Computer Connection

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Microsoft

WE ARE VERY PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE that Microsoft representative, Brett Davis, will be with us again this month to aquaint us all with Microsoft Office 2000 and answer your questions about Microsoft's latest Office suite and its new Web-related features. Office 2000 is not currently in the stores and we would normally not have a presentation for a product still in beta testing, but Brett assures us that it will be in the stores by June, 1999. That assurance, plus expressed interest from members of the group is a convincing argument to have this presentation at this time. So, If you are considering the purchase of an office suite and Microsoft's is one of the products you are considering, you should make it a point to be at the May meeting to pump Brett Davis for information on Microsoft's latest and greatest.

MEETING SCHEDULE

MICROSOFT
General Meeting, Tuesday, May 11, 7:30PM

COMPUTER CRIME
by Data Forensics
General Meeting, Tuesday, June 8, 7:30 PM

Meetings are held at
The Palisades Center Raso Community Room
West Nyack, NY 10994

SLATE OF CANDIDATES FOR THE JUNE ELECTION

presented at the April meeting by the nominating committee:

President: . . . . . Sondra Coulter
Vice President:. . . . . Eugene Frank
Secretary: . . . . . Charles Wendler
Treasurer: . . . . . Thea Zendell

Please welcome our new/interim VP, Gene Frank (hhw@icu.com), and our new Review Coordinator, Sy Berber (syber@usa.net).

We will be taking orders for the 25th edition of the Secret Guide to Computers at the May meeting. This edition contains major updates from the last edition we offered (23rd). It is probably the single most complete and comprehensive computer manual in existance, suitable for novice and experienced users. The author, Russ Walter, offers free computer support by phone, anytime day or night to anyone who buys his book. Single copy price is $15, RPCUG member price is $10. Last chance to order will be at the May general meeting by advance payment only to treasurer, Thea Zendell.

Rockland PC Users Group is located 35 miles northwest of New York City. Our tax-exempt organization is dedicated to community service and public education with demonstrations, special interest groups (SIGs) and individual help with all facets of IBM-compatible personal computing.

FROM THE EDITOR

Getting this month's issue out on time has been a challenge, as many of us hard-working volunteers have been distracted by our personal lives. I offer my heartiest thanks to those of you who contributed articles, stories, and humor; anything that was not used will be saved for the next issue. Please keep it coming, and you *will* see yourself in print!

Marian Baade
Newsletter Editor

PC EXPO IS COMING TO TOWN!!

JUNE 22-24, 1999
Jacob K. Javits Convention Center
New York City

You can register at www.pcexpo.com
Come to the May meeting for information about
★★ **FREE** registration ★★

THE INTERNET IS MIGHTIER THAN THE PEN...

Here's A Vote for Doing Your Own Thing:
http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Bluffs/4157/hampdance.html

Millennium Bug:
http://www.thesitefights.com/wepatrol/mil_bug.gif

Had a Bad Computing Day? This will help:
http://members.aol.com/spoons1000/break/index.html

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POLICY FOR PROFESSIONAL LISTINGS:

FOR THE REMAINDER OF 1999, each paid-up member may run a professional listing (up to 4 lines) for $15, understanding that there is no guarantee as to the number of issues that will be produced this year. Please email your information to me directly at mcbaade@aol.com. You may bring your check to a meeting or mail it (along with hard copy of your ad) to Thea Zendell, Treasurer, RPCUG, 169 South Main Street, Suite 384, New City, NY 10956-3358.

CAN'T GET THAT CONNECTION UP TO SPEED?

Maybe your modem is not at fault - it could be your phone line. Take a look at the **LINE TEST** at
http://www.3com.com/56k/need4_56k/linetest.html

The Rockland PC Users Group, a tax-exempt educational organization, meets monthly, usually on the second Tuesday. Meetings begin at 7:30 P.M. The Rockland PC Users Group supports the computing interests of the community as well as the interests of its own members. The latest information about meeting programs and dates is available on the Internet at ***http://www.rpcug.org.***

NEWSLETTER EDITOR

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Webmaster: Steve Weinberg, / rpcug@acd-pc.com

PRESIDENT'S DESK

By Sandy Coulter

I was very pleased with the enthusiasm for our April presentation of the Linux operating system. As evidenced by the number of Linux CD's that were taken, there is certainly an interest and a market for this alternative PC operating system!

In contrast, this month will feature a presentation by Brett Davis from Microsoft who will demonstrate the beta release of Office 2000. The term "beta release" means that there is still plenty of testing to be done before the product is ready for the general public. Sometimes beta releases are offered for free to the public with the understanding that acceptance of the software obligates the user to report any bugs and could very well cause the user some computer problems. Thus, extreme caution (as in doing a full system backup) is recommended if you decide to do any "beta testing."

As I said at the April meeting, we are looking to increase our general fund so we can afford certain things as needs and desires arise. One method we are trying is to open the general door prize drawing to visitors by charging a nominal amount. Members will still get free tickets, but may also purchase additional ones if they wish to increase their chances. We held a 50/50 fundraiser that was so well received that we intend to do it every month, if possible. We raised about $120, with half going to the winner, Roslyn Irving, and also had a second prize, a Connectix Quick Cam, that went to our own program chair, Jon Olson. We welcome any new or nearly new donations of this type and will provide a receipt for the full market value that is tax deductible to the benefactor.

NEW USERS SIG

Remember that the New Users SIG (Special Interest Group) is held on the same evening and location as the general meeting. The sixth in a series of seven monthly workshops will take place on Tuesday, April 13 at 6pm sharp. The topic will be "the Internet." Non-registered members may sit in and audit the workshop, but no new registrations will be accepted at this time. For further information on the NU SIG, contact Frank Palmeri at 914-634-2966, or e-mail to palmshet@aol.com.

Y2K SEMINAR

Our volunteer panelists for the Y2K seminar held at the West Nyack library did an incredible job, as RPCUG members who attended can attest to. Hats off and a big thank you to members Vinnie Cina, Richie Stark, Steve Weinberg, and Mike Diederich!

MELISSA VIRUS

So far I have heard no reports of any member being affected by Melissa or one of the offspring macro viruses. However, I would still like to remind everyone to practice safe computing by using anti-virus software and keeping it up to date. If you have been unable to obtain updates to McAfee Viruscan or Norton Anti-Virus, (sites have been overloaded from the Melissa panic) and you are an AOL member, you can download and install the updates manually by going to keyword: McAfee and keyword: Symantec, respectively. Also, remember not to open executable (.exe, .com, .doc, .xls) e-mail attachments from unknown sources. Even if the attachment comes from a friend, don't be shy about asking them where they got it. Remember that the vast majority of virus warnings are hoaxes, so do not forward ANY virus warnings unless you are positive it is real. Here are some legitimate websites that carry virus hoax information:

Computer Virus Myths home page:
http://www.kumite.com/myths/

CIAC:
http://ciac.llnl.gov/ciac/CIACHoaxes.html

Data Fellows:
http://www.datafellows.com/news/hoax.htm

Symantec AntiVirus Research Center
http://www.symantec.com/avcenter/hoax.html

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The nominating committee has come through with a full slate of candidates for the next election (see front page). I agreed to have my name put forth for another term upon learning that they found a candidate for vice president who agreed to share my workload and possibly run in the 2000 election. This does not mean that any potential candidates that were overlooked should back off. I would truly prefer to step down and am willing to assist any qualified member interested in stepping up. The nominating committee had to meet a deadline, but nominations from the floor on election night at the June 1999 meeting will be welcome.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Hope to meet and greet you at the next general meeting where we will all get a sneak peek at the **Microsoft Office 2000**. Meeting will be on Tuesday, May 11, in the Raso Community room of the Palisades Center Mall, West Nyack, NY. Sign-in begins at 7:15 and meeting starts at 7:30 sharp. See you there!

FINDING & FIXING Y2K PROBLEMS

PART TWO: BIOS TESTING AND FIXING:

By Ray Isenson, Editor of the 4C'er, Central Coast Computer Club, Santa Maria, CA

[This is Part II of a multipart article on preparing one's personal computer for a smooth transition into the year 2000 (Y2K). The preceding part was a general overview of the several aspects of the problem. This part addresses that which is generally described as the hardware aspect, the BIOS chip and the "real time clock".]

[For the protection of the Rockland PC Users Group, Rockland County, NY and the Central Coast Computer Club and their respective members, the following disclaimer is established: Testing and upgrading your PC to achieve Y2K compliance will require running some programs and adding software patches and making other changes to your system. Within the several sections of this document various programs are identified as being designed to correct the deficiencies that you may find to exist in your machine. The software and patches come from generally reliable vendors. They have been tried in machines belonging to members of the Central Coast Computer Club without creating any observable, unfavorable consequence. Introducing the programs into your machine shouldn't cause any problems, if properly done. However, neither the Central Coast Computer Club nor the Rockland PC Users Group can accept any responsibility for losses to your PC, hardware, data files or software, resulting from such introduction.]

BIOS TESTING AND FIXING: In the preceding part note was made that devising a software program to test the ability of a computer to roll smoothly into the twenty first century or to compensate for inadequacies in the RTC/BIOS isn't outlandishly difficult. Having made that observation it was not surprising then, that during the course of preparing this article more than a dozen such programs were found on the Internet; all free to the private user. Of these about half, that for one reason or another evoked interest, were downloaded and tested to see if they did work as promised. The programs were run both on computers known to be noncompliant with Y2K problems and on computers that were known as "good." All of the programs identified and offered to repair noncompliant systems. However, all but one failed to recognize fully compliant systems; specifically, those equipped with the Award 4.50G BIOS. Several of them reported that only by replacing the RTC and BIOS could the system be brought into compliance. On that account, because there is a reasonable probability of being misled by such a program if your computer is compliant, it is strongly recommended that you perform a manual test before even trying one of the programs. The recommendation applies only to the cases where the computer operating system is DOS 6.22 or WINDOWS 3.x or WINDOWS 95 and where you don't know that the BIOS chip is the Award 4.50G (or, possibly, an Award 4.51).

[At this point another caveat is required. Certain few major PC manufacturers use proprietary BIOS chips that require manufacturer provided "Set Up" programs to set or reset the clock features built into some of their products. Before attempting the following procedures check the documentation that accompanied your computer to insure that your PC isn't among that few.]

To simplify the test and minimize any chance of disrupting the WINDOWS Registry in the computer the test should be run in the DOS mode. If the computer normally boots to WINDOWS start it with your emergency boot floppy or Win 95 Start-up floppy in the A:\ drive.

Note: If you don't have or can't locate such a floppy one is very easily prepared. For WINDOWS 3.x, from the MAIN program group select MS/DOS and enter. Your screen will show: C:\Windows. Type CD.. and press the Enter key to change the command prompt to simply C:\. Place a floppy in the A:\drive and, still at the C:\ prompt, enter the command, format/s a: and press Enter. That's it. The result will be a very rudimentary, but adequate, start-up disk for the tests. For WINDOWS 95 you'll need your original program CD-ROM disk. From the desktop select My Computer, then Control Panel, then Add/Remove Programs. When the new window opens, click on the right most tab, Start-Up Disk, and follow instructions. When you see a message complaining that the computer can't find certain software double check to insure that the location specified in the small window reads "d:\Win95"; where "d" is the label for your CD-ROM.]

For the Y2K compliance test, having booted your computer from the floppy the command line prompt should read, "A:\". At that prompt, type in DATE and press Enter. The computer will respond with the current date and ask that you enter a new date in the specified format. Type in 12-31-1999 and press Enter. Then type in TIME. The computer will respond with the time and ask that you enter a new time. Type in 12:58:00p and press Enter. Now, turn your computer completely off and go get a coke or a cup of coffee or whatever. After about 10 to 15 minutes reboot your computer, again using the floppy. When you see the A:\ prompt, type in DATE and enter. If the computer responds with "Sat 01-01-2000" your machine is compliant with the roll over. If it responds with either 01-04-1980, 01-01-1980 or some other 1980 date, that machine needs a new BIOS or one of the corrective patches.

In either event the question about the ability of the BIOS to recognize that the year 2000 is a leap year must be resolved. This could be done manually. The advantage of allowing one of the following programs to do the job is that they check several years, not just 2000, and do generate a report. Whether compliant or not, go through the DATE and TIME routines once again, resetting the computer to the current time and date.

For non-compliant RTC/BIOS combinations, should you opt for a software patch, you have two basic options. You can introduce the patch manually using one of the downloaded programs discussed below or buy an inexpensive program like "Year 2000 PC Hardware Fix"[4] SRP $29.95 [described later in this section.]

Five of the "freeware" downloaded test and fix programs were evaluated. Only one, "YMark2000", a program offered up by the National Software Testing Laboratories (NSTL) of McGraw-Hill[5] [Note: the number indicates location in the appendix listing.] tested for Y2K compliance only. The laboratories sell the "fix" part. It, however, is included because the report generated was above average in completeness and it did recognize the presence of the Award 4.50G BIOS without calling for a BIOS chip.

In our judgment these testing and patch programs should be conducted in the DOS mode. Their function has to do with the hardware and when invoked as a software patch they go to work before the Windows system is functioning. We see no point in risking a software conflict by running them in Windows. YMark2000 does satisfy that criterion.

Two others of those examined also satisfy it. The first, "Yes2k"[6], a product of the Safetynet Year 2000 Internet Center is a very attractive program but may be needlessly large and powerful for the individual with just one or two computers. It can be used to test and fix a stand alone PC or for a network file server or for automatic testing of a network of work stations. To gain the flexibility needed for the multi-purposes, and probably to satisfy potential users who fear DOS command line control, the authors have opted to include a Windows mode.

The second, made up of "Test2000"[7*] and "Year2000"[7*], are products of the Right Time Clock Company, authorities in timing and control devices. Year2000.exe is a slightly older version of the, now, commercial program, "Fix2000 Pro" contained in the package, "Year2000 PC Hardware Fix" referenced above. The two, Test and Year, require that the user type in one command to run the test and, if found to be necessary, one more command to install the software patch. The tasks are simplified further with the commercial version, requiring only that the entire program be loaded and screen presented instructions be followed.

Norton 2000, a very powerful program that tests and can fix the BIOS but also tests and reports upon the likely Y2K compliance of the many application programs that might be on hard drives. Symantec Corporation has made the BIOS test and fix software available for free download as "NBFIXALL.EXE"[8]. NBFIXALL.EXE is a DOS program that downloads as a 1.3 MByte self extracting file. Upon extraction it creates a program which, in turn, can create a bootable floppy BIOS Test Disk The test program, if it finds the BIOS to be noncompliant installs a BIOS fix driver. The program works easily and well.

Nai was invited to submit a copy of "McAfee's Toolbox 2000" for review in this presentation but didn't respond in time to be included. This program does a BIOS test and fix and, similar to the Norton program, makes use of a built in file of the names and characteristics of the more popular application programs, comparing the programs in the tested PC with that list and reports on their likely Y2K compliance. Also, as with Norton, nai has made the BIOS test and fix portion available as "2000hard"[9] a downloadable file from the Internet.

Otherwise the ease of using the RightTime products warrants that they be adopted. If you get the software by way of a download, unzip the package and copy the elements to a floppy disk. The procedure to test and fix, if necessary, is as follows: Boot from the A:\drive as described for the manual test. Replace the boot floppy with the RightTime floppy and, at the A:\ prompt, type runtest and press the Enter key. A screen will appear asking whether to continue. Type in Y and Enter. Follow the instructions throughout the test. The result will be a report on the screen and a file copy of the report in the root directory (folder) of the C: drive that states whether the BIOS/RTC combination are Y2K compliant with regard to roll over and leap year. Caution: if you failed to run the previously suggested manual test have and missed the fact that you have an Award 4.50G BIOS the results will be misleading.

If you are satisfied that your BIOS is non-compliant, at the A:\ prompt type the command install and Enter. A few seconds later you should have a Y2K compliant system. Rerun the runtest portion, if you like, to satisfy yourself that the fix does work.

Prior to leaving the discussion of making the RTC/BIOS compliant into the next century a very important point must be made. All of the tested BIOS fix programs make use of what is known as a "TSR". That is, a program is loaded into the lower one megabyte of memory during boot, where it

LINUX

FOR THE FUN OF IT

By Myron Steir

Hey, the disk was free and I had the space on my hard drive, so why not install Linux? I thought it would be fun to see what a UNIX clone operating system was all about. It's very different from Windows so I thought that I'd better do some research before I began. *That was a good move.*

I went to the library and found some texts that covered the Unix and Lunix operating systems. There is a lot that is different from the normal Microsoft experience and you have to be prepared. For example, the file management system is quite different from what you have experienced with Windows 95 or even MSDOS. You need to learn new commands and syntax and understand that you have to "mount" and "unmount" your floppy and CDROM drives in order to access them or even change the disks. You can't eject a mounted disk.

The documents provided by my ISP did not cover how to get on line using Lunix, and I'm still waiting for their tech support to answer my specific emailed questions, but surprisingly, it wasn't that hard to figure out on my own. Fortunately, the disk includes and installs a copy of Netscape, so once you hurdle the process of getting connected to your ISP, you'll find yourself on familiar ground. Yes, there is a graphic interface (GUI), but it is a bit primitive when compared to the Windows desktop, so there too, be prepared to take some time to maneuver through the ins and outs. I discovered that there are better GUI interfaces available and I recently installed one called Mandrake. It reminds me more of a Windows desktop. You'll soon discover that Linux is an operating system that can be configured in so many different ways that you will always be learning. Forget about being bored! There's a powerful OS stored up in that one CD.

The RedHat CD has a number of "how to" files that can be accessed through Windows95. I used the "Quick View" program that comes on the Windows 95 installation disk in order to read them. Oh yes, did I mention that Lunix files don't have file extensions? You'll have to tell Windows what program to use in order to look at the text. Browse through those files and be sure to read the installation document. The time you take before you start will save many hours of frustration. I learned the hard way!

You might find that this a bit daunting at first, but don't give up. Just remember how much fun you're having! There are many textbooks, reference materials, websites, Usenet groups and experienced Unix people ready to offer help. What you learn and how you eventually use this OS will depend on the effort and time you're willing to devote.

Y2K...*(continued from previous page)*

remains until the computer is turned off. This causes no problem for Windows programs. However, if you try to run large DOS programs or games you may see an "Out Of Memory" error message and be unable to run that program. The larger the program used to patch the BIOS problem the greater will be the probability of running into the problem. Of those tested the RightTime program left the smallest footprint in memory.

There are only two solutions to work around the problem of RAM utilization.: either replace the BIOS chip with an update that is Y2K compliant or do nothing until the first time you use the computer after New Year 1999/2000. At that time boot up in DOS. From the A:\ or C:\ prompt enter DATE and return. Type in the correct date and Enter. In most cases that will get your hardware system working properly until at least 29 February, when you may have to reset it just once more for the next four years.

APPENDIX (for parts 1 and 2):

Software patches and upgrade sources:

1) Award BIOS:
www.award.com/tech/y2k.htm
2) AMI BIOS:
www.megatrends.com/y2k/default.html
3) Microfirmware (many brands):
www.firmware.com
Phoenix BIOS:
www.phoenix.com/support/y2k.html
4) "Year 2000 Hardware Fix":
Tiger Direct, 800/888-4437,
order #R100-1000, $29.99
5) YMark2000 National Software Test Lab:
www.nstl.com/downloads/y2000.exe
6) Yes2K; Safetynet year2000:
www.pcmag.com/download (search for *Yes2k*)
7) Test2000 / Year2000:
www.rightime.com
8) NBFIXALL.EXE; Norton2000:
www.symantec.com/sabu/n2000
9) 2000 Toolbox Hardware: McAfee,
www.zdnet.com (search for:*2000 Toolbox*)

WANT TO JOIN THE GROUP? HERE'S HOW!

Annual membership in the Rockland PC Users Group includes a subscription to **ComputerConnection**. Bring your completed application and a check payable to RPCUG to a meeting, or mail your application and check to RPCUG at 169 South Main Street, Suite 384, New City, NY 10956-3358. **(PLEASE PRINT ALL INFORMATION)**.

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