



SoftTalk

The Official Newsletter of the Roanoke Valley Personal Computer Club

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Serving the Roanoke Valley

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Help your newsletter

You are invited to share favorite websites, reviews of software or just general computer experiences. Send your article or notes to editor@rvpcc.org.

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IT'S SPRING



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Next Meeting
Saturday, March 13, 2010
9:15 a.m.

Topic:
Wiis Aren't Just for Kids!

Come, try out Stan Rogowski's
Wii, and see how much fun you
can have with one

A Trip Down Memory Lane By Bill Scott

Go to this link for a trip down memory lane to show how far computers have come. Notice the prediction that soon computers will soon have floppy drives and modems built-in. http://www.techlearning.com/uploadedFiles/TechLearning/CCN_Vol1_No1.pdf

Ed note: Speaking of magazines, remember Byte and its cover images? See more vintage Byte covers at <http://www.digibarn.com/collections/mags/byte-covers/index.html>



PREZ' NOTES

March 2010

My email basket overflows with interesting weblinks. Below follow three of them, not all on topics related to the PC. Enjoy.

...Users claim MS Windows 7 Creates Laptop battery problems

http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9151098/Microsoft_probes_Windows_7_battery_problems

...world's scariest path to hike

<http://www.wimp.com/scariestpath/>

... 20 of the worlds most beautiful places

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wv7rgMtX9I0>

Meanwhile a PC topic that has grabbed my attention is the configuring of Firewalls to preclude outbound communications from originating at one's PC without the owner's explicit manual action. I use Sunbelt Software's Vipre Anti-virus and Firewall products. These can be purchased very inexpensively with a site license. This gives the opportunity to protect multiple computers for one price. Sunbelt publishes newsletters with security tips for both XP and Windows 7 users. Here are links at which you can subscribe to these newsletters.

Windows XP

<http://www.sunbeltsecuritynews.com/HEL28L/100224-WXPNews>

Windows 7 (and Vista)

<http://www.sunbeltsecuritynews.com/HEL28L/100224-Win7News>

In their latest Security Tips newsletter, Sunbelt offers a variety of tips to home users on security threats, search danger zones, and spyware risks. Recent updates by Mozilla have been made to reduce vulnerabilities that permit security bypass and remote execution of code in Firefox (v3.0.18; v3.5.8; v3.6) Thunderbird (v3.0.2) and SeaMonkey (v2.0.3) Adobe has patched its Reader and Acrobat to prevent unauthorized cross-domain requests, and to prevent an avenue leading to denial of service attacks. The new Adobe versions are both v9.3.1 Meanwhile, in the Search arena, the Sunbelt guidance suggests that searches for Olympics

(See Prez Notes page 3)



Secretary's Report

February 13, 2010

The meeting was called to order by the President, John Leary, at 9:16a.m.

Door prizes were won by Homer Duff, Bill Scott, Frank Drobot, Bob Johnson, and Helen Trenor.

Officer Reports:

Web Master: The club discussed changing the web hosting site to one that was more economical. Currently, Site Vision is the club's most expensive outlay

Roanoke County Schools: Homer stated that the school is looking for ways to cut expenses. Right now, we aren't in danger of losing our meeting room. The school would like to advertise the club as a part of the Adult Education Program. A motion to this effect was seconded and passed unanimously.

Membership: Frank Drobot has joined the club. Art Sellers, a visitor, was introduced. Club members introduced themselves.

Public Relations: Andy McLaughlin presented possible programs for the coming months, including the Wii, converting vinyl records into DVDs, and HDMI to CDs.

Treasurer: The club is solvent.

Secretary: The January minutes are in the February SoftTalk. Kay Viskup should be back in Roanoke by the March meeting.

VP: No report

President: John suggested that the club review its by-laws. John, Ron Gordon, and Andy McLaughlin will make up the committee to do it.

Program:

Sandy Johnson went over the changes in the Federal Tax laws for 2009.

Bill Farmer demonstrated a Brother PT 2430PC, a label maker that works from a PC. (See pictures on back page.)

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Sandy Johnson, Acting Secretary

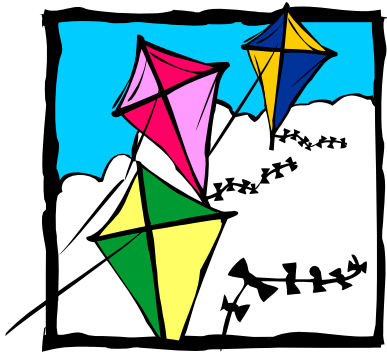
Football Games Seem Draggy?

An article in the Wall Street Journal says that the average 3-hour football game contains just 11 minutes of action. Action is defined as the time between the snap and the dead-ball whistle. The rest of the time is taken up by 67 minutes of players standing around, 60 minutes of commercials, 17 minutes of replays, and other by many other segments. Cheerleaders get only 3 seconds.

The statistics are interesting. Even more interesting is imagining some guy with a stopwatch attempting to time each play to come up with that 11 minutes.

The full article would be enjoyable for all football fans. To read it, go to <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704281204575002852055561406.html>. Or google "11 minutes of action" with the quotes.

What an amazing variety of information is at our fingertips on the 'Net!



Bag Balm Story

Many people swear by Bag Balm. They use it on squeaky bed springs, psoriasis, dry facial skin, cracked fingers, burns, zits, diaper rash, saddle sores, sunburn, pruned trees, rifles, shell casings, bed sores, and radiation burns. Everything, it seems, except on cows.

Enjoy the interesting Bag Balm story at <http://www.ajc.com/news/nation-world/sticky-smelly-bag-balm-287672.html> or google bag balm Atlanta journal. Googling just the words Bag Balm will find 583,000 hits – it must be popular stuff.

Tax Tips

By Sandy Johnson

I learned after the last meeting that if you are using purchased tax software and not itemizing deductions, you will probably have to partially fill out Schedule A (Itemized deductions) in order to get to the proper form, Schedule L. You can add \$500 to your standard deduction if you are single, or \$1000 if you are filing jointly.

Virginia tips:

If you itemized deductions and took charitable mileage, you can deduct an extra 4 cents per mile (code 111 on VA ADJ).

You can also deduct 20% of the sales tax on certain energy efficient equipment or appliances up to \$500 single filer or \$1000 joint (code 109 on VA ADJ).

Unemployment benefits that may have been taxed in the Federal Income tax are fully deductible in Virginia (code 37 on VA ADJ).

Virginia lottery prizes under \$600 are not taxed in Virginia. Enter the winnings as an adjustment to income on VA ADJ code 24.

(Prez Notes from page 2)

themes (the fatal luge crash, "world cup" and "tax filing") all can have undesired results regards spam, and mal-ware web sites. Spyware threats are listed by Sunbelt at the following link: <http://www.sunbeltsecuritynews.com/HEL28L/100224-SunbeltSecurityLabs>

The answer to my February question: "Why bother looking for "Ohio Distinctive Solutions" is that Ohio Distinctive Solutions offers regular discounts on CDROMs with a variety of content, from maps, to books and software, to tutorials and games. Most are in the ten dollar price range. In general, "Ohio-D" offers a lot of fun for a very small price.

John Leary

Protect and Test your Computer

Every computer exposed to the Internet needs antivirus, spyware, and firewall programs.

Locally, Cox broadband customers can download a free MacAfee Security Suite to get the needed protection. But non-Cox computer users will have to obtain their own protective software.

The programs can be purchased, but free is better. Read Kim Komando's article "Save Money With Free Security software" at <http://www.komando.com/tips/index.aspx?id=8167>. Komando recommends several programs that can be downloaded free. She includes a link to her Security Center where the links to the individual programs can be found.

Whether your protective programs are newly installed or already in place, update them now and then at least weekly. Set them for automatic updates if that choice is available.

Once your antivirus, spyware, and firewall programs are installed, updated, and running, you still can't relax. Programs like Flash and Java can create vulnerabilities. Even your Windows settings can create vulnerabilities.

In Kim Komando's article "Test Your Computer's Security," at <http://www.komando.com/tips/index.aspx?id=3984>, two programs are recommended.

First is the Secunia Personal Software Inspector that will keep most everything up to date. If it finds a problem, it will guide you in correcting it. It can be used with Windows 2000, XP, Vista and 7.

The second is the Microsoft Baseline Security Analyzer that will inspect your Microsoft programs for updates, password strength, settings, and other possible problems. There are several download choices. Select the version with EN for English, x86 for 32-bit operating systems; x64, 64 bit. This program also can be used with 2000 through 7.

When your protective programs are in place, your applications are up to date, and all your settings are secured, how safe are you?

Test your computer with "Shields Up", from Gibson Research, at <https://www.grc.com/x/ne.dll?bh0bkyd2>. This program will probe your computer for weaknesses and report any holes that it finds in your security.

You'll have that safe feeling when your computer is up to date, secure, and safe.

Meeting space provided by
Roanoke County Schools

Question for the Day

So why is a mouse called a mouse?
Shouldn't it be called a frog?
It sits on a pad, doesn't it?



RVPC Meetings

When: 2nd Saturday of
every month
Where: Arnold R. Burton
Tech Center
Room 105
1760 Roanoke Blvd.
Salem, VA 24153
What time: 9:15 am until
noon

Belarc Advisor

Belarc Advisor, available from www.belarc.com, is one of the most useful programs you can have. It is free for personal use.

To quote from the Belarc site: *“The Belarc Advisor builds a detailed profile of your installed software and hardware, missing Microsoft hotfixes, anti-virus status, CIS (Center for Internet Security) benchmarks, and displays the results in your Web browser. All of your PC profile information is kept private on your PC and is not sent to any web server.”*

The profile includes component names and model numbers. For licensed software, it shows those pesky key numbers that are so easy to lose. The profile goes into great detail, such as showing how much RAM is in which slot on your motherboard.

Belarc Advisor is 2.2 MB. It runs on Windows 95 through 7, 32 or 64 bit. For a browser, you can use Internet Explorer, Firefox, Opera, and many others.

So right now, while you aren't doing anything else, download Belarc Advisor, run it, and print out the results. This document will be valuable for troubleshooting or for re-creating your system if you have a disaster like a hard drive failure.

DVD Longevity

There has been some concern about the life of the DVDs that we use for backups. Some sources say DVDs can begin to degrade after just a few years. Cranberry (at www.cranberry.com) claims the life of a normal DVD is just 2 to 5 years. They have developed the DiamondDisc with a life of 1,000 years.

Unfortunately, the discs are \$34.95 each and you must send your data to Cranberry to have the discs burned. And you will just have to hope that there will be a DVD player around in a thousand years. The way technology is evolving, it might be hard to find a DVD player in 30 years!

Wipe that disk

If you want to donate an old computer, or just want to make sure that private data is gone from an exiting computer, there are programs available that will permanently remove files.

Simply deleting a program is not safe. The deleted information can be restored easily. A full format of the hard drive will make data difficult to recover, but it probably won't stop determined thieves. Formatting really isn't safe either.

You need a disc-wiping program that overwrites the data on the drive several times, making the data unrecoverable. The best software meets military specifications so you can rest assured that you will be safe.

Kim Komando recommends the free Heidi Eraser in her article “The easy way to wipe an old hard drive” at <http://www.komando.com/tips/index.aspx?id=8086>. SoftTalk won't repeat what she says, both to save space and to avoid a jillion-dollar copyright fine.

You can get Eraser from Kim's site at <http://www.komando.com/downloads/category.aspx?id=1585>. The article is “Erase Files For Good.”

Kim says, “Unfortunately, Eraser isn't intuitive. Some of its deeper features can be confusing.” Get a walk-through at <http://www.komando.com/tips/index.aspx?id=6473>. The article is “Step By Step, Erase Data For Good.”

RVPC
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Salem, Va. 24153
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Meeting space provided by
Roanoke County Schools

Pictures from February Meeting



Bob Johnson's door prize



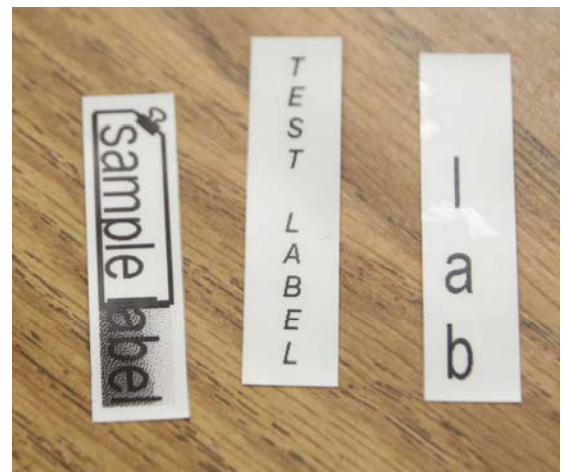
Door prize 'activated'



Art Sellers, the club visitor



PC Connectible Label Maker



Sample labels