Bits of Blue

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

GASPARILLA ARTS MONTH

   March in Tampa

Meeting

Apple's FaceTime
by
Michelle Burgess

Wednesday, March 8
6:30 PM

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Meeting Preview: Michelle Burgess will demonstrate FaceTime, the proprietary videotelephony product developed by Apple.

Editor's Comments

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

Thanks to Merle Nicholson and my purchase of a little camera, there is something to fill the newsletter this month. But I can't purchase a new item each month to have something about which to write. So, some of you need to step forward with your computing experiences.

You might ask, what has a camera to do with computing. Well, a modern digital camera, just like your modern car has a lot of computing going on inside. You cannot begin to imagine all the things that happen when you press the button to take a photo. Then, when you download the digital images to your computer, you typically use a program such as Adobe Lightroom or Sony's Play Memories Home to both download the images and to also organize them. Next, your modern darkroom is software such as Adobe Photoshop or the simpler Adobe Photoshop Elements. Finally, in my case, I use Adobe Premier Elements to either edit and combine the movies from my movie cameras or to turn my still images into videos for easier viewing. It is so nice to not have to purchase film and mess with photographic chemicals. Don't forget to view the newsletter online to better see the photos. ◆

April Meeting: To be announced

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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 February Meeting

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

The Windows Special Interest Group (SIG) opens our monthly meeting. Merle Nicholson, the SIG moderator 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, there were questions about Outlook.com, losing contacts in Windows Mail, Facebook security and a discussion about the current on-line live session on the APCUG website.

Our own longtime member Brian Lance gave an interesting talk and demonstration on video conferencing using Google Hangouts with some discussions on Verizon services, set top boxes and DVR. Brian used a prepared slide show and demonstrated a Brian-to-Brian conference from the outside hall. It was an informative and interesting demonstration after which we discussed if there was a better way to do Android connections to the big presentation screen. ◆

Me vs. The Computer

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

My first personal computer encounter was in 1976, five years before the release of the IBM PC model 5150 in 1981. It too was an IBM, but the model was 5100. Mine (I'm calling it mine) was bought by my company for the engineering department, and the director of my department at the time really did not know exactly what it was to be used for. He just hoped that it would be useful – and eventually it was. How he was able to sell his own management on a $20,000 machine he really couldn't

Amazon Echo

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

My birthday was in February, and my son thought I needed a new toy. He gave me an Amazon Echo. The Echo is a voice-enabled device that connects to the Alexa voice service via a wireless connection. Merle Nicholson tells me he has had an Echo since 2015, but I don't recall an article.

The voice service Alexa is similar to Microsoft Cortana and Apple Siri. It is a personal digital assistant. The Echo simply sits on your desk, or wherever you wish to place it, and responds to your commands. You bring it to life by saying "Alexa." When it hears that word, a thin blue ring with greenish trim lights around its top, as pictured on the right, and it awaits your request.

Once you bring Echo to life, you may ask it the local weather, or you may ask for the weather in any other city. It does a good job at that. But when I ask about nearby Chinese restaurants or about nearby Italian restaurants, the results are not so good. It provided non-Chinese and non-Italian restaurants and some of the addresses were many miles away.

It does better with playing music. It knows who Chopin is; also knows Rachmaninoff. So it is up on the Classics. It even suggested another classical music station after hearing my two previous classical requests. However, asking it to play some Dixieland music produced the response. "I can't find Dixieland songs." But it knows Louis Armstrong and Scot Joplin. Merle Nicholson tells me that Alexa knows performers better than composers or musical genres.

It will also read you a book – if it is in your Amazon library. I asked it to read to me from the *Sound and Fury* by William Faulkner. The response was, "I can't find the *Sound and Fury* in your library." However, when I ask it to read from a book that I have in my Kindle library, it gets right to the task, beginning at the start of the book. I am not sure at this point if you can make it move to a different place in the book.

If you ask for the latest news, you get the news from National Public Radio from tunein. Alexa also knows that Bob Buckhorn is the mayor of Tampa, and it knows what the current time is. I had no luck in asking it for recipes

for various dishes. But it knows how many kilometers are in a mile. It doesn't understand the question: "What Florida county is Tampa in?". Perhaps I needed to rephrase it.

It supposedly can access your calendar and contacts, but not my Microsoft Outlook calendar and contact info. I believe it has to be Google's gMail and Calendar.

There is an Alexa app for both Android and iOS. If you go to that app and set up your commute, then Alexa can tell you about traffic conditions for that commute. A handy feature for me is setting up alarms and timers.

If you have the appropriate interfaces for your lights, appliances, etc. in your house, you may use Alexa to control them via voice commands.

In theory, the Echo could record everything you say, but Amazon says it only pays attention to what is prefaced with Alexa. ◆

Sony RX100 V

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

Obviously the Sony Cyber-shot RX100 Mark V is not a computer in the normal sense of the work, but it is really a computer, as are all modern digital cameras. If you know me you might ask, "Why do you want such a 'toy' camera when you have a very serious Nikon D800 Digital Single Lens camera?" The Nikon does indeed take very good photos (when I don't muck things up). But it is large, heavy and intrusive. I wanted something that I could slip in my coat pocket, or even in a shirt pocket.

Of course, everyone now uses their phone as their camera of choice. And a modern smart phone takes quite good images, my Microsoft Lumia 950 XL included. I imagine that most of the photos you see on the Internet are now taken with either iPhones or top-end Android phones. But that is not good enough for me. One thing phones fail at is low-light photography, and this camera does quite well at that. You can take the ISO up to 12,800. However, I recall reading that the quality of the image is degraded (noise) a good bit after you go over 6,400, I would never use such a high ISO except in essentially nighttime conditions.

The camera takes 20 mega pixel images and has a one-inch sensor (13.2 x 8.8 mm). The images are 5472 x 3648 pixels. Your most recent iPhone is, I believe, 8 mega pixels with a 1/3 inch sensor (4.8 x 3.6 mm). Quite a difference. Just for comparison, my Nikon D800 has a full frame sensor at 36 x 24 mm and creates 30 mega pixel images of 7360 x 4192 pixels. The Sony also has a 35 mm equivalent 24mm to 70mm optical zoom of 2.9 times. Not a big zoom but OK (I have read that the larger sensor makes it more difficult to have a large zoom).

Oh, I almost forgot my main reason for purchasing. The dimensions are 102 x 58 x 41 mm (4.02 x 2.28 x 1.61 inches). That is width, height and depth. The second image on the right displays its width and depth with the lens retracted. It will fit easily in your shirt pocket. The weight is 10.99 oz. For its safety, I use it

with the included wrist strap.

In the top photo above, you see the camera with the lens in shooting mode and the built-in flash and the built-in electronic viewfinder extended. There is an LCD screen on the back that can be put in various positions, but when you have bright sun, the viewfinder is a real plus.

Ever tried to catch an action photo at just the right moment? I have when trying to catch the small cannons being fired and thus emitting smoke. The only sure way to do it is with having your camera fire multiple shots. I believe the Nikon D800 will do 10. The Sony

Internet Picture of the Month

The Jose Gasparilla

From TBO.com at http://www.tbo.com/events-tampa-bay/gasparilla-parade-an-expensive-affair-but-not-for-taxpayers-20160128/. Described as a Tribune File Photo with the description "The Jose Gasparilla approaches the Tampa Convention Center during The Gasparilla Invasion". It happens every year on the last Saturday in January.

RX100 V will do 24/second until its buffer is full, which will last several several seconds.

There is a good and detailed written review of the camera at

https://www.dpreview.com/reviews/sony-cybershot-dsc-rx100-v-review

For a video review of the camera on YouTube, that has many details, go to
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcNa_eFTzkk

For a video review without all the small details, go to

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPKF_DAdsgU

I am finding it a great camera. There is so much photographic power packed into the very small package, not much larger than a pack of cigarettes (recall those things?) when the lens is retracted.

The Rx100 V, where the V stands for the fifth iteration of this camera, can also take videos and stitch together short panoramas. On page 7, the large photo of bread and wine was taken using available light in a restaurant, a task that was previously assigned to my phone. The camera works extremely well in low-light

situations where a flash might be considered intrusive. And, I actually prefer the no-flash available light photos to those taken with a flash most of the time.

The photo at the bottom of this page is a stitch done by the camera as I panned it around my living room; it is 8192 x 1856 pixels in dimension.

On page 7, the flower photo was taken in bright sunlight from just a few inches. The camera will focus down to around two inches. The image below that

is another of my restaurant photos taken in available light.

I have yet to mention videos, and the RX100 V does a very nice job on those also. In fact, I have a hard time differentiating videos made with it and those made with my much larger Sony HDR-CX900 HandyCam video camera. I recently took still images with my Nikon D800 DSLR and video images with the Sony HandyCam and the new Sony RX100 V. Go to my website, http://www.lamartin.com, select the Video menu item and then scroll down to the Gasparilla in

Hyde Park subheading. There you will see four Gasparilla 2007 videos, two each for the races on day one and day two. For each day there are two videos: One video is made of still images taken with the Nikon; the other video is actually made from movies taken both with the Sony HDR-CX900 HandyCam and the new Sony RX100 V. First off, all the slow motion segments interspersed through the movie video were made with the RX100 using the High Frame Rate movie setting. But I challenge you to identify which camera was used to take the other normal speed video segments.

My only complaint about the camera is that it has a very extensive and complicated menu system you need to master if you want to use any but the most basic settings. Oh, the price? You won't like it: $1,000. And you really need to purchase an extra battery since it literally eats batteries. But, it fits in a shirt pocket and gives far superior photos to any phone. ◆

justify is beyond me. That's $86,000 in 2017 dollars for a computer that couldn't do one hundreth of the calculations of a new smart watch today.

If you want to know more, Wikipedia has good articles on both the 5100 and of course the 5150 with pictures. It makes good reading.

Below is what it looked like. On the left is a 5-inch screen and on the right is a precision tape drive. It was called a "Portable Computer" even though it weighed 50 pounds, and you could even buy a fabric case for it.

We also had a robust dot matrix printer, and eventually we bought a second external tape drive and a small B&W monitor to ease the eyestrain from that 5-inch monitor. Other than that, it had no connection to the outside world. If you had external data you typed it in.

This was a 64K machine, and it was very much more powerful than the typical IBM PC of five years later. It had ROM with the language interpreters on it – mine had two languages, BASIC and APL.
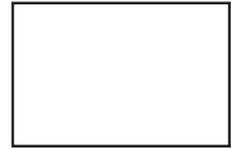
Employees of the department were invited to look at it, time permitting, and to try it out and then go through very long and tedious programmed instruction tapes that taught the programming languages step by step. I started them as did others. Most of the interest was in APL programming, and I believe that the

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P. O. Box 3492
Tampa, FL 33601-3492

☐ *Member: Your membership is up for renewal*

Computer..........Continued from page 7

instructions were very thorough. Some people made it all the way through the tapes, some even quickly, but most were ultimately unable to convert that to a real program that did something useful and gave up. I was slow at it and sometimes frustrated, and I thought I had failed, which at the time put me in a sweat. I was 35 at that time and I couldn't admit to anyone that I couldn't do it. Finally, well before I could finish the tapes, something just clicked in my brain – I got it – and from that point on I just looked up things I needed in the excellent programming manual. And, from that point on for another six or seven years, that computer was mine.

As an aside, the APL language is still very much in use. I have a 2017 version of it, completely modern-ized and it's available on virtually any computing device including Raspberry PI. ◆

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