

New Style



Newsletter of the LaCrosse PC Users' Group

volume 22 number 2

February 2002

Inside

- ▣ Treasurer's report
- ▣ Meeting report
- ▣ Upgrading to Windows XP
- ▣ Internet shopping tips

This month's meeting

February 27

7:00 PM

Gundersen Lutheran, Overhold Auditorium

Presentation by Shane Lambert

Windows XP Explained

An Introduction by Shane

It's been about four months since I started using Windows XP and for the most part I have been pleased with it. It is far more stable, far more configurable and far faster than any other version of Windows. I am now running XP on five computers and the only real problem I have had is getting my flatbed scanner to work, which it still doesn't.

At our next meeting I will be talking about my experience with XP and show you some of the neat features as well as how to configure your version of XP just for you. XP has a whole new look, which I like, however, for those that don't; you can switch back to the old Windows 95/98/ME look either in part or in full. Configuration options are easy to find and a right click on just about any item gives you more options than ever before.

One of my favorite new features of XP is the grouping of similar items on the task bar. In older version of Windows, when you have multiple browser windows open while working with other programs, the buttons on the task bar just got smaller to make room. Now, Windows XP will group them all under one button and pop up a menu when you click on it. I will show this feature in detail at our meeting. For those that don't like this feature, right clicking on the task bar, clicking on properties and deselecting that feature will disable it.

Continued on page 2

President's Message

Marian Havlik

On behalf of the new LCPC Board, I welcome each of you to all of the LCPC meetings. The Board invites you to bring a guest to every meeting. We have some timely programs planned, but also need your suggestions. My contact method of choice is email. How did we ever do without it!

I've been an LCPC member since December 1986. Although a nurse by training (until 1987), I've had a biological consulting business since 1977. We do research on rivers. Our projects for state, federal and private agencies vary from one day to 11 weeks, from Wisconsin to Nebraska, Kentucky, Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, and Missouri.

Projects result in reports up to 200 pages in length, and presentations at regional and national meetings. I first found out what a \$13,000. word processor could do in 1982 at WWTC. Since I got arthritis in my fingers at a young age, I was thrilled with the idea that I wouldn't have to type a manuscript over if editors wanted it changed (which of course they always do).

So I read up on computers, and got one as soon as I could afford it. It didn't take long to realize I wanted an IBM compatible, rather than a Mac. I got an AT & T 6300 in July 1985. \$4,000. for a computer, a 9 pin printer, and Lotus Symphony software. It had 640K of memory, and 2 floppies.

I had Microage tell me how to save a file, and turn it off and on, and figured out most of the

rest on my own. I wondered how I'd ever fill up a floppy disk. Silly girl.

After several years of use by grandchildren, we took my first computer to Goodwill in 1998. In December 1986, I got a used 5 meg hard drive for \$400.

I upgraded regularly until 1993 (Lotus no longer upgrades Symphony). Except that Symphony didn't have all the whistles and bells of some things released after that, I loved it because I easily created text and tables in the same document, and can tell exactly when I changed a file, and how big the file is (something you can't easily do with today's MS Office).

I could also create simple graphs, and export them to Harvard Graphics for a nicer

Continued on page 2

Marsha Kurth, last month's speaker



Visit our homepage at <http://www.lcpconline.com>

President— Continued from page 1

picture or slide. One of my favorite files has a report, tables, graphs and a database in 100,000 bytes.

In May 1992 I got a new desktop (486-66 that's had some upgrades). 2 weeks after the new computer, I found out I was going to be gone a month, and realized I couldn't survive without a laptop. So laptops have been my PC of choice since 1992. I've had Acers, IBMs, Toshiba, Compaq, and since October 2001 I've been using a Sony Vaio. Some have been better than others, and I've liked different things about each.

I prefer the eraser mouse, but have gotten used to the touch pad. The Sony has a huge screen, but it is heavy to lug through an airport (I never travel without a laptop).

Although I have MS Office 2002, I'm still not thrilled with this for many aspects of my reports, but you can create nice, easily adjustable tables in Word. I've forced myself to give up workin on reports in Symphony (although it is much easier on the eyes), but we (Chuck & I) can't figure out how to get expanded memory to "see" all of the big files I have in Symphony. If I import one to Word or Excel, you lose formatting. So guess I'll have to keep both the old desktop and the Compaq laptop working (Win 95 on both).

Many groups require abstracts and manuscripts in a certain format (Times New Roman, 12 pt.), so I'm forcing myself to use Word almost all of the time. Many group require presentations on PowerPoint, and that works well for presentations at meetings, and it's much cheaper than having slides made.

Continued from page 1

Another feature I like is the hiding of system tray icons, you know, those icons over by the clock on the task bar. I have seen some people with over 30 icons on the system tray leaving very little room for task bar buttons. Windows XP can hide inactive icons, and you can configure which ones will appear and which ones should be hidden and when. You can always see all of the icons with a single click.

One of the features I used the most is the ability to put a desktop menu on the taskbar, which when clicked pulls up a menu with all your desktop icons along with a few other useful items. You can also add customized

Treasurers and Membership Report January 2002

Dick Dahlby, Treasurer February 15, 2002

We received income of \$200.00 from ten membership renewals. These were: Don Atkinson and Carol Frank, Marlene Stolpa, Ted Latham, Ken Buckley, Jack Storlie, Robin Alexander, Marian Havlik, Brian Hopkins, Paul Shie, and Gary Stelzig. Thanks to each of you for your continued interest and support.

Expenses paid in January were: \$17.75 for checks, \$34.00 for postage stamps, \$1.20 for mailing envelopes, \$12.66 for 30 photocopies of the January LCPC Newsletter, \$20.00 for annual renewal fee for our registered domain name (website), and \$11.27 for two 15 foot VGA monitor cables.

The LCPC checking account balance as of 02/13/2002 is \$997.00.

We presently have 55 "enrolled" members in LCPC.

Members whose annual renewal fees (dues) are presently past due are: (Dec.) Bill Brockmiller, and Mike Henderson. (Jan.) Kathryn Urban.

Members whose renewal fees are due in February are: Arlene Bacon.

Annual dues are \$20, and checks should be made payable to La Crosse PC Users Group. Dues may be mailed to either of the following addresses:

La Crosse PC Users Group
P.O. Box 2991
La Crosse, WI 54601-2991

Dick Dahlby
501 Olivet St
La Crosse, WI 54603-1318

I may not be able to attend the February 27th meeting, so any dues to be paid to me in person, may have to be done at the March 27th meeting.

We had one visitor/guest at the January meeting: Larry Nagy. Hopefully Larry will become a member in the future.

High tech goes Low tech

While on the Knitters' Forum a few nights ago, I found another use for those excess AOL CDs.

Handspinning!

A simple drop spindle (the primitive precursor to the spinning wheel) can be made by inserting a dowel through a CD and held in place with rubber bands.

A drop spindle has the advantage over a spinning wheel of being cheap and portable.



tool bars to the task bar. I also like the fact that your most commonly used programs will always appear on the start menu, and you can set the number of items that will appear. You can also easily pin items to the start menu for easy two-click access. These are all features that I will discuss at our next meeting.

Those who have a network in their home will find it easy to connect computers with different operating systems to a Windows XP machine. XP will make a network setup disk

Continued on page 4

Wireless, Friend or Foe?

January 2002 meeting

Carol Frank, secretary

The presentation was given by Marsha Kurth, Director of the Technology Business Alliance at WWTC. Her purpose is to promote the region, defined as sixty miles around LaCrosse, as a technology zone. There is a technological brain drain from Wisconsin that she is trying to stop by bringing education, government, and industry together.

The talk is about broadband data services with an emphasis on Wireless. The geography of the Coulee Region, with its valleys and ridges, has caused some difficulty for wireless services. Currently there is a moratorium on tower construction. Some people object to the site of towers and want fewer of them. However, if there are fewer towers, those towers have to be taller. Some towers are disguised as flagpoles and many are on church steeples (a source of revenue for the parish!) and on farmers' silos. Currently the Updated Regional Wireless Communication Tower ordinance and a Regional Tower Siting plan are being proposed and public input is desired.

What is Broadband?

The FCC defines broadband as "the capability of suoothing, in both the provider to consumer, or downstream,, and the consumer to provider, or upstream, directions, speed in excess of 200 kilobits per second" Ms Kurth also has statistics on the world leaders in broadband use.

- U.S.A.-10,000 (9.52%)
- Korea-5,800 (40%)
- Canada-1,900 (16.24%)
- Germany-1,500 (3.94%)
- Japan-1,500 (3.36%)

Marsha also makes the prediction that India and mainland China will soon be on this list. Ernesto later that night made the point that cell phones and other wireless technologies are popular in many less developed nations because the current infrastructure for phone service is very bad. A householder can be on a waiting list for a land line for years.

According to a study done by Ms Kurth,"broadband has prospered in countries where national and regional governments have set aggressive targets, investment in the infrastructure is encouraged and the regula-

tory environment is conducive to competition."

She also had a list of desired bandwidths for home use of certain applications. For example:

- Video conferencing 110Kbs to 800 Kbs
- Tele or E-learning-110 Kbs to 7 Mbs
- Movies on Demand-1 Mbs to 7 Mbs

It seems that greater capacity encourages greater use. UW-L has six T-3s but still crawls because of heavy use by students downloading music and video. However, the majority of home users still use modems to access the internet. DSL and cable are still perceived by many as being too expensive.

Technological advances that would encourage more people to use broadband services and eventually bring down the cost are: e-commerce, e-banking and telemedicine. Ernesto says that Telemedicine is dead because of government regulations won't let medical information be transmitted over the internet (privacy concerns).

What needs to be done is to educate consumer to understand what the technology can do for them.

There was another guest, Dawn King, Resident Nurse Coordinator. There are seven highrises and three family units and they are trying to get computers and internet service at all of the sites. What is needed are volunteers for the computers labs to help residents. Many are very unsure of using computers. There are some Middle School students helping out but more volunteers are always needed. Marian suggested that some of the residents can take classes at the Senior Citizens rates and then help others.

Chuck did some explaining about hubs and routers. A routers can be used as an interface between your modem (or DSL or cable) and multiple computers. A router automatically changes your ISP address, logs onto the

internet for you and prevents 80% of hacking attempts. Some routers have a built in firewall. Since the router has the firewall File sharing can be turned on to allow exchanging data between computers on your LAN.

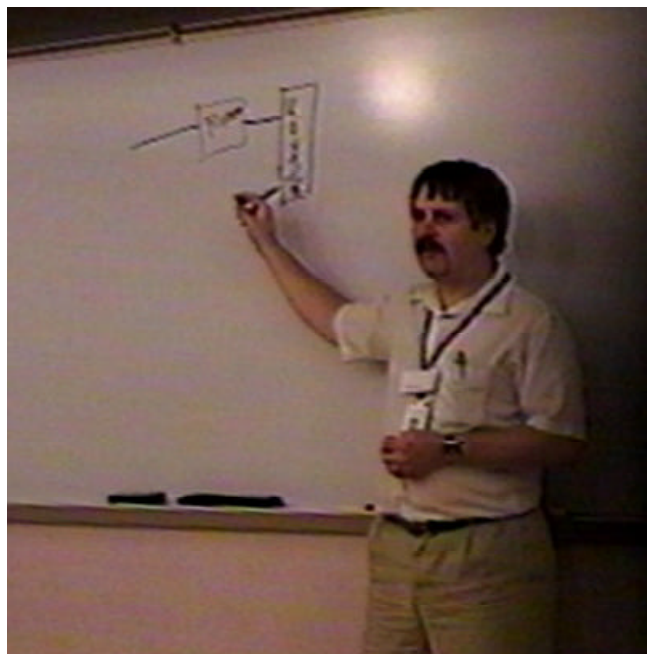
There are only three companies with routers in the \$75 to 85 range: Linksys, Netgear and D-link. According to Chuck, the D-link isn't any good, Linksys is fine but customer service is awful, which leaves Netgear as the one to buy. Sysco is a fine, albeit expensive, router that has management features useful for businesses but unnecessary for home use.

A router with wireless capabilities, (useful for your laptop) can cost \$100 or more. It would have a 11 Mgb microwave antenna and well the 100 mgb wire connections. You can access the internet and the LAN at the same time.

A hub in just a bridge. It brings the wires together and shares everything at once. A router can keep data separated.

Chuck also describes two kinds of modems. The cheaper ones are controllerless and uses the computers CPU. A controlled modem has its own brains and is less work for the computer. The modem can receive up to 11 bits of information and then send them on to the computer. If the computer isn't fast enough, the modem might need to resend because the information was lost.

Chuck explaining about modems and routers



XP Upgrade? Get Ready Now

Steve Bass, Pasadena IBM Users Group, reprinted from Phoenix PC Users Group News, December 2001

I'm going to upgrade. Yep, I'm breaking one of Bass International's number one rules, but I think it's going to be worth it.

I can't give you all the details because it's coming out in December's PC World Home Office column (hey, they pay the mortgage). What I can do, however, is share parts of my upgrade experience, things that I didn't have space to say in the PCW column.

DOS Programs: Every legacy application I tried worked. A 1988 version of FoxBASE+ 2.10, WordStar 7.0, Norton Commander, and even a 1984 copy of Autodex 1.0, something few of you could possibly remember.

More intriguing is Win XP's ability to run these programs better-faster and with more stability-that Win 9x. Why? Who knows, folks, magic maybe, but it does. I had trouble with only one program-an early Windows version of Ventura Publisher. It turns out that even the current version of VP won't run under Windows XP. Advice: Read MS's "Reliability Improvements" article that explains why XP's more stable than Win 9.x. It's at <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/pro/techinfo/planning/reliability/prevention.asp>

Then read "Windows XP Application Compatibility Technologies," a very comprehensive article that explains how to tweak apps so they'll run in XP. Pay special attention to the QfixApp, a tool that gets you to the database of compatibility fixes included with XP. <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/pro/techinfo/planning/appcompat/default.asp>

Drivers and Upgrades: My Turtle Beach Santa Cruz sound card wouldn't work with XP.

Advice: As with any Operating System upgrade (excluding Amiga and GEOS), dig out the drivers and upgrades before you start the upgrade. If you can, burn them onto a CD-ROM.

Networking: Lots, lots easier than in Win 9.x with one proviso...you'll have to dump NETBEUI on the other PCs in the network. Win XP relies totally on TCP/IP.

Advice: Hone up on your networking skills or hire a consultant to up to speed. Read MS's "Home and Small Office Network Topologies," article at: <http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/pro/techinfo/planning/networking/topologies.asp>

Internet Explorer: IE 6.0 doesn't support Netscape-style plug-ins. The only one I missed-and was annoyed with MS's removal of—Apple's QuickTime player. That meant I couldn't play MOV videos. MS's claims it's for security. I say it's hogwash and a way to lock out Apple. By the time you read this, MS and Apple have probably tweaked the QuickTime Player to support ActiveX controls for IE 6.

Advice: If the QuickTime player doesn't work, find the patch on MS's site.

Getting a Jump: One good place to see if your PC is ready for XP is with PC Pitstop. They have a neat-o XP test site that examines your PC's operating system, CPU speed, BIOS version, amount of memory, available hard drive space, and video capabilities. The results tell you how your machine matches up to XP's minimum and recommended requirements. The tool is available for you to try at <http://www.pcpitstop.com/xpready>

MS also has many good articles if you're a tinkerer:

** The "Consumer Desktop PC Design Checklist for Windows XP" provides technical details for building a new PC for XP. <http://www.microsoft.com/hwdev/pcdesign>

** You might want to continue using W2K while experimenting with XP. Read "Multibooting with Windows 2000 and Windows XP" <http://www.microsoft.com/windows2000/techinfo/administration/management/mltboot.asp>

I'll have more to say about my XP upgrade experience next month.

XP—Continued from page 2

for you that will automate the setup of networking on older versions of Windows. It only took me about a half hour to have three computers in the office, one with XP, one with 98 and one with ME networked together. Of course, now all of my computers have XP, which makes network connections faster.

As with any version of Windows, I always suggest to people who are upgrading to not upgrade from a previous version of Windows but to always start with a blank drive. This is especially true with XP as it uses a different, and far superior, file system originally developed for use in Windows NT. In the past, I would have to defragment my drive every week, now, once a month is more than enough. It is possible to run XP using the old FAT 32 system of 98 and ME but the stability of NTFS is one of the main reasons for upgrading. I had a few problems when upgrading from ME on my Hewlett Packer so I went the long route and reinstalled to a blank drive.

I know it's funny to hear me talk so positively about a Microsoft product, but lacking any alternative operating system that will run all of the programs I need to run my business, it's nice to finally see a stable version of Windows. I have yet to lock the system up on any computer with XP installed, and believe me, I have tried.

If you are now running Windows XP or are thinking of upgrading, I would suggest you attend our next meeting where I will talk about many of the features in this article as well as many others. I will also leave some time to answer questions you may have. I don't know everything about XP yet, but I am learning more every day.



Shopping Tips for Internet Shopaholics

By Steve Bass, Pasadena IBM Users Group

Last month I described my experience spending over \$150 to save about \$4 on vitamins I bought on the Internet. This column takes care of the other side of the story: Tips on tackling the problems of Internet buying.

Fighting the Free Syndrome

How much do you make an hour? If you're clocking more than, say, \$5 an hour, don't waste your time hunting for discounts that come and go. The worst ones to try finding are free shipping or \$10 off with your first order. A better strategy? If you bump into an offer from **Half.com**, say, and you're in the market for a bunch of used books, it's a slam-dunk. Otherwise, don't bother tracking them down.

Factor in Shipping

Paying attention to shipping costs may seem obvious, but there are variables to consider. You might think you'll save on shipping by choosing a site that charges a flat fee for shipping no matter how many items you purchase. That's likely true unless the site's products are inflated to cover the shipping costs. With some items—vitamins, for instance—that's not such a big deal as most sites charge a flat \$4.95 for standard shipping. (One exception, though, is **AdvanceRX**; they charge a flat fee of \$3 for the entire order, and the product pricing is lower than other drug sites.)

Listen to Users

The wealth of opinions on the Net is overwhelming and you need to tap into it before making any major purchase. There are two spots I listen in on, are useful in its own way. First try the newsgroups and do it using the **Google.com** search engine. When I was interested in a camcorder, I typed "Panasonic Camcorder" into the Google search field and clicked on Groups. Goggle will provide a list of groups that contain the two words. It's a little daunting from here because you'll face at least 10 groups. Choose the one that's closest to your search. For instance, "Humanities" (Fine art, literature, philosophy) and "Misc" (Employment, health) won't fit while "Comp" (Hardware, software, consumer info) sure will.

You'll then see a dozen or more subgroups belonging to Comp, each with a green bar showing the likely hits in the groups. Type "Panasonic Camcorder" into the field again and choose "Search only in comp."

The dilemma, as you'll soon find out, is there's a lot to sort through in order to find the recommendations and discussion you're looking to read.

The other spot I really like is **Epinions.com**. It's filled with people like us providing their observations and experiences with products. Don't be put off by thinking these are just willy-nilly opinions. Granted, some are, but most people are careful and thorough in their reports, few seem to have an ulterior motive, and those that do are easy to spot.

Try Epinions by typing, "Choosing an Air Conditioner" into the search field. Scroll down to "Member Advice" and you'll get a sense of what Epinions offers. Better, search for an item you're very familiar with and see what others have to say.

Make those Comparisons

You're crazy if you shop on the Internet without using a price comparison site. There are many available, and here's a sampling:

- ** **Mysimon.com**
- ** **Dealtime.com**
- ** **Pricingcentral.com**
- ** **Bizrate.com**
- ** **Smartshop.com**
- ** **BuyBuddy.com**

If you're wondering which sites I use regularly, take a gander at some of my favorites:

Pricescan.com: A neat site with an assortment of ways to search for products and spots to purchase the item. The site does an exemplary job at digging up pricing for a myriad of products including for books, computers, office equipment, home and garden, and other categories.

DestinationRX.com: Does a remarkable job at neatly displaying a grid with product, vendor, price, estimated shipping, and total cost. Great: Sorting by column—cost or price—is easy, and getting details about the vendor is a click away. Not so hot: "Total Cost field" doesn't take into account price per unit, so comparing a bottle of 100 60milligram vitamins with the same bottle of 100mg vitamins isn't accurate.

Canada.rx: A member of another user group told me about **Canada.rx**. She said, "I thought you might be interested in this solution for prescription drugs. A friend is diabetic and has who knows what else. His doctor faxes his prescriptions and he receives a package a few days later with no hassle from the post office. (His only real difficulty lay in convincing his doctor to send the fax and that only had to be done once.) His credit card is charged approximately one-third the price he'd pay locally. I asked him for the URL and this is his response:

'It's CanadaRx. No www, no .com, nothing but CanadaRx. They keep changing the entry screens, making it sometimes difficult to find the screen one wants. But it's all there. All that's needed in patience. Persistence helps some too.'

I checked and the prices really are substantially lower than most discount pharmacies.

Pricewatch.com: This site has been around the longest and provides a fast, convenient way to find the best prices on computing hardware.

Addall.com: Think Amazon has the best prices in town? Nope. **Half.com**, **BooksAMillion.com**, and others often beat Amazon. The saving are enough that it makes using Addall.com a must every time you shop for books.

PCworld.pricegrabber.com: I'm a little biased here, so pardon my conflict-of-interest for a minute, and try PCWorld's Product Finder. Primarily hardware, software, and electronics, it gives you a way to find products, and check and compare their prices. Three things I like better here than the other sites: I can easily track a product, watching for price changes, just by supplying my e-mail address. Next, if the product's been reviewed by PC World, one click gets me to the article. Finally, the site gives me access to the full spec sheet of the product, something I find invaluable.

Cnet's shopper.cnet.com: Does a decent job with hardware and software but only so-so for consumer electronics. It's sometimes difficult separating ads from product reviews.

Steve Bass is a Contributing Editor with PC World and runs the Pasadena IBM Users Group. He's also a founding member of APCUG. Write to him at Steve_bass@pcworld.com. Check PCW's current edition at <http://www.pcworld.com/resource/toc/index.asp> and sign up for the Steve Bass online newsletter at www.pcworld.com/bass_letter.

LCPC Board

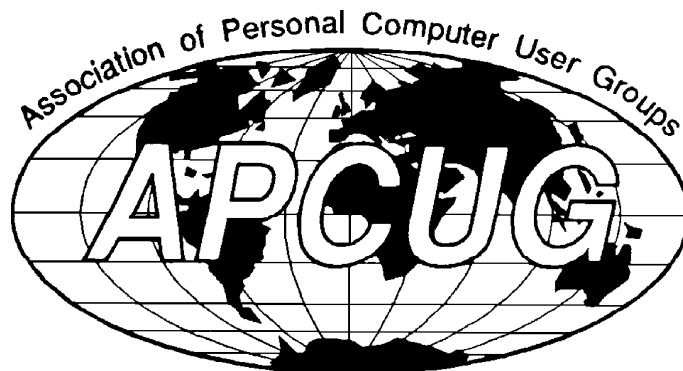
Marian Havlik—President, Board 782-7958
havlikme@aol.com

Ernesto Brauer—Vice-President, Board . 787-6678

Dick Dahlby—Treasurer, Board 781-9356
Ddahlby@cs.com

Don Atkinson 784-0150
Newsletter editor and publisher donaldeatkinson@aol.com

Carol Frank 784-0150
Secretary, Board, newsletter, programs
carolmfrank@aol.com



WWW.APCUG.ORG

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 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:

lacrossepcug@aol.com

Commercial advertising rates: \$50 per page, \$25 for half, etc. Member's personal ads are free.

LCPC

P.O. Box 2991

LaCrosse, WI 54602-2991