COMPUTER CONNECTION

Monthly Newsletter of the
Rockland PC Users Group

Volume 18 Number 6
June 1998

ANNUAL MEETING VISIONEER SCANNERS

Big doings this month! We've got an election to conduct at the June 9 meeting, and our group's future may be hanging in the balance. If we fail to identify and elect four members to serve as officers it will be difficult to imagine a future for our group. Is it

possible that our members, the great majority of whom faithfully turn out for our monthly meetings, would compromise our group's activities by standing passively by—especially when such exciting and momentous changes in personal computing lie just around the corner? We hope that appropriate candidates will take steps to have their names put in nomination.

Another big doing this month is our new meeting location. If RPCUG finds its new officers and can continue its mission of informing and supporting its members, regular monthly meetings will henceforth be held at the new Palisades Center mall at

the intersection of the NY State Thruway and Route 303. (You'll find directions on our Web site, *www.rpcug.org/mappalis.htm*, and on page 5 of this newsletter.)

MEETING SCHEDULE

The Palisades Center 7:30 P.M.

Tuesday, June 9 – Visioneer Scanning Products

Tuesday, July 14 – Windows 98

Tuesday, August 11 – Swap and Sell

(All are welcome)

The new Palisades Center location presents many intriguing possibilities. Already much excitement and press coverage is being generated by Microsoft's scheduled gala July visit. We earnestly hope that these and other plans for future presentations won't have to be cancelled for lack of member support.

In the meantime, on June 9, the first presenter at our new location will be Visioneer, the company that has helped to bring document scanning within the reach of the individual computer user. We'll get a look at Visioneer's acclaimed PaperPort line of flatbed and sheetfed scanners. One of the sheetfeds, PaperPort

Strobe, fits easily between the keyboard and monitor (or even on top of a monitor), and weighs just 1.5 pounds. We understand that the Visioneer folks will be raffling off one of their award-winning scanners. All members, even new members joining at the June meeting, are eligible to receive a free raffle ticket for this valuable prize.

So come on out on June 9, see our new meeting location, participate in our annual election, and learn about the latest in scanning for the home desktop. ■

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Stan Smith

June Elections

We are still looking for members to come forward to declare their candidacies for our elected positions: president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. The nominating committee has not been able to fill the full slate. Since elections will take place at our upcoming meeting, nominations for all positions may be communicated from members attending that meeting. If you don't think of yourself as a potential candidate, try to persuade a capable friend to step forward. The commitment is not huge, but it is vital. Without leaders the Rockland PC Users Group cannot go on.

New Meeting Location

We have mixed feelings about leaving the Rockland Conservatory of Music's friendly auditorium. They made the space available to us when our previous home was sold to a new owner. We thank Conservatory Director Elsa Jean Davidson for helping us to keep our meetings running smoothly and without interruption.

June will be the first meeting at our new meeting site—The Palisades Center mall in West Nyack. The mall facilities are excellent, and the cost is just perfect—zero, saving us $600 per year!

The Palisades Center is huge, so I suggest you follow the suggested route to the meeting room. Directions are posted on our Web site and on page 5 of this newsletter. It would be a big help if some of you would try to arrive by 7:00 P.M. so that any initial setup problems can be easily dealt with.

PC Expo

If you expect to be attending PC Expo (June 14–16) at the Javits Convention Center and wish to share transportation, contact Hank Feinberg (*totalpro@icu.com* or 352-7111). Tell him the days you will be attending, whether you are looking for or will provide transportation, your name, address, and your e-mail address. Hank will attempt to coordinate and match those desiring a ride with those who are willing to provide a ride. If a match is possible, Hank will contact the parties to allow each person to complete the arrangements.

User Groups Online

Many computer Users Groups have Web sites similar to our own. Many of them also contain online newsletters. Steve Weinberg, our Webmaster, has added several links to some of these sites. Look on the Newsletter Web page (*http://www.rpcug.org/newslett.htm*) for a "Ring" of User Group Newsletters. Selecting the available entries will allow you to cycle through them. Similarly, we have links to many other user groups available on our Web site. Check them out. Visit *http://www.rpcug.org/usergrp.htm.*

Discount Coupons

We have received group discount coupons from Six Flags/Great Adventure. They provide discounts of $3, $8, or $15 on individual admissions to the park. The discounts may be used from June 14 through November 1. If you are interested in these money-saving coupons, contact me.

July Presentation

Mark your schedule for a spectacular meeting on July 14 from 7:00 P.M. to 10:30 P.M.—note the early starting time and the later-than-usual ending time. Microsoft will be joining us for two presentations on Windows 98—End User and Technical. Windows 98 is currently scheduled for release on June 25.

Meeting Notes

In May, Minolta dazzled us with information about two hot new technologies: digital cameras and film scanners. Several of our members have this new type of filmless camera. We will soon be using digital cameras to take candid shots at our meetings for posting on our Web site. (Hint: If you are caught snoozing at a meeting you are likely to be a prime subject for a candid shot. Forewarned is forearmed.)

I was very surprised at the photographic knowledge and depth of experience our members demonstrated in the free flow of audience questions.

June will bring Visioneer's document scanners to our meeting. I have always felt that their small sheet-fed scanners (which hide until needed between your keyboard and your monitor) and their PaperPort software would be a great aid in eliminating the paper clutter in my own office, replacing my difficult-to-find-anything-quickly filing system. You can be sure that I will be intently listening to the Visioneer presentation.

The End and the Beginning

This is my last President's Message. In some ways it is a sad milestone for me. In other ways it is an exciting personal opportunity and a new beginning.

(continued on page 8)

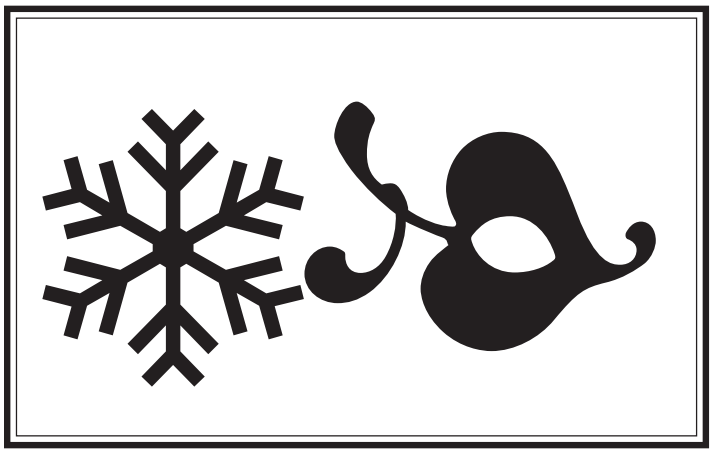
EDITOR'S DESK

by Sy Ribakove

Most of us don't pay much attention to dingbats. I mean the typographer's dingbat, not the Edith Bunker dingbat. Every Windows user owns 250 or so of these useful thingumabobs; they comprise the Wingdings font. (Those using PostScript fonts will find a lesser number in the Zapf Dingbats font.) Dingbats are useful little thingies: boxes, circles and crosses of various sorts, arrows pointing in every direction, as well as plain and numbered bullets. Dingbats can be used to indicate the end of a story (as they are at the end of each story in this newsletter) or as check boxes, like the circles in the membership application on page 12.

Recently a member phoned me to ask how to insert bullets between three items on a single line. She was having no luck with her word processor's Bullets and Numbers formatting tool. Of course, Bullets and Numbers are paragraph attributes, what was actually needed here was a dingbat. You insert a dingbat by running CHARMAP.EXE, which is part of Windows 3.*x* and 95, and choosing Wingdings. In the November, 1997 issue I devoted my entire column to CHARMAP.EXE. If you can't find a copy you can read or download that issue from our Web site, *http://www.rpcug.org*.

Less commonly, dingbats are used to separate paragraphs, as they are in this block of text. Used this "artsy" way, they make it unnecessary to indent the first line of paragraphs or separate paragraphs by double spacing. ❧ However, it would not be considerate to readers to set more than a single page of type this way; their eyes would quickly tire. If you do try this "designer" effect, be sure to increase the spacing between lines just a bit. (Typographers call line spacing "leading," pronounced ledding.) ❧ Dingbats have other uses. They can be used to set off "pull



quotes," the printer's term for those little excerpted passages that you often see off to the side or sometimes right in the middle of a column of text. Pull quotes are used both to draw a reader's attention to important elements in a story and as method for adding texture to a solid page of type. ❧ One of the nicest characteristics of dingbats is that they can be set in very large sizes without any increasing file size. You get instant graphics on a budget. After all, each dingbat is only a single typeface character, and using it at a large point size (the dingbats in the box above are set at 150 and 180 points) is no different from typing the letter "a" or pressing the space bar. ❧ So have some fun: find a dingbat that you like and try it out in business correspondence. I have used arrow dingbats to great effect by pointing them at paragraphs I want to be sure will not be overlooked. I'll bet you can find some special uses for dingbats, too. ■

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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
Sy Ribakove

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TEXTBRIDGE PRO 98

by Marian Baade

After years of arguing with Caere's OmniPage OCR software, usually about memory problems, I was really looking forward to reviewing **TextBridge Pro 98**. I wanted to find out what was missing from this $79 package. (OmniPage goes for almost $500.) Needing only ferociously accurate text recognition without the bells and whistles, my first task when using OmniPage had always been to turn off all the features, in order to avoid a final document full of extraneous control characters. Would **TextBridge Pro 98** turn out to provide simple, straightforward OCR? I could hardly wait.

Installation was easy. However, on first use, the program could not find my scanner. I dashed off an e-mail to tech support and received, within a day, a short, accurate, and polite answer. With some simple changes in a configuration setting, I was off and recognizing!

Re-creating a single page with text, a picture, and a footer was easy. I turned on the Wizard and let **TextBridge** make all the decisions (although I had the step-by-step option of interfering at any time). I saved the document in WordPerfect 5.1 format (always a very stable format) and opened it in WordPerfect 8. The page that appeared on my screen was an almost exact reproduction, except that two lines of text wrapped to a second page. Saving in WordPerfect 7 was a little better; only one line of text wrapped. Saving in MS-Word yielded slightly less satisfactory results; the column breaks were messed up. These problems were easily cleaned up within the word processor, and were minor issues for me. Turning off Retain Formatting produced amazingly accurate raw text, just what I had always needed.

TextBridge Pro 98 supports what appear to be hundreds of scanner drivers, and can be opened from within a dozen other programs—word processors, spreadsheets, Corel Ventura and even America Online. Recognized text can also be sent to the clipboard and pasted directly into any Windows application. I printed a simple spreadsheet from Microsoft Excel. Then, from within Excel, I loaded **TextBridge** and scanned the document right back into a new spreadsheet. Amazing. It was flawless.

Every part of this program is customizable. With proofreading turned on, you can check for errors as the OCR is taking place, adding suspect words to a dictionary and to training (having the software save the peculiarities of a specific document, should you ever want to scan another similarly peculiar document). If you choose to work without the Wizard, you can describe every attribute of your original document to the software, and instruct it as to your desired final format. You can even customize the screen colors. (And I love the little word image box in the upper left corner that magnifies any part of the page chosen by the cursor.) Everything is very user-friendly, although I'll admit that I could live without all the Mac-like thingies that occasionally fly around to tell me what they're doing. The sample sessions in the manual take a new user by the hand through some of the more complex issues of creating zones, scanning multiple columns, training OCR, and recognizing tables and spreadsheets.

TextBridge Pro 98, by ScanSoft, Inc. (a Xerox company), requires at least a 486 processor, Windows 95 or NT, 16MB of RAM, and 20MB of hard disk space. It is friendly, stable, and superbly accurate. And the $79 price is definitely right. ■

Q: How many Internet mail list subscribers does it take to change a light bulb? A: 1,331

1 to change the light bulb and to post to the mail list that the light bulb has been changed;

14 to share similar experiences of changing light bulbs and how the light bulb could have been changed differently;

7 to caution about the dangers of changing light bulbs;

27 to point out spelling and grammar errors;

53 to flame the spell checkers;

156 to write to the list administrator complaining about the light bulb discussion and its inappropriateness to this mail list;

41 to correct spelling in the spelling/grammar flames;

109 to post that this list is not about light bulbs and to please take this email exchange to *alt.lite.bulb*;

203 to demand that cross posting about changing light bulbs to *alt.grammar, alt.spelling* and *alt.punctuation* be stopped;

111 to defend the posting to this list saying that we all use light bulbs and therefore the posts **are** relevant to this mail list;

306 to debate which method of changing light bulbs is superior, where to buy the best light bulbs, what brand of light bulbs work best for this technique, and what brands are faulty;

27 to post URLs that have examples of different light bulbs;

14 to post that the URLs were posted incorrectly, and to post corrected URLs;

3 to post about links they found from the URLs that are relevant to this list which make light bulbs relevant to this list;

33 to concatenate all posts to date, then quote them including all headers and footers, and then add "Me Too;"

12 to post to the list that they are unsubscribing because they cannot handle the light bulb controversy;

19 to quote the "Me Too's" in order to say, "Me Three;"

4 to suggest that first-time posters request the light bulb FAQ;

1 to propose a new *alt.change.lite.bulb* newsgroup;

47 to say this is just what *alt.physic.cold_fusion* was meant for, leave it there;

143 votes for *alt.lite.bulb*. ■

THE ERA OF WORLD WAR II

by Richard Blumenthal

This is a fascinating multimedia CD-ROM on World War II. The vendor, Cascade International, states that it is suitable for ages twelve to adult. There are words, sounds, pictures and video clips starting with World War I's effects on Germany, the rise of Hitler, life in Nazi Germany, the war itself, and its immediate consequences. The text is literate, covering the subject matter concisely. The pictures and video clips are very comprehensive, starting from the turn of the 20th century and ending with the war's immediate aftermath. The text can be heard as well as read, since it is also available as audio clips. While each segment of the program is self-contained, text can be selected from any module, pasted into a text editor or word processor and re-edited to suit the needs of the moment. It is also possible to create a show of photographs and video clips in the same manner. Although the user cannot transfer this material to another medium within the program, I was able to copy the pictures to Corel Presentations and PowerPoint and create my own slide show. Combined with text, this would be a wonderful school project to show in the classroom. To aid the user in the selection process, there is a sophisticated search engine, which makes it easy to look for specific text and pictures.

I was impressed with the some of the videos from German archives. There are clips of German bombers shooting down British warplanes, and of Himmler addressing Hitler over his policy towards the Jews. There are pictures from Russian archives of the war on the Eastern front and interesting pictures of the Japanese occupation of Singapore and Burma. Finally there is an extensive series of visuals on events in Palestine that led to the founding of the state of Israel soon after the war.

This excellent CD-ROM was originally designed for a British audience. While the overall discussion of the events leading up to the war is not centered on England's role, and the module covering World War II itself includes a fair representation of the United States' role, there is, quite understandably, a strong emphasis on the impact of the war on the home front in Great Britain. Most of what we know about the British home front comes from those legendary broadcasts of Edward R. Murrow. Material from his broadcasts is nowhere to be found on this CD; there are some wonderfully evocative clips of British commentators instead.

All in all, **The Era of the Second World War** is a serious piece of educational software and well worth its $69.95 price. High school students will find it illuminating, and adults of all ages will learn a good deal from it. With the caveat noted above concerning its British origin, it is highly recommended.

One final note: Cascade International is a distributor of foreign educational software. Their Web site, *www.cascade-int.com*, is definitely worth a look. ■

How to Reach Our New Meeting Place

On Tuesday, June 9, 1998, the Rockland PC Users Group will begin holding its monthly meetings in one of the Community Meeting Rooms in the Palisades Center mall in West Nyack, NY.

The Palisades Center is the second largest indoor shopping mall in the United States. It is centrally located in the county, has plenty of well-lighted parking, comfortable seating for 150+ people, and a very pleasant atmosphere.

Our meeting time of 7:30 P.M. will not change.

The Palisades Center is very easy to find. There are well-marked entrances when traveling from any direction on Route 59, Route 303, and the New York State Thruway's Exit 12. Enter from any of the adjacent roadways and proceed into the parking lot.

Although one may enter the Center from any pedestrian entrance, the extreme Eastern public access doors (between Filene's and Lord & Taylor) are recommended. There are handicapped parking spaces immediately adjacent to these entrance doors. From that entrance, walk through the doorway alcove and into the mall corridor. Turn left and walk about fifty yards to the escalators. Take the escalator to the fourth floor. Step off the escalator, turn 180 degrees and walk toward the main entrance to the Ice Rink. The Community Meeting Rooms are on both sides of the corridor immediately before the Ice Rink entrance. Look for our Rockland PC Users Group meeting sign.

When entering from any other outside door just ask directions to the Ice Rink. As you approach the Ice Rink, look for the Community Rooms and our sign. ■

AUTOVUE PROFESSIONAL

by John Iurica

If you are dealing with architects, engineers, or contractors and have the feeling that there seems to be a failure to communicate, then **AutoVue Professional** by Cimmetry Systems may be just for you. For years, it was painful for me to evaluate these people's blueprints and drawings. They would bring them in on bound four-foot by six-foot pages. When I spread them out, they spanned some twelve feet, covering not only my own desk but also the next person's workspace. I had to try to write neat corrections and comments on the drawings despite all the lumps and bumps on my desk. Then computers came along, and if I had the same software as the person submitting the drawing, I could load his computer file into my computer and place the drawing on my own screen for viewing. I could even annotate the drawing file, print it or return it to the originator with my comments. Unfortunately, the added comments would alter the original file.

The Problem

Now, I see architects, engineers, and contractors as a peculiar lot. Each one of them has a preferred drawing or CAD (Computer Aided Design) program. Even though many of these people use drawing programs that can export their work in the universal DXF file format, they are tremendously resistant to doing so. Some of them only know how to save files in their programs' native file formats. (Evidently, they never heard of the Save as... command.) Others reject the DXF format because DXF files often require thirty percent to fifty percent more disk space than their programs' native file formats. Still others believe that everyone should own the program that they are using. Some of these programs cost more than $3,000 and, even at that, they are frequently unable to read and write documents created with their own earlier versions.

AutoVue Professional is the lifesaver. It can read and display almost two hundred file formats. The vector formats include: AutoCAD (all DWG and DXF versions), Cadkey, Computer Graphics Metafile, Generic CAD, HPGL, Intergraph Microstation Drawing Format, Postscript, etc. **AutoVue** also reads numerous raster, bitmapped, word processor, database, spreadsheet and fax formats. It seems to want to read everything back to the Year One. An example of this is its ability to read HPGL files, which I first worked with in 1970, and Wordstar 3.0 which I was using in the 1980s. Over the years, I have been a bit nervous about uninstalling some of my old programs because I felt that without them I would not be able to read files stored on my archived disks. **AutoVue** makes it possible for me to get rid of many of these old programs that I really do not need any more.

When **AutoVue** looks at a file it automatically figures out what type of file it is. **AutoVue** then tells you what program created the file along with its version number. After the drawing is displayed on the computer screen, you can toggle to **AutoVue's** markup mode and write comments on the drawing. For example, you might want to let an architect know that he has placed a set of stairs in the wrong place and then indicate the correct placement. You can use both text and graphics to generate markup material. Best of all, the markup material is a separate file that is actually an overlay to the original file. You do not have to alter another person's work. Your comment disk goes back to the draftsman and the process repeats itself until the drawing is finally approved.

How I Tested

To test **AutoVue**, I borrowed some files containing maps. First I opened an AutoCAD 10 DWG file displaying a small segment of Rockland County's streets, buildings and other map features. Next, I imported an overlay of a corresponding set of contour lines. The contour lines fell perfectly in place on the first opened map. I then got my hands on a tax map done on AutoCAD 12. I imported this as another overlay. Unfortunately, this overlay was drawn to a different scale and did not line up with the other drawings. I was able to use **AutoVue's** tools for re-scaling and moving the individual overlays to achieve the result that I wanted—a tax map showing buildings and contours as well as lot lines.

I frequently use CorelDRAW and Micrografx Designer for my own drawing work. I had attempted to import the AutoCAD 10 DWG files into both of these programs. Some of DWGs were properly imported, while others could not be recognized by CorelDRAW or Designer. However, **AutoVue** has a very simple-to-use file conversion utility. I took a couple of the DWG files that would not import and converted them to AutoCAD 9 DXF files. The graphics then imported properly into both CorelDRAW and Designer. This demonstrates the comparative strength of **AutoVue Professional**; it simply overpowers two otherwise excellent drawing programs.

AutoVue Professional with its markup ability is what we could call a "bureaucrat's delight." If you are a Building Inspector, Planning Board member, or Zoning Board member, just think of how easily you could review proposed projects and annotate submitted drawings. Similarly, the program would help engineers and managers turn out better projects more quickly. The price is only $595 for first time buyers (800-361-1904). This is not a lot when you think about the dozens of expensive drawing and CAD programs that you will not need to buy. ■

ADOBE PHOTODELUXE 2.0

by Maria T. Smith

This program from Adobe uses some of Photoshop's high-end technology to bring powerful pixel editing to the masses. And it is such fun! **PhotoDeluxe** allows the average user to modify images and save the results as printed output or as files. The range of possible image alterations includes more than thirty special effects, among them removing blemishes or photoflash "red eye" from snapshots, changing colors and backgrounds, cropping and resizing, sharpening and adjusting contrast and brightness, and—here's the fun part— applying lots of interesting distortions.

My latest project is restoring family photographs—the old postcard type—of my grandparents in their early years in the United States. **PhotoDeluxe** has allowed me to restore damaged areas, sharpen the images and enhance their color, and add some rosy cheeks to the bland sepia-colored photos of the time. I plan, when I have the retouching completed, to import some of those computer-enhanced images into my genealogy program.

Photo Deluxe's EasyPhoto Organizer has also helped my genealogy project in that it allows me to organize my photo collection and create a kind of photo gallery. I can add or remove photos or change their sequence in the collection. I decided to organize my photographs by events and dates. (Note for new users: photos deleted from the Hold Photo area are permanently deleted from your disk. They cannot be rescued from the Recycle Bin.)

Obtaining Images

When using **PhotoDeluxe 2.0** you can select your image input source directly from a scanner (in my case a Hewlett-Packard ScanJet 6100C), a digital camera (I used my recently acquired Kodak DC210 Zoom Digital Camera), a video framegrabber (which allows images from a TV, video camera, or a video cassette to be used—I do not yet own one of these), from any device that has a TWAIN driver, or from any image file on a hard disk, CD-ROM, or diskette. (Film camera users can have their shots developed and put on a CD-ROM or a floppy disk. It's also possible for film processors to digitize photos and then deliver the computer-readable files to you over the Internet. This makes it a bit easier to input your own photos for editing in **PhotoDeluxe**.)

The Nitty-Gritty

Installing **PhotoDeluxe** was quick and easy. After I decided where I wanted **PhotoDeluxe** installed, the installation program took over and completed the setup without any further help from me.

Adobe says system requirements are an 80486 processor or better. (On my 486DX4-100 IBM ThinkPad, I found the wait times for the completion of some tasks almost intolerable, so I would recommend a more powerful computer.) You will also need at least 16MB of RAM, 45MB of hard disk space, plus an additional 40MB of hard disk space for temporary working files. A CD-ROM drive and a color monitor/video card combination that can display 256 colors at 640 by 480 resolution is also required. Of course, as with most sophisticated software produced these days, Windows 95 is a necessity.

With over fifty step-by-step Guided Activity menus, **PhotoDeluxe**'s features enable one to create such things as greeting cards, calendars, flyers, T-shirt transfers, cassette labels, and photo album collections. Along the way, any of the special effects may be applied to enhance or change the final output. The Guided Activity selections offer complete start-to-finish menus, templates, and instruction. They make formidable touch-up tasks seem somewhat routine.

Touching up photographs becomes simple, and one may improve on Mother Nature by removing bags under eyes, blemishes and scars, replacing wrinkles with soft smooth skin, or adding additional hair to simulate that long ago hair line. Once these changes are complete you may want to add a rosy color to cheeks for a healthier complexion. With **PhotoDeluxe** why would anyone consider plastic surgery?

PhotoDeluxe is not only fun, it is generally easy to use—although I did have some trying moments when what I wanted to happen, and expected to happen, didn't, in fact, happen. But the multilevel Undo capability saved the day.

For editing and managing photographs, **PhotoDeluxe** is a powerful application offered at a bargain price. I highly recommend it. **PhotoDeluxe's** retail price is $49, but the street price should be around $39. ■

(After you register PhotoDeluxe you are automatically entered into a drawing for a free color ink jet printer. You also receive technical support, notification of upgrades, and *PhotoEase*, a newsletter with helpful hints about using photos with your computer.)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

(continued from page 2)

No longer having my opinions seen as representing the "official" RPCUG position, I will now be able to be more outspoken. Expect to see future newsletter articles in which I freely present my views of the personal computing industry.

I can also relax a bit. I won't have to be the first to arrive at meetings and the last to leave. I won't have to answer dozens of telephone calls each month from the press, prospective members, and non-members who have computer problems. I won't have to transport, and process boxes of materials and door prizes to each meeting. I won't have to host the executive board meetings. I might even skip a meeting or two if the subject isn't of interest to me or I do not feel well. I won't have to deliver (usually late!) my monthly column to our newsletter editor.

But, I probably won't miss any meetings, even though I could. I will still probably bring materials to our meetings. I expect to write articles, if not a regular column. My telephone will still be answered and help offered to those who call. So, perhaps, the actuality of my participation will not change very much, but the requirement to do so will not be present.

My first President's Message appeared in the June 1991 newsletter. Before being elected president, I spent three years as treasurer, and an additional three years as unofficial program chairman and technical guru.

I am returning to the job of program chairman, a job that I know well. So you'll continue to have me to complain to if our programs aren't of interest to you.

During my tenure as president, RPCUG has grown from about thirty-five members to almost two hundred. We have held meetings at the New City Library, Orange & Rockland's auditorium, the Church of Religious Science, the Rockland Conservatory of Music, and now the Palisades Center Community rooms. We have moved around a bit, but we have endured.

ComputerConnection, our newsletter, has evolved from a two-page (occasionally four or six pages) informative, but not stylish, bulletin to a twelve to sixteen-page national-award-winning professional publication.

We have started Special Interest Groups (SIGs). Some serve (or have served) a limited segment of our membership, e.g., OS/2 or Desktop Publishing. Some have fallen by the wayside due to lack of interest, e.g., Database. Still others continue to provide specialized education, training, and experience sharing, e.g., New Users and Windows 95. We developed and continue to hold computer disassembly classes each year that show participants what's actually inside that mysterious beige box.

Every month during the seven year period we have had well-planned, informative, and timely meeting presentations. Hardware and software vendors have provided most of the content, but our members also have contributed to panel discussions and software presentations. We have considered such "tried and true" products as WordPerfect, Excel, and CorelDRAW. We have also seen emerging technology products, e.g., voice dictation, scanners, Internet themes, digital cameras. Some vendors—Parsons Technology, IBM, Symantec and Broderbund have especially favored us, returning several times to demonstrate their wares to our members. Although not every meeting was of interest to every member, the seven years of meetings have, as a whole, provided an enormous amount of useful information. I have learned something new (usually several things) at each monthly meeting.

Some of the above activities have resulted from a germ of an idea of mine. But the success of the last seven years does not rightfully belong to me alone. Rather, our entire membership—and especially our wonderful volunteers—share in the credit. Many of my past newsletter columns have identified the volunteers that make RPCUG work, grow, and live. Without them there would be no Rockland PC Users Group.

So, my final President's Message to all of you is an exhortation to become involved in our group. Your time and talent and knowledge and experience will make our group stronger. I will still be around as a volunteer, so why not work with me in some extended capacity? Volunteer activities provide an excellent breeding ground for new warm and useful friendships.

To wrap this up—remember our new meeting location! I'll see you all on June 9 at 7:30 P.M. in the Community Meeting Room at The Palisades Center mall in West Nyack on the Fourth Level (adjacent to the entrance to the Ice Rink). ■

ExecNet, Westchester's outstanding Internet Service Provider, offers a 25% discount to RPCUG members. To obtain the discount during the online subscription procedure, use the RPCUG member number found on the mailing label on the bottom of the last page.
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AND KEEP IN MIND

June	
4	New Users Class; New City Library
9	General Meeting: Election; Visioneer; **Palisades Center**
16	Windows 95 SIG, Pearl River Library
17	OS/2 SIG; Phone 634-6618
July	
14	General Meeting: Windows 98; **Palisades Center**

MAILJAIL 2.01

by Richie Stark

It really doesn't seem like so long ago that the Internet was commercial free. I could get on the Net, send and receive e-mail and surf for hours without being subjected to unwanted sales messages. Now all of that has changed; commercial advertising has spread like a cancer through every aspect of Internet life. Web sites display flashing banners on almost every page, beguiling the

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unwary to explore yet another Web site at which to again be subjected to gaudy advertising with every click of the mouse. In my opinion, the Internet has come to resemble a thieves market, where scam artists hawk snake oil to unsuspecting users on the other side of the video monitor.

E-mail has become the preferred tool of the mass market direct mailers. Available software now makes it possible for every wanna-be entrepreneur with a get-rich-quick scheme to fire off e-mail to millions in the hope of enticing a few of us to bite. Since it costs less than $100 to acquire a mailing list with millions of e-mail addresses, the torrents of junk mail being generated are starting to tax the Internet infrastructure. This unwanted junk e-mail is what we now refer to as Spam.

When I first started using e-mail, its purpose was to exchange messages with people that I knew; I had to have their e-mail addresses and they had to know mine. Now my e-mail address (and yours probably) is being harvested along with millions of others and sold to the mass marketers out to make a quick buck.

In an effort to aid those of us who don't appreciate the daily e-mail torrent of spam, a product called **MailJail** from Omron Advanced Systems, Inc. has been designed to significantly reduce the Spam. **MailJail** works with the most popular e-mail clients, including MS Outlook and Eudora, setting up a new mailbox, called *MailJail*, and providing intelligent filtering for incoming e-mail. **MailJail** scans the header and body of each incoming message and then applies filtering rules from its vast knowledge base in an effort to direct the junk e-mail to the *MailJail* folder while at the same time letting the legitimate e-mail go to the user's designated In box.

After I agreed to review **MailJail**, I started saving some junk e-mail in order to test the product. Before installing **MailJail** I re-sent thirty of these junk messages to myself. The **MailJail** installation from a CD was quick and easy. I just had to point the installation program to Eudora Pro 3.0, my e-mail software, **MailJail** was quickly installed as a plug-in. After installation, I configured **MailJail** via Eudora's Special/Message Plug-in Settings/MailJail menu options. Here I had the chance to add new filtering rules to those that were already part of **MailJail's** knowledge base and set up additional criteria for filtering messages. Since the default settings were acceptable, I activated **MailJail**, got online and retrieved my e-mail.

I was quite surprised to find that, out of the box, **MailJail** routed twenty-seven of the thirty junk e-mails to the *MailJail* mailbox. It had only been unsure on two of those. The rest were labeled as *Junk*. As I read my messages, I was able to categorize some of them as junk and **MailJail** analyzed the messages' content and refined its own knowledge base for filtering the next batch of messages. All the tasks were done from within Eudora. **MailJail** became almost transparent as it learned more from me about what I considered to be Spam. I still had the option to view all my mail before it went into the trash for deletion.

MailJail ($29.95) performed exactly as claimed and has proved to be a very useful addition to my e-mail software. If you have been bombarded with Spam and want to regain control over your e-mail, I recommend giving **MailJail** a try. ■

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[ED: RPCUG members can purchase MailJail for $16.95 (add $2 for shipping). Download an order form from *www.mailjail.com/02about/order_form.htm*. Then e-mail the form back to *doherty@oas.net*.]

COMPUTER BOOKSHELF

DEVELOPING WINDOWS ERROR MESSAGES by Ben Ezzell; O'Reilly & Associates; 234 pages; $39.95

Don't you just love it when Windows 95 tells you that a program has performed an illegal operation and will be shut down? Or how about Windows 3.1's General Protection Fault? What happened, what did I do, how do I avoid this problem again? Here's a book that explains why error messages like these are so poor and what can be done to improve their quality.

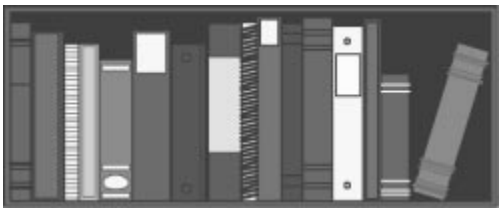
Most error messages notify the user that an error has occurred. An effective error message should also explain the problem as well as its possible causes, and provide a solution that the user might follow in order to eliminate the error. *Developing Windows Error Messages* explores these topics in detail, providing examples designed to improve the information contained in an error message as well as offer alternative methods of handling errors which may prove more beneficial to the user.

The author follows his own advice by structuring the book the same way an error message should be written. He notifies the reader that error messages are usually poor, then explains why they are poor and then provides solutions to the problem. The solutions include handling errors inside the program and writing more effective error messages.

This book comes with a very complete CD-ROM containing DLLs for C, C++, MFC and Visual Basic along with source code, header files, libraries and examples. I'm impressed.

Most users don't realize that it takes twice as long to develop a program with error handling as without and that most errors are handled within the program itself without user notification. A "last resort" message box is generated only if an error is not correctable or the user's intent can not be determined.

My hat is off to author Ben Ezzell. He is right. As programmers, we all fall short in this area and should pay more attention to our interactions with users. *Reviewed by Gary FitzGerald*



PHOTOSHOP 4 ANSWERS! CERTIFIED TECH SUPPORT by David D. Busch; Osborne McGraw-Hill; 318 pages; $24.99

Stream International is the world's largest third-party tech support organization. Working with some of Stream's 3,700 tech support specialists, the compiler of this book has struck a mother lode of Photoshop knowhow. He has produced, at least for this klutzy Photoshop user, one of the most helpful third-party books ever—a compendium of answers to the most frequently asked Photoshop questions. And there are plenty of questions, since Photoshop is, to the average user, opaque and inscrutable.

Between the book's bright covers I found 400+ answers to basic questions such as: "My Photoshop images print too large or too small. How can I change the final output size on my printer?" There are also succinct explanations of more arcane matters, like "What's is the Threshold slider in the Unsharp Mask dialog box used for?" Whether the questions are basic or esoteric, the book's answers are invariably helpful.

It is all arranged for easy accessibility. Chapters can be previewed at a glance and a fine index makes it a cinch to put your finger on what you need at the very moment you need it.

Photoshop newcomers will appreciate the many sidebars and step-by-step "recipes" for bread-and-butter techniques like drop shadows, glowing text, and halo effects. The seasoned user will find solutions that will more than justify the book's price.

Reviewed by Sy Ribakove

OFFICE 97 ANNOYANCES by Woody Leonhard, Lee Hudspeth and T.J. Lee; O'Reilly & Associates; 379 pages; $24.95

The premise of this book is that what Microsoft promises or implies in its ads and promos is not what it actually delivers. The authors feel that while vast strides have been made in providing similar interfaces, compatible file formats and other parameters in Office 97, many more incompatibilities remain. Perhaps, but after reading this book I don't think they've proved the premise. Without doubt you can't do some things in all programs: transferring a data base from Access to Word to Excel to Outlook will create problems depending on what kind of data you are transferring and where you want to send it. But it seems natural to me that a programs designed to do one thing would treat data differently than another specialized program. Otherwise, why would you need a suite of programs?

Much of the book is less contentious and easier to agree with. For example, if the individual applications are integrated, why can't one set of parameters be used for all of them? Most icons on the task bar are the same but some show icons not available on others. While listing the "annoyances," the authors also list some of the compatibilities such as a common dictionary. But here too, we have a problem: you can tell Word to ignore certain words that include a number (Win95) but you can't do it in Excel. It is noted that Outlook has no customizable toolbars but most users wouldn't find that much of a concern.

The book makes enjoyable reading and many interesting tips are shared. The authors also agree that one person's annoyance is another's desirable feature. There is no doubt that, although the integration of these diverse programs has improved considerably, there is still a long way to go. This is not a "how to" book, but anyone who uses more than one of the Office 97 programs will find it interesting and useful. *Reviewed by Stan Tishler*

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