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Cyber Chat

"A computer user group newsletter"

Volume 9 Issue 7

DeFuniak Springs, FL 32435

July 2007

General Meeting

No Meetings for the Months of July and August

Okaloosa-Walton College

Chautauqua Center Room 201

(computer lab—bldg 2) DeFuniak Springs, Fl.



Go to the beautiful beaches of Walton County and we'll ...



See You In September



PROTECT THAT PC

FROM LIGHTNING STRIKES



THUNDERSTORM PROTECTION

What's the best way to keep your computer safe during a thunderstorm? In my opinion, just

crawl under your desk and unplug it.

Although a good surge protector may keep your computer safe during a thunderstorm, I still unplug mine. After all, if the thing isn't plugged into the wall, it's kind of hard for a spike or surge to get through. Also, try to keep all of your computer's external components (monitors, scanners, printers, etc) plugged into the same surge protector as the computer. That way, when you pull the plug, all your equipment is protected and you don't risk a spike / surge coming through an

external component and damaging your computer.

In addition to unplugging your computer, modem users should also unplug their phone line. As we mentioned before, phone lines are probably the # 1 way to for surges to get to, and sizzle, your computer. Note that if you're using a surge protector with a phone line pass through and you unplug it, you need to unplug the phone line as well (most surge protectors don't protect if they are unplugged).

Another cable to unplug would be any high speed internet connection cable. After all, if you're using a cable modem (or DSL) and a surge comes through that line, it may get to your computer. As with the phone line pass through, if your surge protector features an ethernet pass through, you'll want to pull the cable going to your computer (seeing as your surge protector probably doesn't protect when it's unplugged).

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The principle of equal access/equal opportunity for everyone is practiced.

The primary purpose is to assist our members and others to become more proficient in the use of a computer for their personal enjoyment. We serve through promotion of computer literacy and education by being actively involved in the community.

The Chautauqua Cyber Club, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization under section 501(c)3 for educational purposes, and incorporated under the laws of the State of Florida.

CCC Listserv: email to waltonccc@freelists.org

Free computer help by using the club listserv. Post a problem by email and obtain an answer (most of the time).

The listserv is a service provided to members of the Chautauqua Cyber Club and invited guests. It is used for problems solving, posting club news

Publishing information: Articles submitted for publication should be in Microsoft Word or regular ASCII text and unformatted. Photos with article are encouraged.

Presenters/Writers: Members are encouraged to volunteer and present a program on software or hardware. Vendors will provide presentations-in-a-box, and publishers will provide books for review. Whatever is presented becomes the property of the presenter. Make your interest known and share. You will be surprised at what all is available to demonstrate.

Cyber Chat: This newsletter is prepared using Microsoft Publisher 2003, a homebrew 3.2 MHz PC, Hewlette Packard Deskjet 722C printer.

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J. B. Hillard 892-3450 / 892-8100

Boot n' Reboot

by J. B. Hillard—President



Vacation time is here and I'm really into the swing of doing very little. Have reduced my volunteer load considerably and that feels good.

For July and August those who have a burning need to attend a computer club meeting there is one nearby that is always enjoyable. The South Walton Computer Club meets on July 24th, 6:30 PM. I plan to drive down for a leisure dinner before the meeting and go visit some old friends of the SWCC I haven't seen in a long time. Get in touch if you would like to tag along.

There are still several computers available for sale at a very nominal fee. These funds are used to support our community work. In the past two years we have donated \$3,000 to OWC scholarships and provided several free computers to individuals and organizations.

September Program: Is there a particular program you would like to see when we return to normal business in September. Let me know. Incidentally, we have been invited to tour WMBB-TV, Channel 13 in Panama City. If you are interested send me an email and a trip will be organized. It would be great to tour the station one afternoon and stop at Captain Andersons for dinner before coming home.

Club Listserv: If you are not receiving emails from waltonccc@freelists.org and wish to be included just let me know. You may not be on the list. We use this for announcements, meeting notices and changes, and to ask questions about computing problems. It's a good way to stay in touch and stay informed. I'm still amazed how little the listserv is used, but maybe I'm behind the times and haven't come to realize it's really serving little purpose. Surprise me and prove me wrong!

Life Enrichment Senior Center: This is make or break month for the Center. The county budget workshop and final public hearing is this month. Keep those calls going to the Commissioners if you want to see this thing come to life.

Happy computing, J. B.



Since hurricane season is upon us and if we find ourselves with a few hours on our hands, may I suggest you take that time and make a total inventory of your household items just in case they are needed in an emergency situation.

First, start by building a form. This can be either in Word or Excel. I prefer Excel because it is more versatile. Your first line should be what the item is, then a brief description of the item and where it is located, (living room, den, hallway). Then the approximate date of purchase and the amount.

Now comes the fun part. Take a photo of it and insert it in your document. Preferably in the upper right hand side of the document or wherever you can get it to fit.

Following are some **Emergency Contact Numbers** for Walton County:

Emergency Operations Center	892-8065
Also	892-8066
Sheriff's Office	892-8111
South Walton Substation	267-2000
Citizens Information Line*	892-8392
Also	892-8394
Gulf Power	(800) 487-6937
Chelco	(800) 342-0990
Bright House	(800) 288-1664

*phones are activated when emergency is declared.



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**Norton Internet Security
vs
Various Free Programs**

Elaine Bennett wrote with a question many readers have been asking: *"Should I pay for another year of Norton Anti-Virus protection or switch to the free AVG service?"* My short answer is: *Switch to AVG.* However, there are a number of things to consider.

I used Norton for years when it was just an anti-virus program, but have always avoided the expanded *"Internet Security"* version which, in my opinion, often creates more problems than it solves. For \$69.99 the larger suite has a *firewall* along with other tools intended to keep your PC running at maximum performance while supplying protection against viruses, spyware, and identity theft scams. As with similar programs from other vendors, the service needs to be renewed every year.

Well, Windows XP users already have a firewall built into Service Pack 2, and anyone whose PC is connected to a router has a mechanical firewall as well. Check your SP2 firewall status by clicking **Start>My Computer>Control Panel>Windows Firewall**.

Free anti-virus protection, complete with regular updates, is available from **AVG** (*Anti-Virus from Grisoft*). A link to the program can be found on my home page.

As for adware, deleting the "cookies" found under **My Computer>Control Panel>Internet Options** gets rid of most of them, while various malware threats can be deleted by scanning regularly with **Ad-Aware** from LavasoftUSA and/or **Defender** from Microsoft. Both programs are free, with links available on my home page.

Many online services nowadays offer "anti-identity-theft" programs that check all your incoming email and Internet downloads for signs of some kind of scam. Can you imagine how much of your system

resources are needed to constantly scan for the thousands of different *"Please Click Here to Update Your Account"* scams? Just be aware that no legitimate business will tell you via email that *"your account needs to be updated to avoid being canceled,"* nor will eBay tell you *"someone wants to buy your item if you will just give us your account information."* I, for one, can spot these scams without having a top-heavy "anti-phishing" program (Norton's or anyone else's) slowing down my computer.

Use Your Windows XP Built-in Maintenance Tools

As for maintaining your computer's optimum performance, WinXP has many built-in tools, such as **Disk Cleanup**, which is accessed by opening **My Computer** and right-clicking the **C-drive** icon. Next, click **Tools** and choose **Defrag Now** to efficiently realign your hard drive's files and folders. Clicking **Check Now** will tune up your hard drive (or drives) and fix a variety of glitches that may have accumulated.

Turn Off All the Unneeded Programs in Your MSCONFIG Startup List

Another computer slow-down is the collection of programs that needlessly start running in the background when you turn on your PC. Go to **Start>Run**, type in **msconfig**, click **OK**, and **un-check** all the items listed under **Startup** except for your anti-virus program and/or any others you might want constantly running. (I leave my *Yellow Stickies* program checked because I use it constantly and I *do* want it running at all times.)

Finally, ignore all the *"Free Scan to Fix Your Registry"* and/or *"Free Scan to Tune-up Your PC"* ads you encounter online. They are NOT free and they are NOT needed. They say you can **"scan your computer for free"** but **don't tell you** that you will have to **pay to fix the problems** they find — and they WILL find problems — whether you actually have any or not! Call me if you have any registry or tune-up questions.

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TIP LINE

Q.:

Why do I need a surge protector for my computers and what should I look for when buying one?

A:

Ask a loaded question, get a loaded answer :-)

We need surge protectors to keep all the little circuits inside our computers safe from excess voltage peaks. When these power peaks (surges / spikes) occur, it causes the electrical circuit to heat up—kind of like the filament in a light bulb. Although a big surge can cause the circuit to blow on the spot, lesser surges can peck away at it, eventually causing it to fail.

Sometimes these failures are intermittent, causing your computer to do strange and unexpected things. You know, odd lockups, sudden reboots after it warms up, conjuring up lost spirits—that sort of thing.

Most of the time these oddities are not predictable (since they're intermittent and all), and show no type of pattern. That said, if your computer is acting weird, it's not automatically a damaged circuit—don't underestimate Microsoft's ability to make strange things happen in Windows.

Now, a lot of people think that most of the problems come from thunderstorms—you know, when lightening zaps a power line. Although a good hit can certainly ruin your computer's day, there are other more common sources of surges you need to be aware of.

Most of these sources are high powered appliances—refrigerators, air conditioners, furnaces, even hair dryers and vacuums. In ad-

dition to appliances, those big power transformers you see hanging off electrical poles can cause problems—especially on hot days when the local air conditioning is giving them a workout.

Any one of the above can cause a disruption in the power flow of your house, creating a surge. It may not be as dramatic as lightning, but can cause damage over time.

What To Look For:

When you buy a surge protector, try to find something better than the \$5 or \$10 power strip things. Although they are slightly better than nothing, they are notoriously unreliable and most won't tell you when they are no longer protecting your equipment. One good surge and your protection is gone—but they continue to function as a power strip. Very tricky...

Also, when looking for a surge protector, look for one that features a phone line "pass through". Telephone wires can deliver a potent surge into your computer. I've repaired (and seen) more than a few computers that were damaged due to telephone line power surges.

In fact, phone line surges are more likely to cause damage than power line surges. Why? Your computer's power supply acts as a built in surge protector (not a great one, mind you). Even if a surge sneaks through your regular surge protector, the power supply may prevent it from doing any damage.

That said, just because your power supply does some remedial surge protection, it's no substitute for the real thing. Computers get damaged on a daily basis due to lack of surge protection. But I digress...

(See Surge Protection-page 6)

(Protection From-page 1)

Now, do you have to do all this each time you hear thunder in the distance? Personally, I usually do—especially if the storm is of the mean and nasty variety. I have a good surge protector and all, but the information on my computer is very valuable to me and I don't like taking chances. A close lightning strike will blow through just about any surge protector on the planet.

Besides, it gets me away from my computer for a half an hour or so. My, how the kids have grown...

Note that simply turning off the power switch to your surge protector is **not** a good idea. When you turn these type suppressors off, you are also eliminating the power supply to the surge protection circuit, thereby rendering it useless. So, if a surge comes across the power line with the switch in the off position, you have NO protection; however, if the surge protector is left on at ALL times, the circuit is energized, and you will have whatever surge protection your particular circuit is rated for.

Also, keep in mind that cheaper surge protectors can wear out over time. The power strip type surge protectors can protect you against one good surge (although a direct lighting hit happily rips right through them) or lots of smaller ones, but they can wear out. Problem is, most of them have no way of telling you when they've become useless. When you're looking for a surge protector, be sure it features some kind of indicator light that tells you when the surge protection circuit has croaked.

Finally, this may all be a bit paranoid on my part. So, the decision is yours. Just tellin' you what I do. ~ Steve

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See Related article page 5

(Surge Protectors-page 5)

Back to surge protectors.

A good quality surge suppressor will cost anywhere from \$20.00 to \$100.00 and be "UL" listed. It should also feature an indicator light that tells you when the surge protection circuit is no longer functioning.

Now, when you start talking surge protection, you sometimes run across folks babbling about clamping voltages, response nanoseconds, and joule levels. Although that is a valid way to compare various surge protectors (and make the speaker look knowledgeable), not every protector gives you that info—and who's to say it's even accurate? Let's look at the "down and dirty" method of finding a good surge protector.

The easiest way to tell if you're getting a quality surge protector is to look at the "connected equipment" warranty. I like the ones that cover connected equipment for up to \$15,000 or more. I figure if they are willing to risk 15K +, they're probably selling a good piece of equipment. If it doesn't have a connected equipment warranty, set it back on the shelf and keep a-walkin'

Sure, it's not as geeky as going into a computer store reciting clamping voltage figures, but for most people it will be every bit as effective.

~ Steve

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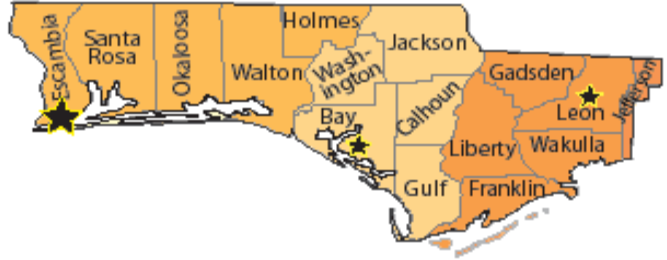
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