Bits of Blue

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

April in Tampa

Meeting

Merle Nicholson

on

Time and position, GPS and When We Are

Wednesday, April 10, 2013

6:30 PM

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

Meeting Preview: Since cars are now computers, Merle Nicholson is going to tell us about his new iCar. Bob La Fave as usual will conduct the Windows SIG.

Editor's Comments

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

Thanks to Merle for his iCar article. It made me pause and think of all the things around my house that are run by computers. There is certainly the central intrusion and fire alarm system. It is obvious that it is a really a special purpose computer when you open its metal box and see a motherboard with chips just like a desktop computer. I suppose even my coffee maker is sort of a computer since you can program it to grind coffee beans and brew coffee at a certain time in the future. Unfortunately it has no feature that will automatically dispose of the used coffee grounds.

Then there is the more obvious example of my HTC 8x Windows Phone 8. As does Merle's Android phone, my phone connects to my car via Bluetooth, where I can communicate with it manually or with voice commands and view its address book on the car's display screen. I don't know if it can play its music through the car's audio system since my phone doesn't have any music files installed. It is odd that as a teenager I

May Meeting: To be announced

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Minutes of the March 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 discussed antivirus options on Windows 8. Windows 8 comes with a new version of Windows Defender – formerly called Windows Security Essentials.

President John Witmer introduced the raffling of hardware we missed last month. He noted the passing of former member Richard Brooks, and we welcomed new member Frank Weitzman. The raffle then was held with Eddie Rodriguez drawing an ink jet printer, Nancy Norton a security camera package, Jeannie Gillespie a printer and iPad cover, Gary Ennis a Bocce Ball set, and additional articles to Merrill Friend and Doug Mullis.

This month the presentation was given by our president, John Witmer, who showed his interest and skills with Microsoft Excel. Starting with a blank spreadsheet, he presented call basics, cell format and custom format, cell math and conditional formatting all using several examples.

John then demonstrated the kinds of activities useful for private use: Check register, filter by category, checking recap and forecasting. John demonstrated an Excel sheet for personal finances including credit card accounts, amortization schedules and net worth. All of these are available as Office templates.

We were shown working copies of spreadsheets for TPCUG; a password keeper file; a graphics demo showing drawing elements and pictures: crop, rotate,

iCar Tech

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

William LaMartin, our newsletter editor, suggested I buy an iThing this month so I'd have something to write about, and I guess I already did without thinking about it. I bought a new Honda Accord, and it certainly qualifies as an iThing as much as a new phone or tablet qualifies. So this month it's about my iCar.

The technology advances that are being made and the progression of that technology downward in price make it available to everyone. Much of the really useful computer technology has been moved to affordable cars. The Honda Accord I bought is just one step above the base model. For those who are not car-aware, the Accord has been a top selling mid-sized sedan in the US for many, many years. Most years it has ranked no lower than third. And Consumers Union has always recommended it. In short, it's a mainstream sedan. Mine is an EX, one up from the bottom of their offerings. No Navigation option, no Leather.

This thing runs on computers. The car won't start, and certainly won't run anywhere, without them. The fuel, air and ignition to the engine are all completely automated by computer. The gas pedal is an input device to a computer. The doors unlock and lock, the daytime lights and headlights come on and off, all by computers. It has an 8-inch LCD screen in the center of the dash, just larger than my Android tablet. The car has two cameras. It has a Near Field Device (a radio), which I keep in my pocket. To open the door, I simply touch the door handle. (You cannot lock yourself out of the car.) To start the car, I push the start button. There is no physical key needed to unlock a door or to start the car.

The LCD screen is used for a variety of functions, all of it real-time. Current music information (track and title, album, sound volume etc.), time of day, current instantaneous miles per gallon, overall mpg since last fill up, last four trips mpg, miles to empty, trip odometer and, of course, the two camera displays, and much more. You pick the music source, AM, FM, CD, Bluetooth and USB. There are a variety of display configurations and options to set for each display. These are pretty much selected by one turn knob with a push select in the center. Many of these functions are duplicated as dedicated buttons on the dash, but, as far as I can see, not used very much after you've settled on your main display. You can even upload a JPG to be used as a desktop background.

Smartphones communicate with the car using Bluetooth in very important ways, and it's this telephone capability that is the focus of this article: CELLPHONE, MUSIC and MAPPING

CELLPHONE
The cellphone connection is truly a marvel. There are controls on the steering wheel to initiate calls, receive and hang up. The microphone is built into the car (somewhere), and the sound comes from the car's speakers. It's always clear sounding, and the person you're talking to will not be aware you're in a car as long as the windows are up. Any good cellphone will have active background noise cancelation, and the interior of this car has noise cancellation, too. When you first "pair" the telephone to the car, it will download the entire phone's contact list to the car. There is a manual process to pick the number for dialing on the screen from the contact list if the car is not moving. It can be done by voice command any time.

Most of this takes some practice to get proficient. If you expect to put the practicing off until you need it, you'll be disappointed. But there's a pretty good built-in solution for that too. It has a shortcut list of twenty telephone numbers that you attach voice commands to, and connect those to the contact list. I have a contact called "Home". But it turns out that a single word like "Home" isn't distinctive enough to voice-recognize reliably, so the voice command I use is "My House." That voice command calls the "Home" contact in the list. You can set up smartphone connections for more than one person.

While driving you press the call button on the steering

wheel, the Car Phone Lady says "Say a command," you say "My House." She says "Calling. Press hang up to cancel." You get a recording of the voice command as you made it and hear the dial tone. We're good.

Now you don't want to get me started on using a phone in the car. If I ever die from apoplexy it'll be from seeing a person holding a long conversation on his hand-held with small children in the van. My goal is to keep conversations to less than 15 seconds. I'm convinced that hands-free devices in the car are a tremendous step up in convenience and safety, but having a telephone conversation is a serious distraction.

Still, for convenience and safety, it can't be equaled. I once called 911 to get an ambulance for a motorcycle driver who went down in the street, and it makes you think back to pre-cellphone days and the thousands of lives it has saved by now.

For those interested, there are good add-on hands-free devices that you can carry in the car and clip on the visor. I had a couple of those for many years. Look for "Motorola hands free" in an Amazon search. The current ones look a lot better than the early ones I used. They have much the same capability as my car, with buttons to pick up, hang up and initiate voice commands. They are only $60. There are also a couple of "Speaker Phones" that will pair to your phone and act as just speaker and microphone. When I was using these I wasn't enthusiastic about them, but the button arrangement was complicated and the battery life short. I think the new ones look pretty good.

MUSIC
The next Bluetooth feature I like in the car is playing music from my phone. It's always playing my album collection when I'm in the car. It comes on when it connects – gets within Bluetooth range – and starts playing from where I left off. There are extensive controls for radio, CD, flashdrive and iPod playing options that I'm not very familiar with, since I never listen to a radio or CD in the car. There are controls on the steering wheel for sound volume, track and album forward and back, pause/play; all the controls you

need to manage music, and it's all controlled through the Bluetooth connection to the smartphone. You have the same capability using a flashdrive – the car has a USB connection. Unless I have the smartphone mounted on the dash for navigation, it can stay in my pocket for both music and cellphone calling. There's just no need to ever look at the smartphone. All the music information is displayed on the screen. Current track and album name – all that music stuff.

GPS MAPPING
We've used GPS mapping software in the car for many years. I'd guess 2001 is our first long trip with a computer and an attached GPS. The notebook navigation is perfect for long distance planning and turn-by-turn assistance, but requires an operator (In My Opinion); Google Navigation does not. When I got our first Android phone and started using Google Navigation, it gave us local, full time navigation in the car unassisted by a passenger. We have car mounts for our phones (both cars) so they're in sight and always on charge.

Google Navigation gives you turn-by-turn navigation and presents itself on the screen as a (optionally) satellite view. It looks like you're viewing your progress and having a long view ahead from a camera a hundred feet above the car. It's all from composite recording from satellites. The advantage of this is so you can look ahead and anticipate turns ahead and see what it looks like before you get there. Google Street View is there, too and it pops up unexpectedly. I can navigate to Pepin for a meeting, and when I get there, it presents me with a camera street view of the Pepin main gate. You just need an active Smartphone connection with data capability. Also, you can use Google Maps that shows you a continuous street map and positions your car in the center of the screen. There's just no reason to not know where you are. Best thing - it's free. And it comes on Android Smartphones.

OTHER TECHNOLOGY TO LOOK FOR IN A NEW CAR
Some of these items are available as standard or optional on a variety of cars. It's difficult to predict, however. For instance there is no rear camera on a VW Jetta. Even on models that would greatly benefit. It's

Internet Picture of the Month

Nesting Sandhill Crane

From the photo stream at Flickr of Carlton Ward Jr. in his Florida Wildlife Corridor set. http://www.flickr.com/photos/carltonward/. For more information on the Florida Wildlife Corridor, go to http://www.floridawildlifecorridor.org/.

just not available. But its sister company, Audi, heaps technology in their cars. It's pretty much expected in high-end cars, but you'll be surprised to see what is available in lower-priced cars.

Lane departure warnings: This is implemented in

several ways depending on the maker, from just a light that comes on in the corner of the outside mirror and audible warning, to a vibrating warning in the steering wheel, and in high-end cars, some form of active steering.

April's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)	http://www.tpcug.org/
Florida Wildlife Corridor	http://www.floridawildlifecorridor.org/
Birds-of-Paradise Project - YouTube	https://www.youtube.com/embed/REP4S0uqEOc
IRS Tax forms	http://apps.irs.gov/app/picklist/list/formsInstructions.html

Forward collision warnings: Sometimes this is just a warning sound or voice warning, to (Volvo) actively braking for you.

Cameras: Rear cameras are available both as standard and as options in most cars now. Some will have multiple views that can be switched and most, if not all, have distance markers overlaid. There are cameras that look at the lanes on either side, emulating outside mirrors.

For more expensive makes, the list goes on and on, like driver dozing detection, heads-up displays on the windshield and night vision augmentation.

Satellite Radio, gas station, ATM and business searches and communications to subscription roadside assistance are common. ◆

thought I would like to be a musician and as a young adult I listened to much jazz and classical music. Now in my old age I hardly ever turn to music on the radio and have no collection of music on either my phone or computer. One's interests change. As to talking on the phone while driving, I think using a hands-free setup as Merle and I have is just about as dangerous as holding the phone in your hand while driving because the problem is not where your hand is but where your mind is.

Finally, as to computers in the house, there is my Nikon D800 camera. Now that is a computer. If you want some optics, then you have to buy a lens. I have had three Nikon digital cameras, a D100 and a D200 being the previous ones. This new camera stands apart in its use of computerization. There are just so many features. The printed manual that comes with it is approximately 5 in x 7 in x 1 in. I should probably read it. One jpeg image producerd by this camera ranges between 12 and 15 MB; a raw image is 35 MB. I think my first IBM compatible had only a 120 MB hard drive, and before that my Apple IIe didn't even have a hard drive, so you could not store very many

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All this you have shared with us and you don't even charge us. You have given us your time, patience and kindness as you set the meeting room up for us, bring beverages and Cookies in and set up the screen and plugs, and probably other activities that we aren't even aware of.

Every year you and your wife go to a lot of trouble creating a warm and welcoming Christmas Party for us. Whenever the time comes that we must go, you and Pepin will be missed ever so much. I and I'm sure many others feel the same way about you, John and Pepin Distributing. You are truly a Class Act.

— Debbie Whittaker

TPCUG FINANCIAL REPORT FOR 2012

TPCUG STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENSES AND BANK BALANCE

2012 INCOME

Memberships (29 Single + 3 Family)	870.00
DVD Sales-Newsletter Collection & Raffle	48.00
Amazon Commission Received	389.67
TOTAL INCOME	**1,307.67**

2012 EXPENSES

Newsletter Postage	197.00
Newsletter Printing – 2 Months	61.53
FACUG Dues	25.00
APCUG Dues	50.00
Florida Incorporation Fee	61.25
Web Site Hosting Fee (12 Months)	181.08
P O Box Rental	74.00
Dec Holiday Party Costs	234.11
Refreshments (Cookies)	41.92
Website Domain Name Registration – 3Yrs	110.97
PayPal Fees (4 payments @ $0.85 ea)	3.40
TOTAL EXPENSES	**1,040.26**

NET INCOME FOR 2012   **267.41**

CASH BALANCE PER BOOKS – BEGINNING OF 2012	6,973.61
CASH BALANCE PER BOOKS – END OF 2012	7,241.02

RECONCILLIATION OF BANK STATEMENT TO BOOK BALANCE:

Balance per BANK STMT at 12-31-2012	7,241.02
Outstanding Checks or Deposits	0.00
Balance per Books at 12-31-2012	7,241.02

Tampa PC Users Group, Inc.
P. O. Box 3492
Tampa, FL 33601-3492

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

insert text and crop to a shape, finally concluding with a collage of pictures and methods of printing. Altogether an interesting view of what Excel is capable of, and some interesting and useful techniques. ◆

Comments..........Continued from page 6

photos from this camera on that. Luckily my present computer has a 2 TB hard drive. The D800 has two memory card slots, a SD card slot that will take up to a 64 GB card and a Compact Flash Card slot that will take up to a 128 GB Card. I have 32 GB cards in them now. I use the SD for storing still images and the Compact Flash for movies. Yes, this camera also takes movies (1080p Full HD movie mode at 24/25/30 fps, 720p at 24/25/30/50/60 fps). My point is that we have gone from a personal computer in 1983 that had only 64 KB of memory (could be increased to 128, which I did) with no hard drive to a camera in 2013 that takes images 35 MB in size (which can actually be 74 MB if you use the RAW uncompressed 14 -bit mode). Wow! It would take a lot of Apple IIes to hold that one image. ◆

Map to TPCUG Meeting Site, Pepin Distributing Co., 4121 N 50th Street. Streets shown: to I-275, Hillsborough Ave, 56th Street, Harney Road, I-4, Martin Luther King Blvd, 50th Street, to Tampa, Columbus Ave. N