Random Bits

ECOTUC
East Central Ohio Technology Users Club

In This Issue

NOW SHOWING

Coming Attractions

This Month's Meeting

General Membership Meeting program on February 15, 2015, 2:30 PM, will be presented by our own President Jim Amore. The program topic is, "Windows 10, and why you will want it". President Amore will explain/demo Windows 10 and have Win 10 running on at least 3 computers for anyone that wants to test drive it. Come with questions and learn how you may get a FREE upgrade to Windows 10.

After XP (which was a very solid operating system) was wrenched away from us, we were offered Win 7 (which was a great improvement over Vista); then they offered Win 8 (which came with many changes, especially that change from the "Start Button" to the massive "Start Screen"), and then along came Windows 8.1 (which confused us with so many changes trying to make up for some bad design choices in Win 8), and then we heard rumors of Windows 9 coming (and then not coming). Suddenly, there is a new dawn breaking with the promise of Windows 10.

For Microsoft, the primary goal of Windows 10 is to create a more unified computing experience. To do that, it is making a common OS available for desktops, laptops, tablets, and phones as well. Windows 10 will also offer a common store for downloading applications on phones, PCs, and tablets. Come join us on the 15th to hear some very exciting news that ALL Windows 7, Windows 8, and Windows 8.1 users will want to hear.

Be there at 2 PM for Fellowship time and be prepared for our Meeting to start promptly at 2:30 PM.

Hopefully you will have read your Random Bits Newsletter for news and special announcements (such as maybe a free door prize ticket?). Also, did you go to our LCCS web board seeking our "Bonus Word for February, 2015".

Vice-President - Programs, Mary Frances Rauch

Member of

apcug

An International Association of Technology & Computer User Groups

Previous Program Points

Mary Frances Rauch introduced Ken, Sue & Stacie Bixler who presented a digital photo travelogue on their trip to the Turks & Caicos Islands (formerly The West Indies).

Submitted: Nancy Grower, Secretary

Sorry for the brief description, we are still looking for someone to step up and provide us with a more detailed descriptions of the monthly presentations.

For more information check out the LCCS Media YouTube channel at the link below.

* Click on the link to the right to see a video of Past Programs and Meetings   **LCCS Media**

The Soapbox
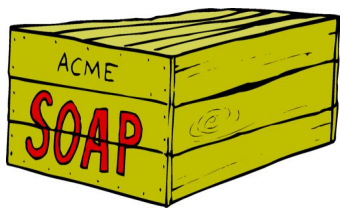
Letter from the Editor

Well with the start of a new year comes change, and that is true for our organization. At the General meeting the membership voted to change the name of our organization. We will be transitioning from the Licking County Computer Society to the East Central Ohio Technology Users Club, or ECOTUC for short. We have also been updating the graphics used by the club, as you can see at the top of the newsletter. The graphic is a 3d environment that includes the different activities of the club. Represented are the Windows, Linux, Repair Desk, Recycling, Digital Imaging, and Apple IDevices. (See example below)

The club has already purchased a new domain name, for our website, the new domain name is www.ecotu.club, which will point to our present website now. We are working to update our present website to reflect the changes that are taking place.

This is a time of change and we hope that all will be patient as we perform our transformation.

The Soapbox
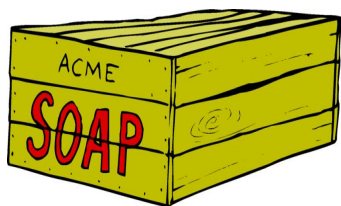
The graphic at the right is a possible new logo for the Club. It is a more up to date 3D representation of the activities of the Club. The following interest groups are represented, Windows, Linux, Apple Idevices, Digital Imaging, Repair Desk, and Recycling. You will be seeing variations of the graphic as the transformation continues.
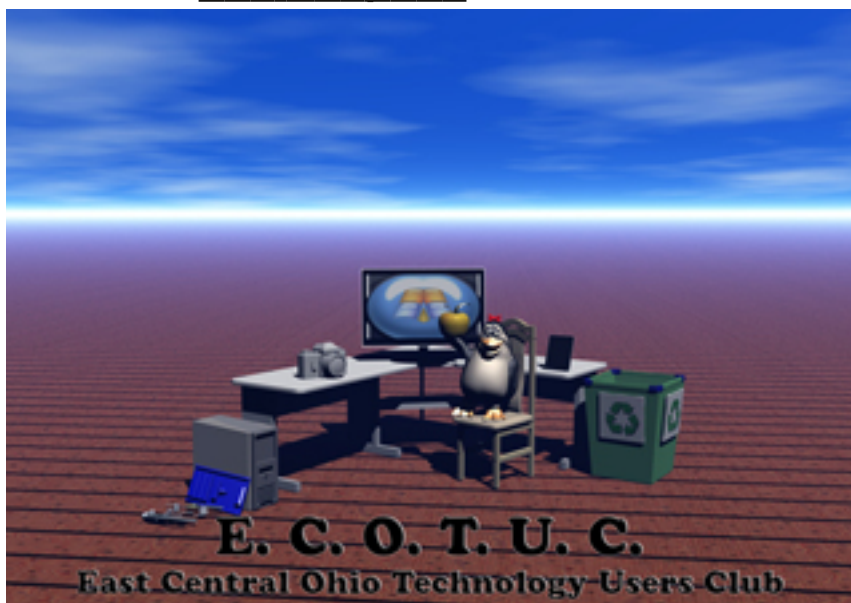
Wrestling with a Name Change

Letter from John Kennedy

As most of you reader know by now (clue was at the top of the newsletter) the Licking County Computer Society has changed their name to the East Central Ohio Technology Users Club. The Executive Board voted to make the change and sent it on to the General Membership for a vote. A motion was made and seconded, and the motion passed. During the discussion part of the process, a number of people indicated they really didn't like the new name. As the person that started this process with the Executive Board and continued it on to the General Membership, I thought I needed to further explain my reasons for this needed change.

I attended a conference session on the growing concern of computer groups having to disband. One particular groups was the computer club in Houston that at one time was the largest group in the United States. Now the group no longer exists at all. There are a number of other groups that have disbanded and an investigation as to the reason was presented at that session. The number one reason (and really there wasn't a need for any other reason) was that groups are not changing to meet the current needs of people. Or possibly the members are not "upgrading" to current technology trends.

As "younger" people are grasping on to the new trends in technology, they are looking for groups/clubs that are providing services for those technologies. If they don't find that a local group/club includes those, then they move on to find some other group. This has happened to a number of clubs that still focus on a single technology, such as an Apple or Windows group or one like ours that speaks only of Computers. This is why a number of people with the LCCS worked to branch out to include iPads and tablets. Others have branched out beyond Microsoft and Apple to include Linux. We even have people asking for help with their smartphones, yet we can't provide that help because we don't have people within our group that can address those needs.

The Soapbox con't

We also need to expand our service area beyond Licking County. Our group seems to have exhausted the resources in this county as our numbers have not increased greatly over the past few years. And we have heard from people outside our county that want services but think they can't get it because they don't live in our county. Because of this concerns and a desire that our group doesn't dissolve, a name change was needed: East Central Ohio, to expand our service area beyond the county lines; and Technology User Club, to expand our scope to include all areas of technology.

I understand how some people feel about changing a name that has been around for a while. But as mentioned at the General Meeting during discussing the proposal, Licking County Computer Society hasn't always been the name for this group. I'm sure that back in 2000 when the name was changed from the Newark Area Computer Club (after being that for 15 years) to the Licking County Computer Society there were many members that weren't in favor of that. But I'm guessing the reasons behind that change was to go beyond the Newark Area to include all the communities in Licking County. I'm not sure about the change from a Club to Society, but I've heard that many people liked that we were changing that part of our name back to Club.

So now after almost 15 years as the LCCS, if we are wanting to insure the long term life of our group; changing the name is a must. Oh, and the other reason for clubs disbanding is the lack of enough leaders. Too many groups (including ours) rely on the same individuals to do all the work, and when those people finally can't do it; what's our group going to do? But that's for another meeting's discussion.
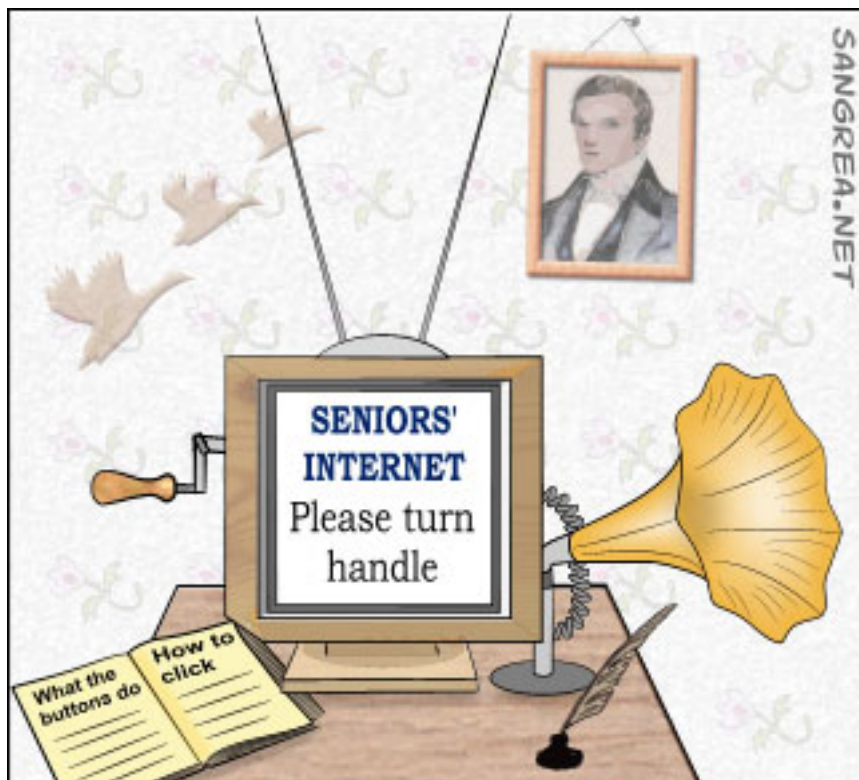
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News and Events

2015 February

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
01	02	03 **Repair SIG/Help Desk** 7:00- 9:00 p.m.	04	05	06	07 **Repair SIG/Help Desk** 1 - 4 p.m. **Executive Mtg** 3 - 4 p.m.
08	09	10 **Digital Imaging SIG/Help Desk** 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.	11	12	13 **Linux SIG** 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.	14
15 **General Meeting and Program** 2:00 - 4:30 p.m.	16	17 **iPad SIG/Help Desk** 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.	18	19	20	21 **Repair SIG/Help Desk** 1 - 4 p.m.
22	23	24 **Facebook Help Desk** 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.	25	26	27 **Linux SIG** 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. **Random Bits Deadline** 6:00 p.m.	28
01	02	03	04	05	06	07 -
08	09	NOTES				

For the latest information on Events "Click" on the link below
LCCS Google Calendar

News and Event con't
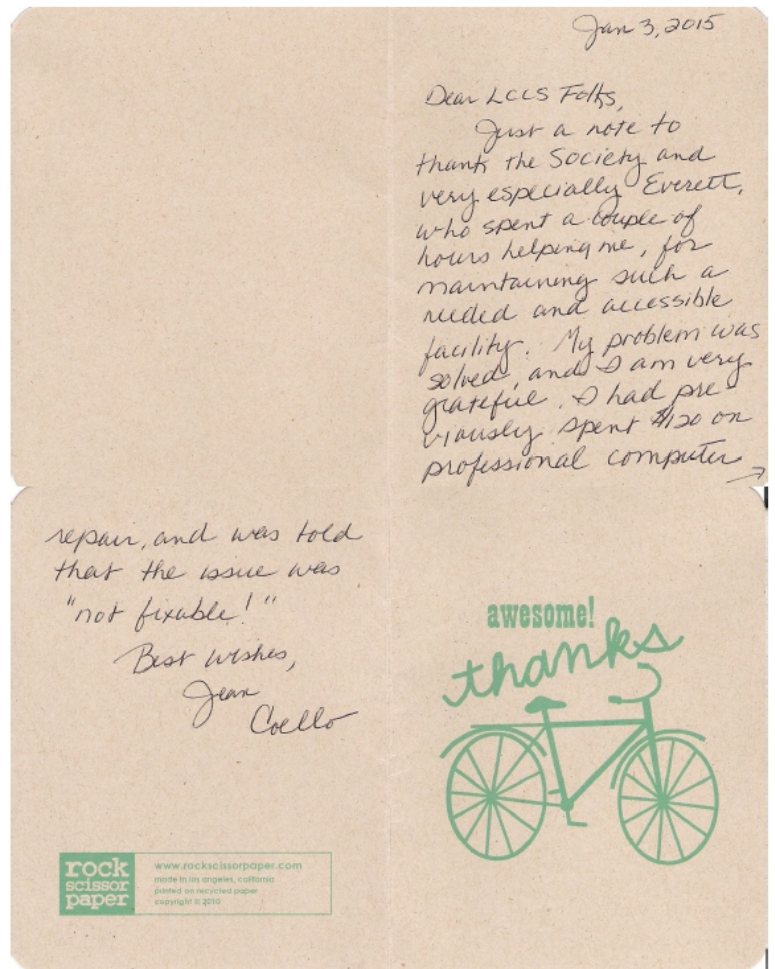
New Help Desk Starting Up

Due to many requests for help with Facebook, ECOTUC will be adding a monthly Facebook Help Desk that will meet on the 4th Tuesday of the month. The first get together will be on February 24th from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (note: this is earlier than the other evening Help Desks). The Facebook Help Desk will be "hosted" by Tracey Gerber and Jim Holton (they are also the team that teaches our "Total Beginner's" class). The Help Desk is a benefit of membership in the East Central Ohio Technology Users Club, but we welcome guests to check us out for a month or two. Then if they want to continue, we would ask that they join our club and have all the other benefits of membership.

We offered a class last year that met with some success, but the teachers/hosts felt that an on-going monthly Help Desk would better meet the needs of Facebook users vs. a repeating class that only meets certain months. So come down to the Technology Resource Center on the 24th, meet Tracey and Jim, and get the help you need using Facebook.

Once again, in 2015, LCCS will support Food Pantry Network of Licking County. Near the middle of the year we plan to donate $500.00 to the pantry. In the meantime, when we have 50/50 drawings, half goes to Food Pantry and half to a club member. Also, as an incentive for people to bring non-perishable goods to monthly meetings, we offer one (1) extra door prize ticket to those donating food. Mary Frances Rauch, V-Pres.

Jim read a note from Jean Coelho, (Vermont) who was visiting friends in the Licking County area. Jean brought her computer to the group for repair. She previously had paid $120.00 for computer repair. Being impressed with the work of LCCS, she joined the group.

Jan 3, 2015

Dear LCCS Folks,
Just a note to thank the Society and very especially Everett, who spent a couple of hours helping me, for maintaining such a needed and accessible facility. My problem was solved, and I am very grateful. I had previously spent $120 on professional computer repair, and was told that the issue was "not fixable!"
Best wishes,
Jean Coello

awesome!
thanks

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News and Event con't

2015 APCUG International Computer & Digital Technology Conference

September 25-27, 2015

Palace Station Hotel & Casino

Las Vegas, Nevada

Whether you are a computer or mobile device user, you will find sessions that will be beneficial to you. It doesn't matter whether you are using a Windows-based, Linux, and/or Mac computer or an Android or Apple mobile device, many programs and applications have cross-platform functionality: there will be something that piques your interest.

Workshops include: Digital Photography, Microsoft's Windows Server, "iPad instead of a PC," Facebook, Instagram, Linux, Internet Security, Social media, "Traveling with your iPad," plus many more.

Your registration fee allows you to choose from the 20 or more presentations. As an attendee, you will receive a welcome bag with vendor items, various discounts and special pricing order forms. Additionally, you will be eligible to win door prizes. Several meal events are planned where you can network with other attendees.

Conference reservations will be handled through Eventbrite at:

www.apcugvegas2015.eventbrite.com

Fee Schedule:

Early Bird Registration - $85 through June 30

Regular Registration - $100 July 1 through July 31

Late and On-site Registration - $120 August 1 through the conference.

Hotel Registration: Palace Station Reservation Department at 1-800-634-3101

Identify yourself as attending the APCUG conference (group code PCIAPCU)

When you make your hotel reservation be sure to request a Boarding Pass card; it will give you discounted meals at the hotel restaurants.

Room reservations come with access to pools and Jacuzzis, shuttles, fitness gym, and 24-hour Business Center.

Conference rate for Courtyard rooms: $55 Friday and Saturday ($30 per day three days prior to and after the conference)

Conference rate for Tower rooms: $79 Friday and Saturday ($49 per day three days prior to and after the conference)

Conference rates are based on reservations made through September 8, 2015

After the cut-off date, any new reservations, date or other changes to an existing reservation will be accepted based upon space rate availability.

The conference rate cannot be changed at check-in or check-out for guests who fail to request the APCUG conference rate. A credit card and one night's room rate and tax must be provided for deposit. If the deposit information is not received within 14 days from the date the room reservation was made, the reservation will be canceled.

Reservations can also be made using this Conference URL: http://tinyurl.com/2015APCUG-Hotel

The Palace Station Hotel & Casino is conveniently located a few minutes from the Las Vegas strip.

ECOTUG would like to invite our members to join the fun and be a winner like our **monthly free ticket winner Wayne Snyde**r

The Education Corner

Teaching Program Update

This winter has been a productive one for the Teaching Program. A team of computer geeks have updated all the computers to make them ready for a new year of classes. We have revised a few of the courses to make them fit better to your needs. March classes will begin the week of the 9th, and April classes will begin the week of the 6th. For exact classes being offered and their day/time, either check with Janet at the reception's desk at Heritage Hall (after the middle of the month), or check either of the websites for LCAP (http://lcap.org/computer-classes/) or LCCS (http://www.lccsohio.org/class%20schedule.htm).

In March we will be offering our "Computers for the Total Beginner" class, for those new to computers (do you know someone that got their first ever computer?). This is a free class to get you started. All the rest of the classes have a very reasonable fee of only $20 for 12 hours of instruction. Registration and sign-up for seniors takes place with Janet and fees are due before the first class. If you have a friend that hasn't quite crossed over the "senior line", they can sign-up through the Licking County Computer Society by contacting: John Kennedy, lccs.freejohn@gmail.com .

We'll also be offering a class for new Windows 8 users that want to learn how to "Compute Using the Modern/Metro Screen". For those with more computer experience and wanting to know even more, there's the "Beyond the Basics: What's Next?" class. This is for both Windows 7 and Windows 8 users and is a more advanced class. For those interested in the free Linux operating system, there will be an "Everyday Computing with Linux" class where students will do all the normal computer work that can be done on a Microsoft Windows computer, but doing it on the Linux computer instead (and for free).

During the April session, we'll be offering a new intermediate level class for those that want to "Compute from the Microsoft Windows Desktop". This is a class that will go beyond the beginners class and help students get full use out of their computers from the traditional desktop. This will be for both Windows 7 and Windows 8 users. For the current Linux user we will have another class learning to use the command line for different tasks and other more advanced practices.

Additionally we hope to offer both an "Exploring the Internet" class and the "Communicating with E-mail" class during either March or April. Our final two classes to be offered (if there's enough interest) will be a "Word Processing" class and a "Spreadsheet" class. If anyone is interested in either the Word Processing or Spreadsheet class, you are asked to call Janet (740-345-0821) and get on the "interested list".

SIG Help Desk Reports

Repair SIG / Help Desk

Submitted by: Ira/Ken

Chuck Tyndal assisted Margo with a tablet issue.

Ken Bixler helped a member with sound and flash video issues. Sound was off due to a setting and flash was being blocked by the browser. He also demonstrated installing VirtualBox and building a virtual machine for Laura Luth.

Everett McKee continues the effort to revive an all-in-one Sony computer.

Jim Amore was updating a laptop. He also worked on updating our web site.

Ira assisted a member by installing TeamViewer for him.

Several other members offered assistance and adminstrative support.

Jim Amore repaired a broken laptop. The lid had been forced back too far and broke the hinge screws loose. He drilled out the old screw holes and used new nuts and bolts to make the repair. $2.00 for parts, 2 hours of labor - one laptop saved.

Everett McKee repaired a desktop computer. The machine wouldn't shut down using normal methods. It required the power button to be held down to turn off the computer. Everett made changes to settings and software, completing the repair.

Ken Bixler updated software on three classroom machines and demonstrated Linux Mint for a disgruntled Microsoft user

Techie Term of the Month
802.11a

802.11a is an IEEE standard for transmitting data over a wireless network. It uses a 5 GHz frequency band and supports data transfer rates of 54 Mbps, or 6.75 megabytes per second.

The 802.11a standard was released in 1999, around the same time as 802.11b. While 802.11b only supported a data transfer rate of 11 Mbps, most routers and wireless cards at that time were manufactured using the 802.11b standard. Therefore, 802.11b remained more popular than 802.11a for several years. In 2003, the 802.11a standard was superseded by 802.11g, which uses the same 2.4 GHz band as 802.11a, but supports transfer rates of up to 54 Mbps.

NOTE: In order for a an 802.11a connection to take place, each device on the wireless network must support the 802.11a standard. For example, if a base station broadcasts an 802.11a signal, only computers with Wi-Fi cards that support 802.11a will be able to recognize the base station. While many routers are backwards compatible with older standards, it may be necessary to manually configure some routers to work with older 802.11a and 802.11b devices.

SIG Help Desk Reports

Linux SIG / Help Desk

Meeting Times
Second Friday 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Fourth Friday 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Submitted by: John Kennedy

As usual, the members of the Linux Help Desk have had some very interesting meetings this past month. We almost have enough topics and questions that we could consider having a meeting each week. But we'll stick with the second and fourth Friday afternoons and invite anyone interested in learning more about Linux to join us at 1:00 p.m.

Among the many topics discussed were:

* Adobe's decision to not support Firefox with updates to Shockwave Flash. They have decided under Linux they are only supporting Chromium/Chrome browser. This means that if you want to use Firefox as your browser and see things design to be viewed with Adobe Flash, you have to allow an older version to run on your computer. We discussed that if you stuck with the "main street" websites you were OK with using the older version. But if you have a habit of walking down certain "side streets" you best not allow flash to run, or switch over to Chromium/Chrome to view those particular sites.

* We discussed seeing Linux articles about "things to do after installing Linux". Most Linux versions come pretty well complete, but heavy users find addition programs or tweaks that might make the operating system work better. We learned that some of the suggestions might be helpful, but for the average Linux user it probably wasn't necessary to add all that extra stuff.

* We were shown some terminal commands that can list just about any information you might have about what hardware you have on your Linux computer or details about your network.

* We got to see a version of Linux that was specially developed for younger children. In the beginning they had simple icons that activated a number of learning programs, and then as needed they could be introduced to a more traditional menu system. This version is an actual full fledged Linux system, with just a desktop environment that was easy to use.

* Everyone got to have a "hands-on" experience installing a printer. We found out that it was as easy as selecting the printer from a list found by the operating system, and then telling the installer to find the drivers for it. We are having/had a special Linux workshop on the 30th to learn how to install a program called VirtualBox and creating a virtual machine (virtual operating system).

* There were also a number of individual questions from new people wanting to learn about Linux, but just too many to report. We invite you to join us and hear all the discussions.

SIG Help Desk Reports

Digital Imaging SIG / Help Desk

Meeting Times

Second Tuesday 7:00 - 9:00 p.m

Submitted on behalf of Dave Clement

At our January meeting Dave Reinhart demonstrated a program named PicturesToExe. Which is a program to take you pictures and videos and add music to make a montage. The software is a free trial and is full of many advanced features not usually accesable in free trial programs.David demonstrated the program by entertaining us with a photo / video montage of a trip to several western national parks. After David's presentation we then went through a number of the program features and how they function. Each of the members then used some of their own pictures and music to create a presentation.

At the February meeting we are going to further explore the capabilities of PictureToExe by doing some hands on work with the program. We are going to explore adding text to a slide and adding audio to the presentation.

In the months to follow we will be exploring how to take pictures of water droplets through a demonstration by Dave Clement and Ron Sherwood.

Prgram website link: http://www.wnsoft.com/picturestoexe/

iPad / iDevice SIG / Help Desk

Meeting Times

Third Tuesday 7:00 - 9:00 p.m

Submitted on behalf of Chuck Tyndall

There was a good turn out for the IPad help desk, there were about a dozen people who participated in the discussion. Several people had questions on printing from the Ipad. We discussed the fact the most newer wireless printers will allow Idevices to print to them.

We had two guest who came to see how the help desk operated, because they are going to form a Facebook help desk / SIG for the club members very soon.

We briefly covered Intellivite as a means of creating events and inviting guest to the event. The program is used for ongoing events like club meetings and ect.

A guest joined us to have some help with an Ipod Touch and how to use it to get on facebook.

Rich Allen demonstrated a Microscope lens attachment for the IPhone / IPad. When placed over the cameral lens of the IDevice it works throught the Camera App, and allows the user to take very closeup pictures of very small items. It could be useful for the visually impaired to help magnify very small text.

Chuck ended the evening by demonstrating an app named Akinator. Akinator is a fortune telling type app that ask you questions about a character of your choosing. The Fortune teller ask the user a series of multiple choice questions. In the end Akinator will eventually tell you who your person is.

Featured Articles

APCUG - Virtual Technology Conference
Judy Taylour <jtaylour@apcug.org>
Source: www.apcug2.org

APCUG's FREE 2015 Winter Virtual Technology Conference (VTC) will be held on Saturday, February 21, from 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm Eastern Daylight time. The sessions are 50 minutes in length and offer attendees the opportunity to ask questions via a chat window. Videos from earlier conferences can be found on APCUG's YouTube channel www.youtube.com/apcugvideos.

To register for this VTC, please click on the below link:
http://bit.ly/APCUG-2015-Winter-VTC

This link is where you can view the presenter bios and, after the conference, you can download the handouts and get links to the videos.
http://apcug2.org/content/vtc14

Spread the word by forwarding this e-mail to your members. VTCs are a great way for them to expand their technology experience and be introduced to new skills. Below are the sessions that are currently scheduled.
If you would like further information, please send an email to jtaylour@apcug.org

TRACK 1

Windows 10 Demo

Bill James, VP of Operations, Computer Club of Oklahoma City; APCUG Advisor, Region 8

Windows 8 was a hard sell for many people who were very happy with Windows 7 and they are still using Win 7. Windows 10 starts a new conversation about the Windows operating system that desktop and touch-screen end users are sure to appreciate.
Win10 addresses many of the complaints or concerns that occurred with Windows 8. The focus is the desktop which will be the default screen for many users with a revised Start Menu which is similar to the start menu of previous versions of Windows. Bill's presentation will be about the desktop and pointing out the similarities of Windows 10 with Windows 7 and 8 plus pointing out some of the features that, hopefully, will make it to the final version. Bring your questions for Bill. He has been using Win 10 since its release and has given many demos to his group as well as other groups via Webinar.

Featured Articles

Linux Software Superstore

John Kennedy, Training Chair & Linux SIG Co-leader, East Central Ohio Technology Users Club; APCUG Advisor, Regions 6 & 7

John will share information about the wide choices of free software available to the Linux user. He will have examples of software that relates to all the common computer tasks we do on a day to day basis. Attendees will see that running a Linux operating system doesn't hinder them doing anything. A lot of the software John uses is also available for Windows and even Mac's.

The Secrets of Making Chrome a Solid Computer

Stew Bottorf, Linux SIG Leader, Tampa Bay Computer Society

Chromebooks, Chromebases and Chromeboxes are for sale everywhere at very favorable prices compared to Windows 8 computers. They are often thought inferior to "real Windows" computers but Chromebooks are perfect for most of our group members. They cannot catch viruses and are always backed up but can they be made productive offline? This presentation shows with proper app selections the Chromebook, Chromebase or Chromebox are real gems that work both online and offline at a fraction of the heavier computer complexity, price, weight and battery power. I value my Chromebook and often use it in place of more complex units sitting on the shelf.

Marketing Your User Group on Pinterest, Twitter and Facebook, Sabrina Watson

Sabrina Watson, President, Crystal Rivers Computer Users Group; APCUG Advisor, Region 9

We're all looking for new members for our groups; this presentation will give you some ideas on how to accomplish that using social media.

TRACK 2

How Secure is My Device?

Jere Minich, Program Chair, Lake-Sumter Computer Society; APCUG Advisor, Region 5

We need to make informed decisions when using any electronic device. Tips for keeping your mobile devices secure and malware free.

Featured Articles

Using VMware Player to Create a Virtual Machine

Francis Chao, Member, WINdows ERS, Greater South Bay User Group, and the Tucson Computer Society

This presentation will be a hands-on demo of VMware Player as Francis installs the new Windows 10 Pro Technical Preview program. Some of the reasons for using a Virtual Machine is to be secure when surfing the Internet, downloading programs, trying a new operating system, testing software, etc. and this demo covers three of the reasons: downloading programs, trying a new OS and testing software. VMware Player is the only virtual machine program that communicates reliably with USB devices such as printers, external fax/data modems, and flash drives.

Google Glass

Mark Richards, Corporate IT Application Administrator for Range Resources, Oklahoma

Although interest in Glass has cooled over the last year, Mark remains a strong supporter of the technology. His presentation will be an overview of Glass and some of its potentials. It is a wearable, voice-controlled Android device that resembles a pair of eyeglasses and displays information directly in the user's field of vision. If it doesn't go forward, the technology is there to be used in other cutting-edge products.
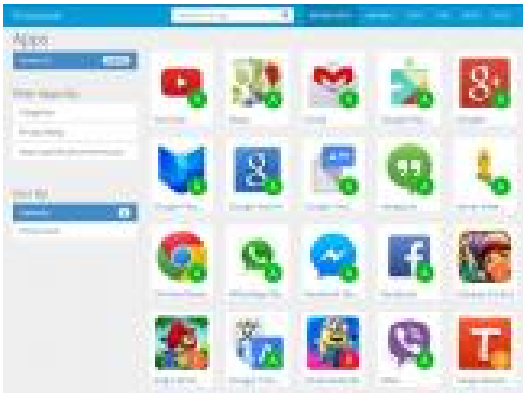
Judy Taylour, Chair
Virtual Technology Committee

www.apcug2.org
www.facebook.com/APCUG
www.twitter.com/apcug
www.youtube.com/apcugvideos
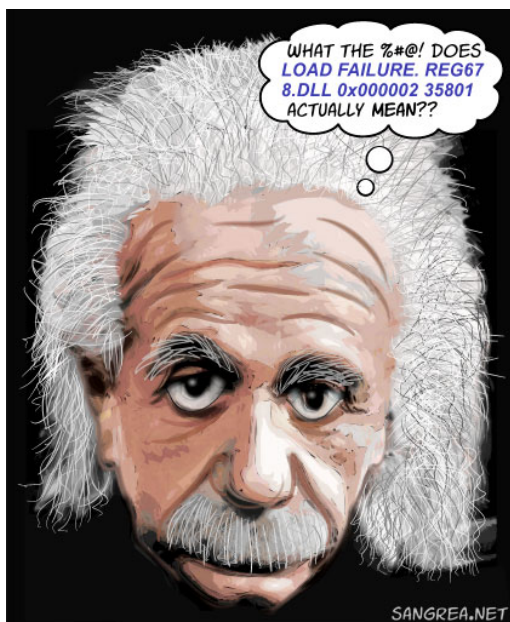
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Direct Link: CLICK HERE

Featured Articles

Are Your Android Apps Spying on You?
by Ira Wilsker

iwilsker@sbcglobal.net

WEBSITES:
http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2895004/What-Android-apps-know-Researchers-reveal-software-listen-microphone-access-contacts-knows-exactly-are.html

http://privacygrade.org

http://privacygrade.org/apps

http://www.vocativ.com/tech/internet/mobile-apps-privacy-settings

http://www.ftc.gov/sites/default/files/documents/reports/mobile-privacy-disclosures-building-trust-through-transparency-federal-trade-commission-staff-report/130201mobileprivacyreport.pdf

http://developer.android.com/reference/android/Manifest.permission.html

http://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2014/12/ftc-warns-childrens-app-maker-babybus-about-potential-coppa

http://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2014/04/ftc-approves-final-order-settling-charges-against-flashlight-app

https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.snoopwall.privacyapp

In recent months I have written several columns about internet and smart device privacy issues. Apparently, a large number of popular apps for both Android and Apple iOS devices utilize access to personal information of various types for other than the legitimate functioning of those apps; while equally applicable to iOS devices, this week's column will focus on Android apps.

It may be totally appropriate for mapping programs, such as Waze, Google Maps, and Here to access current location data from a smart device when being used for travel routing purposes, but it may also be highly questionable why many popular games targeted towards children may also need location information, access to the microphone, contact lists, call logs, photos, camera, text messages, and other data unrelated to the proper function of that game. The issues that will be discussed in this column cover the privacy concerns of otherwise "legitimate" smart device apps, and will not be discussing or including spyware and other forms of malware.

Most of the major sources of apps for download, such as the Google Play Store, clearly indicate the "permissions" requested or required by each individual app, and displays those permissions prior to the download and installation of those apps, and asks for the user's consent. The list of possible permissions is large, in excess of 150 (source: developer.android.com/reference/android/Manifest.permission.html), but only a few dozen are widely used by apps. While many apps only use the minimum number of permission necessary to perform

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their appropriate tasks, there is also an abundance of apps that individually use many permissions well beyond those necessary for their obvious functionality, but also distribute or sell the user's information to third parties for other purposes.

One of these "other purposes" may either be to improve the functionality and usability of a particular app, or to generate revenue for the app developer by displaying unrelated targeted advertising within the app, or for sale to third parties. While it is often a matter of personal choice, possibly even selectable in the user settings for a particular app, some forms of paid advertising may be beneficial to the user. Most often, the advertising displayed is to compensate the developer of the app for creating and updating the app being used. Other times, the advertising may actually enhance the usability of a particular app; for example, when using one of the several popular road routing apps, gas stations, motels, casinos, restaurants, retailers, and other merchants of targeted user interest may be displayed along or adjacent to the planned route. By utilizing the known location of the device, and selling localized advertising on the screen, often explicitly directed to the user based on information already on the smart device, the creator of the app can afford to also display real time road conditions, and other dynamic travel information.

A group of researchers at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University, led by Professor Jason Hong, have created a website, privacygrade.org, that displays the relative privacy ratings of over a million free Android apps using a traditional "A thru D" grading scale. It is obvious that apps receiving a grade of "A" are reasonably respecting the privacy of their users, while apps with a "D" grade may be utilizing personal information garnered from the device for much more than what is needed for the proper functioning of the app. According to Professor Hong, as quoted in the January 3 edition of the Daily Mail Online, "These advertisers are trying to get more targeted information about you, so they can get more targeted ads. These apps access information about a user that can be highly sensitive, such as location, contact lists and call logs, yet it often is difficult for the average user to understand how that information is being used or who it might be shared with. Most developers aren't evil, but they often don't know what to do with respect to privacy and security." The professor went on to explain how some developers " ... may collect data because they can, and nobody stops them."

Privacygrade.org has identified some of the worst offenders, in terms of the number of permissions that they require in order to be installed on a device, without significant regard to the necessity of those permissions to the proper functioning of the respective app. Some of the lowest rated apps that can access and possibly disseminate far more private information than is necessary for functionality are many of the popular children's games. Among the popular games targeting children that have the lowest privacy grades are Happy Fish, Fruit Ninja, Despicable Me: Minion Rush, Despicable Me, and Talking Tom. As an example, the very popular kids' game Happy Fish, which has had nearly a million copies download from Google's Play Store, is coded to determine the user's precise location, access stored photos, read stored text messages, and detect which specific Wi-Fi network is being used. According to the list of permissions listed in the Play Store, Happy Fish also can read sensitive log data, find accounts on the device, send and receive text messages, access photos and media files in USB storage, read phone status and identity, change network connectivity, view network connections, have full network access, prevent the device from "sleeping", and gather other information from the device. According to its self-reported description in the Play store, Happy Fish is suitable for children of all ages, and has "More than 150 kinds of cute fishes are waiting for you! Join us and make a unique aquarium for yourself! Pretty ones, cuties, stunning ones-- Various fishes are waiting for you! ... Please note that Happy Fish is free to enter. But you need to

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pay for some items especially rare fishes <sic> and rare fish food."

     While games for children may be some of the most egregious users of personal data, they are not necessarily at the top of the list in terms of the absolute number of permissions necessary. Some of the most permission laden apps are security apps, apps for communications and chat, and social networking apps. Specifically, those at the top of the Privacy Grade list in terms of number of required permissions are: AntiVirus Security with 44 required permissions; Viber (a chat utility) with 42 permissions; Facebook with 39; 360 Security - Antivirus with 39; Tango Messenger with Video & Calls 36; WhatsApp Messenger 32; and Microsoft's very popular Skype - free IM & video calls which requires 32 permissions.

     It needs to be noted at this point that it is not the absolute number of permissions required that earns a grade from Privacy Grades, but also considered other factors, such as the gap between peoples' expectations about an apps behavior, and the apps actual behavior. It is expected that mapping and road routing apps would need to access GPS and network location information in order to accurately display location information; players of children's games like Fruit Ninja generally would not expect the app to physically track their location. (Source: privacygrade.org/faq). Waze, the very popular road routing app owned by Google which has 29 permissions earned an "A" - Excellent score, and Google Maps which requires 16 permissions, also has an "A" privacy rating.   The Viber chat utility, the second highest number of permissions listed with 42, Facebook with its 39 permissions, also one of the highest numbers listed, and Skype with 32 permissions, all earned an "A"-Excellent rating. By contrast, the Happy Fish game has a "D" - Poor rating as does Despicable Me. The letter grades and summary privacy information for 1,049,549 Android apps is freely available online at privacygrade.org/apps.

     Now that smart device users are becoming more aware of the privacy risks very commonly associated with many of the apps that we are using, especially many of the popular games we play, checking the privacy rating at privacygrade.org/apps may be a worthwhile and even necessary chore. For those of you still playing varieties of "Angry Birds", be aware that most of those apps have a "C" - Fair privacy rating, but the popular "Candy Crush" series mostly have an "A" rating with a few "C" ratings sprinkled among them. Users should also be aware that if they do not want their apps tracking their location, location tracking can easily be turned off from the SETTINGS - LOCATION ACCESS - ACCESS MY LOCATION, but should also be aware that legitimate apps that require location information may not function properly with the location tracking function turned off.

     A special note to parents - since many of the games heavily promoted to children are among the highest privacy risks listed, parents may want to consider uninstalling those games that may be illicitly gathering excessive private information.

Source: CLICK HERE   Direct link: CLICK HERE

Club Officers

Below is a list of your Club officers and their information.

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