Carl Bulger presided.

Tom McCabe talked about how he backs-up and restores his data. Tom has been a member for several months. He is a retired IT professional. He graduated from the Merchant Marine Academy in 1963 and from Brooklyn Polytech with a degree in Electrical Engineering. He programmed using Assembly Language for Link, the simulator manufacturer, on the Apollo Mission Simulator in 1967-68. Later, he was an IT manager for two different Maryland state agencies programming in COBOL and serving on the Electronic Data Processing Security Committee. Designing Backups and Recovery policies for the State of Maryland was a significant part of this work.

Now that he is retired and frequently helping friends with their computer problems he has become aware of how important backups and recoveries are to preventing loss of data on home computers.

Memories, in the form of photos, and financial data are the most important things to Tom that must be preserved. He carefully copies all photos from his camera to his computers before he erases them from the camera memory chips.

He has two desktops and one laptop. Each of the desktops has a second hard drive that he can use for backups. He also bought an external hard drive enclosure from Star Deck for about $35 and permanently installed in it a 2 TB hard drive which cost about $95. He backs up each of the three computers and his son's computer to this external hard drive using Acronis' Multiple Mirror Image Backup procedure. He also does the same to the extra internal hard drives on his computers. About every six months he stores image backups of each of his computers on another external hard drive and takes it to his son's house for safe keeping in case of fire or theft at his house.

He accidentally erased TurboTax records from previous years but was able to restore them from Acronis image backups on the external hard drive.

He and Irv Saltzberg, another Acronis devotee, both recommend taking the extra time to validate backups to eliminate problems when restoring an image or individual files from an image.

Tom said that Acronis backups are forward and backward compatible with Acronis editions from other years. If you not yet using Windows 8 or 8.1, he suggested that you could use an edition from a previous year. It might be a lot cheaper than the 2813 or 2814 editions. But if you are using Windows 8 or 8.1, you will need the 2813-2814 edition. By the way, this edition has a 64 character validation key and is not transferable.

Somebody asked about hard drive failure symptoms. Tom listed three symptoms:

1. Long computer boot ups.
2. Clicking sounds.
3. Blue Screens of Death (B.S.O.D.)

He suggested downloading Hard Drive Disk Sentinel from CNET. This software is capable of monitoring the S.M.A.R.T. chip on the hard drive and reporting the condition of the hard drive.

Tom suggests that it is false economy to buy used or refurbished hard drives. But bargains can be had buying old hard drive models that have never been used.

Dan Lee and Bob Rapczynski teamed up to restore an old Toshiba laptop to good operating condition for a 7th-grade neighbor of Dan. Surprisingly, the initial process involved using a Dell recovery disk that Bob had. Eventually, Dan spent 3-4 days using a Toshiba recovery disk to restore Vista, all service packs, and all security updates.

Bob Blum recommends www.restoredisks.com as a source for restore disks.

Bob Long called our attention to Prince George's County auctions of excess property that often includes serviceable computers and hardware. He calls it a "spot bid auction" that occurs every 3-4 months on a Thursday or Friday. You go look over the equipment, make bids on anything that you might want, and wait for a phone call the following week if your bid(s) were successful. He suggests that you get on their email list for notification of the next auction. Go to the following site to sign up:
http://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/sites/CentralServices/Services/GeneraServices/SpotBidSales/Pages/default.aspx

Tom McCabe got a Chromecast dongle for Christmas. He wants to know if anybody else has experience with one.

Bob Long successfully removed malware from his computer by downloading MalwareBytes to a flash drive, then booting up from the flash drive, and scanning with MalwareBytes. This is a way to circumvent malware that recognizes MalwareBytes and employs countermeasures.

Dan Lee, our Program Manager is looking for volunteers to participate on a Linux forum chaired by Bob Rapczynski and a Flash Drive forum chaired by Irv Salzberg. Interested in sharing your experience and advice?

Our next meeting, on January 16th, will feature a talk by a representative of Inovalon, Inc., a healthcare data analytics company located on Rt. 197 across from the main entrance to the Bowie Town Center. Mr. William White, Director of IT Operations, Enterprise Applications, will provide an overview of Inovalon and what their IT Department does.