

May 2014

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Ken Johnson, Newsletter Editor

CALENDAR

SIG = Special Interest Group

This Week's Schedule:

May 10 - Saturday - 1:00-3:00 PM

[General Meeting](#) - Leader: Ray Carlson

Location: Prescott Public Library

First Hour: Solid State Drives: Are They for You?

Increasingly, we see recommendations for replacing our computer's hard drive with a solid state drive or only purchasing new computers that use the solid state option. Is that a worthwhile suggestion? To help with this question, during the first hour of the General Meeting on May 10th, Jeff Stillman will explain the difference between hard drives (or IDEs), solid state drives, and hybrids that combine the two. He will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each. Questions about problems with such drives will be encouraged.

Second Hour: Phil Ball will present Tips and Tricks with insights into various topics that assist with regular computer activity.

In addition to the presentations, the following are typical events which take place at our General meetings:

1) We hold an informal Flea Market in which you are encouraged to bring in your excess computer equipment or software and make them available for others to enjoy at no charge. Please deposit give-away items on the table in the back marked "Free Stuff." Any items left here at the end of the meeting are subject to disposal.

2) If you have items that are just too good to give away, you may set up a separate table and hold your own sale.

3) We conduct a raffle of new computer items at the end of the meeting, so make sure to get a pair of tickets from whoever is in charge and place one on the item you'd like to win.

4) We will also accept your used ink and toner cartridges for recycling. They are turned in to Think4Inc for credits which PCS uses to purchase office supplies from them.

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Future Meetings

May 17 - Saturday - 1:00-2:45 PM

[Special Topics SIG](#) - Leader: JB Burke

Location: Prescott Public Library

Because of scheduling issues, this meeting will end 15 minutes earlier than normal.

This month, JB will delve into topics related to computer hardware, software, the Internet and the World Wide Web. You are sure to find something educational and/or entertaining and/or interesting in this fast-paced enjoyable session. As always, questions and comments will be welcome. After all, JB has to be learning something from these sessions too!

May 24 - Saturday

There will be no PCS meeting today.

May 29 - Thursday - 6:00-8:30 PM

[Board of Directors](#) meeting - Prescott Public Library; Elsea Room

All PCS members are welcome to attend but you are asked to first [contact Ray Carlson](#) in order to ensure that there will be room available for you.

May 31 - Saturday

There will be no PCS meeting today.

Welcome to NEW MEMBERS

Steve Herman Terry Muench
Vickie Anderson Mac Hasvold
Stacy Booth & Alan Buck
Trygve & Leila Lerwick

*Note that these dates are correct at time of publication but are subject to change.
Up to date information can be found on our website, www.pcs4me.com*

*Unless otherwise noted, our meetings are usually held in the
Founder's Suite at the Prescott Public Library.*

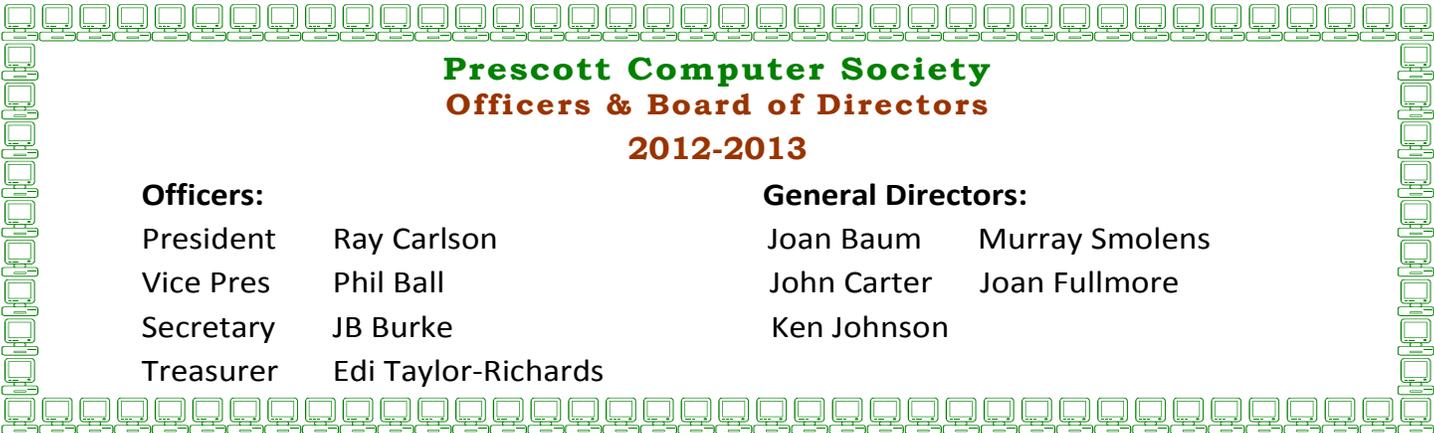
Prescott Computer Society Officers & Board of Directors 2012-2013

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- President Ray Carlson
- Vice Pres Phil Ball
- Secretary JB Burke
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- Joan Baum Murray Smolens
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Take One Tablet and Text Me in the Morning

By Greg Skalka, President, Under the Computer Hood User Group

September 2013 issue, Drive Light

www.uchug.org

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I've been pretty lucky with contests this year. My winning started at our group's January meeting, where I won the copy of Office Professional 2010 that Microsoft gave away at our party at the Microsoft store. Then at a local electronics component trade show in May, I won a drawing for an iPad Mini. Though it was the low-cost 16GB Wi-Fi version, it was still a more expensive tablet than I would have bought for myself.

I had been thinking of getting a new tablet, as the low-cost Velocity Micro Cruz reader I bought a few years ago was never more than fair at getting on the Internet. Since my wife had gotten a Kindle Fire HD for Christmas and my son bought himself a Google Nexus 7, I felt left out of the tablet world. I initially considered selling the iPad and buying a Nexus 7, but in the end kept it, concluding that this was probably the only way I was going to own an Apple product.

I have nothing against Apple; I think they make very good products, but feel they are overpriced. Though I may admire BMW automobiles, I'm fairly certain I'll never own one for the same reason. For me, it is all about value. I'd never considered buying an iPad Mini, as I felt there were a number of alternatives that were at least almost as good, but at 2/3rds of the price. I've known a number of Apple fanatics, some acting like cult followers. I figured this windfall would allow me to more fairly review an Apple product and perhaps give me some insight into the cult.

Though I've had the iPad for a few months, I have not really made much use of it. Its ability to browse on the web is excellent, beating my old Cruz reader by at least an order of magnitude. The iPad easily displays any web page and allows me to bypass those horrible mobile-oriented pages that seem so neutered. Still, I favor wired network connections at home, so I've used the iPad mostly when traveling. I also have not yet figured out how to transfer files to or from the iPad easily. It appears to have a great camera, but I have not been able to transfer photos. Problems with my Apple ID are contributing to the lack of wider use, and I'm still confused as to how to easily bridge the

Apple and PC worlds.

In spite of relatively little use, the iPad did work well for me while on two weekend getaways with my wife early this summer. I'm accustomed to taking my laptop with me when traveling (I prefer a smaller 14" screen for greater portability), but on these trips I also brought the iPad along as it is so small. Since it is so quick to start up, the tablet became my preferred device for web searches for nearby restaurants and attractions. Once back home, however, I went back to my PC ways.

A few weeks ago I learned that I was a winner once again. I had entered a web contest with Littelfuse, a manufacturer of electronics protection components, and got the call that I was one of 10 winners of their Speed2Design contest (www.speed2design.com/contest). The prize was a trip to the NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View, CA, for an all-day engineering-oriented tour on August 15.

Prior to this, I had not considered my streak of luck in contests so significant that I should block out the time in my schedule for the prize trip when entering. I received notice that I had won only two weeks before the NASA trip, so was fortunate that the trip did not interfere with the family mini vacation to Catalina Island I had scheduled for two days afterwards. Since I had already scheduled vacation for the Catalina trip, I decided to minimize the vacation needed for the NASA trip and fly up to San Jose in the afternoon on Wednesday, the day before the tour. I needed to be there at the hotel by 6 PM for a reception, and felt flying mid-afternoon on Southwest Airlines would get me there in time. I'd flown to San Jose many times for business and was very familiar with the airport and area, justifying my lack of much margin on the travel arrangements.

Air travel used to be fun, but now with all the security scrutiny, crowded airports, baggage restrictions and added fees, it has become something like going into battle. I signed up for flight updates by text message with Southwest and with my favorite flight tracking website, Flightaware (www.flightaware.com). While still at work on my departure day, I received messages that my flight's departure would be delayed by 35 minutes. Since I believe delays breed delays, I started getting anxious about arriving in time for the evening reception.

I had planned on bringing my laptop and checking a bag (I like to be prepared, which often means bring-

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ing more stuff than I typically use), but with the news of my flight delay, I decided to see if I could just carry everything on and eliminate the time waiting in the baggage claim area in San Jose. Since this seemed more reasonable if I left the laptop at home, I decided to take only the iPad. I rushed home from work, repacked my bags to take only the tablet, and headed for the airport. Fortunately, my flight was not delayed further, and I made it to the reception in time.

Littelfuse really treated us great, and put us up at the Santa Clara Marriott. My only gripe with the hotel was that they charge \$6 per day for in-room Internet access (\$13 for bandwidth enough for video chat and streaming video). The hotel did provide free Wi-Fi in their lobby, but once again it is indicative of this added-fee culture in the travel business. I've stayed in hotels all over the Bay Area and had always found free in-room Internet access. And this is in the city of Santa Clara, which provides free public Wi-Fi over most outdoor areas of the city (when Santa Clara switched to smart power meters this year, it provided the free Wi-Fi in conjunction with the wireless network needed to read the meters). I was able to sit in the Jack In the Box across the street from the hotel Friday morning after the tour and surf the web on the Santa Clara city network while having breakfast (sorry, I'd forgotten my other Marriott gripe: their hotel breakfast was \$22).

The NASA tours arranged by Littelfuse on Thursday were the experience of a lifetime. Our day was packed with tours and presentations on nine different topics, all of which were excellent. In addition to touring the world's largest wind tunnel and learning about NASA's latest efforts to sustain humans in the closed environment of a space station through forward osmosis filtration of waste liquids, I saw several items that would have been of particular interest to our group. One was the Hyperwall display and Pleiades supercomputer.

Pleiades is a 1.79 petaflop supercomputer, made up of 130,000 cores in 182 racks. To make sense of the results of the complex simulations run on it, NASA uses the Hyperwall, a matrix of displays 12 wide and 7 high. It can all be devoted to the display of one simulation, like a world-wide view of ocean currents, or instead display the outputs of many simulations at once (<http://vimeo.com/71358105>). And I thought my dual display of 23" monitors at work was hot stuff.

Another interesting project we saw was the Phone-Sat. To try to reduce costs and gain more knowledge quickly, NASA has developed small cube satellites (approx. 4" x 4") based on cell phone processors (<http://vimeo.com/71356259>, www.phonesat.org). In early incarnations, there were actual cell phones built into the cubesat. The phones they prefer to use are based on the open source Android operating system (sorry, Apple).

On the flight back from San Jose, I was on a Southwest plane with inflight Wi-Fi. They of course wanted a fee for web browsing (\$8 per day), but on that flight they also had some free live and on-demand TV shows courtesy of Dish Network. The iPad Mini provided a great display for the TV, but since I had not brought headphones, I had to settle for watching their free flight tracker for most of the flight. Installing this Wi-Fi system in their planes is a win-win situation for Southwest, as they can get the extra revenue from the Internet and movie fees as well as save flight weight, as they are making their passengers bring their own screens for movies.

The iPad Mini worked so well on the Littelfuse NASA trip that I again took it in place of my laptop on the Catalina trip. With Wi-Fi at our hotel, it again was great for checking on activities and dining on the web. It is certainly a lot lighter and easier to travel with than a laptop. It does not fill all the travel needs that a laptop does, however.

One thing I have used my laptop for on travel is for photo storage. When my camera's memory card is full, the photos can be transferred to the laptop's hard drive. With the iPad Mini, which has no SD card slot and limited internal memory, I had to bring enough spare SD memory cards for the camera. Another thing I do frequently is to create a document before each of my trips, which contains all the trip information (flight, hotel and rental car times and confirmation numbers, planned activity details and other trip info). I typically keep this document on the USB Flash drive I always carry with me, and then can view it on my laptop if I lose the paper copy. With no USB capability on the iPad, I have to rely only on the paper copy. I suppose I could have put the document in the cloud so it could be viewed on the tablet, but I don't think I want all my travel details in the cloud. For a short trip the tablet works well, but the laptop might be better on longer ones.

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Portable Digital Storage

By Richard Durand, President, Wisconsin All Computer Users Club

December 2013 issue, WAUC Talk

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When I first joined WAUC in 1995, I noticed that some members would always come prepared to meetings and events with some 3.5" floppy disks. These disks were very useful for passing along or receiving files of photos, documents, and even programs. The 3.5" disk had a larger capacity than the previous 5.25" disks but wasn't much more reliable. I remember having a lot of problems getting these disks to be recognized in disk drives. Still, when they worked, they worked very well. They were relatively portable and handy to have along anytime one was out and about.

Of course, for portable storage, floppy disks have long been replaced by USB flash drives. When these were first available, they were incredibly expensive and by today's standards their memory capacity was very small.

I am now embarrassed to reveal how much I paid for my first USB flash drive (which I still have somewhere). It was a lot. But as I think back on it, I carried it around and used it for a long time and it's one of the things I can say I really got my money's worth for. All the other much smaller and slower items of computer equipment at that time cost a lot more also.

Today, USB flash drives are much more affordable and come with unbelievable memory capacities. If you don't have one, this is a good time to pick one up. I have found that for something to carry around, the most affordable ones with the smallest memory sizes are the best. For most purposes, one doesn't need that much memory and if one should lose a flash drive, something almost inevitable with something so small, one hasn't lost that much value.

If you get a chance, pick up an extra one to have as a backup in case you lose the one you already have. And as another precaution, transfer the files on your flash drive to your regular computer as often as possible.

There is now an even smaller and handier form of portable storage available, the SD memory card. These were first used as portable memory for digital cameras. To transfer photo files to a computer one had to connect the camera or an external card reader to one's computer. For some time now, computers, laptops, the new tablet and e-reader products sometimes come with a built-in slot for SD memory cards. If yours has an SD card slot, go ahead and take advantage of it and if not, look for this feature in your future computers and devices. An SD memory card can hold all the different files a USB flash drive can including documents and music files, not just photo files. It is even smaller and easier to carry than a USB flash drive and also easier to lose. One might want to carry it in one of those little plastic cases they sometimes come in. The same advice for USB flash drives applies to SD memory cards also. To be prepared for anything, you can have one of each on you.

USB flash drives and SD memory cards are so small, portable, and useful that you may find yourself with a lot more than you ever expected to have. I'm sure a lot of members have been using these items as portable storage for a long time already.

This column is just a way of saying how practical we are.

Cloud Storage - Are You Concerned?

By Bill Armstrong, Treasurer, Lehigh Valley Computer Group, PA

November 2013 issue, The LVCG Journal

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There has been discussion at our Lehigh Valley Computer Group meetings about cloud storage. Concerns include not being able to retrieve your data without an internet connection, and the safety of your sensitive data. Who is looking at it? Is it encrypted? Can the government get at it and see all your data? Can the company hosting the data read it?

These are legitimate concerns, especially since the recent revelation about the NSA spying on our domestic phone calls, emails, and cloud stored data.

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In today's Morning Call, I found an ad for Best Buy. It offers a solution to this concern that is very practical.

Western Digital offers their My Book Live Personal Cloud Storage external hard drive (HD). This unit attaches to your wireless router. That makes it available to every connected device that you own, both in your house, and when away from it (via the internet). That means your smart phone, tablet, and laptop, whatever. There are apps for both Android and iOS. You can store movies, photos, and all kinds of data, and access them anywhere you have an internet connection. It also makes a good place to share files with other family members, no matter where they are located. Public and Private shared accounts can be created.

Because the data resides on your personal hard drive in your home, the worries about others (government, hackers, etc.) getting that data is greatly reduced, if not eliminated. Your data is safely stored behind your user ID and password (as well as your router's security), which is as safe as you choose to make it (long, complex passwords are recommended).

The cost is not excessive. Best Buy offers the Western Digital 2 terabyte (TB) version for about \$130, and the 3 TB version for about \$150. The included software makes backup of your computer very easy.

Online backup services, such as Carbonite and iDrive cost about \$60 per year. This unit would pay for itself quickly, and offer the added privacy of local storage.

One drawback that I can see is that if my house should burn down, or thieves should steal the HD, your data is gone. Cloud storage is safer in that respect. Any very safe storage system should include off-site storage in some manner. It could be as simple as burning DVDs and storing them in another location.

So, to summarize, it is an interesting solution with many positives, but not a perfect one.

Computer Book & Magazine Recycling Service

Do you have old computer magazines or books that you don't need any longer? Bring them to a General meeting. Just bring your recent, but no longer wanted computer-related material to a general meeting. We suggest not bringing anything over a year old because they are out-of-date.

Anyone, including guests, can help themselves to any items on this table. There will be no charge for any items. After the meeting, remaining items will be discarded.

Prescott Computer Society

Where you share what you know, and learn what you don't.

