

PC NEWS

Alaska Computer Society – PC Users Group

July 2002

Volume 1, Number 12

Meeting Announcement

What to do with your old computer?

Thursday, July 11, 2002, 7 P.M.

Lecture Hall of the Carr Gottstein Academic Center
Main Campus, Alaska Pacific University

Join us for a public forum to discuss recycling and reuse of surplus computers. A panel of experts will be on hand as follows:

- A representative from **DEC** (Alaska State Department of Environmental Conservation), will provide an overview of current laws and ordinances regarding local recycling of computers and monitors.
- Sean Skaling, **Anchorage Chapter** of GreenStar, will discuss the recycling solutions currently available in Anchorage, and a possible approach to recycling/reusing computers and monitors.
- Tom Shackle, **Parents, Inc.**, (affiliated with the **National Cristina Foundation**) will discuss their recently initiated program for reclaiming surplus computers to distribute to families with disabled children and other needy populations.
- Guy Barton, **Smurfit-Stone Recycling**, will discuss the toxicity issues.

The Alaska Computer Society is a nonprofit educational organization. Our meetings are always free and open to the public. We meet the second Thursday of each month, usually at the Carr Gottstein building at APU, 4101 University Drive.

For further details about our group and a map to the meeting location, visit our web site at <http://www.acs-pcug.org>.

PC NEWS

Alaska Computer Society – PC Users Group

July 2002

Volume 1, Number 12

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1 Program Ponderings | 2 |
| 2 Meeting Report – June 2002 | 3 |
| 2.1 Q & A session | 3 |
| 2.2 Announcements: | 4 |
| 2.3 Presentation | 4 |
| 3 ACS Software Evaluation Inventory | 9 |
| 4 What’s Next? | 10 |
| 5 Editor’s Keyboard | 10 |
| 6 The Back Page | 12 |

1 Program Ponderings

by Dawn Scott, Program and Community Service Chair

The ACS-PCUG board of directors has been discussing the lack of a coordinated computer recycling effort here in town for months. There are ecological issues regarding dumping computers: lead, cadmium, and other toxic substances. And there are sociological issues—many agencies and families could use what others call surplus computers. There are some pockets of recycling going on here in town: boy scout troops, a church or two, and the new Cristina Foundation affiliate (see below). But ask the regular computer user on the street, and he doesn't have any idea what to do with his old computers. One of our board members, for instance, says he has 5 computers in his home that have become outdated, and he doesn't know what to do with them!

Then, Tom Shackle, of Parents, Inc., contacted me a few weeks ago, asking if we would help Parents, Inc. publicize their new affiliation with the Cristina Foundation, a national computer recycle/reuse group. After talking to Tom, we realized our community needed to start taking a serious look at this problem, and perhaps ACS-PCUG could be the catalyst for this. So, on July 11, we are bringing the interested parties and current stakeholders together in a public forum format.

PC NEWS

Alaska Computer Society – PC Users Group

July 2002

Volumn 1, Number 12

The ACS-PCUG has actually been doing some minimal recycling of computers for several years. We have been accepting computer donations for the very popular AARP computer lab. Howard Bonar, an ACS-PCUG board member, accepts the donations and does all the work to get them set up on a network for the AARP computer training program. This program trains up to 80 individuals a month, and almost always has a waiting list. The lab is no cost for AARP, and the classes are no-cost for the students (once they join AARP). Heck of a deal! While the ACS-PCUG is not committing to any aspect of a larger-scale involvement in a recycling program at this time, there are user groups across the world that work on recycling programs as part of their services.

For instance, the Tulsa Computer Society works with a local boys ranch in such an effort. Local companies donate the computers, and volunteers from the Tulsa Computer Society go to the ranch on certain weekends and help teach the boys how they work. Together they reformat the computers and fix their problems before passing them on to non-profit places needing them. A short article about the program can be found at www.tcs.org/refurb.htm. We will be researching other user group computer recycling programs before the July 11 meeting. The ACS-PCUG board believes this is an important topic that Anchorage needs to address. We hope you will agree, and will plan on attending the July 11 meeting.

2 Meeting Report – June 2002

by Howard L. Bonar, Secretary, Alaska Computer Society

The June 13, 2002, meeting was held at the Carr Gottstein Lecture Hall at Alaska Pacific University. Gene White, President, called the meeting to order at 7:03.

2.1 Q & A session

- Ray had a question about on-line banking using the bank's web page. His problem comes when he tries to print the screen using a shareware utility. The operation is erratic at best. It may need upgrading or reinstallation.
- Al asked what E-mail utility is used to get the user's due date on the

PC NEWS

Alaska Computer Society – PC Users Group

July 2002

Volume 1, Number 12

meeting announcements. Fred responded with the information that the program being used by ACS is freeware that allows merging which includes this feature. (The freeware is limited to sending no more than one hundred messages at a time.) Fred will send Al the program's contact information.

- Mike asked if anyone else is using wireless networking. He had recently set up a Lynksys on his network at home. He finally got it to work after considerable hassle. Several are using wireless and the consensus is that the Cisco system is the easiest to configure. The dlink system was reported to work fine with a minimum of problems.
- The question was brought up about Microsoft's planned software insurance program. Implementation may be delayed until July 1st. It applies to those having the Version 6 licensing. Check the Microsoft web page at www.microsoft.com for current information.

2.2 Announcements:

- The Newsletter is now available on the web site at www.acs-pcug.org.
- ACS is still looking for volunteers to assist in carrying on the projects of the group. Anyone interested in volunteering for one of the open positions or having any other skill to offer should come to the board meetings held at 7:00 PM on the third Thursday of every month at the AARP Information center in Northway Mall. You will be very welcome.
- Next month's presentation will be announced.
- Door prizes were a laptop carrying case and a very nice polo shirt. Holly won the case.

2.3 Presentation

Mike Barsalou, President of the Alaska Linux Users Group, introduced us to the world of open software. This is software that can be modified by the users at will. He has been involved the group for four years and has been president for two. He has been using Linux since 1997.

PC NEWS

Alaska Computer Society – PC Users Group

July 2002

Volumn 1, Number 12

Mike works for a small company with five employees, most of them engineers. They had been using the Microsoft NT4 operating system for their network. It was costing in the neighborhood of from \$10,000 to \$15,000 to set up. As an experiment, they installed Red Hat Linux on one of their computers and it worked the first time.

A big “Thank you!” to Estimations Inc. of Anchorage for the loan of their laptop which he used for this presentation.

Why Linux?

Cost: Many small business owners are now finding themselves in a financial pinch as they try to keep their operating systems current. We are in an environment mostly controlled by one company who can and does change products at will. This can force an expensive upgrade upon users whether they want it or not. Linux provides an alternative operating system that is basically free. Any upgrades can be adopted at the user’s discretion. Commercial versions are available at a nominal price.

History of Linux: Linux was created in 1991 by then college student Linus Torvalds. He wanted to create an inexpensive operating system for his own use based on UNIX. Unix offered a lot more power and capability than the DOS based machines of the time. Torvalds made his new operating system available over the Internet along with its source code. His concept was simple, other developers could modify the code and present their enhancements back to his group. If the change was worthwhile it would be included in the package. As a result, improvements came rapidly and the use of the new system skyrocketed. Version 1.2 came out in 1992. Version 7.X is now available.

Who Manages Linux: Linux-originator Linus Torvalds and Alan Cox, head an organization that collects the software submitted by the open source community. The group then integrates it, tests it, and decides whether or not to include it in an upcoming release. There are other groups managing their own versions of the program.

PC NEWS

Alaska Computer Society – PC Users Group

July 2002

Volumn 1, Number 12

Why Not Linux?

There are a number of myths about the program which are given as reasons to stay away from it. A few of them are:

- Compatibility issues;
- Liability issues;
- Support issues;
- Availability (of applications) issues;
- Free must be bad, and finally,
- No presence in the community.

Mike presented the “Linux” view of these myths.

Compatibility: It is true that many applications written for Windows are not yet ported to Linux but that situation is rapidly changing. Corel recently released its Linux version of Word Perfect Office. Also, there is a translator which runs in Linux that allows it to run Windows and Windows based programs. (Windows 98 on the demonstration machine was observed to load up faster under Linux than it does by itself on a 266 Mhz Pentium). The translator does use half of the PC resources to operate but it does work nicely.

Liability: When did you ever see a software package that did not say that the company was not liable for any and all damages that might be suffered when using their programs. It is the buyer-beware computer world.

Support: Support is readily available locally from several firms to assist if you have a problem. Core Comm is just one of the companies. As more systems are installed you may be sure there will be more available. The local Linux Users Group (AKLUG) offers several programs to help people get started. (see below for meeting information) On the other hand, the system seems to need a lot less support than some others do. On-line help is available at www.aklug.org and www.dejanews.com. Additional links can be found on both URLs.

PC NEWS

Alaska Computer Society – PC Users Group

July 2002

Volumn 1, Number 12

Applications: Available Applications may be a problem for a few but with the Open Office suite of applications available free there is not much left to need for most of us.

- Sun Microsystems developed a suite of office applications called Star Office for its own version of Unix and turned it over to the Open Office Organization. It has been added to and upgraded to its present level.
- The Open Office suite of applications has been adapted for use with either Linux or Windows. It includes a word processor, spreadsheet, HTML Editor, Basic, a Mathematical formula calculator program, and a slide presentation program.
- Several other applications, many of them free, are available for downloading from web sites such as www.freshmeat.net.
- Those who have a specific requirement may be forced to stay with their present operating system.

Free must be bad: Free is a relative term. There are costs incurred with any system including, acquisition, installation, training, maintenance, and on-going upgrades and enhancements. Firms have reported savings of up to 80% in their overall Information System costs by going to Linux. Once installed, the systems are reported to be very stable and suffer very few crashes. Network servers have been reported as running for months without having to be rebooted. It appears that most of the firms engaged in developing and selling versions of Linux make most of their money from documentation, support, and training services.

Presence: A number of major companies have switched their corporate business to the Linux operating system. According to Mike, Burlington Coat factory, Wells Fargo Banks, Jay Jacobs clothing chain, and the U.S. Postal Service are just four of the many firms that have made the change.

Recent Developments:

Off-The-Shelf: Recent news releases told of several computer manufacturers now offering some of their products with the system installed. They include: Compaq, Dell, IBM, and Intel.

PC NEWS

Alaska Computer Society – PC Users Group

July 2002

Volumn 1, Number 12

Choose your flavor: There are several versions of Linux available although all are based on the same kernel. The major differences are the features offered and appearance.

Choose your niche: Linux is available in several configurations with specific special functions built in.

- First there is the basic Operating System and Linux as workstation.
- Then there are the various server functions, that is, Web Server, Mail Server including a Spam Stopper, and a Data Base Server.

Choose your vendor: As the demand for Linux has increased, Red Hat and other developers began selling packaged versions. These usually include documentation and some telephone and Internet support.¹

Choose your download site: It can be downloaded for free from numerous locations on the Internet.

Choose your local source: Perhaps a better source is the local users group. For this meeting, Mike made several copies of the Open Office Suite of applications to pass out to anyone interested. On the CD were versions of OpenOffice for both Linux and the Windows operating systems.

If you are interested in learning more, the Alaska Linux Users Group meets the third Wednesday of each month at the AIDEA building located at 813 W. Norther Lights starting at 7:00 PM. Linux installations are done at club meetings so if your are interested or need help, contact them for an appointment.

Mini installations are made weekly at the Career Academy on Tudor Road. Meetings start at 6:30 PM on Friday evenings. Entrance to the meeting room is on the North side of the building. Greg Madden is the coordinator. Check their web page at www.aklug.org for more information.

Note: This report was written using one of the free copies of Open Office that Mike handed out after the meeting. It is running on an HP 7965 1.7 ghz pentium four machine using Windows XP home edition. The software loaded

¹Commercial versions of Linux are available at several local computer stores.

PC NEWS

Alaska Computer Society – PC Users Group

July 2002

Volumn 1, Number 12

with no problems and so far seems to be functioning well. The readme file on the disk states that it is compatible with most versions of Windows.

I have not checked all of the other applications included in the package except a quick test of the spreadsheet. It seems to be working fine also. My first impression was that the user interface is a bit “techie” but as I use it more, I think it will be just fine for most people. The help menus and index were very useful whenever I used it. The menus are very similar to Microsoft Word and Word Perfect’s so anyone familiar with either will have no problem learning their way around this one. The list of translators is very limited so remember to save in the Word mode if you are going to be interchanging documents. HLB

3 ACS Software Evaluation Inventory

This inventory is current as of June 2002.

Price listed is the deposit required for the evaluation program. It is the approximate estimated street value of the software. It will be refunded after an acceptable review is turned in for publication in the ACS Newsletter. There is an agreement form to be signed and guidelines available to help you.

These new programs will be available at the July 2002 meeting.

Image Editing Suite by **ArcSoft**, \$50.00

Digital Imaging technology Suite of Utilities.

Drive Image 5.0 by **PowerQuest** \$70.00

Automatic protection for files, restores, etc.

Quicken 2002 Deluxe by **Intuit**, \$60.00

FileMaker 5.5 by **FileMaker, Inc.** \$150.00

Data base program on CD 2001

Pc Sync by **Laplink**, \$100.00

Transfer files between computers (CD with cables)

Web Editor 5 by **Namo Interactive, Inc.**, \$100.00

Creating and Managing Web Sites

PC NEWS

Alaska Computer Society – PC Users Group

July 2002

Volume 1, Number 12

4 What's Next?

August:

Thursday, August 8, 2002: Digital Photography

Jim Lavrakas, an Anchorage Daily News staff photographer for the past 20 years, will speak about the advent of digital photography in the newspaper business. He'll show examples of his work and discuss how "filmless cameras" have changed the face of photojournalism.

September:

Thursday, September 12, 2002: Comparing consumer quality accounting packages

Jacque Briskey, CPA, will discuss, "Accounting Software For The Small Business".

The SBA reports that many small businesses fail because of poor recordkeeping. Yet, doing the books for a small business is a task that most business people loathe. Selecting the right software should be made after thorough research for the program that best fits your business. Explore some of the features and benefits of 3 of the best packages targeted at small business - long-established Peachtree Complete, feature-rich MYOB and popular QuickBooks.

If you own or are starting a small business, bring your CPA and discover together the accounting program that can help you better manage your business.

5 Editor's Keyboard

by Fielder George Dowding, editor and publisher.

An editor is in a position not unlike Janus, that mythical door-keeper. He was the god in the Roman line-up that was usually depicted in art as having two faces. Apparently the artists had the notion that a door (or gate) when closed "looked" in two opposite directions at the same time.

PC NEWS

Alaska Computer Society – PC Users Group

July 2002

Volumn 1, Number 12

Each issue of the newsletter is like a door in time. Publishing the issue is closing the door. One face looks to the past which cannot be changed, and the other face looks to the future which can be given direction.

My Workstation:

Back in 1981 I bought my first personal computer, an Osborne I (tan case). Wow! As puny as the Osborne I was, it and the 300 baud modem permitted me to log in to my account at UAA. I could do my home work at home. I wrote my papers using WordSt*r 3.2 for CP/M.

By the end of 2001, I had experienced DOS, Windows 3.1, IBM's OS/2, Windows 95, and 98. I had tried Coherent. I have experienced the Mac. I decided on the Debian distribution for my Linux workstation. I was still using Windows 98 for three applications that were not available for Linux.

Well, by January 1, 2002, my financial circumstances as well as my general dissatisfaction with proprietary software moved me to my Debian box. I have been preparing this newsletter on my substantially re-cycled hand-me-downs. None of the software I have on my workstation cost me one copper.

For a look at the choices just in the Linux world, take a look at [ilbiblio linux archive](#).

101 Things to Do With a Used Computer:

As I write this editorial, there seems to be only two choices: a used computer may be (item #1) reused as a hand-me-down computer or (item #101) dumped as junk in the landfill. The presentation for July is an expert panel that will dispell this myth.

We in Alaska have an opportunity to take action to benefit society without being forced by legislation. We in the ACS-PCUG have an opportunity to be the glue or communications channel that brings the available forces together to make something bigger than the parts. There will be ample opportunities for volunteering your time and expertise. Keep tuned! Be there! Participate! fgd

PC NEWS

Alaska Computer Society – PC Users Group

July 2002

Volumn 1, Number 12

6 The Back Page

A note to the gentle reader: replace the “{at}” in the address with the “at-sign” should you desire to contact one of the below listed volunteers. I have mangled the address to thwart harvesting by spam-bots. Please visit the “About” page on the ACS-PCUG site for the additional contact information.

ACS Board of Directors

| | | |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| President: | Gene White | president{at}acs-pcug |
| Vice-President: | Mike Jacquot | vice-president{at}acs-pcug.org |
| Secretary: | Howard Bonar | secretary{at}acs-pcug.org |
| Treasurer: | Fred Erickson | treasurer{at}acs-pcug.org |
| Program: | Dawn Scott | sos{at}alaska.net |

ACS PCUG Volunteers

Greetings to Holly Hawkings, who volunteered to tackle publicity for the group.

| | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Community Services | Dawn Scott (Chair) | sos{at}alaska.net |
| Evaluation Coordinator | Howard Bonar | evals{at}acs-pcug.org |
| Meeting Desk Registration | Al Schuerger | sugarshak{at}gci.net |
| Meeting Reminder Fax | Sharon Dunkle | dunkle{at}corecom.net |
| Membership Coordinator | Fred Erickson | membership{at}acs-pcug.org |
| Newsletter: | Fielder G. Dowding | newsletter{at}acs-pcug.org |
| Publications Coordinator | (Position Open) | |
| Publicity Coordinator | Holly Hawkings | |
| SIG Coordinator | (Position Open) | |

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