



microCHIP

the Newsletter of the
Mid-Hudson Computer User Group Inc.

Monthly since 1977

www.mhcug.org

Volume 33 Issue 02 February 2009

Ed Hicks

Ed Hicks - Digital Cartography

Our February 12 main meeting presenter was Ed Hicks, owner of Orienteering Unlimited. Ed spoke about his passion – maps. Ed, a retired New York State science teacher who pioneered the outdoor education and computer programs for his school district from the 70s through early 90s, has been teaching map skills to schools and workshops for nearly forty years, keeping up with advancements and enhancements to map skills, such as the internet utilities MapQuest, Google Maps, and Microsoft's Virtual Earth, and of course GPS technology. But his main focus is on map skills. Ed owns and runs 'orienteering' workshops, where map reading is turned into a day-long outdoor adventure. In addition to having lots of fun, participants enhance their map using skills and confidence.

Starting with a slide view of the Earth, Ed zoomed in to our local area. Ed's presentation included the history of maps, map making, navigational tools from pre-historic times forward, to our digital world of online maps and GPS devices.

Sadly, many of us don't know how to use maps. Many schools don't teach map reading skills. Ed is a map reading evangelist. He and his company want to make all of us map literate. Maps help us get there. They save us time, gas, and aggravation. They show us alternate routes that can be faster, cheaper, and more interesting.

Cartography is the art and science of visual map making. Ed showed us various tools, methods and materials used in modern cartography. Many sources of information are used in cartography, including aerial and satellite photos, existing maps, manually collected data (with and without GPS's), and other sophisticated electronic surveillance methods. Ed also discussed the use of CAD (Computer Assisted Design) and GIS (Geographic Information Systems) in map making.

Maps are widely used off the roads and highways. Sports such as



There is also a world championship event for those who are less capable of tramping through the woods, known as Trail Orienteering. A main part of Ed's presentation was on the map making program OCAD. Ed is also the primary reseller of OCAD in North America. We watched as Ed showed how OCAD drew maps of all types quickly and easily, using a variety of input sources, and outputting to various file types, including PDF. There are both standard and professional versions. For more on OCAD, tailor-made map adventure programs (orienteering events), orienteering supplies, or Ed's presentation, see <http://www.orienteeringunlimited.com/>. Treat yourself, or your club or organization to a day of Orienteering with Orienteering Unlimited. There is a local orienteering club - Hudson Valley Orienteering - <http://hvo.us.orienteering.org/>. They use local sites such as Bowdoin Park and James Baird Park for their events. □



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Monthly Meetings

Scheduled the second Thursday of every month. Check 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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* All area codes are 845 unless shown otherwise.

Website: www.mhcug.org

March 12 - Steven Lindsay of Microsoft presents Windows 7

Steven Lindsay will give a live Windows 7 demonstration 7:30 pm Thurs. March 12, 2009 at Mid-Hudson Computer User Group open public meeting at Best Western Inn, 2170 South Rd. (Rte 9) Town of Poughkeepsie, NY. The presentation will follow a computer oriented Q&A session at 6:30 pm and short business meeting with special interest group announcements at 7:00 pm.

Business owners and computer enthusiasts in the Mid-Hudson area are invited to witness a demonstration of new Windows system 7 features. Users can add and reposition icons on the new super bar which replaces the Taskbar. Learn of the laptop versus desktop comparisons as well as 32 or 64-bit installations. Do installations go smoothly or is it a nightmare? What, if any training is required of the built-in firewall?

Check out the new quick launch and window shake feature. See rolling over Windows and rotational desktop backgrounds in action. Witness or partake in interactive discussions concerning drivers and available support issues. Become familiar with the compatibility analyzer, built in memory and diagnostic tools.

There is more. Come on out, bring a friend and join the fun! □

Dan's Corner

Plan to attend out main meeting March 12 when Microsoft's Steven Lindsey will present and demo WINDOWS 7, formerly known as system 7. This is Microsoft's next Operating System (OS). Lets see if it can replace Vista and surpass Windows XP.

During my absence MHCUG continued to operate smoothly due to the on-going commitment of the Officers and Board members. I see the coming year as a challenge to our club to activate and increase the involvement of our members as a whole, to reach out to our friends and community and to add to the membership numbers.

Our bylaws state one of our purposes is as an educational organization. In our case that is of course for those things pertaining to Personal Computers. The use of PC's now extends well beyond e-mailing, and keeping the checkbook. The Internet or web if you prefer now has expanded our use to such things as the social networks, research, maps, access to books, cloud computing, webmail, and it goes on and on. To find out about all of these and how to get the most out of your PC also means you must learn how to protect your PC and your personal information. What are the tools that we need and what's available both to purchase and that that is free.

To add to tools in this last category Jerry Clark, our Webmaster, has added links to our web site available to members that provide sophisticated checks for viruses, malware, Trojans, worms, spyware, etc.. We hope to set up a presentation by Jerry along with a few other people to expand on what's available to us. Don't just stay tuned but come join us.

Dan □

Upgrade and Repair

By Ray Polivka

December 22th found 14 fellows in attendance at the Upgrade and Repair gathering. Two desktops also made it. A lot of the meeting was devoted to working with these computers. For one of the computers the problem seemed to be a software problem. Zone Alarm kept saying that a file was missing. Much effort was made by several to redo the system. The problem apparently was resolved since the PC's owner was able to get to AOL and the Internet. Meanwhile, the second computer lay on the floor with its innards exposed to several fellows poring over it. This PC came with its LCD monitor, since the problem was related to the display. The monitor was plugged into a second laptop, where it performed correctly so it was not the problem. In trying to resolve the problem, the first suggestion made was to pull out and then reset the video card to clean the connection. If that didn't solve the problem, purchase a new video card. Now if the screen did not interact properly, a new motherboard may be necessary. Pulling out and reseating cards within a PC should be the first step in diagnosing a malfunctioning PC. This is especially the case for computers that have been in service for over a year. It was noted that if a mother board were to be replaced in the PC, one must be careful to replace it with an exact match. Otherwise you will have trouble since Microsoft will believe that you are trying to install the operating system on a different PC.

One person at the meeting was not impressed by Acronis Home. 11. He was getting a corrupted file. Also, the restore CD did not recognize SATA drives. He was tempted to go to Ghost. He was urged to contact Acronis. Another person said he was getting the following message when several applications started. The message was,

"An Active X control on this page might be unsafe to interact with other parts of the program. Do you want to allow the interaction?"

He was advised to say "No" and continue. Another person was confused as to why he was getting the message that his password had timed out, since he had not set any password. It was pointed out that no password was the same as a null password. Another attendee, showed all of us a very miniature combination MP3/Word Voice Recorder/FM device that he had purchased for \$14 from Woot.Com. Both Woot.Com or 1Saleaday.Com offer one different sale item over just a 24 hour period. These sites might be interesting to go to occasionally. The question was raised as to whether the academic version of Microsoft Office 2007 could be moved from an old PC to a new PC. This was believed to be possible.

There was a discussion related to audio and Vista. Apparently, the new digital media files won't necessarily play on older players. A site, AC3Filter.net was mentioned as a helpful source. If you go to that site you will find this information

"AC3Filter is a high quality free audio decoder and processor filter. It allows media players to playback movies with AC3 and DTS audio tracks. Also it can process any audio track, much of processing options allows to adjust the sound in almost any way. It is possible to upmix any audio source to 6 channels. AC3Filter can do multi-channel and digital (SPDIF) output. It can encode any audio source to AC3 on-the-fly and send it over SPDIF to the receiver."

In a discussion on software vulnerability, the software, Online Software Inspector (OSI) by Secunia was mentioned. It is a fast way to scan a computer for "the most common program vulnerabilities checking if the PC has a minimum security baseline against known patched vulnerabilities." Its claimed features are

Detecting insecure versions of common/popular programs installed on your computer.

Verify that all Microsoft patches are applied.

Assist you in updating, patching, and protecting your PC.

It sounds pretty good except OSI only checks up to 100 programs. To get all programs covered you need to get the Secunia packages PSI Personal Software Inspector, or NSI, Network Software Inspector. Apparently, OSI and PSI are freebies, but NSI has a price attached. I tried the OSI version. It took a minute and a half detecting 13 applications, reporting eight insecure versions and five patched versions. It indicated that Acrobat Reader 4X was insecure. This was interesting since my system already contains Acrobat Reader 9X. There were several other back level applications on my system, which also had updated versions already on the system.

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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

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:

dickkranz@optonline.net

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

Jim Warner

Tel: 297-3175

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

Schedule: 3rd Thurs. 7:00 PM

Location: Esopus Library

Interested in starting a Special Interest Group?

contact Jack Marsella

Pinnacle 12

by Jeff Dowley

Our club was honored to have Heather Little, of Pinnacle Systems, give us a presentation of Pinnacle 12.

Parent company of Pinnacle is Avid. Sister companies are M-Audio, and DigiDesign. After 3 years of autonomy under ownership by Avid, the company is consolidating to use the Avid name on all their products. Pinnacle Studio 12 is certified for Vista.

A great source of information on how people use Pinnacle Studio are the actual customers that Heather meets while traveling for Avid. At time of software install, Pinnacle asks you to register, which is the main conduit for feedback and feature requests. This is one of the key reasons Pinnacle likes people to register their software, as this has been a great conduit of requests for new features.

The software is a tool that offers a lot of features, but the real limitation to the results is the creativity of the users. One example of this is a 92 year old grandmother that has been making a video of her life story, using various maps and still photos related to her Eastern European heritage.

Most any feature that works for video editing can also be applied in a compilation of digital still photographs. A lot of the features of Studio are meant to make being creative easy. According to Heather, you should be able to make your first movie without reading the manual or even watching tutorials!

The software has three basic areas to work within – capture, edit, and make movie. When opening the software it always defaults to edit mode since that is the most used mode. But prior to edit mode you need to capture or import files as video clips. Digital Video from camcorders can be either DV format or MPEG format. MPEG-2 format is the default filetype worked with when it comes time to render your video, so it's easier to start your capture as MPEG format.

Studio works both with High Definition (HD) and standard format, whether in 4:3 or 16:9 formats.

A question from the audience was about the ability to capture audio only, such as from a record, or a microphone. Heather agreed that while it was technically possible, there are likely better suited applications that are targeted to doing just that.

Working within Studio is simple to control. It relies on the same mouse movements to select, drag and drop various sources that any user of Windows software should be used to.

Movie clipping points can be designated by regular intervals of time, or even set to match each time the video recorder was stopped and started. She demonstrated that while you can make a video using no transitions, the results are usually jarring and look less professional. So a significant effort is usually made on selecting and customizing transitions between video clips. Studio even allows you work with video in a frame by frame manner to eliminate losing any information if the transition happens at a very important part of the clip.

One member in the audience related that he had sent VHS video tapes to company that then put them onto DVD. However, the raw files on these discs are labeled with names ending with extensions such as .vob, .bup, or .ifo. He wanted to know if these kinds of source could be imported into Studio 12. Heather said that the .vob files can be imported, but didn't know about the other file types.

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Coming Events March 2009

First Thursday March 5th MHCUG Board meeting
7:00 p.m. at Guardian Storage Building

Second Thursday March 12th MHCUG General Meeting
6:30 p.m. at Best Western Inn and Conference Center

Third Monday March 16th, Technology Workshop
7:00 p.m. at Guardian Storage Building

Third Thursday March 19th, Ulster Computing Workshop
7:00 p.m. at Esopus Library

Fourth Monday March 23rd, Upgrade and Repair
7:00 p.m. at Guardian Storage Building

Fourth Thursday March 26th Digital Media 7:00 p.m. at Guardian Storage Building

Technology Workshop

by Harry Elder

Peace of Mind

That's what you get when you know that you've safely backed up all of your precious photos, home movies, personal documents, financial data, music, and everything else that you don't realize how much you'll miss until they're gone forever. One hard drive crash (yes, it happens often), one accidental erasure from an errant reformat, one malicious virus, and all of those memories are just that – memories – that you no longer have. Backups typically are a 'mañana' job, not just because we never sense an imminent loss, but also because good DVD or CD burning programs are expensive and hard to learn.

Enter Lloyd Quick. Lloyd gave us a presentation on free CD and DVD burning software. Most of the burning tools that come bundled with well known PC manufactures or DVD burners are stripped down versions of their retail versions. Lloyd found these free offerings, and told us about them. I'll start with his favorite, CD Burner XP - <http://cdburnerxp.se/en/home>. Their home page description says 'CDBurnerXP is a free application to burn CDs and DVDs, including Blu-Ray and HD-DVDs. It also includes the feature to burn and create ISOs, as well as a multilanguage interface. It's free for all, and does not include adware or similar malicious components.'

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Upgrade and Repair

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Apparently, when various vendors update their applications, they do not delete the previous versions. It would be nice if they told you that. Note, it appears that OSI does not run on a 64-bit operating system.

Another software mentioned was Foxmarks, accessible from www.Foxmarks.com. It is an add-on to the Firefox browser that synchronizes and backs up your bookmarks and passwords across multiple computers. When installed on each of your computers, it keeps your bookmarks and optionally passwords synchronized. In a further discussion of generating passwords, the password manager, Roboform, from www.Roboform.com was discussed. Roboform allows you to:

- Manage your passwords and log on automatically,
- Encrypt your passwords,
- Generate random passwords,
- Backup passwords and copy them between computers,
- and several other features.

There are two forms, Roboform and Roboform Pro. Roboform is free, but Roboform Pro is not. Roboform Pro allows unlimited password creations, while Roboform is limited in number.

Many of us using any Microsoft operating system have it set up for automatic updating. This recommended scheme is done via the Internet without any user participation. However, it is possible that an update could fail unknown to you. Microsoft maintains a log of all the upgrades it made to your system and you may view them. To view the installed updates on a Vista system, follow this sequence.

Start -- Control Panel -- System and Maintenance -- Windows Update.

At this point, click "view update history" in the left sidebar. The listing is impressive. It contains the name of the update, its status, type, and date installed. In my case, the latest update recorded is 1/8/2009 and the first is 10/27/2007. Reviewing it on my system I had a failed update on 6/28/2008 for Microsoft office. On 1/22/2008 I had a set of seven updates fail. It appears that later that week similar updates were successful. Each update carries a case number, KBxxxxxx. If you wish more detail on an individual update, you can call 1-866-727-2338 and hopefully talk to a real person.

To find the update history in XP, go to the control panel. There are in the left sidebar click on Windows update. Then in the resulting window, click on "review your update history" in the left sidebar.

Finally, someone mentioned that there was an interesting free and open source object oriented educational programming language called Alice. Here is what the Carnegie Mellon authors say about it:

What is Alice?

Alice is an innovative 3D programming environment that makes it easy to create an animation for telling a story, playing an interactive game, or a video to share on the web. Alice is a freely available teaching tool designed to be a student's first exposure to object-oriented programming. It allows students to learn fundamental programming concepts in the context of creating animated movies and simple video games. In Alice, 3-D objects (e.g., people, animals, and vehicles) populate a virtual world and students create a program to animate the objects.

In Alice's interactive interface, students drag and drop graphic tiles to create a program, where the instructions correspond to standard statements in a production oriented programming language, such as Java, C++, and C#. Alice allows students to immediately see how their animation programs run, enabling them to easily understand the relationship between the programming statements and the behavior of objects in their animation. By manipulating the objects in their virtual world, students gain experience with all the programming constructs typically taught in an introductory programming course.

For those of you that may be interested, go to <http://alice.org/>. Be careful to use '.org'. Alice.com will get you another interesting but different site.

This is a brief and partial summary of the evening's events. Do come and join in. □

Pinnacle 12

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A different club member spoke up and said that the .bup and .ifo files are part of the DVD directory structure and not the videos themselves.

Heather demonstrated that you can work with clips not only by trimming their ends, but also by cutting segments out of the middle of a clip. Heather mentioned that the audio usually is cut to match the segments of a clip. However it is also possible to clip out a part of the video only and leave that audio intact. This can be useful when you want to substitute a still photo for a running scene that was not needed.

Heather then went on to show how easy it was to title an entire movie project. The title features are accessed with the same Windows skills to place on the video project timeline. Drag and drop, double click and next thing you know, you are ready to edit titles on your project. In fact, you can make so many changes to the titling software that those features alone could be an entire presentation. Studio also supports a near limitless number of undo steps should you not like your changes. Adding sophisticated effects to titling can be as simple as a few clicks on tools such as roll and crawl across the screen.

Another general feature of Studio is the auto save, which helps save your work even if your PC crashes. This can help relieve the stress of unexpected system crashes and keep you from losing hours of editing.

Studio 12 also supports multiple layers of video and audio. This is when there are videos displaying within video, such as you've seen when watching the evening news. The higher versions of Studio 12 support more layers than the standard versions. Studio also supports adding different effects through add-on effects packs. Most users don't need them, but for those that want something special and don't mind the added expense, they may be of interest.

The software supports both audio and video toolboxes that help you set up things such as surround sound or over-dubbing of audio tracks on the video clips. The toolboxes allow nearly limitless tweaking. Another feature is the ability to protect certain portions of the clips from being altered when tweaking around them.

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magicJack – phone service for less than two dollars per month!

I gave a presentation on ‘magicJack’, a low cost, many-featured telephone system that runs through your PC. It costs \$40, and comes with one year of service. That gets you your own phone number (local if available, as mine is), free local and long distance service (international rates are extra, but very low), caller ID, voicemail, and more.

magicJack has a 911 feature, although they recommend that you use an alternate phone line for 911 if available. I called our local 911 dispatcher in Ulster County, Tom Planz, and him if I could make a test call. 911 worked, my name, phone number, and street address were right, but my town was wrong - actually off by 120 miles. I contacted magicJack; they asked me to register a second location for 911. I’ll call Tom back for another test when that registration takes effect. I’ll use another phone for 911 for now.

The call quality? I’ve found it to be excellent, but of course, it can be affected if Internet traffic is high, or your PC is very busy with other tasks. They offered me a chance to sign up for five years for \$59.95, or \$12 per year (that’s \$1 per month without my calculator) during my first month. Sweet.

magicJack is a small USB device. You simply plug the USB side to your PC; the other side has a standard RJ-11 (ordinary telephone) port, where you can plug in a regular phone – even cordless. After a brief registration, magicJack is ready to make calls. One condition is that your computer must be on to make calls. It starts automatically at logon, and takes less than a minute to become active. I use magicJack as an alternate phone when our main phone is in use, which in my home is often.

When I first started using magicJack, I got a telemarketing call from a traditional phone company offering me a ‘great deal’. I told them that I was switching over to magicJack. I never had a telemarketer end their call as quickly as that one! Check out magicJack at <http://www.magicjack.com>

Thanks to all club members for a great meeting. Please join us at our next MHCUG Technology Workshop on the third Monday, February 16, 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. □

Computing Tidbits

Ray Polivka

Prologue: The computing field is immense, exciting, and extremely important. It pervades so many aspects of our daily lives. What follows is an attempt to call attention to various aspects of it. Small tidbits or news items will appear under this title as we come across them. Perhaps they may be interesting to you. Any reader contributions are welcome.

Xobni

One of the regular columnists in the Wall Street Journal, Walter Mossberg, writes about new and interesting

computer related items. In July he wrote about a free plug-in for Outlook Express called Xobni. It is pronounced "Zob-nee". If you spell it backwards it is "inbox". I suppose that is one way to get a name for a product. Its purpose is to add a set of social-networking and data-mining features to Outlook Express. This plug-in is able to organize messages by people, relationships, and histories. This is done through a side bar on the right side of the Outlook window. Xobni starts by indexing messages beginning with the most recent ones. Having done that, it is able to show you a profile of any sender of e-mail in your inbox or other folders. At the top of the Xobni side bar is a search box which Mossberg says is much faster and better than Outlook's search. He felt that this search box alone is worth installing the program. You can download and get more details about it from www.Xobni.com. If you are a user of Outlook express, you may find Xobni interesting.

Clock Numbers

In passing, at the dinner table the other night I noticed something interesting on the clock. If you look at the number on the face of the clock you will find that most of the sums of adjacent pairs add to prime numbers. Thus 12+1, 1+2, 2+3, 3+4, 5+6, 6+7, 8+9, 9+10, and 11+12. Only 4+5, 7+8, and 10+11 do not. Well ok, it has nothing to do with computers, but it is interesting. Now can you rearrange the numbers on the face of the clock so that all adjacent sums add to a prime? I suspect that there are several solutions. Give it a try. Let's see how many we can get. Recall that a prime number is a number divisible only by itself and one. □



Pinnacle 12

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Heather recommended that users store their video projects on a separate hard drive and to manage security applications to avoid interrupting the capture process. She also mentioned that the PC being used be at least relatively recent speed level.

Studio 12 is directly compatible with both regular and HD sources. It can also work with green screens to allow creative Picture-in-picture video projects.

Heather starting wrapping up with a demo of the “make-movie” feature where the software sets all the settings for uploading directly to YouTube or other special resolutions.

But for last she saved the video montage feature. This is where the version 12 Studio software will do all the work of linking together all the clips you supply into a finished project automatically. When montage is done you can either keep it as-is, or use it as the starting point to your own editing project. As a final bonus, Heather donated 2 copies of Studio 12 to the evening’s raffle. She had a pair of copies to give away, one was Studio Plus and the other was Studio Ultimate. □

Technology Workshop

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Lloyd’s second favorite is FinalBurner FREE - http://www.protectedsoft.com/descr_fb.php. ‘ImgBurn’ - <http://www.imgburn.com> – ‘a lightweight CD / DVD / HD DVD / Blu-ray burning application that everyone should have in their tool-kit!’. InfraRecorder - <http://infrarecorder.org> Go get one - any one – of these tools. You already have a CD burner, most likely a DVD burner, in your PC. If not, your PC is too old, and your hard drive fail soon. Carpe Datum. Thank Lloyd later.

Join our next meeting Monday, March 16, 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. □

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