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Brevard Users Group

Member of
The Association of
Personal Computer User Groups

April 2007

Prez Sez

By Larry French

Our speaker for March was Lee Andruss of Southern Photo, Brevard's only remaining photo shop. Lee talked about the advances in digital photography, the short life of photo prints and how to preserve them by scanning them into digital form. He ran a slideshow of many of his photos while he spoke. Later he took questions from the floor. His presentation was fun, informative and enjoyed by all.

It was proposed at the meeting that the club purchase a slide/film strip scanner for the members use. The Board of Directors has approved this and Bob Schmidt has agreed to have it at his home where members may attend the Sunday Tinkers SIG's and use it.

Club membership is up slightly from 129 to 139 thanks to our Treasurer Tom Butler's diligence in contacting members whose memberships have lapsed. Your membership number and expiration date are on the newsletter mailing label as a reminder.

Take care of each other,

Larry French, President

SHADOW NTI...
On-The-fly Data Backups

*by Brian K. Lewis, Ph.D.**
Member of the Sarasota Personal Computer Users Group, Inc.

Backing up applications and data is probably the most neglected operation on any computer.

Even when it has been automated to some extent, we neglect to add new folders to the list that should be backed up. Some users have set their backup to write CDs or DVD's. Then they never check to see how the restoration process really works, if it does. I have seen some where the process is set to append to the original file, but it can't be carried out because the CD is full. The user simply ignores the disk full message and keeps on failing to write any new backup data. So is there a way around this that would be simple enough for any user? That's the idea behind NTI's Shadow software.

This is a small, 12 GB, application that installs quickly and simply. When it is run for the first time you select the folders to back up and the location where the backup should be placed. Then you select the frequency of backup. You can select to have a file backed up every time you save changes to your computer, or you can specify the frequency in terms of minutes, hours or days. Or you can specify once a day on selected days of the week.

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Articles, Reports, and new Advertisements should reach the Managing Editor or Desk Top Publishing SIG by 5:00 p.m the Friday before the second Wednesday of the month. Items received after the deadline will be held for the following month's issue.

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Articles or items of interest for inclusion in the newsletter should be sent to **The Editor** at:

Brevard User's Group
PO Box 2456
Melbourne, Fl. 32902-2456 or
Jim Townsend   728-5979
E-mail to: newsletter@bugclub.org

Secretary's Report

By: Erich Dalton, Secretary

BUG MEETING

Mar 22, 2007

Our monthly meeting was opened at 7:03pm by the club president Larry French.

Larry opened with a welcome for our three visitors and made a few brief announcements.

Then he introduced our speaker, Mr. Lee Andruss of Southern Photo. Mr. Andruss' subject was the digitizing of prints and slides. Many of us have large caches of old photos/slides.

He gave a short primer on the requirements and capabilities of various scanners. A take home point was that you need a scanner capable of at least 3000 dpi to properly digitize a negative or slide (positive) for making a print. Many in the audience were interested and so a fair amount of time was given to answering individuals questions.

We then closed with the raffle.
Items handed out were:

Flash drive - to Lucile Wagner
Flash drive case - to Rex Cummings
Subscription to Smart Computing - to Terry Slane
Subscription to Smart Computing - unknown

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Erich Dalton, Secretary

Treasurer's Report

By Tom Butler

March 2007

EXPENSES

Nltr Mailing (Mar)	$ 89.46
Nltr Printing (Mar)	$ 63.97
Total	**$153.43**

INCOME

Dues	$175.00
New Advertiser	$ 75.00
Total	**$250.00**

Welcome Cartridge World

ASSETS

Checking	$1,163.79
Savings	$2,213.13
Total	**$3,376.92**

Renewals:

Thomas Himes	#1235
Richard Kise	#0472
Joseph Manion	#0980
John MacNeill	#0390
Ray Goulstone	#1155
Michael Thierjung	#1069
Ray Sidney	#1153

Thank you Renewals for you continued support

April — BUG Meetings — 2007

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Tinkers SIG Call 952-0199 to verify meeting	2 Day Meeting 2:00pm One Senior Place Viera	3	4	5 Eau Gallie Library Pineapple Ave 7:00 - 8:00 pm	6	7
8 No Tinkers SIG Easter Sunday	9	10 Linux SIG 7:00 pm Melbourne Library Small Conference Rm	11 Officers Meeting 7 pm Melbourne Library Study Room	12 Melbourne Library Fee Ave 6:30 - 8:30 pm	13	14 Newsletter SIG 12:00 - 2:00
15 Tinkers SIG Call 952-0199 to verify meeting	16	17	18 Monthly Meeting 7 pm Melbourne Library Fee Ave	19 Eau Gallie Library Not Available Book Sale	20	21 Newsletter SIG 12:00 - 2:00
22 Tinkers SIG Call 952-0199 to verify meeting	23	24 Linux SIG 7:00 pm Melbourne Library Small Conference Rm	25	26 Melbourne Library Fee Ave 6:30 - 8:30 pm	27	28
29 Tinkers SIG Call 952-0199 to verify meeting	30					

My Registry Adventures

By Al Gruber
Reprint From:
South Eastern Michigan Computer Organization
Troy, Michigan

Suppose you try to delete a file on your Desktop, but instead the system starts to install a program. You furiously click cancel a dozen times, and it stops. So, you try the delete again, and it happens again, and again, even after rebooting. Evidently, some wires are crossed in your computer: the delete key is now assigned to installing a program called ScanSoft PDF Create. That's what made me delve into the registry.

By way of background, I've had problems with ScanSoft ever since their last upgrade, so I knew enough to demand that they remove their setup program, and hallelujah, that did give me back my delete key. But it made sense to me that this fixed only the symptom. Somewhere in there, the wires were still crossed. And that somewhere must be in the registry. Unfortunately, I didn't know enough about the registry—and though I know a little more now, I still haven't fixed the problem.

To start, I pulled down my copy of Windows XP Registry Guide, (Jerry Honeycutt), which I had always planned to read "one of these days." It's a good book, but at over 450 pages, my mind wandered to the registry-cleaning program (System Mechanic 6) I had recently bought from ZoneAlarm. Their general idea is that they scan your computer for errors and then fix them. Not being that trusting, I finally found out how to stop them from making the fixes before I could review and approve them. Then I ran the program. Surprise, they had no proposed fixes. My Registry was perfect!

But I knew that was wrong. As I was following the Honeycutt book and inspecting the registry, I had discovered many out-of-date entries involving the Start > All Programs menu, some for programs I had uninstalled and others perhaps caused by my habit of combining programs under suitable headings. For example, I have a heading called Graphics that holds 10 different graphics-related programs.

When I asked the System Mechanic techie why their program might not find known registry errors, he explained that they must be shared programs, which I could pin down by running System Mechanic in protected mode. I did, and now found a grand total of 1 error.

I now decided to try some other registry cleaners. Here's a partial list of the commercial offerings:
Error Nuker, Free Registry Fix, PC On Point, RegCure, Registry Fix, RegistryHealer, Registry Mechanic, Registry Medic, System Mechanic.

Unfortunately, most of these programs give off a bad smell. These are inexpensive programs; most in the range of $ 20 to $30, but they all try to give the impression that they're free: e.g., "**free download," "free scan,"** but to fix your registry, you must pay. The most egregious is "Free Registry Fix," which claims on its opening screen: "the world's only FREE registry cleaning software on the market today." Their price is $29.95! Mind you, I understand their problem. Since I don't need registry cleanings very often, I might take my free cleaning without ever buying. But still, it's a shell game. And frankly, I am reluctant to give them my credit card. (Actually, there are at least 4 genuinely free programs, but they are a bit harder to find: **CCleaner, EasyCleaner, RegScrubXp, and Eusing Free Registry Cleaner.**)

Another point is that the commercial product information is more hard sell than information. "Statistics show that over 9 .7% of pc's have corrupted registries;" "Don't compromise with second best;" "100% guaranteed." If there are product differences, and there clearly are, I couldn't find them in their literature. And of course, their documentation is weak. This was especially disappointing because I was hoping their documentation would give me a clue about my problem.

These programs all use about the same approach. They offer to scan your registry (Free! Free! Free!). These scans invariably find lots of "dangerous" errors. To fix these, you must register the program, which is when you find out that it isn't free after all. The programs do give you one or two free fixes. But since all of them find hundreds of errors, you invariably have too many for their free offer. Incidentally, the program that claims to be the only freebie in the universe does give you 50 free fixes, but I don't think you qualify if you have over 50 errors.

After the scan, these programs go automatically into their repair phase, unless you have figured out how to opt out, which again took me quite some time. (The problem here is that they never tell you if choosing "fix errors" will still let you back out.)

So, after System Mechanic had said I had an error-free registry, here's the number of errors I found in the various programs:

Errors Found	#
CCleaner (really free)	1000*
EasyCleaner (really free)	251
Error Nuker	267
Free Registry Cleaner (really free)	1651
Free Registry Fix	740
PC On Point	738
RegCure	2374
Registry Fix	714
Registry Mechanic	430
Registry Medic	1575
RegistryHealer	3777
RegScrubXp (really free)	339
System Mechanic	0

* Estimate, no total supplied.

Now, I knew System Mechanic was wrong when they said I had no errors. But when Registry Healer says 3,777 there must be some grade-inflation going on. After all, my computer boots and runs ok. The ScanSoft problem is a suspicion at this point, not a blue screen emergency. So why should I let Registry Healer repair these errors. I suppose it would speed boot-up and shutdown. Would it actually run faster? The sales pitch says yes, but as I said, I'm not that trusting.

To give you a little more feel, here are the warnings from "Free Registry Fix":

274 high severity problems—apps won't run, system may crash.

121 medium severity—app errors or won't run.

345 low severity—computer will run slow.

This seems like a good time to tell what little I have found out about the registry. First, it is loaded into memory when the computer starts. The part we are interested in resembles a Rolodex, a list of programs and their addresses. Entries are added when you install a program, and removed when you uninstall.

Apparently, not all programs uninstall properly; some entries are not removed from the registry—outdated cards left in the Rolodex. This may create a junky registry, but should not automatically cause problems. Another factor is that programs often involve multiple parts, hence multiple entries in the registry. So, if each improperly uninstalled program had 10 parts, the amount of junk might be that much greater. But aside from the wasted time riffling through left-behind cards, no real harm should ensue. Even if you call a contact whose number has been disconnected, all that happens is a no-answer, i.e., the program won't run because you uninstalled it.

Finally, there are other ways to cause registry junk. If you occasionally reorganize your Start button > All Programs menu, it turns out that old entries are not deleted from the registry. Example: I moved Word from its old category called MsWord to a new one called Microsoft. In terms of the Rolodex analogy, this is like adding a card when a contact changes her name. If she keeps her phone both cards are usable, but the old one becomes superfluous as you switch to using her new name.

Are we getting any closer to understanding how a group of registry cleaners can be so far apart in the number of errors they find? Hold on. Registry cleaners conduct their scans by problem categories that they describe with names that are suggestive but by no means clear. I think that the differences in their results are caused by which categories they pick, and perhaps how tight their rules are. (Though it seems likely that System Mechanic contains some programming errors.) Here are my guesses as to what their categories mean:

Typical Registry Errors Categories

The first 5 items below are written into the registry at the time of program installation, but not always fully deleted at uninstallation. Many registry cleaners offer to delete the useless left-behind entries.

1. Software Locations :

At installation, applications enter their location in the registry.

2. Controls/ActiveX files/Shared Dlls, Browser Helper Objects:

Applications enter the location of their *.dll and *.ocx files in the registry.

3. Help Files:

Some applications enter the location of their help files in the registry.

4. I n s t a l l e r s /Add /Remove Programs:
Applications enter the location of their install and uninstall programs files in the registry.

5. Start Menu and Startup (boot up) entries:

At installation, applications enter the location of both of these items in the registry. The following items are written into the registry at various other times. The cleaners check to see if they represent real addresses. If not, they are useless and can be deleted.

6. Windows Services:

This tells the location of various Windows services.

7. Windows Fonts and Sounds:

These sections tell the location of installed Windows font and sound files.

8. File Extensions:

This lists file extensions (e.g.: *.txt) and tells which if any applications may open them. If an extension lists no programs, or only nonexistent programs, the entry is useless.

9. History List:

This section is scanned for invalid history files paths.

10. Invalid Paths and Folders:

This section is scanned for any other non-existent files and folders.

11. Hardware Drivers

To summarize, I am guessing that looking for somewhat different errors causes cleaners to get different problem counts. This is only a guess because their product descriptions aren't that specific. Surprisingly, nobody claims to look for more problems than their competitors. I suppose, on these grounds, I should pick Registry Healer because it finds (and fixes) the most errors.

But then, I must face the question; should I let Registry Healer delete the "problems" it reports, so that my system won't crash (which it doesn't do anyway) and will run faster (which I suppose is possible)? I admit that part of my reluctance is fear. Whenever anybody mentions editing the registry, they first warn that you could cripple your computer for life, so back up first. And the registry cleaners themselves, of course, say that their software is not created for any useful legal purpose and that users cannot rely on them working.

Part of my problem is with the concept of backups. If my computer won't start after deleting the "problems," and if I had a backup, and, if I had a boot disk, and, if I could get into restore mode, I should be able to rescue the situation. But with my luck, the computer will start fine. Then three weeks later, some program I haven't run since the "cleanup" will not run. And three weeks is long enough (for someone with senior moments) that I probably won't connect it with the cleanup. And if I did, would I want to lose whatever new stuff I had done since then? No!

This brings to the fore one missing feature of all the cleaner programs. My specific problem is a possible registry error involving ScanSoft. But the cleaner programs don't let me search for ScanSoft errors. They just report what they want to report, and on top of that, they all want to report something different.

Speaking of features, here are some of the differences I noticed between programs: As you know, the cleaners find and delete calls to missing programs. A couple however, also search for the missing programs, so they can correct the call if they find it. I don't know how successful this is, but it makes sense to me. Registry Healer is one of these. For the rest, when they say *repair,* they really mean *delete.*

Another feature I like, is the ability to send a list of the errors to disk or printer. This caters to my cautious nature; it lets me think about the "problems" before agreeing to delete them. Registry Healer and EasyCleaner both offer this.

Another feature I found useful is that one click takes you from the error to the actual registry entry. Again, this reflects the fact that I was trying to investigate a specific problem, rather than running a housecleaning operation. About half the programs, including Registry Healer, offer this feature.

Finally, most but not all have some form of online documentation, though most of it is pretty amateurish. Their general rule is to explain the obvious (click scan to do a scan) (click cancel scan to cancel scan) but gloss over the mysterious, such as the purpose and implications of selecting certain registry categories.

Over the years, I have downloaded many trial versions of small-time programs, usually without knowing exactly what they are supposed to do, and why. If the documentation tells me why they made the program, that's a big plus in my purchase decision. And if it then explains logically and coherently how it works, I get confidence. If the documentation sounds smart, I believe the program is smart. By contrast, my problem with the registry cleaners is that they do lots of shouting but not much explaining.

Finally, as you know, I still have lots of questions. I am leaning toward Registry Healer, but haven't bought it yet. E-mail me if you have answers. Who knows, maybe we can do a sequel based on your expertise.

AlGruber@Comcast.net

✐

FREE SOFTWARE

Four articles about free utility software

By Ira Wilsiker

Solve Computer Problems with Canonical Lists of Free Software

In several of my recent columns, I discussed free software for a number of specific purposes. The response to those columns has been encouraging, with a common request being that the readers want more information and resources on free software.

There are several mega-download sites, with thousands of software titles available for download. Two download sites that I reference on a regular basis are <http://www.download.com> and <http://www.tucows.com>. Both sites qualify as mega sites because of the sheer volume of software available, and the ability to search via a menu or search bar. Both sites allow the software in a chosen category to be sorted by license type, such as freeware (free software), ad-ware (free software that is supported by showing the user advertisements), demo ware (demonstration versions of commercial software, generally lacking full functionality), trial ware (functional copies of commercial software, typically with an expiration date), and commercial software (pay to download it). Tucows rates the quality of the software available for download with "cows," five cows being the best, and Download.com uses a star rating with five stars being the best; many programs on Download.com are not rated.

One problem with the mega sites is that, while they are fun places to browse, it is often difficult to decide what software will meet our desired needs, and this is where some of the canonical lists shine.

One of my favorite such lists is **"I want a Freeware Utility to … 450+ common problems solved"** at <http:// www.econsultant.com/i-want- freeware-utilities>. I have personally used the resources on this list to resolve problems that I have identified, or to perform tasks that I want done. With a listing of over 20 categories, each category is headed with the expression "I want to …" and then lists a task or function. At the top of the list is the popular category "Anti- Spyware / Anti-Virus / Anti-Rootkit," where it says, "I want to …" and then lists such responses as "protect the computer against viruses," or "protect the browser from spyware." Following each response is the title of the software that meets that need, hyperlinked to the download site for that free software. Some examples are the four free antivirus products listed (AVG Free, AntiVir personal edition Classic, Avast! Home Edition, and BitDefender Free Edition); three free firewalls (Sunbelt Kerio Personal Firewall, Safety.Net, and ZoneAlarm), three rootkit detectors, and a variety of other protective but free utilities.

Music lovers who want to edit, rip, copy, and burn music will find a detailed list of such programs in the "Audio / Music / MP3 / Real / Wav" section. A lot of us use word processors, spreadsheets, PDF files, and other office utilities; the category covering business and office utilities contains over 25 specific utilities, all free to the user.

Other categories of freeware include communications software, several dozen desktop utilities, file and folder utilities, financial programs, graphics utilities, fun items, Internet helpers, performance enhancements, productivity software, video and DVD utilities, uninstallers, and other categories, totaling over 450 titles in aggregate.

A companion site, containing a canonical list of free "open source" utilities is "Open Source Freeware: 400+ free applications and utilities" found at <http://www.econsultant.com/ i-want-open-source-software>. The categories are somewhat similar to the 450 freeware utilities mentioned above, but this list only includes programs written in open source code. The page describes it thusly: "Extremely useful open source applications and utilities available free under various licenses." Between these two companion Web sites are well over 850 utilities to handle almost any computing task. They can be an excellent place to check for software ideas, without any financial obligations or expenses.

A competitive site is "The 46 Best- ever Freeware Utilities" at <http:// www.techsupportalert.com/ best_46_free_utilities.htm>. This site, which has been

around since 1998, is the brainchild of Ian Richards (known as "Gizmo"), a computer professional who is the editor of this site. Here on the "46" site are his best-of-breed recommendations, including the best free browser, best free antivirus software, best file manager, and 43 other best in class free software products. In addition to listing the best in class free software products, Gizmo also has companion sites that list the best free support sites; best sites for tips, tricks, and tweaking; best troubleshooting sites; best computer security sites; and a variety of other recommendations.

With the variety and high quality of some of the freeware available, freeware can be a very viable alternative to expensive commercial software. Several of the programs that I use on a daily basis are freeware, and I am very satisfied with them. I would recommend that computer users review some of the freeware titles available, and read their reviews to determine their functionality, features and quality. The user may be pleasantly surprised at what is available for free. It should be noted that while all of these utilities listed have a freeware license, there are often restrictions on the licenses that restrict the free use to personal non-commercial use, while others are totally free to all.

To paraphrase a TV commercial, "I am not going to pay a lot for that software!"

Web Sites

<http://www.econsultant.com/i- want-freeware-utilities>

<http://www.econsultant.com/i- want-open-source-software>

<http://www.techsupportalert.com/best_46_free_utilities.htm>

<http://www.download.com>

<http://www.tucows.com>

Free Antivirus Protection

You may have seen the TV commercials, which state that PCs are vulnerable to attack and infection by computer viruses and other malware, with the number of viruses stated, as "114,000 in the past year." This information is basically true, with some variance in the number of computer viruses. Whatever the number, viruses and other malware are out there trying to attack and infect our computers. The viruses and malware may attempt to destroy our data, take control of our comput-

ers from us, use our Internet connections to propagate spam and additional viruses, display pop-ups on our monitors, steal our identities, and a plethora of other nastinesses.

A visit to any computer, electronics, office supply, or mass merchandise store will show that software to protect against viruses and other malware is big business, with annual sales and subscriptions in the billions of dollars. The threat of viruses is very real, and antivirus software properly installed and updated very frequently (now typically every few hours) is a requirement for safe computing. It should be noted that there are some computer experts who purposely and knowingly do not use antivirus software, but these same people are also extremely careful about safe computing practices, and utilize other techniques and technologies to protect their computers from attack. For the rest of us, we need antivirus software.

Antivirus software is published by such well-known companies as McAfee, Symantec (Norton), Trend Micro, Panda, Kaspersky, Microsoft, and many others. Generally, all will provide some protection from attack, but vary in features, frequency and speed of updates, technical support, scan speed, degradation of computer performance, and other factors. Antivirus software also can vary in price. Antivirus software is so important that price should not be an issue, but pragmatically, it, of course, is a factor. Some may argue that an impoverished individual or college student who can afford a $600 computer should be able to afford $30 for antivirus software to help protect him/her, but in reality money can be tight. There are others who prefer to participate in open source concepts, where software is generally free, while there are inevitably others who just prefer to spend as little as possible on their accouterments. Let's face it, and be truthful with ourselves— some of us are just plain cheap.

Fortunately, for those who either cannot afford antivirus software, or those who otherwise do not want to pay for legal copies, there are several free antivirus programs available to the general public, sometimes specifying that they are only for personal, non- commercial use. One of the most popular and widely used free versions of antivirus software is AVG, published by

Grisoft in Czechoslovakia. Grisoft publishes a variety of computer security products for commercial use and sale, but offers its basic antivirus software for free at <http://free.grisoft.com>. The free version of AVG carries the proviso that "AVG … is for private, non-commercial, single home computer use only." Users of the free AVG can also download a companion anti-spyware product, Ewido Anti- spyware, and join millions of other users of the free software. The free versions of AVG are fully functional, and offer good basic protection with frequent updates. The free version of AVG lacks the technical support and speed of updates as its commercial ($38) big brother, but still can count millions of satisfied users.

Another very popular free antivirus program with a wide and loyal following is Avast! (often spelled in lower case as "avast!"), published by ALWIL Software, headquartered in Czechoslovakia. Available since June 2001, avast! "Home Edition" is "… free of charge for home users who do not use their computer for profit." Avast! is available for download at <http://www.avast.com/eng/ free_virus_protectio.html>. ALWIL also publishes a commercial version of its flagship antivirus product, avast! Professional ($39.95), that offers an enhanced user interface, updates "pushed" to the computer in real time, and other benefits.

A German company, Avira GmbH, publishes both free and commercial versions of its antivirus software, the freeware version aptly named AntiVir PersonalEdition. While not well known in the U.S., AntiVir PersonalEdition is very popular in Europe, where it has won recognition by many European computer magazines and Web sites as a top performing antivirus product. Available for free download at <http://www.free-av.com>, this software may be a good choice for those who want a good quality but free antivirus product. Its commercial counterpart, Avira AntiVir PersonalEdition Premium (about $25) has enhanced capabilities, including anti-spyware, anti-adware, e-mail scanning, rapid update service, and other premium benefits. Avira AntiVir offers versions that will run on a variety of operating systems, including Windows 98, ME, NT, 2000, XP, Linux, FreeBSD, and Solaris.

A non-commercial antivirus product, Clam AntiVirus, is becoming the darling of "geekdom," in that it is free "open source," and for the UNIX, Linux, and FreeBSD operating systems. Very well regarded in technical circles, this product is maintained by an international team of volunteers centered in Poland, but includes team members from throughout Europe and the U.S. Clam's claim to fame is that according to tests and research done by German computer magazines, this team is often among the first of the dozens of antivirus companies to distribute updated antivirus signatures, and offer the latest in protection to its users. Clam AntiVirus is available for download at <http://www.clamav.net>.

With the ready availability of dozens of commercial antivirus utilities, as well as the selection of free antivirus products available, there is no fiscal reason why any computer user should not have a functional and updated antivirus program on his computer.

Web Sites

<http://free.grisoft.com> AVG Antivirus—Free Version

<http://www.avast.com/eng/ free_virus_protectio.html> AVAST! Free Version

<http://www.free-av.com> AntiVir PersonalEdition Free Edition

<http://www.clamav.net> Clam AntiVirus for UNIX, Linux, etc. (Free)

Free Utilities to Clean Your Registry and Improve Performance

If you are like me, it seems that I am always installing new software on my computer, and occasionally deleting unwanted software, freeing up space on the hard drive. What we do not typically see, unless we explicitly look for it, is a highly critical and important Windows file called the registry. The registry stores information on programs, hardware, and drivers that have been installed, and tracks the required settings for those items. The registry is frequently written to by the system, and frequently read by the system. The registry may actually be a huge data file that has substantial influence on boot time and computer performance. If the registry contains errors, or remnants of programs that have been deleted, performance will suffer. If the registry contains obsolete information linking to hardware and drivers, system problems may occur, often leading to "blue screens" or system crashes. If the registry startup

components point to obsolete programs or drivers, the computer will boot slower as the system searches for those items, possibly giving some type of boot error message. If the registry grows too large because it contains too much obsolete or incorrect data, overall performance will suffer because Windows has to load the registry, search for items in the registry, and frequently read data from it.

Windows 98, for which Microsoft has discontinued all support, contained an integral, crude but effective registry cleaner. To run the built-in Windows 98 registry cleaner from Windows, click on START— SHUT-DOWN—REBOOT IN MS- DOS MODE. When Windows reboots, there should be a black screen with white fonts. At the prompt, typically "C:\" or "C:\Windows," type SCANREG /FIX (scanreg space forward-slash fix). A blue screen will open with a progress bar showing the evolution of the repair. After the registry is repaired, it can be optimized or compressed to improve performance with the command SCANREG /OPT (scanreg space forward-slash opt). A list of other commands and options is available by entering SCANREG /? or SCANREG /HELP (scanreg space forward-slash question mark or help).

Since the now long obsolete Windows 95 did not have a function such as scanreg, Microsoft released a free utility RegClean, which will clean obsolete data from the registry. Reviews of RegClean showed that it worked on Windows 95, 98, ME, and NT. Microsoft long ago discontinued downloads and support for RegClean, with the latest version being RegClean 4.1a, released in early 1998. RegClean 4.1a can still be found online as a free download at <http://www.download.com> (search for "RegClean"). As Windows became more sophisticated, the integral registry followed suite, and also became more complex. Later versions of Windows, such as 2000 and XP can benefit from functions and capability not found in RegClean, and demand more sophisticated and modern utilities.

A software publisher in Finland, ToniArts, has a free multifunction utility, EasyCleaner, available at <http://personal.inet.fi/business/ toniarts/ecleane.htm>. EasyCleaner is a powerful utility that can clean the registry, as well as other clutter from the hard drive. In a comparison of registry cleaning utilities published in the Langa Letter <http://www.langa.com>, EasyCleaner performed the best of the free cleaners tested, and even outperformed many of the commercial cleaners. EasyCleaner contains a warning that should apply to any utility used to clean and repair the registry: backup the registry before any changes, and utilize any "un-do" options that may be available if for some reason the repair is not successful. EasyCleaner will function on all versions of Windows from 95 to XP.

Another excellent and free registry cleaning utility is the dedicated Eusing Free Registry Cleaner, available at <http://www.eusing.com/ free_registry_cleaner/ registry_cleaner.htm>. This program encourages the user to backup the registry before any repair, and then does a fine job of scanning the registry for errors, and is very quick in the process. Registry problems will be listed for review, with found problems displayed. If necessary, the repair can be reversed by utilizing the restore function. While Eusing Free Registry Cleaner is freeware, there is a link on the page for voluntary donations via PayPal.

A very popular free program, with over 25 million downloads indicated, is CCleaner, from London-based Piriform Software. CCleaner is best known as a multi function utility that can remove clutter and useless files from the hard drive, freeing up hard drive space. A recent upgrade to CCleaner has added a registry cleaner to the utility. As with most other registry repair utilities, CCleaner has a backup and recover function to restore any changes. This utility can be downloaded for free at <http://www.ccleaner.com>. While free, voluntary contributions are solicited by credit card or PayPal, with donors automatically receiving updates and new releases before they are posted to the Web site. CCleaner will run on Windows 95, 98, ME, NT, 2000, XP and the new Vista (Beta 2).

Some research done by computer magazines has indicated that as much as 80% of the blue screens and lockups experienced by Windows users may be due to registry errors. It is also well documented that a cluttered registry containing obsolete information will result in a slow booting computer with deteriorating performance. With free registry cleaning utilities such as those

listed above, there is no reason why we should have to suffer a poor performing computer when it is so fast and easy to clean the registry. I suggest that you download some of these, and try them. Before you use any registry utility, be sure to backup the registry using the integral features so that the repairs can be reversed if problems occur.

Web Sites

http://personal.inet.fi/business/ toniarts/ecleane.htm EasyCleaner

http://www.download.com Search for "RegClean"

http://www.eusing.com/ free_registry_cleaner/ registry_cleaner.htm Eusing Free Registry Cleaner

http://www.ccleaner.com CCleaner

Free Image Utilities for Your Computer

Recently, on one of my forensic e-mail lists was a discussion of a variety of image viewers that can open almost any known image format for viewing, as well as provide basic image editing and enhancement. While some participants extolled the virtues of a several hundred-dollar utility well known for its capabilities, a few others proclaimed the superiority of a hundred-dollar utility. There was a groundswell of opinion in favor of two free utilities that may lack the pizzazz and marketing of the high priced commercial products and some of the less-well used functions, but are quite capable of most image management tasks.

The clear leader in the non- scientific opinion poll was a popular free image utility, IrfanView, **http:// www.irfanview.com**. IrfanView is a powerful but free image viewer and editor that can open and edit almost all known image formats. For users of digital cameras and other sources of digital images, IrfanView would be a good choice. Personally, I have used IrfanView for several years as my primary image viewer and editor. It can easily crop and resize digital images, making them more manageable in terms of both image size and file size. With a mouse click or two, images can be sharpened and color corrected. Hue and contrast are controlled by a slider if desired, with side-by-side images showing the unaltered original image adjacent to the corrected image, with the slider clearly showing the impact of any changes prior to saving the revised image. For those who like to indulge in special effects, users of

IrfanView will not be disappointed with the selection of special effects included in the "Image—Special Effects" menu. A "color swap" function allows the user to selectively change the colors of objects in the image. Images can also be read and converted into any other format, making it even easier to utilize those images in other products.

I do a lot of scanning using my digital scanner. I scan photos, pages of books and newspapers, receipts, and documents to fax. IrfanView is capable of importing scanned images directly from any "TWAIN" compatible source, with the images being capable of being sharpened, edited, color corrected, and cropped. Once the image is in the form desired it can be saved or printed. IrfanView also has a copy function, which will effectively make a scanner into a component of a copy machine, where the image can go directly from the scanner to the printer.

IrfanView has many other noteworthy functions, including the ability to make slideshows that can be saved, played, or e-mailed without any special software, as the slideshow may be saved or sent as a self- executing file with integral viewer. I recently took several of the hundreds of photos recently taken overseas by one of my daughters, and created a slideshow for the relatives. The process was quick and simple, and done by selecting the images from a menu, and then deciding on the speed and pace of the show. One more click, and the slideshow was created. This is a surprisingly powerful function for a free program.

In writing these columns I frequently incorporate some images of my computer screen, nominally known as a "screen capture." IrfanView includes a "Capture/ Screenshot" utility where once set, a keystroke combination will record the image of the screen. This image is automatically opened in the IrfanView editor for cropping and editing, and can then be saved in any selected format.

IrfanView, while best known for its ability to manipulate images, also offers "plug-ins" for other types of media, in addition to images. The "All Plug-Ins" is a

single file, available from the IrfanView Web site, which adds the ability for the program to play almost all video and audio formats, greatly expanding the functionality of IrfanView.

With these features, IrfanView is one of the most popular downloads on the major software sites, including Tucows http://www.tucows.com, www.download.com. As a free Tucows and Download.Com product, the user will not likely find a greater value than this most useful program. On my computer, IrfanView is probably one of the five most utilized programs.

The second most widely recommended program in my online forensic discussion was another free image utility, available for download from **http://www. faststone.org.** The premier utility available is FastStone Image Viewer. As described on the FastStone Web site, Image Viewer is "An image browser, converter, and editor that supports all major graphic formats including BMP, JPEG, JPEG 2000, GIF, PNG, PCX, TIFF, WMF, ICO and TGA. It has a nice array of features such as image viewing, management, comparison, red-eye removal, e-mailing, resizing, cropping, color adjust-ments, musical slideshow and much more." In addition to these functions, the latest versions (versions 2.7 Beta 3 and later), also include a screen capture utility.

I found FastStone Image Viewer a powerful, com-prehensive, and easy to use utility, virtually as powerful as its competing products that sell for over a hundred dollars. Several of the major download sites have recognized the quality and features of this fine program earning "5 Stars" from CNET **www.download.com**, a perfect score of 5 as a "Softpedia Pick" **http:// www.softpedia.com**, and a "Five Star—Excellent" rating from **http:// www.snapfiles.com**. For those concerned about what they receive when downloading this free software, Softpedia had determined that this software is "100% Clean—No Spyware, No Adware, No Viruses."

FastStone has three other free utilities, which are basically a subset of Image Viewer. These include FastStone Capture, a small but capable screen capture utility; FastStone MaxView, a tiny utility that can display all major image formats; and FastStone Photo Resizer,

which can convert and resize digital images, as well as rename, crop, rotate, edit, and add text to images.

These FastStone utilities are a valuable adjunct, useful for digital camera owners, and others who use computer images. As free utilities go, these are excellent in quality and features, and would be a useful addition to the software library of computer users.

Excellent quality and highly functional software does not have to be expensive. In fact, it can be free. That is hard to beat.

Web Sites
http://www.irfanview.com
http://www.faststone.org

Ira Wilsker is an APCUG Director; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont TX; and a radio & TV show host. Contact him at <iwilsker@apcug.net>.

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Editors Note
As with anything, free or not, members should always check other sources for feed back on programs featured in the Newsletter. Google "review 'Name of Software' ", for more infomation.

The next selection is how many revisions of the document do you wish to keep. You can keep no previous version or you can select a specified number of versions to retain in the backup file. You can also choose to have the backup file deleted when you delete the original file on your computer. These are the configuration steps. Certainly not too difficult and the choices are well explained in the help file if you need further assistance.

The problem of deciding what device to use to store backup files is also simplified. Shadow will write your files to any drive that has a drive letter. This includes many forms of removable devices such as external USB drive, flash (pen) drives, FireWire drives as well as internal secondary drives. If you select a pen drive as the backup destination and later remove the device, Shadow will recognize the change. It will suspend the backup until the original drive is replaced. So it is possible to have different flash drives for different purposes.

The problem of restoring files becomes less difficult with Shadow. All the files are copied to the backup destination in the standard format. Therefore you can replace a file or files simply by dragging and dropping the file from the backup to the original location. Or, you can copy it to a new location if you prefer.

I have Shadow running on my main computer backing up any data files as they are saved. I selected the "My Documents" folder as the one I wanted to backup. You can also add other folders that are not in this location. For example, you might want to backup your incoming/outgoing mail. That folder can be added at the time you do the initial configuration. In my case, I save important mail to a folder within the "My Documents" location. As I work on this review, Shadow is saving a copy on my external hard drive whenever I save the document to my internal hard drive. Something I do quite frequently. The best part of this is that I do not observe any noticeable delay due to Shadow's function. Keeping a constant backup of my work on an external drive is certainly an asset. If it were saved on my internal drive and it failed, the whole purpose of the backup would be lost. I would really like to backup my files to a flash drive. However, my folder contains over 8 GB of data. That would require a 16 GB flash drive which is more than I want to pay for at the moment. However, if you have 2-8 GD of data in your data files, the flash drive cost is quite reasonable. Also, if you have a USB drive that can read/write Secure Digital cards, compact flash cards, Sony memory stick, etc.; these cards can also be used for the backup destination.

One caveat that everyone should be aware of with regard to Shadow. It does a great job of backing up your data files and keeping the backup current. However, it does not backup up program files, system files or the registry. For this I recommend that you use an image backup program to make a complete copy of your primary hard drive. That way, if the drive fails, you will have a source for readily reinstalling your operating system and your applications. This image copy doesn't have to be done daily or weekly. Since most of us don't install new programs every week, once a month would probably be adequate for the creation of an image file.

If you don't mind the work involved in reinstalling your operating system and applications from the original CDs, then you can even ignore the image file. However, if you don't want to replace or recreate your data files (pictures, music, etc.) then Shadow is well worth its cost.

Shadow is published by NewTech Infosystems, Inc. The price for a downloadable copy of Shadow is $29.95. There is also a version that includes "DragonDisc" which allows backup to any form of optical media including BluRay. Its price is $39.95. The NTI website is www.newtechinfosystems.com.

*Dr. Lewis is a former university & medical school professor. He has been working with personal computers for more than thirty years. He can be reached via e-mail at bwsail@yahoo.com.

Editors Note
As with anything, free or not, members should always check other sources for feed back on programs featured in the Newsletter. Google "review 'Name of Software' ", for more infomation.

Brevard Users Group Membership Application

First Name _____   Last Name _____

Address _____   City _____

Home Phone _____   State _____ Zip + 4 _____

Family Membership $25.00   E-mail Address _____

Special Interest Groups

Afternoon Meeting
An afternoon meeting is held on the first Monday of the month at 2pm, in One Senior Place, 8085 Spyglass Hill Rd, Viera.

WINDOWS SIG
**Meets 7:00 PM Thursdays
1st & 3rd Thursday at Eau Gallie Library.
All Other Thursdays at Melbourne Library on Fee Avenue.**

BEGINNERS SIG   (Newbies)
Meets at 6:30 pm. The 2nd and 4th Thursdays, in the Fee Ave Library, before the Windows SIG

IMAGING SIG
Meets at 7:30 PM the second and fourth Thursdays, after the Windows SIG, at the Fee Ave Library in Melbourne.

NEWSLETTER SIG
**Meets twice a month on the Saturdays before and after the BUG monthly meeting.
Place is Jim Townsend's home.
Call 728-5979 for directions.**

LINUX SIG
Meets on the Second and Fourth Tuesdays in the small conference room at the Melbourne Library on Fee Ave. 7:00 pm

TINKERS SIG
**Meets on most Sundays at Bob Schmidt's house.
Call 952-0199 to verify meeting and directions.
E-mail: rschmidt@cfl.rr.com**

BUG Club Information

BUG E-MAIL LIST
**To be included in the BUG E-Mail roster, send an E-Mail to Larry French at:
president@bugclub.org.**

We will need your full name, E-Mail address and your BUG membership number. You will then receive notices and updates on BUG activities, special events, changes to schedules, etc.

BUG Officers
**Meets the second Wednesday of the month at the Fee Ave. Library, in Study room 1
Time 7:00 pm to 8:00pm**

Sponsorship Rates

	4 Months	8 Months	12 Months
Full Page	$160.00	$ 305.00	$ 440.00
Half Page	$ 85.00	$ 162.00	$ 232.00
Qtr Page	$ 45.00	$ 86.00	$ 123.00
Bus Card	$ 25.00	$ 48.00	$ 68.00

Moving ?
Don't miss out on any issues of the BUG Newsletter
Send your new address to:
Brevard Users Group Att: Treasurer
PO Box 2456
Melbourne, FL 32902-2456
And e-mail to the Newsletter and Treasurer at:
**newsletter@bugclub.org
treasurer@bugclub.org**

Brevard Users Group
Incorporated
P. O. Box 2456
Melbourne, FL 32902-2456

Meetings:
Are held at the Melbourne Library on Fee Ave. the third Wednesday of the month at 7:00 PM.

Membership:
Is by application and payment of $25.00 annual dues. Membership is for 12 months from receipt of dues and includes a year's subscription to the newsletter.

Your membership expires on the date indicated in the upper left of your address label (YYYY\MM). Please allow six weeks for processing the renewal.

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