



# SoftTalk

The Official Newsletter of the Roanoke Valley Personal Computer Club

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Serving the Roanoke Valley

March 2008

## HAPPY EASTER

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### Help your newsletter

You are invited to share favorite websites, reviews of software or just general computer experiences. Send your article or notes to [editor@rvpcc.org](mailto:editor@rvpcc.org).

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Next Meeting  
March 8, 2008  
9:15 a.m.

Topic:  
Working wireless

Speakers:  
John Leary & Andy McLaughlin

### Tax Stimulus Payments

Don't miss your stimulus payment! If you filed a federal tax return for 2007, you don't have to do anything to collect this payment.

If you don't normally owe taxes and don't file, you must file a return this year to collect it. File either Form 1040 or Form 1040A. Write 'Stimulus Payment' across the top of the sheet. Fill in the amount of social security payments you received in 2007. Also fill in any other income that you might have. Send the form to:

Department of the Treasury  
Internal Revenue Service  
Atlanta, GA 39901-0002

You can file this form for the payment anytime in 2008; April 15<sup>th</sup> isn't a deadline for it.

The government will begin sending out checks the beginning of May.

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## Secretary's Report

February 9, 2008

President Earl Abbott opened the meeting at 9:15 AM. He announced that if Tim Johnson is unavailable at any time, Andy McLaughlin will substitute as Web Master. Weather postponements and/or cancelation due to weather will be posted on the club's web site, RVPCC.org.

**Secretary's Report:** The minutes were published in the February newsletter.

**Treasurer's Report:** Helen Trenor read the Treasurer's report.

**Door Prizes:** John Leary, Andy McLaughlin, Homer Duff, Ron Zoll, Earl Abbott, Sandy Johnson, Beryl Middaugh, Kay Viskup, and Bill Scott were winners.

**Public Relations:** Bill Scott and John Yeatts have not heard back on the proposed programs to visit the new VDOT building and to visit the Moog Company. They are following up. They also need ideas for future programs and trips.

**Future Programs:** The group talked about all types of wireless options. Homer Duff showed a website displaying open Wi-Fi sites in the valley.

Earl Abbot spoke of SPAM reaching the officers via [Officers@RVPCC.org](mailto:Officers@RVPCC.org). He suggested that whenever we use that address we include RVPCC in the subject line.

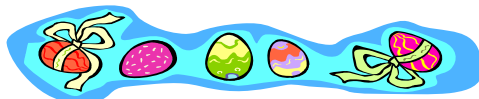
### PROGRAMS:

Sandy Johnson gave a report on Changes in Taxes for 2007. She emphasized that the IRS does not contact people by phone or by email. Do not respond to the scams that have started since the stimulus payments were announced.

Bill Scott gave a program on Digital Picture Frames. He showed two different frames which used internal memory, external memory card, and/or USB flash drives. He stated that he has watched his pictures on a 40" TV screen using his flash drive to transfer the pictures.

With no further business and discussion, the meeting was closed at 11:20 AM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kay Viskup, Secretary



## PREZ' NOTES

Feb 29, 2008

This is being written on February 29<sup>th</sup>, a special day because it happens once in 4 years. I suppose that the length of a year was set at 365 days. When astronomers and engineers figured out that their original length for a year was too short, they added a "FUDGE FACTOR" of one extra day every four years. They decided to call this day "February 29" and to place it in a "leap year". To make the year more special, they decided to have a Presidential Election in the same year.

Years passed, and astronomers and engineers acquired more toys to measure time, and decided that another adjustment was necessary to reduce error in their measurements, so they added a "FINAGLE FACTOR", and add "leap seconds" when necessary.

Years have passed, and astronomers and engineers have acquired more toys to measure time. I assume that further adjustments will be needed in the future, and will be made, and a "DIDDLE FACTOR" will add, or subtract, fractions of a second to drive out error.

So, now you have it: Astronomers and engineers use observations and occasional brilliance to obtain something that will be useful to society. They later add fudge factors, finagle factors, and diddle factors that improve it.

We will have a meeting of the RVPCC on March 8<sup>th</sup>. The meeting will begin approximately three minutes late because that is the operating mode of the current president. Everyone who has a love of computers is invited to attend our meeting where an effort is made to be friendly and informative. I hope to see you there.

Earl Abbott

## Gasoline Prices

By John Yeatts

Try this website to compare local gasoline prices. Just type in an address or zip code.

<http://gasprices.mapquest.com/>

RVPCC

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## Why is my Computer so Slow? Part 3

One of the more common complaints is “My Windows PC doesn’t run as fast as it used to.” There are many factors that can cause this. Most of them can be cured without having to be a computer guru or a master mechanic.

This is the third in a series of articles on slow computers. This month is on RAM. Next month will be on the resource-using programs that run in the background.

### What is “RAM memory?”

The term *memory* identifies data storage chips inside the computer. RAM is an acronym for *random access memory*. You can think of main memory as an array of boxes, where each box can hold a single byte of information. A computer that has 128 megabytes of memory, can hold about 128 million bytes of information. A byte can be thought of as a character, one keystroke.

### How do I know if I need more RAM?

There are several signs that you may not have enough RAM. If your mouse pointer turns into an hourglass for significant periods of time, if you hear your hard drive working excessively, or if your computer seems to run slower than you expect, you are probably low on RAM.

When there is not enough RAM, the system uses hard drive space instead of RAM. Since the data transfer speed of a hard drive is much lower than that of RAM, the system slows down considerably.

If you don’t have enough RAM, adding more is probably the most effective way of improving your computer performance.

### How much RAM is enough?

Bill Gates once said, “...640 KB is more than any home user will ever need.” Now the rule of thumb is “The more the better.” The current recommendation is a definite “it depends.”

For light use, just a bit of surfing, playing Solitaire, and reading e-mail, you can stick with the low amounts. But if you do anything more, like run action games, do photo/video editing, or if you have more than one application open at one time, go for more RAM. Most people like to run with their web browser and e-mail always on, so that puts them in the “more than one application” group.

Ignore the tiny amounts of RAM that Microsoft says are needed to run – it isn’t enough to run normal applications well. Your car would “run” with a 20 horsepower engine, but you wouldn’t like it. The RAM minimums listed below are more “real-world” numbers.

Windows 95: 16 MB minimum, but 64 MB is recommended. More than 64 won’t get you much performance increase, but less will slow down your computer.

Windows 98 and ME: 64 MB minimum. You will probably see a significant performance increase by going to 128 MB. Anything over 128 generally doesn’t get you much.

Windows NT and 2000: 128 MB minimum, but more is better, up to 256 if the computer has some heavy-duty applications.

Windows XP, all versions: 256 MB minimum, but anything below 512 MB is a bottleneck. One Gigabyte is not unreasonable; 2 GB with demanding applications like extreme games.

Windows Vista: The low-end Home Basic version can get away with 1 gigabyte, but anything else needs 2 GB or more.

### Can I put in too much RAM?

For Windows 95, 98, 98SE, and Me, the limit is 512 MB, although some machines may go higher depending on their designs. Those early systems were never intended to run with large amounts of RAM.

A 6/20/07 article by Kim Komando said that on most PCs, more than 2.8 GB of RAM can’t be recognized by a 32-bit Windows operating system, which is what most of use are using. To read this article, go to [www.komando.com](http://www.komando.com) and search for “What happened to my memory.”

Meeting space provided by  
Roanoke County Schools

**SLOW** continued on page 4

**SLOW continued from page 3****How much RAM do you have now?**

Right click on "My Computer," then left-click "Properties" to see the "System Properties" screen. The amount of RAM will be shown under the "General" tab.

Or, get to the "System Properties" screen at the Control Panel by double-left-clicking the "System" icon.

Or, in XP: go to Start < All Programs < Accessories < System Tools < System Information. The amount of RAM will be shown in "Total Physical Memory" near the bottom of the System Summary page.

Or, run one of the free system audit programs. Use Belarc Advisor, WinAudit, or SIW (System Information for Windows). Google the names to get the sources.

**What kind of RAM should I buy?**

The first place to look for information on upgrading RAM would be in the documentation that came with your computer. Next would be your manufacturer's website. The manufacturer's prices on RAM will probably be high. Crucial Technology has a scanning program that will determine the RAM you have and recommend what to install. You can also get their recommendations by looking up your PC's make and model on a chart at the same site. Go to [www.crucial.com](http://www.crucial.com). Crucial gets their income from selling RAM, so their recommendations may be a bit biased.

Similar look-up charts are on the websites of two other RAM-sellers at [www.kingston.com](http://www.kingston.com) and [www.pny.com](http://www.pny.com). Once you get the description of the RAM you need, you can check local shops for prices.

**How do I install additional RAM?**

Installing RAM is one of the simpler PC jobs. If you don't feel comfortable attempting it, perhaps a knowledgeable friend would do it. Or, talk to one of the local computer shops about selling you the RAM and installing it also.

**Does a RAM upgrade make economic sense?**

With the relatively low prices of RAM these days, adding RAM isn't that expensive anymore. However, more upgrades like a new motherboard, a better video card, or a larger hard drive, may not be a good idea. With new low-end PCs selling for less than \$500 including monitor, it might make more economic sense to replace your old PC. Although low-end, the new one would probably perform better than your old machine, and all the parts would be new and more reliable.

**It's a Puzzle**

This is a magic square. No number is repeated; each line adds to 15; each diagonal adds to 15.

2	7	6	→	15
9	5	1	→	15
4	3	8	→	15
↙	↓	↓	↓	↘
15	15	15	15	15

Can you do the same thing with a 4x4 Square? (Hint: 34) See how far you can get. We'll give you an answer next month.

**Pictures from the February meeting**

Sandy Johnson showing changes for 2007 taxes.



Bill Scott showing digital picture frame

Editor's Note: The March 2008 issue of *Smart Computing* has a 3-page article on 'How to Buy a Digital Picture Frame.'

## Tips from Del

**Foxit Reader** is a program that displays PDF files, in the same way as Adobe Reader - except Foxit has a few additional features. One feature is the capability for highlighting text and then copying this text to your clipboard or to another document. Another feature is a snapshot tool that will allow copying a selected portion of the screen as graphics. And another feature is a search function that will look for any word or phrase in the PDF document - or in any group of PDF documents.

All of these features are included in Foxit version 2.2 which can be downloaded for free (Search using Google). I have recommended Foxit to Tim for adding a link on the RVPC web site.

**ERUNT** (Emergency Recovery Utility) is a useful program for users of Windows 2000. As you probably know, Windows 98 has a restore feature that allows you to return your computer to one of 4 previous dates. I have used this feature many times to solve a serious problem. Windows XP has a similar program that will allow restoration to a date that can be selected from a group of previous days. Windows 2000, however, limits the restore feature to a single date (last known configuration) and many times that isn't enough.

ERUNT will automatically back-up your configuration each day and allow recovery to any of the previous days. It can be downloaded for free (Search using Google). There is documentation on the use of ERUNT at the download site.

**Diagnostic Tool:** One other item that provides some interesting info, for users of DirectX, is a built-in diagnostic tool that will tell you who made your CPU and its current clock frequency plus a lot of other interesting information about your system. Click on Start, Run and type in DxDiag and click on Okay. Click on the different tabs that come up to see various types of information.

**Firewall:** I recommend that Zone Alarm be

replaced with Comodo. I have found Comodo to be a user-friendly and effective firewall. It can be found at [www.comodo.com](http://www.comodo.com).

Del Kirschner

## Free Games Online

Did you catch the almost full-page ad in the Parade that came in the Sunday, February 3, Roanoke Times? It said "500+ games. Play now for free. [www.parade.com/games](http://www.parade.com/games)"

They have Sudoku, Mahjong, solitaire, brainteasers, puzzles, and action games. It seems to work as claimed - give 'em a try. The price is right!

## Musophobic?

Some people don't use their computer's mouse as often as others. They don't have musophobia (fear of mice) but they want to use a faster method. So, they use keyboard shortcuts, combinations of keys that replace clicking a choice on the menus.

Microsoft has publications that list keyboard shortcuts for all their products. Go to [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com). In the home page, search for "keyboard shortcuts." Click on the response at the top of the list, "Keyboard Assistance and Shortcuts for Microsoft Products." You will get a list of Microsoft products to choose from.

There are many useful shortcuts here, such as: in Internet Explorer, you can add "www." to the beginning and ".com" to the end of the text typed in the Address Bar by pressing Control + Enter. Instead of typing www dot microsoft dot com, just type microsoft then press and hold Control and press Enter.

