

New Style

Newsletter of the LaCrosse PC Users' Group

volume 19 number 3

March 1999

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This Month

March 31, 7PM in the Overholt

Steve Anderson from Trane presents Turbo Tax.

Thank you, Mr. VP

Recently, Vice President and Presidential candidate, Albert Gore, Jr. took credit for inventing the InterNet. I hope we'll all send him a thank-you note next time we're online.

Rebates

In the January newsletter I mentioned that I had never received a rebate on any item I'd purchased at Best Buy. On the same day I sent for the \$30 rebate offered by Quantum on their hard drive and by D-Link on their networking kit. Well, Quantum has come through! I got the promised \$30 check from them the first week in March.

C'mon D-Link, your 8 weeks are almost up, and after all the nice things I said about you in January's newsletter.

I'll keep you informed.

Areas of expertise

Previously, it was discussed that members who would be willing to help others should provide a listing of what their areas of expertise are. I was volunteered to set up a data base and act as clearing agent. Well, more than a year has passed and I've been swamped by exactly one submission, from Jack Storlie. Thanks, Jack, but you weren't anywhere near as tardy as you thought you were. Members may want to try sending their questions and problems in a broadcast e-mail.

President's Message

By Marian Havlik

If we don't have your email address listed in this newsletter, please send it to deapublish@aol.com. We encourage your articles for this newsletter, on any computer-related topic.

Steve Anderson will speak on TurboTax at the March meeting. He works at Trane Company. Bring your questions about using your computer to prepare and file your taxes.

Chuck Whalen will be making some changes to our Web page, so check it out at: <http://www.centuryinter.net/lcpc>

Is there something you'd like to have on the web page that isn't there? Let us know.

We had a lively February meeting. There was a discussion of ways computers could be used in medical settings today. Other questions concerned modems, and various internet services. Century Telephone has a brand new program to get calls while using online services.

After the Q & A session, Paul Havlik, statistician at Gunderson-Lutheran, showed us how SPSS worked. He accessed SPSS thru the G-L network, and used humor to help explain a difficult subject. This is the statistical software used at G-L. Paul spends 1/3 of his time on research, 1/3 on quality improvement services, 1/3 on corporate re-

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Don giving his presentation on PhotoImpact at the Digital Duffers March 4.



Visit our homepage at <http://www.wi.centuryinter.net/lcpc>

Membership Info and Treasurers Report

Gary Stelzig - Treasurer

Membership renewals include: Jack Storlie, Dave Madson, and Robin Alexander - thank you. Our speaker, Paul Havlik, for the February meeting joined our club after the meeting. Welcome Paul. Paul works at Gunderson/Lutheran as a biostatistician. He just purchased a new HP 450 mhz computer for home use. He uses Microsoft products at work and Corel products at home. Renewals for March include: Jim Andringa, Dan Kelly, and Chuck Whalen.

Our checking balance as of 3/13/99 is \$355.54. Expenses for February include \$13.20 for stamps, and \$50.00 to APCUG (Association of Personal Computer User Groups) for annual dues.

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search/development. He also joined LCPC. Welcome to LCPC, Paul.

We discussed Robin Alexander's offer to donate a computer to an area family (father injured in an accident) if other members would help show the family how to use the computer. Jack Storlie said he would make the 30 mile trip at least once to help get the family started. Anyone else interested should contact Robin and/or Jack. Robin is teaching Wednesday evenings this semester, so he can't attend meetings this spring. Robin envisioned finding a way to help the family make a living using a computer. If anyone has any ideas contact Robin by email.

Secretary Carol Frank has a new job, so this meeting was not videotaped. (It's hard to conduct a meeting and take notes.) Carol plans to have someone tape future meetings if she is unable to attend, but hopefully she'll be able to arrange to attend future meetings.

What did you learn new about your computer this week? I figured out how to edit an AOL e-mail in Notepad, and then return the revised file to the sender. I've also tried to use a "signature" at the end of my emails. Sort of complicated in AOL, so they need to improve that feature in the next release. I'll be traveling most of March, but will check my email frequently. See you all March 31.

Consider leaving your computer on. Most electrical damage happens with the initial inrush of power. You'll have instant access to your machine and not use much power after your monitor goes into sleep mode.

Q and A

Jack Storlie has suggested starting a Q&A section for the newsletter which can lead to discussion at the meetings. He's included several questions about backing up your computer. Following each question you'll see my brilliantly thought out response. At the meeting you can express awe at my perceptive responses, or correct my idiotic answers. All questions from Jack Storlie, all responses by me.

1. When doing a full system backup to floppys, Zip Drives, tape drives or other what are the hierarchies of use?
- A. In the current environment of multi-gig hard drives using floppies to backup other than small groups of files is insane. You'd need about 750 3.5" 1.44meg floppies to backup a gig drive, enough said. The only advantage of Zip, Jaz, Sparq, and Super disks is that you can do your backup more quickly than any tape drive and can run some applications directly from the disk. Sparq will cost you \$33 to back up a gig, Jaz \$125, and Zip and Super will stick you for \$150 to back up a gig.

For cost and convenience of storage tape drives remain king. Multi-gig tapes will cost you less than \$10 per gig of backup. From what I've seen, tape drives still have the best software and will happily record your daily work whenever you schedule it to. Since they achieve a true speed of less than 10 meg transferred per minute your initial backup will take several hours and the verify and correction process will take just as long. If you're trying to save time by not using the verify feature, I hope you've also removed those silly brakes from your car, after all, they just reduce your gas mileage. Chuck says that his system at work will back up a gig and a half in 30 minutes, that's 50 meg a minute. Ask him about it.

There are online storage services available, you pay a monthly fee and they provide you with space for your files. This is handicapped by the tedious speed available by your InterNet connection and the possibility of your or their connection being down or busy.

One other possibility is making your own CD-Roms. CD Recorders are about as fast as tape drives and sell for as low as \$150.

You can backup 600 or so meg of data onto a CD which can then be read by any computer. Rewritable CD Roms are limited because of the 23 meg overhead required for each recording session. Write once CDs are \$1, rewritable about \$5 each.

Do an initial backup of your whole system, then use tape or removable media for saving your daily work.

2. Should Windows itself ever be backed up?
 - A. Preferably over a very deep hole and then dropped. I don't know about you, but I always seem to have to change some of the automatically detected settings to get things to work. Plus there's the changes you make simply out of personal preference. Most programs write files to the Windows System directory and often change the registry during installation. If you don't backup the System subdirectory you'll probably have to reinstall *all* your software.
3. Should vendor supplied software be backed up?
 - A. Floppies crap out, CDs get scratched and they both get lost. I suggest an initial backup of everything on your machine.
4. Should user installed software be backed up?
 - A. ditto
5. If Windows is not backed up what happens to changes in registers, etc.
 - A. They're gone.
6. What is the best way to organize user data files? If all files go to My Documents they are hard to retrieve when needed. A technique I recently learned in Word is to use Insert-Auto Text-Header/Footer-Filename (or Filename and Path) and place it at the bottom of the document in small font. I am sure it is standard practice for many of you.
 - A. My data files usually go in a subdirectory of the program that created them.
7. What are some of the uses of Copy/Paste in email? Internet? (Use of right click).
 - A. I always quote the pertinent part of the message that I'm replying to. This saves confusion on both our parts.

Ulead has kindly provided a copy of the PhotoImpact 4.2 Suite for review. Next month I'll review the image handling programs. This month, Carol looks at a Web program...

Ulead's Gif Animator 2

Carol M. Frank

Recently Don and I received a review copy of Ulead's PhotoImpact 4.2. Among the Web Utilities accessories was Gif Animator 2. Since I already have had done one animation with Gif Construction Set, I decided to give Ulead's product a try.

Gif Animator is a stand alone program. The interface is intuitive and easy to use while giving the user lots of options to manipulate creations. There is a start-up wizard available but the interface is so logical I feel it isn't necessary.

There are four parts to the basic interface- **Standard toolbar**, **Attribute toolbar (Global information and Image layer)**, **Layer pane**, and **Workspace**. The **Layer pane** can list image layers by name or have thumbnails of each layer. Image layers can be rearranged by selecting one and dragging it up or down in the list. Layers can also be duplicated and renamed. As you select each layer its image appears in the **Workspace** for editing purposes. If you check the small box next to the layer name, that frame stays in the workspace when the next layer is selected. This makes it easier to position the next layer, if it is a sprite, in relation to the previous image. Sprites can be numerically moved about by X-Y offset positioning, but they also can be just dragged and dropped to where you want them. (The more intuitive way).

The **Image layer Attribute** toolbar adjusts each layer individually. Each layer can have a different palette than the Global palette, transparency, background color, X and Y offset positioning and layer delay in 1/100ths of a second. The manipulations of each image layer do not stop there. The layer can be cropped to eliminate excess space (and reduce file size), flipped, rotated, and edited pixel by pixel.

The **Global information Attribute** toolbar adjusts how the overall animation will work. This adjusts the size of the logical screen (size of the largest layer), what palette you want, background color and if the animation has infinite looping or not.

You do not even need to start with an image to make an animation. Scrolling text can be created by going to the **Layer** menu, select **Add Banner Text** to get its dialog box. The text can be any font on your system, adjusted for size, scrolling direction and

color. The background color can be changed and a border added. For the number of frames for the effect you can choose: *Best* (40 frames) *Good* (30 frames), *Normal* (20 frames) *Fair* (10 frames) and *Worst* (5 frames).

Another way to have a moving banner is the cube effect. First, in **Add Banner Text** create some text, select colors and make sure scrolling is unchecked. (you'll want only one copy). Do this twice if you want to have two different messages. In **Add Cube Effect** select how the cube is to turn, amount of perspective and contrast between the sides. Usually two images are turned on the cube.

Color animation is another way to jazz up a single image. An image with motion attracts more attention than a stationary one. In the **Color Animation** dialog box select a color from the palette and then a color from the image you want exchanged. How many colors you choose will create the corresponding number of frames. Under the **Plug-in menu** are filters that also can create an animated sequence from a single image. These filters are *Gradient*, *Mirror*, *Zoom*

Motion, *Hue*, *Saturation*, *Charcoal*, *Add Noise*, and *Wind*.

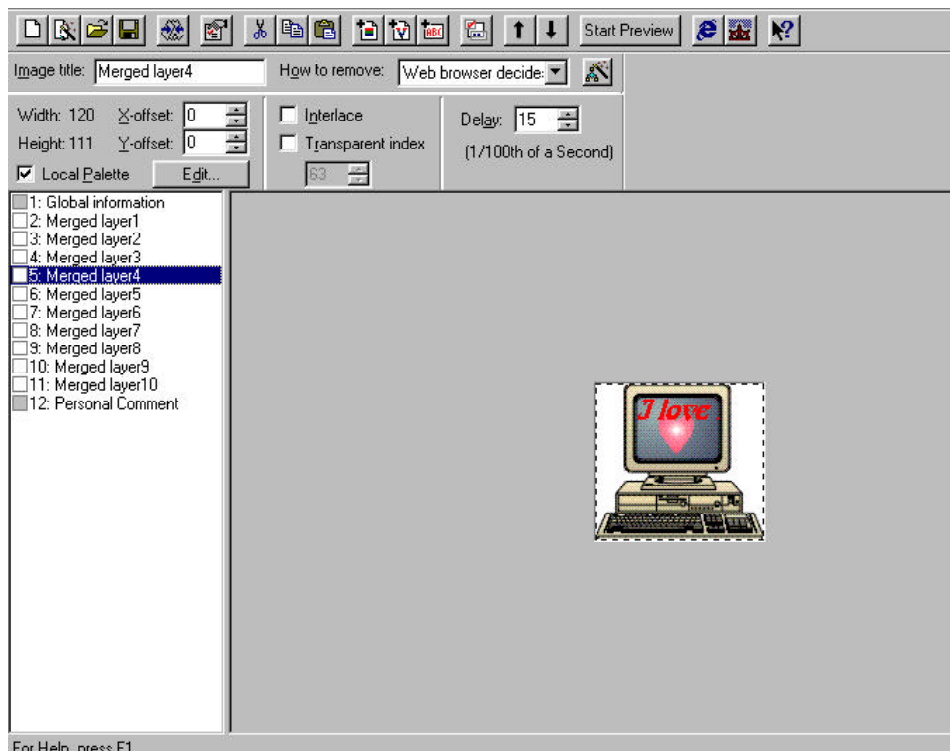
To really see how Gif Animator works I decided to create a couple of preplanned animations instead of just fooling around. For my first animation I wanted a series of pictures that show the benefits of membership in the LCPC. The benefits I decided on was *Member Advice*, *Presentations* and *Monthly Newsletters*. I looked through my collection of snaps of meetings and selected images that show members advice and a presentation. For *monthly newsletters* I arranged some newsletters on the floor of my studio, set up the video camera on a tripod, pointed it straight down and connected it to Snappy™.

I decided on 320 x 240 pixels as a size large enough to view the pictures well but small enough to load in a reasonable time. The old snaps had to be resized and cropped to fit this format. All of these pictures were converted to index color and saved as GIFs. (This step isn't necessary before importing images into Gif Animator.)

After importing these files into Gif Animator, each one is a layer. Non-scrolling banner text was created and merged with the appropriate picture. I could have left them as is and just had one picture flash to another. But I wanted transitions between pictures. From *Member Advice* to *Presenta-*

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The workspace of Gif Animator



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tions I decided on a simple transition. **Simple Transitions** are found under **Layers**. Choices are *Blind (horizontal or vertical)Wipe (left, right, top, or bottom)*, *Split (horizontal or vertical)* and *Spiral*. A sample thumbnail shows how each transition works. Select your source image and destination image. Decide on transition length and quality (*best, good, normal, fair, worst* and *custom*). I decided to wipe from the right and have *fair* quality.

From *Presentations* to *Monthly Newsletters* I wanted to use a plug-in, found under the **Plug-in menu**. Among the dozen choices are: *Gate 3-D, Build, Sweep Clock, Film Peel, Side Roll, Star Wipe, Turn Page-Peel, Diamond FX, Iris FX, and Mosaic FX*. I decided on *Turn Page-Peel* as appropriate and *Worst* quality (5 frames).

Since I wanted this animation to be continuously looping there needed to be a transition from *Monthly Newsletter* to *Member Advice*. *Member Advice* was duplicated and the duplicate dragged down to the bottom of the list. The transition I choose to use from *Monthly Newsletters* to *Member Advice* was *Star Wipe*, gave it a medium soft edge and no border.

I then spent some time tweaking frame delay on the various layers. Some I would delay to over a second for the viewer to get a good look at and some layers I would shorten the delay to 8/10s of a second. The end result was a file size of 731 KB, a bit large for a simple animation. I saved an uncompressed version and then saved a version with the **Optimization Wizard**. With this the number of colors could be reduced, redundant pixels removed and some layers automatically cropped. The preferred settings could be saved and used without running the Wizard everytime. With the **Optimization Wizard** the animation was reduced down to 472 KB, about 35 %. Layer by layer the compressed version showed many images with black areas were the redundant pixels were removed which looked strange individually but they all worked together when in action.

My second animation was more complex than the slide show. I decided on a cute little item of a monitor with a beating heart and the words "I love my PC" scrolling across. For the monitor picture I went to my CorelDRAW clipart CD and selected a picture of a computer and monitor.

In CorelDRAW I added a heart, gave it a circular blend and made a copy of the monitor and heart and reduced the heart size by 90 % in the copy. These pictures were exported as GIFs as two different files-, *compheart1* and *compheart2*. I also could have had exported the monitor by itself and

the hearts as sprites, but of course I didn't think of that until later. It's called experience.

In Gif Animator I made several duplicates of the two monitor-heart pictures and alternated them. Then I made banner text, had it scroll from right to left and adjusted my palette to have the letters in bright red. (The local palette for the monitor picture had no bright colors.) The banner text came after the series of compheart layers and each banner layer had to be interspersed with the alternating compheart layers.

When setting up my banner text I checked on *Merged with background*. This didn't work too well. While running the banner, the background just behind the letters would turn dark. I didn't want this. I deleted the banner text layers and started over. This time I didn't have *Merged with Background* checked. Each banner text layer had its background color made transparent. This didn't work too well either. With a transparent background each layer of text would seem to build up even though I had each layer remove itself immediately.

What I did was merge each text layer with the compheart layer just before it and it worked just fine with no unpleasant color changes, no jerkiness and savings in file size. Just another learning experience.

Before optimization the file size was 39 KB and afterwards was 9 KB. I'm proud of these two animations and will have them on the LCPC website.

Gif Animator will also work in conjunction with PhotoImpact 4.2 to create animations. The *Artist Texture effect, Creative Warp effect*, and the *Transform effect* in PhotoImpact can be used for this. As you work an effect on your image, each step can be saved to a storyboard. Clicking on the *Animation button* in the effect dialog box gives you the choice of saving a sequence of images in BMP format or as a GIF animation. If you select more frames than steps in your storyboard, Gif Animator will create a morphing effect.

Some of the animated effects are really neat. I see the possibility of creating screen savers from them. Just yesterday I bought *Create Screen Savers* at Best Buy to do this.

Gif Animator 2 came with PhotoImpact 4. Gif Animator 3 is available separately. You can order online from <http://www.ulead.com> for online delivery at a cost of \$39.95. A boxed edition is \$49.95 and an upgrade is \$29.95. For registered users Ulead offer plug-ins of extra transitions and filters. These can be viewed on-line. Ulead has made GIF animation easy and fun.

Member E-mail addresses

Please check over your e-mail address carefully for accuracy. If it isn't right let us know!

The LCPC Home Page:

<http://www.wi.centuryinter.net/lcpc>

Robin Alexander—

robin_alexander@uwlax.edu

Jim Andriga—

jander@centuryinter.net

Don Atkinson/Carol Frank—

deapublish@aol.com

Jonathan Bailey—digisoft@aol.com

Gerald Bonsack—

gbonsack@execpc.com

Ernesto Brauer—ebrauer@execpc.com

or ebrauer@gundluth.org

Joseph Doucet— josdoucet@aol.com

Darrell Garner—dvgablur@aol.com

Bob Hansen—rjhansen@aol.com

Marian Havlik—havlikme@aol.com

Dan Kelly—

74541.311@compuserve.com

John Kuschel—

johnk@reinhardtfoodservice.com

or impjohn@aol.com

Paul Shie—

paulshie@reinhardtfoodservice.com

Bill Simdars—billsim@lax.net

Gary Stelzig—gstelzig0@aol.com

Jack Storlie—jstorlie@aol.com

Larry Slezniak—lslezniak@execpc.com

Chuck Whalen—cw@centuryinter.net

The following addresses had "permanent fatal errors" in January. I haven't received any communication from these people so consider these addresses to be bad.

Paul Pfaff—popfaff@juno.com

Paul Rekstad—prekstad@execpc.com

Dean Slindee—slindee@execpc.com

fun web site:

www.twmacinta.com/detector/

English.html (this entire address should all be on one line)

If you can't figure this page out, drop me a line: deapublish@aol.com

The letters page is absolutely hilarious.

Quicken99 Deluxe

by Joe Shipley, Phoenix PCUG
February 1999, Phoenix PCUG

ATTENTION SOFTWARE DEVELOPERS!

Software users are sick and tired when you change our settings without first offering us an option to leave things as they are! When your customer elects to load internet Explorer 4.0, which comes on your CD, you automatically change the default home page from what the customer wanted, to yours. That's not nice. Why don't you at least ask the customer if she or he wants the home page changed, or let them visit your site and then ask them if they want to make it the default home page. Please!

Now that my anger has been vented, *Quicken 99* is a great program! I upgraded from *Quicken 2* for Windows, so I had lots of enhancements to look at and appreciate.

As a checkbook balancing tool and record of how you spend your money, *Quicken 99* does the job easily and clearly. The graphics are nice. The screen is crisp. It's easy to find what you're looking for. When it's time to reconcile your checkbook, the information is presented in a very straightforward manner.

With *Quicken 99*, there are on-line connections available which let you pay your bills on-line, write checks on-line, and get updates

from Intuit over the Internet. You can manage your stock portfolio on-line, update it with stock quotes, and set alerts to provide you with information about companies of interest. You can even enter transactions to your account when you're away from home and download the information later, when you get back home.

Quicken 99 is organized into 5 basic centers of operation:

Banking, Planning, Investing, Home & Car, and Taxes. You can enter any area to track information specific to the area. You can enter loan information (both payable and receivable) and have the program calculate mortgage payments and amortizations. You can keep track of your credit cards and your cash.

Quicken 99 offers excellent reporting capability. It will provide you with instant net worth and balance sheet information. It will show you graphs of where your money goes. It will let you create budgets and do planning to save for the kids' college payments. It will help you create debt reduction plans and retirement plans. It does it all.

With respect to taxes, you can designate categories of items which will automatically be tracked as you prepare your tax information. *Quicken 99* lets you evaluate capital gains tax implications before you take action. You can get Turbo Tax On-line *free*, and have your

data moved from *Quicken 99* directly into Turbo Tax.

With *Quicken 99* you can connect to the Internet and receive instant updates to your software at no charge.

What started out as a simple checking account program has now turned into a complete family asset management center, and it does the job well. Of course, we all remember the phrase, A Garbage In = Garbage Out. @ But if you provide correct data, there's a lot this program will do for you.

Let me also mention that there's audio help on the CD to guide you through areas where you have questions. Just click the Play button on the screen and you can hear helpful information about the area where you happen to be.

Quicken 99 has a suggested retail price of \$29.95 for the basic version (with a \$10 rebate which brings the price to \$19.95), \$59.95 for the Deluxe version (\$20 rebate), \$89.95 for the Home & Business version (\$20 rebate) which lets you track both your home and business transactions, \$89.95 (\$20 rebate) for the Financial Suite 99 and \$99.95 (\$40 rebate) for the Financial Center 99, which does it all.

You can find more detailed information about the *Quicken 99* family of products at www.intuit.com, which is the same location where you can get on-line help and support.

If you are looking for a money-management and financial planning program, you won't find a better one than *Quicken 99*, in my opinion.

Joe Shipley, Co-Owner of SMART IDEA S!, is a computer consultant and Value Added Reseller in Mesa, AZ You can reach him at (602)-831-8332 or by email at joeship@jpxnet.com.

Track lighting puts light where you need it

Computer Lighting

Don Atkinson

How well can you see what's on your computer desk? No, I'm not referring to the clutter, I'm talking about the light level. If you depend on general room lighting, you generally have the shadow cast by your body right where you want to look. Desk lamps take up valuable desk space. Floor lamps may end up miles away from your keyboard and paperwork, if placed on the ends of the desk (depending on the size of your desk). If you put the floor lamp on the back side of your desk it may well glare into your eyes and forces your desk away into the room.

So, what's the solution?

Track lights allow you to put the light right where you want it. Mount the track directly over the desk or slightly behind your chair and point the light cans nearly straight down. You'll get the light where you want it, without the shadows or the glare in your eyes or off the screen.

'But, Don,' I hear you say, 'track lighting is expensive. Wiring has to be run under the ceiling to power it and it has to be installed by an electrician. That's way too expensive.'

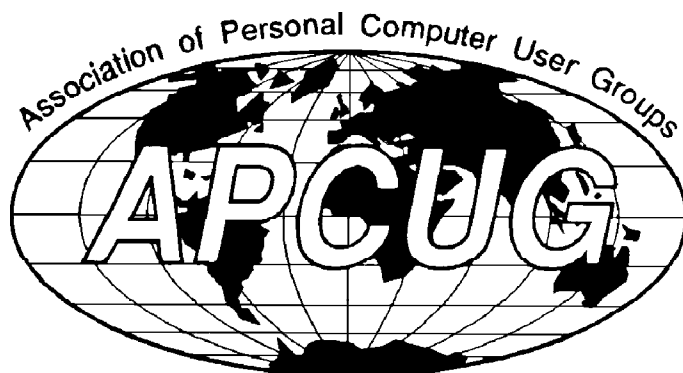
Well, you can do it that way. What we've done is to get an alternate end for the track that plugs into the wall. That takes care of the power supply.

Because the entire assembly is so light, when you mount the track on the ceiling there is no need to screw it into a joist. Use one of the various hollow wall anchor devices, or, if you're feeling adventurous, just depend on the screw in the drywall or lath to hold it up. It's worked fine for us.

As for expense, you should be able to get everything you need for under thirty bucks, any time of the year. Just make sure you can get the wall cord end for the track system you're getting.



Marian Havlik—President, board 782-7958
havlikme@aol.com
Ernesto Brauer—Vice President, board.. 782-7300
ebrauer@execpc.com
Gary Stelzig—Treasurer, board 788-7075
gstelzig0@aol.com
Don Atkinson 784-0150
Newsletter editor and publisher **deapublish@aol.com**
Carol Frank..... 784-0150
Secretary, board, newsletter **deapublish@aol.com**
Chuck Whalen—ex-President, 788-6900
cw@centuryinter.net
Bob Hansen—ex-President, **rjhansen@aol.com**



LCPC is a member of APCUG

New Style is published eleven times a year, monthly Jan-Oct and a combined Nov-Dec issue

General meetings are held the last Wednesday of each month in the Lutheran Hospital, either in the Overholt Auditorium or conference room 1 in the basement, check page 1 for location. The combined November-December meeting is held the second Wednesday in December. Meetings begin around 7:00 PM. Everyone is welcome, attend a meeting or two with no obligation to join.

Dues are \$20 for one year following payment. Membership entitles you to attend meetings, tap into the corporate wisdom, receive special user group discounts from publishers and others, receive (and contribute to) this newsletter. You may also obtain software provided by publishers for review of the product. Unsigned articles are by the editor.

Other user groups are welcome to reprint with proper credit.

The newsletter is printed the Wednesday before the meeting, submit articles by the 13th of the month. Upload to *deapublish@aol.com* or phone me at 784-0150 if you want to deliver the article. Submit in ASCII, AmiPro, or WP5.

Commercial advertising rates available upon request. Member's personal ads are free.

LCPC
P.O. Box 2991
LaCrosse, WI 54602-2991