SLO Bytes Hard Copy
A publication of the San Luis Obispo PC Users Group
Vol. 19   No. 4   April 2003

SLO Bytes Meeting Review, by Bill Avery

Our February Meeting opened with Ray's welcoming message and SIG meeting announcements for the HTML and Linux groups. Alan Raul gave a review of the Microsoft Big Day Event, posing a question about the most commonly used database, Excel. In the XP version, there is a text-to-speech tool available, which read our membership lists in a "HAL 2001" voice. Ray has a raffle setup to buy tickets for the XP Office and other gifts which were made available to our group through the Big Day Mindshare program.

Alan also showed the "DiscOnkey" which plugs into a USB port, and emulates a small data drive. Dell has announced that they will begin to discontinue floppy drives and replace them with these new flash drives. They are useful for transfer of files between desktop and laptop at speeds up to 480 MB/sec. They work with a driver in Win98 and directly in other later versions of Windows such as ME, 2000, and XP. Ray has a version, called Pen Drive Plus 2.0 which he will show anyone who is interested.

Trivia quiz: what is a "sneaker-net"? and when was the 3.5 inch floppy invented? Answers: a floppy disk data transfer method, shuffling information between two computers across a room by moving the disk from the source to its destination is called a "sneaker-net" in computer slang terms. The "mini-floppy" 1.44 MB disk was invented by Sony, in 1980, although IBM and Shugart had created the earlier 8 inch and 5.25 inch versions in the late 1970s. Most of us still have boxes of these mystery disks stashed away in a closet somewhere!

The USB port system has evolved with the XP operating system, so that the latest version is 2.0, and it can be added to existing systems using a add-on card, if you have a PCI bus slot available. Alan carries the XP ServicePack1 upgrade on CD with him to support his work on older machines, and will provide a copy for $2, if you ask nicely. Often there are ports on both the front and back of modern systems, and one member even had some on his new keyboard, which work with his digital camera. Extension cables are available for the earlier USB version, and recently the newer docking station devices also come with extension cables, Ray said. The "Linux on the Desktop" conference had every conceivable type of USB device supported by the Linux operating system, according to Alan.

A neat program to report and record the contents of a computer system is called: "Belarc Advisor", and is available at: http://www.belarc.com/free_download.html It is a small program which builds a local HTML web page, to be viewed in a browser, which shows parts of your computer system, including installed software. I tried it on my system with no problems. It ran automatically as soon as I installed it.

Alan moved on to show his latest projects, a variety of new computers in a new case from ATronics International, Inc., 44700-B Industrial Drive, Fremont, CA 94538 Ph. 800-488-7776 or (510)656-8400
[http://www.pctoday.com/dealers/detail.asp?cid=1963] He has 12 fans in a roll-around case, and needs ear protection when running his machine <G>. Other new developments included questions about Tech-TV and Alan's' latest CD ROM burner. Serial ATA cables will be replacing the old 40-pin ribbon cables, and hard drives, which run at 10,000 rpm will be coming on the market. Warranties of 1 year have been common, recently, but this new series may be covered for 5 years!

For XP users, there is a way to turn off the annoying error reporting feature which wants to send information to Microsoft about problem programs. Alan described disabling it: Right-click on My Computer, go to Properties, or Control Panel - Systems. Click the Advanced Tab, Overwrite, Error Reporting, Disable Icon. Since I do not run XP, I can not see the exact choices available, so bear with me this once, please.

Another user reported that Spy Bot Search & Destroy - [http://security.kolla.de/] - [not "Spy Glass"] is available to detect spyware on a system. I also found another program that sounds interesting: "Aluria" [http://www.aluriasoftware.com/spywareeliminator/index.html]. They offer a scanner to find spyware on your system, which is an approximately 3.2 MB download. It does not eliminate anything, but makes a report. I will try it later, and let you know of my views about the program.

Alan said he used to send information to Microsoft, but he does not do that anymore. Updating the operating system does send information about your computer, and it is probably a good thing to do, but remember that upgrade is not update, according to one dismayed member, who spent three weeks fixing his system after an "update".

The last item in Alan's presentation was a way to install a "Shutdown" and/or "Restart" button on your desktop. Just email him at araul@kcbx.net for the details, and see his home page: http://www.slonet.org/~araul/index.htm for other topics, including Linux activities.

The early meeting adjourned to our break room for the Cookie SIG, hosted by Nancy Vrooman and Peter Stonehewer. Peter has graciously volunteered to substitute for Nancy if she could not make it due to pending eye surgery.   Nancy's surgery was delayed so she was there and Peter did some "on the job training" from Nancy. Hot coffee and tea are always served, to warm up our social hour.

The Main Meeting began at 2:30 pm, with President Ray Miklas making the opening announcements, including an invitation to join our club. We announced the raffle of Microsoft's Mindshare promotional package programs during our next meeting in April. Some lucky members will win Office XP Professional, and other valuable prizes, with tickets from our club through Marvin Baxendale [marvin@surfari.net], our Treasurer.

Our Guest Speaker was Steven Boothe, whose topic was "Internet Privacy". Steven is an Internet Communications Specialist with experience in network administration and consulting, the latter involving installing, securing and maintaining basic and extended Internet services running within a mixed Microsoft Windows NT, Linux and Unix operating environment. He was originally from Orange County, California, but came to SLO from Grants Pass, Oregon, where his mother is working as a tech support person in her retirement.

He asked us how many members use Microsoft Operating systems, and we were almost all in that group. He then described the various types of "free" software we were likely to use. As a result of these inquiries, he explained that we are all probably victims of "spyware", which are programs to report data about our computers to other sites on the Internet. This information is then sold to advertisers, who then invade our privacy with uninvited solicitations. A new technology called "Web Bugs" is being used to gather data, Steve noted. They are very small (1x1) transparent pixel images, so you don't notice them. Since every graphic on a web page is generated by calling it from a server, these bugs send a request to a server, which obtains information about your machine, without your
knowledge, that can be saved on that server. The spyware is usually packaged inside some form of freeware, which is why the freeware trap is so troublesome. So it is important to find a way to avoid these programs.

Steve showed us the advantages of a new browser, Mozilla, which evolved from the early Netscape browser, an early "loss-leader" type of freeware. It was actually only free to private or educational users, but was licensed to commercial users, such as Hewlett-Packard. The altruistic computer science community created an "open-source" type of software license to foster input to projects such as Mozilla, to rapidly improve the quality of programs available for free, as opposed to the closed system of competing commercial software, such as Microsoft's Internet Explorer browser. Anyone who wants to improve the source code of the free programs is welcome to do so. Volunteers do the work and we benefit from that broad base of support. One example of this improvement is the elimination of "pop-up" advertising in Mozilla, as Steve demonstrated. It is available for Linux, and Macintosh operating systems as well as Windows. The email and other features we are used to seeing in popular browsers are included also. Version 1.3 is available from [http://www.mozilla.org/], as an 11 MB file for Windows: [http://ftp.mozilla.org/pub/mozilla/releases/mozilla1.3/mozilla-win32-1.3-installer.exe], or the latest version of Mozilla 1.0.2 containing stability and security fixes:
[http://ftp.mozilla.org/pub/mozilla/releases/mozilla1.0.2/mozilla-win32-1.0.2-installer-sea.exe], also 11 MB.

The "cookie" problem has also been addressed by Mozilla, which allows complete user control of the invasive nature of cookie storage. You can limit them to being stored by an originating source only, and not other follow-up copy-cat cookie-monsters. Microsoft is trying to mimic these features, according to Steve, in the newer versions of IE but not as well as Mozilla. Shopping baskets still work in Mozilla, even with severe cookie control.

Java Scripting is also controlled, and you can select the areas where it is used, such as email. Steve mentioned an interesting alternative to the famous "Hotmail", which he uses and recommends as a secure free email server: Hushmail [http://www.hushmail.com/] . Java scripts are used to generate images in their web mail interface, so that feature needs to be enabled. Also check the "Eudora mail" web site: [http://login.mail.eudoramail.com/], which allows you to check mail from anywhere on the web, but requires cookies to work. Another feature which Mozilla controls is status bar scrolling, sometimes used to advertise products. As Steve progressed through his demonstration, he showed more and more features to control the user's environment and had more fun explaining his new-found freedom!

The membership had a discussion about the history of the browsers, which began with Mosaic from the University of Illinois National Center for Super Computing Applications (NCSA). It is available at:
[http://archive.ncsa.uiuc.edu/SDG/Software/Mosaic/NCSAMosaicHome.html]. Some loyal IE users noted that pop up control is available as a "hosts-deny" file for specific server sites. Someone asked if the Mozilla tool bar can be modified to control the size of icons, as a user feature. Of course you can and we saw how.

An interesting feature of Mozilla is the option to choose if it loads into memory, or stay resident in memory, which means it can run quickly, without using the hard drive, and start just as fast as Internet Explorer. Bookmarks can be imported from Netscape or IE to ease the transition into using the browser. The bookmarks can be organized into Tabs, at the top of the screen to open multiple windows, somewhat like Opera, and ease surfing tasks. Keyboard shortcuts [Crtl-T] are used to create new Tabs. This feature works best over a high-speed connection, according to Guy Kuncir. You can even bookmark a whole group of Tabs, to easily save your research trail on a given topic. The last feature of Mozilla Steve mentioned is a Web page Designer, similar to Composer in Netscape, which works on a page-by-page basis, useful for website maintenance.

We finished with a quick tour of the mail setup process, then Ray sounded the 10-minute alarm, so we had to draw the demonstration to a close. Further discussion of Internet Security will have to wait to the next time when Steve can return to amaze and inform us.

Ray presided over our Quick-Pick raffle, then we closed our meeting. I am looking forward to April 6th, and our next speaker, Jim Medeiros, Division Manager of Performance Technologies, Computer Products Division, in San Luis Obispo. I hope to see you there!

President's Message

At 1 PM Mr. William Eyster of the Make-A-Wish Foundation of the Tri-Counties will be giving us a brief and thank us for our participation in providing them the used/empty printer cartridges.

Here are his email remarks to Dave Grant describing the program:

Last year the program raised about $2,600.00 for MAW. So far this year we are off to a great start with over $900.00 going to MAW from the cartridge program in the first two months. My goal is to raise at least $5,757.00 per year because that is the average cost of a wish in the Tri-County area. I am confident that with your continued assistance and the help of so many others that have generously donated their empty cartridges that we will reach that goal this year and far surpass it next year.

As you requested, due to your computer crash, I will state some information. We collect ALL types of ink jet AND toner cartridges from PRINTERS, FAX MACHINES and COPIERS. Not everything has value. However, we take everything in order to make it easy for those that save the cartridges. We do not expect them to be experts in what is good and what is not.

We request that when someone replaces a cartridge that the empty one be put in the box that the new cartridge came in. The reason for this is to protect the cartridge from damage. The plastic ink jets are fragile and little corners frequently break off when they are just thrown into a bag, rendering the cartridge useless. The copper tape contact must be protected from scratching and also from the edges starting to peel up. Either of these conditions turns the cartridge into landfill fodder. The boxes are flattened and recycled after the cartridges reach their final sorting point in our shop. After the cartridges are sorted, they are carefully packaged in bulk for personal delivery to our vendors that buy the empties. They do their own visual inspection and then they test the electronics. They only pay for cartridges that pass both types of inspections.

I would like to come up some time and personally thank the computer club members for their contributions and also to be available to answer any questions that may arise. If the clubs have a drawing for prizes, I will be glad to provide something for each of the clubs to raffle off.
Thanks and best regards,

William Eyster

Mr. Eyster, in his email to me wrote: "I will bring... assorted computer related goodies" for our end of the meeting raffle give-away.
Note: If you have any **used ink-jet printer cartridges** bring them to our meeting. We collect them for MAW Foundation (at Marvin's table).

At 1:15 PM Alan will be demonstrating a program called AIDA32. This will be a similar program like BELARC which we demonstrated last month. AIDA32 is professional system information, diagnostics and bench marking program running on Win32 platforms. It extracts details of all components of the PC. It's most impressive feature is a built-in hardware database: detailed information about 23000 components. It can display information on the screen, print it, or save it to file in various formats like HTML, CSV or XML. As usual, bring your questions and someone may have a possible solution for you.

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Alan's remarks:

SLO Bytes Linux Users Group Three Year Anniversary.
Can you believe this group has been meeting for THREE YEARS now? How time flies when you're having fun. What impresses me the most about the group is the progress which has taken place. We sometimes deviate in our discussions to Windows and general computing as all of this is part of learning Linux. I would like to thank Ray for providing a meeting place for this group in the past years. KCBX has now provided our meeting place for the last six months. We have 30 people on our mailing list with about 12 or so people showing up each month to our meeting. To see what we are doing in our Linux Users Group click the Linux SIG link off the main http://www.slobytes.org web site or go directly to http://www.slonet.org/~araul/linux.htm
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At 2:30 PM, our featured speaker will be Jim Medeiros, Vice President and General Manager, Performance Technologies, Computer Products Group (formerly Ziatech-Intel). He will discuss the technology thrust of his organization and the markets he is seeking for their products. The Computer Products Group has offices at 1050 Southwood Drive, San Luis Obispo.

Performance Technologies Inc. of Rochester, N.Y, acquired Ziatech-Intel, a local computer systems manufacturer, in October 2002. For five years, the organization now led by Medeiros had focused on telecommunications, where the growth was. However, in response to the current, dramatically changing environment, they have adopted a more balanced approach to the overall market for their equipment, providing systems to customers in different markets such as in industrial automation or medical applications, areas where Ziatech had experience in the past. PTI, the parent organization, typically develops board-level products computer boards primarily for switching technologies or networking; whereas, the local Computer Products Group has more of a systems capability that can provide more computing products that can be prepackaged as a set of capabilities to sell to an end user. This expertise also provides the Computer Products Group with a unique entree into the market as a systems provider, a sector where they also have experience. (Visit www.pt.com for a more information about Performance Technologies, Inc.)

Medeiros earned a bachelor's degree in Electronic Engineering from Cal Poly in 1987. He started work at Ziatech as an intern in 1986 and has been with the company since that time.

Our featured speaker at the 4 May SLO Bytes meeting will be Matthew Ryan, Sales Manager, TCSN.Net (a local ISP)1306 Pine St., Paso Robles.

Take advantage of the four **learning CDs**: "Learn Windows XP, Excel, Word & Power Point" available for our members to check out (at Marvin's table) and use on their computers. Because of the demand, we have now two sets of the CDs.

Lastly, at the end of our give-away raffle, we will be drawing the lucky $2.00 ticket for the **Microsoft Office XP Professional**, donated to us by the Microsoft "Mindshare User Group Team" mindshar@microsoft.com This package contains MS Word, MS Excel, MS Outlook, MS PowerPoint, MS Access, and a Step by Step Interactive Training CD for Office XP. There is still time to buy a ticket (or two) to will this great prize. You don't have to be present to win, so mail in your check to Marvin (543 Gularte Rd., Arroyo Grande, CA 93420), or buy it at our April 6th meeting.

--Ray Miklas

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Club information and meeting times

Hard Copy is a monthly publication of SLO Bytes PC Users' Group located in San Luis Obispo, California. Information in this Newsletter is derived from both our own membership and other PC User Group Newsletters. The purpose of this publication is to inform our members of meetings and provide information related to the use of PCs and various Operating Systems.
Membership: Dues are $25 per year. Full membership entitles you to our monthly newsletter, technical assistance, raffle gift drawing at the end of the meetings, and comradeships.
Article Submission: Deadline for submission of articles is the 15th of each month. Articles should be provided in ASCII format without any type of formatting from your word processor including tabs, indents, extra spaces, or highlighting. We prefer articles on disk or via email but will accept hard copies if necessary.
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General Meetings are held the 1st Sunday of each month. Our meeting location is the San Luis Obispo I.O.O.F. Hall at 520 Dana Street, SLO.
Special Interest Groups (SIGs) meet at 1:00 p.m. to 2:15 p.m.
The General Meeting starts at 2:30 p.m.

Outside SIGs:
HTML-Internet SIG normally meets on Monday at 6:30 PM (following our Sunday's General Meeting) at Ralph Sutter's home in Arroyo Grande.
Linux SIG normally meets on Thursday at 6:30 PM (following our Sunday's General Meeting) at KCBX.net [a.k.a. SLONET] Training Center, 4100 Vachell Lane, SLO.

SLO Bytes Officers/Volunteers:

Ray Miklas (President/Editor) rmiklas@pacbell.net
Guy Kuncir (V.P./Programs) gkuncir@charter.net
Marvin Baxendale (Treasurer/Membership/Publishing) marvin@surfari.net
Ralph Sutter (Secretary/Web Master/HTML-Internet SIG) rsutter@pw-x.com
Bill Avery (Contributing Columnist/Win95/98 SIG)
Alan Raul (General SIG/Linux SIG)
Nancy Vrooman (Refreshments)
Peter Stonehewer (Refreshments)
Nate Wallenstein (Contributing Columnist)
Ken Stilts (Set-up/Clean-up)
Cliff Buttschardt (Set-up/Clean-up)
John Enos (Set-up/Clean-up)
Bill Palmerston (Set-up/Clean-up)

Treasurer's Report Feb 15, 2003 - Mar 15, 2003

Income
Membership Dues $75.00
 Refreshments $30.25
 Rental of PA System $10.00
 Donation for Alpha 5 Pgm $20.00
 Sale of Raffle Tickets $86.00
Expenses
 Rent $75.00
 Refreshments $48.99
 Insurance $247.00
 Checking Acct Balance $2,191.96
Savings Acct Balance $493.81

New Members
James Middlemist

SLO Bytes Website www.slobytes.org

PDF version of this mailing available at:
http://www.slobytes.org/news.htm

Nate Wallenstein's
Recommended Reading

Purely by random chance I went to the website of the Chicago Computer Society and found a link to "Tips"
http://www.ccs.org/Tips/2Tips.htm. There was treatise on Windows troubleshooting
http://www.ccs.org/Tips/Windows/3Windows.htm which is much too long to reproduce here but may be of use to any of you
which may be having shut down or start up problems in 9x or ME.

I also wandered onto a Microsoft web site http://www.microsoft.com which has a link to an innovative article on ten ways to
use a digital camera and other interesting links. The article also has links to other information about digital cameras.

This month I'm searching the newsletters of clubs in Illinois for material of interest. I found the January 2003 issue of "Fox
Tails" the the newsletter of the Fox Valley P C Association http://members.aol.com/fvpca2/jan/nlindex.html which has a four
page article on the frontside bus which is found on every computer and its relationships with most of its other parts. The author
is not listed but it is well written in simple language, well understood by lay people.

For sometime now, we have included a column from the current issue of "The Motherboard" of the Redding P C U G titled
"The Surfboard" by Dorothy Kirk. This column provided URLs for Internet sites of various classes of general interest. The
topic of the current issue is "Problems of Windows XP". The URL for recent issues of this newsletter is
http://www.snowcrest.net/ibmpcugr/motherboard.html. I suggest that this URL should be one of your "Favorites"