Bowie Seniors Computer Club Minutes for Aug. 6, 2009

Dan Lee presided.

Once again I failed to get the minutes of the last meeting posted to our website before this meeting. Bill Meenahan suggested that we look into Content Management Systems software which allows even dummies like me to post and modify websites without requiring a knowledge of html.

Name Tags: Dan Lee mentioned that name tag holders were being purchased to allow attendees to learn each other's names. Ted Tuck, who was wearing a name tag, suggested that the only thing on the tag should be the person's name, in BIG LETTERS.

Dale Grant said that a Comcast installer may be at the Senior Center as soon as next week to install a modem in the computer lab closet and cable to allow the Computer Lab and the two public computers a connection to Comcast separate from the City's network. This will free us from the restrictions imposed on City employees that are not relevant to Senior Citizens taking computer classes, for example, restrictions on connecting to websites unrelated to City business. The Senior Center will need to provide Cat 5 cables to span the additional distance from the Computer Lab to the two public computers.

Presentation:

Giordana Sosa and David Kressman from the Network Sales Support group of AT&T Wireless spoke on the technical aspects of cell phone transmissions. 1G (first generation) cell phones were analog systems. 2G cell phones are digital systems capable of transmitting and receiving up to 300 kilobits per second (Kbps). These include GSM (Global Systems Mobile), IS-95 (CDMA), and IS-136 (TDMA) cell phones. 3G technology is improved digital systems capable of transmission speeds up to a peak of 3 megabits per second (Mbps). UMTS (WCDMA), CDM2000, and 1xEVDO phones have 3G technology. Upgrades from 2G to 3G is mainly in the radio transmission links. 3G allows internet tethering in devices like the iPhone, multimedia messages containing videos, pictures, and more. The cell phone industry is developing 4th Generation refined digital technology (OFDM and MIMO) with very high data speed rates of 20 Mbps in actual practice but with peak rates of 100 Mbps under optimum conditions. 4G includes LTE (Long Term Evolution and WiMax (Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access).

Voice, data, and message calls are each handled differently.

Continuous improvements can be expected for enhanced coverage, cost reductions, quality improvements and speed increases.

Cell phone quality and speed depends a lot on the cell phone vendor and usually corresponds to price. If you have a "G" in the upper right hand corner of your cell phone, it is a 2G phone. If you have an "E", it is an EVDO (3G) phone. 3G phones are backward compatible with 2G phones.

Coverage is inhibited by vegetation, building materials (especially metals), terrain obstacles, and political or aesthetic barriers to more transmission towers. The presenters said that AT&T engineers meet weekly to discuss complaints about dropped calls, weak signals, or dead zones. In some cases, they can tweak the transmitter antennas to provide better coverage. Call the store where you bought your phone and ask them to contact your provider. Coverage maps for AT&T can be accessed at http://www.wireless.att.com/coverageviewer/

If you call 911, you will be connected to the 911 Call Center in the jurisdiction where you turned on your phone. If you have traveled to another jurisdiction, you'll have to request that your call be transferred. (It might be quicker to turn it off and then back on.) The cell phone technology can determine your location within 100 meters. If you have GPS capability in your cell phone, it can determine your location within 2 meters but this information will only be released to to the emergency call center. Big Brother will have to wait.

When flying, turn your cell phone off to conserve battery life.