Antelope Valley Microcomputer Users Group

AVMUG
NEWSLETTER

July 2005

President's Corner

We welcome a return to our published newsletter. During a transition to a new editor we had to suspend publication but have worked very hard over the last couple of month's to make the transition and get ready to produce a new issue. And, if you are reading this, you know that we have done just that. I use the royal we but, in truth, my input into the process has really been limited to cranking out these words, and doing it late as is usual for myself.

Our new newsletter editor has done yeoman's work in getting this issue laid out and put to press (or what passes for press now). I am very hopeful that we will be able to produce an issue every month from here on out and that it continues to provide out members with valuable information.

I am happy to be able to announce that our plans for a network at the senior center are proceeding rapidly. We have had a recent influx of equipment due to the generosity of several organizations. We'll go into exactly whom and what they've provided later this year. We are currently putting together a proposal to present to the director of the senior center and are hopeful that we can proceed with the installation of the network shortly. We expect that this will provide benefits to both the members of AVMUG and the community that makes use of the senior center on a daily basis. Stay tuned, this is definitely a developing situation.

We have a great presentation planned for this month and I hope that everyone is able to attend.

Michael Oke, II

Tech News & Notes

Microsoft announced Windows Automotive 5.0, the latest version of the operating system designed for in-vehicle computers running navigation, entertainment and communication systems. The software can now handle programs to provide 3D driving directions, as well as find the nearest and cheapest gas stations, and provide real-time traffic updates. The operating system also provides support for various digital media platforms, such as Windows Media Audio (.wma), MP3 and DVD. The OS also supports many connectivity standards, such as Bluetooth, USB and UPnP (Universal Plug and Play).

A new, cruel virus has been making the rounds since the London subway bombings. The email containing the virus claims to have an attachment with amateur video footage of the bombings. If you receive an email with the subject line "Terror in London" be very careful, and take extra care with that email. The computer you save may be your own. The virus works by downloading a program that can enable a third party to control your computer from a remote location. An IT director in London was quoted as saying, "Computer viruses exist in many forms but for the creators to take advantage of the terrorist attacks in London is particularly cruel."

!!! Firefox Alert !!!

A security research firm, Secunia, alerted Mozilla of numerous security bugs in their popular Firefox web browser. The worst bug was related to the way Firefox treated Javascript which enabled phishers to more easily fool consumers into releasing private information. Mozilla responded very quickly with a new, totally re-programmed version of Firefox (version 1.0.5). Users are encouraged to download the newest version at www.mozilla.org.

Disclaimer:

Freecycle Network Offers Never-Ending Garage Sale (And It's All Free!)

By Gabe Goldberg, APCUG Advisor and Columnist, AARP Computers and Technology Website

"It's not easy being green", sang Kermit the green Muppet frog. But it's getting easier, as people, corporations, non-profit organizations, and government agencies recognize benefits of conserving and recycling resources of all sorts.

There have always been opportunities such as garage sales, flea markets, and thrift shops for casual/local exchanges of goods. Most of us have likely both bought and sold: giving new life to things we've enjoyed but no longer need, cashing in gifts we can't quite imagine using, and finding economical goods courtesy of neighbors and charitable organizations.

Before we recently moved [http://www.aarp.org/learntech/computers/life_online/Articles/a2005-01-05-preserving_tech_moving.html], my wife and I took the opportunity to get rid of anything we thought was surplus. Fortunately, we beat the year-end crush at places like Salvation Army. But in December I did see 18-wheelers being loaded with goods from people who suddenly remembered the tax deduction for making such donations to charitable organizations. And I wondered how much of the tonnage being hauled would actually be sold and reused.

As in many other areas, the Internet lends new sparkle and efficiency to an old idea: using things until they're completely worn out. It's really true that one person's junk can be another person's treasure. In fact, the worldwide Freecycle(tm) Network [www.freecycle.org] offers goods at the Internet's favorite price (at least for buyers): free! Perhaps best of all, the Network offers in-person one-to-one transfers making it likely that goodies will go places where they're cherished.

The Web site notes:

The worldwide Freecycle Network is made up of many individual groups across the globe. It's a grassroots movement of people who are giving (and getting) stuff for free in their own towns. Each local group is run by a local volunteer moderator (good people). Membership is free.

The Freecycle Network was started in May 2003 to promote waste reduction in Tucson's downtown and help save desert landscape from being taken over by landfills. The Network provides individuals and non-profits an electronic forum to "recycle" unwanted items.

Freecycling is interesting because, while it could only be done on the Internet, it has a very local focus. That is, while Web sites and discussion mailing lists draw worldwide clientele, physical transfer of free goods is constrained to relatively small areas.

So Freecycle operates as locally oriented mailing lists. For example, in the Washington, DC region, there's a huge list for the central city (one of the top ten lists with more than 6,000 people), and many suburbs have their own lists with dozens or hundreds of subscribers.

The main Freecycle Web site lists rules and etiquette, which are echoed by welcome messages to new subscribers. It's all simple and reasonable:
Goods offered must be available for pickup in the local area; stick to recycling, avoid

politics, spam, and off-topic messages; begin all e-mail subject lines with one of the words OFFER/TAKEN/WANTED/RECEIVED

Rules such as "Keep it free, keep it legal, keep it safe for all ages" prohibit offering or requesting items such as guns, prescription drugs, "adult" material, alcohol, and cigarettes. Pets are OK, though. Only free and physical stuff is allowed; barters/exchanges/sales are barred, as are services offered or wanted.

I'm told that the list is best read in individual messages rather than digests (which collect dozens of messages into one e-mail) since offered items are often snatched up in just a few minutes. A reply in five minutes might be too late!

Messages are transmitted by the Yahoo! Groups Web site [groups.yahoo.com] so list archives can be searched. This allows making sure that no TAKEN or RECEIVED has been sent for the OFFER or WANTED you're about to answer.

Donors can decide which request gets the goods. First-reply-wins is a fine approach, but some decide based on why a person needs something. Businesses can use Freecycle to dispose of goods -- for example computing equipment that's usable but not marketable. A company with 25 monitors might offer them to a Freecycle list -- perhaps specifying minimum pickup of five. So smaller companies, recycling organizations, or community-minded individuals could collect and redistribute them where they're needed.

A very unscientific analysis of about 40 postings divided into 16 OFFERs, 12 TAKENs, 10 WANTEDs, and two

RECEIVEDs -- a very respectable success rate for OFFERs and WANTEDs! As of when I'm writing this, more than 2,000 large and small communities have Freecycle groups with more than 700,000 members. And the Web site gives step-by-step instructions for starting one where there is none. Go forth and Freecycle!

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Be sure to attend the July meeting! Featured speaker will be Dan Kozina of Complete Computer Care in Lancaster. Dan's wealth of knowledge certainly promises a very informative presentation!