

Newsletter

Connecticut PC User's Group

May 2014
Vol. 32 No. 9

Next CTPC Meeting

Tuesday, May 27, 2014 - 6:30 p.m.

Fairfield County Makers' Guild

The May 27th CTPC meeting will be a field trip to Fairfield County Makers' Guild, 327 Main Avenue, Norwalk. According to the Guild's website:

"FCMG is a non-profit, membership-based community workshop and fabrication studio that provides access to specialized tools and equipment to enable its members to turn their ideas into reality".

A product of the maker movement, FCMG's mission is to establish a vibrant community of makers, inventors, tinker-

ers, hobbyists, and artists and a culture of learning and sharing with one another. By providing access to tools, knowledge, and community, FCMG hopes to establish a space that fosters innovation and creation."

After two years of meeting in members' houses, restaurants and the Norwalk Public Library, on February 22nd, 2014, the Fairfield County Makers' Guild celebrated the opening of its own space which is housed one floor above the Batters'

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May 27th Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.
CTPC Meeting
Field trip this month

June 24th Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.
CTPC Meeting
Silver Star Diner, Norwalk, CT

GENERAL MEETINGS

Meetings are held on the 4th (not last) Tuesday of the month. There is no charge to attend general meetings. See back page for directions.

www.ctpc.org

Ira Wilsker - Ira hosts "My Computer Show" a call-in tech support show on KLVI radio, 560AM, from 4-5 p.m. Mondays, Pacific time. The show streams live over the net at KLVI.com and on the free iHeartRadio app. His call-in number is 800-330-5584

Paid Apps for Free or Deeply Discounted Now Readily Available

WEBSITES:

<http://hungryforapps.com>

<http://appgratis.com>

Several months ago I wrote about some of the online services that make available to users a "daily deal" of commercial PC and MAC software either for free or deeply discounted. This fully functional commercial software is legally licensed and legitimate, not pirated, and made available for a very limited time for free (or deeply discounted). Two of the websites that I monitor on a daily basis as a source of free or discounted commercial PC software are SharewareOnSale.com and Giveawayoftheday.com. Recently, SharewareOnSale.com has offered for very brief periods of time, name brand software from Norton, BitDefender, IObit, and other well known software publishers. These are le-

gal, full versions of commercial software, made available in the hope that users will later pay for annual renewals or upgrades. Several of the publishers offered a free one year license of their products, with the option of buying multiyear or lifetime licenses at deep discounts, often exceeding an 80% discount from the retail price. This has proven to be an effective way of improving market share in a highly competitive industry while giving users a reasonable opportunity to use commercial software instead of the "freeware" alternatives.

The deals offered by some of these websites have proven so popular that it was only a matter of time until additional categories of commercial software became available. Recently, Ashraf, the publisher of the very popular SharewareOnSale.com website that has become an industry leader in making available these super deals on commercial PC and MAC software, introduced a companion software site that offers similar deals on apps for Android, iOS devices (iPad and iPhone), MAC powered devices. and Windows powered smart devices. This new website is HungryForApps.com.

Updated at least daily, HungryForApps.com is currently offering (as I type this) almost 250 normally paid (commer-

cial) apps either for free or at a significant discount from the "app store" prices. Almost all of the apps listed are downloaded and installed directly from the authorized app stores, such as Google's Play Store, or iTunes, which provides a degree of safety and security not available from third party or illicit pirate download websites.

On the HungryForApps.com website, each app is initially displayed as an icon, about 50 per page, with the descriptive app name, the normal selling price, and the discounted rate. If the item is displayed with the statement "100% Discount", the descriptive word "Free" will always be the first word in the description. Just above and to the right of each descriptive app icon is a smaller icon that denotes the operating system for that particular app. It is very easy for users to visually determine which operating system is required for each displayed app; a small blue icon with a circled capital "A" indicates that the listed app is for iOS devices, and that the app can be downloaded directly by clicking on the icon, and receiving the app directly from the official Apple App Store; a small green robot, the trademark for Android, indicates that the app is for Android smart devices, and can be downloaded via the

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Using a Publisher Program or a Word Processor

If you use email or a word-processing application (like Microsoft Word or WordPad) you probably have no trouble entering and editing text. But when it comes to putting things exactly where you want on the page, well, word processing programs can become difficult. For example, if you delete a few lines toward the beginning of your document, the rest of the document “moves up” so that no empty space appears in the middle of your text. This is great for email and word processing programs but can be a pain if you wanted to place things on a page and have them stay where you put them. Most editions of Microsoft Office (a set of application programs) contain Word (for word processing) and Publisher (for creating all sorts of wonderful publications). If you do not have Microsoft Office or Microsoft Publisher, you can purchase a cheap publishing program such as “Printshop”, “Printmaster” or “Page Plus” or other discount software. Just Google “cheap publisher software” to find these or others, some are even free. Most publisher-type programs work the same way. The following works for Microsoft Publisher (2003 edition) and is a good example of how such programs are used.

Basically a publisher program works with “objects”, not words. Oh, an object certainly CAN be words (I’ll use the term “text” if you don’t mind), but an object can be anything else as well – a photo for example. Let’s say you wanted to create and print some business cards. You would open the publisher program and first look to see what samples or “templates” the program already has to pick from. Select one that you like and it should open in the program ready for you to change anything you want. Click on the text that you want to replace with your name. A “box” will appear around the text – that is the object, in this case a box that contains text – and within this box you can change the text anyway you like. If you have a long name or if you pick a font that is too large, the result may not fit in the box. The easy solution to this is to drag the box to make it larger. You can change the size of a box (object) by dragging a “handle” at the corner or the middle edge of the box. You can also drag the whole box (not dragging on a handle point) to reposition the box anywhere you like. Whether things fit on the card or in the boxes is up to you. Remember you can make the boxes any size you

want, but then you have to make sure the text size will fit in it.

Would you like to insert a photo? Click on “insert” (it will be on a tab or a menu somewhere) and select “photo from file” – this indicates that you have a photo on your computer that you want to insert. A small window should open to allow you to go to the folder you want to find the photo. Just click on the file name to highlight it and click “ok” or “insert”. Now the photo will appear on your business card as an “object” – it will probably be very large, so you need to find the corner handle and drag it to reduce the size of the photo (you may have to use the scrollbars to get to find the handle). With resizing photos dragging a corner handle keeps the photo in the same proportion. Dragging a side handle will distort the photo. What you see on the screen will be exactly what is printed on the paper.

Once you catch on to creating and working with object boxes, everything is easy. Changing what is in once box does not affect the other boxes. But wait, there is more.

If boxes overlap, one box will be on top of the other and will block the one underneath from being seen. Boxes can be filled

with any background color, or be “clear” so that what is behind them is visible. You can change the order of the objects to put the one you want on top of the others. Publisher programs also allow you to “draw” anything you want and keep it as an object (like a photo). Naturally different programs will have different options, but each should have a way to get “help” and find out how to use the tools and options you want. Whatever program you use, knowing how to use the “help” option or tab is always a good idea. Most programs do not come with printed manuals anymore.

Ok, once you have completed your fabulous design of your business cards, you will want to print them out. Because business cards are a standard size, they will print ten cards per 8.5 x 11 inch page. It is best to buy the business card stock from an office supply store – you may even find ones with backgrounds already on them. They will be already perforated for easy separation. I always print on plain paper first and then compare the sheet carefully to the cardstock to make sure all fits nicely before I print.

With a little practice you will be design-

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Rosita Herrick, Director, Sarasota PCUG, FL Nov 2013 issue, PC Monitor, www.spcug.org, editor (at) spcug.org

Windows 8 Defender

I have been asked quite a few questions about virus and malware protection, so I thought I would spend some time to write about Microsoft’s security options in Windows 8. The Windows Defender is part of Windows 8 and comes with the installed system.

If you have another virus protection program like Norton, McAfee, AVG, AVAST etc., the Defender is not activated. While having one software package to protect you is good, two is not better. Matter of fact two active anti-virus programs can cause lots of trouble.

The quickest way to access the security options in Windows 8 is from the Search Charm.

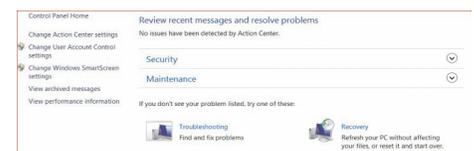


Click on  to invoke the Charms bar.

Click on Settings and type Action in the search bar. This will be the result:



Now click on the Action Center box and you will be able to access both system, security and system maintenance option. In order to view what you can do, click on the little arrow on the right side of the subject. If you want to make changes you will need to have Administrator privileges.



In summary, if you have no virus protection, activate Windows Defender. It is quiet, fast and will protect you from intrusions. ♠

Windows Media Center – Pictures, Videos and TV, too

Microsoft gave us a gift when they included Media Center in Windows. Windows Media Center (WMC) is a media player (organize and show pictures, slide-shows and videos) and a digital video recorder (view and record live TV). Pictures and videos are really no big deal, Windows Media Player, WinAmp and VLC all do a fine job. The real gift is the ability to watch and record TV. It is possible to configure Media Center to handle up to 4 TV signals. Originally WMC was a separate version of Windows XP (Windows XP Media Center Edition), but it was later included in Vista (Home Premium and Ultimate), and finally all versions of Windows 7 (except Starter). Unfortunately, it is not included in Windows 8, but is available for Windows 8 Pro as an add-on for \$9.99. (It was free for Windows 8 Pro early adopters up until January 31, 2013.)

WMC uses TV tuners to record and play back TV from a standard antenna, cable or satellite signal. Digital tuners support TV broadcasts in High Definition or Standard Definition. A TV tuner is a device you use to connect an analog or digital TV signal to your computer. TV tuners come in two basic model types: external TV tuners, which usually plug into a USB port on your computer (the only choice if you are using a laptop), and internal TV tuner cards, which you must install inside your computer. In order to watch and/or record TV using Media Center, you'll need to physically connect a TV signal to the TV tuner on your computer. This typically involves connecting one end of a coaxial cable to your tuner and the other end to your TV signal source (e.g. over-the-air antenna, cable TV jack in the wall, cable TV set-top box, or satellite TV set-top box).

WMC can record TV programs manually, on a One-Touch-Record basis, or it can schedule recording shows using an included Program guide (that is customized to the local TV broadcaster). Recordings can then be put on to a DVD or portable media player (given that there are no copy restrictions). While watching live TV, WMC buffers the program so that the user can rewind, fast-forward or pause the live show, allowing users to review a spectacular touch-down pass or simply skip the commercials.

The User Interface is a little different than what Windows users are used to. The

menus are very large, making them suitable for viewing on a big screen TV from your most comfortable chair. With the addition of a Media Center Remote, the user can control the operation from his/her easy chair without having to go to the computer keyboard (a wireless keyboard also gives the desired result). As expected, the "Close", "Restore Down", and "Minimize" buttons are in the upper right of the display, and note that a "Back" button is a left facing arrow in the upper left side of the display. These buttons appear when the mouse is moved.

You can record a live (currently airing) TV show (the show is recorded from the moment you press the "Record" button). Obviously, if you're halfway through watching a show before you start recording, the first half won't be recorded. (Microsoft has not yet conquered time travel.) To start recording a show, Click the "Start" button, click "All Programs", and then click **Windows Media Center**.

On the Windows Media Center start screen, scroll to **TV**, and then click "**Live TV**". Move the mouse so that the playback controls appear, and then click "**Record**".

WMC provides a Guide that is customized to your own local provider and typically displays a schedule for the next 12 or 13 days. To schedule recordings using the Guide, scroll to **TV** and then right-click the program that you want to record, and then left-click "**Record**" to schedule the recording of that program. You can also search to find a TV show or movie that you want to record. On the WMC start screen, scroll to **TV**, and then click **Search**. Click the category that you want to search by (such as **Title**), and then follow the instructions to start the search. On the search results page, click the TV show that you want to record, and then click "**Record**" to schedule a recording of that program. In order to record your favorite TV show every week, you can automate the process by scheduling the recording of an entire series. On the WMC start screen, scroll to **TV**, and then click **Guide**. Locate the TV series that you want to record, click it, and then click "**Record Series**".

Once you have recorded shows, they can easily be watched. From the WMC start screen, click **TV** and then click **Recorded TV**. This will display all the shows that have been recorded in order of "date-recorded", "title", or "original air

date". This display is a horizontal scrolling list of thumbnails that represent each of the recorded shows. To move left or right, hover around the end of the list to illuminate the arrow for that direction, then click the arrow to move the list. Select a show to watch by clicking the thumbnail. This will display a summary of the show selected. To watch the show, click "Play", (or click "Delete" to remove the recorded show, or "cancel series" if you've changed your mind about the future recording of this show). When you click "Play", the show will start with playback controls in the lower right hand side of the show. These controls will disappear in time, but to get them back, just move the mouse. Click "Pause" to temporarily stop the program. Click "Play" to resume the show. Click "Rewind", to watch something again, or click "Fast Forward", move ahead in the show. Click the "Volume Increase" button (the plus to the right of speaker) or the "Volume Decrease" button (the minus to the right of speaker) to increase or decrease the volume, or click the "Mute" button (the speaker) to turn the sound on or off. When you've finished watching the show, move the mouse, and then click "Stop".

WMC provides many additional features, many of which allow you more specific control of the recording process. You can set up Media Center to automatically record a specific channel at a specific time. And, you can set up Media Center to automatically record TV shows and movies based on keywords that are associated with a program such as actor's name, director's name, or even a word that appears in the title. (Then in the future, when a TV show or movie airs that matches keywords you specified, the program will automatically record.) But even without these extra features, WMC turns your computer into a very capable Digital Video Recorder that you can use to time-shift TV shows. ♠

You Won't Believe Your (TV) Ears

As a 70-year-old, I have trouble hearing my TV. There are no audio controls on the set itself, so I have to strain to listen to the dialogue when it is combined with background music.

My doctors tell me that “when you get to be your age” it is common to experience what is called “ambient noise” problems – the inability to distinguish different sound sources and tones and block them out. It is like trying to listen to one person speak in a nightclub with loud music, laughing and people shouting.

They said ambient noise is the same thing as background noise. You hear these terms used frequently when discussing devices with built-in microphones, such as Bluetooth headsets, computer headsets and webcams. The more ambient noise there is, the more difficult it can be to hear the caller.

In my case, watching TV is frustrating since my wife, only four years younger, does not suffer from hearing loss and background noise does not bother her. When the sound level is fine for her, it is inaudible for me.

My problem is only with the TV, so I wasn't ready to explore hearing aids. What I found, however, was a product called TV Ears.

Since I review all the products before considering them for this column, the manufacturer sent me a product to evaluate.

I can safely tell you that of all the products I have reviewed over the years, TV Ears provided the most immediate improvement to my particular problem.

How do they work? TV Ears is a wireless TV listening device that uses an infrared signal similar to that used in your television remote control. You don't need to have a wireless router.

Following the easy one sheet, easy-to-follow instructions, I plugged one end of the audio cables into my cable box (or directly into your TV) and the other end into the headset base unit. Then I seated the headset into the base unit charger.

When the green light on the charger came on, I put the headset's two ear pieces into my ears, turned down the sound on my TV and turned on the headset volume. I also adjusted the tone control to a comfortable combination of treble and bass.

Let me tell you, folks, the difference was amazing. With the help of the product's “voice clarifying circuitry” technology, the manufacturer's claims were unmistakably true:

“(This technology) automatically manipulates the audio curve to increase the clarity of television dialogue and decrease the volume of background sounds such as music and sound effects. The words seem to jump out of the sound track, making even whispers and accents understandable.”

Don't like to wear headsets? TV Ears solved that problem, too. Weighing only two ounces, the headset is designed to rest under your chin, not on your head. It won't mess up your hair, it won't get hot and you can even watch TV lying down. The TV Ears tips adjust easily to your ears.

One TV Ears customer wrote:

“Just wanted to tell you that I have the latest and greatest hearing aid technology at a cost in excess of \$4000. To watch TV, I take them off and use the TV Ears wireless headset. The hearing aids do not even

come close to reproducing clear sound from the television as does the TV Ears product.”

TV Ears offers a variety of options, including a wireless speaker system, a special device for use with hearing aids and a mobile system for travelers.

Prices for TV Ears products range from \$79.95 to \$249. They are available at www.tvears.com or (888) 883-3277. ♠



A Gresham, Editor, Under the Computer Hood User Group, Dec 2013 issue, UCHUG Drive Light, www.uchug.org, [1editor101 \(at\) uchug.org](mailto:1editor101@uchug.org)

What's More Valuable than a Bitcoin?

You may have heard recently that the publishers of the Oxford Dictionaries' word for the year for 2013 is “selfie.”

“Selfie” beat out seven competitors, including “twerk,” “schmeat” (synthetically produced meat) and “bitcoin” for the Word of the Year crown.

According to the November 20 Article in CNN.COM, the word “selfie” first popped up in an Australian chat room on September 13, 2002, to describe an undignified scene, the dictionaries' publishers believe.

Oxford editors say it is “A photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website.”

This topic came up at our last board meeting when a board member asked if anyone had heard this recent news.

We often discuss recent topics and news--tech gossip if you will--at our meetings. Many times this has spawned

additional discussion and sometimes even a presentation to our group in answer to questions and issues raised.

In this case it resulted in a live demonstration in real time when the editor pulled out his cell phone/notepad/calendar/address book/texting/alarm clock/calculator/stop watch/camera device and proceeded to snap a Selfie.

But just to make actual good use of the camera he quickly turned the phone on the crowd and took a picture of our two newest board members.

And just for the record, the value of one Bitcoin recently exceeded \$1,000.00 US. A year ago it was worth \$20. As of 27 November 2013 it is worth over \$1028, and rising steadily.

With over 57 million photos bearing the hashtag — #selfie — on Instagram alone, I don't know if they are worth more..... or worthless!

Here's looking at you, kid ♠.

Now That XP is No Longer Supported, What Next?

It should be no surprise to anyone that as of April 8, 2014, Microsoft has officially ended all support for the still popular Windows XP. According to the official Microsoft "Windows XP End of Support" website (support.microsoft.com/gp/windows-xp-end-of-support), "What does end of support mean to you? As of April 8, 2014, technical assistance for Windows XP will no longer be available, and you won't get automatic updates. This could mean your PC is more vulnerable to security risks and viruses." While the above was an official statement from Microsoft, there is some controversy about the impact and effects that the cessation of technical support for Windows XP means to the typical user.

Contrary to some massively forwarded emails, internet hoaxes, and urban legends, there is no "time bomb" in the XP that will cause XP to cease functioning at midnight April 8. If for some reason, a user's XP machine appears to crash or die precisely on April 8, it will be a coincidence, and not a part of some alleged vast Microsoft conspiracy to force XP users to upgrade to purchase a new PC with Windows 8. In recent days, I have received several emails from readers of this column who had heard that XP will cease to function on April 8, or they will immediately be subject to massive hack attacks to steal personal data, commit massive identity theft, or remotely crash the computer; these fears that were expressed are unfounded and without merit. Barring some other unrelated internal hardware problem, a PC running XP that is working fine on April 7, will likely continue to work fine on April 9. As long as the PC running Windows XP is functioning satisfactorily, and the user is still reasonably satisfied with it, there is no imminent need to rush out and purchase a new computer running Windows 8.1. Due to age, and the normal wear on the electrical and mechanical components of a PC running XP, it might be prudent to consider a new PC,

but the decision to replace a functional XP machine with a costly new one running Windows 8 can be made in a timely fashion suitable to the user's personal circum-

stances, and not made in haste or in a panic situation. users, even as new versions of a more secure and feature rich Internet Explorer are released for Windows 7 and 8; these newly updated and enhanced Microsoft browsers

WEBSITES:

<http://support.microsoft.com/gp/windows-xp-end-of-support>
<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/help/what-does-end-of-support-mean>
<http://finance.yahoo.com/news/microsoft-xp-users-hang-225300265.html>
[Http://origin-www.businessweek.com/articles/2014-04-04/end-of-windows-xp-support-means-added-opportunity-for-hackers](http://origin-www.businessweek.com/articles/2014-04-04/end-of-windows-xp-support-means-added-opportunity-for-hackers)
[Http://www.pcworld.com/article/2102606/how-to-keep-your-pc-secure-when-microsoft-ends-windows-xp-support.html](http://www.pcworld.com/article/2102606/how-to-keep-your-pc-secure-when-microsoft-ends-windows-xp-support.html)
[Http://www.pcworld.com/article/2046839/zero-day-forever-move-away-from-windows-xp-now.html](http://www.pcworld.com/article/2046839/zero-day-forever-move-away-from-windows-xp-now.html)
<http://www.mozilla.org>
<http://free.agnitum.com>
<http://www.comodo.com/home/internet-security/free-internet-security.php>

are explicitly not compatible with XP. This insecurity and obsolescence of the XP versions of Internet Explorer should really not concern XP users as Firefox (www.mozilla.org) and Chrome (chrome.google.com) will still (for the foreseeable

future) continue to offer free, new versions of their respective browsers that are fully functional and more secure on older XP machines. Google has announced that new versions of its Chrome will continue to support XP at least for another year, and Mozilla has announced that it has no plans to discontinue support for XP in its upcoming new versions. As the Internet Explorer versions currently available for XP contain known security vulnerabilities well known to the hacker community, which Microsoft will not be patching, it will be prudent for XP users to totally abandon using Internet Explorer, and use one of the newly released versions of Firefox and/or Chrome instead.

According to several published sources, such as Investor's Business Daily (April 1, 2014), "Net Applications reports that 27.7% of PC users online in March were running the 12-year-old operating system. XP is the No. 2 PC operating system after Windows 7, which has 48.8% of the market." While Microsoft is effectively abandoning XP, the overwhelming majority of third-party software publishers are not presently abandoning the second most popular Windows operating system, which still has over one-fourth of the PC market. While there may be some truth in Microsoft's allegation, "As time goes on, more and more critical security holes will be found, and attackers will have free reign to exploit them," third party security software publishers will continue to see a large and profitable need that will continue until the numbers of XP users fall below some critical market share, which will not likely happen within the next few years. Just as happened with older versions of Windows, such as Windows 3.1, Windows 95, Windows 98, and Windows 2000, the 12 year old Windows XP operating system will almost certainly become totally obsolete and almost totally disappear from the PC scene, but this will not likely occur for a few more years.

The question now is, what should a satisfied user of XP do in order to maintain the functionality and security of his PC, now that Microsoft has abandoned him? Internet Explorer, Microsoft's ubiquitous web browser, will not be updated for XP

As far as the security vulnerabilities that are currently in the actual XP operating system, which will no longer be patched by Microsoft, hackers will continue to exploit these vulnerabilities as they also seek additional vulnerabilities in the now obsolete operating system. Contrary to what some pundits are expounding, I must disagree that there will immediately be wholesale attacks on XP users. Some conspiracy theorists have expounded that that these threats to XP are predominately coming from Microsoft and the computer manufacturers in order to stimulate the declining sales of new computers with Windows 8, but I am not one of those believers. In my opinion, the typical XP user should continue to have and update modern security suites, a policy which I have deplored them to use for many years.

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Tiny Computers

Personal computers are vital appliances for most of us. We use them to balance our checkbooks, calculate our taxes, communicate with friends and family, store our memories, and keep us informed. This is much different than when they were first introduced, when we felt free to perform experiments using them that today are unthinkable because of the risk of losing valuable data. As a result, we have the ironic situation that as our PCs become more and more complex, we know less and less about them. A solution is to acquire a smaller and simpler computer just to play with. Ideally, it won't take up much space on our crowded computer desk and will be cheap to replace if something goes horribly (or wonderfully, if you're adventuresome) wrong.

There are dozens of these tiny computers, but here I'll talk about just two, the Arduino and the Raspberry Pi. Both are supported by active on-line communities, both are described in several books, both are open source, which means you are free to make any changes you like to their software, and both are cheap – less than \$50. (Although you will probably pay more for a complete starter or experimenter's kit.) Both were developed by educators, the Arduino in Italy and the Raspberry Pi in the UK, for the purpose of helping people learn about computers and computing. However, the two are quite different. The Arduino is really a controller, about as smart as your washing machine, and its inputs and outputs are Voltages on its pins. It runs only one program at a time, and once started, runs it forever. As you use an Arduino, you'll be learning programming and electronics. The Raspberry Pi is a real computer that runs Linux and comes with a full complement of PC software, including a Web browser. Its inputs and outputs are a keyboard, mouse, graphical display, and Ethernet and USB ports. As you use the Raspberry Pi, you'll learn programming, networking, and operating system operation and configuration.

The Arduino (<http://www.arduino.cc/>), like the Raspberry Pi, is about the size of a credit card. In the photo below, the Arduino is the blue card in the foreground. Normally, it's programmed and powered through the USB connector at the rear of the left edge. Once, a program has been loaded, it can be powered via the black connector at the front of the left edge (for

example by a 9-volt battery). This unit illustrated is mated to a solder less breadboard, on which you can build circuits just by pushing component leads into its holes. Jumpers connect the breadboard with the Arduino's input/output pins along its front and rear edges. The Arduino is almost always used as a circuit element, and many experimenter's kits are available to get you started. These usually include an Arduino, a breadboard, and a collection of jumpers and electronic parts, e.g., LEDs, switches, motors, and sensors. Make an Internet search, and you will certainly find many interesting products and projects. My favorite vendor is Adafruit, but it has many fine competitors.

Getting started with the Arduino is quite easy. Go to their home page, <http://www.arduino.cc/>, and download the Integrated Development Environment (IDE), which is available for Linux, Mac OS X, and Windows. (Linux users can also find it in their repositories.) Connect an Arduino board to a USB port and start the IDE. As you may be able to tell from the screenshot, the Arduino uses a variant of the C programming language. The example here is the program blink, which just cycles an LED on and off. This is the equivalent of the classic "Hello World" program that is almost every C programmer's first effort.

The Arduino's capabilities are quite modest – typically the processor runs at 16 MHz, has about 20 I/O pins (some analog, some digital), and is equipped with 32 kbytes of EEPROM (for programs) and 2 kbytes of RAM (for data). Normally, you would use the Arduino just to control the hardware and send any data it collects to a PC for analysis. To make this easier, consider using the Processing language on your computer, available at <http://processing.org/>. It's very close to what the Arduino uses and has an almost identical IDE.

You should be able to get started using only information available from the Internet, but if you prefer a book, look at *Getting Started with Arduino* by Massimo Banzi. Many others are available, some for the beginner and others describing advanced projects.

While the Arduino is a simple controller, the Raspberry Pi, <http://www.raspberrypi.org/>, is a real computer that uses the Linux operating system. The kit I pur-

chased (from Adafruit) included a clear plastic case and a solder less breadboard, but many projects won't need the latter. The Pi has two USB ports (silver connectors on the center right), an Ethernet port (silver connector on the front right), a HDMI port for the display (silver connector on the center front), a power connector (micro USB connector on the front left), a SD connector for storage (a SD card protrudes from the case on the left), a collection of ports (connected to the breadboard by a black ribbon cable at the left rear), an analog video port (yellow connector at the rear), and a stereo audio jack (blue connector at the rear).

The Raspberry Pi is more powerful than the Arduino, with a 700-MHz ARM CPU and 512 Mbytes of RAM. (These specs are for the model B. The model A is much less capable and costs only a few Dollars less.) The processor is not Intel compatible; however, its overall performance is similar to a 300MHz Pentium 2, but with much better graphics. Clearly, it isn't an acceptable replacement for any modern home computer. However, it does act like a (slow) PC, as you can see from the screen-shot below, which shows the desktop with windows open for the Internet browser and file manager.

Getting a Raspberry Pi running is more involved than with the Arduino. Although it's powered through a USB port, PC USB ports can't supply enough current; you will need either a cell phone recharger or a powered USB hub. Be careful of cell phone rechargers though; many cheap units can't supply the current they claim. The safe approach is to purchase one from the vendor from whom you buy your Pi. You will need a USB keyboard and mouse; if you don't have an extra set, they are quite cheap. Hopefully, you have a HDMI display, either for your PC or a flat-screen TV; if not, you could try an old analog TV set, but its resolution will be poor. Finally, connect any USB peripherals through a powered hub, rather than ask the Pi to power them. I bought a no-name 10-port hub that had good user reports on Amazon, and it can also power the Pi. Finally, unlike the Arduino, which comes with its control software installed, you must supply the SD card for the Raspberry Pi and install Linux and its applications on it. This requires a SD card burner, and unfortu-

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Clouded Judgment

The latest trend in computer operation and data storage is “in the cloud”. This refers to storage of files not on your local computer hardware, but on remote servers which are accessed through the Internet. The cloud can be used to store your files so they can be accessed from anywhere, not just from your own computer. Applications can be stored and run through the cloud, requiring less sophisticated local hardware.

Almost all computer users today presently use the cloud, and many probably don't realize it. There are of course the on-line file storage sites which many use for storing and sharing photos. Any photos you view that are not in your computer, tablet or smartphone's local memory or hard drive are coming from the cloud. Videos you watch from YouTube, Netflix or other web sites originate in the cloud. All the information you posted to Facebook about your personal activities now resides in the cloud. Anytime you play one of the games associated with the Google Doodles, those changes made to the Google home page logo to celebrate or commemorate something, you are playing a game in the cloud. In reality, the cloud is the Internet.

Silver Linings

There are a lot of advantages to cloud storage and operation for the computer user. With your files stored on a hard drive in someone else's server, you don't need to have as much hard drive space of your own. Most online services, including Google, Yahoo and Amazon, provide some free cloud storage to their account holders. Having your files in the online storage provided by these companies allows access to your files from any computer connected to the Internet. If your computer is stolen or fails, your files are still safe in the cloud. This can be a great means of data back-up, and most software back-up programs now include a cloud option and online storage space for their customers.

Watching media content from the cloud has many advantages over local content. A vast array of movies and videos can be available to view over the Internet without the hassle of loading and storing on your local hard drive.

Many programs that you might otherwise have had to install and run from local storage space on your computer can now

be run over the Internet, often through a web browser. Web mail is one example of a cloud application. With an email client like Outlook or Thunderbird installed on your computer, you can download and read your Gmail email and store it on your PC. Should something happen to your PC, however, your stored messages may be lost. By using the web mail online application for Gmail instead, you can always access your new and stored messages from any PC connected to the Internet.

More and more companies are providing cloud-based applications. Cloud software allows users to save local disk space, avoid installation issues, buy on a subscription basis and always have the most current version. For software makers, cloud subscription software lowers distribution costs and provides continuous revenue streams. In addition to the traditional versions installed on your PC, Intuit now provides a web version for all of its TurboTax programs. Office 365 is Microsoft's cloud version of its Office software suite. It allows users to buy a subscription to their productivity software and run it from the Internet, with access for up to five PCs and five mobile devices. This allows users to have access to the most current Office software on a yearly or even monthly basis, with 20 GB of online storage for documents.

Another advantage of cloud computing is that the hardware requirements are lower, allowing computing devices that are less expensive and more mobile to be used. Tablet computers and smartphones don't have internal hard drives and their internal Flash memory space is limited, so cloud file storage is almost a necessity. Google's low-cost Chromebook computers are specifically made for cloud computing. The latest version, built by HP, has 16 GB of Flash memory, no hard drive and is priced at \$279. It runs Google's Chrome OS and relies on applications that run online like Gmail and Google Docs, with most data files stored in the cloud. With lower hardware requirements, cloud devices like this can be cheaper, lighter and have greater battery life.

Dark Clouds

Unfortunately, there are a number of downsides to the cloud computing scenario. All those files you stored on someone else's server are now no longer fully

under your control. Cloud services companies are occasionally acquired, sold and shut down, so you may not be able to depend on your data being there when you need it. Cloud providers can also have access problems outside of your control, causing you to lose access to your data, perhaps at critical times. If your web email provider is down, you lose all email access. If you instead use an installed email client, you at least have access to the email archived on your PC.

With your data in the cloud, not only can there be problems for you to access your data, there can also be unintended access to your data by others. Since the terms of service are often unintelligible, you may not have full certainty that your data won't wind up in places you didn't intend it through intentional actions by the cloud companies. And you really don't know what might happen to your data if the company's servers are hacked. It is therefore risky to put sensitive personal information in the cloud, even if it is encrypted, as it could be compromised through no fault of your own.

Another problem with cloud computing is that it requires an Internet connection (often through Wi-Fi only) to do anything useful. If you can't get online, all those files and photos of yours in the cloud might as well be on the moon. That Chromebook laptop may be small and light, but unless it can get a Wi-Fi signal (it has no wired Ethernet connector), it is pretty much useless dead weight, as most of its apps run over the Internet. Other Wi-Fi devices like most tablet computers have the same issue. Even with a cellular-connected tablet or smartphone, a good connection is never guaranteed. I recently found this to be the case in the lower decks of the U.S.S. Midway Aircraft Carrier Museum. If you want to be sure you can watch a movie on your tablet during your next plane flight, you'd better load it on the device.

The performance of web-based applications is often much worse than that of apps running on your local hardware. This is especially true if your Internet connection is poor. Even with good connections, some web sites always appear to be slow. I much prefer to use a local email client for my email as my email provider's web mail

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Paid Apps for Free – continued from Page 1

linked icon directly from the Google Play Store. Several of the displayed icons, often featuring some excellent deals, have a small Amazon App Store logo, which indicates that the app can be downloaded from Amazon's Android App Store, a worthy competitor to Google's Play Store. A quick glance at some of the listed Amazon distributed Android apps showed several relatively expensive Android apps, many in the \$10 to \$25 range, could be downloaded from Amazon for free through the HungryForApps.com linked icon.

These apps marketed by HungryForApps.com serve a variety of purposes and functions. Many of them are games, including some of the more popular paid games, which are available for free or discounted; many others are a variety of utilities, including security software, word processing, mapping, and other practical apps. On just the first page of today's deals (the total listing as I type this is five pages long, 50 apps per page), are an assortment of games, language learning and translation utilities (Spanish, French, Arabic, English), paint and photo editing apps, camera utilities, mathematical and calculator apps, contact managers, encryption apps, ringtone generators and converters, e-book readers, QSR code readers and generators, exercise guides, a bartending guide, city travel guides, and calendar apps. Of all of the commercial (paid) apps listed, about 150 are available for a limited time for free, and about another 100 are discounted from the app store listed prices. The discounts on the paid items mostly range from 30% to 85% off the app store prices, and include a wide assortment of apps including PowerPoint and PDF converters, Microsoft Word commercial templates, large bundles of eBooks, file managers, music editors, games, security software, finance and investment managers, digital scanners, and other types of paid apps.

For ease of use, HungryForApps.com offers a menu bar on its website that can sort the available apps by operating system, or price (free or paid). The current list offers 40 free Android apps, including a \$13 office suite available for a limited time from Amazon for free. Also listed are about 45 paid Android apps, with original prices as high as \$15 with discounts as much as 85% off listed prices. The selec-

tion of about 100 iPhone and iPad apps includes an assortment of apps similar to the Android selection, but almost all of the normally paid iPhone and iPad are available for free, with only a few available with retail prices as high as \$30, but available at discounted prices of 99 cents to \$5. All of the iPhone and iPad apps listed are available for download directly from itunes.apple.com. Another 52 MAC apps are available under similar terms as the others, free or discounted, and available for download from Apple's Mac Download Store.

With an average of about 250 apps a day available from HungryForApps.com, it is an excellent resource for apps, but it is not the only collection of its type. Another excellent source of free and deeply discounted commercial apps is AppGratis at appgratis.com. While its daily offerings for iPhone, iPad, and Android are listed on its website, its primary promotional vector is a daily announcement sent directly to the selected device which lists the day's offerings for that device. While at least one paid app offered for free is featured daily for each device, AppGratis also offers some deeply discounted commercial titles as well. In recent days AppGratis has offered for my Android devices an assortment of paid games and utilities for

free. Several of the iPad and iPhone specific apps have also been most interesting and useful. AppGratis has its own free app for these devices, which can be found in the appropriate app store; this AppGratis app displays a notification on the device whenever new free apps are featured for that device, typically once a day. I can recommend the free AppGratis app as an efficient way to be kept informed of the daily deals. AppGratis also offers a once-daily email of its offerings, as well as its website which displays all currently available offerings.

Between HungryForApps.com and AppGratis, almost any smart device user will almost certainly find some occasional super deals, usually free, that will enhance the enjoyment and functionality of his device. As far as apps are concerned, both of these services are a daily top priority for me. ♠

[Ira provides a number of interesting screen shots to go along with each of his articles. Due to space constraints, I omit them from the printed version of the newsletter but post all of them on the CTPC website. They are at the end of the HTML version of each article – see the May online newsletter. CTPC Editor]

Clouded Judgement – continued from Page 7

site is so slow to respond.

Clearing the Air for Personal Clouds

In spite of the drawbacks, the trend towards computing devices that are more mobile yet storage-limited, like tablets and smartphones, is accelerating this push into the cloud. External USB hard drives and Flash drives may be popular storage accessories for laptops, but few tablets have USB connections. A new class of external storage devices promises to expand the local storage for Wi-Fi devices like tablets, smartphones, Chromebooks and even laptops. These devices combine the bulk storage of a hard drive or Flash memory with a Wi-Fi hot spot to create your own personal cloud.



The Gigastone Smartbox (<http://www.gigastone.com/>; \$45) combines an SD memory socket with an 802.11 b/g/n hot

spot and a lithium ion battery. It allows up to six Wi-Fi devices to connect and share up to 32 GB of SDHC memory, providing handy file sharing and streaming. It can even provide a back-up power source for USB-powered devices.



The Sony WG-C10 Portable Wireless Server (http://www.sony.net/Products/ws/en_us/pwsintro; \$80) does all the

Smartbox does for eight simultaneous users, and adds a port to share a USB Flash drive.



SanDisk's SDWS2 Connect Wireless Flash Drive (www.sandisk.com/products/wireless/flash-drive,

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At present, all of the major security suite publishers, including the commercial (paid) products available from the local big box stores, and the several excellent free security suites, can provide substantial protection from the current hacker threats to XP, as well as most of the threats yet to be uncovered. Note that I said “security suite”, and not antivirus software; as I have written in past columns, computer viruses are still common and threatening, but only compose less than one-fifth of the contemporary threats facing PC users. While there are inevitable differences among the offerings of the software publishers, a typical security suite contains antivirus software, a firewall, anti-spyware, browser protection, email security, and other protective features. The comprehensive security suites typically have some variation of a name including “Total Security,” Internet Security”, “Maximum Security”, or some other iteration in their respective names that indicates fairly complete security protection, and not just a simple antivirus product.

Commercial security suites are published by companies such as TrendMicro, Norton, McAfee, Kaspersky, Panda, BitDefender, and others. Each of these commercial publishers offer a variety of products that provide varying degrees of protection. For XP users, I would recommend one of the products that offers the highest level of protection available, as they are more likely to be capable of securing the current and future vulnerabilities in Windows XP. If needed, wise shoppers of security software should look for deeply discounted sale items at the local big box stores or online. Sometimes, some of the

Using a Publisher

cont'd from Page 2

ing your own greeting cards, labels, tags, return address labels, invitations, banners, and much more. Along the way you will have learned how to use some graphics tools too, and that's a good thing. Don't be afraid to explore the program – see what other templates and options are available to try, you will discover some amazing things. Try designing and printing some creative business cards for your spouse or friend, it will make you look like a printing (and computer) wizard. ♠

commercial publishers and sellers offer “free after rebate” or fully functional free downloads from some of the “deal” websites, such as ShareWareOnSale.com. XP users can also save money at renewal time by using one of the deals offered, rather than paying full retail to the publisher at renewal.

For those who for whatever reason prefer free security software, Gizmo's TechSupportAlert.com lists several free XP compatible security suites that can be downloaded and installed. The two top rated free security suites are OutpostFree, available for download at free.agnitum.com, and Comodo's Free Internet Security, available at www.comodo.com/home/internet-security/free-internet-security.php.

While any of the above security suites are adequate, XP users may enjoy an additional layer of security by using one of the supplemental security products that are explicitly designed to run on top of any security suite (or antivirus program). My personal recommendations are SuperAntiSpyware (superantispyware.com) and MalwareBytes (malwarebytes.org). Neither of these products will interfere with most of the security suites, but will substantially strengthen the protection of XP users, as well as later operating systems. Both are available as fully functional free versions that offer manually updated scanning for malware, and paid commercial “Pro” versions that offer automatic updating and full-time memory resident protection that enhances and strengthens the protection provided by the primary security suites. Discounted deals on the “Pro” versions are periodically available, and often listed on daily deal websites such as dealnews.com.

I have to admit that one of my laptops is still running XP, and despite its age, is still in good operating condition; I have no present plans to replace it with a more modern laptop, but I am fully cognizant of its approaching functional obsolescence. If a user is content with Windows XP, and his PC is still in decent operating condition, he may continue to use it satisfactorily as long as the aged hardware remains functional. With the discontinuation of the release of new Microsoft security patches for XP, users must be aware of the potential security risks that may be here now or coming in the future. Much of

this increased risk can be mitigated by the judicious use of a comprehensive security suite, and possible a supplemental additional layer of security.

As long as the user of XP is happy with it, the PC remains in operational condition, and proper security software is installed, there is no need to abandon XP and rush out to purchase a new PC. ♠

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Clouded Judgement

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\$60) does the same as Sony but can't charge other devices. The Kingston Digital MobileLite Wireless Flash Reader

([\\$60](http://www.kingston.com/us/usb/wireless)) and Wi-Drive (\$60 for 32 GB) are similar products.



Another class of mobile storage devices uses a hard drive instead of Flash memory, providing much more storage capacity. This in-

cludes the Patriot Aero Wireless Mobile Drive ([\\$150 for 500GB](http://www.patriotmemory.com)), a 500 GB or 1 TB USB3 external hard drive that serves to up to five wireless users. Other similar devices include the Corsair Voyager Air (www.corsair.com/voyager-air) and the Seagate Wireless Plus

(www.seagate.com).

In spite of drawbacks, a greater use of portable devices means an increase in cloudiness in the computer world. To avoid operating in a dangerously obscuring fog, good judgment must be used in determining how and where to access the cloud and what data to store there. Personal clouds like the wireless mobile storage devices now available can be a safe and convenient storage alternative for use with mobile devices. ♠

Interesting Internet Finds

In the course of going through the more than 200 RSS feeds, I often run across things that I think might be of interest to other user group members.

The following are some items I found interesting during the month of Nov 2013.

WPA2, WEP, And Friends: What's The Best Way To Encrypt Your Wi-Fi?

This post from MakeUseOf explains the various options to encrypt your wi-fi, and what the best is.

<http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/wpa2-wep-and-friends-whats-the-best-way-to-encrypt-your-wi-fi/>

HOWTO: Extend Laptop Battery Life

Bob Rankin talks about making your laptop battery last longer.

http://askbobrankin.com/howto_extend_laptop_battery_life.html

What's in your toolkit?

Leo A. Notenboom shows what is in his toolkit, and talks about what you should have in yours. Discs, operating systems, anti-malware tools, and other utilities, for emergencies.

<http://askleo.com/whats-in-your-toolkit/>

How to Speed Up Any Android Phone by Disabling Animations

HowToGeek tells how to speed up any Android phone.

[Http://www.howtogeek.com/175033/how-to-speed-up-any-android-phone-by-disabling-animations/](http://www.howtogeek.com/175033/how-to-speed-up-any-android-phone-by-disabling-animations/)

How To Fix Flash Player Crashes Issue in Google Chrome

I was having the crash problem, and this MakeTechEasier post, gave me the solution. Things are much better now.

<http://www.maketecheasier.com/fix-flash-player-crashes-issue-in-chrome/>

Most Fridays, more interesting finds will be posted on the Computers, Technology, and User Groups Blog:

<http://ctublog.sefcug.com/tag/interesting-internet-finds/>

The posts are under Creative Commons licensing. ♠

Tiny Computers – continued from Page 6

nately many on the market aren't up to the job. Again, purchasing one from your Pi supplier is the safe approach.

As with the Arduino, you can probably get started with the Pi using only what you learn on the Internet, but there are also numerous books. The project has published *Raspberry Pi User Guide* by Eben Upton. There are numerous others, as well as magazine and Internet articles. I've seen descriptions of a media center, an Internet radio, a time-lapse camera control, a network file server, a firewall, and a wireless access point. (Many of these don't require a keyboard, mouse, or display once they are running, so you could disconnect these for use elsewhere once the project is on line.) You could even connect an Arduino to a Raspberry to obtain a portable sophisticated hardware control and data processing system.

Both these devices are ideal for experimenting. No matter how badly you screw

up the software, you can just download a new program to your Arduino or reburn the SD card on your Raspberry Pi. Even if you manage to fry the electronics, you can replace either card for less than \$50. Both are wonderful platforms for introducing electronics and computers to young people. There are many Arduino projects that can be completed in less than an hour, including building the circuit and writing the program. The Raspberry Pi software includes Scratch, a programming language for children that builds animated graphics with sound, and Python, a more sophisticated language for older kids and adults. ♠

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CTPC Meeting

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Box. Guild members renovated a long-unused space near batting cages, then pooled their own money to furnish the new home with all the essentials, including soldering irons, a drill press, mini lathe, milling machine, bench grinder, 3D printers, and even a 3D scanner.

The guild has four subgroups, depending on interests. There's a 3D Printer group, a robotics group, an unmanned aircraft (drones) group and a specialty group that uses sensors and electronics for unique projects. In addition to the workspace and equipment, they offer classes in a variety of technologies.

Please note: the workspace is on the 4th floor and there is no elevator so please be prepared.

After the meeting we will adjourn to nearby Uncle Joe's Restaurant on New Canaan Avenue for pizza and refreshments. ♠



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MEETING LOCATION

Silver Star Diner
210 Connecticut Ave. (US-1/ Post Road)

From I-95 Stamford: Take Exit 13 for US-1/Post Road and turn right at US-1 N/ Connecticut Avenue. The diner will be on your left almost at Exit 14.

From I-95 New Haven: Take Exit 14 for US-1/Connecticut Ave and turn right at US-1 N/Connecticut Ave. The Diner will be just ahead on your right.

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