

March 2006

Volume 17, Issue 3

Next Meeting

Are you looking to design a new CPU stand, an iPad ... or even a dream house? At our next meeting, March 7, find out how computer-aided design can help you achieve your goals—even if you're not an architect or an engineer.



President's File



PRESIDENTIAL RAMBLINGS

I have a coffee mug that has a picture of a tired, weather beaten cowboy on it. Next to that picture is a caption that says "There were a helluva lot of things they didn't tell me when I hired on with this outfit."

In a way that caption sums up my first year as President. It's been rewarding but there are certain things I wish I had known up front. Probably the single biggest surprise has been how much time this column takes me to put together. It's usually a week-end or two a month.

This column is a labor of love and an exercise in frustration for me, I'm not a writer. It's not something I enjoy doing. I'd much rather spend my weekends playing golf or paintball or just about anything other than sitting front of a computer... I spend enough time sitting front of a computer during the week.

OK, enough of this... Let's get it on.

News & Notes

Election of Officers – The board of directors will be electing the officers who will conduct the day to operations of DACS for the coming year this month. We will be electing six officers, president, three vice presidents, secretary and treasurer. If you're interested in running for any of these offices please contact me or any other officer or director.

Director and SIG leader, Bill Keane, has informed the board that he will be moving out of the area in the near future and requested that we start looking for a replacement. If you're interested in fulfilling the remainder of Bill's term on the

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board of directors, or taking the reigns of the Advanced OS and Linux SIGs, contact me or any other officer or director.

Viruses and the Mac

A popular misconception is that Macs are immune to viruses. This simply isn't true... Any general purpose computing platform is susceptible to viruses. The fact that the Mac has not been targeted as widely as Windows has more to do with its relatively small market share than it does anything else. At the moment, there are two known OS X viruses OSX/Leap.A (and OSX/Inqtana.A. They were both discovered in mid-February.

The bottom line is if you have a Mac and don't have anti-virus software you're living on borrowed time. I expect to see additional malware targeting the Mac released over the next year. So far, I've only seen limited reports of OSX/Leap.A in the wild, but it's only a matter of time before someone releases an OS X, or for that matter, of a Linux native virus that makes a big splash in the wild.

Regardless of whether you are a Windows, Mac or Linux user you should practice Safe Hex.

1) Keep your system patched. Be sure to check for patches or updates for both the operating system and any applications you use at least once a month.

2) Keep backups of important files. Accidents happen; having backups of your important files makes them easier to recover.

3) Use strong passwords... A strong password should be at least 8 characters and include letters, numbers, and at least one special character. It should also be easy to remember.

4) Don't run as Root or Administrator unless you absolutely have to.

In addition to those basic steps you should also:

- Install and use anti-virus software.
- Install and use a personal firewall.
- Install and use anti-spyware software.
- Use care when downloading and installing programs.
- Disable file and printer sharing in your computer, particularly when accessing the Internet using cable modems, digital subscriber lines (DSL), or other high-speed connections.
- Use care when reading e-mail with attachments:

PRESIDENT'S FILE, Continued on page 4

Membership Information

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The editors welcome submissions from DACS members. Contact Allan Ostergren at 860-210-0047 (dacseditor@dacs.org). Advertisers, contact Charles Bovaird at (203) 792-7881 (aam@mags.net)

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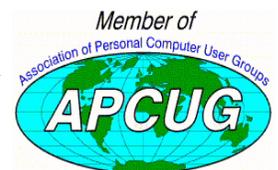
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Applications & Hardware to enhance dacs.doc are welcome.



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HelpLine

Volunteers have offered to field member questions by phone. Please limit calls to the hours indicated below. Days means 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; evening means 6 to 9:30 p.m. Please be considerate of the volunteer you are calling. HelpLine is a free service. If you are asked to pay for help or are solicited for sales, please contact the dacs.doc editor; the person requesting payment will be deleted from the listing. Can we add your name to the volunteer listing?

d = day **e** = evening

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Directors' Notes

A regular meeting of the DACS Board of Directors was held at the Resource Center on Monday, February 13, 2006. Present were Messrs. Bovaird, Corzo, Henderson, Keane, Leifels, Scheef, Setaro and Yates. President Jeff Setaro presided and Secretary Lisa Leifels kept the record. Minutes of the last meeting held on January 9, 2006 were approved.

Treasurer Charles Bovaird reported current cash assets of \$12,779.97, consisting of total bank and postal accounts in the amount of \$12,680.59, plus postage on hand of \$99.38. Subtracting a liability of prepaid dues in the amount of \$6,348.00 left a net equity of \$6,431.97. He also reported that the current membership is 336.

Jamie Yates announced the upcoming General Meeting topics for the next three months: On March 7th, A CAD presentation will be given by Jamie's son Scott Yates; on April 4th, PC Maintenance by Jamie Yates; on May 2nd, there will be a SmartHome presentation. Richard Corzo has a contact for an Apple presentation. Jim Scheef is in touch with someone who can do a Microsoft presentation. Another idea is HDTV, given by one of the local retail outlets such as Tweeter or Circuit City.

Jamie Yates passed around a summary of the survey results from the January General Meeting. He received responses from 75% of the people attending the meeting. Ninety percent said they were interested in the topic being presented. The summary included over 40 different topics for future meetings, some of the ideas included Windows Live, DVD Authoring, Photoshop, Linux, Homeplug, non IE browsers, and how the registry works.

Richard Corzo proposed that the DACS Web site feature, *This Month's Meeting*, should profile the upcoming program instead of the previous one. Jeff said he would communicate this to Scott.

Jamie asked if we knew how many people look at the DACS website. Jeff said that there were good statistics available from Mags.net. Sean suggested that we review the website statistics at the next Board Meeting.

Sean Henderson went over his proposal of changes to improve DACS and increase the membership. He recommended adding local hot spots and photos of the SIG leaders to the website; increasing the number of SIGS, doing a Resource Center makeover and having the general meetings catered.

Bill Keane announced that he will be moving from the area, and we should start

DIRECTORS' NOTES, Continued on page 4

Never, ever:

- Open e-mail attachments from someone you don't know.
- Open e-mail attachments forwarded to you even if they're from someone you know.
- Open unsolicited or unexpected e-mail attachments until you've confirmed the sender actually meant to send them.
- Do not select the option on web browsers for storing or retaining user name and password.
- Do not disclose personal, financial, or credit card information to little-known or suspect web sites.
- Delete spam and chain e-mail's; do not forward these and do not use the unsubscribe feature.
- Log off the online session and turn off your computer when it is not in use.
- Do not use a computer or a device that cannot be fully trusted.
- Do not use public or Internet café computers to access online financial services accounts or perform financial transactions.
- Ensure your browser supports strong encryption (at least 128-bit). Most browsers now provide this by default.
- Install and use a file encryption program and access controls.
- Broadband users: install and use a hardware firewall/router.

End Notes

More books... My reading list for 2006 keeps growing. Here are the latest additions:

- No True Glory : A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah by Bing West
- Biggest Brother : The Life of Major Dick Winters, The Man Who Led the Band of Brothers by Larry Alexander

That's it for this month. I'd like to take a moment and thank Suzy Bogguss, James Taylor, B. B. King and Snapple for their invaluable assistance in writing this column.

Your questions, comments and book recommendation are always welcome. You can reach me at jasetaro@mags.net or jasetaro@yahoo.com.

—JEFF SETARO

Directors' Notes, Continued from page 3

looking for a replacement for him on the board, and also for a new leader for the Advanced OS SIG.

Jim Scheef suggested that we should get a new router for the Resource Center. The current router is no longer supported by new firmware.

—LISA LEIFELS

Meeting Review

Alternatives to Microsoft Office

By Jamie Yates

AFTER A SNOWED-OUT January General Meeting, Jim Scheef, former DACS president, conducted his January presentation at our February 7 meeting. For those who are looking to find a less expensive—and compatible—alternative to Microsoft Office, the two products that Jim described could hit the spot.

One of the products is currently available and the other was just released from beta test. One runs on your own computer, just like Office, and one is Web-based, using Java and your browser.

OpenOffice.org

OpenOffice.org 2.0 is an open source product that runs on your computer and offers almost all the components that Microsoft Office provides but under different names. For example:

Base is the database component compatible with *Access*.

Calc is the spreadsheet akin to *Excel*.

Impress has the functions of *PowerPoint*.

Writer performs the functions of *Word*.

In addition, the package contains several other components such as *Draw* (a simple art program) and *Math* (a formula editor).

These programs provide the functions of Office and can read and create compatible Office files. They are easy to use and fluidly interoperable with every major office suite.

One major current weakness is the depth of its help function. But, hopefully, that will improve over time.

It's a smooth installation, although a large download (76 MB)—and it's free.

ThinkFree Office Online

This new set of Office-compatible tools was just released from beta and is network-based. In other words it performs its functions through a web browser, and can therefore be accessed from any Windows com-

puter. It's been tested on Windows 2000/XP and IE, and will eventually be supported on Linux, Mac, Firefox and Safari.

It is the beginning of a new set of products that are now being introduced by many companies that run on servers instead of your computer. Even Microsoft is working on an online version of Office.

ThinkFree Office Online will be free to use, but is going to be advertising supported. It also is equivalent to the company's \$49.95 downloadable

ThinkFree Office Suite 3 product.

It has three components:

Write is Word compatible.

Calc is its spreadsheet program, equivalent to *Excel*.

Show is the same as *PowerPoint*

Installation is easy—just open the Web site. Load and save files to Web folders or locally. Since it is Web-based using a dial-up connection is not advisable.

Think you can't open Office documents without paying hundreds of dollars for software? Think again. Just visit ThinkFree Office Online and you can open, edit, and create Office documents with this easy and convenient online service.

With ThinkFree Office Online, you can also post documents directly to your blog without any conversion and convert your existing documents to PDF format.

For those interested in a compatible alternative to the very expensive Microsoft Office line of products these two are possibilities. They are still a little rough around the edges but could easily provide the user with everything they need.

Are they for you? It depends on what you need. For the average user, unafraid of a short learning curve, the answer is yes. But if you are working with companies that use Office products that depend on 100% guaranteed compatibility, you may want to think twice at this point.

JAMIE is DACS program director, and a prolific volunteer in the area community



Meeting Preview

Computer Aided Design and Visualization

By Jamie Yates

WHAT'S COOL IN today's hot housing market?—New home construction, existing home renovation, new forms of living space, and an exciting new technology to design and create them. At the March 7 General Meeting, Scott Yates, of H & R Design of Danbury, and son of this writer, will reveal the sophisticated media of all types for computer-aided design, and their interconnectivity that help energize and empower the architectural process from dream to concept to blueprint and to finished product.

Scott has been an architect for the past 15 years and has specialized in residential, commercial and specialty architecture, including acoustics design for sound studios and media rooms. He has accomplished all this with the aid of various applications running on a laptop computer.

He will show you some of the features of AutoCAD for the design of buildings, additions and rooms. He has used this application for the last decade in both the design and production areas.

Although AutoCAD is not a software product for the casual user, since it costs in the thousands of dollars, there are many much less expensive products you could use for some of your own projects.

He will display the work he did in the designing and renovation of his own house, along with renderings that were done using other products that show how the completed project will look. He will also describe and show some of his designs of media studios that have been built around the world, both for major companies and private citizens. These facilities use the latest technology available and cost from hundreds of thousands of dollars up into the millions.

Scott is knowledgeable in the detailed considerations necessary for high end multi-media rooms (both commercial and residential) of which the average person and local component resellers are likely unaware. For example, using software to

analyze and modify the sound characteristics of various spaces.

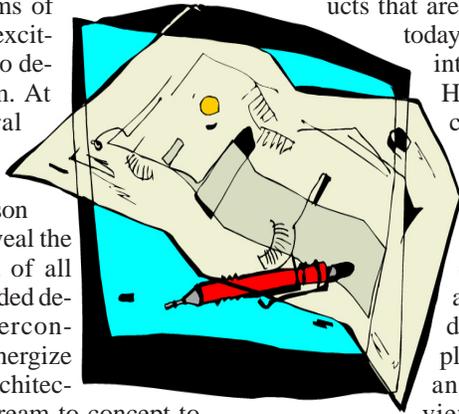
He has dealt with super high end products that are rarely seen in stores today, even with the current interest in wide screen HDTVs and sound components.

All this relates to both practical uses of computers and the major thrust today to use computers and other electronic devices such as MP3 players, smart phones, and hand held movie viewers in the area of multi-media.

You are bound to leave this presentation with new perspectives on what can be done in the above areas and new ideas and information on the topics above.

DACS meetings are held at the Danbury Hospital auditorium. Activities begin at 7 p.m. with casual networking, Random Access and a discussion of what's new in technology. There is a business session at 7:30, followed by a short break and the evening presentation at 8:00. General Meetings are free and open to the public so invite anyone you know who would be interested in this topic.

JAMIE is DACS program director, and a prolific volunteer in the area community



THIS IS YOUR LAST NEWSLETTER

If the membership date on
your mailing label reads

**EXP 12\2005
or earlier**

You need to renew your
DACS membership
NOW

Post Your Biz on *dacs.org*

We would like to post a directory of our members' business services on the DACS web site.

These would preferably be computer related, hardware and software solutions, Web design, etc., but can include Accounting, Travel, Advertising, Public Relations, or any other business service that you might be able to provide to all our members.

At some future date we may include the directory in our newsletter.

To get your listing, post your name, business, phone, e-mail and Web address to dacsprez@dacs.org.

When dining at
the DACS
Resource Center,
please carry your
leftovers out
with you.



Thanks!

*The
management*

What's News

New General Meeting Segment Premiered

By Jamie Yates

A new segment, called *What's News*, has been added to the DACS General Meetings. This will be a 15-minute feature after Random Access and just prior to the break and main speaker presentation. This segment will feature general interest news items on hardware, software, issues, etc., or a short presentation on a single topic.

The format of *What's News* is still evolving, so if you have any suggestions on changes or improvements please send an email to vpprograms@dacs.org. Topics should be related to computers or electronics in general, and include a brief description, along with a URL that provides further details.

A recap of the February 7 What's News segment follows:

Description: TiVo's main news of interest from CES was the announcement of a stand-alone high definition TiVo unit, the Series 3. It's supposed to be available "mid to late 2006." For some of us, there is no point to getting an HD TV until it's possible to record HD programming, so this is great news.

Source: From PVRblog: http://www.pvrblog.com/pvr/2006/01/hd_tivo_series_.html. Live video interview from Gear Live, <http://www.gearlive.com/index.php/news/article/ces-2006-video-tivo-series-3-video-interview-first-look-0108051437/>.

Description: IE 7 beta 2 available with many new features. Includes enhanced security, updated interface, RSS support, phishing support, tabbed browsing, and more.

Source: IE 7 home page for description and download, <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/IE/ie7/default.msp>. Techenclave article on new features, <http://www.techenclave.com/forums/internet-explorer-7-beta1-review-techenclave-5978.html>.

Description: Windows OneCare beta available with announced general pricing (about \$50/year). OneCare includes: Antivirus, firewall, backup, automatic tune up (virus scan, defrag, disk cleanup, backup, and install of security updates). For users who don't maintain their systems or don't want to.

Source: OneCare home page, <http://www.windowsonecare.com/> News.com article: http://news.com.com/Microsofts+security+product+hits+home+stretch/2100-1029_3-6035712.html?tag=nefd.top

Description: WalleTex - a credit-card shaped/sized/thick USB flash drive. It can be carried in the credit-card pockets in a wallet. Up to 64 MB to 2 GB of information. Price: \$25 to \$170. Waterproof and heat tolerant. Can be branded.

Source: WalleTex home page, <http://www.walleTex.com/>

Description: Windows XP Service Pack 3 - now scheduled for 2nd Half of 2007(?)

Source: Windows service pack road map, <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/lifecycle/servicepacks.msp>

Description: WiMax technology has been released to the marketplace in the US. Max distance 30 miles, realistically 3-5 miles. Max speed 70 Mbps. Can support 1000 Mbit DSL lines. Does not require line of site

Source: How stuff works description of WiMax: <http://computer.howstuffworks.com/wimax.htm>.

TechSpot names vendors supporting WiMAX: <http://www.techspot.com/news/20191-wimax-is-here.html>.

Description: Running Mac OS X on the new Intel Core Duo processor, the new iMac delivers performance that is up to twice that of its predecessor. The new MacBook Pro notebook features an Intel Core Duo processor delivering up to four times the performance of the PowerBook G4. It is just one inch thin and weighs only 5.6 pounds. They both feature a built-in iSight camera for video conferencing and the breakthrough Front Row media experience with the Apple Remote.

Source: Apple Unveils New iMac with Intel Core Duo Processor: <http://www.apple.com/imac/>; Apple Introduces MacBook Pro: <http://www.apple.com/macbookpro/>

Description: Government's "Digital Transition Content Security Act of 2005" requires recognizing CGMS-A and VEIL content protection standards. This is for digital to analog copying. To get the VEIL spec:

- Pay \$10,000
- Don't disclose it

Source: Freedom to Tinker website article, <http://www.freedom-to-tinker.com/?p=958>.

Description: Opera Software announces worldwide release of Opera Mini. A full web browser that runs on almost every mobile phone. For phones that cannot run Opera Mobile.

Source: Article from Geekzone, <http://www.geekzone.co.nz/content.asp?contentid=5757>. Opera site: <http://www.opera.com/products/mobile/operamini/>.

Description: Will we all be wearing these new Levi jeans to the next DACS General Meeting? About \$200. Built-in headphones, joystick, and even a docking cradle and remote.

Source: From Sci-tech Today, http://www.sci-tech-today.com/story.xhtml?story_id=40826.

Description: Best Buy Eliminates Mail-in Rebates on Notebook Computers and Introduces Online Rebate Submission. Has created an online submission center for those products which still have mail-in rebates.

Source: From Yahoo Finance, <http://biz.yahoo.com/bw/060124/20060124005780.html?v=1>.

Description: Cingular is trying to patent emoticons on mobile phones (includes text based). Veeeery interesting.....

Source: From cellular-news, <http://www.cellular-news.com/story/15792.php>.

Description: When is the best time to buy your media center or anything else? Airline tickets - Wednesday; Televisions/electronics - April; Houses - Winter; Cars - End of Month; Video games - Wait a few months; Toys - After holidays and August.

Source: From CNN Money, http://money.cnn.com/2006/01/20/pf/best_time_to_buy_everything/

Description: Do you know technology challenged people? Parents, sibs, friends. Do they constantly ask for help over and over? Try an ACF.

Source: From Satire Wire, <http://www.satirewire.com/features/siliconpines/acf.shtml>.

Overbytes

How big is a 300 GB hard disk?

By Jim Sanders,

I RECENTLY ACQUIRED a 300 GB hard disk for \$110 after rebates. When I look at that 3.5 inch hard drive that is one inch high and easily held in my hand, trying to put those 300 Giga bytes of storage in perspective is a little tough. I thought about the first Z80 CPM system I built in 1977 from a Cromemco kit that I had to solder together. It used 8 inch floppy disks that held 128,000 Bytes.

The diskettes were easy to damage and it was a good idea to keep them in storage boxes. I made some good money selling the SRW Computer Products plastic storage boxes at a great ACP Swap Meet discounted price of \$2.00 each. They were designed to hold 10, but you could get 2 or 3 more in if you were careful! I wondered how many floppies that would be, so I punched the numbers into the calculator. $300,000,000,000B / 128,000B = 2,343,750$ diskettes. I don't know how to visualize that, but I did calculate that it would take \$468,750.00 worth of those boxes to store them all. I then remembered that the average price at that time was about \$3.50 a diskette. Again the calculator, $2,343,750$ diskettes \times \$3.50 = \$8,203,125.00. Wow! That is a number that I don't want to think about if I am talking about a hobby.

Another way to wrap your mind around huge numbers is to start small, with something that you can relate to, and work your way up. Now we know that one byte equals one character of the alphabet. The common 10 point type has 10 characters per inch. So, if we have 120 characters/bytes in a row, we have one foot. There are 5,280 feet in a mile. So $5,280 \times 120$ gives the number of character or bytes that would be on a mile long ticket tape that was be-

ing printed with 10 point type, an answer of 633,000 bytes. Compared to the 300 Giga bytes on the hard disk, 633,600 bytes is not much. To find out how much, we need to take the

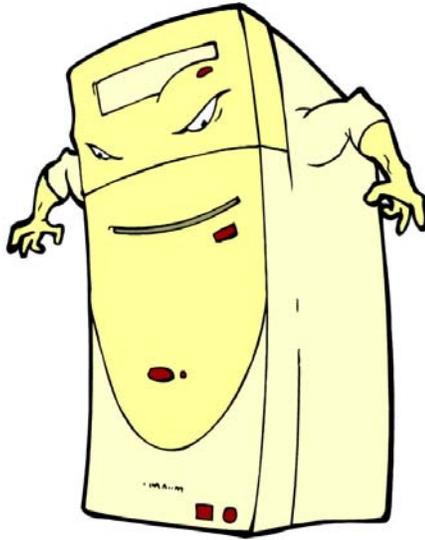
300,000,000,000 byte capacity of the hard disk and divide it by 633,600 bytes in a mile. The answer to that math problem is the equivalent of 473,485 miles of ticker tape.

To put that into perspective, let's take the circumference of the earth (nominally 25,000 miles) and divide that into our answer. So, $473,485 / 25,000 = 18.93$. If we could find a big enough roll of ticker tape, print-

ing all the information on that hard disk would wrap around the equator of the earth 18.93 times. That sounds impressive, but how many people can really visualize that. Besides, I don't know anyone who has a big enough ticker tape printer. Another thought, that ticker tape would be 3,000 miles short of stretching from the Earth to the Moon and back.

But let's try it with regular 8.5 inch x 11 inch paper. Again, standard printing would be 10 point type, 10 bytes per inch, and 6 lines per inch. Most people leave at least a half inch margin all the way around the page. So that means each line will be 7.5 inches, or 75 bytes, and there will be 60 lines per page. So each page will use 75 bytes x 60 lines, or 4,500 bytes. First, let's take 1 of the 300,000 megabytes on the disk and see how many pages that represents. $1,000,000 / 4,500 = 222.2$ pages. We still have 299,999 megabytes left and, using them, the total number of pages comes out to 66,660,000 pages.

That is also a little hard to imagine, so let's see how many reams of paper that is. Take 66,660,000 pages, divided by 500 sheets per ream = 133,320 reams of paper. Again, a little hard to visualize.



A lot of things have their volume given in cubic feet. That's 12 inches x 12 inches x 12 inches or 1,728 cubic inches, or 1 cubic foot. I measured one case of paper at 11.25x9x17.5 inches, or 1,771 cubic inches. Let's be generous and round that off to one cubic foot. So at 5,000 sheets, or ten reams per case, we divide the 133,320 reams that we came up with by 10 to get 13,332 cases, or that many cubic feet of space.

Stipulating that an average house is 1,400 square feet with eight foot high ceilings, then the average house has 11,200 cubic feet of space, ignoring the walls. If you filled up your house, wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling, with cases of printed paper, you would still have 2,132 cases left over. If you are in better shape than I am, there is still room to get one car in that two car garage. That's 10'x20'x9' = 1,800 cubic feet, so that still leaves us with 332 cases of paper. We could take all of the junk out of the other half of the garage, lay down a two foot thick layer of paper and put all the junk back in on top of it. That's how much the 300 Giga byte disk holds! So, unless you are planning on taking out a home improvement loan, don't buy that 400 Giga byte disk.

JIM SANDERS is editor, Orange Bytes, the newsletter of the North Orange County Computer Club. You can reach him at www.noccc.org / [editor\(at\)noccc.org](mailto:editor(at)noccc.org).

This article was provided by the Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member.

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Special Interest Groups

SIG NOTES: March 2006

Access. Designs and implements solutions using Microsoft Access, and with SQL Server as a back-end to the database program.
Contact: Bruce Preston, 203 431-2920 (*bpreston@mags.net*).
Meets on 2nd Tuesday, 7p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.
Next meeting: Mar 14

Advanced Operating Systems. Explores OS/2, Linux, and NT operating systems. For info, follow link to Don's site on *dacs.org*.
Contact: Bill Keane (*wbk@mags.net*) 203-438-8032.
Meets 2nd Wednesday, 7:30 p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.
Next meeting: Mar 8

ASP.Net. Focuses on Web site/server application program development using Microsoft Visual Studio, C#, VB, Javascript and SQL Server programming tools. Session starts with a Random Access session, followed by a programming discussion with examples.
Contact: Chuck Fizer (*cfizer@snet.net*).
Meets 1st Wednesday, 4-6 p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.
Next Meeting: Mar 1

Excel/Math. Review of mathematics with emphasis on programming spreadsheets for business applications.
Contact: Charles Bovaird, 203-792-7881 (*aam@mags.net*).
Meets on 3rd Thursday, 7 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.
Next meeting: Mar 16

Digital Imaging. All about digital cameras, retouching and printing.
Contact: Ken Graff at 203 775-6667 (*graffic@bigfoot.com*).
Meets last Wednesday, 7 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.
Next Meeting: May 31

Investment Strategies. Discusses various investment strategies to maximize profits and limit risk.
Contact: Paul Gehrett, 203 426-8436, (*pgehr4402@aol.com*).
Meets 3rd Thursday, 7:30 p.m., Edmond Town Hall, Newtown.
Next Meeting: Mar 16

Jobs. Networking and discussion of the jobs search environment.
Contact: Charles Bovaird, 203-792-7881 (*aam@mags.net*).
Meets by e-mail.
Next meeting: TBA

Linux. Provides Help in installing and maintaining the Linux operating system. Also of interest to Apple owners using OS X.
Contact: Bill Keane (*wbk@mags.net*) 203-438-8032
Meets 3rd Wednesday, 7:30 pm at the DACS Resource Center.
Next Meeting: Mar 15

Macintosh. Focuses on all aspects of the Mac operating system.
Contact: Richard Corzo (*macsig@dacs.org*)
Meets 1st Thursday at DACS Resource Center at 7 p.m.
Next Meeting: Mar 2

Microcontroller. Investigates microcontroller applications from theory to hands-on implementation and member projects.
Contact: John Gallichotte, 203 426-0394, (*tlclotus@ieee.org*).
Meets on 4th Tuesday, 7:00 p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.
Next Meeting: In hiatus until further notice.

Open Source Web Programming. Focuses on open source tools for Windows and Linux.
Contact: John Lansdale, 914-533-2002.
Meets on 3rd Monday, 7:00 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.
Next Meeting: Mar 20

PC Maintenance. Review of PC hardware and OpSys maintenance and use.
Contact: Charles Bovaird, 203-792-7881 (*aam@mags.net*).
Meets on 4th Thursday, 7 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.
Next meeting: Mar 23

Server. Explores Back Office server and client applications, including Win NT Servers and MS Outlook.
Contact: Jim Scheef (*jscheef@telemarksys.com*)
Meets 2nd Thursday, 7 p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.
Next meeting: Mar 9

VB.Net, Visual Basic-6. Focuses on Smart Client Windows application development using Visual Studio, VB, C# and SQL Server programming tools. Starts with a Random Access session followed by Object Oriented discussions and programming with examples.
Contact: Chuck Fizer, 203 798-9996 (*cfizer@snet.net*) or Jim Scheef, 860 355-8001 (*JScheef@Telemarksys.com*).
Meets 1st Wednesday, 7p.m., at the DACS Resource Center, preceded 1 hour with a shared cost pizza snack.
Next Meeting: Mar 1

Wall Street. Examines Windows stock Market software.
Contact: Phil Dilloway, 203 367-1202 (*dilloway@ntplx.net*).
Meets on last Monday, 7p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.
Next Meeting: Mar 27

Web Design. Applications for designing and creating Web sites.
Contact: Anna Collens, 203-746-5922 (*acvo@annagraphics.com*).
Meets 3rd Tuesday, 7-9 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.
Next Meeting: Mar 21

SIG News & Events

dotNET. A new tool is on its way to us from Chuck's laboratory. Connecticut is full of surprises and so is our luminary of Danbury. As our session opened, Chuck gave us some highlights of his plan for forthcoming sessions. Our new tool will be used by each of us for renewed emphasis in programming in a dotNET environment. For the afternoon session, 4-6 PM, ASP.NET for Web page design will be given dominant attention. For the evening session, 7-9 PM, dotNET will be in view with dominant attention on programming with VB .NET and C# .NET. Some usage of Web Forms and Smart Client are in prospect.

Chuck began with a demonstration of some features of his new tool whose development is currently a work in progress. We saw three controls, two buttons and a textbox: Standard

Postback, Zip Postback, text. The goal of this work is that we can access a server repeatedly without refreshing the page. Another important feature is the use of calculated passwords. Instead of being stored where they could be vulnerable to illicit discovery, they are generated uniquely for each userID as needed to log into an application.

We had our happy interlude with a tasty pizza. After this refreshing pause we plunged again into details of this work in progress. An extended clarification of the Submit function ensued to identify a key difference between different kinds of buttons. Any browser page has a submit function available in it: FormSubmit. One kind of button using HTML would need

SIG Notes, Continued on page 13

March 2006

Danbury Area Computer Society

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">Feb 2006</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr><td>S</td><td>M</td><td>T</td><td>W</td><td>T</td><td>F</td><td>S</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>8</td><td>9</td><td>10</td><td>11</td></tr> <tr><td>12</td><td>13</td><td>14</td><td>15</td><td>16</td><td>17</td><td>18</td></tr> <tr><td>19</td><td>20</td><td>21</td><td>22</td><td>23</td><td>24</td><td>25</td></tr> <tr><td>26</td><td>27</td><td>28</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">Apr 2006</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr><td>S</td><td>M</td><td>T</td><td>W</td><td>T</td><td>F</td><td>S</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>1</td></tr> <tr><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>8</td></tr> <tr><td>9</td><td>10</td><td>11</td><td>12</td><td>13</td><td>14</td><td>15</td></tr> <tr><td>16</td><td>17</td><td>18</td><td>19</td><td>20</td><td>21</td><td>22</td></tr> <tr><td>23</td><td>24</td><td>25</td><td>26</td><td>27</td><td>28</td><td>29</td></tr> <tr><td>30</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table> </div> </div> | | S | M | T | W | T | F | S | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | | | | | S | M | T | W | T | F | S | | | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | | | | | | | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">1</p>  <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">4 PM Internet Prog. 7 PM Visual Basic Chuck Fizer 203 798-9996</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">2</p>  <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Macintosh 7:00 PM Richard Corzo macsig@dacs.org</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">3</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">4</p> |
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| <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">5</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">6</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">7</p>  <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">7:00 P.M. GENERAL MTG</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">8</p>  <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">7:30 PM Advanced OS Bill Keane 203 438-8032</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">9</p>  <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">7:00 PM Server Jim Scheef 860 355-0034</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">10</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">11</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">12</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">13</p>  <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">7:00 PM Board of Directors</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">14</p>  <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">7:00 PM Access Bruce Preston 203 431-2920</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">15</p>  <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">7:30 PM Linux Bill Keane 203 438-8032</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">16</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">7:00 PM Math Charles Bovaird 203 792-7881</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">7:30 PM Investment Paul Gehrett 203 426-8436</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">17</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">18</p>  <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">DACS.DOC Deadline</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">19</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">20</p>  <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">OpenSource Web Program. 7:00 PM John Lansdale 914-533-2002</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">21</p>  <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">Web Design Anna Collins 203 746-5922</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">22</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">23</p>  <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">7:00 PM PC Maintenance Charles Bovaird 203 792-7881</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">24</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">25</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">26</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">27</p>  <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">7:00 PM WALL STREET Phil Dilloway 203 367-1202</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">28</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">29</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">30</p> | <p style="font-size: 2em; color: red;">31</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Programming

Texas Hold-Em an Evolutionary Approach, Part 3

By Richard Ten Dyke

THE STORY CONTINUES as we build a program that will use Darwinian techniques to learn to play Texas Hold-Em. We previously discussed using an object-oriented language to create a limited version of the game. In spite of the limitations, we learned a great deal by playing.

In the limited version of the game you play against two opponents. Neither of them uses a betting strategy—we haven't created one yet. Instead, they stay in the game until it is over. However, you have the opportunity to bet or fold. Playing automatically, you would have a one-in-three chance of winning each hand, but you can improve your own odds by deciding when to bet or fold. With skill at assessing a hand, you can improve your odds of winning to about 50 percent, or so has been my experience. Playing in the simulated poker game is like a tennis player practicing strokes by hitting balls against a brick wall.

Let's look at some examples:

Suppose your hole cards are two aces. This might seem to be a lock on winning, and it will be a winner in many situations. But it would not be a winner against a straight, a flush, or three-of-a-kind held by an opponent. Therefore, we learn that assessing the opponent's possibilities becomes a critically important aspect of the game. So we must study the cards on the table.

Suppose with your pair of aces you see a 7, 9 and 10 on the table. The chances that your opponent has a straight are greatly increased from if there were, say, a 2, 6, and 10. However, suppose that the 2, 6 and 10 are of the same suit. Now there is a chance that your opponent has a flush—and so on. This thinking assumes

that your opponent is going to stay in the game. One betting strategy might be to bet a huge amount and hope that your opponents decide to fold. But we haven't gotten to the betting strategy part of the game quite yet.

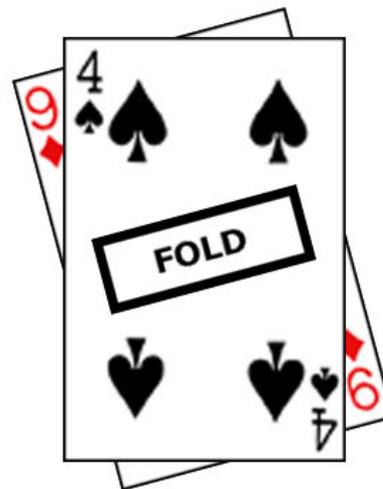


As the hand progresses, first with three, then four, and then five cards on the table, assessing the opponents possibilities against your own hand is very important. If there are four cards to a straight or flush, for example, the possibility that an opponent can fill them out is very likely. Similarly, if you are holding a pair of Jacks, and

an Ace and Queen are showing on the table, you could easily lose to a pair of aces or a pair of Queens. If you hold those same Jacks, and a pair of threes are showing, you can easily lose to three of a kind.

What is a player to do?

I have found that it is a good idea to fold a bad hand early. The first betting round takes place before the flop, when you are looking at only your two hole cards. If you have a four of spades and a nine of diamonds: Fold! Suppose you have a pair of threes: Fold! Suppose you have an Ace and a Queen: Stay! It's the middle hands, a Queen—Five, for example—that present the more difficult choices. You might pair up the Queen, but you would still lose to a pair of Kings. But if you have a Queen—Five suited, meaning of



the same suit—you could walk into a flush. Or, you have a Queen and a Jack, suited. You now have the chance for a good pair, a flush, or a straight.

The odds will change as you see the flop, the turn and the river cards laid out on the table. Perhaps you might play the Queen-Five-suited for the flop, and hold only if there is improvement.

This sounds complicated, and it is. It makes the game interesting. A good player who has played thousands of hands knows instinctively what to do. The beginning player has little chance against him. But remember, our goal is not to learn to play the game ourselves. Instead we want to teach a computer how to do it. Our problem is how to write a program that can capture years of experience in playing the game.

That leads to the problem that I call characterization. The human will learn from three things from experience: (1) that what shows on the table is important, (2) that certain card combinations are more likely than others to portend success or defeat, and (3) how to categorize those combinations to be able to react when seeing similar although not identical card combinations in the future. But the concept of "similarity" is a difficult one for the computer to grasp. It is necessary to do this because it is not practical to pre-plan for all possible combinations. Grasping the concepts of similarity and analogy are distinctly human capabilities. For the computer to evolve these capabilities over time would require the computer to be able to evolve something that approaches complexity of the human brain which is not likely to happen in this experiment.

At a minimum, it appears necessary for a human to tell the computer what categories to use. I experimented with this idea when playing the game. The computer would identify various card combinations showing on the table, and provide a message or warning about what was showing. The computer would warn about the possibility of a straight or a flush. It would also warn that there were cards on the table of a higher rank than

the highest card in my hand. I found I could play the game somewhat successfully based on these warnings alone, without having to look at the actual cards that were showing.

But this is not enough. It is further necessary to place a value on those warnings before the computer. Warning about a three card straight showing should also indicate whether it is an inside or outside straight. Sometimes more than one possibility has to be considered.

One approach, both considered and discarded, was to run a series of simulations with various combinations of hole cards and warnings in order to calculate probabilities of success. Then we would create a table of probabilities to use when playing the game. This looked to be a daunting task. It was clearly time to ask the question: is there a better way?

Yes. There is a better way, and it is another reason why I will not be playing Texas Hold-em for real money on the internet any time soon.

Your opponent in the game has exactly two hole cards, just like you. You ask yourself the question "How many possible card combinations are there that he can hold, and what percentage of them will give him a hand that is better than mine? Starting with the first question, and assuming at this time that all five cards on the table are showing, there are 45 cards left in the deck. All possible two-card combinations is 45 times 23 or 1035, which is not a large number. With my computer at my side, I can feed in the 7 cards that I know about and calculate which of the 1035 card combinations that my opponent may have will give him a better hand. In short, the computer can quickly create a probability of my winning against a single opponent. With a little math, the computer can calculate the probability of winning against several opponents. This is a raw but very useful number. Raw, because it does not take into account that fact that the opponent will make decisions whether to stay or fold so those who are in the game at the last moment will have better than average

hands. But it is a useful statistic because it provides a basis on which to make decisions.

We now can discard all the work and anguish of creating scenarios and concentrate on a single number, a "raw" probability of winning against some opponent. What we are doing is using the computer to do what it does best—evaluate a big number of possibilities.

If I were playing Texas Hold-em on the internet, I would have to assume that those whom I might be playing against have this capability, and I would also guess that anyone who plays without it

is an idiot.

In the next installment, we start to use this insight to develop a computerized betting strategy program.

RICHARD TEN DYKE has previously contributed to this newsletter on the topic of *Digital Photography and computer creativity*. He is retired from IBM and can be reached at tendyke@bedfordny.com. All opinions are his own, and he welcomes comments

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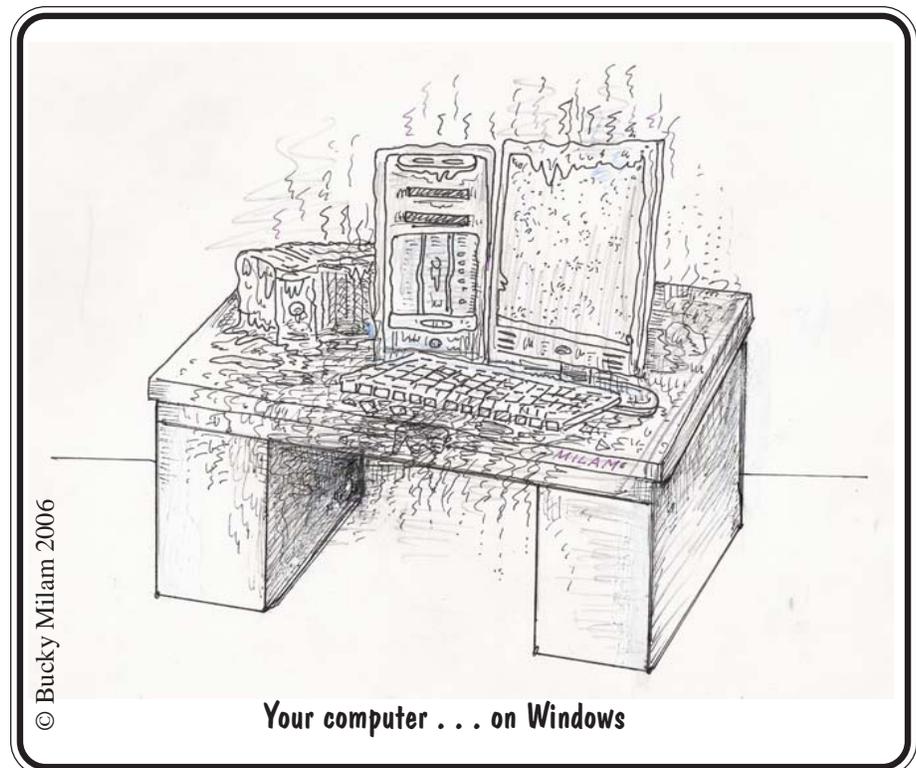
**Needed: Judges for
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Saturday, March 11, 2006, 8 AM
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Help judge over 600 projects entered by students from 7th to 12th grade in our area. You'll talk to 15-18 student scientists, about 10 minutes each, in 2-1/2 - 3 hours. You'll be on a judging team of 3-4 judges, led by an experienced judge.

Our judges are scientists, science teachers, engineers, people with a knowledge of science...The teenagers benefit from talking to scientists about their science fair projects. Your reward: great personal satisfaction, breakfast rolls, and lunch.

Sign up to judge on the Science Horizons website at www.sciencehorizons.org/judge. If you still have questions, call Bill Kenyon at 203-438-5536 (wkenyon@comcast.net).



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Your computer . . . on Windows

Macinations

My iMac G5 Experience

by Richard Corzo

LAST SUMMER, being a little more than 5 years since I bought my first Mac, an iMac G3 CRT model, it was past time to look for a new Mac. I of course had my eye on the beautiful iMac G5's with the computer that disappeared behind a floating LCD panel. The advertisements showed a computer with no wires, because the Bluetooth keyboard and mouse weren't tethered by USB cables, and you could use the built-in Airport Extreme wireless module to connect to the Internet. The only wire needed was the power cord, and even

it was beautifully designed so that the plug at the computer end of the cord was flush with the back of the machine. The only reason I waited until July was to let Tiger, Mac OS X 10.4, settle in a bit from its April debut. I wanted to customize my machine a bit so I ordered a 20" iMac through the on-line Apple Store, upgrading the memory from 512 MB to 1 GB, the hard drive from 250 GB to 400 GB, and getting the Bluetooth instead of the USB keyboard and mouse.

My machine arrived in about a week and I started to set it up downstairs in my dining room. Without reading directions I put batteries in the Bluetooth wireless keyboard and mouse. I was interested to see how the machine would boot the first time with the wireless keyboard and mouse, this being my first experience with Bluetooth. A startup screen came up showing an animated picture of a switch needing to be slid into position on the bottom of the mouse, which was a great and clear instruction to a novice like me. The mouse and computer were paired, as required by Bluetooth, followed by the keyboard where I also needed to slide a switch to the on position and enter a pass key to pair the keyboard with my computer. Shortly I was up and running into the Mac OS X desktop where I could start exploring.

I already had a Netgear wireless router set up with WEP encryption, and since I was downstairs away from my wired net-

work, I relied on past experience setting up the Airport wireless card on my iMac G3 to properly enter the encryption key on my new iMac G5. Then I verified my connection with the Internet and could see my PC and iMac G3 in the Network folder



in the Finder. After verifying that the machine was working well, I decided to partition my hard drive before getting into further customization or starting to transfer data from my old iMac. I was able to boot from the included Mac OS X DVD to perform the operation and then proceed to reinstall

Mac OS X in the first partition as well as restore all the applications that came preinstalled (such as Apple's iLife suite which includes iTunes, iPhoto, iMovie, iDVD, and GarageBand).

I next brought my new iMac upstairs and connected it via FireWire cable to the old one, so that I could use the included Migration Assistant to transfer my settings, data, and applications. This process worked quite well ending with a report on any settings or applications that it couldn't just migrate seamlessly or might merit some attention on my part. Since I had expanded my old iMac with an external FireWire drive, I also did a search for any hard-coded paths to the external drive, i.e. Volumes:FireWire 78 GB, because I planned to keep that external drive attached to the old machine. In the few application configuration files where I found such a reference I manually fixed it to point to my local drive. I have to say the process was relatively painless and would have been even easier for someone that didn't have an external drive or separate partition on their old machine.

I was really enjoying the speed and beauty of my new machine in my first couple of weeks of usage. I connected all my peripherals including printers, a scanner, my iPod, and PDA, many of which were connected by USB. I had a couple of daisy-chained USB hubs and even a USB switch for times when I wanted to

switch the peripherals between my Mac and PC. I was having some trouble getting all my USB devices recognized through the hubs and started trying eliminating one of the hubs and even sometimes directly plugging the device directly into one of the three USB ports on the iMac G5. After trying enough experiments I eventually came to the point where I decided I needed to contact Apple.

I explored their support pages and discovered a live chat option that looked like it might be a promising alternative to a phone call. Within 5 minutes I was chatting live with a support person. Even though he had a foreign sounding name I had no trouble communicating with him via text chat. This eliminated the potential communication barrier that an accent might create if this was a phone call. He made some reasonable suggestions on how to narrow down the problem and he asked that I report back the next day with the outcome of my trials. The next day, Sunday, I was able to initiate another support chat almost instantly and we arrived at the conclusion that I would need to bring in my machine for service. Even though I bought the machine on line I could bring it in to any Apple-authorized service dealer including the Apple store at the Danbury Fair Mall.

On Monday I went to the Danbury Apple Store Web site to set up an appointment at the Genius Bar prior to bringing in the machine. I brought in my iMac, the Bluetooth keyboard and mouse, and my USB hubs. As always seems to happen in these cases we weren't able to reproduce my problem in the store and the USB devices we tried worked just fine when connected through my USB hubs to my iMac. It finally dawned on me the one difference between the store and my home was that we were using a USB keyboard and mouse in the store. Once we used my own Bluetooth keyboard and mouse the problem resurfaced! The Apple store genius decided that it was probably a logic board problem. That was an expensive part to replace, but it would be fully covered under warranty. I was a bit skeptical about the proposed solution, thinking it might be just the Bluetooth module, but decided to let them replace the logic board as they suggested.

It would be more than a week before I got my machine back, part of which time I was out of town, but when we tried some USB devices connected through my USB hubs, the problem seemed to be resolved. I wasn't going to count my chickens be-

fore I brought the machine home, but sure enough, after a burp and a hiccup, all my USB devices got recognized through my two USB hubs and a switch! I had now finally reached Mac computing nirvana.

I also want to comment on the iMac's LCD display, as this was my first experience with that type of display. I remember my first impression a few years earlier of an LCD display for a PC. I thought the colors were unrealistic and it seemed like it would be OK for non-color-critical work like word processing, but I didn't think it would look good when displaying photographs. The technology seems to have matured because by contrast my iMac's display colors seem rich and accurate and photographs look natural and beautiful. The other thing I wondered about was being able to work at less than the LCD display's maximum native resolution. Text looked really clear at that resolution, but eventually I decided my middle-aged eyes needed to work at a lower resolution. Text fonts definitely look softer, but I have found them to be readable.

Newer iMac models have come to pass with a built-in iSight video camera and a remote control for viewing your digital media from a distance, but otherwise the design hasn't changed much from the model I have. I would recommend an iMac to any home user that doesn't have to run Windows-only software. You can do all the normal things like Web surfing and word processing, and work more easily with all your digital media using iTunes, iPhoto, and iMovie. You can check out the iMacs at the local Apple store.

RICHARD CORZO is a computer programmer, a DACS board member, and a born-again Mac user. He currently is coordinator of the Mac SIG.

Are you up to your nose with computer questions? DACS Special Interest Groups may have the answers. If not, let us know, and we'll try to create a new SIG that helps fulfill your special needs.



SIG NOTES, Continued from page 8

specific programming to enable a postback. Another kind of button working with button in .aspx would have a postback already enabled.

A vitally important advantage was made clear for this new tool. All code is managed in one place. A mood of excitement gripped us all to view this excellent prospect as we concluded our evening session.

Jobs. The job SIG will no longer meet on a scheduled basis, as indicated by the last survey. Members will be notified when we have a scheduled speaker on job search subjects. Email communications will continue. DACS members are urged to report employment opportunities to treasurer@dacs.org. Non-Credit courses relating to job search are now available at WCSU in Danbury (register by Sept 30, 2005 for Spring session (See www.wcsu.edu)). Two members reported they are working.

Recent announcements: Praxair-office expansion. Cendant - office expansion.

Math/Excel. The January 2006 meeting illustrated the "central limit theorem" using a graphical simulator model created by the SIG coordinator. The model graphically illustrates the quality of fit one is likely to find in "real world" data compared to common theoretical probability density functions (PDF's). The model also illustrates how well the means (averages) of randomly selected data samples fit the theoretical "normal" distribution, dependant upon the sample size. Prior meetings discussed the use of "descriptive statistics" and

graphing techniques using Excel. We will continue to look at mathematics used in science and business as well as various scholastic achievement tests.

Contact: Charles Bovaird. Meets the 3rd Thursday at 7:00 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center, Ives Manor (lower level), 198 Main Street, Danbury, CT.

Macintosh. In February, SIG member Peter Wehr gave a presentation on FileMaker Pro, a database program popular on the Mac but also available for Windows. It is a relational database in the sense that it relates columns in different tables. For instance an Employee table may refer to a Company table by way of a Company ID column. Filemaker Pro comes in several editions, including server editions, and even a mobile edition for Palm and Pocket PC devices. One thing FileMaker got right from its early days is forms for entering data into the database. Later FileMaker gained scripting capability, but only recently allowed you to copy a script from one table or database to another.

We also got a question from a member having trouble getting a voice chat to work using iChat, where the other party was a Windows PC user. Perhaps we can try that in a future meeting.

In March we'll take a look at the Front Row application that comes on Apple's newest machines that allows you to enjoy your music, photos, and movies on your Mac from a distance using a remote control. We'll also take a look at a similar entertainment center application called MediaCentral.

Community Outreach Equipment Placement

As an IRS 501(c)(3) organization, DACS provides community support collecting, repairing, and redistributing used computer equipment and software to community service providers, such as schools, libraries, and patient/client support groups. DACS members provide pickup, refurbishing, installation, and training assistance as needed.

Firms or individuals wishing to donate equipment should contact Charles Bovaird (203) 792-7881.

During the year 2006, DACS will accept donations of working PCs with Pentium Processors 1.2 Ghz or faster with valid XP operating system and license and documentation, 17" Monitors, PS2 keyboards, and PS2 Mice, USB keyboards, and USB Mice.

Random Access

February 2005

Bruce Preston, Moderator

WE WELCOME QUESTIONS FROM the floor at the start of our General Meetings. In addition, members who are not able to attend the General Meeting may submit questions to askdacs@dacs.org. We will ask the question for you and post the reply in *DACS.ORG*. Please provide as much information as possible since we can't probe during the session.

Q. (AskDacs@dacs.org) I bought two external hard drives on eBay that were supposed to be the Maxtor One-Touch models. They work fine except when copying very large files like image backups. I get a "Delayed Write Error" alert and my system stops the backup. I have to cancel out of the backup and lose the files. I suspect that the electronic interface panel on the external hard drive case is not a true One-Touch circuit even though the drive itself is a Maxtor drive. I have worked with tech support at Maxtor, Microsoft and ATI (there was some suspicion that the ATI Graphics driver may be at issue.) There has not been any resolution so I am wondering if there is a "true" external drive as opposed to a "clone" that is reliable.

A. There was a suggestion from the floor that it may have something to do with heat, as external drives are notorious for getting hot. However, a search on Google found this thread - <http://www.hardwareanalysis.com/content/topic/22061/?o=80> which goes back several years but has been updated as recently as Feb 10th. There is a commonality between all of the problems reported - ATI's video driver, but also various Windows Registry settings. The most recent post (Feb 10) reports a stable system after setting the Page File to "System Managed File", a minimum of 2MB, a recommended size of 1.5 RAM, "Adjust for best performance" set to "Background Services" instead of "Programs". There is a registry setting for LargeSystemCache which if set to 1 instead of 0 caused many systems to crash upon booting - some wouldn't even boot in safe mode. To recover from that required the use of a bootable environment such as Ultimate Boot CD (<http://www.ultimatebootcd.com/>) or

Bart's PE (<http://www.nu2.nu/pebuilder/>).

Q. I have a machine that is running Windows 98 SE which often reports "Illegal Operation" - the cursor follows the mouse, but I can't click on anything, start anything, shutdown properly, etc.

A. First, try to boot it in Safe Mode - after seeing the memory check, but before you see the Windows logo, press the F8 key to get a character-based screen that offers boot options. Select SAFE MODE. Safe Mode loads a very base-line machine with generic drivers - for example, it will come up with just a VGA rather than SVGA display. It will also take a long time to boot. Once in, try START / RUN / SFC.EXE (OK) to run the System File Checker. It will scan your machine, and if it finds a damaged file it will ask for the Windows CD to repair it. If that fails, then try starting in SAFE MODE WITH CD ROM SUPPORT. Re-run SETUP from the CD and see if it offers a repair install. In some cases, just booting into Safe Mode and then shutting down the computer will perform the fix as Safe Mode re-creates paging and cache files that may have been corrupted. Another thing to look at is what is being started when the machine boots - if you have an uninvited guest program (i.e. virus, spyware, etc.) it could be causing a problem. From Safe Mode, in START / RUN load the program MSCONFIG and examine the STARTUP items. Disable anything that is not immediately recognizable and then boot the machine. Upon restart you will be given a warning about selective startup - continue without re-booting again and see what happens. Some things (such as, say CD burner) may not work. Use Google to identify items that

you have disabled, and one-by-one re-enable them and boot after each item is re-enabled. Eventually you may find the guilty party.

Q. I live just over the state line in Verizon territory. My dial-up connection is very slow and full of static. I am running around 12kb throughput. What can be done?

A. The phone company normally only says that they will support 28kb throughput. You just have to keep complaining about static - eventually they will probably switch the pairs within the cable that are assigned to your circuit. A problem that I had years ago was in the line that came from the pole to the service box on the side of the house - it passed within a foot or so of a large tree branch and over time the wires within the line developed a crack from slapping against the tree when the wind was blowing. The service tech finally found the problem by looping a rope over the line and tugging on the rope. That created the static. He ran a new line via a different route (an intermediate pole that the power and cable company used) and the problem was cured. Note that all of this assumes that the problem is between the service box on the side of the house (or just inside) and the central office. For phone service installed within the last 20 years or so you will have a Network Interface Device (<http://www.homephonewiring.com/nid.html>) which you may plug a telephone into which lets you determine whether the problem is on the network side of your circuit or within your home wiring.

Q. I've seen a lot of references to Grisoft's AVG, especially their free edition. Is it any good?

A. As long as the signature files are kept absolutely up-to-date, there is little to differentiate the various anti-virus programs other than ease-of-use, interface, etc. Grisoft is a widely popular anti-virus package that has a no-frills free edition available for home use (<http://free.grisoft.com/doc/1>) Our resident anti-virus guru recommends F-Secure (<http://www.f-secure.com/>) and Kaspersky (<http://www.kaspersky.com/>). I have found that the 'big name' anti-virus companies whose products are

often pre-installed on machines are sorely lacking in support, and often bog the system down with so many additional features that the computer becomes unusable.

Q. I am looking into purchasing an LCD flat panel for computer usage. How do I read the manufacturer's specifications?

A. Unlike CRT-based displays which can change their scan rate etc., LCD flat-panel displays actually only have one real resolution available – this is known as the native resolution. Other resolutions are available via emulation in the video driver where the software simulates the resolution. Common native resolutions are: 14-15": 1024x768 (XGA) , 17-19": 1280x1024 (SXGA), 20"+: 1600x1200 (UXGA), 19" (Widescreen): 1440x900 (WXGA+), 20" (Widescreen): 1680x1050 (WSXGA+), 24" (Widescreen): 1920x1200 (WUXGA) , 30" (Widescreen): 2560x1600. The only way to see what works for you is to do an in-store evaluation. Note also that you may change some of the settings in Windows for such things as menu text size, icon size, etc.

Q. I got an e-mail warning me about a PowerPoint presentation/attachment named "Life Is Beautiful". Is there any truth to it?

A. This is one of many hoaxes. When ever I get one of these, the first thing I do is a Google search, including the word 'hoax'. So the search "LIFE BEAUTIFUL HOAX" brought up this page: <http://www.breakthechain.org/exclusives/lifevirus.html> . Another good site to visit is <http://hoaxbusters.ciac.org> which debunks many hoaxes as well as does a good job of telling you how to recognize them when they come in.

Q. I have acquired an old ThinkPad with a blank hard drive. I've installed Windows but it didn't recognize much of the hardware – network adapter, modem, video adapter etc. How do I identify the components within so that I can get the correct drivers?

A. For any machine made in the last 5 years (or more) the manufacturers will have a support web site that has

model-specific information. More often than not, if you go to the brand's site and look for SUPPORT and then DRIVERS you will be given the opportunity to enter the model number (or serial number) of the computer and be taken to a page which lists the components and their drivers. Usually there will be choice of drivers depending upon which operating system you are using. You will have to download the drivers and get them onto the target computer – perhaps via a CD, USB flash drive, etc. I usually address the network adapter first, as that lets me get other drivers directly. Hint: before you change any driver, create a system restore point – START / PROGRAMS / ACCESSORIES / SYSTEM RESTORE and select "Create a Restore Point". This way, if you happen to install the wrong driver you can roll back to where you were with ease.

Q. My Norton Internet Security 2005 won't automatically update, but does if I force a manual update. It keeps thinking that I have a dial-up connection where I actually have broadband. How do I fix this?

A. Norton makes use of what it thinks are the appropriate internet access settings. In the Windows Control Panel, go to Internet Options and then Connections. Make sure that you have

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DACS members may publish noncommercial, computer-related classified ads in *dacs.doc* at no charge. Ads may be placed electronically by fax or by modem, or hard-copy may be submitted at our monthly general meeting. Fax your ads to Charlie Bovaird at 203 792-7881.

Leave hard-copy classifieds with Charlie, Marc, or whoever is tending the members' table at the meeting.

"Never Dial a Connection" option selected which implies that you have a permanently available (i.e. broadband or via a LAN) connection.

BRUCE PRESTON is president of West Mountain Systems, a consultancy in Ridgefield, CT specializing in database applications. A DACS director, Bruce also leads the Access SIG. Members may send tech queries to Bruce at askdacs@dacs.org.



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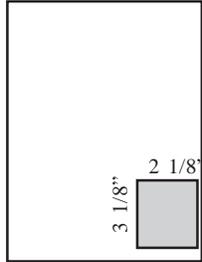
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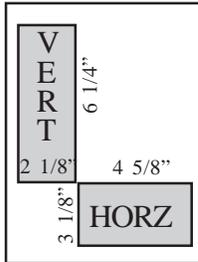
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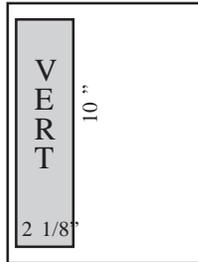
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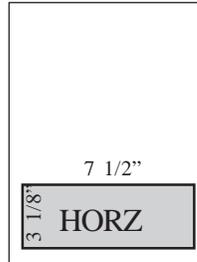
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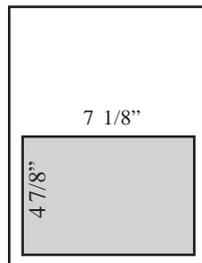
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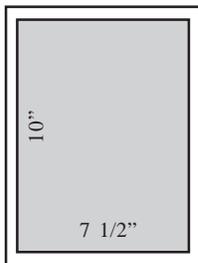
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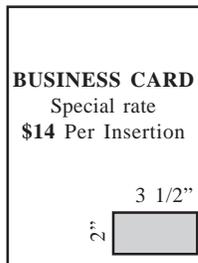
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We sponsor or participate in community support projects by collecting, repairing, and redistributing used computer equipment and software to community service providers such as schools, libraries, and patient/client support groups. DACS members provide pickup, refurbishing, installation, and training assistance as needed. Firms or individuals with equipment to donate should leave a message on the DACS Infoline (203-748-4330). or send an email to recycling@dacs.org.

The Voice for Joanie program was created in 1992 through the initiative of DACS member, Shirley Fredlund. This program provides computer-assisted speech for victims of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis ("Lou Gehrig's Disease"). DACS members have contributed volunteer time and technical assistance since the program began. Voice for Joanie and DACS have earned national computer industry recognition and financial assistance for this vital collaboration.

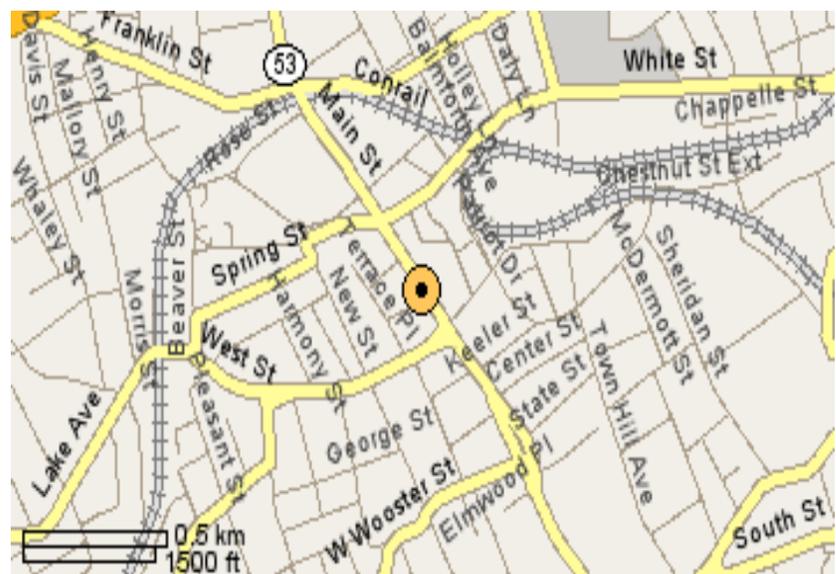
Our general meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month in the Danbury Hospital Auditorium at 7 p.m. These meetings are open to the public. The main presentation is scheduled from 8-9:30, preceded by casual networking, announcements and Random Access, an informal question and answer session. A free product raffle is often held at the conclusion of the main presentation.

In addition to the general meeting, DACS sponsors many special interest groups (SIGs) where members can learn and share information about a specific topic. Each SIG plans its own meeting schedule and program topics.

Our newsletter, *dacs.doc* is published monthly for our members, and mailed to arrive before the general meeting. It features articles written by members and others on timely topics including product and software reviews, issues and trends in personal computing and "how-to" articles on sound, video, digital photography, etc. In addition, each issues includes the calendar of meetings, announcements on SIGs and other DACS events. *dacs.doc* has won numerous prizes over the years for its design and content.

Through its activities, DACS offers numerous opportunities to network both professionals and computer hobbyists. Our Special Interest Groups are an excellent way for members to both learn and share application or hardware knowledge. Any DACS member can form a special interest group on any topic where there is interest. Most SIGs meet in our Resource Center in downtown Danbury.

If you have concerns, requests, or suggestions regarding DACS or its programs, please contact dacsprez@dacs.org. DACS officers and board members' phone numbers are listed on page 3 of *dacs.doc*.



The DACS Resource Center is in Ives Manor, Lower Level, 198 Main Street, Danbury, CT 06810 (203-748-4330).



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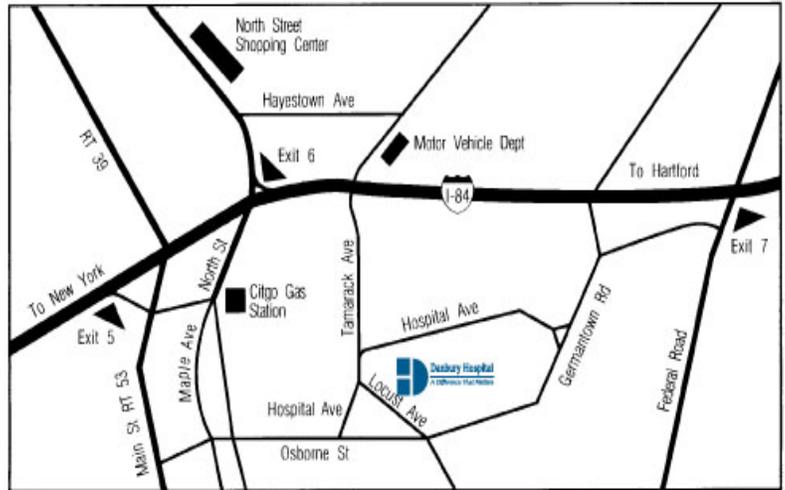
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