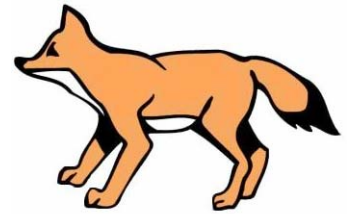


FOX TALES



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Hot Fun in the Summer Sun

Jon Jackman – President FVPCA

Taking a break from working on constructing a Cornhole Bean Toss game to make some notes for the newsletter... If you have not played it, Cornhole is like a soft game of horseshoes or Lawn Darts. There are two 2' x 4' pieces of plywood with a 6" hole, and the boards are set about 30' apart. The object of the game is to toss a bean bag into the hole, or at least toss it so that it stays on the board. I just came back from Lowes with a 4' square sheet of ½ inch plywood (which they cut in half for free) and 24' of 1x4 pine board, plus a little extra for the legs to give it the proper incline. I will assemble it all tomorrow and take it out to a friend's lake house this weekend. My wife is working on making the 8 bean bags. It should be a fun time! Something to do between fishing, boating, eating and drinking cool beverages! The game has been around for a few years and they sell online for over \$100. Materials cost me about \$50. I am not sure what decoration I will paint on it, so maybe this weekend it will be "primer white." I saw the rules at www.playcornhole.org. There is an official organization, the American Cornhole Association., which governs the official aspects of the game. Check it out! If you are lucky you will be invited to play a game at a picnic or backyard gathering this summer!

By the time you read this you may have received an invitation to participate in a brief survey. Unlike the 50 question monsters of prior years, this will be targeting just a few issues: your interest in attending the Midwest Computer Conference in September (which will replace our meeting for September) as well as some questions about what Operating system you use, and how you connect to the Internet. As of this writing, I have not quite finished it. There may be another question or two, but we want to get a handle on planning to see about who is interested in going. September is closer than we would like to think, but we still have time to get everyone's feedback, so please reply to the questionnaire!

Ever wonder what to do with all of those digital photos? I will be doing a program on sharing photos on the Internet for our July 19th General Meeting. I am looking into several alternatives and will share my findings with members at the meeting. As time goes on we seem to load up our hard drives with .jpg files! Organizing them is half the battle. There are various ways that you can share them with family and friends and we will be discussing that as well. We may even look at a photo editing program that will eliminate red eye, crop the photo for effect and other interesting techniques.

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Computer Commando's Workshop

Jon Jackman – President FVPCA

Recently I worked on a couple of PCs. One was an older Dell desktop that had Windows XP on it. The user complained that it was running very slowly. Upon closer examination, it had only 128MB of PC133 memory. I was able to add an additional 512MB which improved performance substantially. Newer machines use faster memory and that would have been much cheaper to upgrade. (The PC133 - 512MB module cost about \$50.) I also applied current updates and adjusted the startup files, so that only essential services were running. She complained about her e-mail and I saw that she used Outlook Express, which was fine, and is a common way to consolidate multiple e-mail accounts into one fairly friendly program. One of the "Accounts" was no longer in use so I cleaned that up. As she did not have a router installed, I took a look at her firewall software. She was using the Windows Firewall that came with XP SP2. I installed Online Armor, which I like over Comodo, and has more features than the one that comes with Windows. Note: it is necessary to disable the Windows Firewall when installing a third party firewall. I also upgraded AVG to version 8 and added the latest SpyBot Search and Destroy program. Things seem to be running quite well. I then burned an image to two DVDs in case we needed to restore the machine down the road. She was pleased with the performance, especially after I separated the SBC Yahoo home page that opened whenever she opened Internet Explorer (IE). As that page opened so slowly, I created one shortcut on her desktop for the SBC Yahoo page and set Internet Explorer to default to Google.

Did you know that you can load several "tabs" to load when you start IE? In IE 7, go to "Tools", then "Internet Options." You can then enter the URL for more than one web address, so long as each has its own line. The time to open them will depend on your computer's speed and Internet connection.

The other user had a problem with running a Scrabble game by Atari. I had switched from Comodo to Online Armor, as Comodo seemed to forget "remember this selection." So this meant that there was a learning curve as Online Armor re-learned what programs were allowed to access the Internet. As it turned out, when the Scrabble game loaded, the Online Armor permission splash screen was behind a blank screen which should have only displayed momentarily as the program connected to the Internet to verify registration. So the Online Armor permission screen was invisible! Obviously, the code for Scrabble was poorly written and should have allowed Online Armor to appear on top. I was able to "allow" access by hitting the enter key. I also looked into the permitted programs and added Scrabble. It seemed to work, though she still had some problems. I suggested that she look for a more current program. (The Atari Scrabble was several years old... the 2002 version.) There were some 2007 Scrabble games around for about \$15-\$20, so we went in that direction. Looking online I saw that the Atari Scrabble game was plagued with problems. Sometimes it helps to look before you buy!

I had problems connecting to the Internet down in my basement myself. I was able to run a long Ethernet cable to my router in my office and connect, but was unable to connect to the cable that ran under a rug and through a ceiling into my basement. I replaced the RJ45 plugs, but still had the problem, even after some other cabling configurations. I was able to determine that the Linksys switch in the basement was bad. After I replaced that with another switch, all worked well. Computer repair is often a matter of deductive logic. Carefully isolating a problem can offer a solution. Fortunately, I had a spare switch that solved the problem.

Hot Fun in the Summer Sun (cont'd)

We distributed the 2008 DOQ-2 at the June meeting. If you missed your chance, we will have the library available for download onto your thumb drive at the meeting. I have already begun to download programs for the DOQ-3 offerings. Also included was a spreadsheet which lists all of the downloads to date. It is a work in progress and requires some additional examination on my part to differentiate the versions of some programs that appear to be duplicated. Hopefully we will have the listing on our website soon. I mentioned at the meeting that we may include a field that would offer some review information (a one star to five star rating) as well as try to differentiate into categories more accurately. This will take some time, and any help would be appreciated. If you have used any of the DOQs, please consider a review. We reviewed several at our June meeting and would like other members to submit their comments. You could do that via the “?” link on our web site. If you have any questions, you could use that to send them in as well. Also at the June meeting, we relocated the DIY projection screen and placed a cover on the skylight, so the projected image was much better this time around. We also had a, “How do you do that” segment where Bill and “Mac” set up the Wi-Fi access point at the beginning of the meeting. Thanks to Tom for bringing in the COSTCO cake. Went very well with the coffee.

Speaking of the website, anyone know PHP? Bill Powell passed along some of Bob Tuftee's books on the subject and I intend to try and teach myself about what it is and how to use it. You may recall that a volunteer (Ivan Rood) had re-worked our website, but as yet we have not migrated to it, because it uses PHP. The web hosting service needs to support it. Last time we checked, our APCUG hosting service did not support PHP. They were considering it however. We will see. As I have little understanding of PHP, we will defer the launch of the new web pages until we get a better grasp on PHP. Sorry about that... so many things to do, and so little time to do it!

I just took a look at the regional radar and see that some more severe storms are headed in this direction. I have set up a shortcut to a good weather radar image site by searching in Google “NWS Chicago” (National Weather Service). Then on the NWS Site I look into Radar Imagery and Local Radar. You can also choose to view a loop. Anyway, the impending storm reminds me to remind you: Do you have a UPS (Uninterruptible Power Supply) yet? The peace of mind is well worth the cost! I have restated this many times in the hope that you have one by now! For less than \$50, you can get a decent model that will automatically shut down your system in the event of a power outage. The “clean power” provided also can help protect your machine during “brownouts” that are common during hot weather! Sales are frequently advertised at Office Depot, Office Max and the big box electronic stores.

See you at the meeting on July 19th at the Civic Center. Bring a friend! Also, be sure to take the survey! (The link will be in the e-mail...)

Jon Jackman – President FVPCA

Security Suites Revisited

By Larry Bothe, 3/30/2008

About a year ago I wrote an article reviewing the relatively new Zone Alarm Security Suite and compared it to several of the popular computer security suite programs. I concluded that both MacAfee and Norton tried to take over your machine, slowed it down, and were hard to manipulate. I had just switched to Zone Alarm and reported that while ZA was no faster at least it didn't try to take over. It was far easier and more intuitive to change settings and get it to do things your way. I liked Zone Alarm, then.

To borrow a line from Dennis Miller, "Now I don't want to get off on a rant here, but....", I'm getting pretty damn fed up with security suites in general. Every one I am exposed to tends to bog your system down, and especially greatly extends boot-up time. It makes me angry that we even have to have all these security provisions. When I grew up we never locked our houses and we left the keys in the car. Why all this lawlessness, electronic and otherwise? I hate it!

After I put ZA on my main desktop machine I decided to upgrade my one-machine license to 3-machines so I could put it on my laptop and my wife's older desktop as their Norton subscriptions expired. The first to cycle up was my laptop, which I don't use very often. The boot time was quite long, and every time it started up ZA wanted to scan the entire system because it hadn't been on for a while. I started out by increasing the RAM from 512 megs to 1 gig. (Of course I had to buy the whole gig because two 256-meg memory chips occupied the only 2 memory slots in the machine.) That helped some, but in the end I still wasn't satisfied. I finally just took ZA off the laptop and replaced it by turning on the firewall in Windows and installing the free version of AVG antivirus. I also have Adaware (free) on the laptop to periodically check for spyware. I'm not very concerned about spyware on the laptop because I don't "surf" with it. I'm much happier with the laptop now that it boots up promptly when I need it, and it doesn't devil me to perform various tasks when I'm trying to get some work done.

Next came my wife's older desktop. I put the ZA security suite on that as well. It was slow so I decided to upgrade the memory to 1 gig. I ordered it from Tiger Direct, and when it came in I promptly installed it in the machine. Guess what? It wouldn't recognize it. The machine is old enough that it will recognize only 512 megs, so my purchase was useless. To Tiger's credit they took the memory back and gave me a full refund, except for the shipping. Fortunately, I had opened the package very carefully and saved all the materials. ZA was slow on my wife's machine, but since it was no worse than Norton we left it on there until very recently.

Just last week ZA sent out a major update. The download was 44 megs and was in fact the entire install program, not just a patch. The occasion was apparently that they had rewritten the program to make it compatible with the Vista operating system. (All my machines run Windows XP, SP2, and I have no intention of upgrading to Vista any time soon.) The new version brought my wife's machine to its knees. Boot time went from about 4 minutes to 12. That being absurd I evicted ZA completely. With no security protection at all (except the Windows firewall) the boot time was 1 minute, 20 seconds. After installing AVG Free and Spybot Search & Destroy the boot time went up to 2 minutes, 10 seconds. That includes opening Outlook Express, which she has in her Startup group. My wife, who usually doesn't pay any attention at all to computer performance, commented that the machine is noticeably faster in all its functions. For her to notice it had to be a major improvement. I also put the ZA update on my own desktop machine. On mine I didn't see any noticeable degradation of performance. I think that's because my desktop has a faster processor and a full gig of RAM, and therefore better tolerates the increased demands of the security suite. Does my desktop have any better security than our other 2 machines? I suppose it's a little better to have the integrated suite of security programs; they do other automatic scans, like boot sectors at each startup.

(Continued on the next page)

However, I'm beginning to believe that some of this is overkill. We all make decisions, conscious or otherwise, to accept some level of risk in our daily lives. For example, each time we get into a car we have accepted the risk of being in an automobile accident. We manage that risk by buckling our safety belts, having air bags, driving carefully, and being vigilant for the actions of other drivers. But we still drive pretty fast, and there is a chance that we could get hurt in an accident. We could of course further reduce the likelihood of injury by staying off expressways, driving 5-mph under the speed limit on surface streets, and wearing a helmet. But those things would greatly limit the utility of our cars so we don't do them. It's the same with computers. I want basic protection (firewall, anti-virus, spyware), but I don't want it to unduly inhibit the use of my computer. I'm comfortable with the separate (and free) security programs that are available to all of us. I do have one additional level of protection from hackers, a router. The outside world can "see" my router, but not my individual computers. There must be others of you out there who are fed up with your computers being bogged down by security suites of programs. It appears that the publishers of these programs are finally taking notice. Last week I saw a Norton ad that claims their latest version is 48% faster than another (unnamed) popular security suite program. Grisoft, the publishers of AVG Free, also sells a complete security suite program. In the list of features on their website they claim "Top-quality protection that does not slow your system down". They don't discuss boot-up time directly, but at least they show a concern. I may try the AVG suite on my main machine when my ZA subscription expires, or just use the available free programs; I'm not sure yet.

Here's what I have learned and conclude from my recent encounters with security suite programs:

1. If you are going to run one of the popular security suite programs you better have a reasonably fast processor, say 1.6 MHz or higher, and at least a gig of ram. Otherwise you will really slow your machine down.
2. You can easily put together your own suite of security programs that are free. When used in conjunction with a bit of common sense they will be adequate for most users. Get AVG Free at <http://free.grisoft.com>.
3. You can safely evict a security suite program and then log onto the Internet and download new security software. Just don't open any e-mails or attachments until your new antivirus software is in place.
4. With respect to the Windows firewall, make sure it is OFF if you are using any other firewall. Firewalls do not play well together; you will likely get conflicts if you run more than one at the same time. Check to make sure it is ON if you intend to use it as your only protection.
5. There are a number of free spyware programs out there. Spybot Search & Destroy is a resident program that loads at startup and protects you from over 50,000 known spyware incursions. You can get it at <http://www.safer-networking.org/en/index.html>.
6. Unlike firewalls, spyware programs are OK with each other. In fact, having more than one is desirable because each one uses different detection methods. If you want a second spyware program you can get Adaware at www.lavasoft.com.
7. Yes, I know, the firewall in Windows XP is lame in that it protects only from incoming threats. But on the other hand, it is very unobtrusive. If you must have outgoing protection as well (Spybot has some; it will warn you of outgoing messages that you did not intentionally send) then you can get the stand-alone free firewall program from Zone Alarm at <http://www.zonealarm.com/store/content/company/products/znalm/freeDownload.jsp>.

If you decide to add RAM to speed up your computer (usually a good idea, and RAM is cheap these days) be sure the machine will recognize the total amount of RAM you plan to install. If you don't know then call Tiger Direct (800-800-8300) and ask. They can look up your make and model and tell you the type of RAM it requires and the maximum it will accept.

Larry Bothe is an associate member of CAEUG and an honorary member of FVPCA. He was President of CAEUG for a time back in the 90's when he lived in the Chicago area. Larry presently resides in southern Indiana where he is retired from the plastics industry and currently teaches people to fly airplanes. He also performs pilot examinations for the FAA. He can be contacted at LBothe@comcast.net.



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THE FOX VALLEY PC ASSOCIATION

The Fox Valley PC Association is dedicated to the task of providing computer information to our fellow members. We are a non-profit organization. The group has been active since January 1985. The dues are \$30 per year. Our meetings are held on the third Saturday of the month (except December.)

The meeting place for (July) will be at the Oswego Civic Center, 5 Ashlawn Ave, Montgomery, IL The formal meeting starts at 9:15 A.M. Non-member visitors are always welcome. If you can, please come early & help with set-up. Thanks!

"USERS HELPING USERS"

Membership Renewals

Tom Anzalone
Richard Bremer
Dave Chestenson
Dean Holste
Norm Hoube
Robert Jackman

Thank-You for your continuing support!!
Don't forget to check the mailing label for your dues date!

The "FOX TALES" Newsletter

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540 S. Randall Rd. St.Charles, Il 8:00am-12:00pm

Items Accepted for Recycling:

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The Fox Valley PC Association Web site is:

www.fvpca.org
Courtesy of APCUG



Have a computer hardware problem or a technical question? Head over to our website and click on the red question mark to send your question! We will research it and have an answer at the next meeting or sooner if needed.

July Program:

Sharing Photos on the Internet

Jon Jackman

The Next Meeting Will Be at 9:15 A.M.

July 19, 2008

**At the Oswego Civic Center
5 Ashlawn Ave. Montgomery, Illinois**