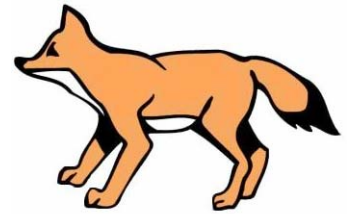


FOX TALES



Volume 22, Issue 3

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Fox Valley PC Association
"Established January 1985"

March 2009

Ever Grateful for Our Volunteers!

Jon Jackman - President, FVPCA

This past month we announced at our general meeting that our Treasurer, Richard Chamberlain, had tendered his resignation as Treasurer of the FVPCA. We had asked our members to consider stepping forward to replace Richard as our Treasurer. This is not a position to be taken lightly, as it requires a great deal of responsibility and a meticulous approach to our finances. Needless to say, there was not a stampede of members to volunteer, yet we were in a dilemma as we need to find a replacement quickly. Fortunately, at our last executive meeting Dean Holste volunteered to act as an Interim Treasurer until a full time Treasurer is nominated and elected at the end of this year. Dean explained that he recently retired from the Kane County Sheriff's Department and will have some free time on his hands. Dean will work closely with Richard during this transition period. Congratulations on your retirement Dean! Richard does want to remain on as a contact person/coordinator with the Oswegoland Park District. He will continue to provide us a line of communication with them.

We have received numerous donations and pledges for the Bill Swiss USO Memorial. I have not received the final figures, but the response has been remarkable. This is a great tribute to our former newsletter editor. I can still remember his presence at the College of DuPage Computer Shows and his keen interest in all sorts of digital gadgets... Once the final amounts are received we will submit the entire collection to the USO on behalf of the Fox Valley PC Association. Once again, thanks to all of the generous members who made their donations.

By our March meeting we will have a date for the First Tee Project scheduled for some time in the second half of the month. It should not take too long, but would be of interest to anyone wanting to explore networking. The golf season is going to be here very soon. The weather last month in Tucson was an improvement over what we had up here in mid-February. I can hardly wait! I am sure there are some excited youngsters looking forward to learning the fundamentals of golf. It will be a worthwhile project to participate in and indirectly foster their development in some way. Getting the kids outside and involved in learning a new activity is well worth our support of the First Tee Project. We look forward to working with our member Kathryn Farrell to get things running smoothly in the old clubhouse at Phillips Park, which is now where the offices for the First Tee of Aurora are located.

We will be making the 2009 DOQ-1 available at the March meeting. There are a number of interesting applications that are included. I was able to find some interesting programs that can record audio and possibly video from Skype calls. Skype 4.0 will be included. The latest version of Open Office (3.0.1) as well as numerous utilities and security programs are on the list. There was a lively discussion at our executive meeting about the fees associated with the DOQ offerings for 2009. The fees will be discussed and we will also provide a brief overview of the "Downloads of the Quarter" at our March meeting.

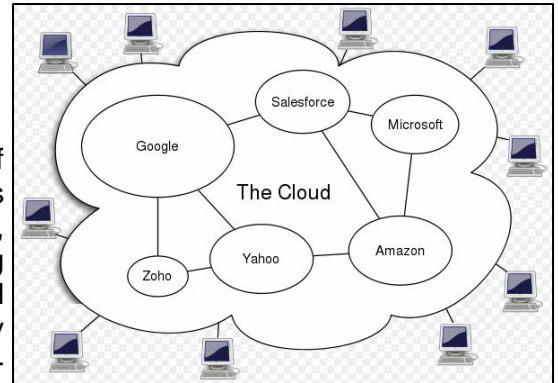
(Continued on Page 3)

The Cloud Approaches

Jon Jackman – President, FVPCA

There is a fairly new term circulating on the Internet: “The Cloud” which is defined by Wikipedia as:

Cloud computing is often confused with grid computing ("a form of distributed computing whereby a 'super and virtual computer' is composed of a cluster of networked, loosely-coupled computers, acting in concert to perform very large tasks"), utility computing (the "packaging of computing resources, such as computation and storage, as a metered service similar to a traditional public utility such as electricity") and autonomic computing ("computer systems capable of self-management"). Indeed many cloud computing deployments as of 2009^[update] depend on grids, have autonomic characteristics and bill like utilities - but cloud computing can be seen as a *natural next step* from the *grid-utility model*. Some successful cloud architectures have little or no centralized infrastructure or billing systems whatsoever, including peer-to-peer networks like Bit Torrent and Skype and volunteer computing like SETI@home.



Architecture

The majority of cloud computing infrastructure as of 2009^[update] consists of reliable services delivered through data centers and built on servers with different levels of virtualization technologies. The services are accessible anywhere that has access to networking infrastructure. *The Cloud* appears as a single point of access for all the computing needs of consumers. Commercial offerings need to meet the quality of service requirements of customers and typically offer service level agreements. Open standards are critical to the growth of cloud computing and open source software has provided the foundation for many cloud computing implementations.

Characteristics

As customers generally do not own the infrastructure, they merely access or rent, they can avoid capital expenditure and consume resources as a service, paying instead for what they use. Many cloud-computing offerings have adopted the utility computing model, which is analogous to how traditional utilities like electricity are consumed, while others are billed on a subscription basis. Sharing "perishable and intangible" computing power among multiple tenants can improve utilization rates, as servers are not left idle, which can reduce costs significantly while increasing the speed of application development. A side effect of this approach is that "computer capacity rises dramatically" as customers do not have to engineer for peak loads. Adoption has been enabled by "increased high-speed bandwidth" which makes it possible to receive the same response times from centralized infrastructure at other sites.

So what are the implications for us regular “Joe the computer users”? This concept seems to apply to larger companies and organizations. I have been exploring the development of a web based data collection instrument. Instead of having an application (in this case Alpha 5... see at www.alphasoftware.com) installed on one machine, the collection of data and reporting is achieved from a web server that allows all authorized users access to the data by simply logging into a specific URL. This means that each user would not need to have the desktop application installed on their machine. Sometimes applications can be quite expensive and installing on each machine would require a separate license. It also means that maintenance can be performed quickly and efficiently on the website, rather than having to update each user's machine. Maintaining one or two machines in a small shop may be acceptable, but when the number of machines increases it can become a nightmare to manage and synchronize data. Use of a program like this on an internal intranet offers security and usability that had never really been feasible as a cost efficient solution. Even if deployed on a server somewhere on the Internet (in the cloud), there are security tools that require authentication and encryption.

(Continued on Page 3)

Ever Grateful for Our Volunteers! (cont'd)

Reminder: if you want to download the DOQ, be sure that you have at least 1 GB available on your USB flash drive!

At last month's meeting we had a lively discussion on tax preparation software. Most users seem to use TurboTax, and some use Tax Cut. We also had a program on using any DVD recorder to convert video projects onto DVDs, and also reviewed Roxio Creator 2009 Special Edition. Despite the snowy weather, we had a decent turnout.

This month Bill Powell will be doing a program on the Internet Explorer browser alternative in his Exploring Mozilla Firefox presentation. Has anyone tried Google Chrome yet? It may make for a good discussion and comparison. The last DOQ version of Firefox was version 3.0.1 in 2008 DOQ-3. The current release is 3.0.3 and I will put it on the 2009 DOQ-1. There does appear to be a downloadable version of Google Chrome, this link will take you to the download and install URL: <http://www.google.com/chrome/>

We have seen an increase in visitors to our meetings. I have received an inquiry from a local resident who would like to know more about our club. Visitors are always welcome. We encourage members to bring along a friend and introduce them to the Fox Valley PC Association. Membership does have its advantages. Participation in Live Meeting programs from home should be forthcoming for our paying members. Of course, the ability to obtain the Downloads of the Quarter offers a glimpse at free programs for use and review. Our forum for questions and answers is always open to anyone, either at our meeting or online. Our motto is: "Users helping users" and we try to help anyone in need of our wide range of all computer expertise.

See you at our next meeting at 9:15 AM on March 21st at the Civic Center location. As always, bring a friend!

Jon Jackman, FVPCA President

The Cloud Approaches (cont'd)

By Jon Jackman

Neither project would need to be very elaborate, but the advantages of having multiple users collaborate on data collection would be beneficial. Access to reports would be convenient and the restrictions on access for data entry and management seem to be fairly straightforward with the Alpha 5 system.

We previously had looked at this software several years ago, but now I believe it deserves a second look. If deployed on a local server or on the Internet, no doubt there will be a need to bone up on web design. This will force a challenging learning curve upon the participants. To help with my own understanding, I picked up a couple of instructional DVDs that provide video training. Perhaps interested members may opt to join a SIG to review the numerous lessons and develop some understanding all the Alpha 5 Web and desktop applications. In this case, "misery loves company" and I would welcome collaboration with anybody who may be interested.

The learning and knowledge that we have, is, at the most, but little compared with that of which we are ignorant.

- Author: Plato

READ ARTICLE ON PAGE 5 FIRST, THEN COME BACK HERE!

After everything is up and running smoothly, we will perform another complete backup and then set up scheduled backups using the version of Acronis that we will install on his machine. The specifications for the Dell 530 are considerably better than those for his old eMachine and he should see some noticeable improvements on performance.

We will keep you apprised of our project in next month's newsletter.

Live Meeting Coming Soon to a PC Next to You

Jon Jackman - President, FVPCA

As our club is a member of APCUG (Association of Personal Computer User Groups), we have been able to utilize some of their resources. Our website (www.FVPCA.org) is hosted by them as part of our \$50 annual membership. We receive invitations to events and are able to receive newsletter articles from their library. They publish a quarterly newsletter with many tips that help us move forward as an effective computer club.

As members of APCUG, we will be able to utilize some very interesting resources. They are experimenting with a Share Point portal that will allow us to collaborate on various projects and also view what other computer user groups are doing. Eventually we will have our own space for collaboration, but for now everything is shared with all of the APCUG users registered at the APCUG Share Point portal.

According to Wikipedia: Windows SharePoint Services (WSS) currently in version 3 provides all the objects underpinning all Microsoft SharePoint technology. Furthermore, a SharePoint page is built by combining the web parts into a web page, to be accessed using a browser. Any web editor supporting [ASP.NET](#) can be used for this purpose, even though [Microsoft Office SharePoint Designer](#) is the preferred editor. The extent of customization of the page depends on its design. WSS pages are ASP.NET applications, and SharePoint web parts use the ASP.NET web parts infrastructure, and using the ASP.NET APIs, web parts can be written to extend the functionality of WSS. APCUG is presently developing this collaborative tool for use by computer user groups that have a current membership.

Yikes!! In layman's terms, basically, all of this is done in the background. The Web accessibility and interactivity with others is what is new and exciting.

Recently, APCUG offered training in Microsoft Live Meeting. In order to participate it was necessary to access the APCUG Share Point portal to obtain information about the training. (<http://sharepoint.apcug.net/default.aspx>) This required setting up a user account, which then had to verify me as a member of an APCUG hosted organization. Once I was able to login, I was able to access more information regarding downloading the client software and more information as to where to go prior to the meeting. During the past two weeks I was able to participate in a training exercise where we explored use of the Live Meeting interface. The first week was from the perspective as an attendee and the second week was from the perspective of a presenter. APCUG wants to enable user groups to use this application to conduct online, real-time programs. Normally, the cost for a participant would be about \$10 each, but with the arrangement with APCUG it will be free!

There are details to be worked out, but this holds promise for many of our members who are unable to attend our meetings on a regular basis, but who would like to participate in some way. This application works through a broadband connection and the actual server is at Microsoft. Basically you would download the client software. A notice would go out as to the URL for the meeting and those interested would logon shortly before it begins. The question arises as to the bandwidth available at the Civic Center location, and whether or not it will be sufficient to support a Live Meeting broadcast. If it does, we look forward to developing programs that will potentially be attended by all of our members. If it does not, we may relocate our meetings to Rasmussen College off of Orchard Road near the I-88 Tollway.

As with any new application, there would be a learning curve and need for some basic guidelines for using Live Meeting. There are many features which allow users to interact with the presenter. There is also a need for an assistant to help field questions during the program. We will discuss this briefly at future meetings and will distribute links to training materials on our website. Some members may have had experience in their business with Live Meeting, and we look forward to their perspectives.

Please feel free to submit any comments you may have about this opportunity via the Q&A question mark "?" on our home page.

Rhineland Repair Shop

Jon Jackman - President, FVPCA

I had mentioned in prior articles of my efforts to help my brother Kim with problems that he has been having with his eMachine. He lives in Rhineland which precludes my just driving over to his house to help him out. Last month I described how I used Ghost to restore an earlier image after his computer had failed to boot. I had sent him a detailed six-page instruction sheet on how to retrieve his data from the hard drive and the failed machine using a USB IDE adapter. I spent several hours on the phone with him getting things back up and running.

This past week I got a note from him saying that his machine had once again, "bought the farm." I suggested that there may be some sort of hardware problems that were causing his machine to fail. His eMachine is over four years old and he indicated that he had decided to get a new computer. I suggested that he consider a laptop for his computing solution, but he had decided to go with another desktop. He had already done some looking around and found a Dell Inspiron 530, which had the ability to be downgraded from Vista Home Premium to XP Pro. The model that he was looking at costs about \$549, through a Dell Employee Purchase Program which was partnered with his company.

He anticipates delivery on March 24, so I have time to look at the specifications for his new machine and offer some advice. One of the things that annoyed him with the eMachine was the preponderance of "Crapware." Often times when buying a new computer, the manufacturer loads it up with various "trial" software titles. (McAfee, Microsoft Works and others are some examples preloaded software that comes to mind.) The original ghosted image used on the last eMachine restore still contained a lot of Crapware that he had spent hours cleaning up. We had hoped to create a more streamlined, personalized Ghost image after I returned from my trip to Arizona. Oh well! One never knows when a computer will head to the crapper.

Having learned from experience, a backup solution is something that Kim needs. We had used Ghost previously, but I explained to him that there are other options that were better and much easier to use. I suggested that he consider a recent version of Acronis True Image to manage his backups. He says that he has been more regular at putting essential files on a flash drive since the last computer debacle. However, it helps to have scheduled backups to ensure recovery from a disaster such as this. He agreed that he needed something, though it may not be needed on the Dell. But one never knows

At the last general FVPCA meeting I had mentioned how easy it was for me to create a bootable flash drive that would run Acronis. It occurred to me that I could build an emergency boot flash drive that would also include several tools that we could use when Kim first boots up his machine. I checked the Dell support website and found a copy of the owner manual for the Dell Inspiron 530. I determined that the BIOS in this machine does support a boot sequence that includes a removable device, so booting from a flash drive does appear to be an option.

I was able to pick up a Toshiba 2 GB flash Drive for sale at \$9.99 at OfficeMax. I also located a copy of Acronis version 10 for a reasonable price. In addition to the application and system files installed by Acronis, I downloaded several applications that I put in a security folder on the flash drive. I also included folders for Skype 4.0, Remote Access (which will allow me to look at his machine from the comfort of my office here in Aurora), other utilities, including PC Decrapifier, and a documents folder that will include the Dell Inspiron 530 manual, and instructions to help him with the contents of the flash drive. I will have mailed this off to my brother by the time this issue of Fox Tales is published so he will have it to use once he receives his new computer. The plan is to immediately create a backup image using Acronis when he first turns on his machine. The backup will be stored on one of the hard drives from his old eMachine using the same USB IDE adapter we have used previously with Ghost. After that, we will enable remote access that will allow us to explore the machine together. Our focus will be on removing any Crapware, installing new "Free" security solutions (firewall, antivirus, anti-malware, etc.) and we will then attempt to set up Skype. As Kim has a daughter in Vermont, I will try to sell him on the idea of using the video call feature of Skype. (I am working on trying to get him a web cam to include with the flash drive.) He also selected to include Office 2007 Home and Student Edition. He had previously used Office 2003 Student and Teacher Edition, and we will explore the differences together. He uses Excel and Word and will need to get up to speed on the differences between the two versions. Kim is not big on change and re-learning, but seems to have mellowed a bit as he has become more computer proficient during our computer repair sessions.

Staying with XP will help him defer the Vista learning curve. There is a "XP Downgrade option with this model.) I am not sure if we will be able to re-install Vista from the original image made at boot, but that is why I think we should try to back up the machine before we access Windows for the first time. If he wants to try it out he can. We will see... And of course we will be connected to the Internet and complete all necessary updates. From my experience, he likes a clean desktop so we will make sure that we make him happy. (I tend to let things proliferate on my desktop, but have been trying to clean it up lately.)

(Sorry didn't have enough space here, Go back to Page 3!)



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There are a growing number of locations that offer free Internet via a wireless Wi-Fi connection! We would like to find a place where we could meet and have Wi-Fi too!

*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 (March) 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

Richard Chamberlain

Dennis Craig

Richard Goold

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

The "FOX TALES" Newsletter

The "Fox Tales" Newsletter is published monthly by the Fox Valley PC Association, Post Office Box 369, Oswego, IL 60543, a non-profit organization, established to provide information about IBM PCs and IBM Compatible personal computer systems (and almost anything "digital") to our members.

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Location:

Kane Co. Circuit Clerk Office
540 S. Randall Rd. St.Charles, Il 8:00am-12:00pm

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Telephones, Cell Phones, Pagers, Answering Machines, Typewriters, Calculators, Adding Machines, Fax Machines, Shredders, Copiers, Postage Meters

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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.

March Program:

Exploring Mozilla Firefox with Bill Powell

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

March 21, 2009

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