COMPARING ISPS
or
HOW I SPENT THE HOLIDAYS
by Jean Bradt, *RCS*

Thought you'd like to read an account of my adventures seeking and installing an ISP (now that I have a nice Pentium that will get me on the net. Well, actually, it's my corporation that owns the Pentium.6).

1. Netzero

I installed Netzero from four floppies I got from a friend. After I filled out a form or two, a Netzero icon was placed on my desktop. Whenever I clicked on it, a strangely black error screen would flicker on and disappear. Then a red and white Netzero screen would appear for a couple of seconds and disappear. Then — nothing — no modem sounds and a blank screen.

So, thinking it hadn't worked, I would click on the icon again. Same results. Undaunted, I would click again. Suddenly, the Netzero dial-up screen would appear. Then a second and a third screen would appear. After a while I realized that Netzero is just slow; I only clicked once from then on.

I must have tried to dial each of the three local access numbers 20 times. If I called during the day, the numbers were always busy. If I called in the wee hours of the morning, the numbers were busy half the time, and half the time the computers were down. Two weeks passed, and I still hadn't gotten onto Netzero.

Exasperated, I called in Jack Greenky. I knew that if he couldn't get me on Netzero, nobody could. Jack pointed out that, although my new Pentium contained Windows95, it lacked a browser. (Apparently Internet Explorer (IE) had been uninstalled from it.) Jack installed IE 5.0. Ever the thorough man, he also installed a Y2K update program.

After four hours, Jack gave up trying to install Netzero. He advised me to get the newer version of it. I went back to my friend and got the new version of Netzero. I installed it and it did the same thing as the old version: nothing. I started wondering if I really wanted Netzero at all; people who used it were talking about how often it's down and how long it takes to get onto it.

2. Freewwweb

My ever-dependable friend again gave me the disks I needed. I installed Free-wwweb and filled out the forms. It wouldn't get me on the net. Seems Freewwweb runs on Netscape Navigator only, not on IE. So much for Freewwweb.

I called AOL's toll-free line and an AOL disk was in my mailbox in five days. I popped it into my computer, filled out the forms, and pushed the "connect" button. There are three local access numbers for AOL, and AOL dials the three numbers alternately until you connect. A step up from Netzero, where I myself had to keep on changing numbers and redialing.

And I was on the net at last! AOL has a lot of services and is easy to use. I was able to get onto it any time of day. It was never down. There was only one catch. (What, you thought AOL was perfect?) It wouldn't let me use any other ISP.

I kid you not. I installed AltaVista next (very easy once you have downloaded and installed Microsoft's DirectX) and clicked on the new icon it gave me. Up came the dial-up box. I pushed "connect." Dialing, verifying, modem squawking. . . . Then all was quiet and a tiny box appeared in the middle of the screen: Please click on Sign Up Now. (But I have learned that you don't click on it now; wait till everything loads and then click.)

But that's not all. Meanwhile, the AltaVista ad bar is loading at the top of the screen. Click the tiny x in the upper right corner and get rid of it. Once the ad bar is gone, guess what you see! Behind everything else, a whole net screen has been loading that says, along the top, "Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by America Online." It has a search icon on it that says AOL Net Search if you click it (though it won't actually search anything). Home button, back buttons, blue AOL triangle, the works. And then a second dial-up screen appears, identical to the first one except that my previously-used *AOL* sign-on name is written in the ID line. (Why didn't AOL go all the way and put in the password I used for AOL too?)

Oh, you're saying, you need to uninstall AOL. But I'm one step ahead of you; the above kept happening *after* I did all of the following:

a. went to file manager, found AOL's uninstall file, and used it. Then deleted anything else I recognized as an AOL file.

b. went to control panel, clicked on Add/Remove Programs, and uninstalled AOL. I also uninstalled a second program AOL installed after installing itself: RealPlayer. (And deleted some "real" files that remained from the file manager.)

c. used Windows95 Find command on AOL and Realplayer. Found 60 to 80 more AOL files, which I had to delete one by one.

So I called the AOL tech support line. This is not to be said lightly; often you wait and wait and press all sorts of numbers only to have AOL hang up on you before you can reach a human being. I eventually got a "supervisor" named Doug on the line. Once he made sure I'd taken the above steps, he insisted that AOL was no longer on my Pentium. I pointed out that the AOL home page shows on my screen when I dial the net. "Where is it coming from then?" I asked him. Doug said IE must be doing it!

Unwilling to make a (toll) call to Microsoft about what was obviously AOL's shenanigans, I tried another tack. I informed him that I was writing an article for the Rochester Computer Society comparing ISPs. I didn't want to have to write that AOL contains hidden programs that make it impossible to log onto other ISPs. So would he please tell me how to get AOL completely off my computer?

Doug became upset, but he kept insisting that, because of IE (somehow), AOL's *name* remained in my Pentium, but that AOL was not actually doing anything in there any more. I explained to him that I never got onto AltaVista, and yet in the dial-up box my AOL ID had appeared. It *must* have come from AOL. He just became more upset. I asked him if he was willing to stand by what he was saying. Apparently not, since he would not give me his last name or his phone number.

I dialed AOL again later. I got a guy named Gabe. He told me how to change my default home page. But I still couldn't get onto AltaVista.

I called AOL *again*. I got a guy named David. He told me how to tell the computer to ditch the IE program as perverted by AOL and return to the original IE 5.0 that Jack had installed for me. Voila! When I clicked the AltaVista icon, up popped the proper AltaVista home page! (But my IE home page still says "IE provided by AOL" on it.) Now to

actually get on the net with AltaVista. See below.

4. AltaVista's FreeAccess

I downloaded FreeAccess from the AltaVista site while on the net with AOL. If you want to use FreeAccess, *do not forget* to d/l DirectX from Microsoft as well.

So once I had AOL out of the way, I clicked once again on the AltaVista icon. Up came the dial-up box. I pushed "connect." Dialing, verifying, modem squawking. . . . Then all was quiet and a tiny box appeared in the middle of the screen: Please click on Sign Up Now. As I clicked on it, Alta Vista's home page came up. Then I got an Internet Explorer Script Error box. And I was no longer able to dial into AltaVista.

What was I to do but call Jack Greenky again? Jack explained that AOL had rewritten some of the script in my copy of AltaVista's home page. The only way to get the computer to let me dial back into AltaVista was to uninstall the current AltaVista program, restart the computer, and reinstall AltaVista from the copy on the floppy. That I did. I was given a registration form to fill out. I asked for a certain ID name and was told it was taken. I deleted a letter from the ID name and reentered my responses. AltaVista responded this time by hanging up on me. I clicked on the icon to try to get back onto AltaVista. Up popped a dial-in box which had an ID name already typed in: the same ID name I had used to use to log onto AOL. *You have entered the twilight zone!*

Quickly I exited that dial-up box. I clicked on the AltaVista icon again. Now a box appeared "to create a new account." I had already done that! Where was the ID name AltaVista and I had agreed on?

So I called AltaVista's tech support. As I waited on hold, I swear the theme song from

Deliverance was being played into my ear. I got a woman named Mia. She explained that, since I downloaded AltaVista using AOL, AOL took that opportunity to pollute the AltaVista files. I had to delete that copy of AltaVista and start over.

5. AltaVista — Really

Now to find a fresh copy of AltaVista. I didn't want to bother my ever-dependable friend again, so I went to my local branch of the public library. For two hours, two kind librarians and I looked through the AltaVista site for a download link. It just wasn't there. I went home empty-handed. I called a different library branch and they said, "We don't offer downloading services yet. Call back in January."

I finally got permission to download AltaVista FreeAccess at work. Downloading it is a little tricky, involving filling out a lot of forms and clicking on just the right icons, but it's very easy to install into the hard drive (or uninstall).

I decided to settle with AltaVista because it's free. I realize that there are other free ISPs out there, but, after my AOL experience, I didn't want to try any more of them. AltaVista's ads are somewhat bothersome, and I get thrown off the net once in a while. But the search engine is right on the home page; that's handy.

When I get rich I'll buy an ad-free ISP.

OFFICE 2000 PRO
Part 5 – POWERPOINT 2000
by Mark Lewis, *RCS*

At the outset, I just want to say that I have not used PowerPoint since Office 4.1, and the last time I used it was about two years ago. That being said how-

ever, I found myself falling into what I wanted to do fairly quickly.

I started with a simple blank animation. By right clicking on the blank part of a slide, I was able to call up the Color Scheme dialog box. Background, Text and Lines, Shadows, Title text, Fills, Accent, Accent and hyperlink, and Accent and followed hyperlink were all available right away. Hit the Change Color button and a color wheel and color spectrum tabs are available to you, so you can change the aforementioned attribute. This type of immediacy in an application, where the tools just seem to fall right into place in your hands, is something I really get off on, and I don't care what the application is, to be honest with you. (Usability issues are very important to me, sorry).

The only trouble is, things began to break down for me after a while in PowerPoint 2000. For example, it took me about 10 minutes to figure out how to change the text color in a text box I had already created. I wanted said text box's text color to deviate from the other text boxes of its type on the same slide. I thought I could get the Color Scheme dialog box by selecting the text, right clicking, and then getting the pop up menu. But I was wrong. I got it by selecting the Font Color menu from the Drawing Tool bar. These are subtle points, but things like this get on my nerves after a while.

In general text boxes were easy to insert and edit, (the text boxes felt like the text boxes in Word).

If you want to insert movie clips into your slides, PowerPoint 2000 seems to only like AVI and QuickTime files, which I thought is totally stupid. There was no support for MPEG or MP3 that I could see at all. This is supposed to be web friendly? Give me a break! So once again, Microsoft claims to

embrace the web, as long as you play by THEIR rules.

Another problem I ran into was trying to apply a different kind of animation effect to each row in a table. Here is the low down. I tried to create a single column table with nine rows. Each row was in a bullet list format. I wanted to animate each row. I wanted each row to have its own unique kind of animation, with each row animation being different from the others that proceeded it. When all the row animations were completed, I wanted all the bullets to line up left justified. Well, to make a long story short, this could not be done.

The only way to do the aforementioned row animations is to NOT use a table, but to make each line of text a separate text box. This makes doing left justified bullet lists, with each row in the bullet list having different animatVions, very hard. So hard, in fact, that I did not want to even bother doing it.

I also had some problems with trying to do Custom Animation. For example, I created a chart. First, I wanted the Chart's title, (in a text box), to make its own animated appearance. Next, three seconds after the Chart title appeared, I wanted all the chart elements to fade in automatically one at a time. I used PowerPoint 2000's Custom Animation to accomplish all this.

Well, for the life of me, I could not get the chart's elements to fade in automatically. They would fade in, but you had to click the mouse or hit the return key in order to get each individual element to appear. In the Custom Animation dialog box, there is a preview button with a large, (about two inch diagonal), thumbnail preview. The preview shows all of the chart's elements fading in automatically, like I had programmed them to. But unfortunately, this only happened

within the preview. So, this was the first true bug I found in PowerPoint 2000.

Lastly, and probably most importantly, is the ability to export your PowerPoint 2000 files to the web.

Well, when you go to save your Power-Point 2000 file as HTML, you are presented with a bunch of options that basically ask you how you want your browser to render the various elements of your PowerPoint 2000 slide show if the browser can not directly support those elements. Due to editorial limitations, I will spare you the details. What I did was turn on every feature I could to ensure maximum compatibility with both Netscape and MSIE.

In Netscape, believe it or not, the Power-Point 2000 slide show opened up OK! But wait folks, before you think I have lost my cynicism, let me tell you of some rendering anomalies.

First off, in Netscape the PowerPoint 2000 slide show is displayed in three frames. The left most frame holds the outline of the slide show. For lack of a better name, I will call this frame the "outline frame." You have little JavaScript buttons at the bottom of the outline frame that allow you to collapse or expand the outline. For each slide, the contents of the first text box in the slide appear in the outline frame as a link. Click on the link, and the slide appears in the top right frame of the browser.

And you guessed it, the top right frame of the browser displays the slide.

The bottom right frame displays nothing at all. (Go figure that one out).

Under the bottom right frame, you also have forward and backward navigation buttons.

Well, this is all just fine and dandy, but there are some MAJOR rendering caveats. First off, slides with a great deal of mixed

media don't render properly. For example, in my PowerPoint 2000 slide show, I have a slide that has three text boxes. Each text box has a different font size, color, and animation. In this slide is also an AVI movie clip.

Well, the whole slide was rendered bad. The only text box that appeared was the largest one, and this text box took up practically the whole real estate of the slide. The line feeds and word wrapping were all messed up. The text overlapped the AVI's display area. In short, this slide was a real mess, and looked nothing like it did in PowerPoint 2000.

As a result of this discovery, I found that in general, when you have slides that contain AVI movies, and/or text or charts with animations and sound, you lose all of the movie, animation, and sound. Basically what is displayed is what you see in PowerPoint 2000 when the slide is in its final state, when all the animations and movie clip(s) have finished playing.

I had another slide in my PowerPoint 2000 slide show that had mixed media. Similar to the previous slide, this slide had lots of animated text boxes and a small AVI movie clip. The final text box displayed on this slide had Custom Animation. In Netscape, this final text box was not displayed. Compare this to PowerPoint 2000, which completely displayed all of the slide's elements, when all of the animations in the slide were finished.

So, in Netscape, there are plenty of rendering problems. Even if you take it for granted that Netscape will only display the PowerPoint 2000 slide in its "final" state, with no animations, movie clips or sound available whatsoever, you still cannot get that "final" state of the slide to come out right every time.

In MSIE, every time I tried to open my PowerPoint 2000 slide show, MSIE crashed!

To conclude, I really wish PowerPoint 2000 would have worked in exporting its slide shows to the web. I really would have loved to have used PowerPoint 2000 to make multimedia web presentations. Even for guy like me, who really is a total newbie to web publishing, I could have really used Power-Point 2000 to do lots of cool stuff. I was really excited when at first my slide show opened up in Netscape. But upon closer examination, I found that there were lots of rendering problems.

I could not get my slide show to open up at all in MSIE, which to me is totally unacceptable.

Needless to say, when publishing to the web, from where I sit at least, PowerPoint 2000 seems to fall flat on its face. I think it is safe to say one can pass on this upgrade.

BUT IS IT SAFE?
by Alex Dumestre
1960 Computer Users Group

A lot of our club members are regular Web surfers but have totally avoided buying anything on-line. Many other members do a lot of on-line shopping and think nothing of it. One of the things that I have noticed is that the only time it is difficult and scary to buy on-line is the first time you do it. The scary part, of course, is giving your name, address, telephone number, e-mail address and credit card number to someone you can't see since there are thousands of hackers just waiting out there to read this information and do all sorts of nasty things to you and to your bank account. We've all heard the horror stories and we know that the press has a tendency to demonize the Internet. I just thought that I'd

use this month's Back to Basics to tell you how I view the Internet with respect to security and privacy. You should not construe any of this to mean that the club urges you to broadcast your credit card number and e-mail address to everyone that owns a computer, it just gives my personal view of the matter.

Do I buy things from Web sources? You bet I do. In the last year or so, I've bought more books on-line than I have at a bookstore; and I'm an avid book buyer. During the same period I've bought almost all of my airline tickets and reserved and paid deposits on almost all of the hotels and rental cars that I've used, and I'm a frequent traveler. In recent times even my wife has done a bit of catalog buying on-line rather than by mail or phone — with excellent results. I have a son-in-law (a club member) who has even bought a pre-owned car on the Web! Have we ever been fleeced? No. But that doesn't prove anything, does it?

Credit Card Numbers on the Internet — Let's look at the matter of credit cards and compare on-line to regular use. Anyone that gets their hands on your name and credit card number may fraudulently make charges against your account. That is the reason that most of us have had it pounded into us to never discard credit card receipts where others can find them and get the information off them. Yet we don't think twice about handing our card to a clerk (perhaps with orange spiked hair, three rings in each ear and a stud in his lower lip) at an unfamiliar gas station or convenience store or to a waiter at some roadside greasy spoon, have them disappear to the back room and later return with our card and charge slip! They wouldn't copy our number, would they? Once the clerk deposits the charge slip in the company's lock box then it is only the company

accounting department that has access to it; but we all know that Trixie's Gas 'n Go has an impeccable reputation — don't we?

On the Web we bypass one of these pitfalls, at least if we make sure that we only give our CC# and other personal information over a secure link (in your browser look for the closed padlock icon that is displayed when you have a secure link). A secure link means that the information that we give the company is transmitted over the Internet in an encrypted form which makes it extremely unlikely that anyone will be able to intercept and read it, much more unlikely than that similar information could be stolen from the U.S. Mail. It is only readable by the accounting department of the company from which we are ordering. Does this guarantee against fraud? No. If we are dealing with Trixie's Gas 'n Go on the Web and know nothing about them, we are just as liable to fraud as if we dealt with them in person. If we are dealing with Continental Airlines or Amazon.com then we have the good reputation of the company on our side, just as when we are dealing with Dillard's in person. This does not mean that some maverick accounts receivable clerk at Amazon .com or at Dillard's can't steal our information, but it is quite rare, isn't it.

If I still haven't convinced you that giving your credit card number to an on-line company is no more dangerous than giving it to a clerk or waiter then there is still a compromise that can be made. If your fear is totally about typing your number on the Internet, then most companies doing e-commerce will allow you to place all of your order and give all of your mail information, etc. on the Web but then call them on their 1-800 number to give them your CC#. (But couldn't someone tap your phone line and get the number that

way? Just forget the whole thing — you're paranoid!)

Privacy Issues — Those of you who have read a few of my Back to Basics or Digging Deeper articles have noticed that I'm a nut on several subjects — but privacy is not one of them. If you are a real privacy nut then there is little that I can say that will change your mind. If you have only a few nagging doubts about privacy on the Internet then you may be interested in what follows.

Cookies are ever present on the Web. Browser makers recognize that many people are uncomfortable with the fact that Web sites that you visit may write small data files to your hard disk and they give you the option to refuse all cookies or to be asked to confirm acceptance of an attempt to write a cookie to your disk. The confirmation option sounds good at first but you'll soon find that it is a major inconvenience to have to respond to every attempt to write cookies. In practice, you will choose either to never accept cookies or to always accept cookies. Here is what the Windows 98 help file has to say about cookies:

Some Web sites store information in a small text file, called a "cookie," on your hard disk. Cookies contain information about you and your preferences. For example, if you inquire about a flight schedule at an airline's Web site, the site might create a cookie that contains your itinerary. Or it might only contain a record of which pages within the site you visited, to help the site customize the view for you the next time you visit.

Only the information that you provide, or the choices you make while visiting a Web site, can be stored in a cookie. For example, the site cannot determine your e-mail name unless you choose to type it. Allowing a Web site to create a cookie does not give that or any other site access to the rest of your com-

puter, and only the site that created the cookie can read it.

In my experience, cookies simply contain a code number, much like a customer number, that allows the Web site to identify your computer automatically to enable them to look up information about you from their own database of past visits to their site. Let's use Amazon.com as an example. On earlier visits, I bought books and gave them my name, mailing address, telephone number, e-mail address and (gasp!) my credit card number. I also indicated that I wanted to activate "one click ordering." On subsequent visits to their site I can browse through their extensive catalog of books, CDs, etc., see

something I like and click the One Click button. It's done! My selection is ordered and will be shipped and billed to my credit card with no other action on my part. Is that the height of convenience? Or does it scare you silly? Loosen up! If I had disallowed cookies or had deleted Amazon's cookie from my Windows\Cookies folder then I would have to re-enter much of my identification information on each visit.

E-mail addresses are another area of concern. It is wise to not spread your e-mail address around any more than you have to. Before giving your e-mail address to a Web site for the purpose of signing up for newsletters of placing orders, etc., you might want to read the site's privacy policy. They should

assure you that they will not sell or share your address with other vendors. The main concern here is not fraud but rather spam. Many members use alternative free e-mail accounts for signing up for newsletters. That way, if the spammers latch onto it at least it is separate from their personal e-mail and they may even choose to close out that account and open a new one.

Personal information availability on the Internet is another privacy issue. Would you believe that I can easily find out your date of birth or the appraised value of your home and how much tax you paid on it last year? I can, and not by any wizardly sleight-of-hand; at least I can if you are a homeowner in Harris County and have registered to vote. The county has its voter registration database and its tax collector's database conveniently online. The voter database contains your date of birth and the tax database contains your home's appraised value (as well as several other tidbits about it). Horrors! That's awful! Well it may be more convenient for people to sit at their computer and browse through all of their neighbors' business but the information has always been available by going to the court house and looking through the same data.

The Internet is not a cesspool of corruption and crime. It has its con men, thieves and muggers just as society in general has. We have learned to live in society without spending all of our time behind double-

bolted doors by following the rules our mothers taught us (look both ways, don't accept rides from strangers, don't walk alone at night in bad parts of town). We can also safely surf the Internet by following other common sense rules (don't give personal information in chat rooms, don't give CC# over non-secure links, if you don't want the world to know something then don't post it on the Web). Your mother probably didn't teach you these last points unless she got an early jump on surfing, but she would have if she had known about them.

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PROTECTING THAT NEW HOLIDAY PC
by Russell James
The Alamo PC Organization

Now that you have invested the money to get that new computer that you have been wanting for so long, you need to look at what it is going to take from you to keep it in tiptop working order. This month we will concentrate on the physical protection and cleaning of the computer system. There are a number of things that you can do to protect your computer that do not take a lot of computer knowledge but fall into the category of good common sense.

The first item on the list is the source of power, the electricity. Every computer system has to be plugged into some sort of power protection. There are different levels of protection depending on what you need. If you want to protect the equipment from damage then you need a surge protector. If you need to make sure that the system continues to run in case of loss of power then you will need an Uninterruptible Power Supply or UPS.

A surge suppressor is going to be the choice for most of the computers that we deal with. Make sure that the suppressor you choose is UL listed and has a plug for your phone line from the wall and to the modem. The modem is usually the first item that we forget about when it comes to surges. We tend to forget that there is low voltage running through the phone lines and neglect to protect the modem. Most of the new surge suppressors on the market now come with a manufactures warranty to protect the equipment that is plugged into it from damage due to electrical spikes and surges. A good suppressor will cost about $35 and is available at most any store that sells computer supplies.

If you have a system that needs to be on will need to get a UPS. You need to first calculate how much power your system uses and then how long it needs to run while the power is out. Most of the systems do not have to be on so the UPS is simply a tool to protect the components and with software to shut the computer down if the power does not come on within a specified time. Depending on how much power the system uses and how long you need it to run without power, a good UPS will cost anywhere from $150 to $600. American Power Conversion or APC, is a manufacturer of surge suppressors and UPS systems. They have an excellent section on their web site that will help you to select the right UPS for your system. The address of the selector is http://www.apc.com/sizing/.

Stay cool

The next item that you need to keep up with is the cooling of the system. The computer has a number of fans inside the box to help to keep it cool. You need to be sure to place the computer in a location that will allow the fans to do their job. Try to keep the front and rear of the computer free of books, papers and any, other items that would block the airflow in or out of the holes in the box. This will allow the fans to circulate the air as much as possible to keep the system cool. Do not forget about the monitor. Those little holes in the top and sides of the monitor are not for you to hang notes on. They are to let the air circulate also.

Dust will also hinder the cooling process. No matter how clean a home or office you keep, you will not be able to keep the dust away from your computer. There seems to be a dust magnet that is built into all the computer systems in the world. Every six months you should turn the computer off, pull the box out and vacuum the dust from the holes in the outside. Inside the box will need to be cleaned out at the same time. Be sure to turn the system off before opening the box. You can use a can of compressed air to blow the dust out of the cracks and crevices inside the box. I like to use the compressed air and the vacuum at the same time. The air will dislodge the dust and the vacuum will pick it up so that it will not make a mess in the house. The very best way is to unplug all of the cords and take the box onto the patio outside for its biannual cleaning. Pay attention to the areas near the fans, as this is where most of the dust will accumulate. The fan on the CPU will also cause you the most problems if the dust is so heavy that it effects the cooling of the CPU.

Make sure to replace the cover so that there are no gaps in the casing. If there are any holes that have been left open from taking cards or devices out, be sure to fill the hole with a blank plate to help to keep the dust out. These can be bought from any computer store along with the screws to hold them in place. This is also true of the plastic covers for the front of the computer. Make sure that they are all in place to minimize the dust accumulation inside the system.

The only thing left is to take a moment to talk about the cleaning of the outside of the system. This would be a good time to tell you all about the customer that brought his laptop into the shop because it would not come on. I looked at the system and as soon as I pushed the power button, I knew I was going to have a problem controlling my laughter. There seemed to be somewhat of an oily residue on the side of the computer. I looked a little closer and found that the residue was on the keyboard and the top and bottom of the laptop. The next thing that came into my head was to smell this residue to see what it was. could not place the smell for a minute and then it came to me. I looked at the customer and asked him why his computer smelled like WD4O. He said that he used WD4O to clean everything because it did such a good job of taking the grime off. There was no hesitation when I told him I knew exactly what was wrong with his computer.

This is an example of what not to use to clean any part of your computer. If you must use any type of liquid, put a small amount of plain water on a soft cotton cloth to clean the grime off of the outside of the box and the monitor. You can also use the moist, but not wet cloth to clean the screen. Make sure never to spray anything into or onto any part of your computer. Always moisten the cloth if you must have a liquid to clean your system.

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SOFTWARE DEALS
from The Deals Guy
Bob (The Cheapskate) Click
Greater Orlando User Group

A nd Now, A Word From Alien Skin!
"User groups are important to us at Alien Skin, and we'd like to show it by offering UG members a major discount on Eye Candy 3.0 and Xenofex 1.0, our popular special effects collections. These plug-ins are now available to members for $89.00 each, $40 off the street price and $10 below normal user group discount. Both Eye Candy and Xenofex are industry-standard tools for creating dazzling special effects, with filters like fire, smoke, lightning, perspective shadow, little fluffy clouds, bevels, glass and more.

We're offering each of these plug-ins for $89 to user group members. Eye Candy and Xenofex are compatible with PhotoShop, Paint Shop Pro, Photo-Paint and other graphics hosts (see the Alien Skin Web site for full info). Also, a discount on Eye Candy 3.1 for After Effects, our plug-in for Adobe's After Effects motion graphics program, is now $299 (a savings of $200). Mention special deal code "UGUS1199" to get the discount.

To order, visit [http://www.alienskin.com/specialdeal.html] and enter deal code UGUS1199. You can download the software right away. Also order via toll-free phone 1-888-921-SKIN (7546), Fax: 1-919-832-4065, e-mail [sales@alienskin.com]. Mention the deal code UGUS1199 to get the special discount! Offer expires on February 29th, 2000."

I have not tried these. It's very hard to reach anyone there. I tried three times to obtain more info about platforms, leaving messages, tech support included, but with no response. Good luck ordering. Sales must be great!

Wait a Minute — Long Distance Calling FREE — Get Otta Here!

I'll bet you thought BigZoo.com was a great deal for long distance calling at 3.9 cents per minute, and it is because it's good anywhere in the world at low rates. But at [http://www.dialpad.com] you call for absolutely NOTHING to all 50 states if you are properly equipped. You need a sound card with a mike, preferably a full-duplex sound card, and I'm sorry to say it's presently good only for the Windows platform. They hope to expand platforms soon. You need Java Virtual Machine installed, and a late version of IE or Netscape.

Just sign up and you're in business. Their page has all the info. I had a problem with a Java script error, so at this writing I have not tried it. When I get the time, I'll look into that problem. My version of Netscape may be a problem. Check into it for yourself.

Since I don't have much going this month, lets discuss free ISPs. Everybody likes freebies, and I'm splitting what I have on free ISPs between this month and next.

You Mean I Can Surf The Web For Free???

Yup; It can happen if you play your cards, or cursors, right. I've known about two free ISPs for a while, but I'm always gun-shy after having tried a couple and being left high and dry. I lost $49.00 on one and $25.00 on the other. My timing was so bad that I never even got on before they went under, and others had been using them. However, lets delve into all this.

The reason I previously featured Web4 Life's "WebCombo" with the one-time setup fee is because they approached me, and after looking it over, I thought they would probably give you better service than the free ISPs, with a minimum of advertising. WebCombo's been around for a while too. It also had an excellent phone number access selection. WebCombo does have reasonably good tech support, even though it is not open 24 hours. My service was a comp so I could check it out, and their tech support was very helpful when I called. They also offer five megs for your Web Page.

I believe that old saw about there being no free lunch. You generally get what you pay for. I haven't given up my Mindspring service because of their excellent service and great tech support. Of course Mindspring is about to change to EarthLink. Actually, I feel WebCombo's access number list is better than Mindspring's.

NetZero

This one's been around for a year or so and didn't have the best name here. I read reviews on NetZero in a couple newsletters so it may be improved. Access numbers are a bit limited. However, you do get Internet access and all you do is endure the ads. Click an ad every little while or it cuts you off. Check it at [http://www.netzero.com]. Good in US and Canada. 56K modem service.

Launched over a year ago, it has a small advertising window that's not removable, but can be moved any place on your screen. It is necessary to fill out a demographics form about hobbies, etc., to become a subscriber. E-mail accounts are available. No Web page space at this time. One complaint is getting dropped off when trying to connect.

Freewwweb

Some local user group members use this one. While they say the service is not great; limited tech support and lack of access numbers, they use it but keep their service-for-pay ISP. Must click on advertising occasionally. Oh well, I put up with that when I had Prodigy and got used to it. In AOL I can at least turn some of the advertising off in preferences.

They provide service at up to 56K to 95% of the US and Canada and they're in their fourth year of service. It is owned by a company called "Smart" which sells cellular telephone service. They provide Netscape "Communicator." Check this free ISP at [http://www.freewwweb.com]. Tech support is by e-mail or a pay phone number, and they say you don't wait. Access number selection is not as good as some others. No Web page space and I don't know about e-mail accounts.

AltaVista

I'll bet you think I'm talking about the search engine. Weell . . . , they also offer free Internet service. You must have MS DirectX 7.0 to use this ISP so you may have to download that from the Microsoft site. Go to [http://microav.com] to sign up. Access number selection was not bad. Supports up to 56.6 modem. E-mail available on AltaVista, but does not currently offer e-mail based on POP e-mail accounts.

Also good in US and Canada and the download is 600K. It includes "AltaVista Live" for your own personalized home page, as well as "MicroPortal," your constant connection to current information, and the powerful AltaVista search functionality. There are no usage limits on this free ISP. For Windows and Mac.

That's about it for February. I'll continue the information on free ISPs next month. One site I'll give is a wealth of information.

This column is written to make user group members aware of special pricing I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of products, no matter how enthusiastic I sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click [dealsguy@Mindspring .com]. Visit my new Web site at [http://www .dealsguy.com].

ANOTHER WAY OUT
by Kim Lewandowski
South Hampton Roads User Group

If your computer hangs in Win95/98 and Ctrl+Alt+Delete gives no response, try one more thing before reaching for the power button: Press Ctrl+Esc. With any luck, this will activate the Start menu, from which you can safely shut down or restart your system.

File Extensions

Ever encounter an application that designates itself as the default program for a file extension previously owned by another program? The quickest way to get out of this jam under Win9x is to find an example of an incorrectly associated file. Click on the file once to select it, then hold down the Shift key while you right-click on it. Choose Open With. Select the correct program, check the "Always use this program to open this type of file" box and click on OK. Or, if you don't find the program, click on the Other button and navigate to the correct program on your drive.

Winmag.com's Tip of the Day

Q: How safe is it to order merchandise online?

A: Personally, I consider it safer than giving your credit card to a stranger in a restaurant or shop. When you order online, make sure you are connected to a secure server by checking that the security "lock" in your browser is "locked." If you're still concerned, here's a tip from *PC World*: Go to your bank and request an additional credit card with a limit equal to what you expect to spend online, like $200 or $500. Then use that card only for online purchases. If the card number is ever compromised, you will know it happened with an online merchant. Another tip: Always pay for online purchases with a credit card, either one dedicated for this purpose or another one. By federal law, you have more protections against theft or misuse of your credit card than you do if you pay by check.

Kim Lewandowski can be reached at kim@lewandowski.net South Hampton Roads User Group (SHRUG). From the January 2000 issue of *The Umbrella Online*.

AI SQUARED® ZOOM TEXT EXTRA LEVEL 2i™
by Robert Thompson
Tucson Computer Society

Having a computer display with text I can read is just as important now as it was 15 years ago, when I bought my first one. The importance of this fundamental issue has not changed: if I can't read it, it's not going to do me any good. I was thrilled when Windows came along, and I learned I could customize colors, fonts, and other screen features the way I wanted. But that wasn't enough. Dialog box text and other features were, and still are, too small. Holding a hand-held magnifier while trying to compute isn't a practical solution.

One great option is to use screen magnification and speech output software. I've used Zoomtext for years. In fact, my job would be nearly impossible to do without this and other accessibility tools. While I've used less feature-rich versions, this is the first time I've used speech integrated within Zoomtext.

Zoomtext Extra Version 7.0, by AI Squared incorporates both screen magnification and text-to-speech features to enable visually impaired people to use Windows. It comes in two flavors. Level 1 includes screen magnification features, and sells for $395. Level 2 adds a text-to-speech utility, "DocReader," which reads documents aloud. Level 2 also speaks menu choices, and many, but not all dialog boxes. These applications work in Windows 95/98/NT only. For DOS support, add $200. A planned Level 3 product, not yet released, will work with a scanner and add Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology, and allow users to scan documents, process forms, read handwritten materials, and read them on their monitors.

Documentation is provided on the CD through excellent help files, on the CD. In addition, a large-print, 178-page document provides full details.

Zoomtext Extra Level 2 is not designed for totally blind users, but is for visually impaired users who can benefit with both screen magnification and speech support. Sometimes I want to simply view the screen, at others, to read a document and not track it visually. Otherwise, I may use the speech feature to verify what I'm typing. This is especially handy when entering data.

Speech output is through the sound card, and version 7.03, the current release, also provides support for dedicated "SSIL" speech cards. This type of card is specifically designed for speech output, and doesn't process music; DecTalk, Arkenstone, Arctic, and others manufacture this hardware, which provides enhanced speech output.

Zoomtext version 7 takes advantage of Microsoft's ActiveX Active Accessibility features that make Windows features available to accessibility software. A minimum of 4 MB video memory is recommended; it operates better with more video RAM. I appreciated seeing the performance improvement when I changed my video card from 4 to 8 MB. When you change your computer's display resolution and color depth, re-start Zoomtext to allow its Profiler to determine and adjust for your video settings.

Getting Started

Setup is fairly straightforward, although things get cumbersome if you need to uninstall Zoomtext after updating to another revision. Version 7.02 was on the CD, which I updated to the current 7.03, accessed from their web site. Due to conflicts with L&H's Voice Xpress Professional and a Zoomtext upgrade, I had to uninstall and reinstall both programs a few times during this review process, trying different install options. To completely uninstall, then reinstall, Zoomtext each time, I manually removed the application and used Windows' Regedit program to remove all instances of Zoom-Text. And while I don't recommend using Regedit for this purpose, it worked. Reinstallation was a snap.

Level 1 Features

Screen magnification from 2-16 times, reversing screen colors or setting the display to various shades of black and white, are just the start. The screen can be magnified as a whole, or split vertically or horizontally to show magnified and normal-sized images. This mode works best for me when someone else is viewing the display with me, and they get lost in the magnified image. Or select a "lens" view to move the cursor and magnify only what's underneath the cursor. Change the sizes and magnification of these windows

to suit your needs. You can even set up multiple magnified areas onscreen, as targets, to monitor various areas; such as changing fields in your application, like the display of calculations, time, and so on. Occasionally there are glitches, some of them due to configuration issues and how Zoom-Text works with your PC's graphics card. I've found a few minor bugs, which AI Squared is addressing. Overall, however, the program provides a plethora of possible features to customize to suit the user's needs.

Level 2 Features

Speech output is quite good using the Tru-Voice engine. Set options to tell Zoom-text how and what to read, and how much detail should be read when dealing with screen features, dialog boxes, text, and so on. Choose from ten built-in voices, and adjust the volume, pitch, and reading rate. You can move over an icon and "speak it," read menu selections, and more.

With DocReader, tell Zoomtext where to begin reading. A DocReader screen appears, where you can control reading speed and pitch. As the text buffer is read, there is a short delay as reading continues. This delay has been decreased in the current interim release, and performance improved. Read the whole document, or use various control keys to navigate and read or spell through the document. Reading web-based documents is a bit more involved, and I'll have to review the instructions to perfect that task. Once you've made your selections, save the configuration as either the default, which will come up each time you start the program or with a separate name. You might choose a name appropriate to each application or situation required, loading the one you want to use.

Shortcut keys, mouse actions, and menu choices provide lots of ways to interface with Zoomtext's powerful features. Ctrl-Shift-U brings up the user interface, for example, and Ctrl-shift-D selects DocReader. If yours is a wheel mouse, hold a control key combination and roll the mouse wheel to zoom in or out. If your Windows application supports it, continue rolling the wheel to scroll in the document. You could use the same zoom controls to view and edit details in your photo editing program, CAD, or similar application.

Application Notes

A note about speech output: Both Zoom-text and L&H Software's Voice Xpress, which was presented at the September TCS general meeting, generate text-to-speech output and directs it to the PC's sound card. If you try using Zoomtext while Voice Xpress is running, the speech engine used is the one provided by L&H. The speech quality is degraded, and the interface that comes up is the one L&H uses. If you're using both products together, turn Zoomtext's speech off (uncheck Enable Speech in its Profiler), and revert to the Level 1 settings.

Let me offer a major caveat, here. If accessibility products developed by different companies are installed, conflicts in their operation are almost certainly guaranteed. For example, Zoomtext and Henter-Joyce's JAWS for Windows, designed for totally blind users, aren't well integrated, at least in previous versions. When using JAWS, for example, try HJ's MAGIC screen magnification product instead of Zoomtext. (Sorry, AI Squared, that's my experience. These conflicts may have been resolved in a newer version of JAWS.)

Problems? Contact AI Squared, as they offer free lifetime technical support. Speaking of which, support personnel were very thorough and complete in solving my predicaments and program conflicts. AI Squared has been perfecting their products for about 15 years, and have a great track record for support issues.

A 30-day demo of Zoomtext is available from the company's web site. You can also find contact information, news on products, upgrades from previous versions, and frequently asked questions there.

Zoomtext Extra version 7 comes on a CD, with spoken installation instructions. The large-print manual provides good descriptions, a thorough tutorial, and plenty of screen shots. You'll need a windows-compatible sound card and speakers.

At the November Digital Imaging SIG meeting, I demonstrated the use of the product. Many of those at the meeting had been unaware that such a resource existed, and we had a lively discussion about its many features. AI Squared has once again done a good job of integrating features, control, and overall quality to develop this highly-regarded accessibility tool.

Reprinted from the January 2000 issue of the Tucson Computer Society *Journal*.

Ken's Korner

CD-RW DRIVES UNSEAT OTHER MEDIA
for Removable Storage Backup, Archives
by Ken Fermoyle

The king is dead! Long live the king! (Until a successor ascends the throne.) The "dead king" in this case is the traditional 3.5-inch floppy disk drive and its cousins: Zip drives, Super Drives, tape backups and other removable storage media.

The new king is the CD-RW (Compact Disk-ReWriteable) drive. The successor, already waiting in the wings, is the DVD-RW (Digital Versatile Disc or Digital Video Disk, depending on your orientation). Portable USB hard drives may be pretenders to the throne.

Of course I'm exaggerating a bit. You can't count out the lowly 1.44-megabyte floppy drive just yet. It is adequate for typical word processing and other applications that don't produce big files. Prices are low enough for both drives and diskettes to keep them alive for the near term. Shipments should peak in 2001, then start a slow decline.

Iomega's Zip and Jaz products, Super floppies, tape drives and their kin won't disappear overnight either, but they all have drawbacks that will make it hard for them to compete with CD-RW drives in the long term. Generally, they have more limited capacity, higher media costs, and aren't priced all that much lower than the CD products. (Note that Iomega recognizes the inevitable and introduced its own CD-RW drive, the ZipCD, in June 1999.)

For example, a 100MB Zip drive costs about $100 to $130, depending on type (internal, external, SCSI, parallel, USB). Disk prices range from about $8 to $15 as this is written in mid-January, 2000. A 1GB Jaz drive costs about $200, with disks going for $90 to $100.

By comparison, CD-RW drives hold 650MB and sell for anywhere from $170 to about $400, with most in the $200-250 range. That means their disks hold as much as 6.5 Zip 100 disks and roughly 66% as much as the 1-gig Jaz disk. The kicker is the cost of media.

CD-R disks cost just $1 to $2 each. You can only write files to them once, no rewrit-

ing, but you can write to them in increments; adding files until the disk is full. This makes them ideal for permanent backup or archiving files. They are easily portable, since they are compatible with all CD-ROM drives of recent years. And they're so cheap you can use a lot of them without busting the budget.

CD-RW disks cost more, about $5 to $6, but you can write and rewrite to them just as you would a floppy or Zip drive. Generally there are more compatibility issues than with CD-R disks; they may not be readable in any CD-ROM, or even other CD-RW, drives. They are best used for day-to-day backup.

The nice thing is that a CD-RW drive gives you the best of both worlds, since you can burn CD-R disks or use CD-RW disks in one.

Let me tell you about my experiences with two quite different types of CD-RW drives I've been using for four months, since Sept. 1999. One is a Verbatim brand, Model 4420a (4X Record, 4X Rewrite, 20X Read): the drive itself is made by Mitsubishi The other is more exotic: a Compro external drive from ACS Innovations. Made specifically for use with notebook computers, it weighs just over a pound and connects to a notebook PCMCIA slot or USB port.

Necessity led me to the CD-RW drives. I was preparing to do my Media Workshop in Orlando, FL last fall and realized the PowerPoint slide show I use to support my presentation was far too big to fit on a floppy. Putting it on a CD-ROM disk was the logical way to go. I began by investigating CD-R (record only) drives. They were cheap ($160 or less) but I learned this was because they were being phased out. I was advised to go for a CD-RW drive instead —

and settled on the Verbatim 4420a as one of the fastest in my price range.

Installing it was simplicity itself. I merely disconnected my existing CD-ROM drive and plugged in the new drive in its place, using the existing cable. It came with just!burn software from CeQuadrat (taken over by Adaptec in mid-1999), which I found very easy to use after an initial goof. I ruined several disks by trying to format them not realizing that they were preformatted by Verbatim!

The just!burn Wizard makes it easy to create backup, audio or data disks. The CD-ROM disks I've burned with the CeQuadrat software have been readable by every CD drive in which I have tested them. The tests have included drives in a half-dozen desktop computers and three notebook computers. I should mention that none of the drives was more than 24 to 30 months old. I can't vouch for compatibility with older drives.

The Compro notebook CD-RW drive is a real gem, the world's first CD Rewriter with CD 4X recording, 4X rewriting and 20X reading function all in a slim 23mm height housing. Bare drive weight is only 18 oz. Other weights are: battery pack w/5 AA batteries (Alkaline or NiCAD and NiMH 1.2V rechargables), 7 oz; AC adapter, 8 oz; PCMCIA card/cable, 5 oz; USB cable, 4oz. Current price is $269.

The whole works adds up to 42 oz., but one normally would use either the PCMCIA or USB cable so actual weight, including a few disks, is less than 2.5 lbs.

The amazing thing is how well this little drive works. It performs so well I don't use it only with my notebook. It is connected via USB port to one of the desktop machines in our office when I'm not traveling.

The Compro slimline came with Adaptec's Easy CD Creator, which most experts consider the top CD creation program. It includes DirectCD, which lets you treat CD-RW drive like a floppy drive. You can copy information in small packets and erase separate files ("random erase") instead of having to erase the entire CD. Packet writing allows sending of small amounts of data or "packets" to CD-R and CD-RW drives without wasted overhead and without risk of data transfer interruptions (buffer underruns).

Easy CD Creator makes it simple to create music, photo, video, and data CDs. You can even make bootable CDs. I have V.3.5 but plan to upgrade soon to V.4.0 which has some desirable features added. (Check it out at www.adaptec.com/products/ overview/ecdc.html)

As always, your comments and experiences with these or similar products are welcome. I also invite you visit my website: www.zyworld.com/wordsmithken.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN
February 2000
by Joe Pia

Here we are into February of the fateful year 2000. There's snow on the ground as I write this. Now, of course meteorology is always fun. But the point here has to do with computers. When it's cold outside, snow or no snow, then the air inside our houses gets a touch dry. It gets dry enough so that just walking across the floor can put quite a static electrical charge on the walker.

We notice it when we reach for the door knob and draw a spark. We also notice it when we pucker up for our sweeties. Getting a shock in the lips tends to dampen enthusiasm for smoochin'. The other place we notice it is when we reach for our computers.

Walking across the floor on a carpet can get us a static electricity build-up, one which has no discriminatory powers at all. We get sparks no matter what we reach for. With our computers, the danger is great. Less than it used to be but still . . .

The cure is to reach for the computer's box or tower before we start touching the keyboard. The box will accept the errant charge and send it down the ground wire and out to the ground where it is safely discharged.

Without some care in this regard we risk losing our CPUs or banks of RAM chips. Either way we lose out. The computer doesn't work anymore and we are out whatever it costs to replace the RAM or the CPU.

You might have seen in films pictures of people who work in computer factories. They regularly wear little copper bracelets on their non-dominant hands. Those bracelets are attached to a copper wire or cable that is in turn attached to a grounding device. The pros take very seriously the prospect of damaging parts of the computers under construction. We should too.

So, next time the temps fall and the indoor humidity falls to Saharan levels, or lower, it's time to take care lest we shock the whammies out of our computers.

Software to Give Away

Nearly everyone has seen *ComputerLink Magazine* around town. Justin Ziemniak, the owner, editor and publisher, is interested in working out a connection with the Society. The arrangement isn't finalized yet, but one aspect of it will be interest to everyone.

People — companies as well as individuals — send Justin lots of software for review in his magazine. He can't possible deal with all of it. He is willing, therefor, to let us distribute the software in the usual way to our members in return for reviews. He will publish some of the reviews in his magazine. We will publish some in *The Monitor*.

Members, and only paid up members, will continue to receive numbered tickets when they enter the meeting room. They will be able to place them in containers assigned to certain software packages. Then, at the end of the meeting, from those containers will be drawn tickets. The numbers will be read. People whose ticket numbers match those drawn will receive the software in question.

Members who receive packages will be expected to prepare reviews of those packages inside of sixty days. If they haven't turned in a review by then, they'll have to return the software to be distributed to another member who will write the review. People who have trouble writing will have help available if they need or want it. People who try to abscond with the software without writing a review will become pariah. Everyone will snub them, especially those who would have been glad to write a review in order to have the program.

If you don't want to prepare a review, don't put tickets in the containers. This is not a simple give-away. It's a trade of free software for a review.

We don't yet know when this system will start again. Justin has been sick and he has had a death in his family. In addition, he has to get out another issue of the mag. All that takes time and energy. If we can start in February, we will. But please don't be surprised if we don't start until March.

Tinkering with the Structure Again

Sally received a copy of *PC Alamode* recently. It's from Texas. The term "alamode" is a pun on the Alamo, the local historical site. Certain aspects of the newsletter are quite instructive.

First, the Board of Directors is much larger than ours and their officers more extensive. But then their organization is considerably larger. They, by the way, are also a 502(c)(3) society. Second, they have a lot of writers. Some, however, produce multiple pieces for each issue.

The first matter is suggestive for our organization. Since I don't know how many members there are in that organization, I can't figure out how they arrived at the number of directors they have. It seems clear to me, though, that we could follow their example. When we start to grow again, as we will once our not-for-profit status is confirmed by the IRS, we will need to rewrite that paragraph in the by-laws to make the number of directors congruent with the number of our members. About one director per thirty to thirty-five members sounds about right. An upper limit of 24 would mean that we would have enough directors to handle a membership of about a thousand. We could write the by-law so that as our membership waxed, and perhaps waned, the number of directors to be elected each year could rise or fall.

While this is an interesting prospect, I do not intend to pursue it during my term of office, which expires at the end of August.

The other aspect of the Texas society is that they have more officers than we do. For example, one Vice President is the regular one. Another's purview is membership growth. Another's is member retention. Etc. We might take a look at this approach and see if we can use it. We could for the moment create some temporary positions, e.g., Assistant Vice President for X, to handle some of the issues we need to attend to. It's clear that the jobs we need doing, even though we are a relatively small group of about one hundred members, require more energy from our officers than they can give. Let's think about this one some more. If we advocate this approach in the next few months, you now know where it came from.

Like the Texas group, we need to develop a body of writers we can call on for pieces to appear in the *Monitor*. Having a stable of people means that no single person has to produce a whole lot of text each month. Some months one will get off scot free. Other months may be times for more production. We have lots of potential writers. So, let's think about this one, too.

Finally

These ramblings have gone on too long. But communication with the members is a major concern. These are some of the thoughts that occupy me this month. If you have a concern, give me a call. Let's talk.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE FOR ELECTIONS 2000

This spring will bring the Society our first elections of officers under the new regime. The new calendar has elections in the spring. The new officers and the old ones operate as a team for the summer. In September the new officers will take over completely. The old officers are supposed to attend meetings and generally be available with information and help through the end of the calendar year, in this case until 31 December 2000.

We will be starting our next full year with our Not-for-Profit [501(c)(3)] status in hand. With that will come all sorts of possibilities for developing programs to help people learn how to use their computers. It's important that our new officers be people who are willing to seek out and make use of the new opportunities offered by our new corporate status.

It's also important that each member consider who might be a good person or two to serve in each of the positions for which we elect officers. Then, please let the Nominating Committee know who you have in mind. It might be helpful to determine before turning in a name to the Nominators if the person you have in mind would be willing to serve.

If your tentative nominee has reservations that you think might fade while talking to a Nominator, please let the Committee know so that the Committee might pursue the matter.

The Committee members are:

Larilyn Bauer, Chair 458-1820
Jean Bradt 256-0775
Charles Grover 242-4868
Steve Staub 458-3420
Joe Varga 223-5269

TREASURER'S REPORT
by Steve Staub

Income

Dues $610.00

Expenses

St. Stephen's – Copier Rental . . $100.00
Paper Supplies 21.21
Pizza and soda 19.22
Total Expenses $140.43
Balance as of 1/31/00 . . . . $2,336.14

NEW USER GROUP TURNS THE CENTURY
by John McMillan

On Dec. 7th, eight regulars gathered around Charlie Sumner's laptop computer at the Monroe Developmental Center to learn about internet browsing and E-mail. Jean Bradt had asked if it was possible to down load Altavista to a floppy disk. Not knowing which phone jacks were internal networks and which were live lines; what access number was required for an outside line; and lacking information about the computers software and communication protocols frustrated our efforts.

A Net Access user who recently updated to Office 2000 with Outlook Express reported that going to Outlook Express first and then Internet Explorer results in a message to the effect that "We are going to disconnect your Net Access, we will hook up another Net Access." This resulted in two icons for Net Access. One icon was deleted by clicking it with the right mouse button and then clicking delete. When this process was used on the second icon, a menu appeared with open, settings, create shortcut and rename as options. He was not sure if either or both icons were shortcuts. There was a possibility that the first icon repre-

sented the program which was then deleted leaving the second icon which may have been a shortcut.

This lead to a discussion of various methods of deleting things. In Windows 3.1, deletion changed the first character of a file name to a ~. It was possible to retrieve files by replacing the ~ before the disk space was reused. In Windows 95 and 98, files and folders can be dragged to the recycle bin where they remain available until the recycle bin is emptied Using the file menu delete command appears to cause an immediate deletion, at least when using File Manager (Winfile.exe). The laptop was used to display the contents of that machines recycle bin. The distinction between shortcuts and program logos was also shown.

Conversation returned to the Net Access replacement message with the thought that the first copy might be running in the background when an attempt was made to open it for another purpose. The task bar at the bottom of the screen shows icons for all active applications to avoid reopening the same program several times. When several copies are active each must be closed, to allow Windows to shutdown normally. An abnormal shutdown causes extensive checking at the next start up to verify that files have not been corrupted.

The conversation turned to a web site called Updates.com which analyzes your computer and software and alerts you to components which have changed and lets you control downloading the newer versions. There is no charge for this service which is covered by advertising income.

Internet Explorer and Windows Explorer are similar names that can cause confusion when not completely identified. Windows Explorer functions were compared to those

of File Manager. It was noted that reopening File Manager (Winfile.exe), returned the same window that existed at closing which is often more convenient that reopening Windows Explorer which reinitiates the entire process starting from a position in the Windows folder. File Manager can be opened in Windows 95 and 98 users by clicking Start; going to Run; typing c:\windows\winfile.exe; and pressing enter. Windows Explorer can be opened by pointing the cursor at Start and pressing the right mouse button.

The New Users gathered on Jan. 4th to discuss their new Christmas toys and console one another on the associated problems. Bill Statt demonstrated his new Epson digital camera, a purchase he has been considering for many months, by taking a picture of the group and then showing everyone the display. Very impressive. Another member admitted to getting Road Runner for speedier internet work.

Despite a pronounced lack of interest in games, this chronicler received CD's with a bass fishing game and six Russian games. When quickly installed (by the givers, not the recipient) it appeared that considerable research would be required to use them effectively. Of greater interest was a Quick Study French CD set. Attempts to install this created much confusion as error messages referred to Quick Study Spanish. The process was further complicated when the computer froze requiring a call to IBM support which is operating from Ireland. They carefully talked me through defrosting, which required over 16 minutes, and got me back in business. It took nine attempts to complete on line registration so Quick Study support could be called. Part of the problem was that a module had not

installed successfully. This particular module was identified with the Apple computer logo despite being used on an IBM Aptiva. After all that help everything appears to be working properly.

The topic of file organization and control arose with a question of how could multiple files be combined into a single entity in a simple way within Windows 98. The method being used was a cut and paste process in which many files were individually copied to the clipboard and then pasted into a single record. Windows 3.5 users mentioned File Manager while 95 and 98 users suggested Windows Explorer or My Computer. File Manager and Windows Explorer are very similar except that Windows Explorer always restarts at the start menu and internal windows must be reinitiated whereas File Manager retains its previous status even when the machine is powered down . This is advantageous when several sub windows are opened to facilitate file movement and the job is interrupted for some reason. File manager will not handle the long file names that are available to 95 and 98 users. Many 95 and 98 users who had experience with File Manager were unaware that it could be opened by clicking on start; then typing c:\windows\winfile .exe and pressing enter. Some were unaware that pointing the mouse at start and pressing the right button would open Windows Explorer.

The final question of the night was what function does a turbo button perform on a 486, to which the answer was nothing. Turbo buttons, intended for 286 and 386 machines, are not wired to anything when a 486 is put in an older case.

The Top 12 Things on a Y2K Survivalist's To-Do List

12. Search for grocery store receipt for 10,000 packets of ramen noodles.

11. Apologize to neighbors about the trip-wire incident; offer to replace dog.

10. Gather recipes for Spam, dehydrated potatoes, and crow.

9. Cancel subscription to *Stockpilers Quarterly*, but keep free can opener.

8. Convert weapons back to semi-auto.

7. Pitch "1000 Ideas for Using Wheat Gluten" to Martha Stewart's people.

6. Return 753 videos to Blockbuster.

5. Water yard, one lousy gallon at a time.

8. Prepare for the dreaded "Arbor Day Bug."

4. Find the felon who sold me dehydrated water.

3. Curse God for not zapping us with his wrath.

2. Convert my anti-Y2K-Bug tin-foil hat back into an anti-Katie-Couric-Mind-Control tin-foil hat.

And the Number 1 Thing on a Y2K Survivalist's To-Do List. . . .

1. Smile conspiratorially at the six billion other Y2K survivors.

The Top Nine Reasons Why Dogs Don't Use Computers

1. Can't stick their heads out of Windows 9x.

2. Fetch command not available on all platforms.

3. Too difficult to "mark" every Web site they visit.

4. Can't help attacking the screen when they hear "You've Got Mail."

5. Three words: Carpal Paw Syndrome.

6. A saliva-coated mouse is difficult to maneuver.

7. Oh, but they will — with the introduction of the Microsoft Opposable Thumb.

8. 'Cause dogs ain't geeks. Now, cats, on the other hand. . . .

9. Sniffing is more direct and less deceptive than online chat rooms.