



# microCHIP

the Newsletter of the

## Mid-Hudson Computer User Group Inc.

Monthly since 1977

www.mhcug.org

Volume 32 Issue 3 March 2008

# Thinking of HDTV

Ray Polivka



Digital TV is rapidly approaching. In February 2009, analogue TV will cease to exist. Thus everyone will be going to Digital TV. At the General Meeting on January 11<sup>th</sup>, Jerry Greenberg presented us with detailed information concerning HDTV. He began by showing a comparison between current TVs and HDTV. For example, in today's TVs the total number of lines on the screen is 525 where HDTV will have 1125 lines. The aspect ratio changes from 3 by 4 to 9 by 16. Instead of two channels of sound there will be five channels. DTV will receive compressed digital signals. He discussed technically the nature of bandwidth and the variety of bandwidths. But then he listed several things that will affect your choice.

Where are you going to put it? Do you want to mount it on the wall? What is the size of the room into which it is to go?

What angle of view is needed? Will it work with existing furniture? How do you want to use it? Such questions and probably others like cost will influence a major choice – Size. There are a variety of sizes from reasonable to ungainly huge.

He discussed the resolution formats. They have changed from today's 480 image pixels vertically and 720 image pixels horizontal to 1080 vertical and 1920 horizontal. The more pixels the better the picture. Of course there is no standard for video recording; there is 720i, 720p, 1080i and 1080p. "i" indicates interlaced scanning and "p" progressive scanning. A lot depends on the transmission folk. Different networks transmit differently. Thus a TV set needs to accommodate all of them. From this jumble of technical details, he went on to illustrate pictorially the various implementations manufacturers are using to create the pictures in the HDTV set. The various techniques were front projection, rear projection, CRT, LCD, and Plasma.

In addition to these, Jerry showed a new scheme called DLP, Digital Light Projection. Originated by Texas Instruments in the 80's, it consists of semiconductor like chips with oscillating mirrors (yes, mirrors, actually there are several million) and for color a mechanical color wheel is used. It has the advantage that black is true. Note that the color wheel has been replaced by light emitting diodes on the new HDTV sets. Today, apparently many stores have the older models with the color wheel.

The world of connections is another source of confusion to the consumer. Some of the connectors encountered are Video, composite RCA, and HDMI (High Definition Multimedia Interface). There are at least three levels, HDMI1, HDMI2, and HDMI3. The higher the number, the better since it offers more flexibility. He showed graphically the various types of cables.

Jerry did not discuss the situation for those who have roof mounted antennae or indoor rabbit ears. He had no experience with them. The government will send you, upon request, two coupons worth \$40 each to purchase a converter box. Note that the purchase of a converter box must be done within 90 days of your receipt of the coupon. This box will convert the digital signal into an analog signal. The technology is changing rapidly therefore you need to research to keep up. Beside the web, PC magazines and Consumer Reports (see the March 08 issue) are good sources of information.

A significant amount of discussion followed his presentation. Jerry concluded by saying that whatever you choose, it will be better than what you have today. In summary, you as the customer have to do some work to determine what is important to you. ☐

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## March 13: Windows Home Server

Our speaker, MHCUG long-time member John Bickford, has been using WHS through the Microsoft Beta and Release Candidate periods. He found this to be so helpful that he acquired an HP EX475 (MSS) which he will bring to the meeting to demonstrate.

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**Monthly Meetings**

Scheduled the second Thursday of every month. Check [www.mhcug.org](http://www.mhcug.org) for possible changes to general and SIG meetings. Local radio stations will be advised if a meeting is cancelled unexpectedly.

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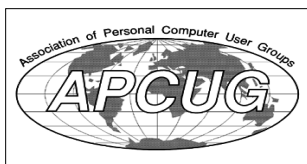
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\* All area codes are 845 unless shown otherwise.

**Website: [www.mhcug.org](http://www.mhcug.org)**

**Bits, Bytes 'N Kudos**

by Dick Kranz

We welcome Harry Elder to the writing staff of our award-winning microCHIP newsletter. Be sure to read his article covering the February 18 Technology Workshop elsewhere in this newsletter. We welcome others to also submit articles concerning their experiences with hardware and software. Those interested in writing an article or review can obtain more information from our web site [www.mhcug.org](http://www.mhcug.org) where

you can click on the microCHIP (submissions guidelines.)

Jack Marsella has been appointed to coordinate with members desiring to start new special interest groups (SIGs). If you feel we should have a special interest group where members can gain knowledge through interaction at a SIG meeting, please contact Jack via his e-mail: [mumbassa@optonline.net](mailto:mumbassa@optonline.net). SIGs can be formed to help members learn various programs, operating systems and whatever challenges your mind. Genealogy? Online banking? Investing? Microsoft Word, Excel? Jack will work with the Board of Directors to survey membership interest and help find a moderator (SIG Leader) and meeting place.

We are in need of someone to install and review Windows Live\* One Care\* 2.0 in exchange for one full year of service for up to three PCs, including unlimited phone and e-mail support. You will be provided with a reviewer's guide that will give you a first look at the features of Windows Live One Care 2.0 and how it benefits non-technical PC users. One Care is an end-to-end PC care service that simplifies PC security, backup and performance tune-ups across multiple PCs in a home or small business network. Contact this writer for further information.

Readers are invited to take a first look at our newly revamped web site. Many thanks to Jerry Clark for his invaluable work updating the old and adding new features such as a forum and a monthly calendar of events. Members who would be interested in moderating a forum congruous with any of our Special Interest Groups or other topics of general interest to our members should contact this writer.

Readers are also encouraged to click on or go to <http://www.apcug-ldc2008.org/> for updated description and workshop schedules at the nearby APCUG leadership development conference May 17 and 18th in Palisades Center mall, West Nyack, NY. You will find LDC to be a valuable resource for advancing one's technical knowledge as well as learning useful concepts for promoting our user group.

\*Windows Live and One Care are trademarks of Microsoft Corp. ☐

**April 10 – WEB 2.0 by**

John Lansdale, CDP, MCP and Christine Novell

John Lansdale possesses a background in Computers as a programmer, director and consultant since 1969. He is currently on the Board of Directors of the Danbury Area Computer Society (DACS) and is Special Interest Group Leader on Web Application Programming. John is also active in the Linux and C# groups. Christine Novell, VP-Programs of DACS will provide additional substance to this presentation by incorporating insights from her own perspective.

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# Special Interest Group News

## Technology Workshop

By Harry Elder

Some opening questions and specific questions at the Monday Feb. 18 Technology Workshop were addressed as follows:

Driver needed for older Lexmark printer on Vista laptop – the driver is not listed on the Lexmark website. It seems that XP drivers won't always work on Vista. A suggestion was made to try a tool called 'double-driver'. A second suggestion was made to install XP under Virtual PC on the Vista laptop and print from there. A third suggestion was to "Google" "Lexmark printer driver for Vista", which was done and the driver was found.

A second question was how to implement 'magic packets'. Magic packets allow a machine capable of using them to be powered on remotely. This is useful if someone wants to connect remotely with Remote Desktop and the target PC is powered off.

Someone had trouble removing 'Easy CD Creator Version 5'. Apparently there was no 'remove' choice under 'add/remove programs'. This prevented a newer program from installing, plus AVG still saw remnants of 'Easy CD Creator' after attempts to un-install it manually. It was explained that some related registry keys are under Microsoft twenty-five character identities strings, and are not obvious.

Dick Kranz gave a Power Point Presentation – compiled by Ash Nallawalla of the APCUG on the recent Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas. The show covered nearly two million square feet of exhibitor space, with 2,700 exhibitors, 130,000 attendees, with 25,000 from overseas. It was mentioned that there were additional off-site venues.

Some items shown were:

A 'fantastic camera' a 'hi-fi ST card with and 'Pinnacle video transfer.' These may be discussed in a future Digital Photography meeting.

A \$599 server that includes Windows Home Server and a 500GB hard drive. Share photos, iTunes, use remote access, backup and restore files for all home client PCs, stream media to TVs, an Xbox 360 or home entertainment center, and more. It's a true server – no keyboard, mouse or monitor.

GPS enabled foot-wear from Isaac Daniel company. Isaac Daniel has a fantastic web site.

Various new TV screens including an 'organic LED no back-light screen' from Sony.

Samsung 31" O-LED – thought to be an 'organic 4mm thick LED screen.

A 150" TV screen.

A new GM hybrid model.

Scott Jordon travel-wear.

Microsoft 'surface'. Large table size surface that you interact with your hands – move pictures around, etc.

Washable mouse.

'Taser with Laser'

A portable clothes dryer.

'Clean Butt' – a type of electronic bidet.

Lloyd Quick gave a presentation on the FCC's re-assignment of the TV frequency spectrum that will take place with the 2009 conversion to digital television. 108 Megahertz of the current TV and FM broadcast spectrum will be re-assigned. The new

digital TV channels will replace the frequencies currently used by TV channels 7-13, 15-19, 21-36 and 38-54. Channels 2-6 will be eliminated. This means that new antennas don't need to be as long as the older or current models, but if you have an older, large antenna, it should work well. New antennas should have a color code on the box that will indicate the relative strength of the antenna. A new antenna marked 'HDTV' may not necessarily be any better than a good, but older antenna.

The discussion continued on with HDTV's in general. LCD displays are nice, but they use a back-light, which eventually needs replacement, and can be expensive. Plasma displays are nice too, but had, or used to have, a problem where a static image left on a display for a very long time, such as a still picture or a logo, could 'burn' the image to the screen. Various new designs reduce or eliminate that problem now. Rear projection displays using LEDs (RPTV) are very promising. They incorporate DLP technology (Digital Light Processor) from Texas Instruments. Older designs use a color wheel, and some retailers still sell them. Newer designs don't use a color wheel, so check with your reseller. DLP-RPTVs have a very long life expectancy. Standard HDTVs range from 720-1080P, defining the picture clarity. 1080P is a Blu-Ray set. Blu-Ray seems to be becoming more popular. To retain good picture clarity, you can generally get up to sixteen feet away from a 480I set, and ten feet from a 720P set, and six and a half feet from a 1080P set. The overall quality of HDTV depends not only on the type of set but also on the type of camera used to produce the image.

Non-HDTVs use a '4x3' format, meaning that for every four inches in width, the height is three inches. HDTVs used a 16x9 format, which corresponds to the ratio of most commercial movies. You need an HDTV that is 1.2 times larger than your current analog set to get the same viewing experience of an analog set where '4x3' programming is shown.

Connect your HDTV with HDMI cables, which replace DVI cables. Also use the highest rated HDMI cables, currently at 1.3., and be sure that your set uses the newer HDMI cables.

The next Technology Workshop will be held on the third Monday March 17 in Conference room "B" at Guardian Storage Business Development Center, 3 Neptune Rd. Town of Poughkeepsie. Contact Technology Workshop leader Dick Kranz for additional information. ☐

## Upgrade and Repair

Ray Polivka

There was a very full house at the Upgrade and Repair gathering on January 28<sup>th</sup>. This time with the 22 plus attendees, no computer came and needed attention. However, there did appear a Linksys wireless router. The router came in with a challenge. Its owner dared anyone to connect to the Internet through the router. Several persons who had laptops tried but were unsuccessful. The conclusion was that the router was defective.

Gene Barlow's latest newsletter discussed the latest release of Acronis. In version 11 and perhaps in version 10, Acronis has a new feature labeled Try and Decide. As the title implies one can try to do a clone or backup without committing to do it. One can go to UGR.com to get this version 11 for about \$29. If you are willing to get it on a CD, the cost is about \$4 plus shipping.

*continued on page 4*

*continued from page 3*

One person had his Dell PC power supply light blinking yellow. This implied that the power supply was failing. He was interested in a tester for power supplies. A discussion on testing and power supplies occurred. Someone reported that one could get a new power supply as cheaply as a power supply tester. The power supply recommended was Antec 's Earthwatts EA380. At meeting time it was listed at NewEgg for \$5 dollars. This must have been a mistake, later it was reported that the price was changed to \$34.99 +\$0 shipping. This is still a very good price in its wattage class. The conclusion was to buy a new power supply rather than a tester which may not be accurate anyway.

Someone reported that he had to recover from a bad virus via an earlier clone. This led to a discussion of encryption. The application PGP, Pretty Good Privacy was mentioned. Go to [www.pgp.com](http://www.pgp.com) to get further information. They do provide a 30 day free trial. There are several open source encryption schemes if you need one. Two such encryption software packages are

- TrueCrypt V4.3a ([www.truecrypt.org](http://www.truecrypt.org)) - free. It supports both encryption and hidden volumes..
- Password Safe ([passwordsafe@sourceforge.net](mailto:passwordsafe@sourceforge.net)) - free. It uses Blowfish (yes, that is its name) algorithms. Blowfish algorithms appear to be the latest encryption schemes.

However, someone mentioned that most encryption programs are not intended to be cloned. If you do clone encrypted data, determine if the cloned data can be read. It is not useful to clone encrypted material only to find you can't read it.

One of the attendees related a problem he had with one of his hard drives. It was misbehaving. He used some SMART software to diagnose his problem. This led to a discussion of SMART utilities. One can search for SMART utilities on the web. Two SMART utilities were suggested. They were

- ActiveSMART v2.6 by Ariolic ([ariolic.com](http://ariolic.com)) This one allows a 30 day free trial before it costs you.
- HDDScan V2.8 ([HDDguru.com](http://HDDguru.com)). It is free and does not require installation just to see data and not to track it over time.

For tracking a specific brand of a hard drive go to the hard drive's manufacture and get their SMART utility. SeaGate and Hitachi each have their own, but they only work on their own brand. Such utilities provide a lot of information such as the temperature of the hard drive and the number of rereads. This latter number could indicate a failing drive. As it turned out for this attendee, the problem was not with his hard drive. It was the cable to it. It had a bad connector. In passing it was mentioned that apparently the perpendicular recording on the densities of 750 MB and higher is causing some problems. Sometimes it doesn't pay to be on the leading edge.

Another person reported that an optical mouse he had purchased for his grandson resulted in a jerky cursor movement. The feeling was that it was a surface problem. Note that while moving on paper was acceptable, a mirror was not. One person reported pulling out an 8 GB flash drive before he should have. Now he was unable to read from it. He was urged to try it on a different PC.

One person found that in order to remove Ghost from his Norton Internet package he had to install it. Norton does have a removal tool called Norton\_Removal\_tool.exe. It is available as a download from [www.Symantic.com](http://www.Symantic.com). (Editor Note. Since the meeting one of the attendees sent me an e-mail related to Norton's

removal tool. The web site Windows Secrets' newsletter reported that Symantec's uninstaller does not remove all of Symantic's code from your computer. If you are a Norton user, go to the site <http://windowssecrets.com> and read their newsletter.)

Ubuntu would not load on one PC yet it installed and ran on a different PC. The person who had this problem was urged to run Belac for details that could help diagnose the problem. Another similar utility SIW, System Information for Windows, provides similar information. To get further information go to [www.gtopala.com](http://www.gtopala.com).

How do you update the firmware for a wireless router? You need to use a hardwired connection to the manufacturer's site and download the update to a PC. One word of caution was not to download during a rainstorm or with a weak battery.

This was some of the action at this meeting. I'm sure everyone came away with useful information. □

## Digital Sig

*By Les Muldorf*

The following were some tips for better pictures discussed at the last meeting

### Tips on Taking Better Pictures

Judges of photographs look at many pictures. What makes one stand out more than others; what makes one a winner, and others just snapshots. Interesting pictures are a must, no matter how they are made: digital, film, alternative process etc. Most pictures are your average stereotypical pictures. The APCUG judges, and I assume judges in other venues look for a fresh, dynamic presentation. Here are a few suggestions they offered to improve our photographs. While these may not make your photos prize winners, they will make them a lot more interesting.

1. Do not have too much in the picture. This could be too much clutter or too much or extraneous background. This excess does not give the eye a place to freely and automatically focus. Beware of object growing out of peoples heads or bodies. Keep background simple or softly focused so as not to distract from the main subject. Make the object that drew you to take the picture be the draw to the viewer's eyes. Have other elements in the photograph aid in pointing to the main subject. In general, get rid of that which is not necessary. Try to have the viewer see what you saw when you took the picture.

2. In most instances, it is boring composition to have your subject dead center. This is a trap easy to fall into. Many cameras have their meter in the center of the frame and we tend to put the subject in that spot. A general rule of thumb would be to divide the frame into nine squares. Some cameras allow you to place this grid in the viewfinder or on the LCD. Do not select all intersections- only one. In general, where the lines of the grid intersect is where the main subject should be placed. Diagonal compositions, where your eye is drawn diagonally through the scene are more vibrant and dynamic.

3. Be aware of the edges and borders of the photograph. On some occasions it will be more interesting to have a subject come out of one edge or touch an edge rather than float aimlessly in the center of the photograph.

4. In general, for landscapes, you should follow the rule of thirds: 1/3 to 2/3. The sky should take up about 1/3 of the photo,

*continued on page 6*



# Q&A

*moderated and written by Les Muldorf*

Q. How does Kasperskiy Antivirus compare to Norton Antivirus software

A. Norton software is more intrusive with its updates, often updating every 15 minutes. On older computers it can slow the machine to a crawl. Kaspersky publishes updates, and downloads them in tight packets when you want to. Kaspersky has more features than Norton, is more efficient, and is highly rated by many sources. You can search Google for further information.

Q. Can you turn off the Norton Update feature.

A. The consensus of those giving the answer was this cannot be done

Q. Are there any small "Mom and Pop" computer stores in the area. The chains do not seem to be very helpful.

A. There were a few stores suggested as well as a few independent individuals who ran a business from home. The yellow pages and Google were suggested as good resources. ☐



President Dick Kranz being presented with the Award from APCUG for best newsletter. Les Muldorf, editor was doing the presentation.



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## Special Interest Groups

Special Interest Groups are for people with common computer interests—novice through expert.

Call group leader to verify schedule.

### Upgrade/Repair

Leader: Dan Sullivan

Tel: 229-0241

e-mail: [dansull@optonline.net](mailto:dansull@optonline.net)

Schedule: 4th Mon. 7:00 PM

Location: Business Development Center Conf. Room B

### Technology Workshop

Leader: Dick Kranz

Tel: 297-1813, 896-7376 or

265-4169 or e-mail:

[president@mhcug.org](mailto:president@mhcug.org)

Schedule: 3rd Monday, 7:00 PM

Location: Business Development Center Conf. Room B

### Digital Photography

Leaders:

Les Muldorf

Tel: 914-475-0885

e-mail: [lesm1@optonline.net](mailto:lesm1@optonline.net)

Jim Warner

Tel: 297-3175

[jhwiii@optonline.net](mailto:jhwiii@optonline.net)

Schedule: 4th Thurs. 7:00 PM

Location: Business Development Center Conf. Room B

### Ulster Computing Workshop (formerly HVPCC)

Leader: Robert Morales

e-mail: [4bobmorales@earthlink.net](mailto:4bobmorales@earthlink.net)

Schedule: 3rd Thurs. 7:00 PM

Location: Ulster Comm College Hasbrouck Bldg. Room 219

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contact Jack Marsalla**

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the ground 2/3, or vica versa. Having the horizon be in the middle makes for a static picture.

5. Light: literally, photography means writing with light. Be aware of light in your photographs. Is it falling on the subject you want viewers to see? Sometimes changing the angle or direction you shoot from will give better illumination. Often you have to wait for the right light. Mornings and evenings give more pleasing results than the harsh light of midday. Be aware of overexposing highlights or underexposing shadows. In portraits, try to get "catch light" in the subject's eyes. This gives the twinkle that makes the subject more vital, dynamic and alive. Be aware that in landscapes the sky is rarely if ever white. White gives the landscape the appearance that the top of the picture is missing.

6. Digital manipulation: this can be fun to play with, but do not overdo it. Use moderation and good taste. In most cases, intense, wild colors get in the way, and detract from the main subject. Don't let your image be overshadowed by overuse of color or saturation.

Excerpts of this article were taken from APCUG reports Vol. 19 Issue 1



Why is he smiling by Les Muldorf

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Disapearing car by Dick Kranz

**All submissions for the Microchip must be in the hands of the editors by the Thursday following the General Meeting. Any articles or information received after that date will be held for the following month's publication. Send submissions to [editor@mhcug.org](mailto:editor@mhcug.org)**

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Winter Scene by Les Muldorf

## Moving on to Vista – Part 4

by Neil Stahfest, Librarian, Tacoma Area PC User Group, Washington

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*Obtained from APCUG with the author's permission for publication by APCUG member groups.*

Windows Vista is a resource hog. A year ago, when I reviewed Vista for TAPCUG, my advice was to not upgrade an existing computer and buy Vista, wait and get it with a new computer. Today I stand by that advice. There are no new major programs that require Vista to run. If you're content with the way your existing computer(s) run with Windows XP there is no real reason to upgrade.

When you do buy a new computer there are several features you should look for it to run Vista well. The first is RAM (random access memory). I don't think any manufacturer is selling a new computer with Vista with less than 1 megabyte of RAM but if you really want Vista to work well with large applications (Microsoft Office, video editing software, many games) try to get 2 gigabytes of RAM. You won't be sorry. There is no point in installing more than 4 gigabytes of RAM. Windows cannot access memory above 4 gigabytes.

The other issue is a video card. Vista wants at least 128 megabytes of memory for video. For best results, the memory should be installed on the video card. Some computers steal the video requirements from your computer's RAM. It works but the card will run slower. 256 megabytes of video card memory is even better.

Many people don't partition their hard disks, I do. I suppose it goes back to the days when larger hard drives started to appear and our computer operating system couldn't recognize and use the larger space. Of course all that has changed now, Windows can use almost any hard drive size most of us will install. When I had to partition my hard drive, to fully utilize it, I discovered other benefits. It's easier to make a backup copy of a smaller hard drive. If I create a partition for just my photographs, and I only need to make a new backup of my pictures, I can just backup the partition containing the pictures and not everything else. A faster and easier process. I can also install another operating system (Windows XP or maybe Linux) on my computer by creating a separate partition and run it using a simple process called dual booting.

So I wanted to partition the hard drive that came with my laptop to use some of the excess space to store a backup copy of drive C. I bought a new copy of Partition Magic. I've used this program many times to partition drives on other computers. Unfortunately I discovered that Vista doesn't like Partition Magic. A trip to Symantec's home page showed that they have no updates for Vista. As I was wondering how I would solve this dilemma, I discovered that Vista has a new built-in Disk Management utility and one of its functions will partition hard drives.

To use this, you first have to get to the Disk Management window. From the start button, go to the control panel. Click on System and Maintenance and scroll down to "Create and format hard disk partitions", at the very bottom of the window. You will see what appears to be a table of every disk and partition installed on your computer. Among other things you'll see the capacity of each disk and the free space available. Select the hard drive that you want to partition and right-click on it. You need to free up empty space on the hard drive, so on the drop down menu. Select "Shrink Volume" and specify the amount of space you want to free up in the Shrink Dialog box. The free space will appear in the Disk Management window as a black bar and labeled "Unallocated".

Now you are ready to create your new partition. Right-click on the "unallocated space". From the menu select "New Partition". Then you just follow the wizard that appears to select the size and type of partition you want to create and format it. It may sound complicated but if you follow the steps listed above it is easy.

Windows assigns drives (hard drives, DVD drives, etc) in alphabetical sequence so if drive letters C, D and E were already used your new partition will be labeled drive F. Typically, when you buy a computer from a company such as Hewlett Packard, drive C will be your hard drive, drive D will be a partition labeled "Recovery Drive" (used to restore your computer to "factory condition" in the event of a catastrophic crash) and drive E will be a CD/DVD drive.

It's a cosmetic thing but I like to group all my hard drives and partitions together. You can use the Disk Management window to relabel your drives. Just select one of the drives, right-click on it and select "Change drive letter and paths". When you left-click on "Change drive letter and paths" press the "Change" button and pick a new letter to label the drive. I usually start by re-labeling the Recovery Drive drive "R" to make the letter "D" available for a new hard drive or partition. Then I re-label the CD/DVD drive Z. When this is done, all the letters from D through Q are available for hard drives, hard drive partitions and flash drives.

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## **Growing Your User Group in Today's Digital Age!**

**Join us the weekend of May 16th, 17th and 18th, 2008.** The APCUG will host the Leadership Development Conference, 2 days of workshops in West Nyack NY, 30 miles north of New York City. This is the first meeting of Eastern Regional Groups in over 10 years.

All are invited to attend. The \$49 early bird registration fee (\$60 for non APCUG members) includes breakfast and lunch for two days as well as a LDC welcome bag and T-shirt. This rate is good until March 31, 2008

**Friday** evening will be a welcome event for those who come early.

**Saturday** is an entire day of speakers and workshops devoted to building and increasing your groups membership. Since so many of our groups are looking for ways to build their membership, we have gathered experts with proven track records, who will give many fresh ideas on this topic. They will "Train the Leaders" by teaching new ideas that are easy to implement in your club. Learn what has worked for others and exchange ideas. This is an area of interest to all. In the evening there will also be a vendor faire with demonstrations of product, software and valuable giveaways for all attendees. If you know of a vendor that would like to participate have him contact Sam Wexler at [swexler@apcug.net](mailto:swexler@apcug.net) or [vendorinfo@apcug-ldc2008.org](mailto:vendorinfo@apcug-ldc2008.org).

On Saturday there is a bus trip into the Times Square Theater District of New York City for spouses & significant others. They can have lunch, see a Broadway show or just visit New York City. This will leave around 10:30 AM, and will have a \$15 nominal cost.

**Sunday's** workshops are on technology, promoting your club, and the ins and outs of running a club. Bring your Board and User Group members as this promises to be a must attend event full of information that everyone can use. We have scheduled dynamic speakers and workshops on promoting your group, leadership development, programming and the newest technical trends of interest to all.

This conference will be held at the Palisades Center Mall, one of the largest in the US. There are many restaurants, shops, movie theaters, a bowling alley and ice skating rink so that all can enjoy their time in NY. The Palisades Center Mall is located near major highways for easy access by car, bus and train, less than an hour from New York City. There are also hotels/motels within a few miles to fit any budget. *See our web site for special event rates and book early.*

We look forward to having you attend. This conference promises to be filled with many worthwhile ideas and great contacts to help you run your club and increase your membership. Registration and current information can be found at <http://www.apcug-ldc2008.org>.

For additional information contact APCUG Advisor Sam Wexler at [swexler@apcug.net](mailto:swexler@apcug.net). Please reserve early, especially to get lodging at special rates. ☐



# IRS Again Offers Free Online Tax Preparation and “e-Filing”

*By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont, TX; radio and Talk Show Host iwilsker(at)apcug.net*

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## WEBSITES:

<http://www.irs.gov>

<http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=118986,00.html> - Free File page

<http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=118992,00.html> - Free File Instructions

<http://www.irs.gov/efile/article/0,,id=118993,00.html> - Information

<http://www.irs.gov/app/freeFile/jsp/index.jsp> - List of participating Companies

[http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-efile/free\\_file\\_agreement.pdf](http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-efile/free_file_agreement.pdf) - Free File Alliance Agreement

<http://www.irs.gov/espanol/article/0,,id=163297,00.html> - Free File in Spanish

Whether we like it or not, April 15 is fast approaching. It does not matter if we are due a refund, or owe Uncle Sam a bundle of money, we still must complete our income tax forms and file them appropriately with the IRS. This is a task that very few enjoy, and many more do not relish. While preparing our tax returns becomes more complex and time consuming, the IRS has once again contracted with a number of tax services to prepare our taxes online for free, if we are eligible. According to the IRS, the goal of the free file program is to enable 70% of taxpayers (97 million people, according to the IRS) to take advantage of the free online service; for calendar year 2007 (taxes due April 15, 2008), the calculated ceiling on eligibility for the free service is an adjusted gross income (AGI) of \$54,000. In addition to preparing federal tax returns for those eligible, the providers will also “e-file” (electronically file) the returns at no charge to the taxpayer. It should be noted that the IRS does not charge for receiving e-filed returns, but does not currently accept e-filed returns directly from individuals without first going through a third party service, for which a fee may be charged. There is no e-file fee for taxes prepared by the free preparers who participate in the IRS free file program.

The free filing service was created in 2002, and renewed again in 2005, when the IRS created a public – private partnership called the “File Free Alliance, LLC” where the IRS contracted with several tax preparation companies to offer free online tax preparation and filing. The Free File Alliance evolved from a “President’s Management Agenda”, which created a series of 24 “e-government” initiatives designed to improve government to citizen electronic capabilities. Originally, the program was limited to 60% of taxpayers, but the 2005 contract expanded the eligibility to 70% of taxpayers. The current agreement between the IRS and the preparation companies expires in October, 2009. The income eligibility ceiling, currently at an AGI of \$54,000, is adjusted annually such that 70% of taxpayers will remain eligible. Members of the Free File Alliance must conform to strict IRS established security and privacy requirements which insure the sanctity of the free filing service.

According to the IRS, there are several advantages and reasons for using the free tax services provided. The IRS claims that users can get their refunds in as little as 10 days, if they opt for direct deposit. Unlike commercial tax preparation offices, the online services are available 24/7, and taxes can be completed and filed at any time of the day prior to April 15. The IRS also claims that the service is environmentally friendly, in that it saves mountains of paper. Users of the free online services will benefit through the automatic checks for accuracy, and will receive a confirmation within 48 hours that the return was received by the IRS.

Users of the free filing service must start at the IRS website, IRS.gov, and initially access the free tax services through the IRS website. Many of the companies that are a part of the Free File Alliance also offer paid commercial tax preparation services, and the only way to get the service for free is to initialize the process through the IRS website. The list of participating companies, 19 of them, includes such well known companies as H&R Block, and software companies such as TurboTax. It is the responsibility of the user to verify his eligibility both for the program (up to \$54,000 AGI), and for the Free Alliance partner selected, as many of the partners have additional eligibility requirements for the free service. The user can either browse the list of individual companies ([www.irs.gov/app/freeFile/jsp/index.jsp](http://www.irs.gov/app/freeFile/jsp/index.jsp)), or can use the button “Guide Me To A Company” to narrow down the choices of free tax preparers. Several of the companies, such as H&R Block’s “TaxCut Free File”, “TaxSimple Deluxe Version”, and “eSmart Tax by Liberty Tax Service” are available to anyone with an AGI of less than \$54,000, and who are also aged 50 or less. “TaxSlayer Free Returns” is available to anyone aged 25 to 68, or active military who meet the income requirements. “TurboTax Freedom Edition” is free to anyone with an AGI of less than \$30,000, or active duty military with an AGI of up to \$54,000. “Complete Tax” will do any age with an AGI of \$12,000 to \$54,000, while “Free TaxAct” will do anyone aged 19 to 54 who has an eligible AGI. Other free preparers have different eligibility requirements, including several that will prepare taxes for people for any age, but have geographic restrictions, in that they only prepare taxes for residents of specific states. Some of the preparers, such as “Online Tax Pros” specify that they also prepare taxes in Spanish. While not a requirement covered in the agreement with the IRS, many of the preparers listed will also prepare and file state income tax returns for residents of states that have a state income tax (Texas does not have a state income tax). While a few will prepare state income taxes for free, most have a nominal charge to prepare and e-file state taxes.

Once the taxes are prepared and completed online through one of the free providers, the returns are electronically checked for accuracy, and then e-filed directly with the IRS. The preparer will receive an electronic confirmation from the IRS that the return was

*continued on page 10*

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received, and forward that confirmation to the taxpayer, typically within 48 hours of filing. If the taxpayer is due a federal refund, and selects direct deposit, the refund is deposited to the taxpayer's specified account in as little as 10 days.

The IRS is to be commended for coordinating this service, available to nearly 100 million taxpayers. One improvement to the service that I would like to see is to allow those of us who prepare our taxes ourselves with commercial software, to be able to upload our returns directly to the IRS without having to go through a third party. That would be a great service to the millions of us who choose not to use, or who are not eligible for, the free filing programs, but would like the convenience of e-filing without sending our personal and private information to a third party.

For the eligible 70% of taxpayers who can utilize the free service, there are few good reasons not to use the service. The price can not be beat.

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## Hasta la Vista

*by Lee Reynolds, a member of the Boca Raton Computer Society, Florida and regular contributor to Boca Bits, the BRCS monthly news magazine*

*www.brcs.org*

*leetutor(at)earthlink.net*

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I'm told the literal meaning of "hasta la vista" in Spanish is "until the seeing." Or maybe a more adequate translation is "see you later." But in this column, I'm using that phrase to invite you to take a look at Microsoft's latest version of Windows: Vista.

### CONFIGURING THE TASKBAR

The Taskbar works very much like previous versions of Windows, particularly XP.

You can configure some options on how it operates by right clicking an empty area on it and selecting from a popup context menu.

For example, you can decide:

To have various toolbars such as the Quick Launch toolbar and a Desktop or Documents toolbar displayed

Show all open windows "cascaded" like a row of dominoes one behind the other, or show them side by side, or one on top of another to cover the desktop

Minimize all the windows to show the Desktop

Start the Task Manager application; or lock the Taskbar so that its settings cannot be modified without unlocking it first.

If you select Properties from the context menu, you are given further ways of customizing the Taskbar.

As in Windows XP, there are options:

to auto-hide the Taskbar (it reduces to a very thin line which only becomes visible as a normal Taskbar when you put your mouse over that thin line)

keep the Taskbar visible over other open windows,

group similar Taskbar buttons for the same application in a stacked list.

### NEW OPTION

A new option available in the Taskbar properties page, is to determine whether or not hovering your mouse over a Taskbar button shows a live preview of the corresponding window (thumbnail.)

### CUSTOMIZE THE NOTIFICATION AREA

Unlike XP, you now have a separate tab to customize the Notification Area, which is the part of the Taskbar on the right hand side, normally showing the system clock, a volume control for your speakers, a Network icon, a Safely Remove Hardware icon, a Power icon (if you are using a laptop on battery power), and others. You can put a check mark next to Hide Inactive Icons and then click the Customize button, in order to access a list of all icons that have shown up in the Notification Area.

This is broken down into two lists, those icons that are currently showing in the Notification Area, and those that have shown up in the past but are not currently there now. For each icon, you click to access a drop down list to choose Hide when inactive, Hide, or Show.

### SYSTEM TIME

One of the things that you can show on the Taskbar is the system time (and that was in previous versions of Windows also), but this now has some modifications.

Hover your mouse over the system time in the Notification Area, you get a balloon tip telling the system date and day of week, but if you click on the system time instead, up pops a nice looking circular clock and a calendar of the current month, with a link to the Control Panel area where you can change the date and time settings.

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# Minutes of the Mid-Hudson Computer User Group Board of Directors

by Jim Walsh

The monthly MHCUG Board of Directors meeting held on the first Thursday of the month in Conference Room B of the Guardian Center at 3 Neptune Road, Poughkeepsie was called to order by Dick Kranz, President, at 7:07 p.m. Officers and Board members in attendance were: Peter Dowley, Dick Kranz, Les Muldorf, Jim Peabody, Dan Sullivan, Ed Terpstra and Jim Walsh. Guests in attendance were: Jerry Clark and Jack Marsella.

Peter Dowley moved that the Minutes of the January Board meeting be accepted as published in the microCHIP. The motion was seconded by Les Muldorf and unanimously approved by the Board. Peter next proposed that the Minutes of the Annual Meeting be considered for approval. This motion was seconded by Dan Sullivan. Peter then proposed a motion to amend the published minutes to show that the terms of Ron McDermott and Ed Terpstra were properly one-year terms rather than the two-year terms reported. Dick Kranz explained that this correction would bring the distribution of term lengths for board members back into agreement with the MHCUG By-Laws. Dan Sullivan seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved. Peter Dowley then moved that the Minutes be approved as amended. Jim Peabody seconded the motion which was then approved by the Board.

Eli Cohen, Treasurer, was not in attendance, but had forwarded the Treasurer’s Report to the Board by email before the meeting. His email highlighted the following items: a \$10.00 donation from Marion Ghosh, a \$25.00 usage fee increase by Best Western, a \$300.00 annual fee to SUNY Ulster for 2008 Ulster SIG meeting space, and \$50.00 for annual membership in the APCUG. The MHCUG finances were reported as follows:

Monthly Income/Expenses - 1/1/2008 to 1/31/2008

INCOME

Donation	\$ 10.00
Drawing	\$ 36.00
Interest Income	\$ 24.80
Membership Dues	\$700.00

TOTAL INCOME \$770.80

EXPENSES

Internet	
ISP	\$ 40.00
Best Western	
Wireless	\$ 25.00
Meetings	
Board	\$ 30.00
General Member	\$175.00
SIGs	\$ 30.00
Ulster SIG	\$300.00

MHCUG Administration	
APCUG Membership	\$ 50.00

TOTAL EXPENSES \$650.00

OVERALL TOTAL \$120.80

NET WORTH as of 1/31/2008

Cash and Bank Accounts

HVFCU CD’s	\$6026.21
HVFCU S1 Savings	\$ 813.68
HVFCU S9 Checking	\$ 525.36
TOTAL Cash and Bank	\$7365.25

TOTAL ASSETS \$7365.25

LIABILITIES \$ 0.00

OVERALL TOTAL \$7365.25

Jim Peabody moved that the Treasurer’s report be accepted and approved. Les Muldorf seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Dick Kranz, acting for VP/Programs, confirmed that Jerry Greenberg would describe the considerations necessary for selecting an HDTV at the upcoming general meeting.

Dick Kranz in his President’s report thanked the Board for its efforts. He urged the Board to visit <http://apcug-ldc2008.org/> for details of the APCUG 2008 Leadership Development Conference to be held May 17-18 at the Palisades Center Mall in West Nyack. Dick next introduced Jerry Clark as the new MHCUG Webmaster and stated that changes to the design of the MHCUG website would be described in detail upon the conclusion of regular business.

Under Membership, Dan Sullivan reported that he has received the membership database from Hugh Ross and will now be responsible for its maintenance.

Les Muldorf, Newsletter, stated that the current issue of the microCHIP had been completed on time and was available to the membership. Les then announced that the microCHIP had been awarded First Place for medium-sized groups in the APCUG newsletter competition. The Board congratulated Les on his success and thanked him for his efforts on behalf of the MHCUG.

Jack Marsella reported that the Upgrade/Repair SIG had a full attendance; Dick Kranz reported that the Technology SIG was over-full. Dan Sullivan reported that the Digital Photography SIG would be reviewing some photo-editing programs and was considering reviewing some video editing programs.

An hour-long Website report was scheduled to immediately follow the close of the regular meeting.

Under new business there was a discussion of possible alternative locations at which to conduct the Ulster Computing Workshop if that became necessary in 2009.

At 8:21 Peter Dowley moved that the meeting be adjourned, Jim Peabody seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved. □

# Help Line

Having a problem? Volunteers have offered to field member's questions by phone. Please limit calls to the hours listed below. Days means 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Evenings means 6 to 9:30 p.m. Be considerate of the volunteer you're calling, remember this is a free service. If you'd like to have your name added to the list, call or e-mail the editor, or see us at the next meeting.

Need help on a subject and there's no name listed for it here? Try contacting one of the SIG leaders or post a message on our Website FORUM. Simply go to [www.mhcug.org](http://www.mhcug.org) and click on the "Forum" menu item, then follow instructions. Answers will be returned to you by e-mail, as well as being accessible via the Website.

Program	Name	Phone #	E-mail	Time
Access (MS)	Eli Cohen	897-5921	mhcug@yahoo.com	( e )
APL (all flavors)	Ray Polivka	462-2698	polivka@acm.org	( d e )
CAD	Fred Krasselt	565-5622	krasselt@aol.com	( d e )
FlightSoft	Clark Zeaman	814-663-0538	zeamanc@juno.com	( d e )
Internet	Art Scott	849-1378	artscotti@gmail.com	( d )
Lotus 123 Macros	Ralph Pollard	462-3389	ralphpollard@verizon.net	( e )
Lotus for DOS	Bill Rogers	452-9104	—	( e )
MS Office	Bryan Rifenburgh	590-0092	MCPPro20@yahoo.com	( d e )
Paradox 4.5	Jim Warner III	297-3175	jhwiii@optonline.net	( d e )
Partition Magic	Dan Sullivan	229-0241	dansull@optonline.net	( d e )
PC/AT Hardware	Phil Van Itallie	462-3924	pvanitallie@yahoo.com	( e )
Personal Finances	John Bickford	435-8615	johnbick@us.ibm.com	( d )
SAS	Ralph Pollard	462-3389	ralphpollard@verizon.net	( e )
Symphony 3.1	Jim Warner III	297-3175	jhwiii@optonline.net	( d e )

Please help us to keep the **Help Line** current by advising us about changes. If you have particular knowledge or expertise about a program or product, please ask to be listed here.

All members of the MHCUG are encouraged to take photographs of any club activity for publication in the MicroChip. Now that we are in a digital format on the web, photographs can be displayed in glorious color or stunning black and white. In addition, we would also like you to exhibit your photographic skills and submit photos of the beautiful Hudson Valley. Here is an easy way to get your name in print. Please forward any pictures to [lesm1@optonline.net](mailto:lesm1@optonline.net). Give me your name and the title or subject of your pictures so I don't have to make anything up.

## Wanted New Members



**Bounty Hunters  
Needed**

**Sponsor a  
new member**

**Get a 3-month  
membership  
extension**

For each new member you bring in you receive a three month extension on your current membership. Ask the new member to name you as sponsor on their application.

New Appl.    Renewal    Addr. Change

The MHCUG is a nonprofit educational organization which promotes activities encouraging the use of computers by its members. The MHCUG encourages professionalism and the development of technical skills.

A **Member** may be anyone with an interest in computers who supports the purpose of the MHCUG.

A **Student Member** must be under 25 years of age and attending an educational institution full-time.

If new applicant or renewal, please check one:

**Member:** dues: \$35 per year

**Student:** dues: \$15 per year

Full-time ID (reqr'd) \_\_\_\_\_

I am enclosing a check for  1  2  3 yrs (Students renew yearly)

Check No. \_\_\_\_\_

Mid-Hudson Computer User Group, Inc.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City State Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: (      ) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like an e-mail reminder of upcoming meetings?  Yes  No

How did you hear about us? \_\_\_\_\_

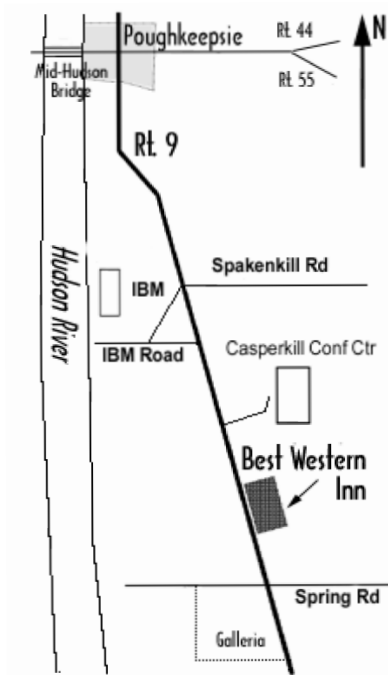
If sponsored by a member, please provide name: \_\_\_\_\_

Dues Amount \_\_\_\_\_ Additional Contribution Amount \_\_\_\_\_ Total \_\_\_\_\_

Make check (on US bank only) payable to:  
**Mid-Hudson Computer User Group**

Send form and check to: Attn Treasurer  
Mid-Hudson Computer User Group  
PO Box 1962  
Poughkeepsie NY 12601-0962

## How to find us on the night of the meeting



## ☞ *Our Next Program* ☞

**Where:** **Best Western Inn & Conference Center**  
Rt. 9, Poughkeepsie

**When:** March 13, 2008  
6:30 – 7:00 Q&A Session: Questions from the floor  
7:00 – 7:30 Regular Business Meeting  
7:30 – 9:00 Program

**Program:** . Windows Home Server Demonstration:

John Bickford, a long time MHCUG member will demonstrate Microsoft windows Home Server

## Coming Events March 2008

### **First Thursday March 6th, MHCUG Board meeting**

7:00 p.m. at Guardian Storage Building

### **Second Thursday March 13th MHCUG General Meeting**

6:30 p.m. at Best Western Inn and Conference Center

### **Third Monday March 17th, Technology Workshop**

7:00 p.m. at Guardian Storage Building

### **Third Thursday March 20th, Ulster Computing Workshop**

7:00 p.m. at Ulster Community College

### **Fourth Monday March 24th, Upgrade and Repair**

7:00 p.m. at Guardian Storage Buildin

### **Fourth Thursday March 27th, Digital Photography/Multi Media**

7:00 p.m. at Guardian Storage Building