



# Bits of Blue

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



March in Tampa

Vol. 26 No. 3

March 2013

## Meeting

**John Witmer**

on

**Excel for Home &  
Personal Applications**

**Wednesday, March 13, 2013**

**6:30 PM**

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

**Meeting Preview:** Working with Excel for home and personal applications by John Witmer. Bob La Fave as usual will conduct the Windows SIG.

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## Editor's Comments

*By William LaMartin, Editor, Tampa PC Users Group*  
[william@lamartin.com](mailto:william@lamartin.com)

**F**irst off, we had a great December with our Amazon link at our home page. The referral fee for December was \$169. Keep up the good work and tell your friends about using the link.

Merle Nicholson writes about what to look for in buying a new notebook computer in this month's newsletter. I would like to have such a thing with a touchscreen monitor, but there have been too many such nice things to have lately, including a new desktop Windows 8 computer built by Merle, a subscription to Office 365 and a new Windows Phone 8, so that device will have to wait.

Regarding Office 365, which I wrote about in the previous newsletter, the change from using Office 2007 has been real easy. The menus are slightly different, but mostly everything is the same. One big improvement for me was how Outlook now much more easily syncs its contacts and calendar with the

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**April Meeting: To be announced**

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**Friend of the User Group***We acknowledge  
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for their support***Affiliations**Florida Association of User Groups  
Association of Personal Computer User Groups**Minutes of the February Meeting***By Merle Nicholson, Secretary,  
Tampa PC Users Group  
[merle@merlenicholson.com](mailto:merle@merlenicholson.com)*

**T**he 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 during the SIG topics were: Backup methods, what computer stuff to keep in a safety deposit box, types of backup drives, cloud storage Acronis and Windows backup methods.

For the business meeting, President John Witmer announced a lot of surplus computer components, especially three printers – available for raffle after the presentation. He again went over the arrangements with Pepin to continue the meeting room and a brief review of those meetings that will be held without his presence.

The monthly presentation was conducted by our own Bob LaFave, Windows SIG moderator, the subject being “Clean up your computer.” He started out with the physical cleaning and brought in a dirty computer that needed cleaning – it was full of dirt and dust - and the reasons that it must be done to ensure correct cooling of the components. We had some up-close views, and also some pictures of the dirt accumulation that can occur. He showed us computer cases, fans and vents, power supplies and CPU coolers. Methods include vacuum cleaners, brushes and compressed air cans. He cautioned us against turning a compressed air can upside down, and showed the propellant going out the nozzle. One member suggested taking the computer outside and using a leaf blower to move the dust out.

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## New Notebook Computers

By Merle Nicholson, Secretary,  
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I always have a notebook computer that I use in my business, mostly at home. I'd guess that I replace them every two years. I was originally buying 15" screen devices and more powerful processors that smoked through the battery; units with DVD players; perhaps eight pounds and had chargers plugged into them always. I guess I've evolved some in my thinking.

There are some transitions going on in the notebook arena right now, and some are pretty complicated. So the subjects I want to address are: Windows 8, DVD, SSD, Screen size and resolution, Ultrabooks, Batteries and Upgrade/Repairability.

With my current one and the previous one, I opted more for lightweight, less processing power, longer lasting battery and smaller (14") screen size. It seems to fit my needs better. It's perhaps because I'm using them more as a communications device and I rarely need a powerful processor. I've come to value the portability of lightweight and the ability to go longer without a power cord. The designs have been changing; the choices are better than ever

**Windows 8** Most new notebooks have Windows 8. That's not necessarily a bad thing as long as you have a notebook with a touch screen. DO NOT buy a Windows 8 machine without a touchscreen. Many are out there without touchscreens, and, believe me, you will not like it. For experts or those willing to pay an expert, there are changes and software additions you can make to bring back the Windows 7 style menus to Windows 8, and this is pretty foolproof and well tested. I use them myself on a desktop machine, and it appears that all problems are solvable. This means abandoning the Windows 8 tiled Start screen, and that's appropriate for a computer without a touchscreen.

One additional warning. Office 2003 cannot run on

Windows 8 (according to Microsoft), so it's time for an Office upgrade if you're depending on Office 2003. I recommend LibreOffice as an excellent quality replacement. It's free. Unless you need Access, Publisher or Outlook, you don't need the expense of MS Office.

You can have someone install Windows 7 on a Windows 8 computer (at extra cost of course), provided the drivers are available. The troublesome drivers for Windows 7 are for touchscreens, touchpads, cameras, fingerprint readers, proximity sensors, LAN and WAN card drivers. This takes a lot of research and is not for the faint-of-heart. There are still Windows 7 computers out there for now if that's what you want, and the pricing is very good. I got a Windows 7 \$1,400 HP Ultrabook for \$1,000 with free shipping.

**DVD players** You can probably do without one. You'll have noticed that starting with netbooks a couple of years back more notebooks are available without DVD players. DVD players seem to be common in 15" and up sizes, optional in 14" sizes and nonexistent in anything below 14". DVD players just aren't installed in anything considered thin or light. On my last 14" you could unseat the DVD player, leave it at home and use a plastic snap-in cover over the slot in the side. In the last year or so that I had that laptop, the more I used the laptop, the more I realized I didn't need a DVD. Several reasons; the largest one being flashdrives. A DVD is good for 4.8GB, and a 32GB flashdrive is about 11 bucks and it's rewritable. My latest laptop is an ultrabook, and it's too thin for a DVD drive.

Almost all software installations are downloads now. Downloads come in executables (.exe and .ISO files). Both formats are easily moved over your home network, downloaded directly or put on a flashdrive. I use .ISO files a lot. So when I get the occasional DVD or CD – the only one comes to mind is Delorme Street Atlas, which I buy yearly – I simply mount it in my desktop computer and create an .ISO using ImgBurn. An .ISO file is simply an image of a CD, DVD or BD disk. (BD is Blu-ray Drive) I use a free product called DAEMON Tools Lite that mounts a BD-ROM player on boot that is used to mount an .ISO file in memory.

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*Notebooks.....Continued from page 3*

It's very fast and reliable.

I do have a portable USB DVD player, a gift which I have never used – still in the box. And obviously I never play a movie DVD on my notebook. I do stream from Netflix and Amazon Prime Movies.

For very large notebooks – 16" and 17" – you'll have a DVD or BD player; why not? You've already given up portability and lightweight anyway.

**Screen size and resolution** This is a complicated subject, but an important one. If you see a very, very good price on a 13" to 15" notebook, always check out the screen resolution. I'll bet it's 1366x768. That's because it's the cheapest display made. To me, it is terrible unless it's an inexpensive 11" to 13" machine. You can say: Well, it's a crappy display but I only paid \$400 for it. Obviously it's a compromise. But don't buy an \$800 notebook thinking you have a quality machine if it's only 1366x768. It's not.

With screen resolution, you're mostly concerned with the vertical resolution as in Something x 768, or something x 1080. That's because screens are designed with the Width to Height ratio in mind. The ratio is typically 16x9 – a "Widescreen." So if the vertical resolution is 1080, the width will be at least 1920. That's the resolution standard of TV now: 1920x1080. Sometimes you will find 1920x1200 or even 2650x1600.

Except for the inexpensive compromises, the goal should be a vertical of 1080 for displays 15" and up. 13" and 14" the goal should be 900, unless you're buying an Apple MacBook with Retina display costing \$1500 and up.

**SSDs and other Hard Drives** The price of SSDs are dropping like a rock. This fact, and the realization that you may not need all the hard drive space you thought you did, make SSD's the best choice for notebooks. An SSD makes all the difference in the world in creat-

ing a fast notebook. You can even compromise in processor speed and graphics GPU as long as you have a fast SSD and plenty of installed memory.

You will see now that many SSDs are not a conventional-looking 2.5" SATA drive at all. Instead the SSD is on an mSATA card. My own has one mSATA card and a socket for a second. Below is an image of an mSATA on top of a 2.5" SATA.



As for size, it made sense to have a 500GB hard drive when it was about \$15 more than a 250GB drive. But the operating system needs only 50GB to 65GB. Especially if this is not your primary computer, a 128 GB hard drive may be more than enough. It is for me, but I do not keep many years' worth of pictures, and no video at all. Besides, your pictures probably do not take as much space as you think. A friend's collection of five years' worth of photos for her family was but 16GB, and it was a LOT of pictures. You can make up the difference in external drives or a card slot that the new computer will have anyway.

Remember that all flashdrives and SD cards have minimum speed ratings, commonly 6MB/Sec to 10MB/Sec, and the price goes up slightly – but not much – the faster the speed. Buy as fast a card as you can.

On Intel notebooks, look for Intel SRT (Smart Re-

*Notebooks.....Continued on page 5*

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## Internet Picture of the Month



### Ghost Cities

As you have mostly likely read or viewed, China is full of ghost towns built in the past for years because of the rampant real estate speculation there. Most of the new cities consist of high-rise apartment buildings, but the one pictured above is a meant to resemble an English Village. The photo came from <http://www.businessinsider.com/china-ghost-city-english-town-2011-6#>.

*Notebooks.....Continued from page 4*

sponse Technology). This is a hybrid system utilizing a 20GB to 32GB SSD and a separate conventional hard drive working together. It results in nearly-SSD speed, but with the large lower-priced, conventional 5400RPM mechanical drive. As I understand it, you must use the system a bit before the extra speed is apparent.

Looking at new notebooks at NewEgg, I found hybrid systems priced from \$500 and up. They weren't that easy to spot because there wasn't any emphasis or special mention. I found typically "500GB HDD + 32GB SSD."

*Notebooks.....Continued on page 6*

### March's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)  
 ifixit The free repair manual  
 60 Minutes - CBS News  
 The Florida Wildlife Corridor  
 Online Newspapers

<http://www.tpcug.org/>  
<http://www.ifixit.com/>  
<http://www.cbsnews.com/60-minutes/>  
<http://www.floridawildlifecorridor.org/>  
<http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/>

*Notebooks.....Continued from page 5*

Be careful if the SSD is 128GB in concert with a hard drive; it probably isn't a hybrid. Instead you should expect to see the entire OS on the 128GB, and the conventional drive a data drive, just as you would see on a desktop machine. That's better than a hybrid anyway.

I've had quite a few notebooks go through my hands recently for repairs, and it's always puzzling at first when I start it up. I say "Why is this thing so slow? There's nothing much going on and no viruses. Oh, it's got a 4500RPM conventional hard drive. What a piece of crap." It's fixable! Look at installed memory, and for Windows 7, 64 bit, it should have 4GB and a reasonably good SSD, and we'll have a new machine!

If all you can afford is an inexpensive machine with a conventional drive, at least look for the hard drive speed. They come in 4500, 5400 and 7200 RPM. Higher is better. 4500 is unacceptably slow. A hybrid system is better, and a SSD is best by far.

Finally, the manufacturers are doing some creative hard drive partitioning, especially on Windows 8. But my Windows 7 machine had two partitions for recovery and emergency install that totaled 16GB, and that's out of about 120GB available. I created the recovery disks using the supplied HP program. It allowed me to make DVDs or boot flash drive, and since it doesn't have a DVD drive the choice was easy. Then I used some Windows utilities to deallocate those two partitions and then extend the C: drive into that space. The result is the full 120G useable.

**Ultrabooks** First an explanation about the term. The term "Ultrabook" is a word copyrighted by Intel. They have a certain set of rules that, if adopted into the design of the notebook, grants the manufacturer rights to call it an Ultrabook. And obviously the numero uno is that it have an Intel processor. So just because it has an AMD processor and is called a "Speediebook" or something like that, does not mean that it's no good. As a matter of fact, AMD has some excellent APU's – that's the GPU, a graphics processor built into the CPU – that are very much more powerful than Intel's built-in GPU. The Intel graphics are numbered 2000, 3000 and 4000, and are notoriously slow – especially

for games. If you're just processing words, who cares?

An Ultrabook has some characteristics though; slim, light, no DVD, reasonably long battery time. So how do they accomplish this? They sometimes do it by making the battery non-replaceable! Not exactly, you can have it replaced, but if it involves taking the whole thing apart, you may not want to do that yourself, and believe me, if the battery has soldered leads and a glued-in soft pack battery, this is not a DIY project.

Many, including my own, require a complete disassembly to add more memory. In my case I can access the hard drive and easily replace the battery, but only after completely removing the back cover. Some cannot have the memory even replaced at all because they're soldered in. An Ultrabook is a compromise, like anything else.

So how do we make sure we're getting the best system? One way is to discover how well designed it is for repairs. The website <http://www.iFixIt.com> tears notebooks – actually all kinds of devices – apart and makes a video of it and gives it a repairability index number. Many, many other people put tear down videos on YouTube. Just search for your model number. Do this BEFORE you buy. This is primarily the reason I bought mine, because of the reduced price and because it had a good repairability index.

**Batteries**, as you may be aware, last for just a couple of years, depending on how they are used. Battery life is rated basically on how many times it's recharged. If it's already charged and you're connected to it with the charge cube, it doesn't count. If it's 50% down when you start charging, that counts as 1/2, not 1.

The newest processors are so much better than previous years as far as battery usage is concerned. They've gone to smaller and smaller die size – Intel Ivy Bridge is now at 22 nm, with every generation getting better. You can research all this ahead of time on the Internet given the manufacturer's model number. Look at the number of hours of operation that they claim. You should expect much better than four hours, but typically five or six.

*Notebooks.....Continued on page 7*

*Notebooks.....Continued from page 6*

Look into the cost of battery replacement. Replacement batteries are very typically \$150, but sometimes much more. Think about that. When it's two years old and costs \$200 to replace the battery it'll be worthless as a used computer if the battery is gone completely. Perhaps it doesn't matter to you, or perhaps it can continue as a useful computer plugged in for a couple more years. The cost of battery replacement should be included as the basic cost of owning the notebook in the first place, and to not know the battery cost is the same as not knowing the cost of the notebook.

**Upgrade/Repairability** I've pretty much covered this where batteries are concerned. Batteries are the #1 repair concern. When buying new, be sure to research all the reviews out there on that model number. It may surprise you with some things you have not considered. Like a really huge clunky charging cube, or screen hinges that are too stiff, or funky keyboard layouts.

**The last thing to consider is installed memory.** For Windows 7 and 8 with x64 Operating System, 4GB is the minimum. But subtracted from that is memory that video needs, and it could be substantial. My Intel 4000 graphics can use up to 1.6GB of my 4G memory. Mine is upgradable to 8G, but many are not. You can offset this by buying a notebook with "Dedicated Graphics." This is a graphics module that is installed in addition to the built-in graphics on the CPU. Intel machines have switches so that you can switch from one to the other, with the CPU unit using less battery. So it's a battery vs graphics performance trade-off.

**Finally** – I can't emphasize this enough, don't buy one without doing your research. Read the reviews first, and then see if there's a repair video. If it's too new to have these things, then it's too new to buy that model. Look for another. ◆

*Comments.....Continued from page 1*

contacts and calendar at Windows Live, or as they now call it, Live.com. All you need do is add your Outlook.com (Live.com) email address as an email account in Outlook.

I have had one problem, though. Twice on trying to open an Office program, possibly Outlook or Word, I don't recall which, the program would appear to begin opening but never finish. To fix this, I simply went into Programs and Features in Control Panel and did a repair of Office 365 (right-click on the program and choose Change). The first time it happened, I did the online repair, which takes longer but is guaranteed to fix any problem. The second time I chose the Quick Repair, and that also fixed the problem.

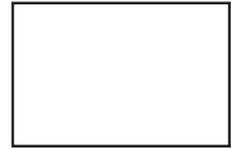
I mentioned earlier that I now have a new Windows Phone 8. That replaces a Windows phone 7, I have had for about a year-and-a-half. My contract with Verizon was a two year one and not due to be over until either May or June, but I noticed in January that they were allowing me to purchase a new phone at the usual reduced price so I began thinking about what to get. However, there really wasn't too much of a choice, since Verizon only offered two Windows Phone 8s. I chose the HTC 8x. It had a larger screen with more pixels and a better processor than my previous phone, and it was thinner – and it cost \$100. However, at Amazon Wireless, I could get the same phone in their Verizon substore for \$50. So I made the purchase there, where they have access to whatever setup you have at Verizon so that I maintained the same plan I had before with one exception: I no longer had unlimited data. But that is the case now at Verizon whenever you purchase a new phone and had nothing to do with me purchasing through Amazon- you can no longer have an unlimited plan and must choose from various metered plans. I chose the 2 GB plan and don't really expect to use more than that based on my past usage.

Now here is the really good part. Since I had clicked on the Amazon link at our website, the purchase of that phone was credited to us, and we received the entire \$50 as a referral fee, not just 5%. I don't know how Amazon makes money on this deal. ◆

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**First Class Mail**

*Member: Your membership is up for renewal*

*Minutes.....Continued from page 2*

Bob then transitioned to software, TMP and TEMP directories and use of CCleaner to remove unwanted software debris.

Our thanks go to Bob, a long term member who can always be counted on for a lively and informative presentation.

At 9:00 PM the raffle was postponed due to the lateness. ♦

