

# Bowie Seniors Computer Club Minutes for July 2, 2009

Carl Bulger presided.

The Bowie High School Robotics Team emailed us this morning that they would be unable to put on a demonstration today.

New Member: Ken Rothermel, bringing our active membership to 72.

The Website Committee was recognized for its success in getting the new website operational. The committee was chaired by Vic Kiviat, driven by guru Eric Hein, defended by legal advisor Ted Tuck, and attended by Carl Bulger, Bob Rapczynski, Dan Lee, and Barry Hammond. Instead of the long form of the URL, <http://home.comcast.net/~BSCClub/>, Bob Blum suggested: <http://BSCClub.home.comcast.net/> as easier to remember. The address is case insensitive, so <http://bscclub.home.comcast.net/> will work as well.

Ted Tuck related a serious, practical application of robotics that occurred in Iraq when a critically injured soldier was remotely operated on by a surgeon in Florida. See <http://www.davincisurgery.com/>, the website of the robot manufacturer. This expensive robot is in 13 Maryland and 4 DC hospitals already because it not only allows remotely controlled operations but also allows the surgeon to perform minimally invasive operations with a precise tactile sensitivity. Usually his console is in the operating room, but it could be on another continent.

Eric Hein and Dale Grant reported that the process of getting off of City network is slowly moving forward. Advantages of having the Computer Lab on our own network would be improved bandwidth, getting away from City-imposed restrictions on web use (Our Computer Class students are not tax-paid city employees and should not be restricted from connecting with Ebay, Genealogy sites, etc.); and a closer wireless transmitter next door to the room we meet in.

Eric Hein suggested that we have a standing reservation for the Center's projector and laptop to use when we need to show someone how to find something in Windows or on the web.

Computer Problems: Charlotte Melichar damaged her laptop computer when she spilled water on it. She emailed several members recently asking for advice on the best way to extract data from the hard drive before she sent the laptop in for repairs. She also requested recommendations of where to send it. Dan Lee is asking her to give a presentation at one of our meetings on her experiences regarding this accident and the repairs.

Dan Lee asked about member's experiences with lightning damage. Vic Kiviat's computer was damaged by lightning or, more likely, a power surge caused by lightning. Some components were damaged, others were OK.

If lightning directly hits any of your electronics, it will not matter whether the power is on or off.

Bob Blum noted that the BIOS (Binary Input/Output Service) often gets zapped. Sometimes a simple procedure will restore it: Disconnect the power. Open the computer. On the motherboard, find the CMOS (Ceramic-Metal Oxide Semiconductor) housing the BIOS. Beside it should be three jumpers in a row, usually labeled "RT Clear", "RTC Clear", and "RTC Clock". A shunt will be connecting the center jumper to one of the end jumpers. Reconnect the shunt to the other end for 30 seconds or more, then move it back. Close up the computer and reconnect the power. If the computer will power up, enter the BIOS. You'll see an instruction on the start up screen about which button to push to enter the BIOS. Edit the BIOS settings back to what they were, save the settings, and exit. If the computer works, you've saved yourself some money.

Laptops can experience intermittent overheating which causes them to temporarily malfunction. Silicon-based semiconductors will not work at high temperatures. Carl Bulger bought a fan platform that can be put under a laptop when it is being used at home to keep it cool.

**The City of Bowie is holding a Shredding and Electronics Recycling Event on 7/18/09 from 8 a.m. - 2 p.m.**

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Someone noted that we're lucky to have "free" electronics recycling in PG County. Seattle requires electronics to be recycled, charging a \$100 fine for putting them in the trash, but they also charge \$25 per electronics item recycled.

Earl Webb had questions about data backups on external USB (Universal Serial Bus) hard drives. The discussion indicated that another presentation on Backups may be useful.

Eric Hein has a new computer hooked up to his TV. He has Verizon FiOS internet service but not TV service. As a Netflix subscriber, he can download and watch any of 10,000 movies in their library for free. What he is missing is a remote control. Anybody know where he can buy a remote control for his computer?

Bob Blum suggested splitting the incoming FiOS signal. Connect one output to the TV Tuner, which doesn't work in Hi Definition. Connect the other output to a Hauppauge high definition TV tuner which has its own viewer, and its own remote. One of these is on sale at Newegg until 7/20 for \$123.

Eric has another question: He uses Microsoft's Media Player. What additional features are offered by Microsoft's Media Center version of Windows?

Bob Davis and Bob Rapczynski continued the conversation on high definition TV signals. Davis has experimented with over the air HDTV signals in his apartment at Riderwood. He has a picture window facing southwest toward a majority of the Washington area's transmitter antennas. Rapczynski suggested that anyone interested in antenna locations, directions, and signal strengths go to <http://www.antennaweb.com>.

Dale Grant lost his Verizon FiOS connection. With the help of a Verizon Support Tech on the phone the problem was determined to be the router. They shipped him a new router, which arrived in two days. I had the same experience with the set top box.

Bill Meenahan says that it is a myth that changing the SSID of a wireless network will make it more secure. The SSID is the name that the router broadcasts. Whether or not the name of your network is broadcast does not affect the network's security. Meenahan provided two references: Ref. 1: Ars Technica's 2002 Wireless Security Blackpaper <http://arstechnica.com/security/news/2002/07/security.ars>; Ref. 2: Ars Technica – The ABC's of Securing Your Wireless Network by Joel Hruska April 29, 2008 <http://arstechnica.com/security/news/2008/04/wireless-security.ars> Sam Duff provided a Microsoft reference: <http://technet.microsoft.com/en-us/library/bb726942.aspx>

The form of encryption of the data is important. WEP encryption is easy to "crack". WPA2 encryption is recommended.

For those of us with hardwired connections from the Verizon FiOS router, it probably isn't necessary to fuss with changing the encryption. The only data that is wirelessly broadcast is the channel guide and local weather and traffic.

We ended the meeting with a "first". It was the first time we have received a call about a computer problem during our meeting. President Carl Bulger answered the telephone. Although we could not hear the other side of the conversation, it appeared to be a person who was not very familiar with their computer or the operating system and was requesting a service call. Carl kindly explained that we don't make service calls and outlined several commercial service options and their ballpark costs. He pointed out that if their computer had Windows XP as its operating system and it was a software crash, they might be able to get back to an operational state by using the System Restore function. He explained how to Restore the System. START >> All Programs >> Accessories >> System Tools >> System Restore >> Restore My Computer to an Earlier Time, etc. I had to leave the room. As I did, Carl was explaining where the START icon is located.