

New Style

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Newsletter of the LaCrosse PC Users' Group

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This Month, April 25, 7 PM

Carol M. Frank will bring in our Aptiva 133 tower and demonstrate the use of a flat bed scanner to capture images and perform Optical Character Recognition. (OCR).

She'll also bring a film/negative scanner but won't be able to demonstrate it since it connects to a USB port, which this computer does not have.

Bring your questions, and maybe something to scan and floppy to take the image home.

President's Message

Shane has not submitted an article for publication by press time.

Improve your Wetware with New Horizons Training

Carol Frank, Secretary

March 28, 2001 meeting

There were plenty of members' problems to discussion before the presentation. Barb Berghan had a MS Word problem. She was doing a document and wanted to tab between fields, not highlight the field titles. Ernesto Brauer and Robin Alexander showed her how to create forms in MS Word.

Barb also had a question about Seller Assistant. She just changed from Auction Assistant to Seller Assistant to keep track of E-bay auctions. This required her to upgrade to Internet Explorer 5.0 but now Outlook Express doesn't work. Instead there is the message "File *** could not be found by

Lonnie Smith, Account Executive from New Horizons

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

Do Compact Discs Degrade?

Bob Starrett, reprinted from *Hard-Copy*, Journal of the Chicago Computer Society

The answer to this question is easy and apparent: of course compact discs degrade. As with every other material, eventually time, temperature variations and the elements will take their toll, on the disc as a whole, as well as each element that comprises that disc. The real question is, how does disc degradation affect readability?

According to the Optical Storage Technology Association (OSTA), CD-R discs have a long lifespan:

“Lifetime estimation of any storage medium is a very complex and statistics-based process. Improper testing or measurement procedures can seriously impact and compromise lifetime estimates. ANSI Committee IT-9 is currently developing comprehensive guidelines for CD-ROM and CD-R life estimation. The CD-R media manufacturers have performed extensive media longevity studies using these industry-defined tests and mathematical modeling techniques, with results claiming longevity from 70 years to over 200 years. The primary caveat is how you handle and store the media. With proper handling and storage, your CD-Rs will outlive you.”

It is one thing to say that discs will last that long. But while we grow old waiting to find out, we need to take some precautions and not rely stiffly on numbers such as these.

How long can you store a disc before you need to possibly reburn it to preserve your data? And is a CD really the best place to store important data for a long period of time? A ‘comprehensive’ study of this topic is best left to someone or some company that has the deep pockets to perform it. The resources necessary to burn, test, age and retest media of different dyes, reflective layers and coatings are enormous.

In the meantime, the best we can do is use existing surveys and anecdotal evidence as a guide. While somewhat old, two studies are also available that provide a little insight into how the media manufacturers look at the longevity issue. The studies are rather technical, but if you want to look at them you can find them here:

TDK—<http://www.cd-info.com/CDIC/Technology/CD-R/Media/TDK.html>

Kodak—[http://www.cd-](http://www.cd-info.com/CDIC/)

Technology/CD-R/Media/Kodak.html

US News and World Report also has an interesting article with a useful chart comparing the lifetimes of several types of storage media. It draws the startling conclusion that unless you buy certain high-quality brands, your CD-R discs may last as little as two years! But note that the National Media Lab took issue with the manner in which its data was used to produce the chart and does not agree with the conclusions drawn.

http://www.usnews.com/usnews/issue/9802_16/I_6digi.htm

It sure would be nice to conduct our own study, but let’s do the best we can with what we have on hand. Let’s look at some really old discs and see if they are readable. In my personal collection, I found three CD-R discs that were at least 10 years old. These discs have not gone through any aging process or artificial stimulus. They have had a nice home in a jewel case, have made several trips to California and back, been joggled, of course, but otherwise they should be in good shape. They are clean discs without scratches, the kind that go into a jewel case right after recording and stay there.

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Membership and Treasurers Report

Gary Stelzig, Treasurer

The club checking balance as of 3/13/2001 was \$673.43. No statement for April yet. For March no new members or renewals paid. Expenses paid in March are \$14.77 for newsletter copies and \$13.60 for stamps. Bills just paid that will show up on the May 13 statement include: \$48.08 for Tribune ad and \$38.00 for post office lock box.

Renewals due for April include: Kevin Blum, Joseph Doucet, and Kathleen Gallagher.

Past due include: Dr. Earl Heartt, Chris Hornbeck, Bill Brockmiller, Lisa Doherty, Shane Lambert, Chuck Whalen, and Jim & Sandy Wheat.

Our modest \$20 renewal fee for LCPC can be mailed to our lock box 2991 or to my address at 2032 South 30th LaCrosse, WI 54601 OR bring to next meeting.

Meet our New Member

Gary Stelzig, Membership/Treasurer

Karen Kesselring (karenUffda@aol.com)

Karen joined just prior to our March meeting and sent the following info after the newsletter deadline.

I am enjoying retirement after 32 years in the nursing profession. My main hobby is genealogy, which is why I bought a computer about a year ago. I do not have a genealogy program yet, so my only experience with the computer has been exploring various web sites and email. I also discovered Ebay so I learned how to use the mouse! I have a scanner that I would like to learn how to use. I also would like to see a smaller group for beginners so we can ask “dumb” questions.

Welcome Karen—Perhaps some of you genealogy buffs can send karen some suggestions on genealogy software.

E-mail address change

Kathryn Urban—kktUrban@aol.com

Al Siikarla, *New Horizons Account Exec.*



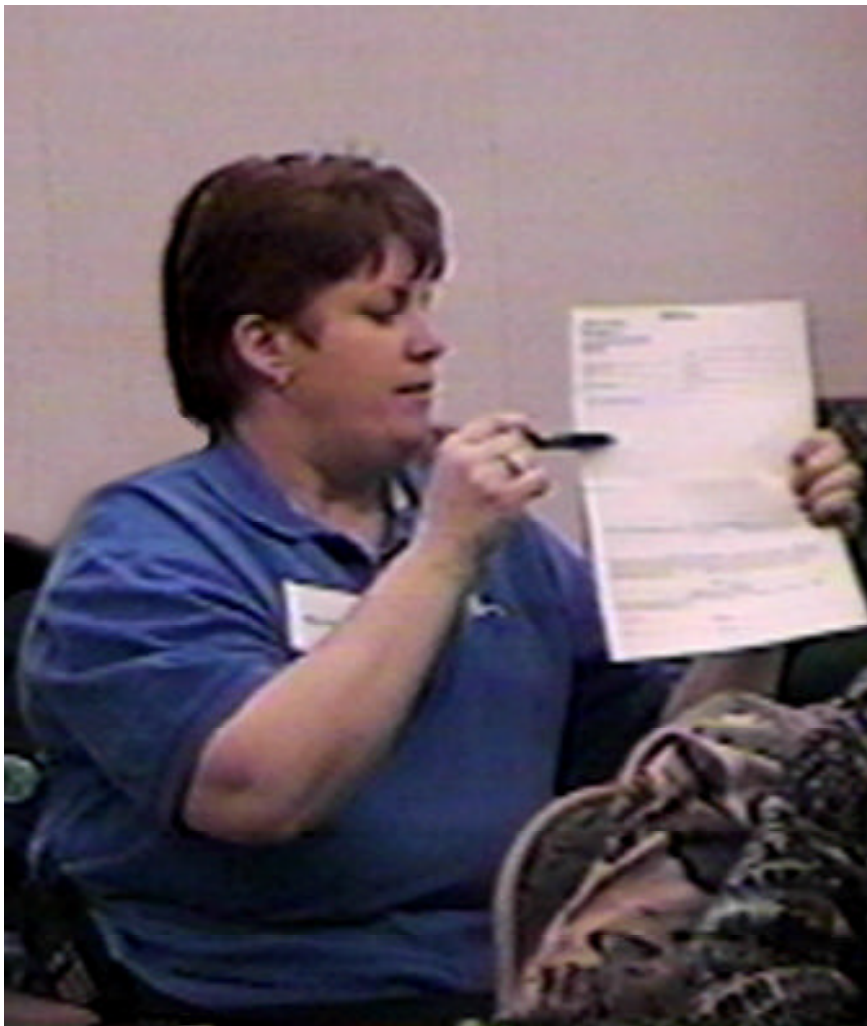
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Access, access denied." Chuck Hosler suggest that she upgrade Outlook with a Service Pack. Just make sure she chooses the correct Service Pack from the MS site.

Another member has downloaded a theme package that put in Windows Opening and Closing pictures. She didn't want those pictures and deleted that package, but the pictures are still there. Shane explained that those files are stored in the Windows folder. The theme package had automatically deleted the originals and replaced them. She needs to go to the MS website, search for Start Up Screen to find a replacement.

Next there was a printer problem, it always turns on when the computer is turned on. Shane explained that new printers have a two-way communication setting (bi-directional printing). This feature tells the user ink status, paper status etc., and will turn on the printer along with the computer. It will not harm the printer to be on while the computer is being used and will turn off when the computer is turned off.

Barb Barghan and her MS Word problem



Chuck Hosler, who has Bi-directional printing, wants to make an adjustment but can't find the menu to do so. The manual was no help in finding it. A suggestion is to go to the HP site and do a help search on Bi-directional printing to find a way to the menu.

Some other topics covered were the differences between a laptop and a desktop computer, Windows 2000 forgetting it has a modem, instructions on resetting a cable modem when it starts to slow down and Scandisk.

Shane will also post the Computer Trivia site on the listserv. Find out how much you know and don't know!

The presentation about New Horizons Training Centers was given by Lonnie Smith and Al Siikarla, who came from the Wausau regional center. New Horizons is the largest corporate training center with over 280 locations worldwide. There is a three classroom training center in Holmen so classroom training is available locally. But classroom instruction isn't the only option.

There is Online learning which takes place at your own pace. Web-based training is done over the internet and Computer-based training is done from a CD which is a total of four hours of training time.

Online LIVE (limited release) has realtime, instructor-led courses over the Internet. This has the advantages of a live instructor and the accessibility of the internet.

New Horizons offers classes on Databases, Hardware, Operating Systems and Programming. Some of the vendors that are covered are Microsoft, Adobe, Cisco, Corel, Linux, Lotus, Macromedia, Novell, Sun etc.

Some of the software categories are Communications, Desktop Publishing, Finance, Multi Media, Project Planning, Spreadsheets, Utilities, Word Processing etc.

New Horizons also helps with certifications. They have one of the largest networks of Microsoft Certified Technical Education Centers (CTECs), Novell Authorized Education Centers (NEACs), Lotus Authorized Education Centers (LAECs & CERT) and Authorized Prometric TM Testing Centers (APTC & CERT=PROMETRIC) in the industry. Many locations have additional authorizations for Apple, Corel, Adobe, Sun Symantec and others.

Barb B. asked if course ware can be customized to clients' needs. Yes, they can. Classes can be added based on customers' interests. For instance a Keyboarding class and Computers Made Easy. Classes generally have 10-12 students at a time and the course ware book can be kept. There is a six month free retake, sixty days access to the 24/7 Help Desk and certificate of completion. The instructors are evaluated and must have a 9.2 score or better to stay employed by New Horizons.

Technical schools can be more inexpensive but New Horizons offers clubs which can be more cost effective by offering many courses over the course of the year for a set fee. Not to mention access to the 24/7 help desk.

After the presentation, there was more talk about Palm. Shane has purchased 3x, which has 16 mg of memory, because Lotus Organizer takes 12 mg on the PC. However, the Palm version is only 1 1/2 meg, space is saved because it doesn't save blank fields.

He is amazed at how compact the programs and databases are for the Palm. He found a database with all 27,000 fish species in North American and it is less than a megabyte. The PC version has pictures, but the Palm version is text only.

You Need A New Video Card

*Bruce Pechman, Atlanta PC Users Group, reprinted from **Hard-Copy**, Journal of the Chicago Computer Society, March 2001*

As most of you are well aware, two years of technology can practically leapfrog any hardware or software you may own. This holds especially true for the thousands of developers and publishers in the PC entertainment industry vying for your greenbacks.

In this column, I will attempt to convince you why your video card is a major player in getting the most performance from your PC. I guarantee you will learn something you didn't know, so let's get started!

Telling It Like It Is

Unless you are a true enthusiast like myself (and would probably rather spend your dough on weekend getaways than buying a new video card every 6 months) you may not be aware of why the video card is so critical in getting the most enjoyment from your computer. The fact is you definitely do not need a new video card every 6 months. Your computer is more than up to the task providing it is a Pentium class running at least 266 MHz. However, if you bought a typical new computer in the last 3 years and it came bundled with a video card, I am sorry to say it is woefully inadequate for the task of running newer entertainment titles. Why? Well I thought you'd never ask! I promise not to get too technical, but I think you will all relate to my analogy. When you go to buy a new stereo, you pick this great receiver rated at 150 Watts per channel with Dolby Pro Logic, DSP, etc. But when it all comes down to it, if your speakers are sub-quality cheapies, your stereo will sound pretty bad even with that fancy 150-Watt receiver. This is exactly the same with a computer system (even today the Gateways & Dells are just getting this message and are finally bundling premium video cards with their systems). See, computers are all about visual information displayed on your monitor. This is how your computer communicates with you.

Ask What Your New Video Card Can Do For You

Things have changed big time. More folks are purchasing digital cameras, the Internet allows us to either download or view stream-

ing multimedia content, and software entertainment developers want you to see their games or stories exactly the way they were designed utilizing the latest technology at the project's inception. Let's put a few things into context here. With digital cameras or viewing web sites the standard can easily be 24 to 32-bit color and resolutions up to 1024x768. Your current video card may not handle that and so the colors will be off or dulled. But this is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Let's talk about video, gaming, or any form of digital video. Two words come to mind...Frame Rate. If you have a typical video card it may have 4MB (poor) or 8MB (still poor) of video RAM (VRAM). Guess what—you can hardly buy a new video card today with less than 32MB and more than half have 64MB of VRAM! Next month, a video card will debut with 128MB of VRAM.

That's right—probably more than your computer's entire system RAM. But don't despair; you definitely will not need that card anytime soon. The point is the primary function of the video card is to off load the laborious chore of graphics rendering from the CPU. That, my friends, is the crux of the matter. This will free your CPU to take care of business without the heavy load of the software rendering process. Remember the Frame Rate thing I spoke of? Frame Rates are measured in seconds, and today's minimum standard for games or digital movies is 30fps (frames per second). A new video card with 32MB of VRAM will allow for silky smooth frame rates passing 60fps, and, depending on what the screen resolution is, possibly over 80fps. In addition, your computer will be running happy as ~a pup with a plate of vanilla ice-cream on a hot summer day" as the CPU is not overburdened when running these graphic intensive entertainment nuggets.

What's All This Talk About PCI, AGP, and 2D and 3D?

Read on so I can clear this up. All video cards today offer outstanding 2D and 3D integrated support. 2D is basically what you

normally see such as you desktop, applications and data files. 3D kicks in when a game, multimedia or 3D modeling app requires it. So, a good quality video card will provide you with enormous benefits whether you're working in Office, cruising the web, game playing, or viewing rich multimedia content. Keep in mind that most video cards sold today are AGP (Accelerated Graphics Port). In addition, most new motherboards over the last 3 years include an AGP slot. AGP commonly comes in two speeds; 2x and on newer motherboards 4x. Even if you decide on a 4x AGP video card, but your motherboard is only 2x there is no problem as the cards are designed to work flawlessly under 2x AGP conditions. I promised not to get too technical, but it is important to know why AGP is a superior technology to the alternative, Pd (Peripheral Component Interconnect). 2x AGP can transfer data to the video card at a maximum rate of 533 MBps (Megabytes per second). 4x AGP can transfer data to the video card at a maximum rate of 1,067 MBps. However, the slower standard PCI slot can transfer only a modest 133 MBps. In a nutshell, the 2x or 4x AGP video cards are the way to go if your motherboard supports them because they can deliver data to video card at extremely fast rates.

I'm Sold...But What Video Card Do I Buy?

There are basically two camps battling for video chipset supremacy today. The two contenders are 3DFX Interactive's Voodoo 5 chipset (as in the currently shipping Voodoo5 5500 series) and N'vidia's GeForce2 (as in the currently shipping GeForce2 GTS series). Now the tricky part about vendor selection. For the Nvidia chipset, there are about 6 mainstream video card manufacturers with your choice or either 32 or 64MB of VRAM on board, but they will all use a GeForce chipset. For the 3DFX chipset, you have no choice of manufacturers as 3DFX makes both the chipset and the board as a sole source. The 3DFX 5500 series comes only in a 64MB configuration. But, 3DFX just released a PC! version of the 5500 series, which may be your only option if you do not have an AGP port and want the newest card.

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Enough, Give Me The Bottom Line

OK, I will tell you the best deal vs. performance out there in my opinion. Keep in mind all the new boards I mentioned from both Nvidia and 3DFX are about \$299 (expect to shell out another \$100 if you want the 64MB version of the Nvidia board). By the way, you really don't want to invest in the 64MB version from Nvidia as it only offers marginally better performance than its 32MB sibling. For details about the 32MB vs. 64MB argument go here: <http://www.tech-review.com/review.pl?id=160> My choice would be... the fact is both cards are very close in performance. When all the reviews are said and done, it's summarized like this: Nvidia has a slight edge in faster fps, but the 3DFX chipset makes graphics look a little better on screen as their Full-Screen Anti-Aliasing (FSAA) technology is better than Nvidia's. Additionally, be aware that the price of video cards may differ because of what is called "Gaming Bundles" or "TV Out" features. This means that some manufacturers will bundle the full version of currently shipping games with the video card. TV Out means you can hook up your TV as your monitor (not something I want to do anytime soon).

Choices, Choices

So what I am telling you is that you can't go wrong with either the 3DFX VooDoo5 5500 AGP (\$299) or the Nvidia GeForce2 GTS (\$299 I did find this for \$239 on the web (800) 585-4080 part # S1100073). If this is too steep for your allowance money, you can also investigate the lower end models of both companies' products. For 3DFX, you can look into the soon to be released VooDoo4, or the VooDoo3 series at around hundred a bucks. From Nvidia, you can research the original GeForce 256 chipset released last October, or even the newer low cost alternative, Nvidia GeForce2 MX (which should be available by the time you read this) for around \$150 as well. Keep in mind the newer cards support 32-bit color as well as the latest technologies, and are priced very attractively for the enjoyment they will bring to your life and PC.

Final Thoughts

Believe it or not I tried to make this article readable while foregoing the technical jargon. The fact is, video cards in and of themselves are extremely complex animals. A few years back, there was a major clash over what API would be supported on the cards: Glide, Open GL, D3D, RAVE, or Di-

rect X.. Thank goodness this has all been sorted out and most cards today will be able to support most anything you throw at them. Keep in mind to always keep your video card drivers current even if you don't buy a new card. When I get a new card, I just assume the drivers on the CD are old and that a newer set of drivers are just a click away at the manufacturer's web site. A few words about installing your new video card; ah forget it - why reinvent the wheel when you can just go here: <http://www.gamecenter.com/Hardware/Doit/Upgradevid/> Ask me any questions about video cards at next month's meeting. By the way—there is a reason I wrote that line about the pup and the ice cream. Bruce is in the doghouse right now as his wife stewes over his choice in getting the newest video card, and she no longer gets the promised weekend getaway to Hilton Head.



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Of the three, one was unreadable in four different models of Plextor drives, while it worked fine in a Kenwood 72X TrueX CD-ROM drive. But the fact that the Plextors could not read it and the Kenwood could, caused me to make a copy of it off the Kenwood, because this ten-year old disc contains data that I may need in the future. I feel safer now with the original and a backup that the Plextor drives are happy to deal with.

When will I check it again? Probably in a couple of years. Does this mean that you have to check all of your discs every so often to make sure they are still readable? Well, not every-thing, but do check your most valuable discs at least every year or two. Hopefully, you don't have so many that this becomes an undue burden. Just try to save the checking and re-recording for truly valuable discs of irreplaceable material, rather than copies of popular audio CDs, for example.

The other two discs were both readable in a professional CD tester and the Plextor drives, as well as the Kenwood drive. One had an error rate in the CD tester comparable to a freshly recorded CD-R disc, and the other had error rates higher than I would like, but still well within the maximum error rate considered safe for CD-ROM discs.

These discs were not tested for errors when they were made, so we do not know how the current error rates compare to the original and therefore cannot really judge degradation. But we do know that out of three ten-year-old recorded discs, one was on the edge, another was middling, and a third was just fine after all that time. Obviously too small a sample to draw any conclusions from, but the best we can do with what we have. One additional thing to note is that CD-R media has improved in the interim, at least discs from quality vendors

have. There are also a lot of no-name brands now that may be worse than our 10-year-old discs.

If your job is to manage a large collection of stored data on CD-R for a company, then you have a rather large task ahead of you setting up protocols and procedures for archival disc testing and re-recording. But for most of us, the time spent checking key discs will be minimal.

So the controversy over the actual life expectancy of CD-R discs continues and our quick anecdotal testing does not solve the mystery. Just be careful with crucial data, use good quality media, and store and treat it correctly. Chances are that you have at least 10 years before you need to start worrying.

LCPC Board

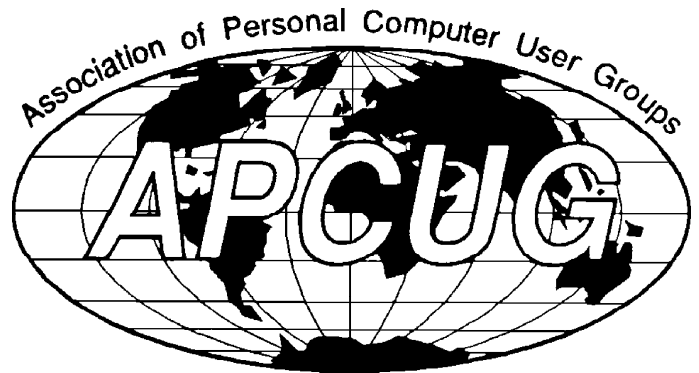
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General meetings are held the last Wednesday of Jan-Oct in the Overholt Auditorium at the Lutheran Hospital. The combined November-December meeting is held the second Wednesday in December.

Thank you, Gundersen-Lutheran, for making this wonderful facility available.

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, please submit articles by the 13th of the month. Upload to:

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