

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Happy 2006!

Happy New Year Everyone!

I hope 2006 is your best year yet! On the technology front, 2006 looks to be a very intriguing year. We have many new technologies to look forward to (or not), new operating systems, new processors, etc. As always I hope that you can utilize these technologies to make life better for yourself and society in general.

January 11, General Meeting

At the first meeting of 2006, Fran Damratowski will demonstrate the latest free, office suite, Open Office 2.0. There are many new features in this office suite, that truly have given Microsoft a run for it's money. As a matter of fact, the State of Massachusetts wants to switch their entire office suite to Open Office. This would be a huge blow to Microsoft Office.

We will also have a couple of short demonstrations at the meeting - financial topics and other technology news.

February, General meeting

At the February meeting, we will demonstrate wireless home networking. Many people have questions as to how this works. Please bring your wireless device, to participate in this demonstration.

Club Expansion

I mentioned a couple of months back that a group on the Eastern Shore (in the Easton area) would

like to become an extension of the Chesapeake PC Users Group. To facilitate this, some of the Board of Directors will be attending their groups next meeting on January 19. If other members would like to attend, I should have information available at the January General meeting.

Another way that we could help to expand the club, would be to participate in more community events. On the weekend of March 25-26, 2006 Greater Baltimore Hamboree and Computerfest will take place at Maryland State Fairgrounds. This could be a great opportunity to promote interest in our club. But we need people to help. Please consider attending the Fest to help. This is also a good way to get rid of excess computer equipment (or find some more to add to your collection).

New Secretary

Kris Johnson has graciously accepted the position as interim Secretary for ChPCUG. Now, with any luck, she'll forget to attend the February meeting, so we can elect her as permanent Secretary.

See You At a Meeting!

Michael

CMS ABSmini 40GB

When a USB key just won't cut it, it's time to bust out a handheld 40-gigger like the ABSmini. This rakish drive packs a 1.8-inch 40GB hard drive (also available in 20GB and 60GB) inside its chrome shell, and uses a USB 2.0 bus-powered interface.

It achieves its “backup system” status by including both file backup and media-management utilities—handy apps that are often missing from portable drive bundles. Though it's rather pricey, the ABSmini works surprisingly well as a notebook backup system.

Operation is straightforward. Because it's bus-powered, you just plug it into a USB port and—*bada-boom, bada-bing*—it works. The USB cable includes a second USB head to use in case a single port doesn't draw enough power, but we never had any issues with it during testing. The only weird thing, is that the included USB cable is incredibly thick—so much so that it's difficult to wrap the cable around the drive when you're not using it, so it just dangles awkwardly from the drive.

You'll back-up your data with the included *BounceBack Express* utility, which is a very streamlined, but powerful, backup utility. A media-copying utility called *copy2go* is included as well for copying audio and video. However, the arcane file structures it copies to the ABSmini, are difficult to organize. We love the backup software, but *copy2go* is just silly.

Our only other issue is with the unit's paltry 4,200rpm 1.8-inch hard drive. Its performance is on the slow side, but still on par compared with similar drives. It's expensive, but the ABSmini delivers on all its promises.

—Josh Norem

Verdict: 8

OFFICERS

President

Mike Young.....(410) 551-4411
president @chesapeakepcusersgroup.org

Vice President

David Cunningham.....(410) 268-2384
vice-president @chesapeakepcusersgroup.org

Treasurer

Karl Richmond.....(410) 268-3860
treasurer @chesapeakepcusersgroup.org

Secretary (Acting)

Kris Johnson.....(410) 544-8706
secretary @chesapeakepcusersgroup.org

Publisher/Editor

Mike Regimenti.....(410) 974-0649
editor@chesapeakepcusersgroup.org

CHAIRPERSONS

Programs Chairperson

Craig Barlow.....(410) 266-6829
programs @chesapeakepcusersgroup.org

Education Chairperson

Sam Shepherd.....(410) 647-6077
education @chesapeakepcusersgroup.org

Membership Chairpersons

Margaret Duggan.....(410) 647-2722
membership @chesapeakepcusersgroup.org

Public Relations Chairperson

Kris Johnson.....(410) 544-8706
pr@chesapeakepcusersgroup.org

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS (SIGS)

New Users Group

Sam Shepherd.....(410) 647-6077
Investment SIG

Len Lindenmeyer.....(410) 647-9142
investments @chesapeakepcusersgroup.org

Technology SIG

Mike Regimenti.....(410) 974-0649
internet@chesapeakepcusersgroup.org

Computer Refurbishing SIG

Fran Damratowski.....(410) 544-7047
refurbishing@chesapeakepcusersgroup.org

Webmeister

Mike DeLucia.....(410) 721-2991
webmeister @chesapeakepcusersgroup.org

Mid-Range to High-End Buyer's Guide

System Summaries

And there you have it: four systems, two budgets, and a whole lot of alternatives. There is plenty of room for substitution of parts that you feel are the most useful, so don't take these recommendations as the only systems that we would currently build. Budget and intended use are both critical factors, so if you want to make a CAD workstation, you would want to add an appropriate graphics card like one of the Quadro cards or a FireGL. If you want to make an HTPC, grabbing more hard drives for storage and focusing on low noise levels, would be more important than a high-end graphics card. So, here are the final component lists; feel free to play "Mr. Potato Head" and come up with your own custom system designed to meet *your* requirements.

Mid-Range Systems

AMD Mid-Range System

Hardware	Component	Price
Processor	Athlon 64 3200+ 512K 2.0GHz Venice (939) - Retail	161
Motherboard	DFI nForce4 Ultra Infinity (939)	98
Memory	Crucial PC-3200 2x512MB Ballistix	124
Video Card	eVGA GeForce 6800 GS 256MB	196
Hard Drive	Western Digital 3.0Gbps 250GB 7200RPM 8MB Caviar SE	99
Optical Drive	BenQ DVDR DQ60 (OEM)	41
Case & Power Sply	Antec Solution SLK3800B + 400W SmartPower 2.0	116
Display	Acer AL1914smd 19 inch 8ms LCD	293
Speakers	Logitech Z-2300 2.1	112
Keyboard & Mouse	Microsoft Comfort Curve 2000 + Optical Mouse	30
Bottom Line		1270

Intel Mid-Range System

Hardware	Component	Price
Processor	Pentium 4 630 2MB 3.0GHz (775) - Retail	174
Motherboard	ASUS 945P P5LD2 (775)	125

*Cont'd on Page 4
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Memory	G.Skill PC-4200 2x512MB Extreme	72
Video Card	eVGA GeForce 6800 GS 256MB	196
Hard Drive	Western Digital 3.0Gbps 250GB 7200RPM 8MB Caviar SE	99
Optical Drive	BenQ DVDR DQ60 (OEM)	41
Case & Power Sply	Antec Solution SLK3800B + 400W SmartPower 2.0	116
Display	Acer AL1914smd 19 inch 8ms LCD	293
Speakers	Logitech Z-2300 2.1	112
Keyboard & Mouse	Microsoft Comfort Curve 2000 + Optical Mouse	30
Bottom Line		1258

High-End Systems

AMD High-End System

Hardware	Component	Price
Processor	Athlon 64 X2 4200+ 2x512KB Manchester (939) - Retail	400
Motherboard	ASUS nForce4 SLI X16 A8N32-SLI Deluxe (939)	230
Memory	OCZ PC-4000 2x1024MB EL Gold	233
Video Card	eVGA 256-P2-N516 GeForce 7800GT 256MB	304
Hard Drive	Western Digital 3.0Gbps 250GB 7200RPM 16MB Caviar SE16	115
Optical Drive	NEC DVDR ND-3550A	43
Case	Lian Li PC-6077B Aluminum	138
Power Supply	ePOWER/Tagan TG-530-U15 530W	120
Display	Acer AL2416Wd 24 inch 6ms LCD	980
Sound Card	Creative Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS	73
Speakers	Logitech Z-5500 5.1 w/Dolby Digital	253
Keyboard & Mouse	Logitech Cordless Desktop MX3100 (Laser tracking mouse)	95
Bottom Line		2984

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Intel High-End System

Hardware	Component	Price
Processor	Pentium D 830 2x1MB 3.0GHz (775) - Retail	320
Motherboard	ASUS nForce4 SLI X16 (775) P5N32-SLI Deluxe	208
Memory	GeIL PC-5300 2x1024MB Ultra	217
Video Card	eVGA 256-P2-N516 Geforce 7800GT 256MB	304
Hard Drive	Western Digital 3.0Gbps 250GB 7200RPM 16MB Caviar SE16	115
Optical Drive	NEC DVDR ND-3550A	43
Case	Lian Li PC-6077B Aluminum	138
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Speakers	Logitech Z-5500 5.1 w/Dolby Digital	253
Keyboard and Mouse		Logitech Cordless Desktop
MX3100 (Laser tracking mouse)		95
Bottom Line		2866

The Law of Diminishing Returns is definitely in full force here: while the High-End systems cost more than twice as much as the Mid-Range configurations, there are very few cases where they will be anywhere close to twice as fast. A bit of overclocking and an upgraded graphics card would all but eliminate the performance difference in gaming, for example. However, there is unfortunately no way to overclock a 19" LCD into a 24" widescreen display, and the extra \$700 spent in that area alone, counts for a large portion of the price difference. I love having a huge display, and I'm willing to sacrifice performance in order to get it; many people would prefer performance, though, so do what you like. The speakers are also in completely different leagues: 2.1 sound vs. 5.1 with digital inputs and Dolby Digital decoding - overkill for some people and yet insufficient for others.

Short of having unlimited funds, even a "High-End" system needs to make some compromises, and it's difficult to make the case for a \$1000 processor when you can often equal or surpass the performance of such a chip with a \$300 CPU and some overclocking. Obviously, [I like to overclock my systems](#) where possible, but most businesses would want to avoid that. Most businesses don't need anything more than a budget computer, though, so unless you're doing 3D modeling, video work, or some other computationally-intensive task, having the fastest PC in the world won't turn you into an incredibly productive

Rule Breakers

by
Len Lindenmeyer

Do you want to see some spectacular growth from a stock or two in your portfolio? Who doesn't? If so, consider investing in a stock or two that is revolutionizing its market, or creating a new market. There have been dozens of these stocks over the years, and we all lament not having bought the stocks when they first came on the market. Names that come to mind include Microsoft, Walmart, and Home Depot, to name just a few.

But the funny thing is, there are stocks like these out there today, and we do not buy them. Apple Computer has revolutionized the way music is sold in the last few years with the IPod. How many of you own Apple Computer (AAPL) today? Apple has approximately 75% of the music market today and can't keep the IPod in stock. How about Google (GOOG)? Google controls approximately 50% of the Internet search market. Do you own Google? Amazon dominates the online retail market. Do you own Amazon (AMZN)? These stocks are all around us and we use their products or services routinely. Typically we never buy the stock and so pass up a golden opportunity for substantial profits.

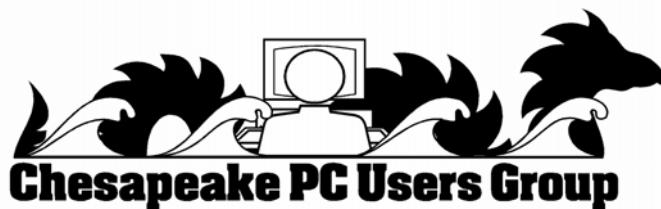
So, consider buying one or two Rule Breaking stocks the next time you are looking for a stock to purchase. A Rule Breaker is a company that introduces a product or service that revolutionizes a market. The automobile put the buggy manufacturers out of business. Apple changed the way music was sold, in the process changed the rules of the game for wanting to illegally download music, made friends with the recording studios and the artists, and is in the process of putting the CD makers out of business or at the very least capturing that market place with a better idea. Google did the same thing with search; Ebay created a new market in online auctions; and Amazon did the same with online retail. Several years ago everyone was writing

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off Amazon and Jeff Bezos, because Amazon was losing money. No one is laughing now, as Amazon expands into countless new product lines other than books.

Here are a few ideas or markets with potential Rule Breaking opportunities. The price of gasoline is skyrocketing and Honda (HMC) and Toyota (TM) can't keep a hybrid car in stock. The American manufacturers are several years behind in hybrid technology. The demand for broad band Internet services is rapidly expanding with the expansion of cable, DSL, and Fiber services. There are many companies rapidly expanding their services in this area. Comcast and Verizon are but two. Software and services for downloading music or video is in demand. Take a look at Akami (AKAM). The cost of heating your house, as well as the cost of electricity, is outpacing inflation. Take a look at companies in the solar or alternative energy markets. British Petroleum (BP) and Evergreen Solar (ESLR) are but two, in this market. Hospital costs outpace inflation and hospitals want patients in and out as quickly as possible. Minimally invasive surgery reduces the hospital stay, and results in a quicker recovery for the patient. Intuitive Surgical (ISRG) produces a robotic machine which allows more physicians to perform these procedures. It has virtually no competition in this market today.

These are but a few ideas. The next time you are thinking stocks, think Rule Breakers. Then look all around you for opportunities.



Fireproofing Your Data

DIY Fireproof Safe Back-up

As an amateur photographer, I take a lot of pictures. Recently, I completely converted to digital photography, because digital cameras and photo printers now produce high quality results. Before digital, I archived my [photos](#) as negatives or slides, while today, all of my precious photos are stored digitally on my hard disk. Like most people, I don't have the time to insert writable CDs or DVDs to back up these photos on a regular basis. I tried an online-based backup service Connected DataProtector, but over time I had to bump up my plan to \$279.95 per year, which is a fair bit. I needed a better [solution](#) that met my requirements:

- Automatic nightly backups (no user intervention required)
- Backup of digital photos and critical documents from every PC on my network
- Recovery from disasters such as a [hard disk](#) crash or a fire
- Fixed cost solution (I didn't have to pay more for additional bandwidth or storing digital assets)

The solution was to purchase a fireproof safe with an internal power strip and host a network-attached storage (NAS) devices inside the safe. Using HomePlug Powerline (Ethernet over ordinary AC power), I connected the NAS device in my fireproof safe to my home network. You need the HomePlug adapters to connect what is inside your safe and what is outside, since you can't run Ethernet wiring into the safe, and wireless won't reliably penetrate the safe's walls.

I then created nightly backup jobs to copy modified files from the PC's in my home network to the NAS device in my fireproof safe. The big ticket item is the fireproof safe, which I had already planned to buy anyway.



In figuring out a backup solution, the key challenge was how to protect against data loss and fire damage without consuming all the bandwidth into my home, or resorting to basically paying for a small-business quality cloud backup service. To get started, here is the parts list for my fireproof safe backup solution:

- Fireproof safe with built in power strip. I bought the [Premier 23 Cubic Foot Stainless Vault By Liberty Safe \(\\$1,349.99\)](#). I bought a cheaper and smaller version of this safe which is no longer available on the Costco web site. You get home delivery (first floor only) as part of the purchase price.
- Network Attached Storage Adapter (NAS). I bought the [Linksys Storage Link NSLU2](#) because I wanted to re-use a USB 2.0 external hard drive I already had. There are numerous solutions of course besides the NSLU2.
- External USB hard drive. I already had one of the [Maxtor One Touch External Hard Drives](#). Of course, you can choose any number of different drives and capacities, or buy a NAS box with the drives built-in.

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Fireproofing Your Data - Cont'd

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- Two Powerline adapters, one for the network inside the safe and one that bridges my existing wired home network with the Powerline network. I bought a pair of the [Netgear XE102 Powerline Ethernet Adapters](#) but there are numerous others from Belkin, IOgear and Asoka, who make equivalent products. Go [here for a complete list](#) [<http://www.homeplug.com/en/products/products.asp>].

Assuming you like my [solution](#) and it matches your own needs, here's how to set up your own fireproof safe backup [system](#).

First, purchase the parts. It usually takes a couple of weeks for the safe to be delivered and installed. You can set up everything else and move the NAS device into the safe when it arrives. Note that you will want some time to get everything configured and tested.

Set up your NAS solution first. If you are using an external hard drive, connect it directly to one of your PCs. Follow the instructions included with the external hard drive, to verify that it works properly when connected to the PC. NOTE: don't copy any data to the hard drive, because the NSLU2 will need to re-format it to a Linux file system.

Have the safe delivered and installed, and connect the power strip in the safe to an electrical outlet.

Configure the network inside the safe. Follow the Powerline instructions to connect the first Powerline adapter to the power strip in the safe. I connected an Ethernet switch to the Powerline adapter to test network connectivity using my laptop.

Connect the second Powerline adapter to a power outlet near your network router or switch. Then connect a network cable from your router or switch to the Powerline adapter. Configure the Powerline adapter using its software, which creates a private encrypted network over your power lines between Powerline adapters.

Go back to the safe. At this point, I verified my network connectivity by plugging in my laptop to the Powerline adapter and making sure I could get a valid IP address

Connect the NSLU2 to the network inside the safe. Connect the Maxtor drive to the NSLU2. If you've done everything correctly, you should be able to open the web admin page on the NSLU2 in a browser window.

Follow the NSLU2 instructions to format the drive and create a "backup" share.

Create a batch file to xcopy files from your PC's to \\NameofNASDevice\\Backup. I used a copy program called Robocopy which ships as part of the Windows 2000 Resource Kit.

Use the task scheduler to run this batch file nightly. You can create a new task on Windows XP (and above) by going to the root \\mypc and clicking on Scheduled Tasks.

You should be done!

One of the challenges I faced, was how to easily organize access to the information I wanted to back up on my home network. I used the "Shared Folders" feature of Network Magic to set up the Windows file shares. Then, I right-clicked on a folder that I wanted to backup, to share it locally, and I added this shared folder to my batch file. Now the contents of the folder automatically get backed up. I'm currently working with Alex Hopmann, a fellow team member at Pure Networks, to develop a PowerToy to eliminate the need to create the scheduled tasks and

Keep Your PC Safe and Efficient

Secure your Firefox/Mozilla browser and your messages, and shrink files down to size.

A PC holds a great deal of data, but there's room for improvement. It could use space and bandwidth more efficiently, and there's simply no such thing as too much security. This month, we look at a Firefox security extension, an update to a favorite file-compression utility, and a tool that turns your PC into a secure repository for electronic while-you-were-gone messages. Each arrives as a free trial, and one remains free forever.

Hold the JavaScript ... I'm Just Browsing



JavaScript helps you make great use of the Web; but in the wrong hands, it lets the Web make use of you. *PC World*'s own Dennis O'Reilly gives solid advice for [blocking JavaScript](#) in both Microsoft Internet Explorer and Firefox. His prescribed Firefox fix, NoScript, adds so many security options, that it's worth going over them here in more detail.

Like any other Mozilla extension, [NoScript](#) installs directly into Firefox or Mozilla. It works in the new Mozilla-based [Flock](#) browser as well. It installs a small icon in your browser's status bar; this icon tells you when you're blocking JavaScript.

I particularly liked NoScript's ability to let you allow partial permissions or blocking, or authorize a site to use JavaScript indefinitely or for just that session. NoScript also gives you the option to block

not just JavaScript, but Flash and other plug-ins.

NoScript is free. You can help the cause by [making a donation](#) to software author Giorgio Maone.

Easier Zipping With a Revamped Winner



Many file compression utilities offer a my-way-or-the-highway interface, that you could envision in a dictionary as an example for the word *unintuitive*. WinZip, the granddaddy of all zip programs, makes file compression easier with new interface options in [WinZip Standard 10.0](#).

The Classic interface remains much as longtime WinZip users remember, but new options have sneaked in. The View Style option shows your files in a Windows-Explorer-like tree view that's a breeze to navigate. If you're a fan of the wizard, don't despair; it's still here, too, enabling fast zipping and e-mailing of files.

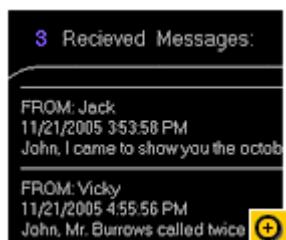
Of course, the real reason we use zip utilities at all is to make things smaller. WinZip's new PPMd and Bzip2 compression technologies, squish files into more compact zips than we've seen in the past. In these data-plump times, when multiple-gig hard drives just don't seem sufficient, every little byte counts.

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Note, however, that PPMd compression is new to WinZip 10, so for now, only other users of the new version of WinZip will be able to unpack files created using PPMd. Bzip2 is not quite as new; WinZip 9 can unpack (but not create) Bzip2 files, and it's supported by other file compression utilities. Bottom line: If you're compressing files to send to someone else, make sure the recipient's zip utility can work with the formats and technologies you're using.

WinZip Standard is free to use for 45 days. At the end of this trial period, it costs \$30 to keep the program. If the ability to zip directly to CD or make automated zip backups sounds useful to you, check out the \$50 Pro version.

Leave a Message on My PC



When you're away from your desk, people who want to talk to you can leave a handwritten note on your desk (or your chair, or your monitor)—but you might not notice it. In fact, it might drift away, or someone else might see it before you do.

If your co-workers could leave secure notes on your PC, you'd be far more likely to get them when you returned. Enter X-Screen Board, which turns your PC into a message board that only you can view.

When you run the program, your monitor displays a plain black screen with a notice inviting those who stop by to type their name and a message into a form, then click "OK" to pin the note to your virtual bulletin board. Every time someone clicks "OK," the message fields blank out and the message tally

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bumps up a number. When you return to your desk, you can see how many messages have been left, but you can view them only by entering your password in the on-screen keypad.

The trial version is good for 10 days and works only with the original (rather obvious) password. To keep using the program after 10 days, and to change the password, register the software for \$15.

Public Beta of IE 7 Nears

by Graeme Wearden

Microsoft is planning to make a beta of Internet Explorer 7 for Windows XP available to the general public within the next three months.

Dean Hachamovitch, general manager of Microsoft's Internet Explorer team, said in a posting on Microsoft's IE blog this week, that his team will publicly release an updated pre-release build of IE 7 for Windows XP before the end of March 2006.

"We want to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to try a pre-release version of IE 7 and tell us how it works with their Web sites, their applications, their add-ons, and how they use the Web overall," Hachamovitch said.

Only Microsoft staff and specifically chosen beta testers, can currently get their hands on the latest pre-release version.

A later blog posting outlined how Microsoft is changing the way Internet Explorer handles "security zones." These zones are used to set security levels depending on the perceived trustworthiness of a Web site. Microsoft is concerned that these zones can be abused by malicious hackers if they can trick IE into treating a dangerous site as if it were trustworthy.

"We realized that the intranet zone—and its lower restrictions—is not relevant at all to the typical home user running IE. One of our interns this summer, Robert Liao, changed IE's logic so that a Windows machine that is not on a managed corporate network will treat apparent intranet sites as Internet sites. This change effectively removes the attack surface of the intranet zone for home PC use," Microsoft said.

How Much RAM Do You Really Need?

The bottom line is that there is not just one single answer to the question of how much system memory you need. However, to help you decide for yourself, we put together the following criteria:

512 MB

There are a few situations where having just 512 MB system memory in your computer can be enough.

- If you run your games at low quality settings (small texture size) because you have an outdated [CPU](#) and graphics card, or because you prefer FPS over visual quality.
- If you only use one application at a time.
- If it is your grandmother's computer.

If you are buying a new computer, even if it's a laptop, opt for more than 512 MB - you will never regret it.

1 GB

Indeed, 1 GB of system memory will most likely be enough for the average user and for people.

- It will allow you to play new games at their highest quality settings, given that you have an adequate processor and a powerful graphics solution.
- You won't have to shut down non-critical applications when you want to play a game.
- You can (accidentally) press the Windows button while in a game, without dying from a stroke

during the seconds it takes to read Windows back into system memory from the swap file.

- If you go from 512 MB to 1 GB, you will always notice the difference all the time. Starting up Photoshop while working with Word, an Internet browser, e-mail client and Acrobat Reader will go so much faster, and switching between the applications is a breeze.

2 GB

Still, there are situations where more than 1 GB is what you want.

- If you are a professional user, you might need more than 1 GB for really heavy applications.
- If you intend to do heavy multitasking, especially if you have more than one CPU or CPU core. Running RAM intensive games such as World of Warcraft, downloading files via high speed FTP or encrypted protocols, BitTorrent or any P2P program; decompressing large archives and playing large size video files in a window or on second monitor all at the same time can max out your system memory pretty fast - if your CPU can handle it.

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

**Wednesday,
January 11th, 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

OPEN OFFICE 2.0

**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.



1783 Forest Drive #285
Annapolis, MD 21401

FIRST CLASS

INSIDE THIS VERY ISSUE!

**IE 7 Beta
President's Corner
Mini Hard Drive
How Much RAM?
Keep Your PC Safe
Fireproof Your Data
... 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.