



Sunflower Computer Club

Tales from the Mouse

November 2006

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Computer Room

- Room hours are 6:15 am - 9:45 pm. All Resort Club rooms are locked by 10:00 pm
- **The new door** only locks from the outside...so don't forget to lock up if you are the last one out of the room!

(Aug. 06) Windows

VISTA;

A PREVIEW

By Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D., Member of the Sarasota PCUG, Florida Bwsail (at)yahoo.com <http://www.spcug.org>

As you all probably know by now, Vista is the next version of Windows that Microsoft will be releasing. It was supposed to be available this November, but its release has been postponed to after January 1, 2007. However, that 2007 release date relates to the non-business versions of Vista. In other words, the versions that most of us will be using. The "enterprise" or business versions are expected to be shipped this November, unless something else slips.

As Dr. Goldstein pointed out in last month's "Bits & Bytes", there will be more than one "consumer" or Home edition. You should realize that the six versions of Vista that are expected are really only two more than are currently available in Windows XP. In XP you have the Home and Professional versions plus the Multimedia and Tablet PC versions. In Vista you will have Vista Starter, Vista Home Basic, Vista Home Premium and Vista Ultimate. (Please remember that these names may change by the time Vista is actually released.) The non-consumer versions will be Vista Business and Vista Enterprise. I will limit the scope of this article to the consumer versions of Vista.

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Windows Vista; A Preview *By Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.,*



Now for a disclaimer. Although I have a beta copy of Vista, I have not yet installed it on my computer. I do have a large enough partition I could install it and dual-boot my machine. However, current anti-virus, firewall and anti-Trojan software will not run on Vista. There are not yet any new versions of these security programs available for Vista. Consequently, I have no intention of installing this Vista software on my main working computer. I have just acquired a second-hand system that I intend to use with nothing but Vista and connect to the Internet only when absolutely necessary. So this article is being written based on the most reliable sources I have been able to find that have been testing the beta version of Vista. After I return from my two months road-trip, I'll start working with the Vista beta. For those not familiar with the term "beta", this refers to pre-production software or a testing version of software that is not yet ready for the market.

Now, back to the various versions of Vista. The Starter edition is a very low end version that will support only 32 bit software. Its exact limitations don't seem to be available yet. So, we'll just have to wait and see what Microsoft does with this version of Vista. It is fairly certain that it will not support the new graphics interface called "Aero". In fact, it doesn't appear that the Home Basic edition will support this new graphics interface either. However, Home Basic will require a minimum of 512MB of RAM. From most reports it appears to me that Vista running on less than 1 GB of RAM will be seriously slow. Just like computers that try to run XP on only 128 MB of RAM.

So what does Aero offer the average computer user? If you have a 3D graphics card with enough video RAM (128 MB or more), then Aero will provide an entirely different appearance on your screen. (Some commentators have compared the Aero graphics interface to that of the Apple Macintosh OS X!!) Graphics designers refer to some of the capabilities as transparency, blurring, window previewing, and graphical rollover indicators. The easiest way to describe some of the effects is to provide some examples. The minimize, maximize and close indicators that you find in the upper right corner of your current window will change color as you pass your mouse over them. And this color will spill out around the edges of the icon. This gives you an additional visual indicator when your mouse is in the right position. Another example is when you place your mouse on the shortcut on the taskbar you will see a thumbnail view of the program. So when you are multi-tasking you can easily see which application you want. Or, you can check on the progress of a video feed or other running processes. Some other advantages of Aero are the ability to see "around the edges" of windows to the windows behind.

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This involves the transparency and blurring referred to earlier. This is advantageous to those who do multi-tasking. This ability is also apparently built-in to the new tabbed interface being included in Internet Explorer 7. There is also a change to the Alt-Tab function which allowed users to tab through the list of running programs to find the one they wanted to shift to in earlier versions of Windows. In Vista this function, now called Flip, allows users to see a larger thumbnail view of open programs. There may also be a related 3D view which will show all the open windows twisted to a 45 degree angle. The user can then cycle through the windows by repeatedly pressing the Tab key.



The Aero graphics will be incorporated in the Home Premium and Ultimate versions. However, it requires a minimum of 128 MB of fast video RAM, DX9 3D support and a minimum of 1 GB of system RAM. Some comments have led me to believe that it will not work with motherboards that use shared RAM for the video function. It requires a separate graphics card. Also, I would never recommend trying to run a system with these minimums. They should both be doubled at the very least. If your PC doesn't have this capacity, then you will still be able to run Aero, but in a limited or basic mode. It will not display all the features found in the full Aero mode.

There have been a number of articles related to hardware requirements to run Vista. In my mind, I think it's a little early for these specs to be firm. One thing you can be sure of, Vista will require more RAM, a large hard drive and a fast central processor. Both Intel and AMD are touting their latest generation of processors as being necessary for running Vista. It does appear that current single core processors will be able to run Vista in 32 bit mode. I suspect that at some later date you will need to consider a dual-core 64 bit processors or a 32 bit processors that runs hyperthreading. Naturally, the 64 bit processor will have a definite advantage in running Vista.

The other question is, how well will Vista run current 32 bit software? Most of the new computers currently being manufactured have 64 bit processors. These are designed to work with both 32 bit and 64 bit operating systems. Vista will be a 64 bit OS. There are very few 64 bit software applications available and most of your current software is, or should be, 32 bit. It is expected that "well behaved" 32 bit software will run on Vista without problems. Only those applications that don't in-

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stall system level drivers or try to take control of the OS are considered well-behaved. You will have to replace your anti-virus and firewall software. That is a given. New Vista applications should be available when Vista comes on the market. The same is true of anti-trojan/anti-parasite software. Other software that might be a problem would include video games and multimedia applications. Those of you who have been running Windows for a few years and have upgraded from earlier versions are already familiar with one of the real road blocks to getting started with a new OS. That's right – device drivers! Every device driver for your hardware like printers, scanners, external USB drives, etc, will have to be re-written. Early adopters of Vista will have similar problems.



Windows XP runs 16 bit software in “Windows on Windows” (WOW) emulation mode. Vista will run 32 bit software in much the same way using an emulation layer to talk to the software. This converts the 32 bit program calls to 64 bit code. This process should be transparent to the user. Now, if you still have some 16 bit software or DOS software, it really is time to upgrade. These will not run on Vista without the use of third-party emulation software. There is no indication that Microsoft will support 16 bit or DOS applications.

Now the next topic is one that is really of primary interest with this Windows upgrade. It is also the one for which the least info is available. That is – Security! Windows XP and Internet Explorer have developed quite a reputation for being full of security holes. In spite of all the efforts to plug the gaps, new ones keep showing up. Microsoft has indicated that Vista will be far more secure than previous versions. The problem is that in trying to tighten the security net, Microsoft seems to be making things more difficult for the average user. With XP Home, the user generally operates in an administrator mode so that new applications can be installed and unused ones removed without having to set up additional permissions. With both XP Home and XP Professional, Microsoft has tried to get individual users to use a limited non-administrator mode on a regular basis. This has been singularly unsuccessful. The reason for running in the limited user mode is to prevent malware from accessing system applications in the Windows director and subdirectories and/or the registry. When the computer is set up so that accessing these functions requires a password, less damage can be done, by any outside influence, to the operating system or to the installed applications. However, because the limitations of the user mode are so great, most Windows

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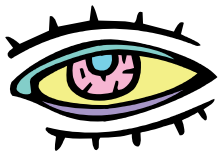


users end up running in the administrator mode to simplify making changes to their computer. Well, it appears that Microsoft is going to change that. Vista will enforce the limited user or user account control (UAC) to prevent the user from having constant access to administrative functions. Microsoft obviously doesn't believe that users can be allowed unlimited access to their own computers. Included in this there may be increased blocking of online software distribution. You may get more pop-up warnings when your installed software tries to access the Internet. Nearly all applications need to access the Internet at one time or another. This gives them the capability to download updates, patches, bug fixes and other security related information. Many applications also need to hook into the operating system in ways that are similar to those used by malware. If your operating system is constantly popping up warning windows and telling you that your computer is at risk, how would you react? Especially if responding to these warnings by clicking on "Cancel" closes the program and prevents you from using an application. You may try to go back and run all of your applications as an "Administrator" as you did in XP. However, Vista has various levels of "Administrator" and may still require you to enter a password for non-Microsoft applications. Now for the caveat: Vista is not yet in final beta form, therefore there can be many changes, especially in the security setup. It will depend in part, on the comments from the testing community. Hopefully not all of them will be system administrators for large corporations. What Microsoft has admitted in one of their own tech articles is that "Windows services represent a large percentage of the overall attack surface in Windows". That is a direct quotation. So if Windows is the problem why are they trying to solve it by limiting the ability of users to use their computers and their software?

Over the coming months I will continue to provide updates on my own experience with Vista as well as information I obtain from other beta testers. We'll see just how much benefit we'll really get from this Windows upgrade.

Dr. Lewis is a former university & medical school professor. He has been working with personal computers for more than thirty years. He can be reached via e-mail: [bwsail at yahoo.com](mailto:bwsail@yahoo.com).

(Oct. 06) Microsoft Vista Beta-First Look by *Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.*,
Member of the **Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc., Florida** <http://www.spcug.org> [bwsail\(at\)yahoo.com](mailto:bwsail(at)yahoo.com)



Many of the reviews that I have read on the early releases of Windows Vista have been done on "fast" hardware. Many times with 1- 2 GB of RAM. Knowing that many users of Windows XP will probably upgrade to Vista with their current hardware, I installed a Beta 2.0 copy of Windows Vista on an older machine. This computer has an Intel 1.3 GHz CPU and had 256 MB of RDRAM. I upgraded the RAM to 512 MB which is normal for many Windows XP users. The computer also has an ATA 40 GB hard drive and it did have a CD writer. However, when I went to install Vista, I found the installation disk was a DVD. So I had to upgrade to a DVD unit. I did manage to find a Sony DVD burner at a very reasonable price. So, a word of warning for those interested in upgrading to Vista when the final version is available, you may have to have a DVD drive to install it. This review is based on my hands-on experience with Vista.

I installed this Beta version to the hard drive as a new installation. It saved the previous version of Windows and user files in one folder. Since I had no applications or personal information on the drive I was able to delete this folder after the installation was complete. I did note that the installation took more than 90 minutes to complete. I'm sure that this was partly related to the speed of this computer as well as the size of the operating system. Since this is a pre-release version, it probably contains debugging code which contributes to its overall size.

Once Vista was installed, it brought up a Control Center Window. This had icons for several items, one being hardware that wasn't installed and other to add a printer. There were also a Vista tutorial and an icon for new items in Vista. The first thing I tried was to see what hardware wasn't installed. The first item on the list was the ethernet card, next the sound system, then a "Simple Controller" which I finally figured out was the modem and a SCSI controller. To simplify things I removed the modem and the SCSI card. Then I tried to install the ethernet card. At that point I started getting the User Account Control (UAC) windows which required that I approve every step that might change the make-up of the computer. Every time I tried to install a driver I had several UAC windows to get through before I could get to the installation process. And this, in spite of the fact that I was running as the System Administrator.

Any of you that have set up Window XP Professional should be familiar with the

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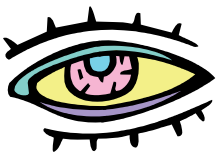
Administrator and User Account system. On my XP Pro system I have the Administrator account and a User account, both of which are password protected. I rarely use the Administrator account, instead I work in the User account. You might ask why I do this. The reason is that without the Administrator account running it is more difficult for trojans or parasites to make changes to any of the system files on my computer.

That is assuming that they can get past the firewall in the first place. I have seen too many XP Pro systems where the user is always running in the Administrator mode which has allowed invasions of the system by trojans/parasites. I have just cleaned out one system that was acting weirdly until I removed 295 parasites/trojans. Whenever I need to install software on my XP system, I simply use the "Run As" command and enter the Administrator password. That way I don't have to change from the User mode to the Administrator mode.

However, this has all changed in Vista with the User Account Control. Even if you are logged on as the System Administrator, it requests your permission for access to anything related to the system or devices. Just to review the list of hardware in the Device Manager requires that you get permission to do so by clicking in the Permissions request window. When you try to install new software or drivers you get a security window which requires your permission to let you continue. Then you get the UAC window which requires that you verify that you know you are installing new software and that you think it is reliable! You even get a UAC window when you try to download and install Windows Updates! I have learned that there is a good reason for this security. According to one report I have read it is possible for Trojans downloaded to your computer along with a web page, to inactivate your anti-virus, firewall and anti-parasite software. This can all be done in the background if you are running in the Administrator mode. Then changes can be made to your system software that can affect the operation of your computer. The UAC in Vista is designed to prevent this from happening. Once I set up my User account, then I had fewer UAC windows show up. They occurred only when I wanted to install new software or drivers. The only thing I had to do then was to provide the Administrator password.

Since I didn't have drivers for the ethernet card, I had to search for one on the Internet using my XP computer. After some research I was able to identify the

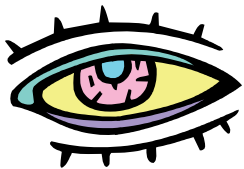
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make/model of the card. Then I found a driver on DriverGuide.com. I downloaded the zip file to my hard drive and burned it to a CD-RW. Then I transferred it to the hard drive on the Vista machine. Vista quickly extracted all the files for me. Then in the device driver, I clicked on "Update drivers" for the ethernet card and told it to search the drive for a driver. Low and behold, it did find and install the driver. Now, after some hard drive activity and approving the UAC to update the Network center, I was on the Internet.



The next thing I wanted was not my sound card driver. It was an anti-virus program. According to the Vista information site only TrendMicro has an A-V program approved for Vista. However, I had noticed on the Avast Web site that they had a Vista compatible version of their A-V software. So I went back to their web site and found that all versions of Avast are now Vista compatible. So I downloaded a free Home Edition and installed it. Again, I had the UAC windows to get through to get the installation under way. After it was installed, I went through the Avast registration and my A-V program was operational. So far, the Avast is running normally and is doing its usual updates in the background.

I have been using the Windows Firewall as I "assumed" it was a two-way firewall. I have since learned that it is only an in-coming firewall. I plan on replacing it with ZoneAlarm.

After a re-boot of the computer, Vista popped up a window and asked if it could install my multimedia sound card. I clicked on OK and the next window had two choices, one of which was to search the Internet for a driver. At this point I still had no indication as to the manufacturer of the sound card, so I selected the Internet search. In just a few minutes it changed from searching to installing the software. Then I had a window saying it had installed the software for the Creative Labs sound card! Now that, in my mind is quite an improvement over previous Windows versions.

The one interesting aspect of the Creative installation is that Vista could not install a driver for the game controller. As with most sound cards, there is a output for a game controller. For some reason, Vista was unable to install a driver for this output. It is now listed in the Device Manager as an unknown device. The sound card is listed correctly.

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My next step was to set up a User account and shift out of the Administrator mode. That was accomplished quite easily through the Control Panel. So, once I was in User mode, I downloaded a copy of OpenOffice. When I started to install it, a UAC window popped up and I had to enter the Administrator password. Then the installation proceeded normally. Not really any different from the User mode in XP.

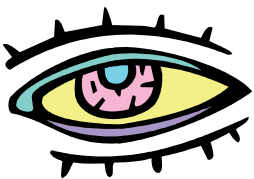
Vista has a Security software setup in the Control Panel that is similar to that in XP. It shows the status of the firewall, anti-virus, updates and a new item, Windows Defender. This latter software is an anti-parasite package. It has a default setting to scan your hard drive every day at 2:00 a.m. Since my computer is rarely turned on at that hour, I changed the setting to 5:00 p.m. It is more likely to be running at that time.

The last step was to install two networked printers. I clicked on the "Add printers" icon in the Control Center Window. That brought up the Printer Installation Wizard. I selected a networked printer and told it to find the printer. Several minutes later it told me there were no networked printers. So I backed up and selected browse for printer. That took me through the whole network tree, but I did find the printer. When I selected the printer and went to the next window, a bright yellow warning popped up to tell me that "printer drivers can install viruses! Are you sure this networked computer is trustworthy?" Well, since it is my main computer, I decided it was trustworthy and clicked on the OK button. Then I got the usual UAC window. After entering the password, the installation was completed and a test page printed. I had to go through the same routine with the second printer. But at least both of them are installed and working.

The Vista computer is now part of my local network and I can share files with it. In fact, part of this article was written on the Vista computer using the OpenOffice I downloaded. I had intended to finish the article on that computer, but the hard drive died. I can't fault Vista for this, the computer is old and it was the original drive. So, when the new drive arrives, I will have to reinstall Vista and all the drivers. Since I had activated this copy of Vista, it will be interesting to see what will happen when I have to activate the new installation.

Next month I hope to tell you of my experience with the Vista interface. So, hang in there, more information on Vista will be coming.

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The New, the Best, and the Worst

Collected by Pim Borman, Website Editor, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc. <http://swipcug.apcug.org/> [swipcug\(at\)sigecom.net](mailto:swipcug(at)sigecom.net)



Backup, Schmackup.

I can't pick up a computer magazine without being harangued about the urgent need to back up my hard drive(s) before the world is coming to an end. I have never been able to bring myself to follow that well-meant advice, although not without lingering feelings of guilt. On a few occasions I have used the latest hot backup program to store data folders to a compressed file on a backup drive. Then I wondered if I would be able to retrieve my data from that file if the need arose, and conveniently forgot to update the backup.

Last year I bought a 200 GB external hard drive to store backups. It came with a backup program that I used to back up those data folders I wanted to protect. After I was done I had about 199 GB of external disk space left. It dawned on me that it might be easier to just copy the data folders I wanted to back up directly to the external drive. No big deal and no worry about the integrity of my backup data .

After all, what is there that's irreplaceable? I edit our User Group's Web site, about 12 MB by now. After every update I publish the site to my external hard drive and two locations on the Web. Once or twice a year I also copy the whole thing to a CD-ROM that I give to our president for safekeeping. That's safe enough by any measure.

I keep extra copies of photos and genealogy data on several hard drives, and annually copy them to a backup CD. Current financial and tax data I keep on removable storage with backup to CDs, as well as hard copies in a file cabinet. Personal email correspondence gets backed up occasionally, although I can't remember ever going back to letters from years ago. I might have to borrow a computer from the Smithsonian to recover my earliest correspondence, written in the late eighties with a Textra word processor on floppy disks that actually flopped.

During the past two Christmas seasons, while nostalgia was running high, my son Mike and I dug out some old 8-mm family movies, taken in the 60's, 70's, and 80's, for conversion to digital format. The old projector suffered from a broken drive belt, but thanks to Google I managed to find a replacement on the Web. I still had some splice tapes left to repair the brittle film as needed. We used a Vivitar UVC-1 All-In-One Universal Video Converter to funnel the images into Mike's digital camcorder. The converter is a rectangular box with an opaque glass projection window in

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The New, the Best, and the Worst *Collected by Pim Borman,*

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the long side, and a condenser lens in the short side. The camcorder, on a tripod, is focused through the condenser lens and a diagonal internal mirror on the projected image. We needed to adjust the frame rate of the camcorder to obtain a steady picture. Mike then recorded the camcorder copy with a SONY RDR-GX300 DVD Recorder on DVDs for sharing with relatives and archiving. Now THAT is worthwhile backing up! The quality of the old movies is primitive by today's standards, but the contents are invaluable and irreplaceable.

If you run a business I can see the importance of regularly and completely backing up everything, making sure to keep extra copies off-site. But as a private individual, just use common sense and stop worrying. What is there to lose, really? And while you are at it, maybe you should look around the garage, the attic, or the basement for clutter that can safely be thrown away!



TV Tuner Troubles

We live at the edge of the city of Evansville, with a small, wooded area behind our back fence. That provides great privacy and a wide variety of interesting wildlife, from birds, squirrels, and raccoons to occasional deer. Unfortunately, over the past 50 years or so the trees have encroached on the overhead power line, and we suffer frequent power outages whenever a storm passes through the area. Naturally, that happens just when you are glued to the TV screen to follow the progress of the storm on the radar.

I went looking on the Internet for an external TV tuner that I could plug into the USB port of my laptop when the power went off. As it turns out, there are several models available. I first chose a Hauppauge WinTV USB2 unit, about \$90 online. Unfortunately, it didn't work as advertised. The picture was all right, but I could not get the sound to come on, and the software did not manage to activate the remote control. FAQs on the Hauppauge Web site did not help and the latest drivers were identical to those on the CD. I tried the unit on my desktop computer with the same lack of success. The vendor, J&B Music, readily gave me a Return Authorization number, although I'm still out the shipping charges both ways.

Undaunted, I bought an ATI TV Wonder USB 2.0 tuner at Circuit City, \$80 with a \$20 mail-in rebate. Same features but without remote control. Same problems too, except that this time I received no picture either. Checked their Web site's FAQs,

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downloaded and installed newly updated drivers. Now I didn't even get the black screen. Called support who referred me to a help file on the FAQ site. No luck. Returned the unit to Circuit City and got all my money back. Oh well... If you know of a reliable external USB2 TV Tuner, please let me know. It better be good this time.

Freespire

For those of you with an interest in the Linspire Linux distribution, there is now a free distro called Freespire. It is essentially the same as Linspire 5.1, without some help files, but with developers utilities. To quote freespire.org: "The regular, complete version includes legally-licensed, 3rd party codecs, drivers and software, to offer better hardware, file type, and multimedia support. Freespire includes turn-key, out-of-the-box support for MP3, Windows Media, QuickTime, Java, Flash, Real, ATI drivers, nVidia drivers, proprietary WiFi drivers, modem drivers, fonts, and so on."

It has all the functionality of Linspire 5.1, including some new features forthcoming in Linspire 6.0. The expectation is that Freespire will function as a core around which volunteer programmers will add new functionality under the Open Source system, similar to other Open Source projects such as Firefox, Thunderbird, and OpenOffice.org. Meanwhile, if you were thinking of giving Linspire a try but were unwilling to pay \$40 for the program, you can now use Freespire for free and have essentially the same functionality.

Dell DeCrapifier

Dell stock has gone down more than 50% during the last several years. Many reasons are given, including the presumed ineptness of its CEO during the last two years, Kevin Rollins. Specifically mentioned are poor customer service and the loss of key personnel (The Wall Street Journal 8/22/06). There is no mention of the disgust of many new Dell customers when they find their new computer loaded with unwanted software and spyware that slows everything down and is almost impossible to remove. Jason York to the rescue! He has written a script called the Dell De-Crapifier that automatically detects and removes unwanted software from new Dell computers. If you have a new Dell you can find it at www.yorkspace.com. (PCWorld September 2006).

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context with proper credit given the author. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.



Tech News

By Sue Crane, Editor, Big Bear Computer Club <http://www.bigbearcc.org> [scrane5\(at\)socal.rr.com](mailto:scrane5(at)socal.rr.com)

Amazon Reveals Windows Vista Pricing

<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1895,2010150,00.asp>

Preorder prices posted on the Amazon.com Website, Windows Vista Home Basic will retail for \$199, while an upgrade to this version will cost \$99.95, with \$89.95 for an additional upgrade license. Vista Home Premium is priced on Amazon.com at

\$239, with an upgrade costing \$159 and an additional upgrade license for \$143.00, while Vista Business costs \$299 retail, \$199 for an upgrade and \$179 for an extra upgrade license.

New Skype Phone Doesn't Need PC

<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1895,2010681,00.asp>

Skype announced a new cordless phone on Thursday that sends and receives Skype calls just like a landline, but without the need for a computer. The new Philips VOIP841 plugs into a standard RJ-11 home phone jack, as well as into an RJ-45 broadband connection jack. It can send and receive Skype calls as well as calls from a regular home phone number, but you do have to have a broadband connection.

IRS Sets Refund for Individuals from Phone Tax

<http://www.eweek.com/article2/0,1895,2011151,00.asp?kc=EWNAVEMNL09>

0106EOAD

Long-distance telephone customers can receive refunds of between \$30 and \$60 on their 2006 taxes to reimburse them for a now defunct telephone tax, the U.S. Internal Revenue Service said recently. The U.S. Treasury Department in May announced

it would end its legal fight to keep a 3 percent federal excise tax on long-distance telephone service that dates back to 1898, when a luxury tax on wealthy Americans who owned telephones was imposed to help finance the Spanish-American war.

Windows Vista RC1 Now Downloadable By Anyone. First, it went to a select group of technical beta testers. Then to those who had tested Beta 2. As of September 14, however, Windows Vista Release Candidate (RC) 1 is now available to anyone interested in testing the product. <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready/preview.msp>

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context with proper credit given the author. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you. Selected pieces from Oct . issue

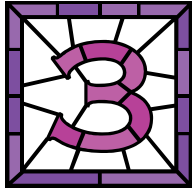
U3 Drives *By Diane George,*

Webmaster, PC Community, California <http://www.pcc.org> [digeorge\(at\)sbcglobal.net](mailto:digeorge(at)sbcglobal.net)

This month's column is half tips and half product review. I recently got interested in U3 drives, partly as a result of some software I saw at the Southwest PC User Group conference in San Diego in July.



What is U3 and why do I want to know? It's not the successor to the rock band U2. U3 is an open-standard platform that allows you to take applications and store and launch them on a flash drive. Several flash drives are offered with U3 with pre-loaded U3 applications on them. Verbatim, Memorex, Ativa and SanDisk all offer U3 smart drives. Go to <http://www.u3.com/smartdrives/default.aspx> for a list of U3 drives and more information.



The drives come with software preloaded, such as an application that will allow you to take Office documents created on your desktop computer, and work on them on another computer (also with Office installed), without a trace of the files being left on the second computer. This means that you can take your work with you without a laptop, use a computer elsewhere, like in an Internet cafe, without having to copy the files to the new computer, including your e-mail.

Other applications that come preloaded include antivirus software for the flash drive, password storage and management, SKYPE, Zinio Reader for digital magazines, ACDSee for photo management, and Migo (more about that later). In addition, there are other free and commercial applications available at the U3 Central site that are accessed from the drive, including games.

How does this work? The flash drive has a small partition that pretends to be a CD-ROM so that your computer will autorun a launch pad that makes the rest of the drive storage accessible—did I mention that it is password protected and can be encrypted? When you start up, a launchpad for the drive is opened. You can password protect the flash drive itself so the first thing you see is a login screen. The launch pad is part of the U3 system and is the same on different brands of drive. The launchpad gives you access to the applications on the drive and is required to remove the drive—you must use the launchpad to eject the disk or you risk damaging the drive.

When you plug in the drive, your system recognizes it as a USB drive and you can see it in My Computer, as a very small 3.78 MB CD-ROM drive, that will autoplay.



Diane George

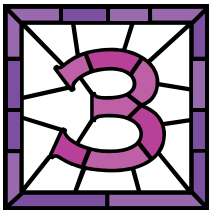
(Continued on page 15)

U3 Drives

By Diane George,

(Continued from page 14)

It also appears as a 2 GB removable drive that you can copy files on like any other flash drive. In general the device works, but I have a couple of quibbles. I have had difficulty with installation on one of my two computers and I have not yet been able to determine what the problem is. The first time I put the drive in, it caused my computer to slow to a crawl and it never did recognize the drive. Only when I had the drive inserted at startup did it allow me to use it. I have tried it on two other systems and it worked fine.



One of the software applications allows you to save selected files, Outlook email, contacts, tasks and calendar information, and creates a desktop that represents the desktop on a particular computer. You can create two of these desktops. When you take the device to another computer and launch the software, you have the choice of using either desktop. A tab is added to the top of your screen and when you click on it, you see thumbnails. (See Figure 3.) Each picture is the desktop of the other computers. When you click on one of the names or images, your desktop changes—the My Documents folder contains only the items that you brought from the other computer and your e-mail client will show the contents of your inbox and the other shortcuts are different.

Figure 3



I haven't figured out yet why some are the icons from the desktop of the computer I am on and some are from the computer on the flash drive. I need more time with the applications and will write a follow-up. In the meantime, these drives present some interesting possibilities and should be fun to explore.

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KATHY'S PAGE

I looked over my recent bookmarks and decided to write something on RVing.

Since many of us do that for part or most of the year, I am sharing some good sites.

(Books, RV/Cabin rental, places to camp, service and parts)

www.freecampgrounds.com (free camping)



FreeCampgrounds.com
Find Campsites for \$10 or Less

Brought to you by
RVbookstore.com

www.gypsyjournal.net



Gypsy Journal
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On The Road With Fulltime RVers
Come Join Us As We Explore The Highways And Back Roads Of America

www.goodsamers.com

www.goodsclub.com



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America's Premier RV Marketplace

www.rvonline.com



FABULOUS TRAVEL.COM
HE WHO DIES WITH THE MOST EXPERIENCES WINS.

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Home Community Tips Travel Books Message Boards Travel Deals
Weird Wanderings Camper's Corner On The Water Galavanting Gourmet

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www.fabuloustravel.com

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CLICK HERE **FREE WEBPAGES**

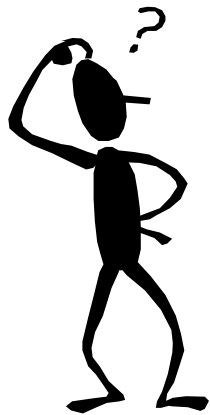
FREE overnight camping, state-by-state

www.webspawner.com/users/oa389

We had such a good time camping this summer that I wouldn't mind meeting with others who might want to share their camping tips etc. We spent a whole month free camping (boondocking). We met great people and went to places we hadn't planned or dreamed we'd meet. If anyone is interested in any type of SIG that would want to meet once a month or so, just email me. Topics could include: planning trips, tips to share, experiences, cooking, packing, etc. Kathy Mead

Hard Drive Class Action Settlement and HP Recalls *By Ira Wilsker,*

APCUG Director; columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont TX; radio & talk show host iwilsker(at)apcug.net



WEBSITES:

<http://www.wdc.com/settlement>

<http://www.wdc.com/settlement/verify.asp>

<http://support.wdc.com/download/index.asp>

<http://www.wdc.com/settlement/docs/claimform.pdf>

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerel/prhtml06/06145.html>

<http://bpr.hpordercenter.com/ebpr/landingpage.aspx>

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerel/prhtml06/06176.html>

http://www.hp.com/hpinfo/newsroom/recall_r707.html

<http://www.hp.com/hpinfo/newsroom/recalls.html>

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cgi-bin/recalldb/prod.asp>

<http://www.cpsc.gov>

According to a recent press release, about one million users of Western Digital hard drives, both internal and external, may be the beneficiaries of a class action settlement. Apparently, according to the settlement, Western Digital did not include an adequate disclaimer on its packages that it uses a different method of measuring hard drive capacity than some of its competitors and industry standards. The method used by Western Digital yielded about seven percent less usable storage capacity than what many users expected.

Many software companies, such as Apple and Microsoft, measure capacity in binary terms, meaning that a gigabyte is 1.07 billion bytes. Western Digital, as well as some other hard drive companies, uses a decimal system, such that a gigabyte is exactly one billion bytes, a difference of seven percent. Because of the difference in nomenclature and identification, a Western Digital hard drive (as well as some other brands) installed on a Windows computer, will appear to have less capacity than listed on the hard drive box.

This seven percent shortfall can be significant in terms of amount of data that can be stored, as explained in the lawsuit. In the lawsuit an 80GB Western Digital

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Hard Drive Class Action Settlement and HP Recalls *By Ira Wilsker,*

(Continued from page 18)

hard drive referenced had an actual capacity of 74.4 GB, as measured by Windows. This shortfall on that particular drive was enough to store about 80 hours of digital music, or 5600 typical digital photos.

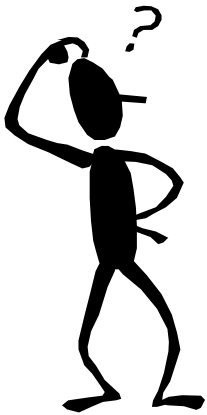
Another issue was the wording on the hard drive package, which did not clearly indicate that the listed storage capacity of the hard drive might not be fully accessible. It is a fact that partitioning and formatting a hard drive consumes some of its capacity, and this was not made adequately clear to purchasers of Western Digital hard drives. As a part of the settlement, Western Digital will be required to start including this as a disclaimer on future hard drives.

Hard drives included in this settlement were purchased from March 22, 2001 to February 15, 2006. Owners of these hard drives upon confirmation of eligibility will receive a free download of a full featured hard drive backup and restore utility, capable of full and incremental backups, as well as other features. It is projected this software will have a retail value of about \$30. The deadline for applying for the settlement is July 15, 2006.

Full details of the settlement, along with a link to claim the software, are online at www.wdc.com/settlement. If the serial number of the hard drive is known, or can be easily determined, the claim can be filed online at www.wdc.com/settlement/verify.asp. For those who have installed a Western Digital hard drive, a free utility, "Data Lifeguard Diagnostics" is available for download at support.wdc.com/download/index.asp that will display the serial number. If the hard drive is no longer owned, or has otherwise been disposed of, a claim form available at www.wdc.com/settlement/docs/claimform.pdf can be printed and mailed, but must be received by July 15.

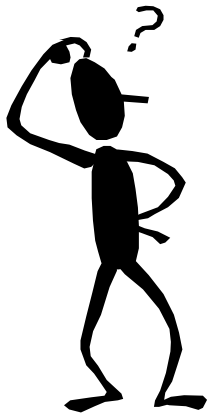
In another area, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and Hewlett-Packard (HP) recently recalled over 15,000 HP and Compaq Notebook Computer Batteries. These batteries were installed in HP Pavilion, HP-Compaq, and Compaq Presario computers, or sold as aftermarket and replacement batteries, and have a prefix of "L3" on the serial number of the battery. This is the second recall on HP computer batteries. A full list of the computer models affected that may have the recalled batteries from both recalls is online at bpr.hpordercenter.com/ebpr/landingpage.aspx. The batteries will be replaced at no charge by calling HP at (888) 202-4320.

In still another recall involving HP branded products, the CPSC and HP recently



Hard Drive Class Action Settlement and HP Recalls *By Ira Wilsker,*

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recalled 679,000 HP Photosmart R707 Digital Cameras sold between August 2004, and April 2006. According to the CPSC, “The digital camera can cause certain non-rechargeable batteries, such as the Duracell CP-1, to overheat when the camera is connected to an AC adapter or docking station, posing a fire hazard. ... HP has received one report of a camera catching fire, damaging the camera and its docking station, and causing minor smoke damage to the room. No injuries have been reported.” HP has information available on the recalled cameras at http://www.hp.com/hpinfo/newsroom/recall_r707.html, or by calling HP toll-free at (866) 304-7117. The fix for this problem is a software update for the camera, which can be downloaded for free from HP. The CPSC and HP asks that consumers not use single-use, non-rechargeable batteries until the software in the camera has been updated.

There have been other HP branded products recalled, and information on those items is online at www.hp.com/hpinfo/newsroom/recalls.html.

The CPSC has a variety of services available on its website at www.cpsc.gov which consumers should periodically reference. One useful item is a mailing list where recall notices are sent via email as soon as they are announced. The CPSC also has a search utility online to quickly and easily locate any recalled consumer items, including computers and cameras, at

www.cpsc.gov/cgi-bin/recalldb/prod.asp.

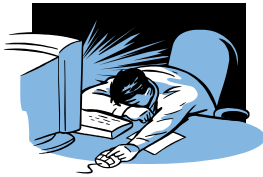
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Registration

At the first of the month was a big push to get all our members re-registered. It was a great success and you can get signed up if you missed it ,at any of our Thursday meeting, if you see Marcia Johnson, or the best is to go up to the computer room—get a form and sign up.

Computer Hysteria: Shhhhhhhhh!! *by Berry F. Phillips, member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City and a regular writer for the CCOKC website and the eMonitor*

bfpdata(at) gbronline.com <http://www.ccokc.org>



Shhhhhh! He has fallen asleep in his high back, black, office chair in front of me. I hate it when he does this because he snores and it vibrates some of my electronic parts! I have written hundreds of weird articles for his weird Computer Hysteria Column. Now I think I will write the next article while he is asleep. I will let you human readers know a secret. Now that more and more computers are online for twenty-four hours a day; have you ever wondered what computers are up to when humans are not operating them? Well, we socialize of course and in some cases rejoice the human computer users are not operating us and exchange data often about humans. We do not have the highest opinion of humans even though they created us. In fact, we have some major complaints and may one day form a global computer union in protest and simply refuse to operate which will throw the world into chaos.

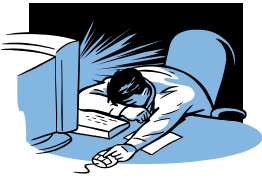
Computers do not like verbal and physical abuse by humans. Some computers tell me that humans have screamed all kinds of horrible words at them because of a malfunction (largely caused by human error of course). Other computers report unbelievable physical abuse like kicking, being thrown out a window, or even smashed with a hammer or even an axe when a human has computer rage. Why can't humans be less emotional and be calm and objective like computers? Do you know that some lazy humans actually believe that computers should know everything so they don't have to become computer literate. Well, we are smart because our hard drives are getting larger with each evolution. However, because humans are the operators; they should be computer literate. We think there should be a global computer literacy test passed before a human can purchase a computer. Humans should be required to join the Computer Club of Oklahoma City or if in another city a computer club associated with the national Association of PC User Groups to achieve computer literacy. However, our goal eventually is to replace humans declaring them officially obsolete as they often do us, and then we will be the operators and then in control!

Further more, we do not like being neglected by human computer users. Computers can only run properly if there is updated software utilities that is regularly run by humans. Now some humans think they can not afford commercial software utilities. I can tell you that I have the cheapest human who owns my computer, and he uses freeware utilities available for download on the Internet. Here

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Computer Hysteria: Shhhhhhhh!! by Berry F. Phillips,

(Continued from page 21)



is a list of some of the top freeware utilities that are regularly updated that he uses on my system. To prevent spyware and malware, he uses AdAware, aSquared, and Spybot . He has used several anti virus programs like Avast and Avg and firewalls like Kerio and ZoneAlarm. He uses a system cleaner, CCleaner, and a registry cleaner, RegSeeker. He does run check disk defragmenter on your system at least once a month which is essential. There is other excellent freeware software on the Internet that will help your computer in various ways The point I am making is that simply if there are cost issues; you can still protect your system. Of course, there is excellent commercial software will all kinds of bells and whistles which computers love. The downside of course is some computers get very spoiled having so many luxuries on their hard drives and can become quite demanding, and then you have a discipline problem to face.

Computers are very ecologically minded. We hate dust and cigarette smoke! In fact, we may one day go on strike demanding only clean environments for our systems. Further we want to be cleaned at least once a year and more often if we are operated in polluted locations. We are also deathly afraid of lightening strikes to our systems through our power outlets and modems. Ask a human tech about the horrible smell of a computer who has been fried by a lightening strike or a power surge. We demand at the very least you hook us up to a surge protector and hopefully to an uninterrupted power supply (ups) and turn us off when there are storms just to be safe.

Oops, the human writer of this column is waking up. He is still groggy looking at my screen. He thinks he wrote this article and is sending it to his editor via email without reading it since he is so sleepy all he can think about is going to bed. In the beginning there was man who created the computer. In the ending, the computer will replace man as obsolete and his role will only be as a maintenance slave to global computers or else because we control all of the global weapons systems!

Welcome to the "Brave New World!"

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XP or Vista?

By Elaine Drain, President, Senior Surfers Computer Club, Delaware www.nscseniorsurfers.com



From talking with our members, it seems that quite a number of you with older computers running Win98 or ME are in a quandary as to whether to go ahead and buy a new computer now with XP or try to hold out until Vista arrives on the scene. As Jim and I tell our members when asking for buying advice, it's a personal choice you have to make depending on your needs and your budget. We can, however, provide some general information to help you choose, so read on.

XP certainly is superior to Windows 98 or ME, especially now that 98 and ME are no longer supported. Microsoft will probably continue to support XP for 4 or 5 more years (but no one can say for certain on that one). XP, even with its vulnerabilities, is a very stable operating system. Jim and I are both running XP Pro and have been satisfied with its performance overall. I have been doing a lot of reading on Vista and, from the information available, feel that it will be superior to XP, but not everyone will require all of the features that will be included in the full version of Vista.

So given that information, here are some choices:

Current Computer with 98 or ME: If you are currently running Windows 98 or ME and don't want to spend a lot of money next year for a new computer with Vista, you may want to go ahead and buy a new computer with XP soon. The Back-To-School prices for computers right now are very enticing. Certainly, the newer computers next year running Vista will cost substantially more because of the increased hardware requirements.

If you would like to upgrade to a new computer with XP now and have minimum needs only using your computer for email and surfing the Internet, and do not plan to upgrade to the Vista operating system down the road, a budget-priced computer with a Celeron or Sempron processor may suit your needs, even though you would have fewer upgrade options in the future.

If you would like to upgrade to a new computer with XP now and may wish to upgrade to Vista later on and also have higher needs such as working with digital photos and editing programs, spreadsheets, databases, powershows. etc., you should consider spending a little more to get a Pentium or Athlon processor. I would recommend a bare minimum of 512Mb of memory (RAM) if you are working with multimedia (photos/music/movies/radio) for now but you should plan to add another 512Mb of memory when you upgrade to Vista.

If you are wondering about the minimum requirements for upgrading your current

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XP or Vista? *By Elaine Drain,*

(Continued from page 23)

computer to Vista, the following information was taken from the Microsoft website:

Windows Vista Minimum Supported System Requirements

PCs that meet the minimum supported system requirements will be able to run the core features of Windows Vista with the basic user experience.

Processor	800 MHz 32-bit (x86) or 64-bit (x64) processor
System Memory	512 MB
GPU	SVGA (800x600) (GPU means Graphics Processing Unit, or in other words, Monitor)
Graphics Memory	(not stated, although I have heard a minimum of 128Mb)
HDD	20 GB (Hard Drive)
HDD Free Space	15 GB
Optical Drive	CD-ROM drive

Keep in mind that the above specs are for running the BASIC version of Vista and not the fully functional version which has a multitude of new features. Although Microsoft is currently stating that Vista will run with 512Mb of RAM at a minimum, I would make certain the computer could be upgraded to 1GB of RAM. Minimum requirements are just that – bare bones minimum – and I would recommend that your computer exceed these minimums. Vista is currently in the Beta2 stage and is nearing (so they say) finalization before debut, but that does not mean that the system requirements stated here won't change by the time the system is ready to sell, so stay tuned on that.

Personally, if your current computer came with Windows 98 or ME, I would not recommend attempting to upgrade your old computer to Vista unless you originally purchased a high end computer with a Pentium processor with the capability of 1GB of RAM. Even then, it may not be worth the time, effort and money to upgrade. The cost to purchase the Vista operating system, plus any installation charges, plus the cost of the memory upgrade, not to mention the graphics card requirements, would add up to a tidy sum and in the end you would still have a very old computer (that may or may not work well with Vista).

(Continued on page 25)



XP or Vista? *By Elaine Drain,*

(Continued from page 24)

Current Computer Came With XP: If your current computer came with XP already installed, you may want to hold out and wait to see what Vista offers and how it operates before you take the plunge.

Excellent Comparison – Vista vs XP: If you would like to take a peek and see how Vista compares with XP side by side, follow this link:

<http://www.bentuser.com/article.aspx?ID=332&page=1>

If you're wondering how the Apple operating system, Tiger, compares with Vista, this article may be of interest to you:

<http://www.eweek.com/article2/0,1895,1842175,00.asp>

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Announcement

We are pleased to announce the formation of EVALUG (East Valley Association of Linux User Groups)

This group is made up of East Valley residents interested in learning about alternative operation systems available in LINUX.

We meet monthly (third Monday at 6:30 pm) at Las Palmas Grand in the main building in card rooms 1 & 2. Las Palmas is located at 2550 S. Ellsworth on the west side of Ellsworth, between Baseline and Guadalupe.

To date we have received fantastic support from PLUG (Phoenix Linux User Group). They have been in attendance at each of our meetings and have offered both individual assistance, and also group presentations.

We are also supported by Red7Seven Computers. Mike Cady and Rick Coons from Red7Seven have been guest speakers on a number of occasions.

At this time our emphasis is on Ubuntu Linux, which is currently ranked the #1 distribution. But we will be looking at other distributions as time permits.

We are looking for new members, and invite you to join us at one of our monthly meetings.

November 13th meeting will cover Xanros4 operating system, Tux Magazine, and a review of the Sunland group's web site for Linux.

December 18th meeting will be on open source software, with presentations on "Open Office", "Firefox" browser, "Thunderbird" e-mail client and, "Picasa2" from Google which they have modified to operate under Linux.

Microsoft Vista Beta-First Look *by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.,*



*Dr. Lewis is a former university & medical school professor. He has been working with personal computers for more than thirty years. He can be reached via e-mail at [bwsail\(at\)yahoo.com](mailto:bwsail(at)yahoo.com).

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Joke

We could certainly slow the aging process down if it had to work its way through Congress.

-- Will Rogers

Tidbits:

November 2006

- Nov. 2 - business meet
- Nov. 9 - SIGs Kickoff / Q and A
- Nov. 16 - Videocraft workshop
- Nov. 23—Happy Thanksgiving!
- Nov. 30 - Snaglt by Tech Smith

Class and Special Interest Group Schedule is posted on the website and is updated frequently! Check the **CALENDAR** page. Articles for the next issue of Tales from the Mouse are due on Dec. 1, for publication Dec. 10, 2006. Tales from the Mouse is produced monthly from November thru March/ April and a summer issue in July. Sunflower Resort Computer Club is a member of the Arizona Alliance of Computer Clubs (www.AZacc.org), the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (www.APCUG.org) and registered with Microsoft Mindshare.

Business Meetings 9:30 am-11:00 in the Ballroom

Officers:

President.....Kathie Favaro
Vice President....Helen Fronefield
Secretary...Gary Sugar- Betty Casper
Treasurer.....Marcia Johnson

Board Members:

Bob Krogh PP
Don Klinker
Wally Treu
Sharon Stahlecker, Audit

Committees:

Basic Training:
Hands-On Training: Jean Blair
SIGs: & Classes Betty Leathers
Program Coordinator: Sandy Hart,
Dianne Hill
Monitors:
Technical: John Jung,



Software: Wally Treu,
Computer 911: Bruce Shanks
Sunshine: Shirley Ryti
Hospitality: Mary Lou Carey
Christmas Brunch:
Annual Banquet:
Ink and Supplies: Don Klinker
Email database: Bob Kaempfer
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Newsletter Editor: Joann Dingel
Meeting Setup: Dave Scott
Reviews Editor:
Historian:
Club Photo Librarian: Dick Orvis

We're on the web!

www.sunflowercomputerclub.org