

So you want to buy a new computer?

The star of the Modesto PC User Group’s next membership meeting on Thursday, April 20, will be Nick Davies, knowledgeable manager of the PC Club computer superstore in Modesto.

He will talk about what you need to look out for in buying a new computer in this precarious time – just before the advent of Microsoft’s new operating system Vista, reportedly due out early next year. He will discuss the latest in computers and touch on what to expect from Vista. He also will answer questions about computers and various associated devices.

The meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. with the Random Access Special Interest Group, where members can get their most pressing computer questions answered. After refreshments at 7:30 p.m., Davies will offer his program.

The meeting, as usual, will take place at Destiny Christian Center on Carver Road just south of Roseburg Avenue. Members and guests should park on the south side of the building.

Election Notes

The club will be preparing for the up coming election in June starting with a nomination of members of the club to fill the positions of President, Vice President and Member at large. If you or someone you know would like to be considered to fill one of these positions, please contact either Bud Bondiotti, Ray Nichols, or Terry Fix to submit your nomination.

For directions to the meeting location see page 10.

**Next Meeting
Thursday, April 27, 7:30
p.m.
Random Access SIG
6:30 p.m.**

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Next board meeting
Come have dinner with the board,
7 p.m. Wednesday, May 3rd,
Ridgeway’s, Modesto.

Be sure and check our web site for last minute information www.mpcug.net



Presidents Report Mike Kumler

Greetings for the April issue of PC Post. At the recent Board meeting, Bud suggested that we are not taking advantage of all that the APCUG offers. As I dutifully begin to do some research, I find that one of the things that many user Groups do is a community service project of some sort. The thought crossed my mind, what kind of a, computer using related, project might our Group be interested in pursuing. I will leave it there for now; just something to think about, until our next general meeting. I will try to get a feel for whether we would be interested and then perhaps kick around some ideas.

It is that dreaded income tax time again. Has anyone had experience with the on e-filing available either/both the IRS or State Franchise Tax Board? I have not yet tried them, but perhaps if enough people I know have done so, I might be persuaded next year. I don't jump on the band wagon first! The Group would like to hear from anyone who utilized either of these systems this year.

It looks like the Blackberry suit has been settled. I know quite a few people who are breathing a sigh of relief over that one. Did anyone else (like me) have their doubts?

It seemed to me that Blackberry had a very good chance at being put completely out of business.

With the additional delay of the release of Microsoft's new, 64-bit operating system, our program for this month should be more than timely. Nick will present us with all the answers when it comes to buying a computer. I'm sure he will be ready for your questions as well.

I look forward to seeing everyone at the next general meeting.

Membership Report Hank Mudge

Members renewing - Thank you for your support:

Betty Hinkley 12/06 Mike Kumler 3/07 Hank Mudge 2/06 Bettie Nickerson 4/06 Donald Risen 2/06

Members dues expiring in March:

Hubert VanVaught Skip Pringle

Members dues expiring in April:

David Futrell Vincent Kerrigan Lester Maxfield Phillip Anselmo John Selover

Members dues expiring in May:

Dick Currie Pete Ball Bee Hagens Jerry Pack Alfred Kaufman

Treasurer's Report Barb Cameron

<u>Income</u>	<i>Modesto PC User Group</i>		<u>Expenses</u>
		<i>Financial Statement</i>	
		<i>March 2006</i>	
Membership	\$ 120.00		
Interest on Savings	\$ 0.04		
Donations	<u>\$ 0.00</u>		
Total Income	\$ 120.04		Total Expenses \$ 0.00

Current Assets	
Checking - US Bank, Modesto	\$ 1,894.91
Savings, US Bank, Modesto	<u>\$ 332.26</u>
	\$ 2,227.17
Fixed Assets	<u>\$ 0.00</u>
Total Club Assets	\$ 2,227.1

Claude's Bytes

By Claude Delphia, Editor Emeritus, Modesto PC User Group

Moving — disposing of software • Email failures II • s • s • s • s

Moving, going, going, gone — I'm now living back in Patterson which I consider my home town. I liked living in Ceres, and miss it, but my life now is about downsizing, simplification and returning to my family, old friends and roots.

However the moving experience — I detailed disposing of old computers and parts in the last Post — got even more painful. As I went hurriedly through boxes of long stored computer stuff, I chucked dozens of old pieces of software, some going back 24 years. I did it so fast, I'm not totally sure what was tossed, and what I saved. I know at one point, I had a 5¼ diskette of PC-DOS 1.0. I hope I didn't throw it away as it might be worth something, but then I thought the same about the original IBM-PC, which is now in some recycling process, probably crushed to pieces.

One of the things I saw when looking through old software, was all the wonderful bound boxes that documentation used to come in. I guess with the prices we paid back then, these fancy boxes were the norm. Of course the documentation was pretty fancy also, and unfortunately not very useful, something which is unfortunately still basically true.

Jim Goodman and I were reminiscing the other day and agreed that we seldom looked at documentation unless we ran into a major problem with a new piece of software. Part of the reason for avoiding the documentation, is that software is pretty standard. With Windows, the same button usually does the same thing no matter what software you have.

So when I get a new piece of software, even one I've never used before, I just use the Quick install and leave the instruction book in the box. Sometimes I have to pull it out and look up something, but that's rare. Does this mean I'm not getting all I can out of the software? Yes, probably. But usually don't use all the fancy extra stuff built into the software, using it mainly for its primary purpose.

I'm so used to various software that I just start experimenting with the various buttons on the tool bar until I get a good feel of what it can do and how it does it. Jim also noted that neither he nor I usually use the often included built in "Tutorials." I think I remember using it once on a new program about 18 months ago. In fact neither he nor I could recall if they still include tutorials in new software.

Now don't take this the wrong way. This doesn't imply anything about those who do use the tutorials or the instruction books. If you really aren't that experienced with a lot of different software, then by all means use the book and tutorials. You may well be better off than we are.

So back to keeping old documentation: if you haven't looked at in ages, you should probably put it in permanent storage. You certainly shouldn't keep previous versions of documentation. However you should keep old software disks as these may be required to reinstall from scratch. I had a program years ago that required that you start from two versions back and then move forward with each upgrade. That was a real ordeal but that's the way they require a reinstall.

Lost emails — I've written here about the fact that you can't be sure emails sent, have been received. This was proven in a major way a week ago when I sent an important email. Three days later, I got a message that

(Claude Continued on page 9)

Google Earth

By Joe Schmitt, Member of the Tampa Bay Computer Society

jschmitt(at)tampabay.rr.com www.tampa-bay.org

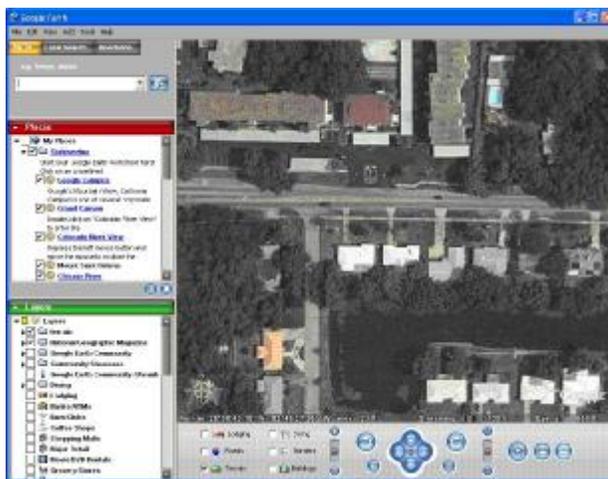
One of the greatest tools of the internet has always been that of maps. From the early days of the Internet www.mapquest.com was a great source for online geography. Now a myriad of new tools is available to home internet users to navigate through the world.

Believe it or not, one of the biggest uses for online maps is not for that big long trip to the Grand Canyon with the kids but for finding local addresses. How many times recently have you used a service such as www.mapquest.com or maps.google.com to find that new restaurant or new store? While the online services available can be used to find the next route cross-country they are more often used locally.

Another popular role that current cartographic sites such as mappoint.msn.com serve is where a particular place is in relation to your current location. There are many times when we are watching the news and someplace like [Jumbo, WV](http://Jumbo.WV) pops up; there is now a great new tool to let you explore the world virtually.

[Google Earth](http://earth.google.com)(<http://earth.google.com>) is a new offering from Google that offers a unique spin on online cartography. While most mapping services try to offer you a straight forward approach to mapping, Google's newest tool takes quite a different tact. Described by Google as "a globe that sits in your PC," Google Earth offers a new perspective on mapping software. Like all its major competitors, Google Earth will allow you to find addresses, points of interest, or a driving route. What makes Google Earth different is the way in which items are displayed to the user. Google Earth has to install software on your machine, and once installed it needs an internet connection to display its images. Also be advised that Google Earth is resource intensive: it requires a fairly fast machine with 3D graphics capability.

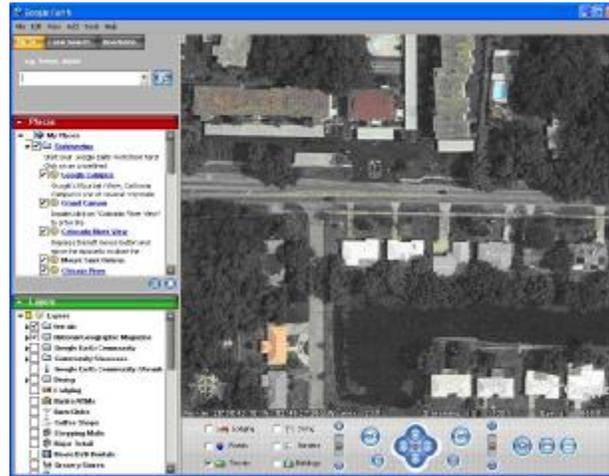
When you first start up Google Earth you see the below image:



Google Earth generates an image of the planet taken from a mosaic of satellite and aerial photographs. If you enter an address such as your home in the search bar, Google Earth doesn't just pop a map of your neighborhood but actually *flies* to the location. You see the image of the earth get larger and larger as if you were descending on the location from outer space. All the time as the planet moves closer, the program continually generates more detailed pictures of the surface until you are sitting above the location you are searching for.

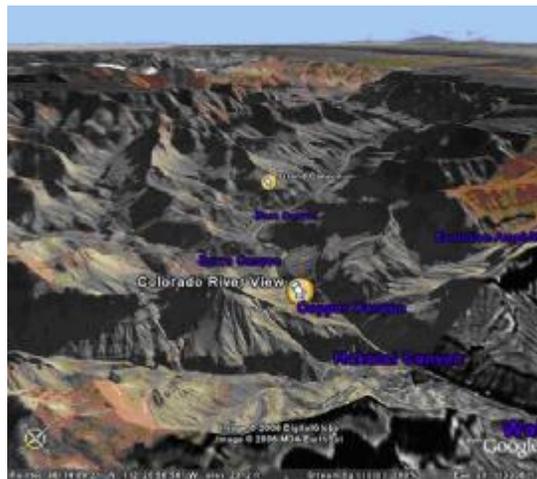
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Another great feature of Google Earth is angular display. Not only are dead top center views available but you can also tilt the plane of the viewing area to see things in the distance. Now this sounds like I should be able to tilt the image and see the windows on my house, but that just isn't possible. All the images are from satellite or aerial photographs that are also taken from straight overhead.

Topography is another feature that Google Earth incorporates makes the tilting feature quite impressive. Topography is how the terrain rises and falls in any given location. Google earth uses 3D technology to render the rise and fall of the land based on radar data gathered from multiple space shuttle missions. The images are melded with the topography and you have the impression of seeing mountains rise and canyons fall:



Not only does Google Earth provide these new ways to explore the world but they have also included the ability to include data files of your own. If you choose to upgrade to the “plus” version you can import data from any of the popular GPS (Global Positioning System) receivers currently available. You can import waypoints, routes, and tracks from the unit.

Also, you can import images, such as a topographic map, and orient them as overlays on the satellite images. The application will let you resize and rotate the map until it fits. Google Earth will also let you save data in files that can be shared with other users. One interesting aspect is files that can utilize data available on the web for dynamic interaction. Click on this link to see some examples: <http://earth.google.com/tour/thanks-win.html> . For example there is a link to a file that will track flights around the US live. It displays an icon for the plane and shows it in relation to where it is in the air.

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The New, the Best, and the Worst

Collected by Pim Borman, Website Editor, SW Indiana PC Users Group, Inc.

<http://swipcug.apcug.org/> swipcug(at)sigecom.net

Talking Turk-ey.

If you've ever earned some pocket money stuffing envelopes, the advent of e-mail may have put you out of business. But the Internet giveth what it taketh away.

Much of the unanticipated success of the Internet is due to the contributions made by selfless volunteers. Businesses then realized the importance of the Internet to advertise themselves, and Wile E. Coyote would now be able to order his Road Runner catchers from www.acme.com (there actually is such a Web site). Nevertheless, volunteers expect to derive some form of satisfaction from their efforts, and the equivalent of envelope stuffing for free does not draw many aficionados.

The Internet would not be more than a large flea market were it not for the powerful search engines capable of retrieving information almost instantly. The retrieval algorithms depend on vast indexes maintained by constantly culling millions of Web sites world wide. Only computer-readable text is indexable. Yet, there are many other types of valuable information on the Web that are not computer-readable, such as hand-written documents and graphical images. It is almost impossible for a computer to distinguish a picture of Picabo Street in her ski outfit from Mother Teresa in her nun's habit. A human can distinguish them at a glance. Hand-written documents must be retyped, as many genealogy indexers know. Thus there is a great need for indexing graphics and hand-written information that requires human input. There are many other instances where human input is required, such as rating the validity of computer-generated keywords describing search targets, or retrieving numbers from scanned documents, such as transfer deeds.

Amazon, with its interest in computer searching with its A9.com search engine, has established a program that enlists human help for such tasks. The program is called Mechanical Turk, after a mechanical chess-playing automaton in 1769 that defeated nearly every opponent it faced. It featured a life-sized wooden mannequin, adorned with a fur-trimmed robe and a turban, seated behind a cabinet. It confounded such brilliant challengers as Benjamin Franklin and Napoleon Bonaparte. What they did not know was the secret behind the Mechanical Turk: a human chess master cleverly concealed inside.

Amazon has set up a Web site (<http://www.mturk.com/mturk/welcome>) as a link between programmers looking for "artificial, artificial intelligence," and paid volunteers providing human inputs to perform the requested tasks, referred to as HITS. These are typically of a simple, repetitive nature and pay a minimal amount, a penny or so, for each input. For instance, I saw a HIT listed to look up deed records on a Web site and find the transfer taxes. The volunteers that complete such tasks are rated on their proficiency and accuracy and build up a reputation that qualifies them for somewhat more challenging and higher-paying HITS.

It is an interesting concept that may catch on as it is further refined. (Mentioned in Bill Machrone's column in *PC Magazine*, February 17, 2006).

Oldie Tribulations

I own a 6-year old former dream machine, once briefly the envy of friends and relatives, a Dell desktop with a 600MHz Pentium III processor and a 20GB hard drive. Over the years I added another 20GB hard drive, upped the RAM to 256 MB, and upgraded from Windows 98SE2 to Windows ME. Lately I have been using this computer to evaluate a variety of Linux distributions that I installed on the second drive in separate partitions.

Recently I took advantage of a special offer to update my version of Xandros (Linux) Desktop Open Circulation to the DeLuxe Edition. I wanted to install it in a clean 10 GB partition, but as a result of the many installations of different operating systems, the second hard drive could not be repartitioned any longer because of

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a faulty partition table. I could read and write to the disk, but neither Partition Magic nor any other disk software was able to repartition the drive, or even to reformat it. It was time for drastic measures.

I discarded the faulty slave drive, bought a new Western Digital 80GB hard drive, installed it as the master, and relegated the original 20GB master drive to slave status. All I needed to do was reinstall Windows ME and then repartition the disk to make room for Xandros and Linspire, my favorite Linux distributions. Easier said than done, as it turned out. I'll try to summarize the lessons I (re-)learned.

- Windows ME only upgrades from Windows 98, not from DOS.
 - Read the manual about the proper location of the itty-bitty jumpers that determine if a drive is the master or the slave. Don't just go by the markings on the drives. Apparently all drives are different.
 - Re-use the old IDE cable if the new cable doesn't reach both drives.
 - Even the most recent BIOS version for this computer available from Dell (dated 2000) is not able to recognize more than 32 GB of the 80 GB drive.
 - Believe it when it says on the box that the drive requires Windows XP or better.
 - The special software, provided by Western Digital, to reach and repartition all 80 GB on an old computer must be used before installing the operating system.
 - After using the special WD software to set up the hard drive, don't use Partition Magic 8.0 to further repartition the drive. You won't be able to reboot and will have to start all over again.
 - The computer won't boot any longer from the old hard drive, reinstalled as the master. In computing too, you can't go home again.
 - After protecting the system with a ZoneAlarm firewall and F-prot antivirus you think it is safe to go online to update Windows ME and install Internet Explorer 6.0. You'll still receive half a dozen instances of a spy program called Alexa, courtesy of Microsoft. AdAware will identify and remove it for you.
- All's well that ends well. The computer now has 20GB of Windows ME, 30 GB of Linspire 5.0, and 30 GB of Xandros DeLuxe Edition, complete with boot manager.

Maybe I should just have bought one of those cheapy Dell computers. But removing all the junk programs they come with might have been just as frustrating. I'll hold out for a system using the 64-bit AMD chip. That excludes Dell, which uses Intel only. Linux has long since run on 64-bit processors, and Windows Vista is just getting around to it. Now is not the time; later this year, maybe. I might have a local dealer built one to order.

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SIG Meeting Dates

Digital Photo SIG - Denny's 1525 McHenry Ave, Modesto Second Saturday of the month

Beginners' SIG - Denny's 1525 McHenry Ave, Modesto Second Monday of the month

Random Access Q & A - Destiny Christian Center, Modesto Fourth Thursday of the month
prior to general meeting

Be sure and check our web site at least once a week: www.mpcug.net
For the latest club and computer information

New Hard Drives and XP Hard Drive Management Utility

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Director; Columnist, *The Examiner*, Beaumont, TX; Radio & TV Show Host

WEBSITE: <http://www.langa.com>

With the oft mentioned convergence, where our desktop computers are now commonly used for more than traditional computing tasks, many of us seem to run low on hard drive space. A quick review of the newspaper and online ads for the electronics and office supply stores often show a selection of large capacity hard drives for very reasonable prices. Sometimes these hard drives can be purchased for an exceptionally low price after the application of high value rebates. Now that many of us are using our hard drives for the storage and editing of video (very large files), countless music files (typically a few megabytes each), and even recording and time shifting TV (huge files), it is quite easy for hard drive space to run short. This is an indication that it is time to somehow utilize an additional hard drive.

The aftermarket hard drives now so readily available come in a variety of packages. Generally the lowest priced drives are name-brand drives packaged as “OEM” intended for computer builders, and typically lack cables, installation software, instructions, brackets, screws, and other sometimes useful accessories. Commonly available at the retail stores, for slightly more, are drives packed in retail packages which usually include cables, detailed install instructions, partitioning and formatting software, technical support, brackets, and other paraphernalia. At the top of the price charts, but still sometimes bargain priced are external drives, already partitioned and formatted, and ready to use by simply plugging one cable into a USB or firewire port, and connecting the traditional power cord, with no other hardware installation. External drives often come with a variety of utility software titles for creating backups, and other purposes. Since there are a variety of hard drive controllers (the device that physically connects the motherboard in the computer to the cable and drive) in use, the purchaser needs to be sure that any internal drives purchased are compatible with the controllers in the computer. Acronyms such as IDE, EIDE, and SATA are commonly used to describe the interface of the hard drives advertised. If the purchaser is not sure which type is correct, a knowledgeable salesperson or call to the hard drive manufacturer may help the buyer select the correct type.

Installing an additional hard drive in a desktop computer may be easy, and can be done by anyone with moderate mechanical or electrical skills. The retail packs often come with very easy to follow directions (and sometimes even a video!) showing the step-by-step process. Most typically, computers come with two hard drive controllers either built in to the motherboard, or on a separate card; each controller can usually drive two hard drives, or a hard drive and a CD/DVD player or burner, allowing for up to four hard drives and CD/DVD units in any combination without the installation of additional controller hardware. One proviso worth noting here is that if the computer is still covered by warranty, opening the case to install an additional hard drive may void the remaining balance of the warranty. There is no warranty risk in using an external hard drive since there is no “hard” installation necessary.

Once a new internal hard drive is installed, it must be partitioned and formatted appropriately in order for it to function properly. If a retail pack was purchased, there will likely be a floppy or CD included that contains the necessary utilities; if an OEM drive was purchased, either a third party utility must be used (my favorite is Partition Magic), or a little know XP utility can be used. External drives, unless home built with a separate drive and case, generally do not need any utilities to make them function properly. Fortunately, users of Windows XP have a built-in utility that can be used for the necessary partitioning and formatting of new drives, as well as other hard drive and computer management tasks. Fred Langa, author of the very popular “Langa List” (www.langa.com) published a series of articles in early March documenting the availability and utilization of this integral utility. “Administrator” access is necessary to access this utility. While there are several ways to access the utility, one of the easiest ways is to right click on the “My Computer” icon on the desktop, and then clicking on “Manage”. “Disk Management” is listed under the “Storage” head-

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it hadn't been delivered after a gazillion tries. That particular address rejects about half of all emails I send to it with no particular rhyme or reason. There is obviously, at least to me, a filter that won't let most of my emails go through. This is something we are going to have to get more used to as greater efforts are made to filter out spam. All it takes is one Website tech who

So if in doubt, or it's really important, send a second email, and then if necessary, phone and ask whether it arrived.

Photo SIG

At the May 13th Photo SIG, Claude Delphia will demonstrate multiple photo editing programs so that MPCUG members can see some of the different things each program does. Amongst those will be Adobe Elements, Googles Picasa2, Microsofts Digital Image Pro 9 and Picture Manager, a program that comes with Microsoft Office. While many of these programs have some similar features, they each also have features that the others don't. Some of these are free and some are moderately priced. Elements probably has the most "near" professional features. Due to time constraints, this will only be a brief overview of each program, just enough to give a user an idea of it something they want to consider using.

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Google Earth offers some new and interesting ways to explore our world. With thousands of user files, it can be customized to any number of needs to suit your tastes. A great resource for new ideas involving Google Earth is the Google Earth blog at: <http://www.gearthblog.com/> or at the community: <http://bbs.keyhole.com/ubb/ubbthreads.php/Cat/0>.

The only limits to Google Earth are what your imagination and determination can achieve.

Joe Schmitt is a computer and technology guru, who also has a love for the outdoors. He can often be found tromping around the woods with his GPS and digital camera.

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ing. From this point, hard drives can be partitioned, formatted, have drive letters designated or changed, and a variety of other hard tasks can be accomplished. It is important to be especially careful not to partition or format existing hard drives with this utility, unless explicitly desired, as it is likely that existing data on the drive may be destroyed or otherwise become inaccessible. Other non-hard drive management tasks can also be utilized from this utility.

If a new hard drive is installed, it will show up as an "unknown" disk. Right-clicking on the new disk will open a menu with "partition" as one of the choices. Selecting this will open a wizard which will guide the user through the steps of initializing and partitioning the drive, and then formatting it with an appropriate format. After the process is completed, the new drive should show up in Windows Explorer.

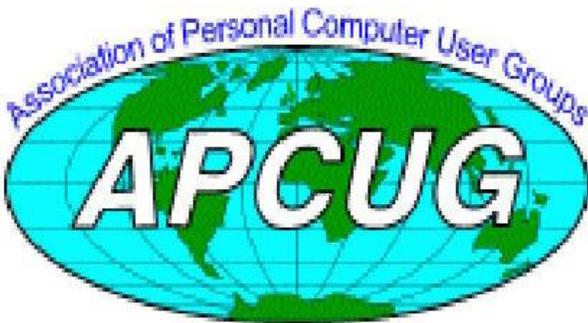
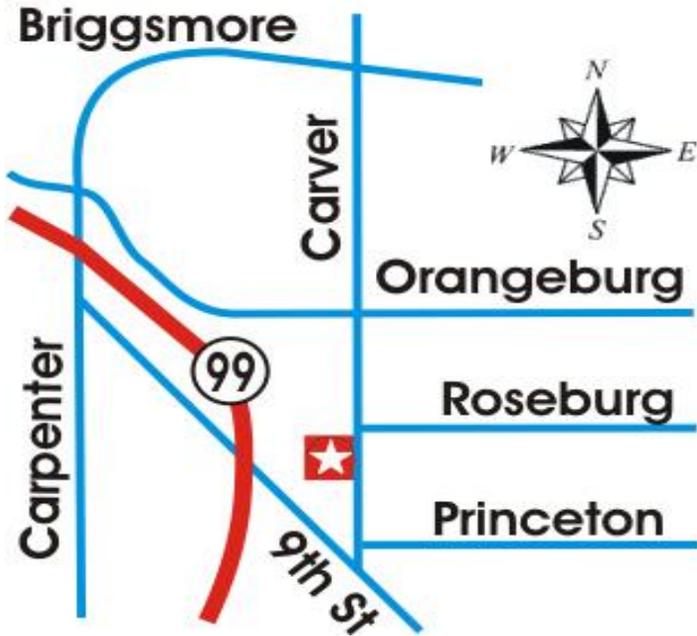
Since many of the new hard drives are truly huge in capacity, it may be more convenient in the long run to partition them as if they were several smaller hard drives, each partition with a separate drive letter. This makes disk storage more efficient, with less wasted space, as well as easier to backup, maintain, defragment, and perform other tasks.

A new large capacity hard drive may be useful to improve the utilization of the computer as well as allow it to be used for the many new non-computing tasks that are becoming popular.

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The Club's Meeting Place

Our general meeting and the Random Access Special Interest Group are held in the Destiny Christian Center, 1161 Carver Road, Modesto, on the west side of Carver Road, right across from Sam's Food City.



Free classifieds for members. Email the text to the editor at editor@mpcug.net



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Be sure and check our web site at least once a week at www.mpcug.net

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PC Post

Editor: Bud Bondiotti

Editor Emeritus: William "Doc" Holloway - 1920 - 1996
Claude Delphia, Editor Emeritus
Bud Bondiotti and Elizabeth Leedom, Presidents Emeritus

Join The Modesto PC User Group

Web site: www.mpcug.net

To join MPCUG (or just get more information about us go to our Web site and fill out the new member form or mail your check to: MPCUG, P.O. Box 5122, Modesto, CA 95352-5122. Membership is just \$24 a year and includes 12 issues of the PC Post along with participation in all meetings and events. You will also receive e-

The PC Post and Editorial Policy

The PC Post is published online 12 times per year and is available to all group members as a membership benefit. Annual group membership dues are \$24.

For information write:

Modesto PCUG PO Box 5122, Modesto, CA 95352-5122

Opinions expressed in the PC Post do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of the members as a group or the Board of Directors.

The PC Post encourages group members to submit articles for publication. We would like to have articles which deal with the writer's experience with computer hardware and software.

An article may deal with any computer-related subject provided it contains no libelous or offensive material. We can't use information copied from other publications without written permission except for quotes.

Articles should be submitted in MS Word text. Do not spend time formatting your article such as indents or centering. Please use only one space between sentences. and do not use bold, italicize or otherwise format the submission as we can't guarantee results in translation to Publisher. Proof read and run your spelling checker. Watch

for special upper and lower case in brand names. Do not tab or indent to layout text.

If you want to include a graphic, please contact the editor for instructions.

We reserve the right to edit articles, for length or to improve readability. Longer articles may be published in several parts. We will not knowingly promote unlicensed businesses.

Letters to the editor are encouraged. All articles and letters to the editor should be submitted to the editor via email as an attached file. Call him at (209) 667-1980 before submission. Please include your name, day and evening phone numbers, and email address for contact.

The MPCUG exchanges some articles with other user groups around the country via the Association of PC User Groups (APCUG). If for any reason you object to having your article distributed to APCUG member organizations for reprinting, please notify the editor at the time you submit the article. Your wish will in no way affect publication of your article in the Post.

Production notes: Prepared using **Microsoft Publisher 2003**, MS Office 2003, Minolta laser color printer and a lot of sweat and a few tears.

Special Interest Groups

SIG meetings are held at the discretion of the leader and participants. Sometimes the date, location and time have to be changed or a meeting cancelled. Give the leader a call before the meeting if it is your first time.

SIG Name	Leaders	Phone#	Date / Time / Note
Beginners' SIG	Bud Bondietti	667-1980	6:30 p.m., 2nd Monday, Denny's 1525 McHenry Ave.
Board Meeting	Mike Kumler	531-2262	7 p.m., 1st Wed. of the month.
Digital Photography.....	J. Goodman	579-0122	Time, location to be announced
Random Access Q&A			6:30 p.m. before general meeting

Membership renewal: As with all organizations, MPCUG is run solely by volunteers. That means that when your membership comes due, someone must send you a reminder, sometimes several times. We try to cut back that need by e-mailing you that your membership is expiring. Please help by renewing your membership in a timely manor. It saves user group money and



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