

Bowie Seniors Computer Club Minutes for November 4, 2010

Carl Bulger presided.

Our Holiday Luncheon will be at Old Country Buffet in Laurel on Thursday, Dec. 2. Let Vic Kiviat know if you're coming and how many guests you're bringing. An announcement will be emailed to you with his email address or you can let him know at the November 18th meeting.

Computer Problems:

Bob Davis likes to organize the icons on his computer's desktop. Booting into safe mode scrambles the icons. Fences, a free program downloadable from <http://www.s-tardock.com/products/fences>, will solve the problem.

Carl Bulger's wife, Pam, has a more serious problem, some of her icons are grayed out and don't work. Yet, on same computer Carl has no problem.

At the Collington Senior Center, a lady needs a computer tutor. Anybody interested? See Carl.

Several years ago we had a presentation by a computer instructor who offered computer courses at Collington. What happened to that?

Presentation:

Tim Foreman, Installer for Best Buy's Home Theater Geek Squad discussed HDTVs and their peripherals and how to install them.

Best Buy's Geek Squad has four "Teams":

Home Theater
PC
TV Repair
Car Audio

The Home Theater Team consults, sells, installs, and troubleshoots HDTVs, the associated receiver, amplifiers, speakers, remotes, wiring, surge protectors, routers, etc.

High Definition TVs (HDTVs) receive digital instead of analog signals. Most have flat panel displays with 16:9 aspect wide screen formats rather than the old 4:3 aspect ratio. Generally they consume less energy than the old Cathode Ray Tube displays and tend to have fewer problems.

For large screen sizes you'll want "full HD", or 1080p. For smaller TVs (42-inch diagonal or less) you can get by with 720p unless you're going to use it as a computer display. To help prevent blurring of fast objects (balls, horses, race cars, etc.) get a set that changes the picture 120 or 240 times a second rather than 60 times a second. Again, for smaller TVs 60Hz will probably be satisfactory. The engineers at Consumer Reports Magazine recommend getting the biggest HDTV set you can afford and that you have the space to accommodate for a Home Theater or Home Stadium experience.

There are three basic types of HDTV screen: Liquid Crystal

Displays (LCDs), Plasma displays, and Front Projectors. Liquid Crystals are tiny variable filters imparting black, white, and color for each pixel in the array. They are backlit by hot- or cold-cathode fluorescent tubes. The hot-cathode fluorescents are more energy efficient. Fluorescent backlights are now being replaced with lower voltage, lower energy, longer lasting Light Emitting Diodes (LEDs). Cheaper LCD-LED HDTVs have the LEDs at the edge of the screen and depend on diffusers to distribute the backlight across the back of the screen. More expensive LCD-LED HDTVs provide an array of LEDs behind the LCDs. This increases the TVs thickness slightly. Although the LEDs aren't as small and numerous as the pixels, which determine the screen resolution, their intensity can be locally increased behind picture highlights and reduced behind shadows and other dark areas of the picture. Manufacturers have had variable success in getting the LED backlights to produce realistic pictures. More expensive Plasma HDTVs produce their pixel light with ionized gases. They are more expensive, usually larger, and thicker and have the richest colors but need a relatively dark room to avoid washing out the display. Front projector TVs also need a relatively dark room.

3D TVs are being sold. Foreman says 3D is still in its infancy. There are very few 3D movies and other 3D content available now.

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Signal cables are called High Definition Multimedia Interface (HDMI) cables. Vendors try to sell you a Monster brand HDMI cable costing \$50 or more. There are other less expensive brands. For a 3-6 foot HDMI cable, expect to pay \$20 or less. Buy one online if you can't find one in a store.

If you should choose to mount the display on a wall, you may want to run the wires and cables down inside the wall to avoid unsightly black wires and cables hanging down the wall. Tim Foreman warned that if you choose to run the power cable down the wall, you should buy an Underwriter's CL-code cable which is designed to burn much slower in a fire. (You don't want a cheap power cord conducting the fire quickly up the inside of the wall. Non CL-rated power cords are forbidden by the fire code.) If you are merely connecting the TV to a wall plug or a surge resistor, the cable that comes with the TV is fine.

Protect your new TV and other electronics by connecting them to a power strip with a surge resistor. Many manufacturers will warrant their surge resistors for a few years and reimburse you if a power surge damages the TV or other electronics plugged into it. Depending how many power outages and power surges they have been subjected to, surge resistors should be replaced every 3-6 years because the voltage-limiting

diodes wear out. They should be rated to limit transient voltages to less than +/- 330V. The same is true for other electronic devices like computers.

If you are going to attach the TV to a wall, you'll probably need a mounting device. There are three types. The least expensive mounts the TV flat on the wall like a picture. Tilting mounts allow the TV display to be tilted down or up. Articulating mounts allow the display to also be tilted sideways and to be moved out from the wall. Most HDTVs come with an easily attached base which allows the TV to be set on a table, desk, shelf, or in a cabinet. Since the new HDTVs are relatively light and thin, they are easy to move or rotate when the base is attached.

Audio quality in HDTVs is usually poor because they are located in the frame surrounding the screen and, therefore, small. Manufacturers concentrate their attention to quality on video and leave sound quality to the consumer. Higher quality sound can be obtained by using external speakers, usually two, five, or seven high and mid-range speakers and one woofer, a non-direction low frequency speaker. These arrays are designated 2.1, 5.1, and 7.1. The ".1" refers to the woofer which can be placed somewhere out of the way on the floor or in a corner. 2.1 has a speaker on each side of the TV. 5.1 has three speakers in front, one on each side and one in front

of the TV plus one on each side of the viewers. 7.1 has an additional two speakers in back. These must be powered by a dedicated power source.

If you have a nice digital signal coming in by cable, dish antenna, or fiber optics, you may want to buy a digital receiver to receive, amplify, and send music and radio to the same speakers.

Since you have a HDTV you may want to view movies on Sony Blu-Ray-encoded discs. For that you'll also need a Blu-Ray DVD player.

When you sit down to watch a program, broadcast, or movie, you may be juggling remote controls for the TV set top box, TV, Blu-Ray player, and receiver. All-in-One remote controls are available for a premium price that will allow you control all of these with one remote. In fact, you may already have one. Verizon FiOS' set top remote control, for example, has the capability of controlling several devices. Logitech sells all-in-one remotes that can be programmed with a computer.

Many more expensive HDTVs come equipped with a jack or connectors for an internet connection allowing you to display internet video/audio. You must use the arrow keys on your remote to move the cursor. Google TV makes a box which will facilitate this. You can also stream video from subscription services such as

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Netflix, Blockbuster on Demand, Amazon Video on Demand, Vudu, Verizon on Demand, and many other sources. You'll get higher fidelity sound if you have a receiver, in which case, the TV does not have to be On.

Many TV's also allow you to display videos and pictures by connecting your camera to the TV or inserting a memory chip from your camera.

Tim Foreman recommended that you buy a Screen Clean kit for \$20. Do NOT clean your screens with paper towels or harsh cleaners.

Consumer Reports Magazine usually has an issue in late winter devoted to electronics and TVs. In March 2010 it rated TVs, Home Theater systems and Blu-Ray players. It also discussed the features and performances of two inexpensive projector TVs. It also had an article about Web content that can be displayed on a TV and how to hook it up to the internet.

You can contact Tim Foreman at timothy.foreman@geeksquad.com or call him: 410-292-7976. The general number for the Geek Squad is 1-800-GeekSquad.