

PC Post



Official Newsletter of the
Modesto PC User Group.
Modesto, California

26 YEARS OF USER HELPING USER

NOVEMBER 2008 – VOLUME 26.11

OUR NEXT MEETING

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What's in Excel?

Modesto PC User Group president Mike Kumler will explore what can be done with Excel at the membership meeting on Thursday, Nov. 20.

Mike says he will demonstrate functions and formulae plus charting and a few "what-if" scenarios.

The group will meet at 6 p.m. at Denny's Restaurant, 1525 McHenry Ave., for its Random Access Special Interest Group, featuring questions and problems members are facing. Following dinner at 7:30 p.m., Mike will make his presentation.

20 days to find
new PC Post
Editor

IMPORTANT MEETING DATES

General Meeting — November 20 — Dennys 1525 McHenry
Board Meeting — December 3rd — Ridgeway's Restaurant
Beginner's SIG Meeting — December 2nd — Dennys

Claude's Bytes

By Claude Delphia, Editor Emeritus, Modesto PC User Group

Layout programs — Some of you probably don't know what the difference is between a layout program and a word processor. In the very earliest days of the PC Post, we only had word processors — and they were crude ones by today's standards — to compose and layout text. In the first 8 months of MPCUG I put out two issues between our first and third editors. My word processor was so crude, and that's another story, that I ended up cutting and pasting the text the way it had been done for decades by newspapers and commercial printers, and was still being done by many. It was effective that way, but not quality. At that point we didn't have laser printers let alone inkjet printers, just dot matrix and a few of us had carbon ribbon printers which cost around \$2,000.

When I was able, I bought Adobe's PageMaker program which was originally created for Mac computers. For those days it was a wonderful program and it would still be relatively usable in comparison to current word processors being used for layout.

Here's the basic difference between word processors and layout programs.

Word processors are designed to do basic typing with a lot of formatting. A page is somewhat restricted in what can happen on it. Everything typed has to fit within the Page Setup parameters, a key to word processing setups. While some word processors can do a lot more, but layout features are limited.

In layout programs such as MS Publisher and Adobe's replacement for PageMaker, InDesign, you do type in a "box" but that box isn't restricted in where it can be located on a page. If you click on the edge of the text box you can move the box anywhere you want including off the page and onto another one. Try that in a word processor and you will immediately see the difference. This is the simplest explanation of the difference. There are many more.

Layout programs are designed to deal with photos and graphic elements as a standard part of the program rather than as an accessory or limited feature. These programs will feature various ways of editing the graphic they unless you try them, there are few words to describe how they work or what you can do. Photos in particular can be edited in many ways some found only in photo editing programs.

After many years of publishing the PC Post in MS Publisher, I can highly recommend it. It's not expensive and while as is true of any inexpensive program it lacks certain abilities, it is very usable and easier to use than the professional layout program Adobe InDesign. Commercial printers, newspapers and other more sophisticated media producers are using even more professional programs. If you have a serious project consider MS Publisher. It comes with Office Professional.

Strange email experience — A friend of mine recently had an unusual experience. A month ago, her HP computer did one of it's regular updates and suddenly her email program was totally new and completely different. Not only that but all her saved emails and addresses were gone. I wasn't able to figure out where her previous backups might be or how to deal with them in the new version called Outlook Live. Then out of the blue, her old version was back with all her emails and addresses. Recent emails and addresses were gone. Anyone else have this experience?

It's almost over for me — We are approaching the end of the year which means only one more PC Post under my editorship. I've not heard who might take it over. How about you? Someone who want to keep it going will have to step forward and take over the editorship starting with the January Issue. Stay tuned and we'll see what happens to the PC Post and the future of MPCUG now 26 years and 8 months old.

Mac versus PC

by Sandy Berger, CompuKISS

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We have all seen the popular Apple television commercials encouraging computer users to switch from Windows to Mac. Not only are the commercials convincing, but Apple has made some moves that make the Mac a viable option for computer users. In years past, the biggest drawback to purchasing a Mac was that Windows software was incompatible with a Mac. You couldn't use Windows software that was not available in a Mac version so switching from a PC to a Mac meant repurchasing all your software applications.

Then Apple made the move from Motorola processors to Intel processors. This made the Apple hardware compatible with Windows software. Any Mac that you purchase today is able to run both the Windows and the Mac operating system. You can do this by using a free Apple program called Boot Camp that is available to all Mac users. Using Boot Camp, you have to reboot the computer every time you want to switch between the two operating systems. Another option makes using Windows on a Mac even easier. If you purchase a simple virtualization product like Parallels, you can switch on the fly.

Being able to run Windows on a Mac has been a boon to Apple. In 2004 their market share in the operating system segment was a little over 3%. Today it is close to 8% and growing. There are fewer worries when using a Mac. For the most part, Macs are almost completely virus and spyware free. It's not that Macs are actually more secure, it's just that with the viruses and programs that infiltrate computers to steal information and to send out spam are operating system-specific. In other words, the hackers have to create their programs to run on either Windows or Mac. Since the Windows operating system is currently running on over 90% of computers, that operating system is the most likely target for the bad guys. So right now, Macs are ignored by most hackers.

It can also be said that Macs run their software better than PCs. The reason that this is true is that because Apple produces all of the hardware they can have strict control over every hardware component. So the software producers know exactly what hardware their software will run on. In the PC world, slight differences in the hardware can cause software headaches. As you know, with HP, Dell, Acer, Sony, Gateway, and many others producing the hardware, there is compatibility, but not necessarily full hardware/software compliance.

So why doesn't everyone switch to the Mac? Well, it can be summed up quite easily in one word, "Price". Macs always have been, and are still are, more expensive than PCs. Often Macs can cost several hundreds of dollars more than comparable Windows machines. This week Apple announced their first sub-\$1,000 laptop computer. The MacBook will now be selling at \$999. Their higher-end MacBook Pro will start at \$1,999. In contrast, you can buy many Windows laptops for under \$1,000, and some are now even under \$500.

Another thing that makes the Mac more costly is that when you purchase an Apple computer it comes with the Mac OS X operating system. If you want to run Windows on your Mac as well, you will have to purchase a

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full version of Windows. As I write this, Amazon is selling the full version of Windows XP Home Edition for \$179. A full version of Windows Vista Home Premium is currently selling at Amazon for \$222. If you want to add the ability to easily switch between the two operating systems, you will have to dish out about \$80 more for Parallels or another good virtualization program. In some cases those added costs can almost double the cost of a cheap PC.

The other reason that some people won't switch to a Mac is that they don't want to have to learn to use a new operating system. But if you are currently using Windows XP and you purchase a new computer now, you will have at least a slight learning curve to make the transition to Windows Vista.

If Apple would lower their prices and create a free program that would let you run Windows without rebooting, I wouldn't mind purchasing the additional Windows software necessary to be able to run both operating systems on a Mac. In fact, I think that those two changes would have people flocking in droves to the Mac. But then, if the Apple operating system gains a bigger market share, hackers will start targeting it as well as Windows. Oh well, I guess life in the computer world really does mirror life in the real world. It seems that nothing will ever be perfect in either world.

Parallels Desktop for Mac is the first solution for Intel-Macs that give you the flexibility of running Windows on a Mac OS X simultaneously without rebooting. C

Computhanksgiving

by Berry F. Phillips, a member of the Computer Club of Oklahoma City
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The Computer Club of Oklahoma City recently celebrated "Thanksgiving in August" at our monthly General Meeting when we celebrated all the members past and present who have given of their time and talents in the evolution of our computer club. As I was preparing for the General Meeting, I thought how far we have come from our humble beginnings in a small house where a few people attended to try to master DOS. Today, the Computer Club of Oklahoma City enjoys a high tech facility complete with a computer lab and is partnered with Senior Net.

The first computer club was the Homebrew Computer Club which had its humble beginnings in a garage in the Silicon Valley in California in March 1975. The club was an informal group of electronic enthusiasts and technically-minded hobbyists who gathered to trade parts, circuits, and information pertaining to computer devices. The club evolved rapidly to a large auditorium. The 1999 made-for-television movie "Pirates of the Silicon Valley" (and the book on which it was based, "Fire in the Valley: The making of the Personal Computer," describes the role of the Homebrew Computer Club in creating the personal computer. Engineers working on very expensive main frame computers in those days dreamed of developing a personal computer that would be so affordable that almost everyone could have one in their home. The rest of course is technological history.

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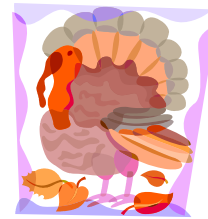
(Continued from page 4)

SeniorNet was founded in 1986 by Doctor Mary Furlong in San Francisco, California and was later moved to Santa Clara, California. Dr. Furlong believed that telecommunications could enhance the lives of older adults. She faced considerable opposition in getting the project funded. The Merkle Foundation realized the potential of the project and funded it based at the University of San Francisco. Five learning centers were opened with twenty seniors, and computers were furnished by Apple Computers. Today SeniorNet has won numerous national awards and has 200 learning centers both nationally and internationally with a membership of approximately 20,000. SeniorNet is the leading technological educator of older adults and has benefited millions of seniors since its inception.

The birth of the personal computer was due to the development of the microprocessor, a single chip with all the circuitry that formerly occupied large cabinets. The early personal computers were called microcomputers and were sold as electronic kits with programming done by toggle switches and output was provided by front panel indicators such as neon bulbs. One remembers the Altair which you couldn't do much with but was of interests to hobbyists and technicians. Today due to the considerable evolution of the personal computer in 2008, one billion were sold worldwide and a projected two billion by 2014.

I am reminded of the Virginia Slim commercial, "You have come a long way, baby!" I wonder how often do we think of the thousands of our fellow citizens who have been involved with the development as well as the teaching of how to use these amazing technological devices that have so transformed our lives and indeed become a necessity and our very windows to the world? Perhaps, it is time to celebrate together a well deserved "Computhanksgiving."

Happy Thanksgiving from the Computer Club of Oklahoma City.



Microsoft Releases Photosynth Panoramic Image Creator

By Ira Wilsker, APCUG Advisor; Columnist, The Examiner, Beaumont TX; radio and TV show host
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<http://photosynth.net>

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Many of us take a lot of digital photographs. I have hundreds of digital photos from two recent weddings; others may have vacation photos, family photos, scenic images, or other content. Would it not be interesting if a collection of photos with some degree of commonality could be seamlessly "stitched" together creating a 3-D panoramic view of the subject? For example, if I took the wedding pictures of my daughter's recent wedding, the images could automatically be merged into a single three dimensional, easily navigable image of the entire wedding ceremony and reception. The panoramic image can be manipulated, rotated, zoomed, and viewed from any direction. If I can do this with wedding pictures, imagine what you can do with landscapes, theme parks, or other images. This new service from Microsoft, known as Photosynth (photosynth.net) is currently free, but does have several provisos, one of which is that all images created will be considered as "public", and can be viewed by anyone on the Photosynth website.

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Photosynth is graphics intensive, and may not run on older computers lacking adequate video power and capabilities. It will run on Windows XP (SP 2 or SP3), and on Vista. Mac users can use Photosynth if running Boot Camp. Images are displayed on a browser, and Internet Explorer 7 as well as Firefox 2 and 3 are supported. 256mb of memory is the absolute minimum to run Photosynth, and 1gb is recommended. In order to function, Photosynth installs two programs to the computer. One is a web browser plug-in (both IE and Firefox compatible), and an application aptly named "Photosynth" which is used to create panoramic images. Install of both programs is fast and easy, and is accomplished with a single download. Since the actual processing is done by Microsoft, the images (or parts of them) are uploaded to Microsoft by the Photosynth software, which requires a broadband connection. Microsoft has posted a warning, "All synths are public. Your photos will be visible to everyone on the Internet. In order to create images, it is necessary to sign up online; users who have a Windows Live ID can use it for Photosynth access.

Photosynth performs two material functions; it reconstructs the scene or object from several two-dimensional digital photographs, and then examines the images for similarities, and mathematically use that information to estimate the real shape of the object, and the vantage point the photos were taken from. Using the digital data, the three dimensional space is created, and the merged photos can be easily navigated as if they were a single photograph. Microsoft's new "Seadragon" technology delivers only the required pixels to the browser, making the loading of images that may have included hundreds of individual photos a fast and pleasing experience.

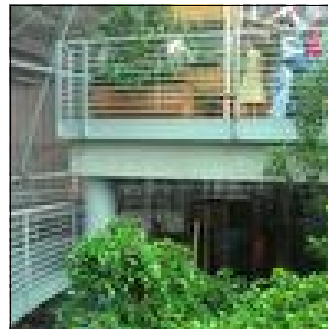
On the main page for Photosynth (photosynth.net) are dozens of samples of the output than can be created. Some of the examples are the Sphinx, composed of 239 photos taken by National Geographic; a walk around Eton College, 427 photos; The Taj Mahal, 179 National Geographic photos; the Space Shuttle, 246 photos; and many others. It is important to note that this computing power and service is available for free to all of us who are willing to make our images public. The "Recently Synthed" link shows the most recently created scenes (many dated today, as I type this), which include street scenes, still life, sunsets, Hawaiian scenery, Nathan's Hotdog Eating Championship – 2008, backyards, portraits, kittens (cute), athletic events, and other topics. It is a lot of fun just browsing these synths and seeing what others are doing and what the system can do for digital images.

The potential applications for Photosynth are almost endless. It could be used by real estate agents to easily create an interactive three dimensional view of a house or an apartment; industries could use it for training purposes; products can be promoted via 3D images that allow the viewer to explore the details of a product; likewise car dealers and manufacturers could easily create interactive views of any cars in inventory. Criminalists (as in CSI) could easily create 3D crime scene images; the potential uses are unimaginable.

If you are willing to release your image to the public (in the current iteration), and would like to create interactive 3D panoramic photos from your digital photos, then Photosynth would be a great place to experiment. At present the service is free, only requiring a Windows Live ID registration. If you have any interesting photos of the same subject, try synthing them.



Empire State
Building Observa-
tion Deck
63 photos



Rainforest at the
California Academy
of Sciences
26 photos

Need a sticky note? Put it on your computer!

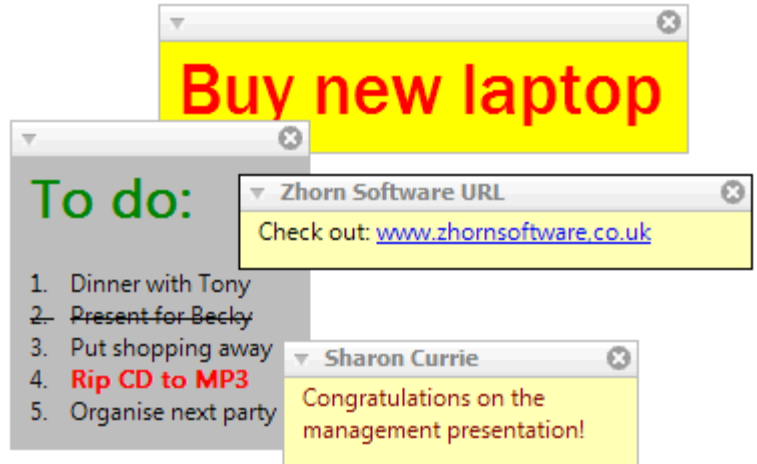
by Linda Gonse, Editor & Webmaster, Orange County IBM PC Users' Group, CA
www.orcopug.org / [editor\(at\)orcopug.org](mailto:editor(at)orcopug.org)

Sticky note programs for your pc, as you might imagine, are a utility that takes the place of paper Post-It notes that we all stick to our monitors!

But, sticky note programs I've researched this year discouraged me from even trying them out. Sometimes they didn't have enough features, or if they did, they were expensive.

Then, someone recommended a program called Stickies, created by Tom Revell, at www.zhornsoftware.co.uk/. So, I looked at Stickies on the web page, liked what I saw, and downloaded the program.

My first discovery about the program is that it is small, 953Kb, and doesn't interfere with system files and doesn't write to the registry. In fact, Stickies stores all its information in a single text-based ini file. When was the last time you had a program on your computer as well-mannered as this one?



An icon in your system tray will allow you quick access to Stickies' features and options. From this dropdown list you can manage your Stickies notes, configure them, get help, and download new skins. When you do make a Sticky, it won't disappear unless you tell it to, and it stays where it is placed. You can edit, format, and print them. Make as many as you want, or as many as your screen space will permit. But, to save room and keep Stickies organized, they will snap to each other and to the sides of the screen where they can be neatly lined up. You can even "hide" them from view.

Besides viewing Stickies on your screen, you can attach them to a website, a document, or a folder, so they only appear when the objects they are attached to are on the screen.

Special Interest Groups and Meetings

Meeting Name	Leaders	Phone	Date / Time / Note
Beginners' SIG	Jim Goodman	579-0122	6:30 p.m. 1st Tuesday, Denny's 1525 McHenry Ave.
Board Meeting	Mike Kumler	531-2262	7 p.m., 1st Wed. of the month.
Random Access Q&A			6:30 p.m. before general meeting

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What's fun is being able to customize the notes with various fonts, colors and buttons. You can even download customized skins from a big selection to change the outward appearance of the notes — plain, borderless, simple border, etc. The notes can be resized, just like the sticky notes in Acrobat.

Stickies are located in five categories within the application so you can see and manage them. You can search for information in Stickies, wake sleeping Stickies, restore closed Stickies and detach Stickies.

What else? Oh, yes! Another attractive feature of Stickies is...the program is free!

What are you waiting for? Try it out and see if you like this little program as much as I do!



On the Lighter Side

Why We Should Feel Sorry for Tech Support People

A woman called the Canon help desk with a problem with her printer. The tech asked her if she was "running it under Windows." The woman then responded, "No, my desk is next to the door. But that is a good point. The man sitting in the cubicle next to me is under a window, and his is working fine."

Tech Support: "OK Bob, let's press the control and escape keys at the same time. That brings up a task list in the middle of the screen. Now type the letter 'P' to bring up the Program Manager."

Customer: "I don't have a 'P'."

Tech Support: "On your keyboard, Bob."

Customer: "What do you mean?"

Tech Support: "'P' on your keyboard, Bob."

Customer: "I'm not going to do that!"

Overheard in a computer shop:

Customer: "I'd like a mouse mat, please."

Salesperson: "Certainly sir, we've got a large variety."

Customer: "But will they be compatible with my computer?"

I once received a fax with a note on the bottom to fax the document back to the sender when I was finished with it, because he needed to keep it.

Customer: "Can you copy the Internet for me on this diskette?"

I work for a local ISP. Frequently we receive phone calls that start something like this:

Customer: "Hi. Is this the Internet?"

Let Me Count the Ways I Like Linux

by Kerry Miller, a member of the Front Range PCUG, Colorado
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I used to use Microsoft Windows up to Windows 98. I then switched to Windows NT in a dual boot system with Linux. However, when I went to boot NT one more time and NT gave me a message to the effect "I'm sick, fix me," I said goodbye to Windows and Linux has been my main operating system since. I found Linux applications to match all my user data. I was able to move all that data from the NT file system (NTFS) to the earlier Windows file system (FAT). From there I copied all the data into the ext2 file system, which was used by Linux at the time.

Now let me count the ways I like Linux:

1. Linux resembled the HP-UX operating system (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HP-UX>) I was using at work. This made going between work and home easier.
2. The roots of the Linux operating system go back to the late 1980's. By the time I decided to switch to Linux, it was a viable (if little known) multi-user, multi-tasking operating system for Personal Computers. That meant I could establish more than one user for my PC and run multiple programs simultaneously—I was not restricted to either the Windows or MAC operating systems for those PC capabilities. And, of course, Linux was (and still is) free.
3. Linux comes with a distribution of the X windows protocol produced by an international consortium. To understand this capability, think of it as "...providing the basic framework for building Graphical User Interfaces (GUIs), and moving windows on the screen and interacting with a mouse and/or keyboard." (extracted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/X_windows). Because this capability was (and is) not built into the operating system, it provides greatly enhanced flexibility for anyone creating Linux applications.
4. For those familiar with the Windows and MAC operating systems, it is surprising to realize that the software that creates what you see as the "desktop" can actually be a separate application program. I use the GNOME desktop together with X windows. This desktop (one of several that can be used with Linux) allows me to use a number of different screens and switch between them as I wish. This allows me to open an application on one screen and switch to a different screen to open another application. From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GNOME> "The GNOME project puts heavy emphasis on simplicity, usability, and making things 'just work....'"
5. There are a wide range of user applications available, as well as tools to write your own applications.
6. Linux has (and has had for some time) a reputation for stability. The operating system doesn't crash unless the user does something to make it crash. Around 1997 (about the time I decided to change to the Linux operating system) I read an article (in a Linux magazine) professing to use two computers as near identical as production processes allow. They loaded one computer with Microsoft Windows and the loaded the second computer with Linux. They ran similar bench mark programs on both computers. The machine loaded with Microsoft operating system crashed in a short time. The machine loaded with Linux continued to run for as long as the comparison experiment was set to run.

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7. Many distributions of Linux are as easy, or easier to install than Microsoft Windows.
8. A person can customize and/or build a Linux operating system to meet individual needs.
9. Many distributions of Linux include such primary applications such as the Firefox web browser, OpenOffice, an office suite similar to Microsoft Office (word processor, spreadsheet, presentations, etc.), and a number of other “name brand” applications.
10. Linux can be cost free. There are hundreds (or more) of applications written for Linux and there is a growing library of applications.

Microsoft Windows was the new kid on the block at the time I switched to Linux from my point of view and it did NOT do many ordinary things well.

Tips & Fun Facts

www.smartcomputing.com



Productivity In Vista

To put your icons in order of how recently you've used them, tell Vista to sort them that way starting in the upper-left corner. Right-click an empty space on the Desktop and then choose Sort By and Date Modified.

Solar Power

If you go on an extended camping or fishing trip, the limited number of recharges from an external rechargeable battery, battery-powered charger, or disposable power supply may not last your entire trip. Fortunately, solar-powered chargers allow you to recharge electronic devices anytime the sun is out. The Solio Universal Hybrid Solar Charger (\$99.95; www.solio.com) features an internal battery that stores power for up to a year and includes connectors for most mobile phones, iPods, and portable gaming systems. You can also purchase tips and connectors for other portable devices. If you're looking for a lightweight addition to your backpack, the Soldius1 (\$89.99; www.mysoldius.com) weighs only 3 ounces and is compatible with BlackBerrys and Nokia, Sony Ericsson, Siemens, Samsung, and Motorola cell phones. You can also use solar chargers outside the campsite; for example, you can recharge portable devices in your car or office as long as sunlight can reach the charger's solar panels.

Digital Photo Tip

If the autofocus on your digital camera has a tough time locking on when you're shooting close-ups, switch to the camera's Macro mode if one is available. Otherwise, set the camera to its highest resolution and lowest compression level, step back, take the shot, and crop it down to size later using an image editor.

For the fun of it and a look at some unusual USB memory sticks/flash drives go to:
<http://www.customusb.com/products-flashdrive.html>

The Club's Meeting Place

Our general meeting and the Random Access Special Interest Group are held at the Denny's at 1525 McHenry Avenue.



For Information about our website host and how you can get on board:

Click on this link info@fire2wire.com

Cyrano Writing & Editing

When you need help putting it in words, call Cyrano.

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Resumes, letters, applications, articles, newsletters, press releases, theses

Elizabeth Leedom



Free classifieds for members. Email the text to the editor at editor@mpcug.net It's hard to believe that none of our members have anything to sell?

apcug Member of The Association of Personal Computer User Groups

Need help hooking up that new PC, or installing DSL-Cable? Call Jim Goodman, \$60.00 for a long as it takes. 579-0122 1000999@spcglobal.net Modesto, Ceres Area. Our general meeting and the Random Access Special Interest Group are held at the Destiny Christian Center, 1500 Carver Road on the west side of Carver across from Sam's Food City. Parking is available both in front of and behind the Center. No park-

Modesto Find-HG.Info sources for area home & garden artsandhome.com Claude Delphia, publisher Websites, Photo Editing & Graphics 209-402-1936

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

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Claude Delphia, Editor Emeritus
Elizabeth Leedom, President 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-mail advising you of extra events or news.

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 \$24.00.

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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 or digital photography.

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) 892-5037 before submission. Please include your name, day and evening phone numbers, and email address for contact.