August SLO Bytes Meeting Review, by William Avery

Our new newsletter format continues with this issue. The report of the Early Meeting is simply a question and answer session with our sage explorer of the computing world, Alan Raul. His discussions are available on tape, for those who might wish to listen at a later date.

We started with an introduction to our new Bulletin Board, provided by Boardnation.com: http://users.boardnation.com/~slobytes/index.php. This project is done with YaBB SE , who explain: YaBB SE is a PHP/MySQL port of the popular forum software YaBB (yet another bulletin board). It incorporates the same intuitive user interface, and several of the most popular modifications from YaBB's Boardmod project. All that means is the Bulletin Board is very user friendly, and has several useful features, which Alan and Ralph showed to the group. I had to use Internet Explorer V.5.0 to access it, as my old Netscape 4.79 was unable to display the pages correctly. The posting of comments and questions for registered users only makes it somewhat like a newsgroup, and the html basis allows fancy graphics, such as an author's picture, to appear with their posting. Alan suggested that responses be written to the bulletin board rather than the individual poster. That way all readers will benefit from our shared solutions.

There is a point system to rate our usage of the BB, and each post equals a point. If we go over 7,000 points per month, then the system may restrict our usage. There is an ICQ style notification system, which you can set up to notify everyone on a list when you check into the BB. It was suggested that we reserve its use for SLO Bytes members, if possible.

Searching the posts is possible, and that can be handy, as Alan demonstrated. Pictures are a bit more challenging, and Ralph will set up a link to a web location where an image can be stored. Each user's settings can be configured, and passwords are set during that part of the registration.

We will see how this new system goes over the coming months, and adjust it as needed. The demonstration continued until it was time for our Coffee/Tea SIG, which met in the Break Room with a fine spread of cookies and treats for all to enjoy, hosted by Nancy Vrooman and Peter Stonehewer. Thanks for the memories!

The Main Meeting opened as Ray reminded us about the SIG meetings in the first week of each month: our Website / HTML group, the first Monday at Ralph Sutter's home in Arroyo Grande, and the Linux group at KCBX Tech Center, 4100 Vachell Lane in San Luis Obispo. [See map: http://www.kcbx.net/contact/map.php]. As soon as we recognized and welcomed our guests, then Guy introduced our speaker, Doug Chanley, representing Alpha Software Inc., providing an overview of Alpha Five V.5, a relational database system. They describe it as follows:

 Alpha Five Version 5 (A5V5) is the most feature-filled database and application development tool ever released by Alpha Software in its twenty year history. With Version 5 you are able to track,

report, and manage any information related to an activity or organization -- be it about people, projects, images, equipment or facilities. Version 5 introduces fundamental innovations to database software and adds a huge number of new capabilities that will appeal to users of all skill levels. The system is designed to provide the user with enormous power and flexibility in manipulating and reporting on data, without requiring the user have programming skills.

Alpha Software Inc. is located in Burlington, MA.

Their products are outlined on http://www.alphasoftware.com/products/default.asp.

An A5V5 overview is on http://www.alphasoftware.com/products/a5v5/overview.asp.

New features are on http://www.alphasoftware.com/products/a5v5/newfeatures.asp.

In his presentation, Doug provided database basics (what they are, including basic and relational database structures, and how to use them). He presented the Alpha Five database specifications and outlined some of the system's capabilities by describing the Control Panel, Building Tables and Sets, Field Types, Adding Field Rules, Design Techniques (for forms, reports, letters, and labels), Database Operations, and Action Scripting. He also discussed use of A5V5 with MS Word Mail Merge and MS Excel.

Doug has been using Alpha Software database products since 1990, first applying their DOS-based Alpha Four Version 2.1 and continuing with subsequent DOS versions until Alpha Five Version 1, a Windows-compatible system, was released. He developed his skills at the "learn by doing" school of hard knocks, starting out by developing business and home applications for personal use and moving to applications useful to his workplace. As President of Doug Chanley Personal Consulting, Delano CA, he spends about half of his time in consulting and development system applications. He is also part of a larger team working on projects with other developers in the Southern California area.

Doug asked how many people use a database at home, and several members raised their hands. Doug said the topic is a little dry as a subject for a presentation, so he hoped we would enjoy his discussion. First, he wanted to explain the difference between flat databases and relational databases. As an example of a flat database, he said an address book would be one type, as long as each entry is an independent piece of data. In relational databases, such as invoices, multiple tables can be displayed via linking information or keys, called parent and child keys. These are created by a set of rules. If a flat file such as an address book were to add an automatic ZIP-code lookup, then we could say it is a relational database. He went on to discuss additional features of the product.

Guy asked about a comparison with Microsoft's Access database program. He noted that Access features macro operations that are learned automatically. Doug responded that Alpha can learn keystroke sequences in a similar manner. Alpha's X-Basic script language is a more advanced feature not found in Access. Documents can be e-mailed, using either the internal mail function or an external program, such as Outlook. Reports will summarize database information, and present it in a user-friendly format. Guy wanted to know if bar-code fonts could be used, and Doug suggested asking the FAQ user inquiry on the website. Guy also noted that the logical depth of expressions

limits Access, which does not seem to be a problem with Alpha. Doug noted that large numbers of users could be handled by A5V5, also. He offered a 30-day trial CD ROM version for those members without a high-speed connection; otherwise all products are available via website downloads.

Our meeting ended with a Pick 'n' Win raffle and announcements for the SIGs next week. We gained 5 new members at this meeting, a club record, for sure. A prize Chessmaster CD was won by one of those lucky guys, too. Resume Maker went to a retiree, who will give it to a favorite grandchild. Kiplinger's "Simply Money" went to our very own Bird Watcher, Debby Schmitt. Norton Utilities, V.8 was a gift we gave to Fred Cook. The best prize was Alpha Five, which went home with Ralph Sutter.
See you next month.   -Bill

President's Message

At 1 PM Alan will moderate a computer question/answer session. If there are no questions then Alan will reach into his hard drive and show you something new or at least different!
Below from Alan:
Some interesting web links:

- - - - - - The complete Internet guide and Web tutorial by Microsoft - From the basics of browsing the World Wide Web to the details of banking on-line, the Internet Guide delivers the knowledge you need to venture onto the Internet, explore its vast offerings, and make it work for you.
http://www.microsoft.com/insider/guide/intro.asp

- - - - - - Are you looking for an old version of some program? - Sometimes upgrading to a newer version can be a good thing. Other times, your computer may not be compatible with the new version, the new version is bloated, or all the good options are no longer available. If you are looking for an old version of any program, OldVersion.com should be your first stop.
http://www.oldversion.com/

At 2:30 PM, our featured speaker will be Steven Boothe, a local San Luis Obispo "computer type" who will be returning by popular demand, to continue his discussion of Internet Privacy issues.

Building on the presentation he gave in March, Steven will be presenting other ways in which users can reclaim some the joy of web browsing. Last time, guided by his presentation, we explored ways in which we could utilize the Mozilla web browser to block pop-up ads and to fix the number of times we actually have to watch the same animated advertisement. If that wasn't enough, we even learned how one could simply "right-click" on an offending image and choose to have all further images blocked from that server! This month Steven will return to demonstrate how the latest developments in Mozilla not only permit us to be more selective with advertisements displayed as images but can also be used to control Macromedia Flash as well! He will introduce us to the all new

'Click to Play' plug-in that lets you disable all Flash objects by default, while giving you the opportunity to "Click- to-Play" the Flash objects that YOU desire to see! Time permitting, we may look at using Mozilla as a spam resistant email reader and webpage-authoring tool, and may explore the latest developments with the new and improved Mozilla Firebird project.

Steven began tinkering with computers sometime in the late seventies and became serious about them in 1992. He discovered electronic Bulletin Boards in 1993 and the Internet in 1995. Since that time, he has endeavored to learn everything he can about electronic communications. He has installed and maintained a variety of electronic information systems for various local profit and non-profit organizations, is a certified Linux professional and is currently employed in that capacity. He received his education from Cuesta Community College and Cal Poly State University.

Our featured speaker at the 5 October SLO Bytes meeting will be Dennis Johansen who will be speaking about Digital Cameras. Dennis is the Owner/Operator of Jim's Campus Camera in San Luis Obispo.

August raffle winners were Gary Docherty, winning the Microsoft FrontPage 2002 and Ralph Jones won the Microsoft Publisher 2002. These products were donated to us by the **Microsoft "Mindshare User Group Team"**. Gary has also won The Windows XP Professional at our June meeting so he certainly is very lucky. Congratulations to both our winners!

You are invited to take advantage of the **money saving offer that KCBXnet (aka Slonet)** is extending to all current and future members of SLO Bytes. If you chose to subscribe to KCBXnet as your dial-up ISP, you and SLO Bytes will benefit. You will be billed only $17/month and SLO Bytes will receive $2/month from KCBXnet. Check out our web site's Announcements http://www.slobytes.org for further details.

Continue to bring any **used ink-jet printer or toner cartridges** to our meeting. We collect them (at Marvin's table) and turn them over to "Make A-Wish Foundation" who generate much needed funds for their organization by refurbishing and selling them.

--Ray Miklas

Webmaster's Comments

As announced at the August meeting, the SLO Bytes PC Users' Group Bulletin Board, courtesy of Boardnation.com is now available at http://users.boardnation.com/~slobytes .

The first time that you use the bulletin board, you'll need to register before you can access the site. Doing so is quick; easy and without charge. To register, at the above URL, click on the link aptly named "click here". That will take you to

http://users.boardnation.com/~slobytes/index.php?action=register. Enter your e-mail address and choose the name that you wish to use on the bulletin board. The information that you provide is not used for any purpose other than accessing the SLO Bytes Bulletin Board.

Now return to users.boardnation.com/~slobytes and enter the username and password that you just created. The next screen gives you the option of viewing the SLO Bytes General Discussion Board or the OTHER TOPICS Bulletin Board. Click on the bulletin board that interests you and the next screen will display the various topics of discussion. Click on a topic and it will display in chronological order all of the postings for the topic. If you wish to add your own comments, click on "Reply" at the bottom of the screen. To start a new topic, click on "New Topic" at the top of each bulletin board.

If you need assistance, see the Board Nation on-line help file available at www.boardnation.com/community/YaBBHelp .

Next month, I'll explain how to set up your profile for the bulletin board.

Ralph Sutter

Editor's Recommended Readings

The San Gabriel Valley Technology Users Group http://www.sagatug.org/ in their July 03 newsletter has an article by Semantec on various computer security threats and (of course) how their products fight these "baddies". This article is written in simple nontechnical language and is a good basic reference especially in these mischievous times. This home page also has links to previous issues containing other articles of general interest. Other links are provided to other sites of varied ratings from G to XXX. You could spend (waste) hours.

The Hayward PC Community http://www.pcc.org/ Newsletter for August 03 has an announcement of a presentation at their August 03 meeting about the ONEbox Media Center by NiveusMedia, Inc. this device is apparently a digital video recorder similar to a TiVo except that there are no monthly fees involved. No other information is provided except the URL of the manufacturer http://oneboxmc.com/. A visit to this site shows that this is a very impressive piece of equipment as is the price $999 with an 80 GB hard drive or $1199 with 160 GB.

The NL also contains a column by Diane George called "Tricks and Tips". In this issue she covers the new Adobe Reader, a new enhanced browser called "My IE2", and a new freeware utility called "SpyBot-Search and Destroy" which does what its name implies.

The site also contains links to previous NL issues.

The "Motherboard," the newsletter of the Redding IBM Computer Users Group http://users.snowcrest.net/ibmpcugr/motherboard.html for July 03 has a number of worthwhile articles:

***"The surfboard" by Dorothy Kirk, Redding IBMPCUG. URL's for Internet games for kids of all ages.
***"Bits and Pieces" by Rush Blodget, Redding IBMPCUG. Varied topics.
***"Encarta Deluxe 2003" by Mario Quinn, Redding IBMPCUG.
***"Factory Reconditioned Products" by North American Precis Syndicate, Inc.
***"Performance Issues With Windows XP" by Ira Wilsker, Golden Triangle PC Club.

Editor's note:
If you have any comments, suggestions, wants, don't wants, beefs and/or ????, please e-mail me at junate@charter.net.

Treasurer's Report
July 15, 2003 - August 15, 2003

    Income

        Membership Dues $150.00

        Refreshments $36.57

        Raffle (Front Page & Publisher) $18.00

        Dividends $6.59

    Expenses

        Rent $75.00

        Refreshments $31.21

        Checking Account Balance $3,080.64

        Savings Account Balance $795.82

New Members
  Paul Norman
  Cherie Smith
  Eric Schug
  Jaleah Brynn
  Marvon Fenton (rejoin)

Club Information and Meeting Times

SLO Bytes, a PC Users Group dedicated to educate its members in the use of personal computers, digital devices and software, meets on the first Sunday of each month at the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) Hall at 520 Dana Street, San Luis Obispo. All meetings are open to the public at no cost. Special interest groups meet from 1 to 2:00 PM and guest speaker presentations begin at 2:30 PM. Contact Guy Kuncir (489-1395, gkuncir@charter.net) or visit www.slobytes.org for additional information about SLO Bytes and the scheduled presentation.

HardCopy 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 via e-mail, technical assistance, raffle gift drawing at the end of the meetings, a voice in the affairs of the club, and comradeships.

Article Submission: Deadline for submission of articles is the 20th of each month. Articles should be E-mailed to the editor at junate@charter.net

Disclaimer: Neither SLO Bytes PC Users' Group, its officers, editors, or contributors to this newsletter assume liability for damages arising out of this publication of any article, including but not limited to the listing of programming code, batch files and other helpful hints. Articles from this newsletter may be reprinted by other user groups if credit is given to both the author and newsletter from which it was taken. Reproduction of articles with a specific Copyright notice is prohibited without prior permission from the original author.

Outside Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

HTML/Internet SIG normally meets at 6:30 PM on the Monday following our Sunday General Meeting at Ralph Sutter's home in Arroyo Grande. Call Ralph at (805) 489-8678 for directions

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:

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Nancy Vrooman (Refreshments)
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John Enos (Set-up/Clean-up)
Bill Palmerston (Set-up/Clean-up)

SLO Bytes Website www.slobytes.org