docs.doc

Danbury Area Computer Society, Inc.

MAR 2005 Volume 16, Issue 3

Ok, hot-shot! What are you going to do once you've snapped all those pictures? At our next meeting, DACS Q&A wizard, Bruce Preston, will show you how to save, select, sort, store, re-size, sharpen, and share your images.

President's File

PRESIDENTIAL RAMBLINGS
VERSION 2.11

It was my pleasure to announce last month that Jeff Setaro will become DACS President when my term is up at the end of March. Over the last year I've made a big deal about succession. Rest assured, I hope to remain active in DACS for some time to come; but I want to see more people have the chance to leave their mark. Many clubs—computer user groups, in particular—seem to allow one group of people to run the organization for too many years. At some point they wonder why things seem so stale. I don't want that to happen here at DACS. I have truly enjoyed serving as DACS presiden, but it's time to pass this opportunity on and I'm glad Jeff has accepted the challenge. This club and its membership have tremendous potential. The general meeting programs that we produce are top notch and we have some really cool stuff lined up for the coming months. Our newsletter wins award after award because of the articles written by our own membership. Every month I find that I learn something new from the content we generate. You can and should be a part of the newsletter, the web site, and the special interest groups.

The best part of being DACS president is that I get to write this column. Believe me when I say that finding topics has been difficult. The entertainment industry wants to take away your right to fair use of the digital entertainment products you buy—music and movies are the big items—but now this extends even to the ringtones on your cell phone.

And far more serious is how we have allowed our civil liberties to slip through our fingers. It is no longer possible to travel anonymously and your privacy, online and off, is rapidly disappearing. Heck, these days you can't even get sick without telling the world! The health insurance claim is recorded by several entities, and when you pay for the prescription with your credit card, the whole thing becomes searchable by an ever expanding number of organizations for purposes that have little to do with your sniffles. Someone smarter than me said, "Those who give up liberty in the pursuit of security will have neither."

The sixties mantra of "power to the people" has become "power to the moneyed interests". Just today, our Congress people passed a law restricting your right to sue in state courts. Why, you ask? Because the corporations that poison, injure and defraud you feel that they will be treated better in the Federal courts. If you care about any of this, the people who need to know represent you in Congress. We elected them; they should be doing things in our best interests, not what some lobbyist wants!

Trenton in the Spring

Enough of this doom and gloom. In my very first official column as DACS president (Version 0.0 in May, 2002), I wrote about the Trenton Computer Festival. TCF traces its lineage to the very first personal computer show ever: the East Coast Computer Fair held in Atlantic City in 1976. This year, the festival moves back to The College of New Jersey (formerly Trenton State College) and it will be earlier than past years. Save the weekend of April 16-17.

The best part of TCF is the outdoor flea market. Every year I find "priceless" items for mere pennies. Some years the bargains are incredible. The weather can play a big role. Good weather brings out big crowds and the traffic keeps prices high. Bad weather and the vendors drop prices because they don't want to have to take the stuff back. On the other hand, good weather brings out more vendors which increases competition. "Vendor" is a relative term at TCF. Some are hob-

RAMBLINGS, *Continued on page 4*

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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

Program	Name	Phone #	
Alpha Four	Dick Gingras	(203) 775-1102	(d e)
APL	Charles Bovaird	(203) 792-7881	(e)
C/UNIX/ObjC	Kenneth Lerman	(203) 426-4430	(d e)
Clipper	Dick Gingras	(203) 426-0484	(e)
Dbase/DOS	Alan Boba	(203) 264-1753	(e)
DOS	John Gallichotte	(203) 426-0394	(d e)
Electronics	Andrew Woodruff	(203) 798-2000	(d e)
Focus	Jim Scheef	(860) 355-0034	(e)
Hardware	John Gallichotte	(203) 426-0394	(d e)
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Microsoft Access	Dick Gingras	(203) 426-0484	(e)
Newdeal	Marc Cohen	(203) 775-1102	(d e)
Paradox	Alan Boba	(203) 264-1753	(e)
PhotoShop/Dreamweaver	Anna Collens	(203) 746-5922	(e)
Statistics/Data Analysis	Charles Bovaird	(203) 792-7881	(d e)
SQL Server	Chuck Fizer	(203) 798-9996	(d)
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Visual Basic	Chuck Fizer	(203) 798-9996	(d)
HTML/Java	James Costello	(203) 426-0097	(e)
Windows	Nick Strother	(203) 743-5667	(e)

Directors' Notes

A Regular Meeting of your Board of Directors was held at the Resource Center on February 7, 2005. Present were Messrs. Corzo, Keane, Preston, Scheef, Setaro and Yates. Also present was Larry Buoy.

President Jim Scheef presided and Secretary Larry Buoy kept the record. Minutes of the last meeting held on January 10, 2005 were approved.

In the absence of Treasurer Charles Bovaird, Jim Scheef quoted from a balance sheet prepared by Charlie with current cash assets of $15,259.77, consisting of total bank and postal accounts in the amount of $15,193.74 plus postage on hand of $66.03. Subtracting a liability of prepaid dues in the amount of $6,773.00 left a net equity of $8,486.77. He also reported current membership of 351.

With respect to programs for General Meetings, it was reported that Bruce Preston would make a presentation in March on Using Digital Images, followed in April by Bob Hughes of IBM (courtesy of John Patrick) on Voice-over Internet Protocol. These will be followed by the previously confirmed programs on Genealogy (Jack Scully) in May and on Astronomy (Parker Moreland) in June. Jeff Setaro announced that he was attempting to obtain a presentation on MacIntosh for July, after which there was open discussion on possible programs on Animation, phishing (FBI,) transcribing of analog signals to digital and Home Theater.

Jim Scheef advised that he and Howie Berger had scheduled a meeting with a representative of Science Horizons to determine if DACS could possibly recruit any judges for the forthcoming Science Horizons Fair.

Bill Keane briefly remarked on the new Hardware and Math SIGs initiated by Charlie Bovaird, reporting that the Hardware SIG had been well attended. Also briefly discussed was the possibility of DACS volunteering technical help to local non-profit organizations, with no considered approach to such activity being deemed workable.

Jim Scheef reminded those present that the Trenton Computer Festival was scheduled for April 16 and 17 at the College of New Jersey (formerly Trenton State College).

—Larry Buoy

Ramblings, *Continued from page 2*

byists whose wives have forced a basement cleanup. At the other end of the spectrum are the large electronics surplus dealers who look to empty out their warehouse. Of course there are all sorts in between these extremes. Keep in mind that "high" prices at the flea market are still better than what you might see at one of the local computer fairs and there is far more variety. Brian Kernigan is the keynote speaker this year. Brian, along with Dennis Ritchie, "wrote the book" on the C programming language. In his talk, Brian "will explore some of the central ideas of computing and communications, and discuss why it is important that everyone should have some basic understanding of them." Here is a chance to meet a true industry pioneer.

I like to buy my ticket in advance to save standing in line, and then drive down on the day with the best weather. Check out the web site at *www.tcf-nj.org*.

Help judge the Science Fair

Elsewhere in this issue is an ad for Science Horizons (*www.sciencehorizons.org*), the group that produces a science fair for local junior high and high school kids. This fair has produced some spectacular results. A couple years ago, the winner (from New Milford High School) went on to win the Intel Scholarship. Her project was a new way to find asteroids and project their path. Naturally, not all of the projects are on this level, but there is no way to know unless you help judge the entries. There is a form on the Science Horizons web site to volunteer as a judge. Naturally, some knowledge of science or engineering will be helpful.

For some reason I still get to write one more Presidential Ramblings column (version 2.11 – zero based) even though Jeff takes over in April. See you all then.

—Jim Scheef
dacsprez@dacs.org

Meeting Preview

OK, I've got the picture in the camera - now what?

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY has come of age. It is appearing everywhere—you find digital cameras on key rings, in wireless phones, and of course, all shapes and sizes of more traditional cameras. With the image in a digital form, it becomes much easier to share images, whether via printing, e-mail, or posting on the web.

But just taking the picture and distributing it has some issues. You need to know how to process the image so that it is appropriate for your intended viewer. Have you ever received an image in an e-mail, only to find that you can only view about one quarter of the image? Have you ever waited for 10 minutes on a dial-up connection just to get one image? Have you ever seen a really distorted image on the web? Each target delivery mechanism has its pros and cons, and if you don't adjust your image appropriately, you may end up with a less than optimum viewing situation.

At the next DACS General Meeting, our own Random Access wizard, Bruce Preston, will address the basics of digital photography and image processing. For his presentation, Bruce will discuss digital images in general: the file formats and conventions; what is involved in editing an image; cropping, resizing and compressing it; and evaluating the trade-offs between image size and quality. Several different image editing programs will be used, but the emphasis will be on the basic principles involved rather than on how a particular program works. As time permits, other editing processes such as color correction (white balance, etc.,) red-eye correction, etc. will also be discussed.

The DACS General Meeting begins at 7 p.m. with Random Access, followed by a brief business session and a break for networking. The presentation starts at 8 p.m. All General meetings are open to the public.

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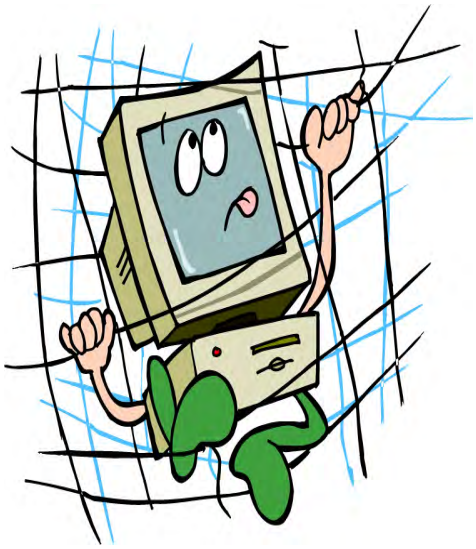
"It's the latest security patch for Outlook Express."

Meeting Review

Weblogs

By Marc Cohen

LONG TIME MEMBER, Mike Kaltschnee, our speaker for the February meeting, introduced us to the rapidly growing world of Web logging. As an aside, I find it a pleasure when one of our DACS members present a subject they are passionate about, without the always underlying sales message that accompanies most meetings.



First off, let's define blog (n.) (and) and blogging (v). The number one new citation in Merriam Webster in 2004: blog: a web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments and often hyperlinks provided by the writer. Web Log: Weblog is an application containing periodic posts on a common Web page with comments and additions by readers. These are often posted in reverse chronological order, but not necessarily.

The vast numbers of Blogs have been doubling for the last few quarters. As of October 2004, they number over eight million, with close to five million remaining active. There were 1.5 million new blogs in the last 30 days alone. In Korea, even with government suppression of news, free thought and opinions, there are estimated to be over 10 million blogs. A January 2005 Google search brought up more than 37 million sites. With that many blogs, it's safe to assume that most are not worth the cyberspace they occupy. The bulk are boring, offensive self indulgences, produced by those with axes to grind, prejudice to spew, porn to peddle and all without the oversight of gatekeepers and editors that newspapers, magazines, book publishers and broadcasters provide.

Not withstanding the above, why are Blogs important? They are an easy, fast and cheap path to micropublishing that can attract a global audience or can be private and password protected, for an audience of only one. All you need to blog is a computer, PDA or phone, Internet access, and blogging software. Several sources of blogging software are Typepad, Movabletype, Wordpress, Livejournal, A search for Blogging software will bring up many more. A dedicated Web site, *www.Bloger.com*, gives a live demo on how to setup a blog.

The key to having your Blog discovered is to submit your efforts to search engines, so when you post, several sites are automatically notified. Most blogs allow for comments; sometimes the comments are better than the post. As blog creator, comments can be turned off or the commenter can be blocked.

There are many reasons to set up a blog: exhibit your expertise; promote your business; publish your club newsletter; self-publish your writing; post your resume; even make some money....

It's time to get on board the virtual bulletin board of unedited personal opinions about almost everything. Almost two-thirds of people still don't know what a blog is, but readership is up 58%; 32 million read blogs, more than 8 million have created a blog, and 14 million have posted comments.

Blogs worth looking at include:

Local

www.danbury-ct.gov — about our city

www.NewsTimesLIVE.com

www.Patrickweb.com—John Patrick's travels and internet news

www.Stich.com — needlework

www.KellyMeekerDesigns.com—jewelry designer

www.HackingNetflix.com — Mike Kaltschnee's site about every thing about movies and Netflix movie rentals

Others:

www.Engadget.com—great new gadgets

www.Boingboing.com —directory of wonderful things

www.Slashdot.com — Stuff that matters

www.Scriptingnews.com—about blogging

Keeping up with the news:

www.bloglines.com

www.newsgator.com

www.americasdebate.com/

www.NetNewsWire.com

www.FeedDemon.com

I want to thank Mike for steering me to the website that has 40+slides and the outline of his February presentation: www.*MarketingWeasel.com*

Mike Kaltschnee can be reached at *MikeK@hackingnetflix.com*

DACS has been offered to participate with the "association and user group program" at C3 EXPO which will run JUNE 28-30, 2005 at the Javits Center in NYC. They have offered DACS a free 10x10 booth and discounts for our members to conferences. Their web site is www.c3expo.com. As the programs evolve DACS will keep you informed of DACS plans for participation.

Computers and Creativity

Computers and Creativity - Part 7
Genetic Algorithms and Evolutionary Computing

by Richard P. Ten Dyke

AS WE START TO bring this series of articles to a conclusion we can draw on some of our shared experiences.

Previous sections of this series focused on the use of randomness in the search process. The idea is that if there is no plan, there can be no predetermined result. The basic tenet of computers is that one step inevitably follows another. By introducing random elements we interfere with that tenet, which then allows us to go beyond it.

We admit that we are really using pseudo-randomness that is algorithmically created, so it can, therefore, be repeated. But would our results have been any different if we had used real randomness instead? No. We could have, but it was more convenient to use a type of randomness that was computer generated.

In the last part, we looked at Neural Networks. Although the technique was biologically inspired, it developed into a statistical optimization method instead. Yet, the neural network was useful to creating evaluations where human judgment might otherwise be employed.

In this section, we look again to biology and evolution, to find inspiration.

The concept of Genetic Algorithms was introduced by David E. Goldberg in his book of the same name in 1989. He and John Holland, at the University of Michigan, developed and promoted the concept that biological model or reproduction and evolution employing DNA could be used to solve problems with a digital computer. Every computer program, and all information for that matter, can be represented by a string of bits—ones and zeros. The approach of Goldberg and Holland is to represent something—an idea or a concept—as a string of bits, and then manipulate the string in such a way that the resulting final string is useful.

The manipulations take their lead from models of biological reproduction. One manipulation is to combine two different strings by cutting them both in the middle somewhere and then swapping the pieces so that each consists of half of one string and half of the other. This is called "crossover" and is similar to sexual reproduction involving the merger of DNA from sperm and egg.

The second manipulation, mutation, is the result of randomly changing bits in the string. This also exists biologically in asexual reproduction, but in the real world its use is limited to very simple organisms. A little reflection of this will suggest many reasons why this has to be.

A third manipulation replicates individual strings in accordance with some measure of fitness, so that there are more of the better ones in the pool. This is similar to evolution. Statistical rules determine that the better strings will be selected more often in the reproduction process.

Since 1989 these concepts have been expanded and improved upon to include what is now called "evolutionary computing." A society exists to encourage and promote study in this area. The next Genetic and Evolutionary Computing Conference will be held in Washington D.C. at the L'Enfant Plaza Hotel from June 25 to June 29, 2005. I may attend.

I have been to several of these conferences over the years, but I must say that I have not come away with much that I can hang my hat on. They are academic; the problems are narrow, focused on student projects, full of jargon, and with little commercial implication. Where there have been useful applications, they resulted more from users being inspired by the ideas being presented rather than actually using them.

This is not to say that their efforts should be dismissed. One topic keeps coming up: the creation of new proteins. To accomplish this would have hugely important implications in medicine. Proteins, as you know, are the construction materials of life. They consist of very long molecules that fold into little balls—or rather, little ball-like objects—where their exact shapes determine their biological properties. The trick is to create an artificial protein molecule and then see into what shape it folds. The second, harder, trick is to define a shape and find the protein molecule that will fold into it. This is big stuff, and huge computers are presently being used. IBM created one called "Blue Gene" which is designed for that purpose. This is playing around at the very edge of life itself.

We were doing the evolutionary thing with our poker game. Each player in the game had a "string" which was a set of numbers that determined a betting strategy. As the strategy played out, some players did better than the others, and their "strings" were modified, but not significantly. "Not significantly" is an important point. Each "new" string bore a resemblance to its "parent", but was also somewhat different. Each new string was but a small step away from its predecessor. It was a limited form of mutation rather than bisexual reproduction. Steps which represented changes for the worse tended to disappear. Steps which represented changes for the better, tended to reappear. But nothing was certain. We were dealing with tendencies rather than certainties.

Following in the lines of evolutionary computing, we should mention the famous monkey problem. It goes as follows: Given enough monkeys, sitting at typewriters typing random letters, over time they would eventually type all of the known works of Shakespeare as well as the Bible, the Koran, the works of Isaac Newton, Einstein, and every other written work including this one. Of course, this is absurd, so we therefore conclude that the idea of a creative computer is also absurd. What's wrong with this?

Beyond its impracticality, the proposed experiment assumes that the monkeys would never learn. All of their typing is random, and continues to be random, and therefore, the probability that a monkey could even put together a simple sonnet is too unlikely to be considered possible.

But consider a slightly different experiment taken from our now shared experiences. Suppose one very fast monkey has an editor. Every time the monkey types a page, the editor looks at it and tells the monkey whether this page is better than

the last. If it is better, the monkey makes some random changes in the paper and resubmits it. Again the editor comments, and again, the monkey saves the new one or throws it away depending upon the editor's comments. Eventually, the editor says "Well I declare, Mr. Monkey, this is a beautiful sonnet: one that Shakespeare could have written if he had your talent."

So what is missing in the original statement of the monkey problem is the absence of an editor. Unfortunately, finding such an editor presents us with a new problem.

Next Month: Wrap up.

Richard Ten Dyke, *a member of the Danbury Area Computer Society, has previously contributed to this newsletter on the topic of Digital Photography. He is retired from IBM and can be reached at tendyke@bedfordny. com. All opinions are his own, and he welcomes comments.*

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*,.

New Members

From 1/23/2005 to 2/18/2005

Desmond Nolan

THIS IS YOUR LAST NEWSLETTER

If the membership date on your mailing label reads

EXP 11\2004

or earlier

You need to renew your DACS membership

NOW

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

Be Informed by E-mail

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

Smart advertisers reach over 500 active computer users and software buyers by taking advantage of the attractive advertising rates in DACS.DOC

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.

Special Interest Groups

SIG NOTES: March 2005

Access. Designs and implements solutions using Microsoft Access database management software.
Contact: Bruce Preston, 203 431-2920 *(bpreston@mags.net).*
Meets on 2nd Tuesday, 7p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.
Next meeting: MAR 8

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 9

dotNET. Programs for Web site/server.
Contact: Chuck Fizer *(cfizer@snet.net.*
Meets 1st Wednesday, 4-6 p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.
Next Meeting: MAR 2

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 25

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 17

Jobs. Networking and discussion of the jobs search environment.
Contact: Charles Bovaird, 203-792-7881 (aam@mags.net).
Meets on 3rd Friday, 7 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.
Next meeting: MAR 18

Linux. Helps in installing and maintaining the Linux operating system. OCT also be 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 16

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 3

Math. Review of mathematics with focus on computer applications and graphical representation.
Contact: Charles Bovaird, 203-792-7881 (aam@mags.net).
Meets on 3rd Thursday, 7 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.
Next meeting: MAR 17

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: MAR 22

PC Maintenance. Review of PC hardware and OpSys maintenance and use.
Contact: Charles Bovaird, 203-792-7881 (aam@mags.net).
Meets on 4thd Thursday, 7 p.m. at the DACS Resource Center.
Next meeting: MAR 25

Server. Explores Back Office server and client applications, including Win NT Servers and MS Outlook.
Contact: Jim Scheef *(jscheef@teleAUGksys.com)*
Meets 2nd Thursday, 7 p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.
Next meeting: MAR 10

Visual Basic. Develops Windows apps with Visual Basic.
Contact: Chuck Fizer, 203 798-9996 *(cfizer@snet.net)* or Jim Scheef, 860 355-8001 *(JScheef@TeleAUGksys. com).*
Meets 1st Wednesday, 7p.m., at the DACS Resource Center.
Next Meeting: MAR 2

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 28

Web Design. Explores popular 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 15

SIG News & Other Events

PC Maintenance. The first meeting was held Thursday Jan 27, The topic was motherboards and associated components. In the next meeting FEB 24 we will look into BIOS settings**.**

Members wishing to join this SIG should plan to attend the fourth Thursday of the month - February 24 ,2005 7 to 9 pm **at the DACS resource center. Non DACS members are invited to attend one introductory sig session.**

HOMEWORK: Run Belarc on your computer and bring printout to sig meeting. Belarc is a program that does a great job of documenting installed hardware and software.

The license associated with this product allows for free personal use only. You can find it using Google or at *www.belarc.com*. It can be downloaded as one 620K file named "advisor.exe". It is recommended the file be stored in the subdirectory C:\My Documents\maint\dl. To run/install double click on advisor.exe.

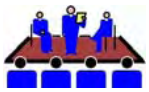
Server and Networking. The February Server and Networking SIG meeting covered using Group Policies to help manage the computers in an Active Directory domain. We looked at an example of applying security and configuration settings to create a computer kiosk that can be used to access a company web site by restricting access to such things as Control Panel, Internet Options, and just about everything else.

The examples included using the Group Policy Management program to create and edit policy objects and to apply them to Organizational Units in a Windows Server 2003 domain. While this may not sound very exciting, it was fun.

Next month we'll look at building a router. The Server and Networking SIG meeting will be held on Thursday, March 10th at 7pm in the DACS Resource Center. See you all then.

March 2005

Danbury Area Computer Society

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Feb 2005 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		1  7:00 P.M. GENERAL MTG	2  4 PM Internet Prog. 7 PM Visual Basic Chuck Fizer 203 798-9996	3  *Macintosh* *7:00 PM* *Richard Corzo* *macsig@dacs.org*	4	5
6	7	8  7:00 PM Access Bruce Preston 203 431-2920	9  7:30 PM Advanced OS Bill Keane 203 438-8032	10  7:00 PM SERVER Jim Scheef 860 355-0034	11	12
13	14  7:00 PM Board of Directors	15  Web Design Anna Collens 203 746-5922	16  7:30 PM LINUX Bill Keane 203 438-8032	17 7:00 PM MATH Charles Bovaird 203 792-7881 7:30 PM INVESTMENT Paul Gehrett 203 426-8436	18  7:00 PM JOBS Charles Bovaird 203 792-7881	19  DACS.DOC DEADLINE
20	21	22  7:00 PM Microcontroller J. Gallichotte 203 367-1202	23	24  7:00 PM PC Maintenance Charles Bovaird 203 792-7881	25	26
27	28  7:00 PM WALL STREET Phil Dilloway 203 367-1202	29	30	31	Apr 2005 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	

Networking Fun(damentals)

Part 3 - Routers and Firewalls

by Bruce Preston

IN THE PREVIOUS installment, I introduced the topic of the router and its functionality. This installment will embellish upon the router and firewall.

As previously described, the primary function of the router is to determine whether a connection request is local to the Local Area Network (and thus should be ignored) or a request for an off-site host—in which case the router should field the request and pass it on to the other end of the broadband connection.

For home (or small office) broadband connections (cable or DSL, doesn't matter) the router also provides functionality which permits several computers to be connected on the local side of the connection, and independently make use of the shared circuit to the ISP. This is a good trick because as far as the ISP at the other end of the circuit is concerned, there is only one computer at the home (or small office) end of the circuit.

The router performs this function via the mechanism of Network Address Translation. The router assigns a distinct IP address to each computer device on your local area network (LAN) and takes ownership of the IP address provided by the ISP at the other end of the broadband connection. This primary IP address may be either static or dynamic. The LAN IP addresses may also be either static or dynamic. If dynamic, they must be from a pool of addresses managed by the router, and the router must be configured to act as a DHCP server.

DHCP server address pool: The designers of the internet reserved several blocks of IP addresses for use by local area networks. These blocks are: 10.0.0.0 through 10.255.255.255, 172.16.0.0 through 172.31.255.255, and 192.168.0.0 through 192.168.255.255. By definition, these are non-routable addresses, and thus may be freely used for private networks without fear of collision with other users on other networks. If you have enabled DHCP in your router, and your computer is set up to 'acquire IP address automatically'—your computer will get an address from the IP address pool assigned to it by the router, as well as the gateway address (the router's address) and the subnet mask. If your router has DNS entries and your computer has 'acquire DNS address automatically' then your computer will also get DNS addresses loaded at boot time.

Here is an example of how Network Address Translation works: Let's suppose that your router has the LAN-side address of 192.168.0.1 and your computer has the private network address of 192.168.0.100. Further, let us assume that your ISP has assigned your router's wide area network (WAN) side address of 66.123.23.12.

When your computer makes a request for, say, Google, it addresses the request as being TO: 64.233.161.104:80 and FROM: 192.168.0.100. The router sees that the TO address is not local, so it intercepts the request and sets up to forward it to the router at the other end of your broadband circuit. However, as part of this process, it substitutes its own address (66.123.23.12) within the FROM field of the request. Simultaneously, when the connection is established, it records the "socket number" (similar to a connection number) in memory and associates with that socket number the IP address of the originator (in our example, 192.168.0.100.)

A few milliseconds later, Google responds on that particular connection (socket) with the search results and sends them to 66.123.23.12—your router, on the same socket as the original request. The router sees the socket number, does a lookup in its tables, and substitutes in the TO: field of the packet the IP address of the original requestor: 192.168.0.100. It then delivers the 'translated' packet back to the requesting machine. Since the Google response was a web page, Google is finished responding, so it drops the socket connection. The router sees that the connection has been dropped, so it deletes the NAT entry for the socket as well. If you as a user click on a link on the page, another request is made (probably to a different site) and the router creates a new socket for that site, etc. with another NAT entry.

There is an additional benefit to the NAT mechanism—all connections must be originated from within the LAN-side of the router, as only they create sockets/connections to outside hosts. If a site on the internet side of the broadband connection tries to establish a connection, the router will not respond to it because it does not have an entry in its translation table, and thus can't deliver the packet to any of the local machines. This is a simplistic firewall—nothing that originates on the outside can get through (unless explicitly permitted, as in the next section.)

Port Forwarding: Suppose that on one of your machines within your LAN you have a machine that is functioning as a web page server. You would like to give people outside the ability to see your web pages, but nothing else. You can do this by implementing Port Forwarding. You may remember that certain services are associated with ports. For example, web page services (HTML) is associated with port 80. So if someone on the outside creates a connection request for port 80 at your public IP address (the address associated with the WAN side of your router) then you know that they want to connect to your web server. Let's say that your web server is located at the private IP address of 192.168.0.110. In that case, you may enter a port forwarding request in your router's tables—the rule being

that any incoming packet addressed to your WAN IP address with port 80 is to be 'forwarded' to 192.168.0.110 port 80. The router will perform the NAT translation and deliver the request. Note that the request has a 'from' associated with it, which is not touched. When your web server has generated the requested page, it sends it back to that calling address over the same socket, and then closes the socket.

Stateful Packet Inspection: Inside a TCP/IP packet is information as to what kind of data is contained. A firewall that makes use of SPI will examine the data within the packet and determine if it is consistent with the request. A simplistic example: if the packet is addressed to a web server; it will not permit a TelNet command (remote terminal command) to be passed through.

Setting Up Your Router

Most routers make use of a web-browser interface for configuration management. You get into the router's management console by connecting a computer to the LAN side of the router and then setting your browser's address to the router's LAN-side IP address. You will be presented with a login screen which requests a login name and password. More often than not this will be some variant of no logon name with a password of admin, or a logon name of admin with no password. One of the first things you should do is assign a logon name and password. Note that the router is smart enough that it will only respond to configuration console requests from the LAN side, so you you physical access security—only users with internal access to the LAN can get at the router. You may, however, elect to permit remote configuration access, but this is never available by default.

Once you have the management console, you usually have separate pages for various sections of the router's management. For example, one page may be to control the configuration of the WAN side. It usually includes the selection of static or dynamic IP address for the WAN connection, the protocol selection (such as straight TCP/IP pass through versus the use of PPPoE), logon name and password for a PPPoE connection, etc.

Another page may be used to activate DHCP, and if so, to specify the address pool to be use.

Yet another page may be used to specify port forwarding. This may be indicated in several ways - Port Forwarding, Virtual Server, Special Applications, etc.

Some routers may be set to restrict access to only machines that have hardware addresses (MAC addresses) that have been entered into a table within the router.

There is usually also a page in the configuration management console that permits loading of new 'firmware' into the router. Firmware is the software within the router that is 'burned into' memory. In this way, if the router vendor needs to make a change to the operational capabilities of the router, it may be done via a firmware update. For example, about a year ago my router's firmware was modified to permit 25 port forwarding entries, where prior to that it only permitted 10.

Next time: WiFi.

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.

Let DACS Promote your Business

DACS is offering members free space to advertise their small businesses in the business card section of the colored insert in dacs.doc. This offer is being made subject to space available, and cards will be rotated each month to guarantee equal access.

Please send your cards to DACS at 4 Gregory Street, Danbury, CT 06810-4430, give to any board member, or e-mail graphic image to *dacseditor@dacs.org*.

Sorry, but postal regulations require that ads be computer related, and specifically forbid ads for Credit, Insurance or Travel Services.

Scams and Sculduggery

FTC Names Its Dirty Dozen:

12 Scams Most Likely to Arrive Via Bulk Email

Editor's note: The following is from an FTC press release on e-mail fraud.

EMAIL BOXES ARE filling up with more offers for business opportunities than any other kind of unsolicited commercial email. That's a problem, according to the Federal Trade Commission, because many of these offers are scams.

In response to requests from consumers, the FTC asked email users to forward their unsolicited commercial email to the agency for an inside look at the bulk email business. FTC staff found that more often than not, bulk email offers appeared to be fraudulent, and if pursued, could have ripped-off unsuspecting consumers to the tune of billions of dollars.

The FTC has identified the 12 scams that are most likely to arrive in consumers' email boxes. The "dirty dozen" are:

1. Business opportunities

These business opportunities make it sound easy to start a business that will bring lots of income without much work or cash outlay. The solicitations trumpet unbelievable earnings claims of $140 a day, $1,000 a day, or more, and claim that the business doesn't involve selling, meetings, or personal contact with others, or that someone else will do all the work. Many business opportunity solicitations claim to offer a way to make money in an Internet-related business. Short on details but long on promises, these messages usually offer a telephone number to call for more information. In many cases, you'll be told to leave your name and telephone number so that a salesperson can call you back with the sales pitch.

The scam: Many of these are illegal pyramid schemes masquerading as legitimate opportunities to earn money.

2. Bulk email

Bulk email solicitations offer to sell you lists of email addresses, by the millions, to which you can send your own bulk solicitations. Some offer software that automates the sending of email messages to thousands or millions of recipients. Others offer the service of sending bulk email solicitations on your behalf. Some of these offers say, or imply, that you can make a lot of money using this marketing method.

The problem: Sending bulk email violates the terms of service of most Internet service providers. If you use one of the automated email programs, your ISP may shut you down. In addition, inserting a false return address into your solicitations, as some of the automated programs allow you to do, may land you in legal hot water with the owner of the address's domain name. Several states have laws regulating the sending of unsolicited commercial email, which you may unwittingly violate by sending bulk email. Few legitimate businesses, if any, engage in bulk email marketing for fear of offending potential customers.

3. Chain letters

You're asked to send a small amount of money ($5 to $20) to each of four or five names on a list, replace one of the names on the list with your own, and then forward the revised message via bulk email. The letter may claim that the scheme is legal, that it's been reviewed or approved by the government; or it may refer to sections of U.S. law that legitimize the scheme. Don't believe it.

The scam: Chain letters-traditional or high-tech-are almost always illegal, and nearly all of the people who participate in them lose their money. The fact that a "product" such as a report on how to make money fast, a mailing list, or a recipe may be changing hands in the transaction does not change the legality of these schemes.

4. Work-at-home schemes

Envelope-stuffing solicitations promise steady income for minimal labor-for example, you'll earn $2 each time you fold a brochure and seal it in an envelope. Craft assembly work schemes often require an investment of hundreds of dollars in equipment or supplies, and many hours of your time producing goods for a company that has promised to buy them.

The scam: You'll pay a small fee to get started in the envelope-stuffing business. Then, you'll learn that the email sender never had real employment to offer. Instead, you'll get instructions on how to send the same envelope-stuffing ad in your own bulk emailings. If you earn any money, it will be from others who fall for the scheme you're perpetuating. And after spending the money and putting in the time on the craft assembly work, you are likely to find promoters who refuse to pay you, claiming that your work isn't up to their "quality standards."

5. Health and diet scams

Pills that let you lose weight without exercising or changing your diet, herbal formulas that liquefy your fat cells so that they are absorbed by your body, and cures for impotence and hair loss are among the scams flooding email boxes.

The scam: These gimmicks don't work. The fact is that successful weight loss requires a reduction in calories and an increase in physical activity. Beware of case histories from "cured" consumers claiming amazing results; testimonials from "famous" medical experts you've never heard of; claims that the

product is available from only one source or for a limited time; and ads that use phrases like "scientific breakthrough," "miraculous cure," "exclusive product," "secret formula," and "ancient ingredient."

6. Effortless income

The trendiest get-rich-quick schemes offer unlimited profits exchanging money on world currency markets; newsletters describing a variety of easy-money opportunities; the perfect sales letter; and the secret to making $4,000 in one day.

The scam: If these systems worked, wouldn't everyone be using them? The thought of easy money may be appealing, but success generally requires hard work.

7. Free goods

Some email messages offer valuable goods-for example, computers, other electronic items, and long-distance phone cards-for free. You're asked to pay a fee to join a club, then told that to earn the offered goods, you have to bring in a certain number of participants. You're paying for the right to earn income by recruiting other participants, but your payoff is in goods, not money.

The scam: Most of these messages are covering up pyramid schemes, operations that inevitably collapse. Almost all of the payoff goes to the promoters and little or none to consumers who pay to participate.

8. Investment opportunities

Investment schemes promise outrageously high rates of return with no risk. One version seeks investors to help form an offshore bank. Others are vague about the nature of the investment, stressing the rates of return. Many are Ponzi schemes, in which early investors are paid off with money contributed by later investors. This makes the early investors believe that the system actually works, and encourages them to invest even more.

Promoters of fraudulent investments often operate a particular scam for a short time, quickly spend the money they take in, then close down before they can be detected. Often, they reopen under another name, selling another investment scam. In their sales pitch, they'll say that they have high-level financial connections; that they're privy to inside information; that they'll guarantee the investment; or that they'll buy back the investment after a certain time. To close the deal, they often serve up phony statistics, misrepresent the significance of a current event, or stress the unique quality of their offering-anything to deter you from verifying their story.

The scam: Ponzi schemes eventually collapse because there isn't enough money coming in to continue simulating earnings. Other schemes are a good investment for the promoters, but no for participants.

9. Cable descrambler kits

For a small sum of money, you can buy a kit to assemble a cable descrambler that supposedly allows you to receive cable television transmissions without paying any subscription fee.

The scam: The device that you build probably won't work. Most of the cable TV systems in the U.S. use technology that these devices can't crack. What's more, even if it worked, stealing service from a cable television company is illegal.

10. Guaranteed loans or credit, on easy terms

Some email messages offer home-equity loans that don't require equity in your home, as well as solicitations for guaranteed, unsecured credit cards, regardless of your credit history. Usually, these are said to be offered by offshore banks. Sometimes they are combined with pyramid schemes, which offer you an opportunity to make money by attracting new participants to the scheme.

The scams: The home equity loans turn out to be useless lists of lenders who will turn you down if you don't meet their qualifications. The promised credit cards never come through, and the pyramid money-making schemes always collapse.

11. Credit repair

Credit repair scams offer to erase accurate negative information from your credit file so you can qualify for a credit card, auto loan, home mortgage, or a job.

The scam: The scam artists who promote these services can't deliver. Only time, a deliberate effort, and a personal debt repayment plan will improve your credit. The companies that advertise credit repair services appeal to consumers with poor credit histories. Not only can't they provide you with a clean credit record, but they also may be encouraging you to violate federal law. If you follow their advice by lying on a loan or credit application, misrepresenting your Social Security number, or getting an Employer Identification Number from the Internal Revenue Service under false pretenses, you will be committing fraud.

12. Vacation prize promotions

Electronic certificates congratulating you on "winning" a fabulous vacation for a very attractive price are among the scams arriving in your email. Some say you have been "specially selected" for this opportunity.

The scam: Most unsolicited commercial email goes to thousands or millions of recipients at a time. Often, the cruise ship you're booked on may look more like a tug boat. The hotel accommodations likely are shabby, and you may be required to pay more for an upgrade. Scheduling the vacation at the time you want it also may require an additional fee.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit *www.ftc.gov* or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

Random Access

February 2005

Bruce Preston, Moderator

WE WELCOME QUESTIONS FROM the floor at the start of our General Meet-ings. 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. I bought some memory, and on the package it said "Not for Dual Channel Use". What does that mean?

A. We looked on Google and found that some motherboard/processor combinations support dual channel—essentially this permits simultaneous reading of two separate ranges of memory, or a write back to one range of memory while another memory area is being read. Memory access has cycles—periods of time while the logic circuits within the memory are recharging the set bits, or the memory is available for reading, etc. Since the memory worked in your system, we may presume that your system is either not attempting dual channel use, or knows that the memory sticks don't support it. For full description, take a look at this page on the Kingston site: *http://www.kingston. com/newtech/MKF_520DDR whitepaper.pdf.*

Q. I have an Excel spreadsheet that has ZIP codes in it. They are formatted as "special - zip code". However, when I try to use them in a Word Mail-Merge operation, the leading zero is stripped off. Is there a way to fix this?

A. During the Q&A session, we were unable to find a solution, although we did find a reference to a similar problem with Word 98. However, follow up found this technique:

1) define the zip code field with the cell format "special" and the sub-type of "zip code + 4" as you had.

2) In Word, in the Mail Merge Wizard, select an "Address Block" for your address area. Select the format of the address block to use from the list, i.e. with or without salutation (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr. etc.) etc. Then click the MAP FIELDS button to link your Excel columns to the components of the address block. Save the mapping, then "Update All" to make the changes apply to all of the references to the address block. (This is for the case of labels where you generate several labels on one printed sheet.) When the merge was performed, the leading zero in the zip code was preserved.

Q. I have a USB solid state memory device (commonly known as a pen drive or flash drive.) To reuse it must I reformat it?

A. No, not at all. As matter of fact you probably do not want to format it except for the case of a problem. Instead, you may open up the drive using Windows Explorer (it will look just like any other drive, it will have a drive letter) and click on files or folders to delete them.

This brings up a caution: Most devices that use memory sticks (Smart Media, Compact Flash, Secure Digital, etc.) use the FAT 12, FAT 16 or FAT 32 format for the file structure, not the newer NTFS format as preferred by Windows NT, 2000 and XP. (FAT - File Allocation Table) If you format a memory card using NTFS it will not be readable by the camera, or a FAT that the camera doesn't understand, the card will not be usable. If a card is corrupted somehow (such as by trying to write to it from a camera with almost-dead batteries) then the card may require a low-level format. Not all card readers have the correct controller chip withing them that will permit a low-level format. There is a software/hardware package available—OnBelay from CompuApps that I have used to recover corrupted memory cards.

Q. I have a son who is looking to get into programming and development. What would be a good starting language?

A. This question is almost like picking a religion—there were lots of suggestions of all types. Here are some of them:

Python - an interpretive language that is available on most platforms

Perl - another interpretive language, most often used on web servers

Pascal - a language that won't let you make an error in structure or inconsistent data usage. However, it is considered by many to be obsolete.

ANSI-C - (Also known as K&R C) A very popular and 'vanilla' rendition of the C programming language. C has since spawned C++ and C# (pronounced C sharp). C++ is an object-oriented implementation of C, and C# is Microsoft's cut on C with heavy emphasis on Microsoft's proprietary .NET architecture.

Visual Basic 6 (as opposed to Visual Basic .NET) - a very powerful implementation of VB that does not include all of the .NET 'baggage'. It has a very good integrated development environment and many third party components. However, it will only produce applications for the Windows environment. You might be interested in Visual Basic Express Edition Beta—a lightweight (and free) version that you can download (or order a CD)—check this Microsoft page: *http://lab.msdn. microsoft.com/express/vbasic/default.aspx.*

No matter which language you choose, you should know that the first one is always the hardest because you have to learn two things simultaneously: the syntax of the specific language, plus program-ming concepts. Once you have this foundation, it is usually not as big a step to add a second, third or fourth language as then you only need to learn the language specifics.

Q. On my cable modem there are several lights, most of which are always on. Is the "Power" light an indication that there is a connection to the cable, or is it that there is line voltage?

A. The power indicator on every modem we have seen indicates only that you have power coming from the wall outlet (usually via a small transformer/power cube that changes line voltage to typically 5 or 12 volts DC.) It does not report anything about the presence or absence of a cable signal.

Q. I get e-mails that have "Undisclosed Recipients." Are the addresses present internally in the e-mail and thus visible if I know where to look? And if so, how is this done?

A. All of the recipients are "Blind Copy" messages (typically marked BCC from the old "Blind Carbon Copy" of typed memos.) They will not be visible. To send a BCC you have to activate the BCC entry field when you compose the message. It is not normally visible in the mail interface. If you are doing a distribution list, such as for a club, one way of doing it is create an address book entry (Club List, for example, which has as its components the e-mail addresses of the members. You then put the address "Club List" into the BCC field and your mail program will expand it.) A warning—many mail processors will block a message if they see a large number of BCC addressees, since this is a popular mechanism with spammers. You might start with a limit of 100 addressees and see if they go. Note also that it may not be your ISP that does the blocking. For example, lets say that your ISP has a cap of 200, and your address list has 60 addresses at AOL. When your ISP distributes the e-mail, it will establish a link to AOL and try to submit the message with the 60 AOL addresses. If AOL has a cap of, say, 50, it will block the message.

Q. My children have really messed up an old computer. I decided to format the C: drive and start over. However, Windows won't let me format the drive because it says that the drive is "in use." What do I do?

A. It depends upon which version of Windows you are running. If it is a version such as 95, 98, 98SE or Me, you can create an Emergency Recovery Diskette (ERD) that is bootable. Boot from it, and then format the drive and then install Windows. The Windows 98SE ERD is especially nice in that it has the OAK CD-ROM driver which will recognize just about any CD-ROM device out there. For Windows 2000 and XP the distribution CD is bootable and you may boot from it.

Q. But the machine doesn't have a floppy drive (Or the floppy drive is USB, and you need a loaded Windows to see it.)

A. Typically, machines that don't have a floppy drive are newer and have the capability of booting from the CD. This is usually not 'armed' by default. To activate it, you need to get into the ROM-BIOS Setup utility and change the boot sequence order. On many machines, this is done via pressing the DEL key immediately after power-up, well before Windows starts. On other machines (typically DELL), you need to press the F2 function key during boot. With your computer you should have received either a Microsoft Windows CD, or perhaps a vendor-branded "system restore" CD. When you boot from the CD it will start an install or recovery procedure.

Q. Is anyone familiar with a utility called Password Safe - a utility that stores passwords for you?

A. No one present had heard of that particular utility, but there are many of them out there. Some members reported liking Robo Form and Password Pro 32. A search on *Download.COM* (a CNET company) using the phrase Password Manager found 115 hits. Thee is probably at least one there that will suite your needs and budget.

Q. I get images from my family that are too large to view on my screen. How do I fix this?

A. Windows XP comes with an image viewer that handles this problem. For older systems, one way would be to download a free utility IrfanView from *www.irfanview.com*—it will let you size the image to your screen as well as define a slide show, etc. I've used it for years. Google recently acquired Picasa software and is distributing Picasa 2 for free. You can download it from *http://www.picasa.com/*. Next month's General Meeting topic will discuss this in detail.

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.

FREE CLASSIFIEDS

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.

Voice for Joanie

Help give the
gift of speech
Call Shirley Fredlund
at 203 770-6203
and become a
Voice for Joanie
volunteer.

Future Events

March 1 • Bruce Preston on Digital Imaging
April 12 • Bob Hopkins, IBM • Voice Over Internet Protocal
May 3 • Jack Scully • Genealogy