Carl Bulger presided.

Vail Clemence visited to see his old baseball buddy's, Bob Blum's, presentation and also to request a volunteer or volunteers to help with a charity he and his wife, Barbara, run. They administer F.I.S.H. of Greater Bowie, a volunteer, non-profit service that provides rides to medical appointments for those who cannot drive or who cannot afford transportation. Every month he updates an Excel spreadsheet that lists volunteer drivers, telephone callers, and people who need transportation, and their appointment times. Van recently suffered a heart attack and he wants to provide continuity in preparing these Excel spreadsheets to prepare for when he can no longer do it. He wants someone who knows about computers and computer software. You might even transition F.I.S.H. to a free spreadsheet such as is available in Libre Office. If you can help out, give Vail Clemence a call at (301) 262-2313 (home) or at F.I.S.H. (301) 262-8479.

Another visitor, Lois Darr, has a computer problem. (See Computer Problems, after the Presentation.)

PRESENTATION:

Bob Blum gave three of his excellent mini-presentations, one on Linux, another on Flash, or thumb, drives, and the last on Customization Tricks for Microsoft 8.1.

LINUX:
In previous years Bob has given more comprehensive and detailed presentations on Linux. This time he concentrated on a lightweight Xfce (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xfce) version, or distribution, called Xubuntu. This presentation is timely for some of us who are still using Windows XP on one or more of our computers. Windows XP will no longer be supported by Microsoft with monthly security updates beginning April 8th. Computers using the XP operating system tend to be older computers like my ten year old HP computer that cannot be upgraded to Windows 7. But it could be upgraded to a lightweight version of Linux, such as Xubuntu, and it is FREE!

Xubuntu took Bob 17 minutes to install and approximately an additional half hour to set up. It will probably take the rest of us, except another Linux-lover like Bob Rapczynski, at least a day to set up. But it will be worth the effort.

Go to the Xubuntu website (http://xubuntu.org/getxubuntu/). Download the .iso file and burn the .iso image to a CD. Then go into your computer's BIOS and modify the boot sequence to boot from the CD drive.

Bob showed some of the software titles in his Xubuntu partition. Among them was Libre Office because Microsoft Office can't be used with a non-Microsoft operating system. Libre Office (https://www.libreoffice.org/) is also free.

Flash, or Thumb, Drives:
Bob uses a flash drive for easy portability of his favorite programs, especially those for troubleshooting and for malware detection and removal. He went to the Kaspersky website and downloaded Kaspersky's On-Line Virus Scan (http://usa.kaspersky.com/downloads/free-anti-virus-scan?ICID=INT1675328&bid=hp_sbanners_kss). It's free, but download it just before

you are going to use it or connect to it directly if the computer to be scanned is connected to the internet so you get the benefit of the latest malware fixes.) Many Anti-Virus vendors offer online virus scans. Just Google "online virus scans". Why do they offer them for free? To interest you in their paid software and to collect samples of new malware. But since they are updating their software continuously, wait until you have a problem, and then download their scanning software using another computer. Download it either to a CD or to your flash drive. Then go into the BIOS and alter the boot sequence on the infected computer to boot from your flash drive or the CD. Many clever hackers know how to immobilize the anti-virus software resident on your computer, so an external source is necessary.

His flash drive is an excellent repository for a lightweight version of Linux. Linux is frequently used on recovery disks to access files on malfunctioning computers.

Also on the Flash Drive is Parted Magic ($4.99) (http://partedmagic.com/) for managing hard disks (disk partitioning and cloning; data rescue and erasing; and, benchmarking).   Also, he had a free partition editor called GParted (http://gparted.org/). "GParted is a free partition editor for graphically managing your disk partitions.

With GParted you can resize, copy, and move partitions without data loss, enabling you to:

- Grow or shrink your C: drive
- Create space for new operating systems
- Attempt data rescue from lost partitions

 Also on the flash drive was a disk eraser, a disk health analyzer, Clonezilla for cloning disks, a system profiler, and MS-Sys (a SourceForge.org program for creating Microsoft compatible boot records).

Bob recommends www.portableapps.com as a site to download portable apps for your flash drive for use within Windows.

Customization Tricks for Windows 8.1:
Do you want to logon without having to type your password? In the searchbox type "netplwiz" without the quotes, click the netplwiz icon when it appears, in the Users dialog box that opens up uncheck "Users must enter a username and password to use this computer."
If you are a heavy user of Microsoft apps, Microsoft suggests that you continue to login to your computer using your special Microsoft password. Microsoft claims that their apps will work better together in Win 8/8.1 if you do so.

If you want Sidebar Gadgets like those in Windows 7, go to www.8GadgetPack.net . It's free.

If you want a "real" START button and menu, go to www.ClassicShell.net . It's free, although they ask for a donation.

Computer Problems:

Our visitor Lois Darr can't get her Windows XP computer to work. It won't even boot into SAFE MODE. She gets an error message that the *hal.dll* file is missing. She received several suggestions. Rather than I try to repeat them, I would suggest anyone having this problem go online from another computer and Google "hal.dll". Several websites will be listed with suggested procedures for restoring hal.dll. Apparently, this problem happens to users of Windows 7 and Vista, as well.

Russ Vaughn has two Brother multi-purpose printers, one connected to a Win 7 computer, the other to a Win 8 computer. The one connected to the Win 8 computer won't go on-line. Eric Hein suggested trading printers to make sure they both are working the same. Bob Long suggested switching to another USB port and also checking to see if that printer is on that computer's list of printers, has up-to-date printer drivers, and is selected as the Default Printer. Someone suggested checking network connections.