

Newsletter

Connecticut PC User's Group

March 2007
Vol. 25 No. 7

Preview of the Next CTPC Meeting Tuesday, March 27, 2007 - 6:30 p.m

Make XP More Functional

We took a poll at the February CTPC meeting and found that exactly 0 members in attendance had made the switch to Microsoft Vista. But we are not alone! It has been reported that US Government agencies such as the DOT and the FAA, and companies such as Intel, are waiting at least until Service Pack 1 is released before deploying Vista throughout their organizations.

While Vista looks quite different and seem a bit daunting when trying to find familiar features since they have rearranged the furniture, from a strict functionality standpoint it has little new to offer. That, of course, will change as new applications appear that are written specifically for Vista and will no longer run on XP. Then we'll have a real incentive to switch.

But in the meantime, those of us itching for some kind of upgrade can satisfy that urge with some interesting free utilities that can actually make XP more functional.

That will be the topic of the March CTPC meeting. Please feel free to share with us any ways you have found to enhance pre-Vista computing.

As always, there will be "Random Access," a Q&A session where we try to solve perplexing computer problems and "Picks and Pans," a chance to sound off about recent things you've found to love or hate about computing, and the ever-popular Pizza SIG at Uncle Joe's Restaurant following the meeting. ♠

CTPC SCHEDULE

Mar. 8th - Wall St. SIG - Luca's in Greenwich, 6:00 p.m.

Mar. 27th - Tuesday 6:30 p.m.
CTPC Meeting
Norwalk Transit Bus Depot

A SIG is a Special Interest Group. There is no charge to attend general meetings or SIG's.

GENERAL MEETINGS

4th (not last) Tuesday of the month

WALL STREET SIG MEETINGS

Odd months on the 2nd Thursday

The CTPC Web Site

www.CTPC.org

Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, Texas; Radio and TV Show Host

New Security Products Shown at APCUG Annual Conference

WEBSITES:

<http://www.apcug.net>
<http://www.pandasoftware.com>
<http://www.grisoft.com>
<http://www.trendmicro.com>

I recently had the opportunity to attend the annual meeting and convention of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG) in Las Vegas. Even though I have attended APCUG annual events since 1991, it always amazes me how quickly technology changes, and how those changes are rapidly introduced to us consumers. Every year participants are astounded by what we see, but every year has also demonstrated technologies dwarfing those shown the previous year. The APCUG events were all on topics related to personal computers, including security, applications, operating systems, hardware, CPU, and other technological services and components. Three of the presenters were companies in the computer security software sector.

Grisoft (www.grisoft.com) is a computer security software publisher headquartered in the Czech Republic, and best known in the U.S. for its very popular free version of AVG antivirus software. I was

very surprised to learn that the more sophisticated and comprehensive commercial versions of AVG are among the most widely used computer security utilities in Europe. AVG has a professional staff of engineers in Europe, but also has sales, and more importantly technical support services, located in the U.S. I have to admit that until I saw the AVG-Grisoft presentation, I was unaware of the degree of sophistication and quality features built in and backing up the AVG products. My opinion of AVG was positively changed, as I had always thought of it as an excellent free antivirus product; now I know it as a technological leader providing enhanced features and functionality in its products. While I will still recommend the free version of AVG antivirus software to those who may not be able to afford commercial software, I would also hope that those who use AVG free version and are satisfied with it would eventually upgrade to the more comprehensive and feature rich commercial products. AVG offers a comprehensive selection of security software ranging from antivirus software to complete security suites. AVG has been certified as among the most effective

antivirus products by several independent testing and rating services.

Panda Software (www.pandasoftware.com) is a publisher of computer security software headquartered in Spain, but with a strong American presence. I first became acquainted with Panda several years ago when I purchased a copy of Panda Antivirus at one of the big-box office supply stores. I had read some amazing reviews of it in a computer magazine, so I decided to try it on my Windows 98 computer to replace an expired competing big-named American product. My "98" computer continued to have Panda protect it for the remainder of its lifetime, and Panda never failed me. At APCUG Panda amazed me with its degree of technical sophistication in dealing with the changing threats facing the computing public. According to Panda, over 90,000 new malware threats appeared in 2006, with some individual months in 2006 having as many new threats as in all of 2005. Panda explained how the threat scenario for computer users changed from the old-fashioned viruses intended to damage computer files with random acts of vandal-

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Traveling with Computers

My husband and I have taken several cruises and both of us do some other traveling for business and pleasure that keeps us in a hotel for several days at a time. Being addicted to using our computers, it's impossible to travel without our notebook computers. We both take our own notebook computers. As a result we need to do a little additional planning to take what we need to connect and use both computers.

First item is a small power strip. We found some lightweight ones with a short power cord and four outlets that are easy to fit into a computer bag. Because we also take digital cameras, it helps to be able to plug in several devices at once, computers and chargers. While most hotels have multiple outlets, cruise ships typically have one outlet so the strip is doubly important.

Did I mention that we use bags on wheels that can be carried on an airplane? The basics need to fit into that bag. Usually there is enough space for some personal items (e.g., toothbrush, underwear, medications).

We take lots of spare batteries—neither one of us can stand to use the touch pads on our notebooks so we use cordless mice. The cameras also use batteries. Plan to bring the used batteries back with you as most places don't provide for disposal of spent batteries.

When we are going to be staying in a hotel, we take a small wireless access point—it's designed for travel and comes with a carrying case that includes the Ethernet cable that is needed. The one we have is made by Linksys and is slightly larger than a deck of cards. For some hotels, this will allow us to simultaneously use an Internet connection. This will usually work where hotels provide free Internet access—it doesn't help when there is a charge because they track the user's IP address for billing purposes.

Expect to pay about \$10.00 a day for Internet access at those hotels that charge—they may have wireless access, but be sure to pack an Ethernet cable in your computer bag in case they don't. There are still some hotels that only offer a modem connection, but in general most hotels now offer some type of Internet access.

On board ship, connections are provided via satellite and the cost is fairly high. On our most recent cruise, the basic charge was 75 cents per minute on a pay as

you go basis. You could also purchase longer time periods for a lower rate per minute, e.g., 100 minutes for \$55.00. Connections suffer from some lack of reliability due to weather and satellite positions. The ship offered wireless access in a few locations for people with their own computers. The charges applied whether you used the ship's computers or your own. We opted not to use the on board access because the cost did not seem reasonable. On other trips, we used on-shore Internet cafes to review email, in Mexico, Costa Rica and the Caribbean. This trip (Hawaii) we did not find any that were near the port.

One of the conveniences of having Internet access on board was the ability to check-in online for our flights while we were still at sea. Southwest Airlines, in



particular, allows you to check in 24 hours before your flight time. If you check in online within the first couple of hours, you will usually be assigned to the A group—first in line to board. The ship offered a short (30 minutes) package for \$12.95. I was able to check in four people at Southwest and had a few minutes to spare—nobody said it was fast!

Online check in requires you to print your boarding passes. At many hotels, you can get the concierge to print your boarding pass—you give them the confirmation number and they will do it for you. On the ship, we could have paid for the Internet access and to have the passes printed, but

instead we took a printer with us so we were able to print our own. I saved the passes as PDF files and then took them back to our stateroom for printing.

In prior years, we took a small photo printer with us, but found that to be too limiting. We bought an HP 460, an inkjet printer, which prints photos and 8 ½ x 11 pages as well. It was designed to be mobile, so is fairly compact and lightweight. It can be tucked into a suitcase among your clothes. The printer has an AC adapter and a USB connection. We took a small supply of paper, both plain and photo paper tucked in the bottom of a suitcase.

Aside from printing boarding passes, we also used the printer to print photos to give to some of the friends we made during the cruise, passengers and staff. The pictures were much appreciated.

This leads to the main reason for taking the computers—we take a lot of pictures with two digital cameras. On cruises, in particular, we have to download the images in order to recover space on the memory cards. Even with multiple cards for the cameras, we would never have enough storage space without off-loading the images. We get pictures from our in-laws who travel with us and spend some time on the trip organizing the images before we get home. On the last cruise we had five days at sea before we got home, so there was plenty of time to work on them.

Another item that has been useful is a small external drive. We have a 40 gigabyte drive that is about 6 inches by 3 inches and ¾ inch thick. It connects via USB and does not require a power supply if you connect it to your computer directly. This allows us to back up the photos and to share them with each other or our traveling companions. You may also want to take a card reader if your notebook doesn't have a built-in card reader. A USB hub may also be useful.

We take a small scanner (about 1 inch thick) and a folding table. Because there is usually one desk in hotel rooms or in staterooms, the second notebook user has to resort to using the coffee table, a chair or the bed. It's really inconvenient and hard on the back, so we have a small plastic table that comes apart and is easy to reassemble. It folds to less than 2 inches thick

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Computing Tips

Tables In Word:

Tools such as Microsoft Word 2003 offer a variety of standard formats that can be applied to tables. Just click anywhere in your table and then click Table and Table AutoFormat. A formatting dialog box will appear, so you can select from a variety of established format styles. Examples are shown for each format, so you can experiment with different looks until you find the one that suits the situation best. When you decide on a format, click Apply to reformat your table. If you make a mistake or change your mind, click Undo and repeat this process to apply another table format.

Garbage In, Garbage Out:

It's great to take pictures at low resolution because you can cram more photos in your camera's memory. But with all things PC, the GIGO (garbage in, garbage out) rule applies. Low-resolution photos are ideal for posting to Web sites or emailing, but not for printing, unless you're willing to keep the size down to roughly passport-photo size or smaller. Let's say your printer works best at 200 pixels per inch. For a good 4- x 6-inch photo you need 800 x 1200 pixels; double that for an 8- x 10-inch. Low resolution for today's cameras usually means 640 x 480 pixels, not nearly enough for anything about a 3- x 5-inch picture. Shoot at higher resolutions for larger photos.

Slow Computer?:

If your computer is running slowly, you don't necessarily need to reinstall your operating system, make sure that you don't have unwanted programs hogging your memory. Do thorough spyware and antivirus scans, and then uninstall any unnecessary programs. Check your system tray. Are there a lot of programs running? Disable anything that you don't actually need, then see if your system performance improves. If all these fixes don't help, and it's been at least a year since you got your computer or you reinstalled the OS, then your PC might be a good candidate for re-installing the OS.

Recycle Bin:

It's easy to delete files by dragging them into the Recycle Bin. At least it's easy if you can see the Recycle Bin. But if the Recycle Bin is hidden beneath one or more

open windows, there's actually an easy way to deal with this situation. Drag the files you want to delete over a blank section of the Taskbar and wait for a moment. Windows automatically minimizes all of the open windows for you, which makes it easy to finish dragging the files to the suddenly visible Recycle Bin.

Replace Start Menu Items:

In Windows 2000, you can add the Control Panel to the Start menu. You can also add other options that Windows users often need, such as the Administrative Tools utility and the Favorites folder, and you can add cascading menus to the Printers, My Documents, and Control Panel items. Right-click the Taskbar and select Properties. Click the Advanced tab, make your changes, and click OK.

Create A Toolbar For My Computer:

If you frequently access your drives or DUN (dial-up networking) connections through the My Computer icon on your Desktop (Windows 98/Me/2000/XP), you can simplify things and create a My Computer toolbar. Click the My Computer icon and drag it to the top or either side of your Desktop. Release the mouse button, and Windows creates a toolbar that displays the contents of My Computer. You can drag the edges of the toolbar to resize it. You can also edit toolbar options by right-clicking the toolbar and selecting an option from the context menu that appears. This tip works for any folder on your Desktop, and you can combine toolbars by dragging one on top of another.

Set Up Outlook To Download IMAP & POP Mail:

Click Tools and Accounts. Once the dialog box has been displayed, go to the Mail tab and click Add Mail. Follow the prompts, adding the required information. When the Wizard asks you

for your email server name, you will need to know whether your email is POP3 or IMAP; select the appropriate option from the drop-down menu. The Incoming server is usually the name of your ISP preceded by POP3 or IMAP (for example, pop3.emailprovider.com or imap.emailprovider.com) and the outgoing (SMTP) server is normally the ISP name preceded by SMTP (smtp.emailprovider.com). Your ISP will provide you with your incoming and SMTP server information. Your account name is the part of your email address before the @ symbol. After you click finish, you can compose, send, and receive email from Microsoft Outlook.

Google Toolbar:

Google's toolbar has several useful options for digging deep into your information search. One of them is the Page Info button, which you can activate by checking the Page Info menu box in the toolbar's Options menu. You can then select to translate the page to English, view pages that link to the page, or find similar pages. The option to view a cached version of the page is useful for seeing how the site has changed since Google last crawled the page.

Alter The View:

If on-screen items are too large or too small, you can alter your display resolution. From the dialog box you just accessed for the previous tip, you also can adjust the Screen Resolution, Screen Area, or Desktop Area slider to change the resolution (higher numbers make things smaller and fit more on-screen). Depending on the option you select, Windows may reduce the number of available colors. (Don't forget to click OK to save your changes.)▲

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Things, Thinglets & Thingassos

Words Of Wisdom

If builders built houses the way programmers build computer programs, the first woodpecker to come along would destroy civilization!

Keeping Track Of Multiple Passwords

Passwords are a part of our everyday life: we use them for e-mail, online banking, stock trading, shopping, blogging, etc. For good security, you should have a different password for each website you enter. But how can you remember so many passwords?

A password manager is a great way to consolidate all your passwords without compromising security. Generally, a password manager is a program that stores all of your passwords for you. All of your passwords are kept secure with—you guessed it—a password.

The key advantage to using a password manager is that you only have to remember one password. That's not too bad. Then you can retain unique passwords for each of your various accounts without taxing your memory.

There are several pay programs that work this way. Before buying one, try KeePass (<http://keepass.sourceforge.net/>), a simple, free password manager. It can help you organize your passwords and also enter them into log-in forms.

How does KeePass work? After you download and install it, there are several easy steps to setting it up. The first time you open it, you have to create the file that will store your passwords. Click the "New" button at the top left of the window which will prompt you for a "Master Key." Make it one that you can easily remember, but which someone else can't easily guess (e.g., your birth date, your spouse/child's/pet's name), because it's the password you'll use from now on to unlock all your other passwords.

KeePass includes categories for online functions such as e-mail, home banking and others. To put a password into KeePass, select a category and then click the "Add Entry" button. You'll be able to enter a title for the password, which will help you easily identify where the password is used.

Let's take Hotmail as an example—an

effective title for a Hotmail password could be simply "Hotmail." You could also enter the web address where the password is required. KeePass automatically fills the password box with a random password. Chances are that it's stronger than the password you already use for Hotmail, but to make it work, you have to log into your account and change it to match KeePass.

If you want to keep things simple, erase the pre-filled box and put in the password that you already use and click "OK". Do the same steps for all of your everyday passwords and take a load off your memory. You can drag and drop passwords directly from KeePass. Click the password you need from KeePass and move it to the blank form on a Web page. The password will appear in the blank.

KeePass keeps your entire password file encrypted. The only way to open or read it is with your master password, so don't lose it!

In addition to Windows, "switch-hitters" can download versions of KeePass for Macintosh, PocketPC, Palm and Linux. You can also take KeePass with you on a thumb drive by copying two files onto your thumb drive. One is the KeePass program (KeePass.exe), and the other is the file containing your passwords (the default is called Database.kdb).

Backing Up Outlook Contacts

Outlook stores all data in a single file called a ".PST file". This file contains your contacts, e-mail, calendar items and tasks. It's easy to back up your entire Outlook .PST file—just locate it and copy it as you would any other file. Backing up individual folders within Outlook is also easy, so you can export your entire "Contacts" list. Simply highlight "Contacts" in your Outlook folders list. Then click "File," and "Import and Export" to open the "Import and Export Wizard." Select "Export to a file" and click "Next," to choose from a list of options (I recommend Microsoft Excel as the best one to choose in order to export all your contacts into a nicely ordered spreadsheet). After making your selection, click "Next." You'll be given the option again to select the folder you want to export. Highlight it, click "Next," and specify the name and location where you would like to save your file (use the "Browse" button if needed), click "Next" and then click "Finish."

You can use the same procedure with other items in the Outlook folder list. This is handy if you only want to export certain parts of your Outlook data file. You can use the files with other programs such as a "Database." You can also use it to share information with other people. Say you want to share your contacts with friends or co-workers: just export them, and others can import your list into their Outlook program.

To import a file, click "File," and "Import and Export." Select "Import from another program or file," click "Next," and select the type of file from which you're importing. In this case, select "Microsoft Excel" and click "Next." Click "Browse" to locate the file you wish to import, and then select your import options. You may want to allow duplicates, or you may wish to replace duplicates with imported items. You can also specify that duplicates not be imported. Click "Next," select the destination folder, click "Next" again, and finally, click "Finish."

Novice Corner

Starting Your Computer in "Safe Mode"

At some point in time you may need to start your computer in "safe mode." You should print these instructions before continuing as they will not be available after you shut your computer down in step two.

Click "Start," click "Shut Down," and then in the drop-down list click "Shut down." In the shut down window dialog box, click "Restart," and then click "OK." When you see the message "Please select the operating system to start" or "Windows" appears on the screen, press the "F8" key several times. Use your arrow keys to highlight the appropriate "safe mode" option, and then press "ENTER." If you have a dual-boot or multiple-boot system, choose the installation that you need to access using the arrow keys, and then press "ENTER."?

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Review of Spin It Again

Convert vinyl records and cassette tapes to MP3's and CD's

<http://www.Acoustica.com>

What is it? Spin It Again by Acoustica is a software program that will make it easy to convert your collection of cassettes, 33's, 45's and even 78's to MP3/WMA/WAV files or directly to CDs. Some folks have even used the program to rip 8-Tracks. Remember those?

Cost? \$34.95 retail, but \$27.96 for User Group members. This 20% discount is available online from the link above. You must use the code "CLUB2007." You will receive a registration code via email. But, you can try it free for three times. (3 albums).

Where do I get it and/or read more? <http://www.Acoustica.com> The program is an 8+ MB download.

System Requirements: If you have a Windows computer with a soundcard you're ready to use the software!

Recommended? YES!

How good is it? REALLY GOOD! First off, I was impressed by the voice instructions when the program starts. There is a Hookup Wizard with photos of how to connect to your amplifier, cassette player or turntable. Songs are automatically divided into files based on the lull between songs. A Level Wizard sets the volume level automatically based on playing a portion of your loudest song in an album.

You can save the files as MP3, OGG, WMA or WAV files. A variety of choices are available to clean up the recordings, e.g., Damaged Record, Damaged Tape, Tape clean with Equalizer, Tape Noise Begone, Warped record, even a No-preamp blues setting, etc. Someone referred to this as a Mikey cereal eater that eats Snap, Crackle and Pop. Accept the defaults and it's very easy work.

I recorded three record albums and two cassette tapes of music using a stereo amplifier, cassette player and turntable. The result was free of any clicks, pops and hiss of the original recordings, at least to my ears. The only "problem" I had was a song by Judy Collins that had long silent passages which fooled the software into thinking there were several songs. But, it

was easily fixed with the Merge options. (Be sure to read the tutorial.) I chose to save the songs in MP3 format and gave each a name in the chart before actually hitting the Save/Convert button. You can embed in the files the Artist, Title, Genre, Year and add comments. On the last test I chose to record an album directly to CD using the Spin It Again software. It worked like a charm with no need to make a later recording from the MP3's using Nero, Roxio, etc.

I had a priceless cassette tape of family nonsense that had been re-recorded from reel to reel tapes from long ago when my children were small. The volume varied greatly. I placed the cassette tape in a small inexpensive hand held player (Walkman type) and connected a cable between the speaker jack and the Line In jack in the back of my computer. This meant I could adjust the sound during the low and high volume sections of the tape by using the player's volume control. That worked satisfactorily since the tape was not perfect in the first place. The recording was even better than the original with little or no hiss and a more consistent volume level! There is an option for auto-leveling the volume for a given song to eliminate distortion on high peaks.

An MP3 file of La-Paloma had a loud click at the 51-second mark that could not be cleaned properly even with the special peak click filtering after manually isolating the click. I was finally able to eliminate the click but each side of the original click had a warble that was worse than the click. The Help file said if this happens, try to make a better recording somehow. Since it was only one click, I would guess there was a spot of something on the vinyl surface or a pin point gouge. You can't make a purse out of a sow's ear, huh?

One of the fun and useful features is the ability to adjust the speed of a recording. I recorded several old 78 RPM records using the 45 RPM speed of my turntable and increased the speed accordingly using the drop-down menu until it sounded normal. I'm trying to find my 78 RPM copy of Roy Acuff's "Sixteen Chickens in a Frying Pan." Everybody needs to hear that.

For the tinkering types out there, many tweaks are available including a change in sampling rates, sensitivity of track detection, recording levels, etc.

Highly recommended. *Rod Rakes*

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Adobe Photoshop Elements 5 - A Software Review

Adobe Photoshop Elements 5 is a photo editing and organizing program that also includes easy to use features to backup your photos, and really fun creative ways to show off your photos to family and friends.

Adobe Photoshop is the top of the line photo program for the professionals and costs hundreds of dollars. Elements (under \$100) has many of the same features as the professional version with a lot of fun and easy features added in, making it the software choice for the non-professional user like you and me.

The software installs the Adobe Photo Downloader in your system tray and is ready instantly whenever you plug in your camera or memory card. Your photos are downloaded into the Organizer where you have easy access to them for viewing, tagging, creating collections, printing, emailing, creating all the fun projects, or switching to the Edit mode for a Quick Fix or Full Edit. Your photos are identified by Elements in Catalogs. You can have multiple catalogs for different users of your computer in the family, or say for photos that you may use for work which you want to keep separate from home photos. You can even use the Organizer to select photos to order prints online or size and send through your email client. Your photos are managed by date with a timeline across the top of the screen that is very easy to navigate when you are looking for a photo at a specific time on the calendar. The Tags and Collections feature takes a few extra minutes when you first download the photos, but sure makes it easier to select certain photos when you are ready to create a project. Tags can be given for photos of specific family, friends or places and events. Collections work in a similar fashion but could include several different people, say in a vacation.

Since software packages come with little or no manuals, I find that one of my first places to explore is the Help feature. The Adobe Help Center, which is on the Help menu, includes a very extensive index of help on the program as well as hyperlinks to video tutorials on the Adobe web site. The Help Center includes a very good Search tool with easy navigation and even a Bookmark feature where you can bookmark a topic that you may want to return to again quickly. I was also offered free online tutorials from Adobe after I regis-

tered the software. Be sure to take advantage of this offer. There are eleven video tutorials that give a very good overview of everything from getting your photos into Elements to creating fun creative projects. Another quick way to get to help on any of the tools on the screen is to hover your mouse over the tool and a link appears that takes you directly to the Help Center on that tool. You will find that you don't miss the manual with this complete Adobe Help Center.

When the Elements program starts there is a Welcome Screen where you can choose to open the Organizer, Quickly Fix Photos, Edit and Enhance Photos, or Make Photo Creations. Once you decide which mode you want to begin with you can set the Welcome Screen to always open in that mode or stay with the Welcome Screen. Since you need to open a photo in order to edit it or select several photos for projects it made sense to me to always open in the Organizer mode.

With a right click of a photo in the Organizer you can select the Go to Quick Fix feature as a truly "quick fix". With this feature you are able to fix the most common problems with your photos without having to know any of the more advanced features. Now mind you the advanced features are in Elements, but you may find that you seldom need to go into that mode to get the results that you want. With Quick Fix mode you have auto buttons for lighting, color, sharpen and red eye. Then if the auto button doesn't quite get the photo like you want there are fine tuning levers to adjust to finish the job. If you just can't get the look you want you can click the Full Edit tab from this window and go into the more fully featured mode of Elements to complete the task.

Some of the new features for editing in Elements include correct lens distortion, sharpen blurred edges, fine-tuning with curves, creating dramatic black and whites and support for raw files. One of my very favorite features of Elements in the Full Edit mode is the Artwork and Effects Palette. From this palette you can pick from dozens of backgrounds, frames, graphics and shapes. Then select a style for that object from a dozen more selections and just drag and drop onto your photo. This palette includes different themes for effects, filters for effects and text styles, all applied with a double click. There is even a Favor-

ites area where you can drag an effect that you especially liked and want to get back to quickly. A couple other favorites of mine in the Full Edit mode are the Adjust Color for Skin Tone and the Spot Healing Brush. If you have a photo where the skin color just doesn't look right you can use the Adjust Color for Skin Tone feature to quickly change the skin tone by using the eyedropper over the skin. If you want the result a little more tan or blush there are easy adjustments in that same dialog box. The Spot Healing Brush works wonders for those marks and blemishes just by clicking over the area. There is also a new feature called Magic Extractor that provides an easy wizard to extract an object (or person) from your photo. Again there are fine tuning options in this wizard if the extraction is not quite what you want. I found that this features works very well. The red eye fix in Elements 5 is by far the best red eye fix that I have used in a photo editing program. There is even an option to have red eye corrected as your photos are being downloaded from the card reader.

Elements 5 has added a Back-Up and Restore feature that allows you to back up your photo catalogs to a server online (you have to sign up for this service). The online back up service through Adobe Photoshop Services gives you a 30 day free trial. There is also a Back-Up feature that will do Full and Incremental back ups of your catalogs to a CD or DVD, another drive, or another folder on the hard drive. This feature is Wizard driven and makes this very important task quick and easy, without leaving the Elements software. This feature is right there on the tool bar along with all the other online services.

Once you have your photos downloaded, edited and backed up it is time for the really fun part of Elements 5 – creating projects like photo book pages, photo layouts, album pages, greeting cards, CD and DVD jackets and labels, slide shows, VCD's with menus, photo galleries and flipbooks for the web, photo calendars, and PhotoStamps. Most of the print projects can be printed on your own printer or ordered through an online service that can be set up with a wizard right in Elements. I didn't register for the online service but was very tempted by some of the neat projects that can be created and then sent

Continued on Page 9

Thinking about Disaster

Here, we aren't discussing PC problems such as disk crashes, but real life disasters, such as those represented by the four horsemen of the apocalypse: pestilence, war, famine, and death. There's not much we can do about these, but careful preparations will lessen the consequences. While it's not pleasant to contemplate woes, and you certainly don't want to become obsessed, some constructive worrying today could save you or your family much trouble later.

PCs have become indispensable tools for many of us. The conscientious user backs up regularly, probably to an external drive sitting beside the PC. However, if you experience a fire, flood, or theft, both your PC and its backup data will probably disappear together. If a theft occurred, not only have you lost your data, but somebody else has it. You'll need to cancel your credit cards and close bank accounts immediately, but you no longer have the information you need to do this. Thus, there are two problems: replacing the lost data and stopping somebody else from misusing it.

The best solution to the first problem is to keep a backup of your critical data in a safe place, such as bank deposit box. Many banks offer free boxes to their customers, but you could also keep the information at work or with a friend. It will be most convenient to restore this critical data to your (presumably new) PC if the backup takes the form of diskettes or CD-ROMs. If your deposit box is too small or too full to hold a 5 ¼ inch disc, use a 3 1/8 inch CD-ROM (holding about 200 Mbytes) or a USB thumb drive. The saved data will include, for example, your passwords, contact names and addresses, financial data, and family photos.

For the second problem, keep a paper copy of your credit card and bank account numbers as well as contact information for your financial institutions. You will want this data immediately, and it will take a little time to find a PC and print out the contents of a disc.

You've now taken care of disasters that happen to your home, but what if something happens to you? What information will your family need if you are not available or incapacitated? Certainly, this includes the user names and passwords for your computer and PDA. They will need

the URLs, user names, and passwords of any sites you use for financial transactions, such as credit cards, banks, merchants that are authorized to charge your credit cards or make withdrawals from your bank account, employers, and retirement organizations. They will also need the passwords for any data you have encrypted, such as Quicken files or password storage programs. Finally, they will need your social security number, birth certificate, and life and health insurance policy information. You should have a paper copy of this information and tell your family where it is.

What do you do if a relative dies and you must obtain access to their PC and allow their family to carry on with their financial duties? If there is a BIOS password on a desktop PC, you must open the system unit. Most motherboards have a connector into which you can insert a jumper to restore the BIOS factory defaults and remove any passwords. Laptops have similar provisions, but you will have to contact the manufacturer to find what it is. Once the BIOS password is removed you can boot the machine, at which point you may find it has a Windows password. The safest procedure is to obtain a Linux "live CD-ROM", such as Knoppix. With this you can boot Linux directly from the CD-ROM, which will let you read and copy, but not necessarily write, Windows files. Once you have copied all the critical files from the PC, you can reset the Windows password using one of the password-cracking programs that are available on the Internet. IMPORTANT EXCEPTION – Windows 2000 and XP Pro allows files and folders to be encrypted. If this has been done, resetting the Windows password will render these permanently unreadable. Fortunately, few users use this feature. There are also PDA password cracking programs, but those I've found work only on the PC desktop program that backs up the PDA; I've not seen one for the PDA itself. If there are encrypted Quicken files, Intuit promises to remove the passwords for \$10 per file; see their Web site for more information. If you are more adventuresome, Quicken password-cracking programs available on the Internet.

If the relative uses on-line banking, contact the bank to obtain a new password and change the ownership of the account. Monitor the account carefully for auto-

matic transfers, both deposits and withdrawals. You probably want to stop these. Also contact all credit- and debit-card vendors to close the accounts, and notify employers and, if appropriate, Social Security of the change. Open and read carefully all letters; some bills and checks appear to be junk mail. Finally, be alert for scams; for instance, you might receive unordered merchandise or claims of debts.

Having to deal with these issues is especially difficult in times of stress, and preparing the information before they arise is a much better approach. ♠

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Traveling with Computers

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and fits in a medium size suitcase. You can work with a notebook and have room for a mouse. It weighs about two pounds so it's not a big burden to include it and it saves fighting over who gets the desk.

Before you leave, double check to make sure you have all the USB cables that you need, as well as the adapters for your devices. If you take a printer, be sure to include extra ink cartridges. Depending on where you travel, you may or may not be able to find what you need. ♠

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Pandora – a Free Music Resource

The Internet is filled with free resources, but some are better than others. Here is one of the best free music resources on the Web.

Pandora is one of my favorite music websites. Just surf over to www.pandora.com and type in a song or an artist that you like. Pandora analyses your choice and creates a music station with similar-sounding music. It will then play comparable songs that it thinks you will like. You can add more music and/or artists to the station to refine your choices. You can also tell Pandora whether or not you like the song that is playing. It uses your likes and dislikes to refine the songs it chooses. You can create up to 100 different stations with different types of music.

Pandora was created by the Music Genome Project, a group of musicians and music-loving technologists who have broken music into hundreds of music attributes or “genes” such as melody, harmony, rhythm, instrumentation, orchestration, arrangement, lyrics, and harmony. They then use high-tech methodology to analyze the musical qualities of each song and rendition.

The results are uncanny. I created several music stations with different genres that I like and in almost every case I was presented with similar music that I found very pleasing. You can experiment with different combinations. For instance, putting James Taylor and Willie Nelson together gave me an interesting, but likable mix of music.

Pandora is pretty smart. Typing in The Christmas Song and choosing Diana Krall as the artist gave me a whole station of mellow Christmas music which is just what I was looking for. Typing in The Nylons and Take 6 gave me a nice selection of acappella and harmonistic music.

Pandora also lets you bookmark songs or artists so you can remember what you liked. You can look up more information about artists and songs right on the site. Two clicks will lead you to iTunes or Amazon where you can purchase the music. You can also share your music by emailing your stations to friends.

Pandora is ad-supported so you will see ads for everything from gym shoes to cell service. I found the ads to be unobtrusive, but if you want to get rid of them, you can pay to eliminate them. For \$36, you get 12

months of unlimited use with services exactly the same as the free version, but without the ads.

Since the ads don't bother me, I'll continue to use the free version of Pandora. It's an entertaining website that provides much listening pleasure to keep me company when I am working on the computer.

If you are into music, you may also want to check out two other music resources. MusicIP Mixer and Goombah.

Like Pandora, both of these sites provide intriguing music adventures. ♣

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New Security Products— cont'd from Page 1

ism, to the new threats that are almost all commercially driven. Panda Software offers technology security solutions ranging from its free online “Active Scan”, to free-standing antivirus software, to comprehensive security suites complete with antivirus, firewall, anti-spyware, anti-spam, wi-fi protection, and other protective features. Panda has its own proprietary “TruPrevent Technologies” which is designed to protect computers from attack by new and unknown viruses even before the virus signatures can be updated. Most Panda Software packages can be installed on multiple computers under a single license, and should be considered as a very strong and capable competitor to other better known security products on the market.

Trend Micro (www.trendmicro.com) explained the degree and types of security threats facing computer users. Identity theft of various types was discussed as well as the means to detect, protect, and neutralize a wide variety of other computer threats. Threats can come via email, malicious code on websites, from file sharing services, and countless other places. In order to deal with and protect from a wide variety of threats, Trend Micro demonstrated its flagship product Trend Micro Internet Security 2007 with its integral TrendSecure online services. Previously known under the moniker PC-Cillin, Trend Micro Internet Security 2007 provides protection from viruses, spyware, spam, phishing, and other forms of attack. Features also include a “fraud defense” to explicitly help protect credit card and other sensitive personal information from being compromised while online. The 2007 version includes a single license that can be installed on three computers which make it both a qualitative and economical good

choice when compared to the other name brand security software titles widely available at retail.

I am a firm believer in good competition and the free enterprise system. As was clearly demonstrated at APCUG and CES, competition drives innovation which in turn provides valuable and tangible benefits to the consumer. We all need antivirus and other flavors of security software on our computers and any of the feisty competitors above can provide a quality product and service at very competitive prices. If more computer users could have seen what those of us at the APCUG event saw, the security “biggies” would have a lot to fear, because these aggressive “little guys” are providing excellence by innovation and superior service and support at a fair price. Those big guys on the block should be looking over their shoulders, as these little guys are growing stronger by capitalizing on the weaknesses of their larger competitors. Security software should not just be purchased based on the familiarity of the name or brand, but on the quality of the services and support offered. Any of the three products mentioned above would be a good choice for virtually all PC users. ♣

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off for printing and delivery. For instance the photo calendar can be created with 12 of your photos and then step through the wizard to choose the cover, page layout, and title, etc. Then through the wizard the calendars will be printed, bound and mailed – what a great idea for Christmas gifts!

I decided to create a slide show with photos taken at Disney World. After selecting the photos from the Organizer and then selecting Slideshow from the Create menu the wizard started with slide show preferences and then the main Slideshow Editor opens with very full featured options that are available in most of the stand alone slide show programs. This feature is like a program within a program – I am really impressed with the scope of the Slideshow Editor. There are transition options, panning and zooming, audio and narration, and adding blank sides and graphics and text.



Once you have the show the way you like it the Output feature opens another wizard for options to save the show as a file, burn to disc, e-mail the show or send to a TV. The wizard works great burning to a Video CD format. (The only option that I would like to see added would be to burn to DVD.) If you have several slide shows that you would like to burn to one CD you can select the Create a VCD with menu and the wizard will allow you to add multiple slideshows and then create a menu before burning.

The next project I tried was to create a Photo Gallery. With the same Disney photos selected the Photo Gallery opens a wizard with three types of galleries; Web Galleries, Animated or Interactive. With Web Galleries chosen the wizard asks for arrangement of the photos on the page and a style with both options showing thumbnails of how your choice will look. Next the wizard opens a dialog window with more options to customize, such as Gallery Title and Slideshow duration and effects. You then can select where to Share the gallery; either choose Do Not Share (which saves to your hard drive), Photoshop Showcase (more about this later), My FTP Site, or CD. I also tried the Animated and Interactive galleries with the same photos. The wizard makes creating these very complex shows a breeze. If you don't know how to publish to your web space a dialog box offers simple steps to help with that task, or you can register and sign on to the [free](#) Adobe Photoshop Elements Showcase feature. This is an online community for users of Elements to upload and share their photos and galleries.

Each project that you create and save is added to the Organizer at the top. If you want to edit a project you just double-click the project file and the wizard that was used to create it opens. All of the print projects like the Photo Book Pages, Photo Layouts and Album Pages, are saved (with multiple pages when applicable) with a .pse extension. The print projects are wizard driven and offer step by step selections for size, layout, theme and then additional options depending on the project chosen. I decided to make a print project of a CD cover and label for the Disney slide show that I created earlier. The wizard walked me through the entire process opening Elements in the Full Edit mode with my selected photo and all the

layers in the layer palette created – it truly seemed like magic. Since you are left in this mode you can then adjust or fine tune the project before saving and printing it.

One feature that I was not able to try but may be of interest to some reading this review is the ability to download and upload photos from a mobile phone.

I highly recommend Adobe Photoshop Elements 5. There is an upgrade rebate in the box of \$20, so if you are using an older version you can take advantage of that. The price today at Amazon.com is \$69.99 with free shipping and your \$20 rebate makes the total price \$49.99. There are other special offers at local stores and online. Visit Adobe's web page www.adobe.com for system requirements.

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Define multiple home pages in Firefox

All browsers let you define a home page that opens when you first start your browser. Did you know you can tell Firefox to open multiple home pages at the same time?

There are two ways to do this: You can either click on Tools, Options, Main and type in multiple URLs separated by the vertical pipe symbol (|) in the Home Page panel. Or you can open the appropriate number of tabs, point each one to the desired home page, and then click on Tools, Options, Main, Use Current Pages.

Once you've done this, Firefox will open the requisite number of tabs and load each of your home pages when you start it up or click on the Home button.

Fred Langa published this tip from one of his readers, Chris Rogers, in The LangaList - one of the best online newsletters about computing. Fred has since joined forces with Windows Secrets newsletter edited by Brian Livingston. Check it out at <https://windowssecrets.com/info/>. ♣

CTPC MEETINGS

The CTPC meets on the fourth Tuesday of the month (not the last) except for December when there is no meeting. E-mail Editor@CTPC.org for information.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Annual membership dues are \$25.00 (payable to CPC). Partial year memberships will be charged at the rate of \$2.00 per month. Send your check to CTPC, PO Box 291, New Canaan CT 06840.

Please also provide your e-mail address so that we can send you meeting announcements each month.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

1. All members will receive an e-mail notice during December requesting their dues payment.
2. Members whose checks have not been received by early February will be reminded once by mail.
3. Since we really would like to have you as a member, the Membership Chairman will try one last time with another e-mail in early March.

DISCLAIMER

The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the CTPC or its members.

Neither the CTPC, contributors nor the Editor of this newsletter assume any liability for damages arising out of the publication or non-publication of any advertisement, article or any other item in this newsletter. Articles are published at the discretion of the Editor.

NEWSLETTER INFORMATION

The CTPC newsletter is a monthly publication of the Connecticut Personal Computer User's Group (CTPC). Infor-

mation is drawn from both the membership of the CTPC and other user group newsletters. Its intent is to inform members of meetings and provide them with other information related to the use of their computers.

SUBMISSION OF ARTICLES

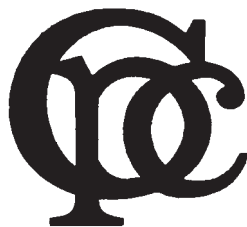
Articles for the CTPC newsletter may be submitted by e-mailing the editor at Editor@CTPC.org. Please include the article in the body of the e-mail and attach it as a simple ASCII, rtf or Word file (any version). The deadline for material is the second Tuesday of the month.

REPRINTING OF ARTICLES

Nonprofit organizations such as computer clubs are free to reprint articles without specific copyright notices from the CTPC Newsletter provided appropriate credit is given to the author and to the publication.

ADVERTISING RATES

Noncommercial member ads are free. Others will be printed at the discretion of the Editor. Display ads must be camera ready. 3 lines \$15.00; business card \$10.00; quarter page \$15.00; half page \$30.00; full page \$50.00.



Connecticut Personal Computer User's Group
P.O. Box 291
New Canaan, CT 06840

HERE'S WHERE THE MEETING WILL BE

Norwalk Transit District Offices 275 Wilson Avenue Norwalk, CT

From the North

Connecticut Turnpike to Exit 15 (Exit forks at the top, take right fork. Take the left fork at the bottom of the ramp). Left onto West Ave. at Fourth traffic light, about .5 mile, bear right onto Martin Luther King Drive for 1.8 miles to 7th traffic light. Left at light onto Wilson Avenue (Rte. 136) then .4 mile to facility on left.

From the South

Connecticut Turnpike to Exit 14 (Fairfield Avenue). Right at the end of the ramp onto Fairfield Avenue. Continue for .4 miles (second traffic light) to Martin Luther King Drive Right on Martin Luther King Drive. Continue on Martin Luther King Drive for 1.6 miles to 5th light. Left at light onto Wilson Avenue (Rte. 136) then .4 mile to facility on left.

FIRST CLASS

March 2007 ISSUE