

New Style

Newsletter of the LaCrosse PC Users' Group

volume 19 number 11

December 1999

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This Month: Dec. 8 in the Overholt, 7PM

Elections: It's time again to elect the board. The nominees are: Carol Frank, Chuck Whalen, Gary Stelzig, Darrell Garner, and Marian Havlik. Nominations will be open before the voting.

The presentation will be: "Report from Comdex" by Carol Frank and Don Atkinson.

Good news, we won't be talking too much, it will just be an introduction, and then you can go over the available programs and literature. Hopefully we can answer any questions you may have.

So, you're dying to know, what have we brought?

Loot

We got a bunch of stuff from the APCUG sponsored events and at Comdex itself. Remember that I'm the newsletter editor and am always trying to get material from you, our members. The following items will be available at the meeting, assuming we get paid the \$31 it cost to UPS the first load home. If you want a book, you have to write a review of it. If you want a program, you have to write a review of it. If you want a mouse pad, you have to write a review of it. If you want a T-shirt, you have to write a review of it, er, wear it.

full programs

Adobe ImageStyler: Appears to be a program to dress up your web site. Create custom buttons and graphics, add Java to enable cool effects to make your page even slower to load.

President's Message

Marian Havlik

Your last chance to ask questions about Y2K will be at the December meeting, so be sure to come. Elections will be held to pick 4 Board Members.

We've made a lot of electronic progress this year. I've made hardly any phone calls on behalf of LCPC; all of my 1999 communicating has been by email (along with a few board meetings). We have very up-to-date equipment for our monthly meetings, thanks to Gunderson-Lutheran. Although we've had a few minor glitches along the way, we've been able to show any kind of presentation on either a computer, overhead projector, or

VCR. Not many groups have those kinds of capabilities. We are fortunate.

For our December program Don Atkinson and Carol Frank will report on Comdex they attended in November in Las Vegas. Hopefully they'll bring back a few goodies for December door prizes.

I bit the bullet and called Quicken's Pay for Support (\$1.95/minute). Turns out my Quicken report problem stemmed from AOL 5.0 which apparently installed a new Arial.ttf font file that changed the way reports looked in Quicken 98. Quicken emailed an old Arial font file (which I had trouble downloading

Your editor and secretary hard at work in Las Vegas, making contact with Taiwan high tech companies.



concludes on page 5

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

but that's another story). Even Chuck Whalen emailed Arial fonts to me. When I deleted the Arial.ttf file, Quicken and AOL 3.0 both defaulted to Arial italics which was hard on the eyes. Finally copied the Arial.ttf font from my desktop computer which hasn't had any new software in several years. Voila! Quicken report problem solved; AOL 3.0 and everything else look fine on the screen. I sent AOL an email as to the nature of the problem, however no response from AOL as of mid-November.

Guess it really pays to check out all programs you use after you install something new. Now if I could just figure out why I can open our newsletter in Adobe just fine one month, and yet get "errors" the next month. Maybe I'll eventually be able to read them on our website, but so far I haven't figured that out either.

A couple of years ago Jack Storlie told me about helping someone who was going to use Quicken exclusively (and not keep a written checkbook). I was horrified. Believe it or not, I've finally arrived at that point. If you check your bank balance frequently (usually through an 800 number), you can balance your checking account on the fly. But it also means that you scrupulously record every number and amount when you write checks. If you're not willing, or unable to do that, you'd be better off with a written check record. But I finally got tired of keeping 2 sets of records.

I found out I could input data into a state agency web site using AOL 5.0 (probably the only thing I'll use 5.0 for). Couldn't do that with AOL 3.0 because it didn't have a good enough firewall.

Happy Holidays. What did you learn new about your computer this week?

Marian shows Chuck her latest conundrum as Darrell Garner looks on.



Who was David Huffman?

Marian Havlik

Do you know who developed the system of I/O's used to make computer codes? David Huffman, Columbus, Ohio, got his BS from Ohio State U at age 18. After getting his PhD from MIT, Boston, he taught at MIT, and eventually ended up at the U of CA, Santa Cruz. While at MIT Dr. Huffman wrote a term paper which became the computer sciences standard. The Huffman Coding Procedure (Huffman Codes) resulted from that term paper and remains vital to data storage and transmission.

While at Santa Cruz he founded the Computer Science Department; he alone gave that department credibility.

String's of I/O's represent each character in a file; the length of the string depends on the frequency with which the character appears in a file. It provides a way to compress data files so that they occupy a smaller amount of memory. This method is a fundamental component of computer science curriculum, and is widely used not only for compression of text, image, and audio files, but also for management of files in large computer systems, and compression of data for transmission by fax machines, modems, and high-definition TV broadcasts. The essence of Huffman was to take the complex and make it gorgeous. He kept poisonous snakes as pets, and became a SCUBA diver at 70. Dr. Huffman died from cancer October 7 in Santa Cruz, CA; he was 74. (New York Times obituary, October 13, 1999)

Member E-mail addresses

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

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Membership Info and Treasurers Report

Gary Stelzig, Treasurer

No renewals for November or December. Only paid members can vote at the December meeting for election of club board members. Two past due members: Paul Pfaff and John Kuschel.

Our checking balance as of 11/13/99 is \$334.97. October expenses of \$13.20 for stamps and \$50.00 for our national dues to APCUG.

October meeting report

Carol M. Frank, secretary

At the October 27 meeting treasurer Gary Stelzig reported that he renewed our APCUG membership and suggested putting a link to the APCUG site at our website. Chuck Whalen was added to the nominee list. Carol Frank announced that some of her rugs are for sale at *iShopWisconsin.com*.

Kathy Gallagher had taken Chuck Whalen's advice from last month and checked a library CD for viruses and found one. She also said her CD drive name was "M". Chuck told her that she could change drive names.

Chuck gave some opinions about the differences between McAfee and Norton virus checkers. McAfee would try to fix some files that Norton would not fix. As an experiment, he had let McAfee fix a file and compared it to a recreated file from disk. When compared, there were differences between these files. Chuck saved the recreated file and deleted the fixed file.

Arlene Wiese's 2 year old Aptiva suddenly doesn't give any sounds. Chuck suggested going into the control panel and test sounds. Arlene had already done this. He then suggested looking at the speaker icon on the taskbar to see if it had the "no" symbol on it. This would mean the sound had been muted. Use the pop-up menu to adjust the volume. Checking the cords and jacks was also rec-

Arlene Wiese and May Borgendahl chat with Bill Brockmiller about their computers.



ommended. Gary suggested checking to see if the speakers are battery powered.

Darrell Garner also had a sound problem when he reloaded AOL and lost some sounds. Chuck suggested the control panel to bring back the missing sounds.

Marian had a problem with a state site and firewalls. She was irked that the site didn't tell her what was needed to get in. There was some discussion on remembering and changing passwords. Some of us have a lot of passwords to remember.

Marian changed from AOL 5 back to 3 because 5 would put the oldest e-mail at the bottom. Extra keystrokes are needed to read the e-mail in the order it came. This is a lot of extra work for over thirty messages a day.

Mike Larson has a monitor that doesn't work with his new computer but works on his old one. Chuck recommended checking the video card on the new computer. Before taking out the video card he suggested having the computer turned off but plugged in and placing a hand on the power supply for



Bill Brockmiller

a second to remove body static and to be grounded. This would work best if the outlet the computer is plugged into is grounded. A plug in circuit tester is available from Menards for under \$5 that will tell you if your outlet is wired properly. Be careful when handling thin, gold-plated circuit cards.

The presentation was given by Bill Brockmiller. He custom builds computers, gives at-home lessons and upgrades older computers. He lists some of the advantages of custom-builts:

1. Get exactly what you need—no unused extras that cost add to system cost.
2. Avoid problems with proprietary systems—sometimes extras can't be added internally because of case design.
3. Avoid inconvenience of all-in-one motherboards—for example built-in modems and video boards can cause trouble with upgrading if the old one can't be disabled. Switches are often unlabeled and manuals are lost.
4. Local person is accountable, gives better service.

Mr. Brockmiller handed out literature on some of the components that he uses in his custom-builts. He has a strong preference for AMD which gives a good trade-off between speed and price. He avoids Cyrix unless the customer wants the lowest price. He also prefers Western Digital harddrives.

There was some discussion between him and Chuck on how Y2K would affect software and motherboards, and back-up methods. Chuck recommends HP Colorado because of the software.

Not ready for Prime Time

Ideas and products that have not developed enough for you to spend your money on.

Don Atkinson

Wearable computers

Information is sent to an eyepiece that fits over one eye and to an earplug. Depending on the model and manufacturer there may or may not be a keyboard, most control is by a joystick strapped to your waist. The computer itself is either a fanny or backpack.

While an interesting technical exercise, and of some conceivable utility in industrial maintenance and trouble shooting, these products have no practical use for the common user. I can imagine the situation where a technician would find it worthwhile to have a machine manual online as he tries to figure out what is wrong with something in a remote location, such as the damper on the top of a smoke stack.

But even then, I imagine that he'd find the weight and bulk of the computer and its interfaces to be a burden.

Digital cameras

Digital cameras, am I kidding? They've been around for years, probably hundreds of thousands of people have them and I have the audacity to say that they're "not ready for prime time"?

Yup.

As a photographic enthusiast, I've been watching the development of digital cameras for the last fifteen years. In two or three years they may be a viable replacement for a sub \$200 35mm camera, but not yet. Only recently have digitals almost reached the quality level of the 110 pocket instamatic.

You may see the newer cameras referred to a "mega-pixel". This means that they have a resolution that yields more than one million pixels per image. A popular resolution is 1280x960 pixels, yielding 1.23 meg pixels per image.

At the same time, scanners dedicated to scanning film have dropped in price from around \$700 to the \$350 range, if you shop around. These have resolutions of 1950 to 2400 dots per inch, depending on model. That means that your 110 negative is a 1.5meg image. A full frame 35mm image is 6 meg, far beyond the best current camera, which are now entering the 2 meg range. If you have a camera using the Kodak Advantix film system you can get a Kodak Advantix

Film Drive FD 300 film scanner for \$250. For about an extra \$10 you can have your pictures scanned onto a Kodak photo CD when you send your film in for processing. If you're going to display on a web page just scan your prints with a flatbed scanner at 200 dpi, your four by six inch print will be 800 by 1200 pixels.

If you have a camcorder, shell out \$130 for Snappy and its latest software. This is what we use to get images from the meeting tapes for the newsletter. It will allow you to capture video frames up to 1500 by 1124 pixels. With a video tape you have essentially an unlimited number of still images to pick from. The problem is the unavailability of 8mm VCRs to do a decent freeze frame.

Let's compare the features of a mid range digital camera and a mid range 35mm or Advantix camera.

Digital pluses

- ☺ LCD screen allows you to instantly view how picture turned out
- ☺ LCD screen allows you to review images and discard those you don't want, freeing storage space
- ☺ instant access to images

Digital minuses

- ☹ limited number of images may be stored
- ☹ high cost of replacement memory cards
- ☹ need to have access to computer to download images to clear camera memory
- ☹ "digital zoom"

Film pluses

- ☺ lower initial cost
- ☺ faster operation, less time between pictures
- ☺ take unlimited number of pictures
- ☺ able to use different film speeds for diverse conditions
- ☺ much better resolution

Film minuses

- ☹ recurring cost of film and processing
- ☹ inconvenience of having to finish entire roll before processing

What about features?

Generally, digitals have what they call "digital zoom", they are a fraud. Let's say you are shooting at 1280x960 and you can't get the framing you want using just your optical zoom. So you use your digital zoom to go 2 times closer. You are now shooting at 640x480 resolution! Digital zooms discard pixels as you zoom in, you would be better off using your computer imaging software to crop and resize the image. Ignore digital zoom when comparison shopping, consider only optical zoom range.

Let's assume you are comparing lenses for 35mm cameras. You have two 3 to 1 zoom lenses, the longest focal length is three times as long as the shortest. What's the difference between them? Well, one is a 35 to 105mm lens, the other is a 70 to 210mm. Since you're dealing with a fixed image size (the film) you can directly compare the focal lengths and decide if you want the wide angle to short telephoto zoom or the short tele to medium tele lens. Both are useful lenses, but for different purposes.

But you can't do this with digital cameras. Unfortunately, due to different sizes of the imaging chip, you cannot directly compare the focal lengths of lenses, you have to depend on the zoom ratio specified.

A few cameras have auxiliary wide angle or telephoto lenses available that screw onto the filter ring of the main lens. These are generally of lower quality and are a very questionable value, regardless of price.

Some digitals offer what they call "rapid fire" mode, or a similar name. This allows you to take a picture every 1.5 to two seconds. Almost any auto advance 35mm will be faster than this. The fabulously expensive Kodak DCS series cameras, based on Canon and Nikon interchangeable lens single lens reflex bodies will cycle at two or 3.5 shots per second for two or three seconds, depending on model.

Years ago, it was expected that add on digital backs for film cameras would be developed. This has not happened, in part, because most imaging chips require a warm up period of a second or more so the shut-

Loot cont. from page 1

ter release would need to fire up the chip before tripping the shutter. This technical problem will only be overcome when the manufacturers see a big enough market for add on backs, which they don't at this time.

One booth at Comdex, selling memory cards, said "Your camera just stopped shooting after twelve pictures. Your thirteenth shot." Over a picture of a masked rioter, armed with a lit Molotov cocktail, emerging from a wall of flame. Well, I can't imagine using a consumer digital camera to shoot this kind of action. If you're a pro you'll be using a motor driven 35mm SLR, if you're a civilian you should be heading in the opposite direction as fast as you can move.

Some cameras hold as few as six high resolution images (Agfa 1680, \$899, Agfa CL-30, \$399, and others). Of course, this is dependent on resolution, size of storage medium, degree of compression, etc.

For under \$350 you can get an auto focus, auto exposure, auto advance, auto flash, single lens reflex (SLR) camera with interchangeable zoom lens. If you want to have interchangeable lenses on your digital camera you'll have to buy the Kodak DCS series. DCS520, which is built on a Canon EOS1 body, lists for, I hope you're sitting down, \$14,995. This is about \$14,000 more than the film version of the camera. Doing research, I discovered that there is a DCS, built on a Nikon F5 body, that lists for \$28,000!

Currently you can buy 320x240 cameras for under \$50, and if you look hard you can get 640x480 for about \$100. You may choose to consider this as an expendable item and shell out the money for something to experiment with. But if you're looking for a practical photographic tool either wait a few years or get a decent zoom lens point and shoot (\$100-300) or single lens reflex.

Don't lie to me

One of the Olympus booths at Comdex was for a \$1499 list camera. The presenter said that he had taken some trick skateboarding photos at the "Gravity Games". He said "I was impressed with the camera's ability to focus on the contestants and stop the fast action." (or words to that effect)

The preceding statement was, at best, Clintonian, and arguably, lies. Both the contestant and the state capitol building in the background were in clear focus. This indicates that the camera was set at the "hyper focal" distance, where both the contestant

and background is in focus without focusing on each shot.

As for fast action, the contestant was hardly moving when the picture was taken. Each was taken at the top of a jump, at the point where they have stopped rising and are about to start dropping, they are effectively standing still.

I imagine this went unnoticed by nearly everyone present, but it was still a deliberate attempt to mislead.

Naughty, naughty, Olympus, you make fine products, you shouldn't have to lie about them.

The lights go out all over the world

Perhaps the most disturbing trend is the development of free sites that allow you to post your personal pictures on the Internet. It's not bad enough that you inflict your off kilter, out of focus, boring pictures on relatives, coworkers, neighbors, and ex friends. Now you can inflict them on any one who stumbles onto the World Wide Web. Just imagine, a billion people can now look at pictures of great grandmother Helen's birthday party, your new car, or the world's most beautiful baby.

We are indeed at the end of civilization.

Catch 22 again

Don Atkinson

Returning home, I was anxious to try out some of the software we had gotten. Then I learned the CD Rom drive on our leading computer didn't read disks. It has power, the door opens and closes, but the system can't access it. So I took off the computer cover and removed and reinstalled the data cable. I lost the network connection and still had no CD. Do it again, change the BIOS and lose the second hard drive, still have no network or CD. Try again, change BIOS back, now have hard drive and CD. Test run CD. Put cover back on. Computer won't start. Take cover off, remove and reinstall cable and cover. Lose CD. Quit while behind.

I'm *almost* back to where I started. It's probably a bad cable. I could reinstall the network if I could access the Win98 CD or get the system to read the files on the boot drive, but how, the system won't access the Wtindows directory or its subdirectories when the system is running. Suggestions?

Viagrafix ViaPage: A program for total web page creation from scratch.

Sun Staroffice: Office suite, word processor, database, spreadsheet, etc.

Adept Street Wizard: Combination trip planning (select highway routes, print directions) and street mapping to find addresses.

DataViz Desktop to Go for Palm Pilot

WorldMan/WorldFinder: "Navigate the Web without the barrier of languages." Translates on the fly between English, Japanese, Korean, Classic Chinese, and Simplified Chinese!!!!

Trend Micro PC-cillin 6: anti-virus software. Needs to be reviewed for the January newsletter, to keep my promise to them.

Quicken deluxe 2000: Despite the fact that we're meeting in a hospital, there WILL be order as we decide who gets this program. No rushing of the podium, no fisticuffs. I will be armed.

demo programs

Viagrafix DesignCAD Pro 2000: 2D and 3D computer aided design/drafting.

Samsung products and services demo.

Vistatalk.com: Internet phone software.

BEos: An "alternative" operating system. Claims to be faster and more stable than Windows, using fewer system resources and easier to program for (gee, just like DOS).

Wild File Go Back Professional: Easily restore a previous operating environment that worked. Protects against virii, users deleting the wrong file or messing up the registry, etc. Thirty day preview. Wild File is located in Plymouth, outside the Twin Cities. When I spoke to James Arth, the sales manager, he said they might be willing to come down for a presentation.

News Flash! As this issue is about to go to press I received a full copy of **Go Back Professional**. So we'll have both the thirty day trial and the full version available.

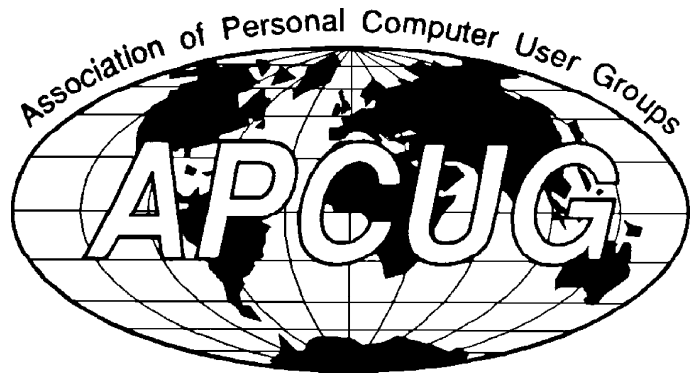
There are other programs available for download if I can find the business cards of the people I spoke to. I've got lots of other cards, but can't find some important ones.

Book

Teach Yourself Microsoft Office 2000 by Brian Underdahl. Two copies available, it would be interesting to get reviews from different members.

Miscellaneous promotional items will be available also.

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LCPC is a member of APCUG

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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.

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