



# SoftTalk

The Official Newsletter of the Roanoke Valley Personal Computer Club

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Serving the Roanoke Valley

October 2003



**High resolution scanner saves old photos: See tips from Bill Scott on page 2**

## Microsoft Speaker Here Oct. 11

On Oct. 11, the club will host Microsoft for a presentation on the new Microsoft Office System to be released Oct. 21. This is an ideal time to invite someone to visit RVPCC.

The meeting will be held in the Arnold Burton main meeting room, and the club promised Microsoft it would produce an audience of at least 75 members and guests.

Bring as many folks as you can.

In the meantime, you can check out details of the new system at [www.microsoft.com/office/preview/default.asp](http://www.microsoft.com/office/preview/default.asp)

If you are interested in an official launch event, you can find those listed at <http://www.microsoft.com/office/preview/default.asp>

## Can 'Programmed' Nuts and Bolts 'Grow' a Machine?

by LIONEL MELANCON

"A genetic algorithm can make a computer genuinely creative, capable of imaginative leaps and subtle connections, which would elude the minds of many engineers." Now that's a pretty profound statement.

But it's happening. Take Steve Smirardo's July demonstration of how to render a building. It took months of patient work to accomplish some of his renderings. According to "Darwin in a Box" in the August issue of "Discover" magazine, a new way has been developed.

The elements Smirardo used in his program — bricks, colors, textures, tile, etc. — could be used as genetic elements in a new program, which, according to the article, can reason and make choices. A genetic algorithm can be written telling a computer program what it is wanted.

The program could do the job for him in short order.

The article describes an animated stick figure that tries to walk, falls on its back and flails its legs helplessly. Then it appears at the left of the screen and takes a few baby steps, and falls again. Appearing once again, it has learned to raise its knees and takes a few confident steps, but once again falls over on its side.

After trying over and over, the figure eventually strides off the screen as though its motion had been captured from videos of a human walking. The figure was not taught to walk by an off screen animator, but evolved the capacity to walk on its own.

Thanks to a small miracle of computer programming, and an algorithm telling the program what was wanted, the figure learned as we all do, by trial and error.

Standing, falling and trying again eventually discarding the parts of the last effort that didn't work, and might have hurt, and trying again until all the bad tries were discarded and the good efforts kept, the stick figure "learned" to walk because it was the correct solution to what was asked of it.

According to the article, if the entire McMaster-Carr industrial supply catalog of 400,000 items of screws, bolts, hinges and everything else imaginable were put into the gene-pool, somewhere in that mix is a machine. Simulated evolution, using an algorithm to direct it, may be the fastest way to design, or render.

For more detail, see the August issue of "Discover" magazine. It'll probably appear next month on the web site: [www.Discover.com](http://www.Discover.com) as the articles are usually a month behind the magazine lease.

## Next Meeting

**Date:** Sat., October 11, 2003  
**Place:** Arnold R. Burton  
 Technology Center, Room 105  
 1760 Roanoke Boulevard  
 Salem, Va. 24153  
**Time:** 9:15 AM - 12:30 PM

*This newsletter is published by the RVPCC. Its contents are the views of individuals and not necessarily those of the membership.*

### Upcoming: November 8

Officer Nominations

### Guest speaker:

Sandy Workman of Hayes Seay  
 Mattern & Mattern (HSMM)

### December 13

Election of Officers

### Don't forget:

Send tips, questions, stories for  
 newsletter to [editor@rvpcc.org](mailto:editor@rvpcc.org)

## From The President's Desk

by Tim Johnson  
[president@rvpcc.org](mailto:president@rvpcc.org)

Do you like the way the club is running? Now is the time for you to take a more active role in the operation of RVPCC. Join the officers and help out in the decision making process of the club.

The officers would like to thank Sandra Kelly for taking the position of RVPCC's newsletter editor. Sandra has many years of journalism experience, and we are very pleased she

## Resizing a Treasured Snapshot

By **BILL SCOTT**

I had a small snapshot (shown on page 1) taken in the early 1920s of my grandfather standing in a tobacco field holding my mother when she was a toddler.

It was a rare family snapshot, and I wanted to blow the photo up to get a larger image of his mother. Here is how I did it:

I scanned the picture with an HP4400C. The important thing to remember when scanning a very small part of an image that you want to enlarge is to choose only the part of the picture you want to use. Then, manually set your scan software to use the highest scan resolution (dots per inch) that your scanner will do.

With the 2400 dpi resolution of my scanner, I was able to get the cropped image. I was able to get a decent 5x7 print of this cropped image.



**Enlarged portion of photo shows Scott's grandfather with Scott's mother**

When buying a scanner or digital camera, you do not need the higher resolution for every picture, especially if you do not intend to enlarge the picture, but when you want to enlarge a small part of the picture as I did here, you want the maximum resolution that you can afford.

### Sites to see

#### Elderhostel programs

<http://www.elderhostel.org/welcome/home.asp>

Not-for-profit educational and travel program for older adults

#### Barnes & Noble University

[www.bn.com](http://www.bn.com) (click on B&N University)

Offers free online classes in some fun things and sells tutorials at reasonable prices

#### SeniorNet

[www.seniornet.org](http://www.seniornet.org)

Has everything from United Nations' policy on aging to information about conferences on caregiving. Best part is a Personal Computer section with free tutorials.

volunteered to help with creating and editing our club newsletter. Keep sending articles her way! That helps to make a great monthly newsletter.

Elections are in December and we need you to volunteer to take a leadership role in the club. The more the merrier!

Get ready for a fun time at our October 11<sup>th</sup>. meeting! Microsoft will be presenting Office

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# Secretary's Report

By Margaret Hoag  
[secretary@rvpcc.org](mailto:secretary@rvpcc.org)



**September 13, 2003**

Tim Johnson called the meeting to order.

## Officer Updates:

**Secretary** - Margaret Ann Hoag - Minutes of the last two meetings were approved.

**Membership Chairman** - Del Kirschner - We had no visitors today. One member dropped out, and we have one new member, Diana Struven.

**Treasurer** - Azella Tingler - absent. Del gave her report. All bills are paid, and we have sufficient money left in the account.

**Public Relations** - Lionel Melancon - Program for October is Microsoft. Lionel stated that he has several programs in the works and members also gave suggestions.

Bill Scott - Announced that the company he works for (Moog) is installing Internet phones. He also talked a little bit about scanning pictures and printing them out from digital cameras. Wal-Mart has a special new machine to do this.

**Roanoke County Schools** - Homer Duff - absent. Del Kirschner reported that the Fall classes are under way.

**Webmaster** - John Yates - The web site is available for you to use. Take advantage of it.

**Newsletter** - Sandra Brown Kelly and Del Kirschner will now be doing the newsletter.

**Vice president** - Ernie Arnett - explained that anyone submitting an article for the newsletter and having it printed will receive an extra door prize and get first choice of door prizes. Send articles to [editor@rvpcc.org](mailto:editor@rvpcc.org) as a Word or text file

or within an E-mail.

**General information**— We will omit door prizes at the next meeting because Microsoft will be here. The Christmas Party will be finalized by next month.

Ernie talked a little about putting songs from your own old records onto CD's for your own use only. A Question and Answer Period followed.

## Door Prizes:

1. Lionel Melancon - Label Maker
2. Betty Aliff - Home Publishing Suite
3. Bill Scott - Floppy Disks
4. Margaret Ann Hoag - Paper
5. Ed Irving - Video Editing
6. Cal Aliff - CD
7. Tim Johnson - CD
8. Sandra Johnson - Magnet Maker
9. Hugh Martin - CD
10. Bill Steele - Pen
11. John Cook - Pen

## Wireless router talk:

Tim Johnson gave a short talk on his new wireless router by Cisco.

## Program:

Bill Scott presented a program on DVD Writers. The DVD's you buy come in DVD+R and DVD-R. You must be careful about which one will play in your DVD Writer. The DVD Writer is installed internally. He then showed a video from Pinnacle Studios that showed how to capture from camcorder, digital camera, VCR, or video files; create time lines, trim and edit footage, make titles, credits and captions to tell a story; add 3-D scene transitions; add music including audio footage from MP3 or WAV files; add voice over narration in sync with the action; and add sound effects.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

**Respectfully submitted,**  
**Margaret Ann Hoag**  
**Secretary**

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Photo by Azella Tingler

### RVPCC audience gets serious during August meeting at WDBJ-Television.

**From the President's Desk**  
Continued From Page 2  
2003. Tell all your friends and coworkers!  
Members can increase their chances to win a great Microsoft prize by receiving an extra drawing ticket for every friend they bring to the presentation. What a treat!  
Also, if you are interested in signing up for one of the many Microsoft webcasts taking place this Fall, please visit <http://www.officelaunch.com/webcasts> to see a list of dates and times and to register.

### Pros Offer Tips for Better Digital Images

Expert photographers recently shared their tips on taking digital picture suitable for framing at MSN.com.

Here is a summary:

- Hold the camera steady
- Try for simple background
- Get on eye level with your subject
- Consider the range of your flash
- Always carry spare batteries
- Use a high-capacity memory card.

Read story at <http://go.microsoft.com/?linkid=263845>

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