



January in Tampa

A Monthly Publication of the Tampa PC Users Group, Inc.

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January 2000

Meeting

Hardware Presentation

January 12, 2000
6:00 PM
Museum of Science
and Industry
4801 E Fowler Ave.

Meeting Preview: At the January meeting we will have a hardware presentation covering motherboards, processors, hard drives, hubs and other topics. Mary Sheridan, as usual, will conduct a 30-minute Windows discussion at the beginning of the meeting.

President's Message

By [Mary Sheridan](#), President, Tampa PC Users Group

My first president's article and I have no idea what to say. Since we've all survived the "end of the world", I guess congratulations are in order. I knew we'd make it.

I hope we can make the year 2000 the best year ever, both in our personal lives and for the Tampa PC Users Group.

First of all, it's important to thank the people who have worked so hard to make things run smoothly. I'd like to let Merle Nicholson know how much his excellence in serving as our president for the past two years is appreciated. Kudos to Mike Hodges for his professionalism and willingness to stay late at work so we can use the Reflectone facilities. To William LaMartin who is always willing to help anyone who needs it, who creates and maintains our wonderful website AND tirelessly publishes our newsletter month after month goes our deepest gratitude. To Don Patzsch for knowing so much and writing it down to enable all of us to share his knowledge, much thanks. Hats off to James Weber for his note taking which keeps us all abreast of the meetings we aren't able to attend. Thanks to Jenny Olin, our dedicated treasurer, who keeps the books up to the minute and always makes sure the budget is balanced. Thanks to

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February 9: Meeting topic is yet to be announced — Check our web site

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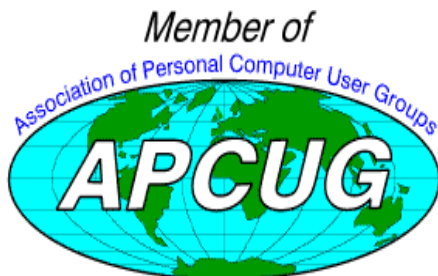
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Minutes of the December Meeting

By James Weber, Secretary,
Tampa PC Users Group

During this month's general meeting we had an opportunity to sit together and talk among ourselves about some of the many things that have been going on over the past year, without the constraints of a fixed agenda. Our members also supplied a mixed fare of food. There was definitely the air of the holidays about.

We started at 6:00 PM with the election of officers. As there was no opposition to any of the seats it was motioned and seconded that we vote on all seats at once. A voice vote to elect the officers was unanimous.

The remainder of the meeting was spent socializing. There was no drawing.

To you and your families, I hope you had a wonderful holiday season and look forward to what we can do together in the new millennium. ◆

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Larry Anders for all he does and never wants any credit for. To Bruce Register who will do whatever you need for him to do, whenever you need it. To Kevan Sheridan for his years of dedication to the group and for being such a special person. Cheryl Alexander has taken over as our membership "committee" and is doing a great job. Last, but hardly least, to all the other members who make our group the best it can be. Thanks and thanks again.

My personal goals for the year 2000 are establishing working relationships with other user groups in the area. I'd also like to work on partnerships with local businesses.

I appreciate being given the chance to serve as your president. ◆

New Hard Drives for Improved Performance

By [Merle Nicholson](#), Member at Large,
Tampa PC Users Group

Look for new hard drive standards when you're upgrading or buying a new system. The words to look for are UDMA 66, Ultra 66 or UIDE 66 and 7200 RPM. These new drives give significant improvements in your computer's performance. They've become inexpensive too.

On my current system I set the computer up with a standard hard drive first, then copied over to a 7200 RPM drive a week or so later, and a few months after that, installed Ultra-66 support. So I have some subjective comparisons. The system is an AMD K6-3/450 with 2M cache.

Drive Speed

It makes sense, doesn't it? The faster the hard drive spins, the faster the data will go on and come off. The "normal" rotation speed for IDE has been 5400 RPM for a long time. Faster drives for SCSI are available, though. Seagate and IBM - that I know of - have had even 10,000 RPM drives for some time. They've always been with SCSI interfaces, and very high prices. SCSI drives are used in servers and in very high-end workstations.

The newest drives for consumer PCs are 7200 RPM, a 33% increase in rotational speed. These drives should give you a very noticeable 20% improvement in program load time. The price difference between 5400 and 7200 drives is very low, and very often the new ones go on sale with rebates.

Notice that I mention "program load time". Loading large files from disks is where you'll notice the biggest difference; and notice it you will!. You'll see a dramatic improvement when you turn on the computer and it's loading Windows, and you'll notice it when loading large programs like MS Word or MS Access. But the hard drive is used for nearly everything. The extra speed will be used when moving data to the swap file, for instance, and when caching pictures from the Internet and so on, but in my own experience it won't be as dramatic a difference. You'll know it's there, but it isn't a "wow" thing like loading Word or Paint Shop Pro.

Drive Interfaces

The SCSI standard has been upgraded over time to specify higher and higher data rates, starting with 5MB/sec (in 1986) up to 80MB/sec (in 1996), making it possible to raise the data rate of hard drives themselves (or maybe it was the other way round). SCSI drives are not normally used in consumer PC's because of their much higher price. You can do it

though, and some people do, when the cost isn't a great factor.

IDE, on the other hand, had been stuck at 33MB/sec for some time, starting with 486 systems, until recently. IDE is the standard for all personal computers other than workstations and servers. IDE drives are inexpensive (I wouldn't have been saying that two years ago), but the recent big news is Ultra-66. It's also called UDMA-66 (Ultra DMA-66). This new standard specifies a data burst transfer rate of 66MB/sec.; technically, "burst transfer rate" means the data transfer from the hard drive's cache memory.

You need four things to get Ultra-66. A hard drive that supports it, a system board or alternately an Ultra-66 controller card, a special 80-wire cable and, last, a utility program that sets the hard drive to either 33 or 66.

Hard Drive

What you're looking for - 66 - should be obvious, but believe it or not there were many drives manufactured that are 66-capable, but set as 33 and shipped that way. Look at the specs on the box if the 66 isn't obvious. Look for DMA Mode 3 or 4. Mode 3 is 44 MB/sec, and Mode 4 is 66 MB/sec. There's a utility program that should be shipped with the drive, but sometimes is not, and can be easily downloaded from the manufacturer's web site. It's a tiny DOS program, and it's used to set the drives speed from 33 to 66 or vice-versa. Recent drives are set to 66 out of the box. So be careful here if you're hooking it up to a 33-only controller. A 66 controller will handle both, but a 33-only will give you drive errors if you connect a drive set to 66 to it. Boot into DOS first, and insert the diskette with the setting software and run it. Follow the instructions.

System board or 66 Controller card.

I've used both - several system boards and also I have a Promise Ultra66 PCI controller card on my personal system. It will simply recognize the drive and use mode 4. Look at the bootup information closely, and you should see it. Mode 4.

Ultra-66 Cable

As you supposed, when you go to Ultra-66, the old 40-pin ribbon cable won't work. It's still a 40-pin ribbon cable but it now has 80 wires. The extra 40 wires are grounded to eliminate interference. It's easy to spot, too. The cable is stiffer because it has two layers of wires and seems - to me - more fragile. It's an additional cost unless either the motherboard or the drive comes with it. In my case the cable came with the controller card, making the Promise board a better deal for me than others. Drive cables normally come with the motherboard, and many boards do not include a 66 cable, just a 33, even though 66 is supported. The cable is expensive - \$15 or

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so.

Promise Ultra66 controller card - technical

The Promise Ultra 66 works the same as a system board except for one thing, and I discovered it by accident. I don't think it's the Promise Card's fault, but the Quantum Hard drive 33/66 utility would not find the hard drive when it's plugged into the controller card. So I switched the cable to the (33) system board to set it. It had me going for a while. This controller card will recognize that the correct cable is being used and refuse to put it into Mode 4 if not.

A couple of interesting things about this board. All technical. It uses one interrupt (IRQ). That's in addition to the two that your system board takes. But they'll run simultaneously, for up to eight drives total. If you put all your drives – including CDROM – on the controller card, you can disable the system board devices both in Windows and in the bios. In that order. That'll free up IRQs 15 and 14.

Promise is at <http://www.promise.com/Products/idecards/u66.htm>.

My personal trials

I'd bought the Quantum 9.4G UIDE66/7200RPM drive from Buycomp.com for an incredible price. It was backordered, but I didn't care. I'd wait. When I copied the drive image over to it and installed it – with the system board that does not do 66 – I started having some program failures and some disk errors. But I puzzled over it for a while, lived with it, and in the meantime ordered the Promise card. So when I got it and installed it, I ran the Quantum utility to set it to 66, and found it already was. Errors explained. Read the manual, dummy. Of course that was how I found out that the Quantum software couldn't find the drive at all when it was on the card.

So I got the card in, and Windows up and running, and within twenty minutes got a corrupt registry error message, requiring a shutdown. On bootup the registry utility restored the last backup and restarted Windows, with an immediate error message again, reboot again, etc., to go on forever.

So I decided to reinstall Windows SE. The first thing that Windows SE does on a reinstall is to check for a corrupt registry, and if it finds it, run a repair utility. Good. I cancelled the rest of the installation, and rebooted into Windows, and it worked for a while, but the same evening I got the corrupt registry back.

So I pulled the Promise card out, and connected to the system board and ran the Quantum utility to set it to 33, and we're up and running fine. The machine ran like blazes with that 7200

RPM drive in it.

I used the machine with no problems for a month or so and then got the registry corrupt problem again. Some research on Microsoft knowledge base came up with the reason, a bad memory module. That's what it said. So it wasn't the Promise card at all, and I don't have to send it back – I didn't want to anyway. I bought a 64M memory module and installed it as the first DIMM, and I had no problems for another month, when it happened again. This time I didn't repair the registry, I just pulled one 32M module out of the machine, and I've had no problem since. I got lucky, I had a 50-50 chance of getting the right one of two.

So at last I can install the Promise card again. I was ready to do that because I wanted my machine in a smaller case to go on my desktop, and while I was at it, I wiped the drive clean and have been installing software for four days now.

Adding Ultra66 support wasn't a wow thing because I'd been using an older AMD K6-2/300 system while I rebuilt. I'm so happy with the speed of the new machine, I'm still amazed at how fast the programs load. For a test, I put this article on the desktop, and rebooted the machine, and as soon as Windows was loaded, I double-clicked on the document. MS Word loaded up and read this 2-1/4 page file in 2.75 seconds by my stopwatch. It was worth it. ♦

A Note from our Membership Coordinator

By Cheryl Alexander, Membership Coordinator, TPCUG

Allow me to introduce myself: I'm Cheryl Alexander, the Membership Coordinator. This is a fairly new, appointed position for the TPCUG, so the defined responsibilities are still rather fluid.

I plan to make calls to members every month. For lack of a better roster, I will be using the list of expired memberships. Part of my call will be to remind you that your dues are, well, due. Another part of my call will be simply to make contact with our members and let them know that we care for them as people. The most important part of my call will be to find out if the members are benefiting from being part of the Tampa PC Users Group. If not, please tell us. We can work together.

Input from the members concerning what they want and need will help us help you. Also ideas and contacts for programs would be appreciated. So, when I call, if you have anything to pass on to us, this will be a golden opportunity for all of us. ♦

Editor's Comments: Old photographs, New Computer & Online Shopping

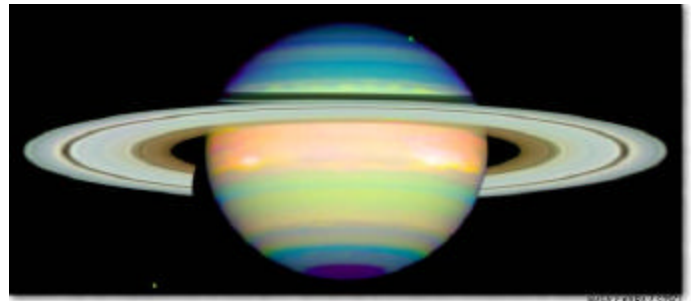
By *William LaMartin*, Editor,
Tampa PC Users Group

Old Photographs My main project last month was creating an online, searchable index for the Tampa-Hillsborough County Library System's collection of old Tampa photographs in their Burgert Bothers Photographic Archive. To access this collection on the Internet you have to use Telnet instead of the World Wide Web (like DOS as compared to Windows). Then use key strokes to move about the different Telnet screens and enter keywords to do a search. Doing a search results in a new Telnet screen with at most seven entries, where you have to enter some more key strokes until you get to a screen that lists the URL for a particular photo. Finally, you have to copy this URL and paste it into your web browser before you can finally view the photograph.

This was like the Dark Ages compared to what we have become used to on the WWW. So, I wrote a Visual Basic program that connected to the library's Telnet site and captured the approximately 4,500 titles listed under Burgert Brothers along with their descriptions and URL's. I then did more programming to

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Internet picture of the month



A false-color image showing infrared light reflected from the planet Saturn taken from the Hubble telescope.

This image is from the MSNBC's Space News Site. The URL for MSNBC is <http://www.msnbc.com>
The URL for the Space News is http://www.msnbc.com/news/SPACENEWS_Front.asp
The URL for Hubble Telescope images, including the one above of Saturn, is <http://www.msnbc.com/news/338343.asp>

January's Interesting World Wide Web Locations

Tampa PC Users Group (that's us)	http://www.tpcug.org/	
Ifilm (Internet films)	http://www.ifilm.com/	
FreeVBCode.com	http://www.freevbcode.com/	
VBGreatOne, The Place to learn Programming	http://vbgreatone.8m.com/	
One-Stop Source Shop (Visual Basic)	http://www.mvps.org/vb/	
10k Wizard (search engine for SEC filings)	http://www.10kwizard.com/	
ditto.com - the premier visual search engine	http://www.arribavista.com/	
Bandwidth Speed Test Results	http://computingcentral.msn.com/topics/bandwidth/speedtest500.asp	
RootsWeb.com (genealogy)	http://www.rootsweb.com/	
Hessen genealogy (& good links)	http://users.rootsweb.com/~deuhes/Hessen/index.htm	
Nordstrom (shopping)	http://www.nordstrom.com	

Some of these links will join the many already on the Links page at our web site, where you need only click on the name.

Hard Drive Problems

By [Merrill Friend](#), Tampa PC Users Group

When starting up my personal computer recently I found that Scandisk was under the mistaken impression that I had not turned off my computer properly and insisted on checking out my directory structure as well as my hard drive for drive problems. That has happened before when there was a power outage or for some other reason the computer was powered down and not correctly turned off, but in those cases Scandisk only checked out the directory structure so this was a bit different. Now it wanted to check out the entire drive. Nevertheless I didn't expect anything serious. I was certain I had powered down correctly but it seemed a bit mysterious that Scandisk wanted to check out the entire drive. Scandisk has never found anything serious before so why expect problems now, I told myself. Well, I do want everything to work right so go ahead and see what you can do Mr. Scandisk, I thought. As it turns out it did find and marked one sector as bad. So now I was impressed and felt the worst was behind me. But that was not to be the case.

When I began to use my browser, Netscape Communicator 4.5, it failed to work because it was unable to find the key file Netscape.exe. Based on this I uninstalled Netscape and reinstalled it again. Now, my browser ran all right but it loaded up perhaps a bit slower than it had in the past. I checked some other programs and they also worked OK so now once again I felt the problems were all behind me. Well I was wrong again.

The next time I powered up the computer Scandisk gives me the same message as last time and wants to start all over, not only checking out the directory structure but also scanning the entire hard drive again. Well, since I had already been there and done that, I exited out of Scandisk and proceeded to use my computer as usual. When I attempted (while using my browser) to pull up for downloading a program using Adobe Acrobat Reader it mysteriously ceased to bring up the selected Adobe file. I asked for it again and after three tries it did bring it up and I was able to print out all but the first page. For some reason the first page printed blank even though it appeared there on the screen in front of me. So, I then decided to uninstall and reinstall Adobe Acrobat, after which it worked flawlessly.

The next day I booted up the computer again, and my old buddy Scandisk appears like the ghost of Christmas past with more dire suggestions of impending disaster. Then I put a message on the User Group Web Site and William LaMartin was kind enough to respond in the discussion area of the Web Site, but he phoned me as well. In our phone conversation he suggested that I might want to consider buying and using

a copy of SpinRite about which he had written recently, so I took his advice and did so. I was able to download a copy direct from their web site and was using it before the day was over.

The program was simple to use and in the areas of the disk where my hard drive was apparently in good shape it ran very fast. Where there apparently were problems it spent a good bit of time working with one cluster after another.

When I began SpinRite I had been told by Scandisk that I had only one bad cluster. SpinRite found another 40 bad clusters, plus it recovered data from about 18 other places. Most of the bad sectors were in areas where no data was stored so I guess I was lucky there. I set it on level 5 which is the highest and most thorough setting and which not only attempts to recover data but also to make previously unreadable sectors readable. When I started, SpinRite estimated all this would take about 10 hours on my computer. It actually took about 17 hours, so obviously it had a lot of work to do. My spirits were bolstered by all the good things it said it was doing. The messages on the log were so well written and to the point it would not have been difficult to think I was directly connected to some human typist inside there somewhere who was talking to me personally.

I now started up the computer once again, this time thinking that now I have all the gremlins removed. Not the case. Once again Scandisk starts to roll forward like a bad nightmare. This time the problem is one of my Netscape plug-ins. It seems some images produced by the plug-in and stored on the hard drive are corrupted but this program has an uninstall program so I use it thinking this will get rid of this problem. Well, the uninstall program tried but it could not read all the information it needed to uninstall the plug-in. Once again I was stumped. I couldn't remove this corrupted program from the computer because some part of the uninstall program is apparently corrupted. At this point I contacted Dell computer on their 24 hour toll free technical line and was instructed to run Scandisk from Windows using "**Programs/accessories/system tools/scandisk.**" Previously, I had run Scandisk only when the computer first started. Apparently this runs the program from DOS. Well I was impressed; running Scandisk from Windows seemed to do the job although it took the program about four (4) hours to run on my computer, a Dell Dimension XPS P166s, using Windows 95. I am certain much of this time was caused by Scandisk having great difficulty reading the drive.

Just to see what would happen on startup I went to the shutdown window and selected RESTART THE COMPUTER, and it restarted without pulling up Scandisk again. Then I got really confident and selected SHUT DOWN THE COMPUTER and after a short while started it up again. This time

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Scandisk was back again suggesting I might have problems with one or more disk drives so I let it run again to see if it would do any better now that Scandisk run from Windows had been so successful. It began to do a full hard drive scan. Finally I got a message that “Windows has detected a registry configuration error click here to restore this from a known back up copy.” I selected this option, really I didn't feel I had any choice, and the program ran until completion. I then got a message that “At least one area of drive C has sustained physical damage –although such damage might be caused by an isolated incident such as a power failure, it is often a sign of impending hard drive failure.” The message further suggested that I run Scandisk daily for awhile and if more errors develop the hard drive should be checked by a qualified technician.

At this point I shut down the computer and rebooted from a cold start and miraculously everything ran perfectly. I shut down the computer several times and it restarted and ran without any incident the rest of that day. The next day the old problem was back again.

I found that my 3-year parts warranty with Dell Computer would expire January 22, 2000 so perhaps I was in luck. All this happened in mid December. I phoned the Dell 24-hour line again and got another technician. I learned that they maintain a call log and the new guy was fully up on my earlier problems. He agreed it sounded like a hard drive problem but asked if I still had the Diagnostics disk that came with my computer when it was new three years ago. I did. He asked that I run that program and then call back on the technical line. He also guided me through the start up part of the diagnosis. The Dell technician suggested that this test might take an hour or more. Well it only took about 20 minutes before the program stopped and announced an unreadable area on the disk and announced it as a hard drive failure.

I called Dell back again and they said they would send me a new hard drive under my warranty. Now I only have to learn how to install a new hard drive, which I have never done before but Dell tells me it will come with instructions and if I have problems I can call back and they will walk me through the process. The number is toll free which is a big help although on average it takes about 20 minutes before the technician comes on the line so I spend that playing a computer game while holding the phone to my ear.

The replacement drive is covered by my warranty as long as I return the defective drive to Dell. That makes sense, otherwise there may be too much of an incentive for an unethical individual to talk Dell into a replacement drive when the existing drive is still in good working condition.

When I bought this computer several years ago Dell had set it

up so I could make copies of all the supplementary files Dell had installed in addition to Windows, including special video drivers, Windows 95 drivers, etc., which were not on the Windows 95 disk. Now that I have had a hard drive failure, I am so glad I produced these discs at a time when the computer was new and all was working flawlessly.

The replacement drive arrived by Airborne Express Monday morning. The Dell technician had authorized it the previous Friday evening. Now, on Monday morning I got out my original Windows 95 disc, the special Dell driver discs, my various program discs and called Dell for assistance. Since this was my first time doing this sort of thing I wanted all the hand holding I could get.

I thought I would have to run Fdisk and Format the new drive but Dell said that was not to be necessary since the drive was already set up and ready for loading Windows 95. I booted up using the Dell systems disk but when the Windows 95 disc was put in the CD-ROM drive nothing happened. The CD ROM drive would not operate. The Dell technician had me look for the mscdex.exe file, but for some reason it could not be found. It was also not to be found on any of the special discs I had prepared when the computer was new. The Dell technician then wanted to know if I understood DOS because he needed my help using DOS to get my machine functioning. I indicated I felt I knew enough to be of assistance.

I was then instructed to disconnect the CD ROM drive and attach those connections to my old hard drive which enabled us to copy the mscdex.exe file from there along with a number of other files the Dell technician indicated were necessary. We ended up with a modified Systems disc, which also contained the additional files Dell required. I had to exercise a lot of care to make certain that the old hard drive did not come in contact against any other metal parts of the computer possibly causing a short of some sort. I was able to rig a book so that it provided the necessary insulation. And, of course, the computer was turned off whenever any of these connections were changed. I must tell you that it had me holding my breath at times.

Finally, at the Dell technician's direction, the config.sys file was edited and in a short time the CD-ROM drive was functioning properly. After that Windows 95 was installed along with my old programs and files. I did find that some of my accessory items, such as the all important solitaire and hearts games were not installed but I learned that I could go to the Control Panel and select “Add/Remove” programs, then double click on “Accessories”, select the missing games and insert the Windows 95 disk and now include them on my hard drive. This was all very new to me since I am much more a computer user than I am a computer technician.

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Then I thought disaster had struck again because now my computer had no sound. However, I found that one of the speaker wires had become partly disconnected and all the sounds returned.

Once I had everything running again, I mailed the old hard drive back to Dell as part of their exchange arrangement. The old drive was put in the box in which the new drive was shipped and protected with the same materials used for the original shipment. Dell had a return prepaid Airbill for Airborne so all I had to do was call Airborne who came by the house several hours later and picked up the old drive and got it on its way to Dell.

The drive I returned was manufactured by Western Digital, and the new one was a "refurbished" drive made by "Quantum Fireball." The name infers that it is fast and frankly it seems to be faster than the old drive. Of course it is hard to tell since the old drive was in poor shape and perhaps had been gradually slowing down over the last couple of years, making comparisons difficult.

I am happy with the result. Since I had no prior experience with this sort of thing, it did take a lot of my time. But then, the price was right. The phone calls to Dell did not cost me anything, and their personnel were skilled, helpful, courteous, and took the time needed to get the job done. ♦

(Comments.....Continued from page 5)

provide two ways of viewing these photographs.

In the first way, I created five web pages at my web site, since the photographs are stored on the library's server in five different archives. On each of the five pages are listed the titles in that archive with descriptions and hyperlinks that you simply click on to view a particular photograph. Some of these pages may contain as many as 1,100 links.

In the second method of viewing the photographs, I created a searchable database of the titles and URL's, then using the Active Server Page (ASP) technology and Visual Basic Scripting, I placed this database online at my lamartin.com web site. Note that after you have done a search, you can click on the word Date at the top of the Date field and the search results will be ordered by date. This is one more example of the usefulness of ASP. To try this out, go to <http://lamartin.com> and click on the *Hypertext Index to the Burgert Brothers Online Photography Collection of Tampa Photos* link.

New Computer There is a new Gateway 600 MHz Pentium III computer in our house. I am just amazed at what you can get on these machines now: 128 MB RAM, 20 GB hard drive, DVD/CD drive and a flat screen monitor. That monitor is what really sets this machine apart. The 15 inch flat screen has as much viewable area as a regular 17 inch monitor--and takes up less than 1/10 of the space. Of course, it costs a bit more than a standard 17 inch monitor. Gateway was also basically giving away a color printer, an Intel PC Camera and some software. By paying \$100 more, we upgraded the printer to an HP 832 C DeskJet. I didn't really need another printer in the house, but since this machine will be residing in my daughter's room, I thought having her own, newer printer would be nice.

You read correctly, the new computer is for my daughter. I am still working away happily on my Gateway 166 machine. However, I will be able to use the new machine, and it will be networked into our home network. Right now it is networked with a temporary cable running through the house that can be rolled up when not in use, but I have plans to run a permanent network cable to it under the house and through the attic.

The only problem I have discovered with the new computer is with the DVD drive. As with most new computers bought from major retailers, there is no DVD decoder card. All the decoding is done with software, Software CeniMaster99 in my case. Not having a decoder card is good since it is not taking up an expansion slot in the computer; however, it is also bad, since there are going to be some DVD's that the software will not decode. And wouldn't you know it, the first DVD we purchased, *October Sky*, could not be played on our system. It played fine on fellow member, Wade Herman's, computer, and all of his DVD's played fine on our computer. But apparently *October Sky* is not going to play on our machine until CeniMaster puts out a patch to their software to cover those titles for which there is a problem.

I had no problem getting through to Gateway's toll free support, but after several calls, I realized that the technicians I was speaking with really had no solution to the problem--probably didn't even understand the problem. That is when I brought the computer into the local Gateway store and the technician there said that everything was fine with my system. It played each of the 15 DVD's they had for testing, but there would always be some DVD's that would not play on a software decoded setup. Anyway, for the 95% or more of DVD's we can view, the quality and sharpness of that 15 inch flat screen LCD monitor makes it quite easy to watch a DVD movie.

Online Purchases With the closing of 1999, you probably

(Comments.....Continued on page 9)

Space Explorer II

By [Mike Hutchison](#), Tampa PC Users Group

Well, some of you may have gotten a new bike or Barbie, but I got a Meade 60mm (2.4") refracting telescope for Christmas from my wife Laura. It was a surprise, but I couldn't be much happier with the selection. This reaction was augmented greatly when I got a peek at the software that came with the telescope. O.K., O.K. the name sounds a bit hokey, but the program is not. Certainly not for someone such as myself who cannot consistently differentiate the Big Dipper from a large redneck with a lip full of Copenhagen. At one point in time I had a schoolboy level of familiarity with the constellations, etc., but this faded, and once I began trying to keep track of MBRs, FATs, EXEs, ASPs, et alia, lots of things got jettisoned to make room in my old melon for subjects currently in the forefront.

The software includes an Ephemeris which allows the user to see data for the Sun, Moon and all major planets. The information provided covers the Right Ascension (celestial counterpart to the Earth's longitude) and Declination (celestial equivalent to Earth's latitude), the rise and set times for the object and transit time. Also listed are Apparent Size in arc seconds, Disk Illumination in %, and Geocentric Distance/Heliocentric Distance (distance from the Earth or Sun) expressed in Astronomical Units, Kilometers, or Miles. By clicking the Auto Update On button, the data will be updated in real time.

The Moon Calendar feature, which is located near the bottom of the Ephemeris drop down menu, shows the phases of the Moon for any month and year and may be printed out for use as a calendar.

I would have to say the most impressive part of the package from the strictly visual standpoint is the Star Map. Once this feature is activated, options to print the map, toggle it on and off, zoom in and out, change the view of the current zenith (a snapshot of the whole sky centered overhead) become enabled. Other items such as star and constellation names, grid lines, etc. can be turned on and off. The Star Map can be animated, allowing you to track the orbits of objects such as the moon, the planets and so on for hours, days or years. You can select the interval time to see what the sky will look like in subsequent hour by hour steps, or day at a time intervals. The Star Map can be set up to show you what the sky looked like on the day and year of your birth and you can set down and plan an observing session for a given day and time a month or more in advance if you like.

The Viewing Log which is accessed by left clicking any-

where on the Star Map lets an observer enter the time, date, object being observed, camera used & comments about an observation session. You can also select and attach an image (if you have a camera and the interface attached) to the log entry.

The program has dialog boxes to let the user enter data to make the software work for the specific location and time that observation is taking place. Various dialog boxes ask for latitude and longitude down to degrees, minutes and seconds. You can deal with time via the Gregorian or the Julian calendars.

Now all I have to do to utilize all these features is find a primer on basic telescope orientation and navigation to answer some questions that have occurred to me. For instance, in terrestrial mapping the variation between Grid North and Magnetic North can be sizable depending on your location on the geoid. So exactly where do you set 0 degrees before you start spinning angles both horizontal and vertical to look for Galaxies and Fairlanes (wait a minute that's something else again) in deep space. Never fear, I'm searching the Internet as we speak on these topics. ♦

(Comments.....Continued from page 8)

have heard all you want to hear about e-commerce, but since I have a little more space to fill, I will relate how I found a difficult item to find, saved a lot of money and received everything in a very timely fashion.

My mother needed new transmitters for two garage door openers made by Pulsar. Pulsar no longer exists. As you might expect, if you don't own a Genie opener, you are not going to easily find a transmitter at Home Depot, Scotties or anywhere else. Furthermore, those "universal" transmitters are not all that universal. However, a search on Yahoo yielded two California companies that could supply a replacement for a Pulsar transmitter of the frequency I needed. The cost was \$20 per transmitter plus about \$6 in shipping.

My next foray into e-commerce was to Buy.com to purchase some additional ribbons, both photographic and regular, for my ALPS printer. I purchase a lot when I order, and the price came to a total of \$95. However, if I had made the purchase locally, the price would have been \$160. Quite a savings, and they arrived in two days with regular shipping.

I buy most things locally. The new computer came from the

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Special Interest Groups

Internet SIG

This SIG meets the first Monday of the month at 6 PM at the Reflectone Building, off West Waters Ave. You must sign up to get on the list and to get by security. *Contact Mike Hodges at hodges@reflectone.com.* For directions, see the map at our web site or contact Mike Hodges.

We consider all topics concerned with creating web sites. We study sites of interest from the web and those created by members of the SIG. And, in general, we consider anything of interest concerning the Internet.

Genealogy SIG

To be included on the TPCUG genealogy mailing list, contact Jenny Lind Olin at 960-5723 or jloin@aol.com

Visual Basic SIG

This SIG meets the third Tuesday of the month, at the Gateway 2000 Store on North Dale Mabry (just south of Columbus Drive) at 6 PM. For information, *contact Merle Nicholson at merlenic@tampabay.rr.com.*

Windows SIG

This SIG occupies the first 30 minutes of our monthly, regular meeting at MOSI and is devoted to a general Windows and computing discussion. Mary Sheridan moderates the discussion.

Quick View Plus Version 5.1

By [Don Patzsch](#), Tampa PC Users Group

Quick View Plus is a real neat program. It allows you to view graphics (pictures), text, html files, and much more. A condensed version of Quick View comes with Windows 95 and 98, but the number of programs that it supports is limited. The latest version adds 175 more file types to view, copy and/or print.

Installing Quick View Plus from the CD ROM is simple and easy. Once you have it installed, you can bring up any file, such as a picture, or an attachment to an email, or an html file you have just downloaded and want to check; you may view spreadsheets, or database files also. It shows you the format, and displays the fonts, style, columns, headers and footers, embedded graphics, and OLE objects, etc., exactly as the original program would show them. Hyperlinks can be seen and activated. On my hard disk all the files that are produced here are saved in one location so that it is easy to back up or to copy them to a disk to be stored elsewhere. You can then go to this list of your files and view any one very simply, whether they are pictures, html files, encoded or whatever. This makes it easy to find the ones you want.

Two manuals are furnished with Quick View pro. The guide for win95, win98, and winNT; and the guide for win 3.1.

Suppose you have a couple of compressed files, PKZIP, TAR, or LZH, etc. that you want to look at. Simply bring up Quick View Pro and it will show you the files contained in the zipped files, and you can click on EXTRACT this file, EX-

TRACT SELECTED files, or EXTRACT ALL files. and you can read any files included in the zipped file, without the need to unzip the whole file first.

You can view a UUENCODED encoded text file from the Internet or any HTML file, and the text will show on the screen in a simple text file view. In other words, the file formatting does not show unless you prefer it to. Makes it easy to print an HTML file from the Internet in simple text form, without the HTML coding showing.

You may edit your files easily. Just click on File "open file for editing". This review is being edited right now in Quick View Pro.

QVP works with all the major e-mail and groupware programs, Microsoft Exchange, Outlook, Eudora, Netscape mail, and Lotus Notes. It is easy to configure QVP with other programs.

You may zoom and/or rotate graphics.

You may view Mac or Windows files on your PC. Take your files home from the office and view them at home; there is no need to have the programs that you have on the office machines.

The QVP program is written by Inso Corporation and sold by JASC, the people who write Paint Shop Pro. The version of QVP used here is 5.1. It is useful enough so that it is on the task bar in the lower right of the screen on this computer. ◆

Friends of the User Group

We acknowledge the following firms for their support

Museum of Science and Industry
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And these software and hardware vendors for their demonstrations and review software and contributions of evaluation software to our group

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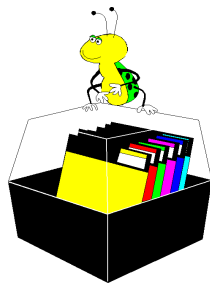
MEMBERS' HELP LINE

Program	Code	Name	Time	Phone	Codes
Adobe Acrobat	AA	Cheryl Alexander	10:00am - 9:00pm M - F	914-0008	HTM,PSP,WP
AOL	AOL	Larry Anders	Mon - Sun 6:00pm - 10:00pm	989-9119	AOL, ME, MW, FP, PSP
Computer general	CG	Warren Fuss	10am - 9:30pm	949-6844	CG, WNT, N
Delphi	DE	Bob LaFave	8:00pm-10:00pm	248-3379	W95/W98, MOS
DOS	DOS	William LaMartin	Mon - Fri 9:00am - 9:00pm	251-3817	AA, FTM, IG, MOS, MP, VB, W95
Family Tree Maker	FTM	Merle Nicholson	Mon - Fri 7:30pm - 9:30pm; weekends	879-3602	CG, DE, DOS, HG, HM, HP, VB
Hardware general	HG	Jenny Lind Olin	Mon - Sun 8:00am - 10:00pm	960-5723	ME, MW, PAF, Q, WP
Hardware Modem	HM	Don Patzsch		689-8662	CG
Hardware Printer	HP	Mary Sheridan	9:30am - 9:00pm	988-6480	AOL, CG, DOS, HG, IG, MW, Q, W95, W98
HTML coding	HTM				
Internet general	IG				
Micrografx Graphics Suite	MGS				
Microsoft Access	MA				
Microsoft Excel	ME				
Microsoft FrontPage	FP				
Microsoft Office Suite	MOS				
Microsoft Publisher	MP				
Microsoft Visual Basic	VB				
Microsoft Word	MW				
Networking	N				
PAF	PAF				
PaintShop PRO	PSP				
Quicken	Q				
Windows 3.1	W3				
Windows 95/98	W95/98				
Windows NT	WNT				
WordPerfect	WP				

We encourage other members to add their names to the list of those willing to assist fellow members with their computer problems. Contact William LaMartin to add your name to the list.

Tampa PC Users Group, Inc.

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- Vendor: Your product was reviewed on page ____

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local Gateway store, and most of my books come from the local Inkwood bookstore; however, technical books I usually order from our User Group's link to Amazon.com, as I did with the DVD above. However, on comparing Amazon.com's price of \$50 to Borders.com's price of \$35, I was forced to deny the TPCUG their 5% commission and order from Borders. So it pays to compare—something the Internet makes easy. Finally, my daughter made some last minute gift purchases from Nordstrom—and they arrived for Christmas with no special handling. So our e-commerce experiences were all positive.

2000 January 1, 2000 has come, and my computers seem to be fine. The four newer computers seem OK, but not everything has been checked. And on the three older machines, two 486's and a 386—all of whose batteries are dead, thus requiring me to set their clocks to make it 1/1/2000—only the 386 exhibits a problem. Something seems to be wrong with the Microsoft Office Suite. In Note Pad, I could copy and paste for example, but this could not be done in the Office Suite. I also could not insert or format anything in Word. I think this most likely has nothing to do with Y2K. Somehow the Office setup on this machine got corrupted. I am going to relegate this machine to the garage anyway. It is really too old to test anything on. I keep these older machines around to test Visual Basic programs on different platforms, but since no one uses a 386 anymore, it doesn't make sense to take time testing on such a machine anyway. ♦

