1Style}" FontSize="48" />
...............
```

Then there is the C# code that runs behind the scenes and does all the heavy lifting. A small sample:

```
StreamReader readFile = null;
if (myStore.FileExists("ItemAndCategory.xml") == true)
//this will not be true on first use
 {
   try
   {  //Retrieve Category info

    readFile = new StreamReader(new IsolatedStorageFile
Stream("ItemAndCategory.xml", FileMode.Open, myStore));
string fileText = readFile.ReadToEnd();
doc = System.Xml.Linq.XDocument.Parse(fileText);
readFile.Close();
..................
```

My goal is to show you how to create a very simple Windows Phone 8 app (the grocery shopping one is not simple) and a very simple Windows 8 tablet app. After that, I will simply demonstrate several of my phone apps and Windows tablet apps using the emulators provided by Visual Studio. It would be a bit difficult to give a good demonstration on an actual phone or tablet.

If there is any time left, we can talk about what sort of devices have just hit the market for Windows 8 and what is planned. The Windows Phone 8 is scheduled to be released very soon with all major carriers having a couple different types. As you should have seen, Microsoft for the first time has manufactured its own computing device called a Surface. It is a tablet running Window 8 RT that can also have an attached keyboard. A second Surface running Windows 8 Professional is due in several months. We can also discuss the differences between Windows 8 RT and Windows 8. Come out and learn something new. I will try to make it understandable. And if you have a Surface, please bring it. ◆

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of this, but the Windows Live Movie Maker will read multiple .VOB files. That also eliminated the menu and it allows you to clip any ends that need it. Then you can save it as .WMV video file.

I had another, similar project – I have a VCR tape of my youngest son in a TV commercial from when he was professionally modeling when he was seven. I was able to apply what I'd learned and record from tape to DVD, convert to .WMV and then I converted that to .MP4 so it could be published on our family Google+ site. What fun. Now he can impress girls in bars with it. 30 seconds of … Awwww. ◆

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