Bowie Seniors Computer Club Minutes for Aug. 20, 2009

Carl Bulger presided.

Our annual election will be the first meeting in October. To encourage a large turnout, free subscriptions or renewals to Smart Computing magazine will be raffled off at that meeting.

Good News! A "committee" consisting of Eric Hein, Dale Grant, Sam Duff, and Dan Lee achieved their goal of getting the computer lab/classroom hooked up to the same Comcast line that our two common access computers are using. Bowie's IT Department then unhooked the line connecting the lab/classroom to the City's system.

This will free us from the City's bans on external media (CD's, DVD's, USB drives, and external hard drives), and on ordinary html email (the city uses SMTP). We can now resume teaching the courses on Internet and Email while experiencing higher internet speeds because we won't be sharing with all of the City's computers.

Eric Hein and Sam Duff waited most of the day on Wednesday for the Comcast technician to show up and make the changes. After seven hours of waiting they called Comcast to find out that no one had been scheduled. After some urging, they sent out a contractor who did a minimum amount of work. The hero of the day was Harry, the Senior Center's Maintenance Man, who climbed up into the attic and strung the new cables from the TV room to the Computer Lab/Classroom. Eric and Sam verified that the new connection worked before the Comcast guy left.

The computer classroom is an emergency backup for the City's computers. If there is a local outage at City Hall, the City can reconnect to the Classroom/Lab computers and use them until problems at City Hall are corrected.

The cable modem/router/wireless transmitter was also moved from the TV room/library to the closet in the computer lab/classroom. This enables better WiFi reception in the room where we meet.

The 802.11g wireless modem/router is encrypted. This necessitates giving the password to anyone using a laptop wirelessly on the system. Eric Hein asked for a vote on how we want to handle or distribute the encryption key. We voted to pass it out on a "need to know" basis. We can fine-tune or change the policy later based on experience.

Computer Problems:

Jess Mitchell lost all of the desktop icons on his XP computer. We were able to use the Center's projector and laptop computer to experiment until we lost all of the icons on the Center's computer, then reversed the procedure to get them back. If you lose all your icons, right-click on a blank spot on the desktop (which will be ALL blank). A menu box will be displayed. Left-Click on the first line, "Arrange Icons". A sub menu will appear. Left-Click on "Show Desktop Icons". Jess tried it when he got home and it worked. He thanks the members who helped.

This is the time of year when the major computer security firms begin to come out with their final versions of next year's software. It was timely that a member who is experiencing a slow computer. with a 2006 Norton (Symantec) security product asked if the free or paid version of AVG would be less of a load on their system and would speed up the scan time which is currently about two hours.

Beginning in 2008 Norton was able to significantly reduce the load imposed on a computer by their security products. Eric Hein is using Norton Internet Security 2009 on all three computers at home. He is quite satisfied with the speed. I have been using the 2008 version for about six months and haven't had a malware problem. And the computer is faster than it was with other anti-virus products such as Zone Alarm and AVG. On my other computer I have a free anti-virus (Avira Anti-Vir), free firewall (Outpost), and several free anti-malware products (Windows Defender, Malwarebyte's Anti-Malware, SuperAnti-Spyware, and Spyware Blaster).

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Scan speeds are influenced by a lot of factors: number of files to be scanned, thoroughness of scan, priority assigned (background or high priority), processor speed, memory capacity, hard disk speed and free memory, interference by other programs, and connection to the internet.

I have two similar desktop computers running XP, each with AMD Athlon processors with 128 KB primary memory cache and 512 KB secondary memory cache, 2GB RAM, ASUS motherboards with 200MHz bus speeds, Phoenix BIOS, and 160GB Western Digital hard drives. Major differences: Computer 1 has a 2.20 GHz processor, 104GB free space on the hard drive, and about 1,060,000 files. Computer 2 has a 2.40 GHz processor, 140GB free space on the hard drive, and only about 300,000 files, so you would expect scans to go faster on Computer 2.

Norton Internet Security 2008 takes 1 hr.50 min. to scan (1,060,000 files) on Computer 1. Zone Alarm and AVG sometimes would take over four hours.   On Computer 2 Avira's AntiVir scanned 30, 023 objects for rootkits and 229,844 files for viruses and malware in 28 minutes. On Computer 2 Malwarebyte's Anti-Malware scanned 149,705 objects in 34.5 minutes compared to 2 hrs 20 min. to scan 273, 095 objects on Computer 1.

Scan times can be reduced by doing a disk cleanup and, if necessary, a disk defragmentation, and rebooting, then disconnecting from the internet and exiting from any unneeded programs and processes, especially other security products, before starting the scan,. Many security products give you the option of selecting a high priority scan which takes precedence over many processes and programs. Or you can choose to stay connected to the internet and continue to work while the security product scans in the background. Background scans take longer.

Dick Henthorn sees "net.net" each time he turns on his computer. We Googled the term but didn't really come up with an explanation. Most of the references were to Microsoft's .Net Framework. A few days after this meeting, his computer crashed.

Cynthia Bravo wonders how she should respond to the offer during disk cleanup to "compress old files". She said that Smart Computing magazine recommends NOT compressing old files because it slows down the computer when they have to be decompressed when they're needed. Eric Hein mentioned that in the NTFS (New Technology File System) whole directories are compressed and decompressed automatically, usually without the user's intervention or awareness.