

# Bits & Bytes

A Publication of the Kern PC Users Group



**Identity Theft Crime presentation given by the Kern County Sheriff's Office**

**The meeting is on February 12 at 7pm**

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Volume 22 Number 02



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Camera-ready copy should be submitted to Bits & Bytes, c/o Dave Chalmers, P.O. Box 2780, Bakersfield, CA 93303

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I hope everyone is safe and sound, staying warm and out of any fender benders from the rain and fog we've been having. We will be raffling off the 1<sup>st</sup> Place Prize of One Year Computer Training at New Horizon and 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize a Cordless Keyboard and Cordless Mouse. We have several tickets and money from tickets, members have taken but have not brought back. So don't forget to bring all the tickets and money in with you when you come to this Thursday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004 meeting.

We have a wonderful program this month that everyone you know should come to the meeting to listen, learn and ask questions. It is IDENTITY THEFT CRIME presented by Detectives John Hartman and Steve West with the Sheriff's Office of Kern County. They will bring some handouts regarding this subject and are extremely nice to talk too. This subject is very dear to my heart, being that I have been a victim three times this past year alone. Once by a babysitter (in prison for the crime), then with another woman with my same name pretending to be me and last on the internet with a eBay scam. This is a topic every mother, brother, cousin, friend, business associate and all should attend. It is hell to go through with so many things you have to do once, let alone several times. I have passwords on bank accounts and credit cards now. There is so many scams going on out there, the more you are aware the less likely you will get got by one. I hope to see you and others at the meeting. Rhonda [:-)

## Accessories for that New Digital Camera

By Ira Wilsker

Last month I wrote about the features to look for in a new digital camera. That column was most timely as many in the national media are predicting that digital camera sales will soar this holiday season. It is also common that many of us “accessorize” our gifts to others to enhance the enjoyment of the recipient. Appropriate accessories would include cases, memory, photo editing software, photo printers and paper, rechargeable batteries, and other useful items.

Cases for digital cameras are usually available from the camera makers as well as a broad assortment of third parties. The primary function of a case is to provide protection for the sensitive instrument. Other functions include a means of conveniently carrying the camera, and a place to store accessories. In shopping for a case, look for proper fit and good protection from harm, as this is the function of a case. This protection may be in the form of padding, water resistance, and a variety of other factors. Do not practice the fine art of “buying cheap” and trusting a several-hundred dollar camera to a five dollar case, unless that case can provide adequate protection and convenience, which will not be likely.

Additional camera memory may be one of the most valuable adjuncts to a new (or already owned) camera. Almost all new cameras come with integral memory which can only store a very limited number of images before it must be downloaded to a computer, or the images in memory must be deleted to make

room for more. While some cameras, such as several of the Sony models, use a floppy disk or mini-CD-R disc to store images directly to a universal media, almost all other digital cameras use some type of nonvolatile memory card or stick to store images. These cards or sticks are inserted directly into the camera, and provide additional storage for images. In shopping for camera memory be absolutely sure that the proper type is selected for the camera, as there is often little interchangeability between the types. Common types of memory are “CF” compact flash, smart memory, multimedia cards (MMC), “SD” secure digital cards (sometimes interchangeable with MMC), tiny “xD” cards, memory sticks, and several other formats. Normally, “more is better” applies to memory capacity, but price must also be balanced with capacity. If photos are taken at full resolution (not normally a best practice), a 2 megapixel camera uses about 900k for a single JPEG format image, so a 32meg memory card will hold about 35 images, while a 128meg card will hold about 142 images. Other resolutions and amounts of memory will be somewhat proportional. A 4 megapixel camera uses about 2 megs of memory for each image at maximum resolution. Another factor which varies among different models of memory is the speed (faster is better) and power consumption (less is better). Along with a new memory card, an external reader, typically with a USB connector, is a great convenience which enables photos to be transferred without the camera.

Almost all digital cameras come with a “lite” or limited functionality photo editing software. The included software may be adequate for normal snapshots, but often we want to do more to enhance or improve our photos. Near

the top of the price range of popular photo editing software is the Adobe PhotoShop at around \$600, and its lesser brothers from Adobe including PhotoShop Elements (about \$90). One of the other powerful photo editing and enhancement utilities is JASC's PaintShop Pro 8, available locally for around \$60. I especially like PaintShop's "One Step Photo Fix" that can automatically perfect almost any reasonable digital image. For the bargain hunters who want a powerful editing and enhancement utility, without paying big bucks is the very popular Irfan Viewer, which is available for free download from [www.irfanview.com](http://www.irfanview.com). Personally, I use both Irfan and Paint Shop Pro about equally. Other editing software is available from other publishers.

Most color printers on the market today can print plausible color images using stock inks and decent quality paper. Some printers offer enhanced photo printing capability for a moderate price, while there are also dedicated photo printers on the market. Good photo grade paper is a necessity to produce quality prints. Some printers on the market print directly to Polaroid film, giving real photos from a digital camera. Many users prefer both the quality and economy of having their local photo finisher print digital prints, a service which most now provide, often at prices less than "do it yourself".

My digital camera eats batteries. Using AA alkaline batteries would be a major expense, if it were not for the now common NiMh or Lithium rechargeable batteries. Many cameras utilize the common AA size, and as an added advantage, the better NiMh rechargeable batteries typically offer many times the

photos of disposable alkalines, at a far lower cost per picture. Spare batteries, especially if fully charged, can be a godsend.

Other popular accessories for digital cameras may appeal more to the advanced user than the amateur. These include tripods, accessory lenses, external flash devices, and other items. Just be sure that the accessories are compatible with the user's camera.

Ira Wilsker is the Advisor for Region 8, APCUG Representative & Bylaws Chair for the Golden Triangle PC Club, a columnist for The Examiner in Beaumont, Texas, and has two radio shows. He also graciously shares his articles with the APCUG editors.

There is no restriction against any non-profit group using this article as long as it is kept in context with proper credit given the author. The Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an international organization of which this group is a member, brings this article to you.

## Online Information for the Elderly & the Disabled

By Steve Rosenthal, Secretary, Space Coast PC Users Group, Cocoa, Florida

On Tuesday, July 22, 2003, Kim Komando ([www.komando.com](http://www.komando.com)) had a link to a site that is of major interest to EVERYONE approaching retirement, Social Security, and/or who is permanently disabled for any reason. The site is sponsored by the National Council on the Aging, and hosted by AOL's GovernmentGuide.com. It is called <http://benefitscheckup.org> (do not add 'www'), and is a comprehensive guide and list of any and all programs that are available to the "older generation," i.e. adults who are ready for Social Security or on permanent disability. This is a "must see" site for anyone with questions of importance about their benefits at or near 65.

The opening page has several choices: 1) How to Use the Site, 2) Tips, 3) Sponsors, 4) Support for N.C.O.A. (National Council On Aging). The first place to go on the site would be the "Benefits CheckUp" button, which will take the reader to several pages

that ask important and pertinent questions about the individual, spouse and any dependents living in the household. There is a second button that takes the reader to a page for prescription drug information and savings.

I would suggest starting with the Check Up button, and going through the questionnaire, filling out ALL the questions as accurately as possible. The reader will need information on: A) State & Zip Code, B) Dates of birth for individual and spouse, C) Type of residence, D) Length of time living there, E) Veteran status, F) Employment History as it refers to governmental employment, G) Prescription Medication List (very important), H) Current income and their sources, I) Current Expenses.

Get this information together BEFORE entering the site, as it will speed the process of "filling in the blanks." The reader has only 20 minutes to answer all the questions, before the site 'times out,' meaning the reader will have to start all over from the beginning.

Once the reader has started the questionnaire (Click the 'Click Here' button), there are about 35 or so ques-

tions, on approximately 10 different pages, some of which will require detailed information on medications, household income, work status, marital status, and the like.

A detailed questionnaire on current medications will probably take the longest, so it is advisable that a current list of medications be written out and by the computer when answering this part of the questionnaire. Not all drugs are listed; some are listed as generic meds.

After filling in all the information, the site will then take a minute or so to assess the input, and select a list of sites and contact addresses/phone numbers for applications for various programs that would be valuable to the individual, assist limited income individuals who need help with their bills and even suggest further research for available programs for the retired and limited income families.

The federal government offers tax breaks and some private companies offer reduced price medicines for individuals and families on fixed incomes, which help retirees and the disabled cope with month-to-month living expenses and 'survival.' As far as I can

tell, none of the information is stored - it is erased after the 20-minute time period has elapsed. It doesn't appear to be 'collected,' and if it is, it would only be for statistical purposes, since the site does not ask for a name, address, phone number, Social Security Number, or any other personal identifying information directly traceable back to the individual. Answering the questions honestly simply retrieves information for the reader. In total, there are about 40 questions, and the most comprehensive is the one about prescription meds.

With ALL of your personal information at hand, it should take about 10 to 15 minutes to complete the survey, and another minute or two for the site to retrieve the pertinent information for your specific situation. The results will vary according to each individual's input and can list a few or several sources for further printing out the final results, as names, addresses, phone numbers and web sites can be extensive and comprehensive, depending on the individual's answers to the questionnaire. Examples of the results may include:

- 1) Golden Access Passport, 2) Food Stamp Program, 3) Medicare Counsel-

ing through the SHINE organization, 4) Real Property Tax & Other Exemptions, 5) Homestead Property Tax Deferral (for FLA residences in particular), 6) Earned Income Tax Credit, and other qualifying programs, depending on income status.

These are by no means the total list; you will get a list that applies directly to YOUR specific needs and income level. Anyone with a computer can access this information, and if you don't have a computer at home, your local library (or even a neighbor, friend or family relative) can access the site, fill in the required information, retrieve the results, and print out the information for you to follow up via letter or phone call.

The Internet is chock full of, and a FANTASTIC source of information if you know where and how to look for it. This particular information might take an individual months to collect separately, but on the Internet, it took only 20- 30 minutes to gather, print, and store in a file that can be referred to over and over again.

I was able to download the PDF file with ALL the information in text form, which I can then read at my lei-

sure or constantly go back to as a reference source. Anyone who is interested in available benefits should access this site, and do the questionnaire for themselves. Again, the name of the site is [http:// benefitscheckup.org](http://benefitscheckup.org) and is available 24/7.

Take advantage of what the Internet has to offer; you'd be surprised at the wealth of information available. If you need further information, my Email address is [stever43@bellsouth.net](mailto:stever43@bellsouth.net). Feel free to contact me, and I will do my best to help you find the information you are seeking. Good luck with your search, and use the Internet to its fullest capacity, you'll be pleasantly surprised at what it has to offer.

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# Take Rest Breaks, Exercise To Prevent Computer Ailments By Ken Fermoye

Between us, my wife and I offer a catalog of physical ills caused by long hours of working on computers: repetitive stress injury (RSI), neck pain, backaches and vision problems. Liz underwent surgery twice for carpal tunnel syndrome and still has frequent wrist and hand pain.

I have suffered from aggravated neck and back injuries. My vision has deteriorated from 20 years of staring at a monitor, although admittedly age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and cataracts have been more damaging.

The sad truth is that if we knew 15 years ago what we know now, these problems need not have occurred. Or if they had, they would have been less severe. Even sadder is that prevention of many computer-related ailments is neither difficult nor especially time-consuming.

Frequent rest breaks are vital, says my chiropractor, Kurt W. Rice, who is also my son-in-law, God bless him. (He has helped me more times in recent years with neck and back problems than I care to remember!)

The breaks needn't be lengthy. Dr. Kurt recommends that we get up from our chairs every half-hour or so, stretch our backs and walk for a minute or two. Other experts offer different opinions about frequency and duration of breaks but all agree that they are vital.

Sitting and working at a computer creates more tension and stress on muscles, nerves, tendons and joints than most of us realize. Our bodies fight gravity every minute that

we're seated. Breaks alleviate this tension and stress.

To prevent the dreaded carpal tunnel syndrome, during your break let your hands go limp at the wrist and wiggle them vigorously in what some call the clerk & typist exercise.

Some people use voice recognition programs to cut down on their need to use a keyboard and mouse. I find that difficult; after more than 50 years of banging away at typewriter and computer keys, dictation comes hard to me. Now that voice recognition is improving and more reliable, however, I've resolved to use it more often. A major benefit is that you can use a microphone or headset while standing or even lying down. I plan to try dictating drafts, then to rewrite and edit as necessary from the keyboard.

Vision experts warn that we should take eye breaks even more frequently. Every 10 or 12 minutes, look away from the monitor at objects 10 to 12 feet away. When I'm working with a word processor or any other program that allows me to increase type size easily and temporarily, I do it. Working with 14- instead of 10-point type prevents squinting and straining to see my work. It also allows me to sit up straight, not bent over the keyboard, and you can always reduce point size before printing or sending e-mail.

I mentioned my neck and back injuries earlier. The neck problems began about 17 years ago. I was riding my bicycle when a large tree limb broke off and fell on me. (Fortunately I was wearing a good helmet or the freak accident might have killed me.) That caused some damage, which increased with age and was aggravated by working on computers and long-distance cycling. The pain got so bad I could not turn my head to either side more than 12 or 15 degrees. Dr. Kurt came to the

rescue, with manipulation, ultra-sound and heat packs. He recommended several simple exercises, which I try to do regularly.

My back injuries were computer-related. The first came when I installed a second drive in one of our machines. I crawled under a desk to get at the computer case. After removing all the cables, I tried to lift the box and slide it out to where I could work on it, not waiting to shift to a position that would give me more leverage.

Bad move. I heard a pop and was in instant agony. It took several weeks of Dr. Kurt's ministrations to recover from that one. I injured it again in October 1999 after conducting my monthly desktop publishing/word processing SIG. I took a computer and 17-inch monitor out of a car trunk with a high lip that made it impossible to lift them properly. I had to bend and lift with my back and pop, there it went again! This time, recovery took even longer.

I mention these details to make a point. The first instance was pure accident. No way could I foresee that a brittle, rotted pepper tree branch would break off and fall just as I pedaled under it. The second injury occurred because I didn't take time to position myself properly. The third case was avoidable too; I should never have tried to lift heavy objects out of that particular car trunk. Trouble is, I forget my hard-used back is more vulnerable now than it was even 20 ago, and I think many of us who have reached senior citizen status do the same.

I just caught myself in a no-no a few minutes ago. I wanted a book from a built-in shelf high and to the right of my home office workstation. I started to reach up, twisting my back at an awkward angle. Various muscles prepared to scream in protest, so I did what I

should have done in the first place. I moved my chair out of the way, got a step stool I keep folded behind the door, set it firmly in place and climbed up to find the desired book. It took a few extra minutes, but it kept me from aggravating my previously-injured back.

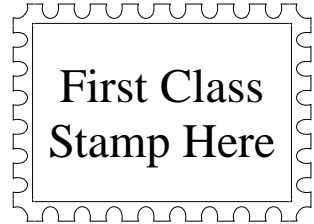
The book, by the way was Zap! How your computer can hurt you and what you can do about it. Written by Don Sellers (edited by Stephen E. Roth). You can find Zap! and the condensed version, 25 Steps to Safe Computing, also by Sellers, at [micronite.com](http://micronite.com). Either book would be a good addition to your library.

Meanwhile give yourself, and your body, a break at least once every half-hour!

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*We are on the web at*  
**WWW.KIPUG.ORG**

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**Sarah Perelli-Minetti Webmaster**

Meetings are held on the second Thursday of the month  
at the Kern Superintendent of Schools Building.  
17th and L streets Downtown  
Meeting Time is 7 pm