Carl Bulger presided.

PRESENTATION:

Our speakers were two computer techs from Office Depot in Bowie's Freestate Mall, Aaron Estrogano and Steve Price. Aaron is the Technology Department Manager. Steve formerly worked for Staples and was hired when Office Depot finally brought "live" techs on board locally.

Aaron and Steve brought a couple of laptop or notebook computers to demonstrate. One, Asus Transformer, had a removable touchscreen which could function as a tablet.

Office Depot sells HP, Toshiba, Asus, Lenovo, Acer, and Gateway computers. For gamers, they sell the HP Elite. Tablets they sell are the Asus Transformer TF101 and Asus Eee Pad Transformer Prime, BlackBerry Playbook, Lenovo IdeaPad K1, and the Toshiba Thrive.

Rather than desktops the store concentrates on sales of laptops, notebooks, and tablets. They carry a few desktops for display but the customer usually must order a desktop and have it shipped. Those that they usually have in stock are the HP Slimline, Acer Slimline, and the Asus. For gamers, the HP Elite Touchscreen series is in stock.

Most computers are heavily discounted, especially around the holidays. Their manufacturers probably lose money on the actual computer parts and assembly but the manufacturers and Office Depot net a profit after they are compensated for software advertising and by related software purchases.

Aaron and Steve recommended 4 – 6 GB of RAM, a minimum of 750GB capacity hard drive, Dual Core or Quad Core Processor (for Intel processors, that would be Series i5- or i7-processors) and 64-bit Microsoft Home Premium operating system.

After you purchase a computer, they will try to sell you a software "protection and optimization" plan. For $70, the standard plan will provide two years of McAfee AntiVirus Plus protection and optimization of your software by removing trial software (often called "Crapware" or "Bloatware"). New computers frequently come with multiple trial versions of anti-malware, internet service providers, browsers, Quicken, Microsoft Office, etc. It's interesting that Office Depot and the manufacturer profit from trial software installation, and Office Depot and the computer techs profit by taking a lot of it off. The rationale is, "If you are

paying for 2 years of McAfee, why do you also need a three month's trial of Symantec's Norton Antivirus?" For an additional $20, Office Depot's techs will "tune-up" your new PC for optimal performance. For $130, they'll provide McAfee's Total Protection software and provide 2 years and 10GB of online data backup.

For hardware protection they also offer three plans. The 2-year Standard Repair Plan provides for power surge protection, shipping coverage, repair of mechanical and electrical failures, labor cost coverage, and toll-free, 24/7 technical support and troubleshooting. In addition, both the 2- and 3-year Premium Repair Plans also covers a one-time battery replacement, coverage for accidental drops and liquid spills, monitor screen replacement. Costs of these plans depend on the retail price of the computer you bought. Prices vary from $60 to $170 for the Standard Plan for products that originally cost $200 or less up to products that originally cost $750 or more. The price range for the Premium 2-yr plan is $70-$260. For the 3-yr Premium Plan the price range is $170-$350. There was no mention of manufacturer warranties and how they would impact Office Depot prices.

Office Depot also provided a detailed list of their TechDEPOT services available in the store, in the home or office, remotely, and offsite (by a company in Florida). Costs of these services appeared reasonable.

They also offer a $30 training session for those who buy a tablet computer.

NEW MEMBERS:

Bruce Crabill, a professional programmer, including Linux and mainframe computers.

Rosa Carbo Sherrill, wants to learn computer terminology.

COMPUTER CLASSES:

Computer classes begin next week. Someone asked if anyone was going to teach PhotoShop.

Our previous instructor, who was excellent, no longer wants to teach. Our new computers in the classroom have PhotoShop Elements 9 installed. Know anyone who would like to teach it? Contact Dale Grant, our training coordinator.

Submitted by Barry Hammond

COMPUTER PROBLEMS:

Bruce Crabill raised the topic of Firewall and Security Programs. He has several computers. He's using Microsoft's Security Essentials on at least one of them. He also mentioned Norton and Zone Alarm. He had used McAfee on at least one of those computers. When he used McAfee's uninstall utility, it also removed his video driver.

The usual discussion of what's best ensued. One testing organization that appears to do a thorough and unbiased analysis of anti-virus products is at www.av-comparatives.org . The website also has links to other testing organizations. Neil J. Rubenking tests and reviews anti-malware programs and suites on PCMag.com Security Watch PCM_SecurityWatch@enews.pcmag.com. He admits that he doesn't have the resources to test as thoroughly as AV-Comparatives and many of the other testing organizations, but he is savvy and well-informed. Over the last five years, he has given high ratings to Symantec's Norton Internet Security, Norton's 360, and Norton's Anti-Virus. He may be biased toward Symantec, but in his last issue of the PCM SecurityWatch newsletter, there is an article about a suit against Symantec accusing it of distributing scareware: http://securitywatch.pcmag.com/none/292826-symantec-sued-for-scareware-tactics .

Submitted by Barry Hammond