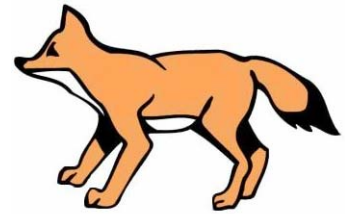


FOX TALES



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October 2007

Elections at October Meeting

by Jon Jackman – President, Fox Valley PC Association

The weather during the end of September and early this month had been fantastic, but now the temperatures have dropped and we are beginning to be reminded that winter is not far away. I recently took a trip up to Rhinelander for a reunion with my four brothers. The fall colors were just beginning to show their beauty up there. We had a bang up time! It seems that we are very project oriented, and at one point we were fixing two leaf blowers, a chainsaw, a leaky 2 1/2 ton floor jack, attempting to put a laser sight on a slingshot and CO2 BB pistol, repair a pump action BB pellet gun, not to mention fishing for Northern Pike with great success. The double batch of chili was great, as was the brat and sauerkraut casserole. There was also steak and just a few beers consumed. Also had a chance to fire off a round from my brothers .30-06 deer rifle. Talk about loud! Needless to say, we had a great time. I wish I had more time to sit down with my brother Kim and tutor him a bit on the new computer that he recently got. I will be sending him my Video Professor CDs on "Learning Windows XP." It should help him improve his computer skills. (This was the brother I had connected to using LogMeIn, as mentioned last month.) After I returned home I realized that I missed the companionship shared over the long weekend. Hope to reunite again next year!

Nominations for club officers were made at our September meeting. They are: Jon Jackman - President, Tom Anzalone - Vice President, William Palmer - Secretary and Richard Chamberlain – Treasurer. The election will be held at our October 20th meeting at the Oswegoland Park District Civic Center location. Please attend the meeting so you can cast your vote. Members need to be in good standing to participate. (Dues paid and up to date.) We are grateful for the ongoing hard work from our appointed executive committee members: Bill Powell - Membership Coordinator, Bob Tuftee - Website Coordinator, Dean Holste - newsletter layout editor, and Craig McGregor - Program Coordinator. Together we strive to improve the services for our organization. If you have an area of ongoing interest that may contribute to our clubs efforts, talk with one of our executive committee members.

The DOQ program is continuing to grow. We had several additional members subscribe at the September meeting. At this point, we have had three DOQ offerings and the final DOQ for 2007 will be available at the November meeting, the final meeting of the year for the FVPCA. The fourth offering will include an archive of all Fox Tales newsletters for the past year as well as some program notes from 2007. There will also be additional downloaded programs included.

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Elections at October Meeting (Cont'd)

by Jon Jackman – President, Fox Valley PC Association

Please consider submitting a comment on any of the programs that you have tried. Some of them can be quite handy! If you have a suggestion, forward it on to the board.

We have been moving towards distribution of our newsletter over the Internet, as well as through the mail. Last month we were running late on sending out the newsletter, so we sent along an e-mail notice to those who have chosen to receive their newsletter via the US mail. They were advised that we were attaching the newsletter in PDF format so as to ensure delivery prior to our meeting. An archive of newsletters is also available on our website. (www.fvpca.org)

This month, Tom Anzalone will be making a presentation on setting up an older computer to act as a router. The configuration includes a machine with three network interface cards (NICs) as well as software for antivirus and firewall security, among other things. This sounds like an intriguing program, so be sure to attend the October meeting.

If you have any questions that you would like us to try to answer at our meeting, please visit our website and submit your query from there. This will allow us to do any research to try to figure out what the problem resolution may be. Our Internet access at the meetings has been limited to what is available via Wi-Fi at the Yorkville Public Library, or via Tom's Sprint wireless broadband connection. It has been helpful to Google member problems in real time during our meetings.

Don't hold your breath, but we may have a connection this month at the Civic Center location. One can only hope! We have tried, and tried again to pursue this, and it appears that we are on the brink of broadband access success. This will enable us to offer more programs which require Internet access. We continue to look for volunteers to demonstrate software and hardware at our meetings. If you feel you can do it, or need assistance, please let us know. We will help you "get 'er done." Our thanks to Bill Palmer for his program on Acronis True Image ver 10 at the September meeting. Bill was looking for a solution to migrate data from a failing drive to a new drive. Acronis True Image provided him with a solution, but also has powerful backup tools. Interestingly, I recently had the same problem. To my surprise I discovered that if you have a Seagate or Maxtor hard drive, the utility available from the Seagate website includes a light version of Acronis. It took care of the formatting and cloning of a new drive recently installed on a friend's machine. There was a pop up screen that offered a 40% discount on the full version of Acronis. The light version appears to support disk imaging to other drives (USB and Networked.) So I guess, to keep it simple, make your next drive a Seagate! I picked up the 250 GB PATA drive from Tiger for about \$65.

Ever have a "blue screen of death" (BSD)? I have been struggling with a friend's machine. (That is one reason why I needed to buy a new hard drive.) He had complaints of frequent BSDs. I will begin to relate my experiences in how I attacked the problem in an article in this newsletter, "Trying to Figure out BSDs"

Hope to see you at the meeting on Saturday, October 20th at the Civic Center! Show up and vote! We will be having a cake from Costco, as well as some hot coffee! See you there.

Jon Jackman

The Dreaded BSD Error Message – Part 1

by Jon Jackman - President, FVPCA

Most of us have run into a problem with our computer locking up and displaying an error message on a blue screen. These are affectionately referred to as a, "Blue Screen of Death", or BSD. Sometimes the message displayed is helpful, but more times than not you are left scratching your head wondering what it all means.

A couple of years ago I had helped a friend, Tim, build a PC. After doing some upgrades about a year later, we began seeing some BSDs. I asked Tim when this happened. He told me that it was fairly random, but occurred with some frequency.

As it was not something that I could readily fix, I took the machine home to try to figure out what the problems were. I used my digital camera to take screenshots when a BSD would pop up. I also configured Windows to dump error files on the hard drive. I have never really explored Windows debugging features, but I figured that it would be something worth knowing about. I think I will need to get a book, as it is something that is very intimidating. However I did discover that there were some resources available to help me out.

One resource to decipher stop errors is a very good book, "Microsoft Windows XP - Inside Out", by Ed Bott and Carl Siedhert. Chapter 27, "Troubleshooting Windows Errors" has a section on How to Troubleshoot Specific Stop Errors. I had also Googled the various stop errors, though the book was more to the point on most of the problems.

I had mentioned the problem PC to Tom Anzalone at our recent Executive Board meeting, and he referred me to a program from Microsoft, Windbg, available as a download by searching "debugging tools for Windows" on Google. Tom also told me that I needed to download the corresponding symbols for particular versions of Windows. You can use Debugging Tools for Windows to debug drivers, applications, and services on systems running Windows NT 4.0, Windows 2000, Windows XP, Windows Server 2003, Windows Vista, and Windows Server 2008 as well as for debugging the operating system itself. Versions of the Debugging Tools for Windows package are available for 32-bit x86, native Intel Itanium, and native x64 platforms. Visit this site for details:
<http://www.microsoft.com/whdc/devtools/debugging/default.mspx>

Like I said, debugging offers real challenges and a steep learning curve, and this process requires using some of that gray matter between your ears. The book provides some general advice for dealing with stop errors that can be helpful. If you experience a stop error, they say, "Don't panic. Instead, run through the troubleshooting checklist to isolate the problem and find a resolution."

Look for a driver name in the error details. If the error message identifies a specific file name and you can trace that file to a driver for a specific hardware device, you may be able to solve the problem by disabling, molding, or rolling back the driver to an earlier version. The book suggests that the most likely offenders are a network interface cards, video adapters, and disk controllers.

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The Dreaded BSD Error Message – Part 1(Cont'd)

by Jon Jackman - President, FVPCA

Tip: try an alternate driver. Experienced support engineers recommend that you use the hardware driver that was made specifically for your device. However, if an unsigned driver causes stop errors, you might have success by using a more recent driver for a product in the same family, even if the model name is not identical. The strategy is most likely to work with printers; it is least likely to be successful with video adapters and network interface cards.

Don't rule out hardware problems. Sometimes software is a victim and not the cause of the blue screen errors. Damaged hard disks, defective RAM, overheated CPU chips are three common hardware failures that can result in stop errors. Weak or failing power supplies may also cause some of these errors.

Ask yourself, "What's new?" The book suggests that you be suspicious of newly installed hardware devices and software programs. If you added a new device recently, remove it temporarily and see whether the problem goes away. Take an especially close look at software in the categories that install services or file system filter drivers, which hook into the core operating system files that manage the file system to perform tasks, such as scanning for viruses. This category includes backup programs, multimedia applications, antivirus software, and CD burning utilities. You may need to uninstall or update the program to resolve the problem.

Search the knowledge base. Make a note of the error code and all parameters that appear on the same line. Search the Microsoft knowledge base using both the full and short formats. DATA_BUS_ERROR or 0X0000002E.

Check your system BIOS carefully. If an update is available from the manufacturer of the system motherboard, consider upgrading. (Back up the old BIOS!) Stop errors are especially common in connections with advanced configuration and peripheral interface (ACPI) machines, where flaws in the BIOS may trip up the operating system. Also, check the BIOS documentation carefully. Resetting all BIOS options to their default settings can sometimes resolve an issue caused by over tweaking. I downloaded the PDF manual for the motherboard from the ASUS website. (This board is an A8V Deluxe.)

Are you low on system resources? Stop errors are sometimes the result of a critical shortage of RAM or disk space. If you can start in safe mode (F8 key before Windows loads), check the amount of RAM installed and look at the system and boot drive to see how much free disk space is available. You may be able to free space by running the Disk Cleanup Manager. (Maybe you need more drastic measures to make space: backup and delete data, or obtain a larger hard drive. Consider using the old drive as a slave in your system as a target for image backup. Also, RAM is less expensive these days. Be sure to follow the recommendations of the manufacturer for RAM upgrades.)

Is a crucial system file damaged? To reinstall a driver, restart your computer and press F8 when prompted to start Windows in safe mode. To repair a damaged system file that prevents you from starting even in safe mode, start from the Windows XP CD and use Recovery Console. From Recovery Console's special purpose command prompt, the copy command automatically expands compressed files on the fly when you copy from the CD to a local drive. (Help with the Windows Recovery Console may be found here: <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/314058>)

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The Dreaded BSD Error Message – Part 1(Cont'd)

by Jon Jackman - President, FVPCA

I also used a program to test the RAM on the machine. It is one of our DOQ's (#2-Utilities Memtest 3.3): memtest86, and is a download one could easily find on Google. You create boot disk, and run it to see if there are any memory errors. Another utility program that helped me identify chipsets on the motherboard, and that will be included in the next DOQ, is CPU-Z. I also used Driver Detective to review the installed drivers on Tim's system. Although the trial version does not go out and obtain the "latest" drivers, it does give a clue as to what might be out of date. I would point out that some of the drivers that Driver Detective marked as in need of update were the latest drivers that I could find, so I let them be.

Early on during my efforts to diagnose the problem, I downloaded and installed the Windbg program. To use it I needed to have some memory dumps available. Take a look at your system to see if you have any already. Go to: C:\windows\minidump. If there are any there, they would be named something like:Mini092607-01, which is basically the date that it was created. There may be many on one day (Mini092607-02, Mini092607-03, etc.) these files are relatively small (64-92KB) and may not provide enough information to diagnose your problem, but may provide useful clues.

You can also have Windows do a thorough memory dump. Be sure you have enough hard disk space to do it! Go to the system properties by right clicking on my computer and choosing properties.. Under advanced, startup and recovery, choose error reporting. Enable error reporting, then choose okay. Under startup and recovery, choose settings. Here you can choose whether or not you want to have the system automatically restart or not. I left mine unchecked so I could view the BSD. I would then hold the power button on the computer in until it shut down. You can also change the type of write for debugging information: for a small memory dump, a kernel memory dump (that I have not tried yet), or a complete memory dump. If you choose complete memory dump be sure to reset to none or small after you have completed your debugging. Otherwise, you risk having your hard drive loaded up with huge memory dump files. You may also choose to overwrite an existing file or not. The large memory.dmp file will be located in the Windows folder. Once you have completed your debugging successfully, you can delete the minidump files as well as the memory.dmp files.

I will detail my efforts in next month's Fox Tales. But so far, they seem to have paid off. The machine has been running for several hours and no stop errors have reappeared. Hooray!

Jon Jackman - President, FVPCA



Remember the date to set your clocks back has changed. The date to move your clocks back one hour is now at 2:00am on Sunday November 4, 2007. If you forget you'll be late for church!

Your friendly Layout Editor-Dean Holste



J&S DISTRIBUTORS
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27 Stone Hill Road ♦ Oswego, IL 60543
(630) 554-1728 ♦ Fax: (630) 554-1198
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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 this month (October) will be at the Oswego Civic Center at 5 Ashlawn Ave Montgomery, Illinois. 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!

The following members have renewed their membership:

Gerald Cornwall
Kit Kimes
Bill Palmer
Joseph Waldeck

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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Recycling Tips

Obsolete electronic gadgets -

Don't pitch them, recycle them. Check out www.epa.gov/ recycling or www.earth911.org for info about electronics recycling.

In Illinois, http://www.commerce.state.il.us/dceo/bureaus/energy_recycling/recycling and http://www.illinoisrecycles.org/byteback_text.html.



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27 Stone Hill Road, Oswego, IL 60543
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E-mail: jim@agema.net



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Fox Valley PC Association

President

Jon Jackman 630-892-7767
e-mail jockjoj@aol.com

Vice President

Tom Anzalone 630-482-9808
e-mail tanzalone2@earthlink.net

Secretary

Bill Palmer 630-859-8939
e-mail william_palmer@att.net

Treasurer

Richard Chamberlain 630-892-9361
e-mail Rsqrd_chmb@aol.com

Newsletter Layout Editor

Dean Holste 630-966-8521
e-mail [deanholste\(at\)sbcglobal.net](mailto:deanholste(at)sbcglobal.net)

Membership Coordinator

Bill Powell 630-553-1887
e-mail wpnkp81@sbcglobal.net

Website Webmaster

Bob Tuftee 630-553-0513
e-mail retjtt@comcast.net

Publicity Coordinator

VACANT
e-mail

Program Coordinator

Craig McGregor 630-554-1923
e-mail Craig.McGregor@ACXIOM.COM

Fox Tales

Fox Valley PC Association
P.O. Box 369
Oswego, IL 60543-0369



The Fox Valley PC Association Web site is:

www.fvpca.org
Courtesy of APCUG



October Meeting Program:

Build Your Own Firewall with Endian

Presented by:
Tom Anzalone

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

October 20, 2007

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