

SLO Bytes HardCopy

A publication of the San Luis Obispo PC Users Group

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SLO Bytes March 2004 Meeting Reviews

Alan Raul's General SIG Review

Our March meeting started out with some spectacular pictures which were shot by the Hubble Space Telescope. Anyone with a high-speed connection can download the massive sized images to get the best possible pictures. Those with dialup connections can still enjoy the pictures as the web site has smaller download sizes available.

<http://snipurl.com/4xts>

Anyone wanting to read books on-line can go to the Free Library. They have quite a few books on-line. This link was provided by our still famous Bob Ward.

<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/>

Dave McLaughlin added that you can read even more books on-line by going to Project Gutenberg. Project Gutenberg is the Internet's oldest producer of FREE electronic books (eBooks or eTexts).

<http://promo.net/pg/>

Our next subject was what the Windows XP Prefetch folder is and how to clean and control it. The best way to think about this folder is consider it like your temporary Internet folder, but relating to applications instead. "Windows XP monitors the files that are used when the computer starts and when you start applications. By monitoring these files, Windows XP can prefetch them. Prefetching data is the process whereby data that is expected to be requested is read ahead into the cache. Prefetching boot files and applications decreases the time needed to start Windows XP and start applications."

This information is logged and stored on your hard drive taking up space and requiring a process to be kept running monitoring which applications are being run. This has a performance impact on your PC. Disabling the Prefetch function or at least only enabling it for the Boot Files will allow you to free up some system resources and preserve some disk space. You can download Windows XP Prefetch Clean and Control software from Jester 2K Freeware. The program is located at the bottom of the page.

<http://snipurl.com/4xu3>

We then saw a demonstration on how to save those Flash movies that we see so much on the Internet lately. Flash Saving Plugin lets you easily save flash movies right from Internet Explorer and can be downloaded FREE from UnH Solutions, Inc.

<http://snipurl.com/4xua>

We briefly touched on the next Microsoft Windows release called Microsoft Windows XP "Reloaded." this will come out before "Longhorn" which is scheduled to be released sometime in 2006.

Microsoft Windows XP Service Pack 2 should be release in the next 3 months. If everything works out we may even see the Release Candidate 1 at the April SLO Bytes meeting.

I am going to make all the readers work and go to the SLO Bytes Bulletin Board to get the URL's for the above two topics. The links are listed under the topic called March 7, 2004 web links from the general SIG. All the URL's are hyperlinked which means all you have to do is click on them and you will be taken to the appropriate web site.

Don't forget about the Microsoft-California Class Action Settlement. You may have vouchers due you for past purchases of Microsoft operating systems and applications.

<http://www.microsoftcalsettlement.com/>

Last but not least, if you want to be on the cutting edge of technology, Computer Associates has a beta of their upcoming release, eTrust EZ Antivirus 6.2, which you can download for FREE.

<http://snipurl.com/4xt7>

Bill Avery's March 2004 Main Meeting Review

Alan's early meeting finished a discussion of virus prevention programs, and noted that the links will be posted on our Slobytes Bulletin Board, which is found on our club website, <http://www.slobytes.org> We took a break for coffee, cookies and catch-up with Nancy Vrooman and Peter Stonehewer as our hosts. The main meeting began with further announcements by Ray Miklas and an introduction by Guy Kuncir of our speaker, Pete Gannon, owner of Computer Stuff, <http://www.stuffguys.com/> and <http://store.stuffguys.com/> with 3 stores: San Luis Obispo [542-0180], Arroyo Grande [489-4149] and Paso Robles [237-8020]. He is well known in our towns for his efforts to serve each customer as a friend and fellow computer user. His wealth of experience and understanding of our needs has helped many Slobytes members resolve their computer problems effectively. Pete noted in his opening remarks, "I see a lot of familiar friendly faces in the crowd." His topic was "Upgrading Your Computer", which seems like a big choice on a repeating basis for many of us. Pete had a couple of handouts, with URLs, about tech hints and upgrades. Those should be posted on the club bulletin board, <http://users.boardnation.com/~slobytes>

The Windows XP Tweaks are at: <http://www.geocities.com/ziyadhosein/index.html> written by "Big Z". He covers virtual memory, control panel settings, software settings, registry and text file editing tweaks. For those interested in the latest tech news, Pete mentioned AnandTech <http://www.anandtech.com/> and also see Epinions.com for their top 10 best rated lists in computer and electronics related categories, at: <http://www.epinions.com/> They are a service of Shopping.com, a comparison shopping site, discussed in the "About Epinions", <http://www.epinions.com/about/>

He also recommended Eisenworld / Aloha Bob's migration software for upgrading your computer to a new operating system. See <http://alohabob.com/PCRelocator.asp?sub=1> for the details. I note that the transfer options are LapLink Parallel Port cable or USB cable, with variable times, depending on the connection, from 30 minutes, up to 5 hours per Gigabyte. For today's large systems, this seems a bit slow, so be careful. The price is \$29.95 for a download, or a boxed copy with a cable delivered to your door. A 3-day free trial version is available at: <http://alohabob.com/TryPCRBASICStep2.asp?sub=6>

Pete noted that upgrading your computer is a very personal choice, and only your usage can help you determine when or if you really want to take the plunge. Intel and Microsoft do not really force you to upgrade, but we all share their constant enticements to change.

If you are not interested in bigger, better, or faster computing, then at least backup your current system, because there are mechanical components that will fail, such as the hard drive. Average lifetimes for hard drives are slightly more than 3 years, and that figure is coming down as drive sizes increase. He recommends one drive by Western Digital, their JB Model, with 8 MB cache, and 7200 RPM, and 3-year warranty. Their policy states: "WD Caviar® SE EIDE, and WD Caviar® SE SATA hard drives carry a Standard Warranty Period of three (3) years." <http://support.wdc.com/warranty/policy.asp>

The other models are 1-year, except for Enterprise Raptors which are 5-years, (on the same page). The most important upgrade to a computer is to increase memory. This relieves the hard drive from servicing the swap file, or virtual memory on the mechanical storage system. The next best thing is to wipe the hard drive, and start over again ! This cures the slow accumulation of broken files and errors in programs, such as the operating system, which slow down a machine until it is almost dead in its' tracks. FDISK it, and reformatting will create a new environment on the hard disk, which is clean and fresh. The only problem is that a blank drive will need to be restored one piece at a time, and that can be very painful! So, Pete suggests PC Relocator [Ultra-version], mentioned above, from Aloha Bob. Cloning the old drive will copy all the bad files back again, so be careful.

As a guideline towards deciding whether to upgrade or not, the age of your machine may be a good measure. If your computer is over 3 years old, the design is for P3 CPUs and not suitable for an upgrade, because your new P4 chip is located on the upgraded motherboard directly over the old power supply location, causing heat dissipation problems, and burning out the nice new CPU ! New faster systems may have a larger number of motherboard supports (standoffs), and the old cases did not provide enough holes, so the lack of grounding and physical support causes major difficulties , also. Without adequate structural relief, a new board loaded with cables could actually bend enough to short out on the case, causing smoke, and tears ! If you buy your upgrade parts at Computer Stuff, they will provide support in terms of space on a bench, and advice if you need it, in San Luis Obispo, and Arroyo Grande. If you have a name-brand machine, with proprietary designs, such as Dell, HP, E-machines, or Compact, for example, there are problems in trying to upgrade those systems. Some parts may be useful, and could move to a new case, but often floppy drives and small parts will not work away from the original design. Additional points were made in Pete's talk, and they are available on the tape recording, if any member wishes to hear them, just let me know.

The new computers are going towards very compact and super fast designs. Pete says he is fascinated by what he sees coming in our future. So "flatten" your system, start over, and get ready for new computing, and I hope all goes well. See you at the next meeting, April 4th, with a special SIG review of MS Works, Ver. 7.0. - WA

Guy Kuncir's Featured Speaker Programing Schedule

April 4th will be **SIG Day** at SLO Bytes. Three of our **Special Interest Groups** will be meeting simultaneously, giving members and visitors alike a live example of why we consider them to be "special." **Alan Raul** will be discussing computer hardware, **Ralph Sutter** will be demonstrating the use of HTML, and **Bill Avery** will be looking into the use of a Windows software suite. You don't want to miss this meeting! If you've ever wondered what they do in these "special" groups, April will be your chance to find out. One or more of these SIGs may be just what you've been looking for. Here's a snapshot of Sunday's activities:

What's inside your computer? Are you confused with those technical computer terms and numbers? If you already have a computer, thinking about adding a component to your present system or even thinking about purchasing a new computer, then this question and answer session with visuals will explain some of the latest computer hardware technologies. Alan Raul, a computer consultant and instructor, will be leading this session.

Have you ever wanted to make a web site of your own? Ralph Sutter, leader of the HTML SIG, will demonstrate how to create a simple web page and place the page on line using freeware currently available on the Internet. He will also offer suggestions for building a web site designed for expansion so that, as the site grows more elaborate, it will still be easy to maintain. Anyone interested in learning more about building web sites is encouraged to attend the HTML SIG which meets the day after the SLO Bytes general meeting. For more information, visit <http://htmlsig.slobytes.org/index.html>.

What's inside of these software packages? Bill Avery will tackle the ins and outs of Microsoft Works in his Windows SIG. MS Works is a reasonably priced software suite that contains a little bit of everything you need to do home information processing: word crunching, spreadsheet development and database management. Why buy those expensive software packages when Works will do the job? It's not just what's in the package -- it's how easy it is to install and use. These Windows-related issues and others will be discussed and/or demonstrated.

The speaker for the May 2nd meeting will be Enrique "Ricky" Maza from Gateway Computers, San Luis Obispo. He will provide us with the specifications, capabilities and a demonstration of the *Gateway 610 Series* Media Center PCs. Should you be interested, Ricky will be offering club discounts.

President's Message

At our 4 April 2004 meeting:

At 1 PM Alan will moderate a computer question/answer session

At 2:30 PM, we will split-up and attend one of the three **Special Interest Group** presentations

The winner of the **Microsoft Office Professional Edition 2003** was Alan Raul, a most deserving member of our club. Congratulations Alan!

At our 12PM, 7 Mar 2004 SLO Bytes Board Meeting the decision to purchase a **second LCD projector** for the SIG held in the dining room, was voted on in the affirmative. Ralph Sutter was authorized to make that purchase.

Nate Wallenstein has resigned as our **HardCopy Editor**, so starting with this April 2004 issue, Ray Miklas will assume the duties of the Editor. Thank you Nate for all the many hours you've spent working on our News Letter for the last year

You may want to order the **FREE MS update CD** for W98, W98Se, WinME, Win2000 & XP with ****ALL**** security updates through Oct `03. It's an ideal CD to have on hand if you ever have to format your drive or reinstall Windows. And, it's really FREE. Go to http://snipurl.com/MS_order to order.

Check out the **money saving offer that KCBXnet** (aka Slonet) is extending to all current and future members of SLO Bytes: <http://www.slobytes.org>

BTW, KCBXnet has added an accelerated dial-up access for their subscribers. Basically, it permits faster page loading while surfing on the Web. Check it out at: <http://kcbx.net/index.php>

Continue to bring any **used ink-jet printer or toner cartridges** to our meeting and take advantage of the four **learning CDs**: "Learn Windows XP, Excel, Word & Power Point" available for our members to check out (at Marvin's table)

--Ray Miklas

Nate Wallenstein's Recommended Readings

Spyware Demystified

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If there's spyware on your computer, it's likely you installed it yourself. When you downloaded that free music player or utility, you may not have known the software was also designed to collect and transmit information about you. In most cases, publishers disclose this secondary functionality in end-user agreements. However, as you well know, most of us never read end-user agreements, at least not completely. We just click OK and go, especially when we're downloading freeware. And sometimes, even if you read an entire agreement, the description of the spyware component is too ambiguous to take clear what the component does. In any case, there may be spyware on your computer, and you may be wondering whether it's dangerous, or even legal.

Most spyware has a legitimate purpose

Although some spyware has been used to make malicious attacks or to further identity theft, most spyware is a legal, if annoying, technology. It's often used to gather data for marketing purposes and therefore has a valid, generally benign purpose. In some cases, it may even make your on-line commercial experience more focused and convenient. For example, some spyware tracks the kinds of on-line ads you choose to follow. The publisher uses this data to replace random ads with those relating to your areas of interest. The net result is the ads you see in your software's interface become more relevant to you. However, some users may be averse to this kind of market.

So, what is spyware?

Spyware is perhaps best described as split personality software. It resides on your computer's hard drive and usually has a practical and attractive set of primary features. This core functionality has nothing to do with spying. It might be a utility or an mp3 player or some kind of game, and it's usually offered as a kind of freeware. The problem is, apart from its primary features, spyware also has a second, less conspicuous component. This second component gathers information about your computing habits and sends that information over the Internet to the software's publisher. Because this secondary action often goes on without your knowledge, software with this kind of dual functionality has come to be known as spyware.

How does spyware end up on my computer?

If there's spyware on your computer, it's likely you installed it yourself. When you downloaded that free music player or utility, you may not have known the software was also designed to collect and transmit information about you. In most cases, publishers disclose this secondary functionality in end-user agreements. However, as you well know, most of us never read end-user agreements, at least not completely. We just click OK and go, especially when we're downloading freeware. And sometimes, even if you read an entire agreement, the description of the spyware component is too ambiguous to make clear what the component does. In any case, there may be spyware on your computer, and you may be wondering whether it's dangerous, or even legal.

Be proactive with spyware

There are several preventative measures you can take to identify spyware and to make informed decisions about whether you want it on your machine. Be selective about what you install on your computer. If you don't have a reason to trust the company providing a piece of freeware, hold them to increased scrutiny. Visit their Web site to learn more about the people behind the technology, as well as the technology itself. Don't just click those "Yes, I accept" buttons when installing freeware. Instead, read each license agreement carefully, and look for language pertaining to spyware activity. Beware of programs that flash ads in the user interface. Many spyware programs

track how you respond to these ads, and their presence is a red flag. When you see ads in a program's user interface, you may be looking at a piece of spyware. Use only trusted download sites, some of which now indicate which of the freeware products they offer have a spyware component.

How to control spyware already on your computer

Once you've installed a piece of spyware and accepted its end-user agreement, the spyware component will go to work. While you're enjoying the main freeware features listening to music or playing games the information-gathering tool is functioning in the background. Without some sort of Internet security tool, the spyware will continue working indefinitely, routinely sending information to the publisher. However, a security program like Norton Internet Security™ with Norton™ Personal Firewall can detect and stop spyware in its tracks. Norton Personal Firewall monitors when any application, whether it's spyware or a Web browser, attempts to access the Internet. If you haven't already told the firewall to allow a program to connect to the Internet, it will prevent that program from connecting, send you an alert, and ask what action you'd like to take. At some point all spyware will attempt to connect to the Internet, and when this happens, Norton Personal Firewall will be there to block the program and ask you what to do. Then it's up to you to say yes or no to the spyware activity. You can either keep it (perhaps you see the information it gathers as a kind of "payment" for the freeware you're using), or you can remove it. If you decide to remove spyware, make sure you delete the entire program. Sometimes un-install programs only remove the primary software features and leave the spyware component in place. You may want to use a housekeeping utility like Norton CleanSweep™ in Norton SystemWorks™ to make certain there aren't residual spyware elements on your computer. In the end, there are several things you can do to ease your mind about spyware. You can be careful about the freeware you download, taking the time to read end-user agreements with care. You can research the companies who make spyware and decide whether you want them to know about you and your surfing habits. And, once spyware is on your computer, you can use a product like Norton™ Personal Firewall to monitor and control the software's Internet use. These basic steps put you in control and take a great deal of mystery out of this shadowy figure with the enigmatic name.

Treasurer's Report

February 15, 2004 - March 15, 2004

Income

Membership Dues	\$225.00
Refreshments	\$25.45
Raffle	\$84.00
Equipment Rental	\$10.00

Expenses

Rent	\$75.00
Insurance	\$242.00
Refreshments	\$29.74

Checking Account Balance	\$3,558.13
Savings Account Balance	\$930.81

Club Information and Meeting Times

SLO Bytes, a PC Users Group dedicated to educate its members in the use of personal computers, digital devices and software, meets on the first Sunday of each month at the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) Hall at 520 Dana Street, San Luis Obispo. All meetings are open to the public at no cost. Special interest groups meet from 1 to 2:00 PM and guest speaker presentations begin at 2:30 PM. Contact Guy Kuncir (489-1395, gkuncir@charter.net) or visit www.slobytes.org for additional information about SLO Bytes and the scheduled presentation.

HardCopy is a monthly publication of SLO Bytes PC Users' Group located in San Luis Obispo, California. Information in this Newsletter is derived from both our own membership and other PC User Group Newsletters. The purpose of this publication is to inform our members of meetings and provide information related to the use of PCs and various Operating Systems.

Membership: Dues are \$25 per year. Full membership entitles you to our monthly newsletter via e-mail, technical

assistance, raffle gift drawing at the end of the meetings, a voice in the affairs of the club, and comradeships.

Article Submission: Deadline for submission of articles is the 20th of each month. Articles should be E-mailed to the editor at junate@charter.net.

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Outside Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

HTML/Internet SIG normally meets at 6:30 PM on the Monday following our Sunday General Meeting at Ralph Sutter's home in Arroyo Grande. Call Ralph at (805) 489-8678 for directions

Linux SIG normally meets on Thursday at 6:30 PM (following our Sunday's General Meeting) at KCBX.net [a.k.a. SLONET] Training Center, 4100 Vachell Lane, SLO.

SLO Bytes Officers/Volunteers:

Ray Miklas (President, HardCopy Editor) rmiklas@bigfoot.com
Guy Kuncir (V.P./Programs/Publicity) gkuncir@charter.net
Marvin Baxendale (Treasurer/Membership/Publishing) mbaxendale@charter.net
Ralph Sutter (Secretary/Webmaster/HTML-Internet SIG) rsutter@cuesta.edu
Bill Avery (Contributing Columnist/Win95/98 SIG) wavery@slonet.org
Alan Raul (General SIG/Linux SIG)
Nancy Vrooman (Refreshments)
Peter Stonehewer (Refreshments)
Nate Wallenstein (Contributing Columnist)
Ken Stilts (Set-up/Clean-up)
Cliff Buttschardt (Set-up/Clean-up)
John Enos (Set-up/Clean-up)
Bill Palmerston (Set-up/Clean-up)

SLO Bytes Website www.slobytes.org