

Antelope Valley Microcomputer Users Group



AVMUG NEWSLETTER

September 2004 Newsletter

Next AVMUG Meeting:

- Wed. Nov. 17, 2004
- 7:00 P.M.
- Lancaster Senior Center
- 777 West Jackman
- Lancaster, CA

IMPORTANT INFORMATION Read this Newsletter carefully your name might appear in one of the articles.

Vote

Don't Forget it is time to run for office, vote, and volunteer to be a Talent Pool Member. The AVMUG can't continue to operate without your help.

Also it is time to renew your membership.

See Page 4 for Ballot
And Membership Renewal
Form

Hoaxes, Chain Letters,

Sob Stories -- Check Them Out, Don't Forward Email Hoaxes -- Check 'em Out, Don't Forward.

By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor, Region 2; columnist for AARP's Computer and Technology Web site

Spam and malware -- nasty virus, worm, spyware, and such software -- turn many peoples' email inboxes into bloated wastelands. Anti-virus and anti-spyware tools help prune the weeds. But another hazard lurks as innocent-seeming email: hoaxes, chain letters, and sob stories, all urgently demanding that you "Forward this to everyone you know, right now!"

Many of them come from well-meaning friends, relatives, and colleagues. Others come from legitimate mailing lists you've subscribed to, and some surely come as spam. They often have a common structure: they tell a plausible story, cite seemingly authentic sources, contain specific details, offer a compelling reward or threaten something scary, and issue a call to action.

Before following the instructions, remember that something isn't true just because it's on the Internet, whether as an email or a Web page article. It was said early-on that the Internet makes everyone a publisher. While that can be true, it doesn't mean that everything published is true or well-intended.

I've seen earnest warnings posted to work-topic mailing lists, such as a story about a new method of carjacking becoming common at gas stations. A five-second Google search on carjacking hoax "gas station" revealed dozens of links such as

<http://hoaxbusters.ciac.org/HBScareChains.shtml> which show the warning to be a hoax. A similar bogus post cautioned not to blink headlights at cars driving with their headlights off at night, lest one become a target for gang violence. Searching on headlights "gang initiation" revealed sites including <http://www.snopes.com/horrors/madmen/lightout.asp>. Another type of hoax masquerades as virus alerts, suggesting searching for a specific file on your PC, warning that its presence indicates infection with the virus, and suggesting deleting the file. No surprise, a simple search on the

given filename combined with the word "hoax" reveals the warning's hoaxish nature. A funny parody of such warnings equates following the instructions with banging oneself in the head with a hammer, then sending hammers to everyone you know, telling them to bang themselves in the head. The full text is at <http://mailman.theapt.org/pipermail/sfobug/2004-March/001080.html>

Many hoaxes have been around for years; some will soon celebrate tenth or higher birthdays. Just like cicadas -- due in many areas this year on their every-17-year visit -- hoaxes ebb and flow, decline and are rediscovered and rebroadcast. Hardy perennials include myths of Bill Gates paying people to forward email so he can track it, and of a

Neiman-Marcus cookie recipe ripoff. Another deals with Congress planning an email tax, urging recipients to complain to their legislators and forward the alert. Sometimes details undermine the claims (the supposed Congressional bill number is invalid), sometimes they're well-crafted. But the important lesson isn't remembering specific debunked hoaxes, it's being suspicious about potentially fictitious news and being able to search for reliable information on such matters.

Remember that Web sites are not equally definitive and reliable. There's a big difference between a niche/hobby/advocacy site -- perhaps newly

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Board of Directors:

President - Bob Lion
president@avmug.av.org

Vice President - David Francis
vice-president@avmug.av.org

Secretary - Vacant
secretary@avmug.av.org

Treasurer - Ruth Moore
Treasurer@avmug.av.org

Webmaster/Librarian - Ray Coronado
Librarian@avmug.av.org

Newsletter Editor - Bob Swank
Talent Pool
editor@avmug.av.org

Past President - Frank LaLiberte

Talent Pool:

Membership Chairman - JB Brown
imasok@surfside.net

Fundraising Advisor - Ed Groth
Guy14kt@qnet.com

Ken Henderson
Kfh777@juno.com

Hardware Co-technician -
Kevin Caricofe

Club Photographer

Ray Santana-Images by Santana

Our Internet Site:

<http://www.avmug.av.org>

Our Phones:

AVMUG 661-940-9680

Presidents Corner Help Alert November 2004

AVMUG needs a President/ Vice President or we face DISBANDING!

AVMUG faces a critical situation at its November 17th meeting, as of press time.

November elections are upon us and once again it is time to select our officers to continue the good works we have accomplished this year. Our membership has more than doubled, we have added several computers, monitors, a media projector, a network of computers, three workgroups, gamer's group, and an active website & newsletter, and we have prevailed over our funds limitations and continued our door prize program. To continue to grow and evolve, we need good leaders to set the path and guide the club.

Our current Board of Directors and our Talent Pool has done an outstanding job rebuilding and energizing AVMUG. Our members have supported club operations by participating in our 50/50 program. We are growing and our future looks bright, except for need of two board positions.

Our nominating committee has been successful in finding many supportive members to run in all other positions. If no one is willing to serve as President and Vice President, then under our current bylaws, the club will have to be disbanded effective January, after continuous operations since 1982.

I ask each of you to consider accepting nomination to either the position of President or Vice President, so our club will continue.

I will continue to serve on the board as Past President in accordance with our bylaws.

If you would accept nomination to any other club position or could help the club by serving on a committee (i.e.

hardware, membership, fund raising, software review...) please let me know as soon as possible.

At the November meeting, we will accept nominations from the floor, but the person being nominated must be willing to accept the nomination.

Also, if you have any suggestions for guest speakers, programs, field trips, or workshop activities, I would like to hear about them. We want to continue to improve service to our members by providing a wide variety of activities that appeals to all skill levels.

If you can't attend the November meeting, you can print up the ballot from the newsletter. Your ballot must be in our hands at the November General Meeting before counting starts.

Let's keep the club going, and bring some fresh thinking into the board. AVMUG has been here since 1982. Please think about this and be prepared to discuss the situation-If someone has an alternative method of operating AVMUG without a President or Vice President, maybe we can make a change to the bylaws.

Bob

Disclaimer:

<>"By following any of our tips, advice, or recommendations (for software, hardware or otherwise), you agree not to hold AVMUG or any of it's MEMBERS responsible for any problems that may arise in following said advice. All of our tips, recommendations, and information are intended for you to use at your own risk.

Although all information given is proposed to be accurate at the time of publication, we make no guarantee, either expressed or implied, that the Information in this newsletter is totally error free and 100% accurate".

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Hoaxes, Chain Letters, Sob Stories

launched -- and a long-running site committed to factual analysis, concerned about its reputation, and providing updates, clarifications, and corrections when needed. Credible and well-regarded debunking sites include <http://www.urbanlegends.com/> and <http://www.snopes.com/>. A wonderful reference for all-things-virus-related is

<http://www.vmyths.com/>; its False Authority Syndrome writeup explains how misinformation spreads and why it's important to consider the qualifications of people and organizations making assertions.

Another type of "forward me now" email is sob stories. The granddaddy of Internet tear jerkers is Craig Shergold. A real boy (eight years old in 1989) had a real brain tumor. People close to Craig used a paper chain letter to solicit get well cards to cheer him up and earn listing in the Guinness Book of Records. They succeeded: the million cards received in less than a year took the record. After 30 million, a philanthropist heard of Craig and paid for surgery. Craig has recovered; he and his family have pleaded for an end to cards. But with Internet-powered networking and new people constantly discovering this "worthy cause" and forwarding appeals to everyone they know, the torrent is unending. The whole story is at <http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/weekly/aa102997.htm>.

Then there are chain letters -- what can I say? Unless you've signed up for the "chain letter of the day" club, you're probably not happy to see them. Especially armed with dire threats or implausible promises, chain letters are an imposition on the recipient.

Perhaps once a novelty, especially if they carried interesting paper letterheads and postmarks, with creative handwritten endorsements, emailed chain letters are simply a modern-day irritant. Just don't do it!

Before forwarding anything to anyone, especially to a mailing list or "everyone

you know", consider whether your potential addressees really want to receive it. If it's a hoax, chain letter, or sob story, they probably don't. A better course of action is to quietly discard sob stories and chain letters, and to research hoaxes and send debunking information back to the sender.

Computers Expanding the Use of Robots

Jim Hinwood, Columnist & Program Chair, Monterey Bay Users Group -- PC, California

So many articles I've seen lately have been about robotics---it's the newest hot topic. Last month's *Technology Review* and this month's *Wired* magazine have articles on robotics. When I see the Roomba vacuuming a house automatically on TV it reminds me of The Jetsons cartoon series where the home of the future is all automated and housework is a thing of the past. Many of the cartoons I remember as a kid were about automated houses that went crazy and started to attack the cat or the dog: its robots would come out and start sweeping or vacuuming at the slightest indication of dirt. As computers become more powerful, who knows what timesaving devices may be invented?

In the *Technology Review* article, the author makes a prediction that robotics will take off the way computers took off ten years ago. The more powerful computers we have today will be the brains for this new class of servants. These robots may not look like the anthropomorphic types we see in movies and TV. Many may just be simple-looking box-shaped machines (like the Roomba) with one specific job. But some will certainly be more complex with a multitude of functions and a human-like shape. Honda has recently been advertising a robot that is complex and can do many things.

Robots have been used in manufacturing for quite a while now. One of the reasons we Americans fell behind the Japanese in the auto industry is because they had the largest number of automobile plant robots in the world. Part of the future mechanization of our manufacturing plants will be heavily dependent on robots. The computing

power of the latest CPU chips is in the trillions of operations per second. In ten years we will no doubt have plenty of chip-powered intelligence to drive robots to unprecedented capabilities.

Isaac Asimov wrote *I, Robot* in the 1950s and there is a current film with the same name starring Will Smith. With these stories always comes the fear of artificial intelligence and whether it may someday have the ability to take control from humans.

This is a recurrent theme in everything from *2001: A Space Odyssey* with the computer Hal, to the current *I, Robot*. This fear of our inventions taking over may not be as important as how we feel about the egos of those who use the technology.

I recently read about some robotic legs which could give the wearer the ability to carry a much larger load in battle, similar to a pair of bionic legs from *The Six-Million Dollar Man* TV show. How long will it be before robots fight it out as seen in the movie *The Terminator*? There are probably many battlefield applications for robots and many are probably already in the making.

The real problem is not the artificial intelligence but the human intelligence behind it, directing robots to do good or evil. I hope that like the computer, robots will become powerful tools for the benefit of all mankind.

My first thought after reading many of these articles is that this would be a great time to invest in this fledgling science. In the movie *Frequency*, Dennis Quaid plays a character that goes back in time to change his past. While he is there he mentions one word to his friend. When he gets back to the present he runs into this friend who remembered the word and is now rich and has the word, Yahoo, on the license plate of his Mercedes. How many of us would like to know what the next big investment is going to be?

Maybe in the future, one of us will be driving that Mercedes around with "robots" written on our license plate!

Antelope Valley Microcomputer User Group
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BALLOT

Here is the current slate of officers to be presented to the general membership at the November 17, 2004 meeting.

Nominations will be taken from the floor prior to the confirmation of the slate.

Currently, no one has agreed to accept nomination for President or Vice President.

If you cannot attend the meeting, you can have it dropped off or mail it. We must have it by ballot counting time and know that it came from a member in good standing.

President: _____

Vice President: _____

Secretary: Lori Johnson

Treasurer: Ed Groth

Newsletter Editor: Bob Swank

Librarian/Webmaster: _____
Kevin Caricofe

Please

Don't let us melt away to nothing.



January 2004

It's Time to Renew for 2005

If you renew before the counting of the ballots at the November 17th meeting,

You can still renew at the old dues rate of \$25.00, and family members are still free.

(this will probably change with the upcoming bylaws revision).

BONUS BONUS :-) With your early renewal, you will get a chance at a winning a bonus drawing for a \$25.00 or a \$50.00 Best Buy Gift Card.



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Club Photographer

2005 Membership Renewal Form:

Name _____

Family Member/s _____

Please print the names as you would like to appear on your name tag/s

Optional:

Email address-needed if you want to receive the AVMUG email newsletter.

Phone Number needed if you want to be notified of meeting cancellations, official club communications.

May we list with your name, your phone number and/or your email address in the password protected club roster on the AVMUG Website?

YES _____ NO _____

Comments:

Special Interest:

Operating System:

Win95___ Win98___ Win98SE___

WinXP___ Linux___ Other___

