

NEXT MEETING, JULY 6: WITH PHOTOSHOP RAINBOWS ARE FOREVER



INSIDE:

NYPD GOES DIGITAL • PHOTOSHOP SECRETS • VOLUNTEERSPOT.ORG • FILM FEST
PHOTOS • SOLID STATE DRIVES • CATHEDRAL OF THE BAZAAR • PLUS, MORE SIG NEWS,
COMMENTARY, AND ANSWERS TO YOUR COMPUTING QUESTIONS

President's File



The Connecticut Film Festival Interactive was a great experience for DACS. In the space of a few weeks our group lined up items for a booth that looked spectacular! Thank you to all who volunteered time and efforts

for booth setup, lending and/or providing materials, staffing the table area, and assisting with the CT Film Fest organizers with their projects.

Given the venue of the CT Film Fest Interactive, we had a few requests regarding workshops for video editing and /or production and for game design and development. Please contact me if you are interested in the formation of these SIG/Workshop venues so the groups can be formed.

For those not aware, the 'Virtual Computing SIG' has been removed from the SIG lineup and rolled into the 'Server/Back Office SIG.' So, for those of you who still wish to get your 'virtual' fill then that is the new place to get it. This change was made largely because the topics we were moving into are more suited to Jim's group—it's just we're doing them with virtual machines. For the past couple of months we've been working on moving machines and using iSCSI SAN/NAS tools. All the software we've been using is free.

Is anyone interested in modifying and hacking (used in the creative sense, not malicious sense)? If you're some-

one who enjoys reading or doing things such as those found on

<http://www.make.com>,
<http://www.instructables.com>,
<http://www.hackedgadgets.com>,
 or similar sites, please let me know.

Last month I asked about people who 'work remotely.' Perhaps the wording was wrong. What we'd like to know is if there is interest in having the Resource Center open periodically throughout the month for folks who would like to telecommute from someplace other than home and would like to save time and gas from a 45+ minute commute to work.

That's it for now... have a few hours of sunshine to take advantage of! See you at the next meeting!

—Rob Limbaugh
dacsprez@dacs.org

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Be Informed by E-mail

Members who wish to receive DACS email messages who have not received an email notice for the General Meeting should send a request to be put on the DACS email list to: *treasurer@dacs.org*.

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Membership Information

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The editors welcome submissions from DACS members. Contact Patrick Libert at 860-567-9586 (dacseditor@dacs.org). Advertisers, contact Charles Bovaird at (203) 792-7881 (aam@mags.net).

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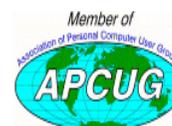
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Applications & Hardware to enhance *dacs.doc* are welcome.



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Directors' Notes

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APCUG LIAISON: Patrick Libert (plibert@dacs.org)

RESOURCE CENTER: (203) 748-4330 • **WEB SITE:** <http://www.dacs.org>

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

Program	Name	Phone #	
APL	Charles Bovaird	(203) 792-7881	(e)
ASP.Net	Chuck Fizer	(203) 798-9996	(d)
C#, VB	Chuck Fizer	(203) 798-9996	(d)
Electronics	Andrew Woodruff	(203) 798-2000	(d e)
Interface-Instrumentation	Andrew Woodruff	(203) 798-2000	(d e)
PhotoShop/Dreamweaver	Annette van Ommeren	(914) 232-0149	(e)
SAS	Lewis Westfall	(203) 790-0229	(e)
Statistics/Data Analysis	Charles Bovaird	(203) 792-7881	(d e)
SQL	Lewis Westfall	(203) 790-0229	(e)
SQL Server, MySQL-5	Chuck Fizer	(203) 798-9996	(d)
Malware	Jeff Setaro	(203) 748-6748	(d)
VB.Net, Visual Basic	Chuck Fizer	(203) 798-9996	(d)

A regular meeting of your Board of Directors was held at the Resource Center on Monday, June 8, 2009, at 7:00 p.m. Present were Charles Bovaird, Richard Corzo, Sean Henderson, Patrick Libert, Rob Limbaugh, Jim Scheef, and Joseph Tobin. Minutes of the last meeting held May 12, 2009, were presented and approved.

Treasurer Charles Bovaird reported current cash assets of \$6582.48, plus postage on hand in the amount of \$34.77 for a total of \$6617.25. Subtracting a liability of prepaid dues in the amount of \$359.00 left a net equity of \$6258.25. He also reported that the current membership is at 206, 188 with email.

Asset request update: Vista machine in Hospital Auditorium - Bruce Preston has worked out remote Vista VM for use (coordinated with Jim Scheef) across remote access.

General Meetings

The following persons have volunteered to write previews and/or reviews:

Program Previews: July (Sean), Aug (Rob), Sep (cancelled).

Program Reviews: June (Patrick), July (Patrick), Aug (open), Sept (cancelled)

The remaining 2009 meeting topics are: July – Photoshop Tips and Tricks (Lesa Snider King), Aug – Back to School/saving money on tech (DACS presenters), Sep – cancelled due to Labor Day conflict, October – Over clocking (Pete Basel), Nov - Medical Technology (coordinated through Allan), DEC - John Patrick.

There was a discussion of posting general meetings videos or portions of them to (YouTube) and whether or not this should be available to the public versus kept private. Rob has about one year of meetings already digitalized. No decision was made.

Paid advertisements were dropped from newsletter since the Ad rates do not cover the cost of the advertising space in the newsletter.

CT Film Festival Interactive

All agreed it was a success. We estimated that about 50 people came by the booth.

The process of setting up for this event has led to the availability of booth materi-

DIRECTORS' NOTES, Cont. on page 4

Meeting Preview

Lesa King: Simple Retouching Secrets for Photoshop CS4

by Sean N. Henderson

AS ATTENDEES AT THE recent Connecticut Film Festival Interactive in Danbury have experienced, our July presenter, Lesa King, really knows how to show us mere mortals how to take wonderful pictures.

As her website clearly states, Lesa is on a mission to teach the world to create and use better graphics. She is a stock photographer and chief evangelist for *iStockphoto*, founder of the creative tutorial site *Graphic Reporter.com*, author of "Photoshop: The Missing Manual" (O'Reilly, 2008), "Graphic Secrets for Business Professionals" (*Lynda.com*, 2007), "From Photo to Graphic Art", and "Practical Photoshop Elements" (*KelbyTraining.com*, 2008). Her latest offering is "Photoshop CS4: The Missing Manual" (O'Reilly, 2009) and she is excited to give DACS members and visitors some insight on getting the most of this powerful software.

Lesa writes regularly for *Macworld Magazine*, the *National Association of Photoshop Professionals*, *Elements Techniques*, and *Layers Magazine*. She is a corporate trainer and teaches at many indus-



try conferences including *Photoshop World*, *Macworld Expo*, *Mac Mania Geek Cruises*, and the esteemed *Santa Fe Workshops*.

This would be a great time to invite your friends, colleagues, and neighbors, and join us **Monday, July 6, 2009**, for this upcoming general meeting.

DACS meetings are held at the Danbury Hospital auditorium. (*Click here for directions.*) Activities begin at 6:30 p.m. with registration and casual networking. The meeting starts at 7:00 p.m. with our regular features. The main

presentation begins approximately at 8:00 p.m. The meeting is scheduled to adjourn at 9:30.

DACS General Meetings are free and open to the public. Members and prior attendees are encouraged to extend invitations to anyone interested in photography, digital media and digital arts.

Danbury Area Computer Society (DACS) is a registered nonprofit and has been serving the region since 1990. Members receive an award-winning newsletter, members-only workshops and events, and access to volunteer phone support.

DIRECTORS' NOTES, Cont. from page 3
als, a suggested 'booth kit' for future public events. We now have an excellent flyer, Posters.

There have been requests for a video production and game development SIG from multiple people (about 3-4 each). We made contact with the Danbury Inventors group, and the author of *Blender for Dummies* is willing to come up from NC for a future General Meeting presentation.

Corporate Casuals (Corporatecasuals.com), from whom we ordered custom decorated polo shirts for the Film Festival staff, has made their digital stitch files of the DACS logo available. They can be downloaded and used by another vendor for embroidery purposes.

Resource Center availability for member

All DACS members have access to use the Resource Center - SIG leaders, officers and members. Cost associated is wear and tear on projector (ex. Bulb replacement). The discussion was as to whether or not we would allow members to host non-DACS related meetings in the RC. This could lead to liability exposure to DACS and should be decided on an individual basis. The motion was made and approved that Jim Scheef can use the RC for a meeting of his other club and he should enter the meeting date on the DACS calendar.

—Mary Tobin, Secretary

Meeting Review

NYPD - Where Technology Can Mean Life or Death!

by Patrick Libert

JIM ONALFO HERALDED the opening of his presentation with a short but impressive video on the New York Police Department. It is obvious that Jim is very proud of having been chosen at the NYPD's Chief Information Officer in 2003.

Jim accepted the responsibilities under the condition that he report directly to Commissioner Kelly in order to be as effective as possible in reorganizing how information was disseminated and used in the department. Meeting some resistance from the bureau-

cracy on his first day, he quit until his conditions were accepted.

Jim's mission was to build and integrate the Real Time Crime Center (RTCC) into the NYPD. The goal of this center was to gather all the available information about crimes and criminals into a database that would be available to every officer on the force at a moment's notice. This reduces the use of paper reports and allows the entire force to have all the information it needs to solve a crime. Previously, this information was often available but in indi-



vidual precincts and not necessarily shared with all the force.

Jim used several examples of recent cases where the use of this technology led to the apprehension of the perpetrator(s) in record time. Whereas in the past fingerprint information was faxed between the Albany database and the NYPD, Jim's efforts made this an immediate transfer of information. This is crucial because NY State laws demand that the perpetrator be indicted within 24 hours of arrest or else he must be released.

In addition to the successful creation of the RTCC, Jim is also involved in the modernization of the NYPD communications system.

Jim's presentation was excellent. It presented a perfect example of how IT is a vital cog in the wheel of our everyday life.

PATRICK LIBERT is editor of *dacs.doc*.

Commentary

SIGNIFICANT BITS - July 2009

by Sean N. Henderson

I'VE BEEN WORKING with UNIX/Linux now since 1998, and have a good grasp of the applications available for that platform. When surveying audio/sequencing software for Linux, sometimes I'd see Blender in the application list. Mousing over it indicated it was a 3D modeling program. OK - I'm not really into making animations (I have enough projects), so I moved on to searching for a good MIDI sequencer. I have few "modeling" experiences. One was some failed attempts at learning TurboCAD 4x. During this past year or two I stumbled across Google's SketchUp. I made a couple of 3D models for some small projects, and thought SketchUp was nifty and sort of left it at that. My last SketchUp use, incidentally, was a quick model of the *DACS.org* booth for the Connecticut Film Festival where I was trying to visualize our table setup with our projector, screens, easels, banner, and so on.

Now it's 2009 and I was fortunate to attend the Connecticut Film Festival (CTFF) and take in a couple of events. One event was a Blender demonstration by Jason Van Gumster. Jason recently authored "Blender for Dummies". His presentation was exciting, upbeat and very enthusiastic - it is obvious he loves working in animation and he is a bit of an animated character himself. Read more about this event and Jason himself at <http://tinyurl.com/cfawb2009>. His company is Hand Turkey Studios.

To briefly summarize Blender is to say that it is a model open-source project (pun intended). My interest in Blender isn't so much about needing to do animations myself, but more about how the Blender Foundation and the Blender user base came together to improve Blender, and to support it. The Blender community seems self contained and not necessarily concerned about how "Hollywood" perceives it. The Blender Foundation website is www.blender.org, and its history is worth reading. For example, when promoting Blender, one take was not to focus on the program itself, but to do a major project with Blender. The result was the first open source movie, *Elephant Dream*. Not only is the movie freely available, but so are the tools and source used to make it. From an organizational point of view, the

fundraising for this project was a spectacular show of support from the Blender community.

So what's the buzz about Blender? Well, first it is multi-platform and uses OpenGL - a standard graphics code library that is cross-language and cross-platform. The interface is structured in OpenGL such that all the fonts, buttons and such can be "zoomed" in a way that it'll work on any display, not just any platform. The other nice feature is that menus are depreciated somewhat in favor of hot keys or key commands. These hot keys are strategically placed to distribute the work between the hands and fingers to reduce fatigue. I was fascinated by this during Jason's explanation. To my mind, it seems that all new software was about menu-diving and ribbon rummaging. In fact, the controls and keyboard based focus kind of reminded me a bit of Ableton Live, a digital audio workstation. Jason also mentioned SIGGRAPH, which was a graphics SIG that eclipsed its host organization and another organization. All of this was of interest to me, more so than the actual animations produced or the idea of using Blender myself.

So what would be the other titles to compare with Blender? Wikipedia lists Cinema4D, Lightwave, Sketchup Pro and Maya, to name a few. I had heard of Lightwave from when I was using an Amiga 2000 and doing music production using a MIDI sequencer by the name of "Music-X". Lightwave is a NewTek product, and first appeared around 1990 for the Commodore Amiga. It is worth noting that some of these titles go for thousands of dollars. Then there are the high-high end systems used by the likes of Pixar and similar.

The *DACS.org* President, Rob Limbaugh, attended Jason's panel as well, and we both left that event very excited about the idea of DACS putting together a Blender/animation related event or meeting. Look for more animation-related offerings from DACS later this year.

Sean N. Henderson is a DACS MEMBER AND FREQUENT CONTRIBUTOR TO *DACS.DOC*.

This is Your Last Newsletter

If the membership date on your mailing label reads

**EXP 4/3/2009
or earlier**

You need to renew your DACS membership

NOW

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Hastily organized, America's first immigration authorities use remote sensing technology to sniff out hidden weapons.

Website Review

VolunteerSpot.org

by Sean N. Henderson

VARIOUS TYPES OF group software (groupware) have been around for a long time. In my opinion, Yahoo! Groups (formerly eGroups) is still the best, or at least the benchmark, of this type of software. Yahoo! Groups provides a Calendar, Database (non-linked csv tables, really), File section, Polls, Links, besides being a list server suitable for an email forum or newsletter.

With all that Yahoo! Groups does, I've found it does not perform scheduling of people very well. There are workarounds, of course, but wouldn't it be refreshing if it did this better?

SITUATION

So, I had a group of volunteers for the DACS booth for a multi-day event. (The Interactive portion of the Connecticut Film Festival.) The final list of volunteers was not known. Some did not want to use Yahoo! Groups. Some did not give me their availability for this multi-day event or even their names. I needed something different from Yahoo! Groups or a personal spreadsheet to organize this volunteer situation. Most importantly, I didn't want to be the bottleneck for managing this since I was busy with other projects.

I saw the listing for VolunteerSpot on a TechSoup email. I read the description, then went to www.volunteerspot.org to learn a bit more. They had a nice video demonstration of their software and I was impressed enough to try it.

USING VOLUNTEER SPOT

VolunteerSpot is really very, very simple to use. The organizer creates an "Activity" by picking a day in the calendar. After that, Tasks are added and are one of two types - something to bring or something to do. "Bring" items can have a time assigned or not. Add some more "Bring" or "Do" items and then your "Day" is done. If the "Activity" is a multi-day event, then the entire "Day" setup can be copied using their calendar app - brilliant! When the "Activity" setup is done, then it prompts for an email invite list (think eVite) to send the URL to this "Activity". Time to get coffee and relax...

Between this first invitation email sent out to the volunteer list and the event, the organizer can choose to post the URL anywhere they like, or even use VolunteerSpot to send to additional volunteers. When a volunteer clicks the link, and decides to volunteer for a "Bring" item or "Do" item, they are required to enter their full name and phone before VolunteerSpot will accept them as a volunteer. If the organizer assigns a volunteer within VolunteerSpot, the same applies.

VolunteerSpot sends reminders two days before the event. If assignment changes are made, only the affected volunteers get an email and for multiple changes VolunteerSpot is smart enough to collapse them all into one email per recipient. Nice! The organizer can download the daily assignments and volunteer roster, and even get a CSV file download of the whole daily assignment. I particularly liked that feature and wish more websites would pick up on that sort of functionality. I was able to forward the spreadsheet to the person handling the passes at the venue and that-was-that. I didn't even have to read and/or open it.

LIMITATIONS

As nice as VolunteerSpot is, it is not without limitations. There can be only one organizer. After the initial setup of an "Activity", changes to that activity get "noisy" as far as email frequency goes, since setup changes go to everyone, it seems. There is no way to stop or aggregate assignment change emails to multiple days. The reminder email lead time is fixed. There is no way to email the volunteer list other than by invite, so it is not for use as a list server - that you'll still have to manage elsewhere. At DACS.org, our ISP's spam/UCE filter incorrectly listed VolunteerSpot on its blacklist so there was a bit of hassle navigating that situation. For that reason, like any application/software/website of this type, test it first and take any hiccups as a sign that it likely is not usable for your purpose. Lastly, the website uses some flashy screen overlays versus popups, so a modern browser is necessary. The website style

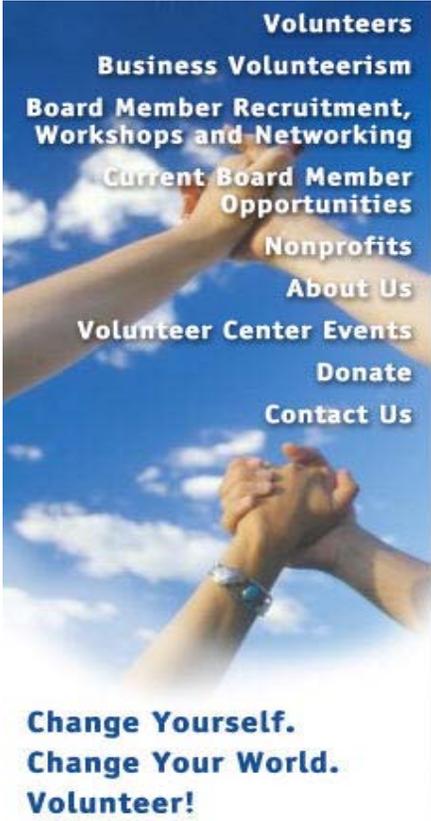
is also very tall and makes poor use of screen space, so I found it hard to navigate on my laptop's 15.x inch display. Lastly, all the emails generated by VolunteerSpot are HTML and cannot be toggled.

WHO AND WHY

Within an organization, and if it is using Outlook/Exchange, then VolunteerSpot does not offer anything new or better. Where VolunteerSpot shines is where volunteers are from both within and outside an organization. So, this even is better than Yahoo! Groups and similar groupware. Even if Yahoo! Groups had scheduling, it would depend on the volunteers being a member of the Yahoo! Group where for VolunteerSpot, while registering (name and/or phone) is required, group membership is not.

In DACS.org's case, while we are finalizing our CMS/CRM back end system, VolunteerSpot became a great lightweight solution for scheduling a volunteer activity such as this, and saved me some time and effort. I would use it again.

Sean N. Henderson is a DACS MEMBER AND FREQUENT CONTRIBUTOR TO *DACS.DOC*.



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DACS goes to the



Special Interest Groups

SIG NOTES: July 2009

ASP.Net. Focuses on Web site/server application development using Microsoft Visual Studio, C#, VB, Javascript and SQL Server programming tools. Starts with Random Access, 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: July 1

Digital Imaging. 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: July 29

Jobs. Networking and jobs search

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: Drew Kwashnak 203-910-6477 (Cell)

Meets 3rd Wednesday, 7:30 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.

Next Meeting: July 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: August 6

Open Source Web Programming. Focuses on open source tools for Windows and Linux.

Contact: John Lansdale, 914-533-2002.

Meets 3rd Monday, 7 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.

Next Meeting: On hiatus

PC Maintenance. Review of PC hardware and OpSys maintenance and use.

Contact: Charles Bovaird, 203-792-7881 aam@mags.net.

Meets irregularly, at the DACS Resource Center, announced by e-mail.

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: July 9

Tech Projects. This SIG Will work on DACS "Online Community projects as well as other areas from practical application solutions, to brainstorming and to tweaking Commercial products. All skill levels and backgrounds are welcome. The goal is to mix, match and customize technology to fit our needs.

Meets 1st Wednesday, 7 p.m. at the DACS resource center.

Contact: Rob Limbaugh at (203)648-9176, reimbaugh@dacs.org

Next meeting: Cancelled

VB.Net.. 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 Greg Austin, 845 494-5095 greg.austin@ryebrookpba.org.

Meets 1st Wednesday, 7 p.m., at the DACS Resource Center, preceded 1 hour with a shared cost pizza snack.

Next Meeting: July 1

Virtual Computing. This SIG will explore virtual computing technologies and how to leverage them as additional system resources. Our main focus will be on the free VMWare products, but we will also look at other technologies and tools.

Meets 4th Tuesday, 7 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center

Contact: Rob Limbaugh reimbaugh@dacs.org, 203 648-9176

Next Meeting: Combined with Server SIG, On hiatus.

Web Design. Applications for designing and creating Web sites.

Contact: Annette van Ommeren avanommeren@dacs.org.

Meets 3rd Tuesday, 7-9 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.

Next Meeting: July 21

Windows. This SIG will discuss ways to get the most out of your system and applications, how to do new things, and other options in terms of hardware and software to help make life easier. All skill levels are welcomed and encouraged to attend

Contact: Rob Limbaugh reimbaugh@dacs.org, (203)648-9176

Next Meeting: On hiatus

SIG News & Events

ASP.Net & C#VB.Net. Out of the randomness of static comes a signal to inquire how Microsoft has framed us. So many frameworks have been released that dotNET fans are spaced out on which ones can be used for development.

Bruce Preston and the rest of us were illuminated by Chuck, who told us that progress has been made through .Net 1.0, 1.1, 2.0,3.0, and 3.5, the current version. On the horizon is version 4.0. Programs know which to use.

A second question arose as to uploading of very large video files. At Catalyst.com they have answers, as Bruce indicated. That firm is now offering a 50% discount on their prod-

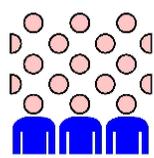
ucts for new subscribers. Socket Tools is a recommended product from that source.

Time waits for no man but Chuck provided a morsel of Java Script to sink our teeth into. We take the measure of our days, months, and years with his application for a calendar that will demonstrate the use of Java Script. Not to worry! Chuck takes a clear signal from ISO 8601 that the first Thursday of a year marks the first week of a year. With a namespace of CalServerControl we have a morsel that is digestible if we chew it well.

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July 2009

Danbury Area Computer Society

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																																										
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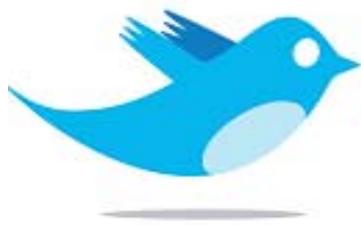
Communication Tools

Twitter – What You Are Doing Right Now?

by Ira Wilsker

SEVERAL OF THE READERS of this column asked me, “What is Twitter?” following the media reports that senators and congress people were “Twittering” during recent presidential speeches. Twitter (the internet service and the person who does the posting) and Twittering or Tweeting (the posting of personal activities on Twitter) has become one of the most popular ways of communicating one’s activities so that others can follow what is going on in the life of a Twitter. The service is self-described as, “Twitter is a service for friends, family, and co-workers to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, fre-

quent answers to one simple question: What are you doing?” for a free account. The signup process was very fast and easy, only asking for me to create my user name, create a secure password, and entering my email



address. After creating my account, I was given the opportunity to upload a photo of myself for display to anyone that views my Twitter page, and allow me to customize my page to control the way others view it. I entered my first short

message that I was using Twitter, and it appeared on my now personalized webpage. Since messages and other postings are intended to appear as text messages on cell phones as well as on a webpage, individual postings are limited

to 140 characters, the maximum length of a text message (SMS) allowed on most cell phone systems. As I was typing this column, I posted a Twitter (message) that I was typing this column; if anyone is following my activities at this instant, he would receive this news as a text message on his cell phone, as an RSS feed on his computer, and email, or by simply viewing my Twitter webpage. On my view of my webpage is a text box where I can type my current activity, as long as I keep it under 140 characters, as shown by the counter adjacent to the text box. Postings can be made or received by computer, cell phone text message, BlackBerry, or other communications device. Postings can also be received on any newsreader that uses the RSS format news feed.

Twitter makes it very easy to find friends who also Twitter. By clicking on the “Find People” icon, a window is opened that says “Find people. Follow them”. To locate friends on Twitter, I chose to allow Twitter to access my email address book to determine if any of my current correspondents are on Twitter. Twitter can access (but only with your express permission) address books on Yahoo, Gmail, AOL, Hotmail, and MSN. It will quickly scan the online address book, and match any email addresses in the address book against the millions al-

ready in the Twitter database. Twitter states that it does not save the email addresses and passwords, and does not send out emails to those located without express permission to do so. I also used the “Find on Twitter” feature to enter my last name to see if any of my relatives are on Twitter, and add them to my friends list. Just as a lark, I entered the names of some of our elected officials, and found



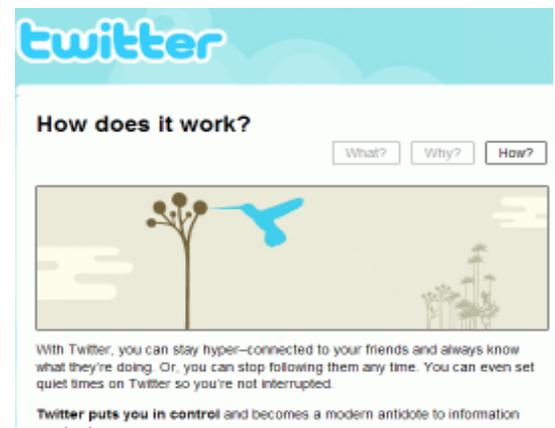
that several of them do have Twitter accounts. If I want to invite friends by personal email, I can enter their email addresses in the “Invite by Email” box, and Twitter will send them an invitation.

If I want to add celebrities to my friend’s list, I can click on “Suggested Uses”, and a list of celebrities who Twitter will be displayed. By checking the box adjacent to their names, we can exchange Twitter posts and monitor each others’ activities. Some of the more interesting celebrities and online services that can be added to anyone’s Twitter friends list are the Jodrell Bank observatory, the Dell Outlet Store, JetBlue Airways Customer Service (monitors Twitter 24/7), the New York Times, 10 Downing Street (the official residence of the British Prime Minister), rapper M. C. Hammer, CNN Breaking



quent answers to one simple question: What are you doing?” According to some of the national media quoted by Twitter.com, “The New York Times calls Twitter “one of the fastest-growing phenomena on the Internet.” TIME Magazine says, “Twitter is on its way to becoming the next killer app,” and Newsweek noted that “Suddenly, it seems as though all the world’s a-twitter.” One may wonder why a Twitter user would post his daily activities as they occur; Twitter explains it this way, “Why? Because even basic updates are meaningful to family members, friends, or colleagues—especially when they’re timely.”

Just to experience the life of a Twitter, I went to www.twitter.com and signed up





and news outlets listed post breaking news or special deals to their Twitter friends. One that I added, being the nascent bargain shopper, is *Woot.com*, which posts one deeply discounted bargain each day in each of its merchandise categories.

Twitter, the company, is headquartered in San Francisco, and was founded in 2006. It is a small company, with only a few dozen employees, but has millions of members. It has a marketing model to generate revenue, but the revenue model has not yet been implemented, leaving all of the posts and web pages currently free of advertising.

I am not sure how much I will be using Twitter on a regular basis by posting my personal activities and short commentaries, but I will check my page occasionally just to see who is following my activities. The main purpose of Twitter is to answer the question, "What are you doing?" For those who want others to be able to know the answer in real time, they can do so with Twitter.

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WEBSITES:

<http://www.twitter.com>

Why use Twitter?

What? Why? How?



Why? Because even basic updates are meaningful to family members, friends, or colleagues—especially when they're timely.

- **Eating soup?** Research shows that moms want to know.
- **Running late to a meeting?** Your co-workers might find that useful.
- **Partying?** Your friends may want to join you.

News, Al Gore, John McCain, Whole Foods Market (Fresh organic tweets from Whole Foods Market HQ in Austin), Lance Armstrong, Britney Spears (Yes! This is the real Britney Spears!), George Stephanopoulos (ABC News Chief Washington Correspondent and Host of "This Week"), Women's Wear Daily, the Nightline TV news show, Martha Stewart, comedian and magician Penn Jillette, rapper 50 cent, and many more. The business

Hardware

Solid state drives set to replace hard drives

By Dick Maybach

"... because SSDs have no moving parts, they are smaller, lighter, quieter, more rugged, and consume less power than disks."

COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY is continually evolving. Just in the last few years we have seen diskettes replaced by DVDs and memory sticks, and CRT monitors replaced by LCDs. The next victim of progress is probably the hard disk drive, which is fast becoming eclipsed by solid state drives (SSDs). They are already widely available, primarily in the form of Secure Digital (SD) cards, which are currently used in laptops, digital cameras, and other portable consumer products. As in the past, the new technology is more expensive than the one it will replace, but this is changing fast.

Current SSDs are based on flash memory, which retains data without being powered. However, they also have a small amount of dynamic random access memory (DRAM) that acts as a cache. DRAM is faster than flash memory, and its role is to exchange blocks of data quickly between the computer and the SSD to avoid tying

up the central processor. As a result, the SSD also contains a capacitor that stores electricity long enough to move data from the cache to flash memory if the power fails suddenly.

Although SSDs currently have slower data transfer rates than rotating disks, they have faster seek times (the time required to reach the desired data). This is because data stored on the surface of a disk is not available until the head moves to the proper track and the disk rotates to move the data under the head. As a result, file fragmentation has very little effect on SSD performance. In addition, because SSDs have no moving parts, they are smaller, lighter, quieter, more rugged, and consume less power than disks.

Shorter life spans

However, current SSDs have shorter lifetimes than disks; typically an SSD byte becomes unreliable after it experiences roughly 10,000 to 100,000 write cycles. Manufacturers are beginning to include wear leveling in consumer SSDs, which insures that every byte experiences the same number of writes. Without this feature, the

area used to store temporary files, for example, would fail long before the rest of the device. Finally, although SSD access and read data are very quick, they have much slower writing rates than do disks.

Obviously, your first defense is the same as with disks—follow a good backup routine. (My netbook has a 40-gbyte SSD, and I back up my user data daily to a 16-gbyte SD card. The SD card experiences one write cycle per day, and a 10,000-to-100,000-cycle life means it will last from 27 to 270 years.) You can also take some simple steps to prolong the life of your SSD by reducing the number of writes it experiences, which, because writing is slow, will also speed up your computer. For example, install enough RAM so that you don't need swap space, and then turn off RAM swapping. (This is why my netbook has 2 Gbytes of RAM.)

Disable file indexing, which generates auxiliary files to make searches faster. If your operating system permits, create a RAMdisk and move temporary storage folders to it. (A RAMdisk is an area of RAM that looks like a disk drive. Because RAM is cleared when you turn off the power, a RAMdisk is practical only if your operating system can create it and the temporary folders automatically at boot time.) This will also speed up operations involving these temporary files, as RAMdisk is very fast.

Solid State, Cont. on page 15

Circuit Writer Version 6.11

by Jim Scheef

Firefox and Windows .NET Framework 3.5

A VERY ALERT NEW MEMBER tipped me off about a story regarding how Microsoft, using Windows Update, had installed a Firefox extension without telling anyone. And to add intrigue, the add-on cannot be removed! My initial reaction was that this rumor might not be true and could be point me to the source of this dastardly rumor. So where was his source? What it SlashDot? What about Geek.com? Maybe eWeek Rumor Central with Spenser F. Katt? No! It turned out that his source was an article in that bastion of technological news and rumor, *The Washington Post*! As he was describing this little piece of software, I opened the Add-ons dialog in Firefox on my laptop to see if this “Trojan” existed on my computer, and there it was, grayed out Uninstall button and all! Naturally this applies only to Windows XP, Vista and Server 2003 and 2008. Don’t bother looking if you run Firefox on Linux or a Mac.

The Washington Post article turns out to be a blog by Brian Krebs called Security Fix; the May 29 post (tinyurl.com/nmb32n) is entitled “Microsoft Update Quietly Installs Firefox Extension.” In it, Krebs just as quietly describes the “component” called the Microsoft .NET Framework Assistant 1.0. The controversy comes from the fact that Microsoft slipped this into a non-Microsoft product as part of a “critical update” with no fanfare and using typical Microsoft logic, set it up so that the Uninstall button is inactive.

So what, exactly, is this mysterious bit of code? For that we turn to the Microsoft Knowledgebase and article KB963707 which describes an update to the original component. The add-on makes Firefox compatible with websites that use the .NET Framework 3.5 and a “ClickOnce” feature in that version of the Framework. If the add-on is not found in your Firefox, it is because you have not installed the service pack for version 3.5 of the .NET Framework. “ClickOnce” is one of those insidious Internet Explorer vulnerabilities that can be used by a website to install software on your computer.

If you do find the add-on on your computer and your reaction is “how dare

they!” let me assure you that you invited Microsoft to install the component when you installed the .NET 3.5 Framework. In the end user license agreements for the Framework, Windows Update, and truly diabolical Microsoft Genuine Advantage, you authorized Microsoft, in its infinite wisdom, to install updates without your permission. Since all versions of the .NET Framework are optional, Microsoft’s case is pretty strong. Also the descriptions for an individual patch in Windows Update are very brief. Even the most critical updates point to a Knowledge base article that has more information. I even looked in the SP1 readme and still found no mention of Firefox. If your blood is still near the boiling point, look at Brad Abrams’ MSDN blog (tinyurl.com/aqm419) for an explanation, such as it is, for why the uninstall button is grayed out.

Since many of us originally adopted Firefox as a way to avoid Microsoft-related vulnerabilities, how do we remove this affront to our sensibilities? The Washington Post blog references an article on the Annoyances.org (annoyances.org) website with instructions on how to remove the add-on (annoyances.org/exec/show/article08-600) by modifying the registry. If you would rather not go mucking in the registry, you will be surprised and pleased to learn that Microsoft has issued a fix for the fix that caused all this controversy. That’s what the Knowledgebase article mentioned above (tinyurl.com/lzd8ss) is all about. Read the KB article as the add-on must be enabled when this new patch is installed. There are versions for both 32- and 64-bit Windows; so download the appropriate “bitness” and run the install. You will note there is never a mention of Firefox even though that is the purpose of the fix. When you restart Firefox, the uninstall button will be enabled.

For now, the mere fact that I can, if I want, click that uninstall button is enough for me. I have the add-on enabled and have checked an option to ‘Prompt before running ClickOnce applications’. This way I’ll know if I ever come across such an application even if it means that I must click twice. Whew! Potential disaster

averted! Plus, my add-on is now version 1.1, so how cool is that?

Did They Lie to Us? Are they still?

Since I am so late in completing my column for this month, I’ll jump on an article on page 1 of today’s New York Times about “E-Mail Surveillance Renews Concerns in Congress” (tinyurl.com/19t8rc). This, plus an article from Wired Magazine, “FBI Use of Patriot Act Authority Increased Dramatically in 2008” (tinyurl.com/owom7r), should be enough to remind us that a slow economy will not slow down the FBI or the NSA as they stomp on our civil liberties. The article on email surveillance is about NSA programs that apparently are still secret while the Wired article is about the FBI’s increasing use of “national security letters” that bypass the FISA court. When you see this, it is not surprising that the FBI’s use of FISA warrants was down last year. Please read these articles and then remind your Congress people that you want the truth about domestic surveillance. Before moving on I’ll point out a related, but more political story about Judge Sotomayor (tinyurl.com/nokcyr) and her possible leanings on this issue.

Another note on page 1 of today’s NYT touches another aspect of government control of the Internet. Iran places more limits on what its citizens can find on the Internet than any other country – even more than China. Of course there’s North Korea where no one has a telephone, let alone a computer so Internet control is less of an issue. Over the last few days, the U.S. State Department asked Twitter to delay scheduled maintenance (tinyurl.com/nzfs7f) of their world network. The downtime would have come at a critical time following the Iranian elections and text messaging is a major means of political communication in Iran. The State Department request shows the level of tech savvy in the current administration and how something as modern as social networking can affect a country so deeply mired in the ancient and so resistant to change.

China Wants All PCs to Have an Internet Filter

Now we’re talking real control here. China announced last week (tinyurl.com/nxmc4v) that it would require all PCs sold in that country after July 1 to have a program similar to the filters used in some schools and public libraries. The official line is that the filter is to stop “unhealthy and vulgar” content such as pornogra-

phy. Called Green Dam-Youth Escort, the software could allow the government to record and log every Internet search and every website visited and because it is installed on the local machine, it could report if the user tried to bypass government Internet limitations by using a proxy site. Such proxies have been used by people all over the world to achieve anonymity on the Internet – for good and bad. (See the Wikipedia article en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proxy_server for more information.) Criticism of China's edict both in and out of the country may have had some effect as there are now reports that China has said that use of the software would be optional and need not be pre-installed. We'll see...

Less Doom and Gloom

If this column has you in new depths of depression, we will end this month with Microsoft Bing. Will Bing be the Microsoft Bob of search engines? Bing is billed as a "decision engine." What does that mean? How is Bing different from the old Microsoft search engine, Live Search? All I can see so far is that Bing is very economical with colors. When using Bing in Firefox, the initial screen is multi-tone gray with small orange hilites. Microsoft must have spent thousands on focus groups to come up with that. Using IE6 the initial screen shows a picture with little hot spots that display hints about the picture when you roll the mouse over. I don't have the energy at the moment to try Bing in Google Chrome. If you try it, let me know what you get. So far, a few sample searches seem to return the same results as Yahoo. Bing has a Wikipedia page, although I cannot fathom how it passes the relevance test.



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carry your
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The
Management

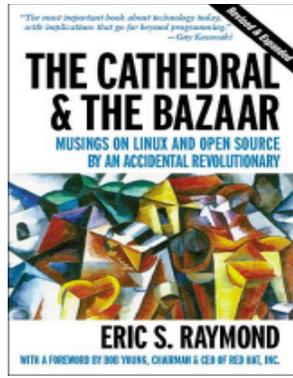
Book Review

"The Cathedral & the Bazaar"

Reviewed by Sean Henderson

"The Cathedral & the Bazaar" by Eric S. Raymond. O'Reilly Media, 1999

ABOUT TEN YEARS AGO A very inspiring book was published by a famed hacker by the name of Eric S. Raymond. The title is "The Cathedral and the Bazaar" published in 1999. Raymond was the author of a program in UNIX called fetchmail and this book is based on an essay he presented at a Linux event. I came across this volume in the bookshelf where I work. The title was cited in the documentary "Revolution OS". Now having read the book I can see where much of the book and documentary dovetail.



Raymond's book has some not-so-obvious aspects to it. One is that it is a bit of a theoretical primer on economics and resource management theory. Before reading the book I didn't know the terms "hierarchy culture", "exchange culture" and "gift culture". Now being aware of these terms and definitions, I look at open-source software in a more informed way. For the past couple months I've been concerned at work that I was the only developer on a commercial application with

thousands of users. After reading this book it has confirmed my notion that developing in isolation is not the most advantageous way to develop any application, regardless of whether the source files are released or not. The implications for development of any complex system are apparent.

One of the book's nuggets is a quote from Linus Torvalds that "given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow." Other great information is provided on the nature of hacking, the term "hacker" and how it is abused in media, and the origins of the whole free software movement and various other distinctions. It also explains to non-programmers and business types why programmers would contribute code and improvements to a project on a volunteer basis.

I highly recommend this book to anyone involved in any sort of software development or if you are managing a software project. It is a useful book also for filling in some technology history gaps, and perhaps (re)learn some key concepts.

—Sean N Henderson
DACS.org Member



Do the DACS General Meetings leave you thirsting for more? Find all that plus food for thought at the meeting after the meeting—the DACS PIG SIG.

Ask DACS

June 2009

by Jim Scheef

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.doc* and on *dacs.org*. Please provide as much information as possible, since we can't probe during the session.

We had two email questions this month, but the member was at the meeting and asked the questions from the floor.

Q – I know it just came out, but has anyone installed Vista SP2 yet? If so, what's the verdict? Any problems with it?

A – Very few members at the meeting had tried SP2, so I installed it the next day on the Vista installation I have running in a virtual machine. As recommended at the meeting, I downloaded the ISO of the installation CD from Microsoft at tinyurl.com/5e6mae. The same CD covers Windows Server 2008 as well as Vista and in both 32 and 64-bit versions. Rather than burn it to a CD-R, I mounted the ISO as a virtual CD drive. The install starts similar past service packs except for the warning that the system may reboot more than once. My dedication to DACS ends when it involves watching a service pack install, so I watched long enough to be sure it was doing something and then went to do other things. When I returned several hours later, the system was showing the login screen. After logging in, I ran Windows Update to see what patches might still await. There were none, so I ran the Disk Defragmenter several times and declared success. The only caveat is that my case is somewhat unique. My installation, on a virtual machine, is virtually (sic) new – no applications installed and no time surfing the web where it might pick up nefarious code trying to do me dirt. I had not even applied all the post SP1 updates from Windows Update before applying SP2. Even so, I expect most people will experience no trouble installing SP2. Only time will tell if there are problems waiting to show up after SP2.

Q – For my next PC, I want to equip it with more than 4GB of RAM. But

that, of course, will require a 64-bit version of Windows to take advantage of the increased memory. I know the pluses with a 64-bit OS. What are the downsides? Will I run into compatibility problems with certain software or hardware?

A – An informal survey of the audience found less than ten raised hands indicating they were running the 64-bit version of Windows Vista. The reality is that many more people may be running Vista64 without realizing it. Most new computers are sold with the 64-bit version of Vista pre-installed. No one in the audience indicated application software problems, but one or two people mentioned that the drivers for their older printers did not work on Vista64. Hardware device drivers is an area where “bit-ness” is important and older hardware like scanners and printers may not work. Hardware manufacturers have no motivation to provide new drivers for out of date models when the alternative is for you to buy a new one. One person reported that “bit-ness” can cause problems with printers shared over a network. A printer installed and shared on 64-bit Windows would not work from a machine running 32-bit Windows, even though that machine had the correct 32-bit drivers installed for the same printer. So it pays to do a survey of your existing hardware and the device drivers available for those devices before introducing Vista64 to your Network Neighborhood.

Q – I switched to DSL from Charter Cable and I now want to remove the Charter Security Suite software. When I run the uninstall and reboot, the software reinstalls itself. How can I remove this software?

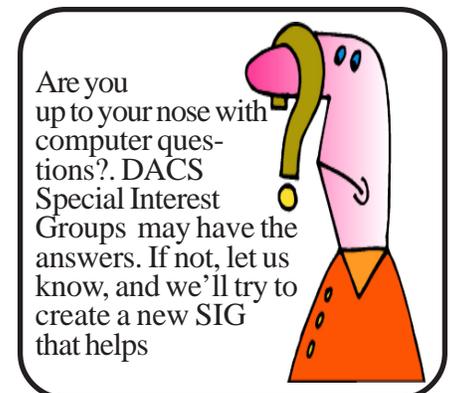
A – This behavior sounds like malware!

Several suggestions: Reboot into Safe Mode and run the uninstall. Use MsConfig.exe to stop the software from running automatically when Windows starts and then run the uninstall. Another suggestions was a tool for uninstalling applications called Revo Uninstaller (revouninstaller.com).

A couple of days after the meeting the member contacted me to say that none of these suggestions had worked. As a last resort, I suggested calling Charter support. It appears there is a bug in the uninstall routine that comes with the Charter Security Suite. Charter support was aware of the problem and gave the member instructions to download a patch that resolved the problem and allowed a successful uninstall.

Q – I have an AT&T Wireless Broad-band connect USB device and the connection is exceedingly slow, so slow that it can take several minutes to display a web page. What can I do to improve the speed?

A – There were several rounds of questions and answers to resolve exactly what type of device is involved. The device plugs into a USB port and connects to the AT&T cellular phone network by way of the fastest service available at the location. Several people in the audience were familiar with the service which is the same as used by an Apple iPhone for the data connection. The consensus was that the slow speed was caused by being in a location where the fastest “3G” service is not available. The device will use whatever data connection the cellular network can provide at that location. A suggestion to determine what data service the device is using (3G or something



else) was to look at the icons showing on an AT&T cellphone at the same location. If the 3G icon does not show, then the device will be using a slower service. The Windows software provided by AT&T with the device should also indicate what service and possible the speed available at that moment. It must be noted that even under the best of conditions, this device will not be as fast as a Wi-Fi hotspot, such as the wireless network available in the Danbury Hospital auditorium.

Disclaimer:

Ask DACS questions come from members by email or from the audience attending the general meeting. Answers are suggestions offered by meeting attendees and represent a consensus of those responding. DACS offers no warrantee as to the correctness of the answers and anyone following these suggestions or answers does so at their own risk. In other words, we could be totally wrong!

Solid State, Cont. from page 11

No appreciable speed

However, my Linux netbook did not speed up noticeably when I implemented these measures. A sensible approach is to do what is easy, follow a good backup program, and enjoy the advantages of the SSDs that will be appearing in more computers every year. Leave the worrying to those who enjoy it. The above problems are only temporary; as SSDs become more prevalent, operating systems will adapt to them, and of course, SSD lifetimes will improve. For now, these work-arounds are easy with Linux; I don't know if they're available in Windows or Macs. However, Windows 7 is reported to be adapted to SSDs, and, since there is a Mac model with an SSD, we can assume that Mac OS X has similar features. As a practical matter, SSDs are now common only in netbooks, which most owners use only occasionally when they travel, and concern about write cycle limits here is academic.

For more information on SSDs, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solid-state_drive. For details on tuning Linux for SSDs, see <http://tombuntu.com/index.php/2008/09/04/fourtweeks-for-using-linux-with-solid-statedrives/>.

DICK MAYBACH is a member of the Brookdale Computer User Group in Lincroft, New Jersey. This article is reprinted with permission from the BCUG Bytes June 2009.



Do you have a burning computer question, but can't make it to the meeting or just never seem to get your hand up in time? Email your inquiry to Jim Scheef, the answer guy, at askdacs@dacs.org, and your question will be taken up at Ask DACS at the next meeting.

SIG NOTES, Cont. from page 8

Chuck took us right to the bones of his development process. We saw how the lines and numerals were directly controlled by coding structures that gave effect to a programming strategy.

Our pizza break put us in a good humor with more meat to chew, as bacon, pepperoni and onions added flavor to the proceedings.

Chuck proceeded with his model of the Microsoft paradigm that reveals placement of the application with a button on the browser. There are no dependencies on external sources of data. Script Manager is added to this program to allow use with AJAX. Yes, this application is a work in progress to challenge a developer to cut deeper into Java Script.

Macintosh. In June we got to that security article we promised last month, but first we started with a question from a member on his Time Machine backups.

Chris wanted to know why he used to see backups going all the way to last summer, but now he is only seeing them going back to April of this year. He brought in his laptop and Time Machine drive, so we could see that his Time Machine drive was getting full. Indeed, Time Machine was performing normally. When it starts running out of room, it will delete the older backups. When it does a backup, it only backs up the changes since the last backup. But you don't have to worry that it will lose a file when it deletes an older backup, even if the file hasn't changed in all that time. The pruning is done intelligently, so you still have a complete backup of every file as of the earliest backup it keeps.

The security article "15 easy fixes for Mac security risks" was from Computerworld (<http://www.computerworld.com/>

<http://www.computerworld.com/action/article.do?command=viewArticleBasic&taxonomyName=Security&articleId=9131990&taxonomyId=17>). We had time to go through the first eight or so fixes, and I showed how they could be implemented on the Mac. You don't necessarily need to implement them all, but you can decide which ones are worthwhile once you understand the risk.

I discussed the second fix, "Install antivirus software." I don't run an antivirus program on my Mac, but I do run a software firewall so that I'll be made aware if any unexpected program tries to make an Internet connection. The program I use is Little Snitch (<http://www.obdev.at/products/littlesnitch/>) which lets you control which programs can make outgoing Internet connections and what kind of traffic is allowed from them.

Due to the timing of the July 4 holiday, there won't be a Mac SIG meeting in July. We'll return in August.

Server, Networking and Virtual Computing. This month we made more progress configuring one of the Resource Center servers to use virtual storage on the storage area network (SAN) that we set up in May. Rob Limbaugh demonstrated how to use iSCSI to make a chunk of disk space on the SAN server appear as a "real" disk drive on Windows Server 2003.

This is really cool technology that offers great flexibility and we are using open source Linux-based software on the SAN server. The networking implications are also very interesting.

At a future meeting we'll explore using a VLAN to isolate the storage traffic from the rest of the local area network.

The next Server, Networking and Virtual Computing SIG meeting will be Thursday, July 9th at 7pm in the DACS Resource Center.

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Future Events:

July 6

Lesa Snider King,
Tips and Tricks from
'Photoshop CS4:
The Missing Manual'

August 3

DACS presenters,
Back to School:
Saving money on tech

September 7

Cancelled, due to
Labor Day

October 5

Pete Basel,
Overclocking