THE PRINTER

PRESIDENT'S CORNER
Welcome to Spring!

After another winter, it's finally time for the weather to become tolerable. And with Spring, comes Spring cleaning.

Taking place at the April 12 General meeting, members of the Computer Refurbishing SIG will demonstrate how to clean your PC for optimal operation. Cleaning your computer will help it last longer and run more efficiently. The CRSIG will also demonstrate some of the innards of various PC components. This should prove to be very interesting to all.

Guest Speaker Alert!

At the May 12 meeting we will have the representative from Epson and Canon on hand to discuss their products and demonstrate a piece of software that will calibrate your monitor for optimal output to your printer. Calibrating your monitor with your printer is important for accurate color output.

The June meeting will take place on June 7 (due to the school schedule). At this meeting we will have a speaker, Mike Alloy, from Severna Park Photo to discuss the latest in digital photography. **Please Note:** There will no be a **Technology SIG** meeting in June.

Coming and Going…

Len Lindenmeyer, the SIG leader for the Investment SIG, has moved out of the area. I would like to personally thank Len for his years of dedication to the SIG. Your leadership will be missed. And I wish you a happy and profitable retirement. With Lens' leaving, no one else has volunteered to

Outfit Your Workstation Ergonomically

Ergonomics affect everyone, especially if you sit at your computer for extended periods of time. You don't need an in-home expert if you follow a few simple rules to keep yourself healthy. Believe it or not, the proper way to sit while working at your computer is not reclining against a beanbag on the floor with a keyboard in your lap. Ergonomics isn't just for corporate cube dwellers. Everyone needs a comfortable workspace—and if you're in front of your computer as much as we are, this is doubly true.

If you're one of the millions of PC users who experience frequent wrist, neck, or back pain, properly setting up your workstation is something you need to do now. Pain and discomfort can get better, but only if you take steps to improve your environment and consult a doctor. If you haven't had any workstation-related pains, optimizing your desk can prevent them from ever occurring.

We've done all the research for you. We consulted a variety of ergonomic experts to compile our most complete list of ergo advice ever:

PRESIDENT'S CORNER - cont'd

lead the Investment SIG, thus the SIG will no longer hold meetings.

Chesapeake PC Users Group continues to grow!

Mid-Shore Computer Users Group

We have now added a Chapter to the users group that will be based in Easton, MD (on the Eastern Shore). The Mid-Shore Computer Users Group has become a Special Interested Group of the Chesapeake PC Users Group. The group leader will be Lee Wickline. Lee can be reached at mscug@chesapeakepcusersgroup.org or you can phone him at (410)745-9932. The SIGs meetings are held the third Thursday of each month. Please contact Lee for more information and directions to the meeting.

I hope you can make it to one of the upcoming meetings, the topics are very interesting and the speakers are superb.

Michael

How to Buy a Desktop PC - cont'd

ethernet. If you go wireless, you'll also need a card or an external adapter for each PC. (See "How to Buy Home Networking Products" [http://pcworld.com/howto/bguide/0,guid,17,00.asp] for more specifics.)

Sound: In the office, the basics should suffice; integrated sound in your PC is more than adequate for most work. At home, though, you'll probably want surround sound. If your PC doesn't already support surround sound, for $100 or more you can buy an upgraded sound card with Dolby 5.1 support, plus a decent set of speakers that includes a subwoofer.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT MONTH

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4 Tips for Troubleshooting Your Broadband Blues

by
Kim Komando

Many small-business owners shell out big bucks for high-speed Internet access. The savings in time are usually rewarded with higher productivity.

■ ■ ■If your high-speed system happens to be running slower than a clogged drain, don't complain just yet. Before you pay for an expensive in-office visit from your Internet service provider's tech support, here are four things you should consider.

1. **Know your speed.** You can sit at your computer with a stopwatch to see how long it takes to connect to your favorite Web site. But this is not a very good indication of download speed. Believe me, I've tried it. There are too many variables involved. I suggest you call the ISP and ask. The ISP probably can check download speeds on your line remotely. The number you get from the technician will probably be a best case figure; real-world Internet traffic can be bogged down. Or, you can also easily check your speed online, through MSN Tech & Gadgets' Internet speed test. Two other good sites are at BroadbandReports.com (formerly DSLReports) and Bandwidthplace.com. All three sites send data to your computer. The tests calculate the connection speed based upon the elapsed time it takes to download and upload the data. You may receive different results based on which test you use and where that test's server is located. For example, BroadbandReports offers servers throughout the world, while Bandwidthplace's test server is located in Texas. The further away you are from a server, the greater chance you'll encounter bottlenecks.The speed tests can give you a baseline speed. To establish that baseline, test your connection speeds throughout the day and keep a log. If there is a noticeable difference during specific times of the day, you'll be able to troubleshoot better.

2. **Start at the source.** You could have one of the fastest connections in the world. But if your computers are old, it won't matter much. When surfing the Net, you are downloading information. Some Web sites are simple and don't require much processing power. But most are heavy on graphics and code. A modern, fast chip will process and display the pages quickly.Memory is crucial, too. A Web page is loaded into your computer's memory. If there's not enough memory, some data is saved as a swap file on the hard drive. This can really slow things down, especially if you are running multiple applications. If you are using Windows XP or Windows 2000, you need a minimum of 256 megabytes of RAM. Windows 98 and Windows Me require 64 MB. Don't worry about purchasing a separate video card for your company's computers. Video cards are great for processing intense graphic images you'll encounter in games and video editing. When it comes to the Net, you won't see much difference between a system that uses an integrated video card and one with a video card separate from the motherboard.

3. **Clean the cache.** If you have the latest and greatest processor with plenty of memory, your Web browser may be causing the slowdown. After weeks spent on the Internet, your Web browser can get bogged down from temporary files. It's time to do some spring cleaning.Go into your Web browser and clear out your history and temporary files. To do this in Internet Explorer, click Tools and Internet Options. On the General tab, click Delete Files (place a check mark next to Delete all offline content) and Clear History. In Netscape, click Edit and Preferences. Under Navigator, find History. Click Clear History. Under Advanced, click Cache. Click Clear Disk Cache. If you're using Apple's Safari, click Safari and Empty Cache. Reboot the computer.

4. **Tweak your settings.** You may need to configure your computers' settings to take advantage of

3

I've Got the Broadband Blues - cont'd

broadband. BroadbandReports has a "Tweak Test" that will examine your computer's configuration (from the BroadbandReports home page, click on "Test & Tools" at left). After the test, enter the service you have (cable, DSL, etc.), advertised speed, operating system and connection type. Click recommend. You'll find a series of settings that can be changed along with notes and recommendations. Recommendations are broken into five categories, ranging from "something good" to "big problem." If your computer is not optimized to maximum, you'll probably find that DrTCP is recommended. This is a small, free program at BroadbandReports that acts as a GUI interface into your registry. Before changing any of your settings, I recommend you read the FAQ on the program at the BroadbandReports' site (www.dslreports.com/faq/578). If you are still experiencing unusually slow speeds, you might have to call in an expert. Your ISP's small-business tech support might have to come to your office to evaluate the situation. There may be an internal hardware issue (your router, modem, networking wires, etc.) causing the creeping service. Lagging service can also be caused by the lines outside your company's walls. There are many outside influences that can cause slow-surfing problems. The Internet is system of countless networks. When delays occur, it's not necessarily your fault.

Kim Komando*Kim Komando writes about workplace technology and security issues. She's the host of the nation's largest talk-radio show about computers and the Internet, and writes a syndicated column for more than 100 Gannett newspapers and for USA Today. Find Kim's show on the radio station nearest you, and send an e-mail to subscribe to her free weekly e-mail newsletter.*

Linksys 54GX4 Wi-Fi

The industrial-looking Linksys WRT54GX4 looks right at home in an IT department; less so in a home environment. But its 5-inch long antennae deliver excellent range when paired with the WPC54GX4 wireless network adapter.

We achieved unencrypted TCP throughput of 57.4Mb/s at a range of 75 feet from the access point, on an outdoor patio surrounded by trees, with two gypsum interior walls and one plywood-siding exterior wall in between (see "Environment 1" in the benchmark chart).

Testing inside the house approximately 25 feet from the access point, with four gypsum interior walls separating the laptop from the access point, we achieved average TCP throughput of 101.2Mb/s (see "Environment 2" in the benchmark chart).

The SRX400 combo supports WPA and WPA2 encryption, and we saw negligible throughput deterioration using those standards. But we then configured it to use the older 128-bit WEP encryption, because that's the only standard recognized by both of the A/V streaming boxes we

4

Outfit Your Workstation Ergonomically - cont'd

Dr. Nancy Baker, an occupational therapist with the University of Pittsburgh; Michael Abramson, co-founder of HealthyComputing.com; and chiropractor Pam Adams of Life Chiropractic College West. Spend 10 minutes and take their advice. Your radiocarpal joint will thank you!

Setting Up Your Chair and Desk

Experts agree that your chair is the single most important piece of equipment in your ergo-arsenal, so if you can afford it, spring for the works. Your seating scenario needs to fit both you and your environment, which means you need a chair that's as adjustable as possible. Here's how to adjust the chair:

1. Adjust the seat height until your arms bend at a 90 degree angle when your lower arm is level with the keyboard. If your desk is too high, consider installing a keyboard tray underneath the desk, which can make this adjustment much easier.

2. Now, if you're very short, your feet may be dangling. Add a footstool or some other stool-like object so your legs are supported.
3. Sit back in the chair so your entire back is supported from the shoulder blades on down. Again, if you're too short for the chair and you can't use the back rest without your feet hanging down, place a cushion behind you. A lumbar support is great if your chair has one. If not, try putting a rolled up towel between your lower back and the backrest.
4. Finally, adjust the armrests so they support your elbows at the 90 degree angle you set up previously. Don't rest your elbows on the desk. As for posture, sit up straight or recline a bit, whatever works for you. The important thing is that you're comfortable and that the critical points of your body are supported and aren't subject to constant stress.

As a final note, remember that the area under your desk shouldn't be a storage space. Keep it clear so you can move your legs and stretch them out from time to time.

Setting Up Your Keyboard

The goal with your keyboard is to keep your palm from twisting in any way, either back toward the wrist or side-to-side, toward the pinky or thumb. Lay your hand and wrist flat on the desk with your fingers curled, as if lightly holding a ball. This (called the "neutral position") is how your hand should look when you're typing.

To get your hand in the neutral position, first you'll want your keyboard as level as possible. Don't use the tabs on the underside to raise the rear of the keyboard, as this increases stress on the wrist by forcing an incline out of the neutral position. (Some fancy keyboards actually offer "negative tilt" and tilt away from the user.) Next you want to get your arms as parallel as possible to avoid the twisting that will happen by forcing your fingers all together on a cramped, straight line. This is why split keyboards were invented, and if you're especially—ahem—wide and can't get your arms close together, try one out. Some people find these keyboards so hard to use, though, that they end up becoming stress creators instead of stress eliminators.

Finally, use a wrist rest if you type with your palms touching the desk, as most people do.

Ergonomic - cont'd

Make sure it's made of a soft material, which will help eliminate stress on the palm muscles and bones.

Setting up Your Mouse

Most ergonomic experts say a trackball is easier on the body than a standard mouse. The frequent movements that mousing entails can overwork the joints in your shoulder and part of the back, which is simply not designed for the small, precise movements that mouse work entails. A trackball relocates these movements to the fingers, which are better equipped for the strain.

Whether you use a mouse or a trackball, keep your mouse as close to your keyboard as possible. The further you have to stretch your arm to reach the mouse, the more stress you place on a whole panoply of muscles in your shoulders, upper back, and neck.

Again, whether you use a mouse or a trackball, position your armrest so your arm can remain at a 90-degree angle when moving the cursor. Make sure you keep your elbow supported as well.

Setting up Your Monitor

Reach your arm out directly in front of you. Drop your eyes about 15 degrees. That's roughly where the center of your monitor should be if you have good vision and a decent display. Try tilting the monitor back slightly in order to improve visibility. The distance from your monitor to your eyes is flexible and is largely dependent on your eyesight and the size and resolution of the display. But if you're having trouble reading small text, try decreasing the resolution or consider getting your eyes checked before you start inching the monitor closer to your face.

The relative angle between your head and your display, however, is far more important than height and distance: Your monitor should be straight ahead of your body, not off in a corner. Some foolish people put their monitor to one side of their desk and crane their head in order to see it. This is one of

the worst things you can do for your neck; a few hours of working like this will almost certainly land you in agony.

Special Concerns for Laptop Users

Laptops let you work and play anywhere, but their limitations can be murder on your body. We don't want to discourage you from using a notebook while you hang out on the sofa, but take a few precautions when you do.

Use your laptop at a table or desk if possible. This way you should be able to follow most of the advice in this article, aside from adjusting the screen height.

If you must flop on the couch to work (and we can hardly blame you), adjust your body appropriately so your plush comfort doesn't turn into awful RSI pain. If your laptop is indeed in your lap, make sure it's supported and isn't wobbling around when you type. Using a laptop tray like the Lapinator [http://www.lapinator.com/] will help stabilize the machine while keeping your bits and pieces from getting too hot, which can cause serious fertility problems (gulp!) in addition to uncomfortable sweatiness in the pants department.

Next, support your arms. It's easier than you think. Just take the pillows from the couch and wedge them on each side of you, under your elbows. Finally, tilt your monitor back a little more, to alleviate some of the strain your neck experiences by having to bend sofar.

from the Secretary's Desk
Minutes of CHPCUG Board meeting on January 18, 2006

Attendees: Mike Young, Karl Richmond, Mike Regimenti, Mike DeLucia, Fran Damratowski, Lee Wickline, Frank Foster, and Kris Johnson

Discussion about future programs for the general meetings:

April - "Computer Cleaning" by Fran Damratowski and Understanding the Physical Makeup of Hard Drives" by Karl Richmond

May - "Canon Digital Cameras, Epson Photo Printers & Color Calibration Software" by MAC Business Solutions

June - "The Latest & Greatest in Digital Cameras" by Mike Alloy

September - Video Animation (Tentative)

NEW BUSINESS

Lee Wickline made his proposal to the Board, that the current computer users group in Easton, MD become part of the ChPCUG. This was unanimously approved by the Board.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Karl gave his monthly report and indicated that we are solvent. Karl is actively pursuing an application to the Combined Federal Campaign for the group to be consider for funds.

The SIGS

Technology SIG

Next Technology SIG meeting will Microsoft's IE 7 beta release and the current issues with IE 6.

CRSIG

Fran Damratowski gave a report that the State of MD has stated that the CRSIG will be able to stay at their current location in Crownsville until June 2007, unless it is bought and taken over by a third party.

MSCUG SIG

The fine people from *Smart Computing* will be at their May 24th 7pm meeting at the Talbot County Tourism Office in Easton.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM.

Kris Johnson
Secretary

Linksys 54GX4 Wi-Fi - cont'd

had. Imagine our surprise when we saw TCP throughput drop by more than 20 percent! Airgo tells us its performance-enhancement algorithms for WEP were disabled, because the industry no longer considers it a secure encryption technique. Still, it's the only technique supported by many streaming boxes and older laptops.

+ GRASS-FED BEEF: Awesome speed; incredible range.
- FACTORY-FARMED BEEF: Butt-ugly formfactor; uncertain future compatibility.

VERDICT: 8

URL: www.linksys.com

Splints and Braces

Do arm braces and splints do any good? The logic behind these products is that they force you to keep your wrist in a healthy computing position, so you don't have to consciously think about maintaining the appropriate posture. And if your doctor has prescribed wrist splints, you should definitely follow her instructions.

But for many people, splints and braces can do more harm than good. Many users self-diagnose carpal tunnel syndrome and buy drugstore splints at the first sign of pain. But using them soon becomes problematic, as the splints interfere with "good" motions along with "bad" ones. The result is that wearers can fight and strain against the splint, causing them to overcompensate to make what would otherwise be a simple movement. This can actually make pain worse instead of better.

Unless a doctor directs otherwise, spend your time and your money on properly configuring your workstation instead of buying splints.

Breaks, Stretching, and Exercise

After a long, cramped flight, you stand up and feel sore. Staying in one position for too long—no matter what you're doing—is bad for your bod. It's important to remember to move a little, even if you're in the eighth hour of that World of Warcraft session.

Experts offer a variety of tips on how often you need to move around. HealthyComputing.com posits the 20/20/20 rule: Every 20 minutes look away from your monitor for 20 seconds, and look at something at least 20 feet away. But Baker says that you should actually stand up every half hour and do some kind of stretching or walking around. You might as well combine the two and take regular, 20-minute breaks if it's at all possible. Get a drink, take out the trash, eat a Cheeto. Just do something to keep your muscles limber.

8

Throughout the day (or night), fiddle with your workstation. Make tiny modifications by tilting the monitor a bit, moving the keyboard slightly closer to you, or raising your armrests slightly. This gets your body into different positions and keeps you flexible. As for stretching, you can find a variety of stretching regimens online and in books written specifically for computer users. But Adams offers "the most important stretch" she gives her patients, the chin press. ***"Sit on the edge of the chair, feet flat on the floor. Lift the breastbone upwards and tuck the chin into the throat as if you were soldier standing at attention. This should be uncomfortable but not painful. Count to 10. Relax. Repeat whenever you feel tension in your neck, upper back, or shoulders."***
Try it. It works!

When to See a Doctor

Despite the horror stories and media reports, carpal tunnel syndrome isn't as common as you might think. Your hand might hurt because of a neck problem, with pain referring down your arm. You might just be sore from doing a lot of work, and tomorrow it could pass. Self-diagnosing yourself with serious illnesses is unproductive and dangerous.

When should you give in and see a professional? Occasional discomfort that goes away soon after you've finished working is generally OK. It's when problems get more severe that you need to make an appointment with a physician. Specifically, if you:
* Experience constant pain that doesn't get better quickly after you stop using the computer.
* Wake up at night in pain.
* Find that your fingers are turning blue or feel cold to the touch.
* Experience numbness in your extremities (any numbness calls for an urgent response).
In a nutshell, if you experience any chronic pain in the fingers, neck, or back, pain that feels severe, or pain that keeps recurring, it's time to see a doctor.

How to Buy a Desktop PC

Introduction

With so many factors to consider, deciding which desktop PC to buy can be a real challenge. From components to software to accessories, new PCs offer a bewildering array of choices, and, for some folks, sifting through the large number of options can be daunting. At *PC World,* we test dozens of new desktop PCs every year. What follows is the collective knowledge of our editors and Test Center analysts.

The Big Picture

Before you go out shopping for a new desktop computer, you have to decide what you want to use it for. We'll guide you through the options.

The Specs Explained

From CPUs to RAM to optical storage, we'll break down the jargon—and tell you which specs are most important to your purchase.

PC Shopping Tips

Want some advice before you head to the store or visit a Web site? Our recommendations will help you build a system that fits both your needs and your pocketbook.

The Big Picture

Today, almost any PC on the market can more than adequately handle such standard office chores as word processing and spreadsheets, as well as basic Internet functions such as e-mail and general browsing. So for $1000 or less, you can get a PC that will suit most people's needs.

If you're a more demanding user who wants to edit digital video or manage a large database, however, you may need more than the basics. You're better off looking at systems that start in the $1500 to $2000 range. For high-end needs, check out our reviews of power systems, which cost $2000 or more.

The best way to pay only for what you need is to carefully consider what you want to do with your system now and anticipate what might interest you next year. Specific applications call for certain types of hardware, whether at home or in the office.

Key Features

Processor: If you plan to use your PC for standard office productivity and basic Internet tasks, most any processor will do. But if you want more power, Intel Pentium 4 or AMD Athlon 64 systems are your best bet. For the highest performance, buy a system with a dual-core processor, which will allow for faster multitasking. To save a couple hundred dollars, buy one or two levels down from the top—you're unlikely to lose more than 5 to 10 percent per tier in performance.

The Pentium 4, the Pentium D or Extreme Edition (both dual core), and the Athlon 64, 64 FX, or 64 X2 (dual core) can support most high-end work. Dual-core systems are best for the most demanding applications, such as video editing or high-resolution game play. Our tests currently show that the top AMD-based PCs tend to do a bit better than the leading Intel-based systems on our WorldBench 5 applications test suite. You can find bargain PCs with either of these chips, even at fast speeds. To pay a lower price, you'll have to sacrifice graphics performance, hard-drive size, and possibly monitor size (among other things).

Memory: To give Windows XP and applications sufficient room to work, you should get a minimum of 512MB of RAM. If you can afford to get more, do it. RAM costs a lot less today than it did some years ago. High-end PCs should have at least 1GB— that amount lets you keep more applications open and comfortably handles memory-intensive applications like Photoshop. (But if Photoshop is your app of choice, get 2GB of RAM; you won't regret it.)

Storage: In most cases basic PCs come with hard drives of 80GB or larger. This amount of storage is fine for the majority of mainstream tasks. If you plan to work with graphics files, large databases, video, or music, however, you'll want to bump the

ShrinkTo5

ShrinkTo5 Is Storming the Market with A Radically Enhanced Version of Their Open-source DVD Shrinker - ShrinkTo5 GUI 2.02

RATINGEN, Germany. - April 3, 2006: **ShrinkTo5** today announces the release of version 2.02 of **ShrinkTo5** GUI, a new cross-platform DVD copying engine distributed at no cost to anyone. This application lets you copy and shrink your favorite DVD disks in brilliant quality, which is complemented with a surprisingly high processing speed. You can copy an entire DVD, copy the main movie only, or copy its content elements selectively. The output can be saved to the hard disk drive as an ISO image or compressed and burned onto one DVD disk. The best thing in copying DVD disks with **ShrinkTo5** is that it no longer involves tedious and sometimes confusing configuration. **ShrinkTo5**'s AI chooses the perfect balance automatically.

What's New in ShrinkTo5 2.02?

The new release builds on the success of the first version that has seen over 1 million downloads since its official release in September 2005. "The large amount of enthusiastic feedback from end users that followed that release has been a great inspiration to all of us here at **ShrinkTo5**," says Ocrana, the leading developer at **ShrinkTo5**. "Their ideas and suggestions have driven the development of version 2.02, which is now reflected in the carefully redesigned user interface, new additions and enhancements, including bad sector detection and repair, a Machinist2.dll support, a new Skin component, a built-in burning component, among others. We hope these new extras will make the great product even more appealing to users."

- Support for Machinist2.dll. The program has been modified to support new Machinist2.dll. Now, ShrinkTo5 has a unique ability to make DVD backups that cannot be handled by other DVD copying software like DVDShrink. Please, note that Machinist2.dll cannot be downloaded from the **ShrinkTo5** website since it is not legal in our country. But you can find it via any search engine and download it for free.
- Free burner plugin. The **ShrinkTo5** GUI package comes with FoxBurner, a shell plugin that allows you to burn directly from the Windows Explorer. Now, you don't have to donate or download a burner separately.

10

- **ISO Image**. Along with burning onto DVD disks, copied images can now be saved as ISO images on the hard disk drive and burned onto disks later if the need arises.
- **Auto-Repair.** New **ShrinkTo5** lets you automatically restore scratched and defective DVD disks so that their content can be accessed and copied. This doesn't affect the picture quality, which remains to be as good as on any new original DVD disk.
- **Dynamic Compression.** The code of the dynamic compression rate has been enhanced, which now allows users to get an even sharper picture.
- **Build-in Player.** New **ShrinkTo5** features a built-in player that allows the user to view selected video tracks. This gives you more control over the copying process.

Read more information about new ShrinkTo5 GUI at http://www.shrinkto5.com/software.asp
Watch the online tutorial demo at http://www.shrinkto5.com/gTour.asp

ShrinkTo5 GUI Availability
ShrinkTo5 is available as Basic and Professional. Both versions run under Windows 2000/XP. The Basic version is available as a free download from http://www.shrinkto5.com/software.asp.
The Professional is available as a three day trial. The price of the Professional version is 39.95 USD. Both version are compiled without DeCSS. To enable ShrinkTo5 to decrypt CSS, users should download "Machinist2.dll" from the internet.

Product page link: http://www.shrinkto5.com
Download link: http://www.shrinkto5.com/_data/ShrinkTo5AdFree.exe (4.77 Mb)
E-mail: info@shrinkto5.com
Company website: http://www.shrinkto5.com

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storage capacity up to at least 120GB. You'll need it because 30 minutes of uncompressed digital video takes up nearly 6.5GB of space, while 250 4-minute MP3s at 128 kbps use more than 1GB.

Graphics and display: Responsible for generating all images on your monitor, the graphics subsystem in a PC ships either as a removable expansion board or as a chip that's soldered permanently—or integrated—onto the motherboard.

Only dedicated gamers or people who work with 3D modeling need a top-of-the line graphics card. Home users who want an inexpensive system with decent graphics should choose a card with an older-generation nVidia chip such as the GeForce 6600 or a base-level ATI chip such as the Radeon X1300; for as little as $100, they can boost performance even with recently released games. If you want to do some gaming and are keeping an eye on the future, get a card with at least an nVidia GeForce 6800 chip or a Radeon X800 chip. Try to get a board with 256MB of RAM. (See "How to Buy a Graphics Board" [http://pcworld.com/howto/ bguide/0,guid,21,00.asp]for details on specific cards.) In the office, integrated graphics should satisfy your needs and save you money unless you're doing high-end graphics, Web, or multimedia development. Some motherboards with integrated graphics, such as models from Intel or nVidia, allow you a graphics upgrade option via an unoccupied PCI Express slot. Ask for the slot when you buy, if you want to be able to upgrade later.

Get at least a 17-inch LCD monitor—prices are low enough that you should be able to buy one for about $300. You can spend $400 or more for a high-quality model. For about $400, you can have a 19-inch monitor, which provides over 20 percent more screen area than a 17-inch model. Better models range from $450 to $600. (See "How to Buy a Monitor" [http://pcworld.com/howto/bguide/ 0,guid,9,00.asp] for more specifics.)

Removable storage: Your most cost-effective removable-storage option is a CD-RW drive. However, home users may want to consider substituting the more flexible DVD-rewritable drive: You still get CD-RW functionality, and DVDs store at least 4.7GB of data, versus 650MB for most CDs. They also let you create your own video DVDs to play in your living-room DVD player. DVD write speeds are much slower than CD write speeds, though.

DVD drives cost more than CD-RW drives, but prices are falling quickly. If you want the latest, buy a drive that supports dual- or double-layer DVD writing, which allows you to put more data on a single disc. (See "How to Buy a DVD-Rewritable Drive" [http://pcworld.com/howto/bguide/ 0,guid,28,00.asp]for more specifics.)

USB thumb drives and micro-drives are also growing in popularity. These keychain-size devices, made by a number of manufacturers, can store large amounts of data, even 1GB or more. If you use Windows 2000 or XP, a thumb drive requires no additional software; Windows will detect the device as soon as you pop it in a port, and will assign it its own drive letter in Explorer. If a standard key-fob style doesn't suit you, some companies have integrated thumb drives into pens, watches, and even a Swiss army pocket knife. Whichever model you choose, make sure you pick one that transfers data at USB 2.0 speeds; the older USB 1.1 devices move files at a pokier pace.

Communications: Most PCs come with a modem for dial-up Internet access and an ethernet port for broadband access. If you want to connect to the Internet wirelessly, you'll need a wireless network adapter.
To share your broadband connection or to network your PCs, get a gateway or router. A PC and router with gigabit ethernet will give you a faster local network connection than products with 10/100

**The Next Regular Meeting will be at
The Severn River Middle School**

**Wednesday,
April 12th, 2006
Meeting will be held in the large meeting room.
It starts at 7:00 PM with club business
and a short discussion period.**

There will be Presentations on

Cleaning Your Computer
by
Fran Damratowski

**Members and their friends are welcome to
come, ask questions and become enlightened.**

How to Find: Severn River Middle School

SRMS is close to the Arnold, MD campus of the Anne Arundel Community College. From Annapolis and parts south, take Rte 2 (Ritchie Highway) north about 3 miles from the intersection of Rt. 50, **turn right on College Parkway**. At the first light, turn left on Peninsula Farm Road. (Of course, if you are coming from points North, you would turn left on to College Parkway) about a half-mile down the road the large SRMS school building, set back off a large two level parking lot, will be visible on your right. Park here and go to the main entrance. Signs will be posted to direct you to the **Large Group Room** where we will be meeting.

How to find: The Technology SIG, A ChPCUG Special Interest Group**
Meets the 1st Wednesday of each month at 7:00 PM

The meetings are held at the SRMS in the Library.

Chesapeake PC Users Group

**1783 Forest Drive #285
Annapolis, MD 21401**

FIRST CLASS

INSIDE THIS VERY ISSUE!

**President's Corner
New SIG on the Shore!
How to Buy a Desktop PC
Shrinkto5
The Broadband Blues
from the Secretary's Desk
... and a little more!**

Note: *The date above your name on the mailing label is the expiration date of your membership. Contact the Membership Chairman (page 2, column 2) to update.*

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