

# COMPUTER CONNECTION

Monthly Newsletter of the  
Rockland PC Users Group

Volume 18 Number 2  
February 1998

## THE ABC'S OF BACKUP ARE YOU SAFE OR WILL YOU BE SORRY?

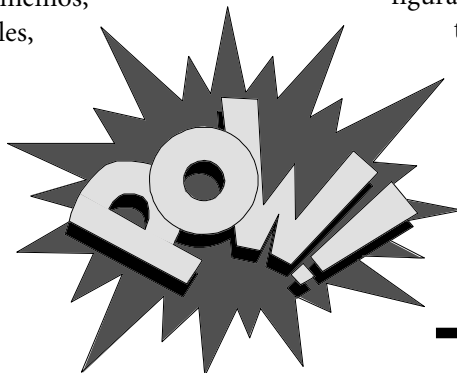
It will happen—with a bang or with a whimper. Your hard disk will fail and every last one of your letters, memos, address books, databases, macros, batch files, fonts, graphics, newsgroups, e-mail, and business documents will be gone. Your applications and utilities will be lost as well—the ones you have so carefully tweaked with upgrades, patches and preferences. Then there's your operating system; that's gone, too.

Can you find installation disks for your operating system and your applications? Have you recorded the serial numbers? Can you replicate the information needed to rebuild your Internet connection?

At our February 10 meeting, Exabyte Corporation will provide a look at the hardware and software we need to be safe when a catastrophe strikes. With new entry-level computers sporting hard drives in the multi-gigabyte range, the days are long gone when one can maintain backups on a stack of floppy disks. Backup storage media must of necessity be able to store vast amounts of data. Many of us don't know how to organize a backup regimen or understand the backup jargon. What is a differential backup? What is an incremental backup? How can we be certain that our backups are 100% accurate? Should we back up every day, every week, once a month? Should we back up

everything, or only our data files? How about the unseen configuration changes to our computing environment that are recorded every time we install a new application or remove an old one?

There are answers to these troublesome questions, and we expect that Exabyte's visit will leave us feeling more certain that we know what needs to be done to protect ourselves when the inevitable hard disk disaster strikes. ■



### Prez to Step Down

Stan Smith has announced his intention to refrain from seeking reelection as RPCUG president. (See his column on page 2.) In recent years, in addition to guiding our activities, he has made repeated efforts to involve more of us in maintaining our group's health and well-being. Under his administration, our group has grown in membership, achieved status as a nonprofit tax-exempt educational organization, produced an award-winning newsletter, initiated useful special interest groups, built a BBS and a Web site, and received recognition both in Rockland County and in the larger user group community.

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#### MEETING SCHEDULE

*Rockland Conservatory of Music 7:30 P.M.*

**Tuesday, February 10 – Backup with Exabyte**

**Tuesday, March 10 – Alps Color Printing**

**Tuesday, April 14 – IBM Virus Protection**

(All are welcome)

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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Stan Smith



We are fortunate that we will have the opportunity this year to participate in a six-day mid-June marathon intensive Computer User Group and PC Computing forum. The annual PC Expo show will be held at the Javits Center from Tuesday, June 16 through Thursday, June 18. The annual New York PC User Group-sponsored Intergalactic meeting will precede PC Expo on Saturday June 13. And, for the first time, the Association of PC Users Groups (APCUG) semi-annual conference will take place in New York on Sunday, June 14 and Monday, June 15.

Mark your calendars so that you have time available for these events. I will provide further information in upcoming columns. We also plan to continue to distribute free PC Expo exhibit passes to RPCUG members.

Since this is the first time the APCUG conference will be held in New York City, volunteers are needed to assist in planning, logistics, and execution of the many events. I am hopeful that several of you will contact me (634-6618) to assist in these efforts. This is a one-time commitment. So sharpen your community spirit and volunteer to assist. The rewards will be numerous.

## IBM Dialer

Many of us use the IBM Global Network

(previously know as Advantis) as our Internet Service Provider (ISP). If you are one of this group, be sure to download the latest phone list and select the new Rockland County (Sterling Forest) telephone number as your primary telephone number for connection to the Internet. Click on Services in the Dialer Menu Bar and then select the Update/Download Latest Software link to identify the components (dialer software, telephone/country lists, and modem list) that are not up-to-date on your system. Then download the needed components and follow the onscreen instructions to install them. After the installation, visit the configuration and settings screens to select the new telephone number. You could reduce your telephone bill considerably or reduce future increases in your charges for the Bell Atlantic Regional Calling Plans. A side benefit of the Rockland County number is an even faster connection: contacting the White Plains/Harrison number I usually obtained a 42,266 BPS connection. Using the Sterling Forest number, I have attained 48,000 BPS on every connection.

## Deregulation

What does this topic have to do with your daily personal computing? Perhaps a lot.

Orange and Rockland (as well as other utilities nationwide) will soon allow electric customers in their service area to select the company that will supply your electric needs. O&R will still be the company that delivers electric services to your home or local business. But you will be able to select, for example, the ABC Company located in Phoenix, Arizona, to generate and supply to you the electricity you use. You would, in this example, contract with ABC to provide you with, say, 1740 Kilowatt Hours per month of electricity.

Now—what happens if you need more than the contracted 1740 KWH in a given

month? Well, it is unclear that you will receive any excess amount required to match your demand without some perturbations—especially in the early days of this new program. And will O&R (or any electric distribution company) be as diligent and timely in restoring power in an ice storm-caused outage for customers that don't buy their power from O&R?

Because of other technical limitations of the new proposals and because the national, regional, and local power grids will be required to perform in situations that they were never designed to handle, even if you stick with O&R, you may experience severe brownouts or blackouts.

Plan to protect your computing equipment by installing a small uninterruptible power supply (UPS) and consider all possibilities when examining whether to purchase power from a company other than your electric distribution company (O&R for most of us). Perhaps a wise course of action would be to wait for eighteen months to consider switching. A delayed decision would allow you to see how well the new options work and what problems (if any) have surfaced.

## Upcoming Elections

The RPCUG bylaws require that we have a nominating committee designated by March to determine candidates for the elected RPCUG officers: president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. I am hopeful that several members will step forward to serve on the nominating committee: it is a short-lived task and doesn't involve a great deal of activity. Please contact me (634-6618) to discuss your participation in this important activity.

For the past two years our annual elections have involved some turmoil and unrest. I am hopeful that this year the election process will be a smoother one.

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# THE EDITOR'S DESK

by Sy Ribakove

By an extremely apprehensive about reviewing IBM's ViaVoice dictation program. This is being dictated with ViaVoice Gold, the newest version of IBM's speech recognition offerings. In the past, I have had mixed results. The program's accuracy has sometimes been startling; at other times, the way text appears in the window is *mad willingly* inaccurate.

The above paragraph was spoken, rather than typed into my word processor. Errors occurred in the first and last sentences. The words *I am* were heard by my computer as *By an* and *maddeningly* was transcribed as *mad willingly*. However, after selecting *mad willingly* and saying maddeningly again, **ViaVoice Gold** "learned" to correctly interpret the "maddeningly" sounds and was able to produce the word accurately whenever I spoke it.

**ViaVoice Gold** is IBM's latest voice dictation product for the PC. The software is capable of understanding continuous speech, rather than...the...pause...between...words "discrete" recognition of earlier versions. The first IBM speech program I tried was VoiceType, a very expensive "high-end" offering suitable for use in corporate computing. Simply Speaking, IBM's next voice recognition product, was a "lite" version of Voice Type.

Next came Via Voice, much like the present continuous speech **ViaVoice Gold**, except that it lacks the Gold version's additional ability to voice navigate around programs and respond to spoken menu commands. **ViaVoice Gold** can also read text back in any one of a variety of variable male and female vocal simulations—a capability that has proved somewhat useful for proofreading.

Is voice recognition the way of the future in computing? Without a doubt. Is the technology ready for prime time? Not yet. Those who witnessed the demonstration of **ViaVoice Gold** at our November meeting had lots of questions, but lost their enthusiasm when the presenter tried and failed to get ViaVoice to recognize our newsletter headline: Look Ma, No Hands! It was a strange way to demonstrate ViaVoice's capabilities; the software claims to be most effective when used in ordinary business correspondence. The "Look, Ma" phrase is one that you would rarely hear in an office environment. I suspect that the software was also confused by the informal noun, Ma, and the headline's status as an incomplete sentence. Looking for logic, the software found none.

Another thing stands in the way of gen-



eral acceptance of IBM's voice products. Whether they were originally priced at more than \$500 or less than \$100, all have shipped with a fragile Andrea microphone headset. It is referred to on the box as "top-of-the-line" but it is actually bottom of the barrel. The parts are mostly cheap plastic. The microphone can never be stationed in the same place twice in relation to the speaker's mouth, which is unfortunate since consistent microphone placement is absolutely essential to obtaining accurate speech recognition.

Anyone who is interested in getting voice recognition software to be useful must be prepared to spend hours training it. The claim is that, after the brief micro-

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The Rockland PC Users Group, a tax-exempt educational organization, meets monthly, usually on the second Tuesday. Meetings begin at 7:30 P.M. The Rockland PC Users Group supports the computing interests of the community as well as the interests of its own members. The latest information about meeting programs and dates is available on the Internet at <http://www.rpcug.org>.

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# MICROGRAFX PRINT STUDIO

by Sy Ribakove

Micrografx's "low-end" **Windows Draw Print Studio (Premier Edition)** lists for under \$50. It is a steal.

Here's what you get in the big box: the highly-automated *Windows Draw* application; *PhotoMagic*, a user-friendly pixel editor; *Instant 3D*, an entry-level 3D rendering program; 300 flamboyant True Type fonts; many more artistically-designed templates than I had time to try; and *Media Manager*, for viewing, dragging and dropping any of the 20,000 bundled pieces of clip art, photo images and symbols into your artwork. There's more. On a bonus CD, you get *CreataCard Special Edition*, Micrografx's loony-looking, but great output-producing greeting card (and more!) creator, and on still another CD, IMSI's *MasterClips*, a collection of 33,000 draw-type images. That's four CDs in all.

The installation (with a limited set of fonts) devoured 111MB on my hard drive. I monitored the process with Quarterdeck's *CleanSweep* and discovered that, despite my instructions to the contrary, files had been put in C:\Program Files\Micrografx and, of course, into the already bloated \Windows and \System directories. (Will someone please explain why applications can't put their unique DLL files and fonts in their own directories instead of strewing them all over my hard disk?) In addition, forty-six changes had been made to the Windows 95 Registry. Looking at the list of modifications to my system, I was not amused.

My gloom lightened as I started to explore *Draw*. The manual (a real manual to hold in your hand and turn pages and, if you like, read in any public or private place) consisted mostly of hands-on tutorials. The tutorials were fun to do. I enjoyed using a Wizard to create Web pages, either by adapting one of the attractive templates or creating one of my own using no more than the suite's graphic tools. In under ten minutes, a great-looking page had been saved as a Web document and then opened in Netscape. I used Netscape to let me view the source document and there it was, all the HTML code I didn't have to write myself! Anyone who wants to create a couple of Web pages (most Internet providers offer subscribers free space for personal pages) won't find an easier way to put up a small, attractive site.

Among the other tutorials were a travel brochure and a party invitation complete with graphic road map directions. Each tutorial made use of all of **Print Studio's** major modules.

Take a look at the *Draw* interface in the next column, keeping in mind that any of its elements can be hidden or viewed at the click of a mouse. At the top are a standard Menu and Toolbar. On the left is a context-sensitive Visual Toolbar which contains all the choices available for the entire drawing, or the currently selected object, or the next basic task you wish to perform (e.g., Create Text). On the right of the screen is a Gallery which,



as its tabs indicate, can show all the available Type Styles, Fonts, Fills, Lines, Shadows, Effects and Clip Art. Art can simply be dragged from the Gallery to your own work.

At the bottom of the screen are tabs allowing you to select the parts of a multipage project, plus tabs that indicate layers—in the illustrated family recipe book project there are two layers, one for graphics, the other for text. (Layering a drawing makes it easier to work on one part without affecting another.)

It's possible to include *PhotoMagic's* bitmapped images in the *Draw* projects. The same holds true for the *Instant 3D* renderings. The graphics can be dragged from one application into another or saved and imported, or copied to the clipboard and pasted. It's all great fun and the results can be spectacular if you've got one of the current personal color printers.

I suspect that most readers will by now have the required 486DX, Windows 95, 8MB RAM, a VGA display with 256 colors, a CD-ROM drive and 55MB of free disk space. Those whose systems don't meet the minimum system requirements will have to sit back and lick their chops.

I have seen **Windows Draw Print Studio** discounted for less than \$30 after the manufacturer's mail-in rebate. Go out and buy this suite for yourself, or give it to someone as a gift! ■

ExecNet, Westchester's outstanding Internet Service Provider, offers a 25% discount to RPCUG members. To obtain the discount during the online subscription procedure, use the RPCUG member number found on the mailing label on the bottom of the last page.  
ExecNet's access number for new accounts is (914) 667-4567

# THE SMART SHOPPER

by H. Stanley Smith

In the last segment I proposed several strategies for the purchase of a new computer. This month's topic deals with the highly controversial issue of how (and whether!) to upgrade an existing system to take advantage of technological advances or to improve a system's capabilities.

Based upon thirteen years of experience as a PC reseller, consultant, and thirty-two years in data processing and computing, the following are my thoughts on the matter. Others may offer differing advice. However, *caveat emptor*—Let the Buyer Beware.

## CPU Upgrades

For about five years Intel has produced upgrade processors, which are faster and more capable replacements for original equipment Intel CPUs. Other major CPU manufacturers (e.g., Cyrix and AMD) have produced their own upgrade products. And third-party manufacturers (e.g., Kingston Technology and Evergreen Technologies) have used the available CPU chips and upgraded their capabilities with special hardware attachments.

Are these CPU upgrades worthwhile? Will they deliver the implied performance improvements? Well, maybe they will and maybe they won't!

A seasoned professional would caution against moving away from the class of your present processor (e.g., don't move from an 80486 to a Pentium, from a Pentium to a Pentium Pro, etc.). Since the design and capabilities of your original processor are linked to the underlying motherboard design, any upgrade processor must be compromised (or throttled down) to be compatible with the original motherboard. If you cannot afford a new system or a combination CPU/motherboard upgrade, you should understand that you are not likely to achieve blazing speed with a CPU upgrade alone.

"But, what about upgrading from a Pentium 90 to a Pentium 180 with MMX technology; is that a wise move?" Again, if you cannot purchase a new machine or a new motherboard and CPU, that choice will probably extend the useful life of your computer. Similarly, upgrading from a 233 MHz Pentium II to a 300 or 400 MHz Pentium II wouldn't be a bad idea.

However, do not expect any CPU upgrade to produce a surge of system throughput. The CPU is only one component of your overall system. All CPUs spend much of their working lives waiting for other components (e.g., memory, disk drives, display adapters/monitors, keyboards, and other peripherals) to perform their functions. There's an old saying: "Every CPU ever produced, regardless of its internal speed, waits at the same speed." So you will notice a speed increase only when the CPU is actively computing, and not merely waiting. This means that for the

average computer user a 100% increase in internal processing speed, e.g., upgrading from a 90 MHz to a 180 MHz processor, might produce a 25–35% increase in system throughput. Display screens will draw perceptibly faster and spreadsheets will recalculate faster. But you will not see dazzling increases in overall system performance.

How difficult is a CPU upgrade installation? In some systems it's as simple as removing the case cover, raising a small lever, removing the existing CPU, inserting the new CPU, lowering the lever, and replacing the case cover—possibly ten minutes of work. On other systems, motherboard jumpers or switches may have to be changed. A Voltage Regulator Module may have to be installed. Disk drives, add-in cards or cables may have to be removed just so you can get at your CPU. The system BIOS may have to be upgraded to support the new CPU. CMOS settings may have to be changed. I have generally found that the ten minute upgrades happen about once in fifty times. And even understanding which upgrades will work in your system requires a great deal of knowledge—why, for instance, a 200 MHz Pentium OverDrive will not work in an original 66 MHz system.

I hope I am conveying the idea that a CPU upgrade installation is not a task to be taken lightly by the average PC user.

## Motherboard Upgrades

Replacing a motherboard and CPU at the same time sidesteps many of the problems associated with a CPU upgrade alone. A new system board (carefully chosen) will have been designed for the new, faster CPU. The new CPU can be a more advanced class of CPU. The motherboard's BIOS and CMOS are likely to be fully compatible with the new CPU.

This option is more expensive than the CPU upgrade alone; there are two purchases involved—a CPU and a motherboard. (Sometimes the two are sold together as a unit.) And installation is certainly more difficult.

There are several "gotchas" in considering this approach. Will the memory installed on your old motherboard work on the new? Will the new motherboard fit physically into, and have the same circuitry as your present case? Will your existing video and sound cards work in the new motherboard? (Some older hard disk controllers and video adapters will not work in a PCI motherboard.) Will you have enough expansion slots in the new motherboard—most newer motherboards usually contain fewer of these slots than older ones. Will your front panel cables (e.g., Turbo button and light, Reset switch, disk-in-use light, power light, and keylock) match your new motherboard's connectors? Does the

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# I'M A WEBMASTER!

by Steve Weinberg

Who knew in early 1997 that I would soon become familiar with such terms as HTML, URL, Perl, FTP, animated GIF, CGI script, Web server, ISP, frames-enabled, JavaScript, and HTTP? I certainly didn't. Now, not even a year later, I know and am able to work with them all—and more—because I volunteered to become the RPCUG Webmaster.

As Webmaster I am now responsible for creating and maintaining the World Wide Web pages that any and all Internet browsers can reach at <http://www.rpcug.org>. I had to collect and assemble the data to be displayed (images, forms, text) and maintain and modify each one as necessary. I had to design the look of the site using layouts and images. I had to learn to program in CGI, Java, JavaScript and Perl. It would be my responsibility to keep things running smoothly so that the site would be available and functional for any net surfers who might point their browsers to it.

The creation of a Web site was an RPCUG executive board decision. More and more of our membership were becoming Internet-adept. What better way to serve them than to add an Internet presence to enhance the value of RPCUG membership?



On a personal level, I found that the technical aspects of creating Web documents for our members and the world at large a challenge I could not refuse.

I was intimidated at first. Where to start, and how to begin to understand the way this whole Web business worked was the first challenge. In addition to the friendly support I was receiving from several RPCUG members who encouraged and assisted me, I decided to approach the situation from the ground up by getting a book on HTML, the basic language of the Internet.

The book I selected had 1,100 plus pages. Did I have to know all of HTML? I felt it was important to understand something about the basic language for creating Web pages. I knew that there was Web page creation software that could make it pos-

sible for me to create, publish and maintain our Web presence without ever worrying about HTML. (Later, when one of these advanced tools didn't achieve a desired result, I was glad I had learned enough about HTML to tweak the underlying code.)

With the look of the Web pages beginning to take shape in my mind, the next task was deciding what material we actually wanted to put up on the Web. I had on my initial list our group's mission, how to contact us by e-mail and links to other interesting places on the Internet. The Investment SIG provided input. There were many interesting financial sites on the Web and the SIG members felt that our Web site should provide a dynamic list of those sites. Visitors to our site would only have to click on the name of one of these sites to be transported there without ever having to know a site address or URL.

SIG members Hank Feinberg and Bob Jenks worked on collecting interesting financial sites. I contracted with ACD (American Computer Distributors) in Nanuet to host our Web site and establish our unique domain name, [rpcug.org](http://www.rpcug.org). A discussion at the Communications SIG meeting early in 1997 elicited lots of interest and opinions from the membership. There was more than enough input. Now, I just needed some output.

HTML pages can be created using the most basic of text editors. Plain text is all that is needed to instruct a browser to perform. HTML tags are plain text phrases that mean something special when they are on a Web site. When I discovered how tedious it was to edit HTML documents this way, I began experimenting with various HTML page editors that offered a Graphical User Interface. This interface made it possible to see immediately what a page would look like, and at the same time allow me to directly modify it. I used Netscape Gold 3 both as a browser and as a page editor to create most of what our site is today. (The newer Netscape Communicator 4.0's Composer module serves the same purpose and adds functionality.)

Many Web page elements became absorbing areas to explore. I was fascinated by animated GIFs—Web page graphics that appear to move before your very eyes. I created an animation for RPCUG that would provide interest, but not be too distracting. It was the RPCUG logo, the OK hand sign, with the letters, R-P-C-U-G, spelled out in an arc in succession above it.

In any new task, my approach is to start with the basics and tweak and tune a thing until it works as closely as possible to what I would like. Take, for example, providing a background for the pages. If I left it at its default setting, each visitor's monitor would display whatever color his browser was set to (usually gray). I chose to specify a graphics file created with a painting program

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# WEB READING AND SURFING

by Steve Weinberg

## Resources I Have Used

WEBMASTER IN A NUTSHELL, DELUXE EDITION; O'Reilly, \$69.95 ISBN 1-56592-305-7.

Here is a book on CD-ROM that takes you from the very basic concepts in its accompanying 374-page printed volume to several much more complex topics and programming languages. The CD actually contains not only the complete text of this printed volume but also the texts of four more advanced O'Reilly books (HTML: THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE, 2<sup>ND</sup> EDITION, CGI PROGRAMMING ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB, JAVASCRIPT: THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE, 2<sup>ND</sup> EDITION, PROGRAMMING PERL, 2<sup>ND</sup> EDITION). The CD versions provide hypertext links to make it very easy to jump to appropriate related information.

CGI PROGRAMMING ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB by Shishir Gundavaram; O'Reilly; 450 p; \$32.95; ISBN 1-56592-168-2

CGI Common Gateway Interface programming provides the mechanism for having a program run at a Web server (such as AOL or ACD) and do just about any programming task you might imagine. This book provides an excellent view of CGI, exploring such topics as "Embedding Counters into HTML Pages."

LEARNING PERL by Randal L. Schwartz & Tom Christianson; O'Reilly; 302p; \$29.95; ISBN 1-56592-284-0

Most of the programming examples in the CGI book (above) are written in a language called Perl. This is the book that introduced me to Perl programming, which is very much like a BASIC procedural script.

The Internet has become a vehicle for encouraging personal Web page development. I view it as the largest library of information available today in the world. Here are some particularly interesting sites: <http://www.hotwired.com/webmonkey/> at which you will find everything from an article on how computers communicate, to help for solving tough Web site issues like speeding images over the Web to waiting net surfers. Or try: <http://www.sun.com/styleguide/>, a cookbook for helping people create better Web pages that contains chapters on many more topics than you could ever imagine. At <http://www.bignosebird.com/losewait.shtml> there are specific articles like, "Lose Wait & Look Great! The skinny on fat graphics..." that show you how to take advantage of public domain images that meet your needs, and tells how to modify them using various effects to achieve a desired result. There are hundreds of articles just begging to be read on just about any topic concerning Webmastering. ■

## I'm a Webmaster! *(continued from page 6)*

instead. I believed it would provide a texture that would add visual impact to the page. Here's where member feedback became important. Someone using a different browser, browser version or screen resolution complained that he could no longer easily read the text on the page because of the darker portions of the background. It was time to find a new background graphic.

Graphics used as Web page backgrounds get tiled across and down the page repetitively. I created a white background with the letters R-P-C-U-G in light gray, like a watermark, that would not interfere with the text. I found a way to reduce the size of the graphic file so that the Web page would appear on the screen a bit faster. Then, I read an article that recommended using a default background in a color that is close to the graphic file color so as to avoid the annoying snap of color change as the page appears. I made the change and liked what I saw.

Someone wondered if we could tell how many people were actually visiting our site. This was an important question: was our Web site going to be effective in answering the needs of our membership? I learned of programs called page counters, sometimes called "visitation counters" or "hit counters," that provide all sorts of statistics on page access. I chose one called Net-Trak. By clicking on the Net-Trak logo on our home page, it's possible to learn how many times each page has been accessed on each day of the last 31, what browsers were used to access the pages, how many total hits were recorded, how many unique hits, etc. (When you visit our home page for the first time each day, you may be asked to allow a cookie to be set. This is the way the Net-Trak service keeps track of unique hits so that no matter how many times you access our home page on a given day the counter will be incremented only once.)

As exciting and stimulating as these activities have been to me, there is the workaday aspect as well. A Web site is a living entity which must be kept current on an ongoing basis. For example, each month our calendar of events must be updated to reflect upcoming meetings and other Rockland events. I welcome help from interested members on this or any other aspect of maintaining and enhancing our RPCUG Web site. ■

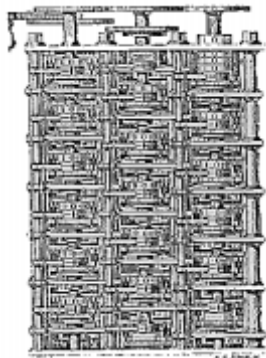
### AND KEEP IN MIND

#### February

- 5 New Users Group; 7:15–8:45 P.M., New City Library
- 10 General Meeting; Exabyte; 7:30 P.M.
- 17 Windows 95 SIG; 7–9 P.M.; Pearl River Library
- 18 OS/2 SIG; 7:30 P.M.; 634-6618 for directions

# OUR READERS TELL US

Charles Babbage was an English inventor and mathematician who, in the 1800's, believed he could build a computing machine. His proposals for mechanical computers predated the modern reinvention of computers by almost a century. Because of this accomplishment, Charles Babbage has earned his place in history as the "Father of Computing."



## Carol Dudar writes:

About three years ago, as I was browsing through the software on the shelves of a local Babbage's, I saw him, and immediately I had an unquenchable desire to possess him. There, mounted on the wall, slightly above eye-level, hung a two-foot-by-two-foot engraved aluminum plaque with the dignified likeness of Mr. Babbage himself! When I asked the clerk the price of the plaque, he informed me that it was part of the store decor and was not for sale. Still burning with desire, I called the main office for the Babbage stores and inquired if I could purchase a similar plaque from them. Again the answer was no.

A week before Christmas 1996, I learned that the Nanuet Mall Babbage's was about to close its doors forever, and that it was selling every thing in the store at seventy-five percent off. Of course, I lost no time in getting there. Ever mindful that Mr. Babbage was still gazing down from his plaque on the wall, I mingled with the other shoppers and made several software selections.

It occurred to me that since this store was about to close, I might be able to pur-

chase the coveted Babbage plaque. The friendly young manager told me that he was the lucky owner of the Babbage plaque from another store and that he understood how I felt. He said that for a small price this plaque could be mine; that is, if no one else who worked in this store wanted it.

I returned a few days later. Mr. Babbage was gone! Only a large patch of dried-up glue remained on the wall as a reminder. Someone else had taken the plaque. I was devastated.

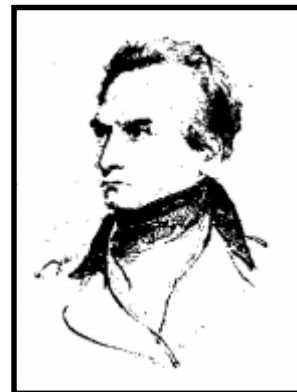
A few weeks later, when speaking to a fellow shopper at CompUSA in Paramus, I learned that there was a Babbage store in a Paramus mall was about to go out of business. I was with my husband, Walter, who was tired and wanted to go home. Walter knew what I was after when I pleaded with him to take me to Babbage's.

When we arrived at this Babbage store, the plaque was there. I lost no time in seeking out the manager. He told me that the store would close the next night, and that if none of the employees wanted it, the plaque would be mine for a small price. He told me to phone around noon the next day.

When I called the next day, there was good news and bad news. The good news was that the plaque was still there. The bad news was that they were unable to remove the plaque, because they feared they would damage the wall and have to pay for the repair.

Suddenly I had an idea. I called back and asked, could I have the plaque, if I was able to remove it without damaging the wall. His answer was yes.

An hour later Walter and I arrived at the store with our "equipment"—a hair dryer, a putty knife and a long extension cord. The idea was to melt the glue with the hair dryer and pry the plaque off with the putty knife. As people watched from



Charles Babbage (1791-1871)

inside and outside the store, Walter went to work. It took only a few minutes of work with the putty knife and the plaque was easily lifted from the wall. We never had to turn on the hair dryer.

Mr. Babbage now gazes down at me as I sit at my computer desk, and I gaze back at him and contemplate the inscription on the plaque. "Computers were first designed by the 19th century English mathematician, engineer and industrialist Charles Babbage. In 1822 Babbage built the Difference Engine, a machine for calculating and printing numerical tables. In 1835 he began work on his life's dream: the Analytic Engine, which was the first machine to incorporate the major design elements of modern computers. Babbage never completed his visionary work of the Analytic Engine, but his dream has been realized in today's world of computers. The store is named as a tribute to Babbage's pioneering accomplishments."

## Irene Kleiner writes:

My family meets periodically for a nice quiet dinner and talk. The talk usually gets down to the latest computer gadget, program, or achievement. One evening, my older son brought out his newest acquisition—a small camera. "But it's not just a

*(continued on page 9)*



## Kleiner *(continued from page 8)*

camera, it's a digital camera," he said. And he proceeded to take pictures at short intervals.

We all discussed this latest marvel and I said that I would like a family picture.

Several days later, I got online and opened Netscape Gold for my e-mail. I was told that I had five letters and that excited me. Usually, I receive one, two or at times three, but five! I watched one, two and three letters coming in. Then, there was a halt. Nothing. I tried, and tried to download the letters and then left it for another day. It was the weekend and I thought I would have to wait to get any help or answers.

I left word with my Internet provider (TZ-Link) that I could not get my mail.

On Sunday, I received a return call. It seems that my son had tried to send me several photographs as e-mail. Photographs make very large computer files. Each digital image should have been compressed (zipped) and sent as an "attachment" to a letter. I'm still waiting for a copy of the photos, but now they're coming by snail mail instead of e-mail. ■

[Ed: When a very large message or a message attachment is being downloaded, it can appear to the user that nothing is happening. In these situations it is a mistake to abort the transfer. An external modem's blinking lights would indicate that data was still being downloaded and the system was not stalled. Windows 95 users with internal modems who encounter a situation when "nothing is happening" need to right-click on the Taskbar icon for their Internet connection, and then left-click on Status. This will show whether or not the system is stalled.]

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## Prez to Step Down *(continued from page 1)*

It is too soon to begin to recount all the services and insights that Stan has so generously provided in his eight years as president. It is certain that the best way for us to repay him is to expeditiously find a worthy successor. The person who is chosen to assume this important role will be free to shape it to fit his or her own capabilities and vision.

Stan plans to remain active in our group. It is difficult to imagine our Q&A sessions minus his reasoned answers and explanations. Every ending is also a beginning, and we look forward to continuing RPCUG's growth and usefulness to our members and the community. ■

## Editor's Desk *(continued from page 3)*

phone setup and audio level routines have been accomplished, the product will work out of the box. Truth is, it will work somewhat, but if you want to have any chance of turning ViaVoice into an effective tool, you must be prepared to read between fifty and two-hundred fifty boring sentences into the microphone, and then walk away from between thirty minutes to several hours while the speech engine "digests" the special nuances of your spoken style.

There is another thing that will prevent speech recognition from eventually taking the place of my keyboard as a method for getting data into a computer. For almost sixty years the keyboard (typewriter and computer) has been the way my brain expresses itself when it needs to give form and substance to my thoughts. Dictating turns out to be a special skill, requiring me to carefully pre-organize my thoughts. Words flow easily when my fingers feel a keyboard under them. Speaking into a microphone involves, for me at least, some degree of stage fright. There is pressure to say it right the first time. Also, correcting recognition errors turns out to be tedious work, for one must not simply type in the correct words or phrases. That would rob the software of the opportunity to refine its recognition skills. Rather, mistaken words or phrases must be highlighted, pronounced into the mike once more and assimilated by the speech engine, which will then get them right the next time.

**ViaVoice Gold** has a couple of very clever supplementary features. A macro capability makes it possible to speak a couple of words and have paragraphs of text appear on the screen as if by magic. And it is possible to have the software learn new words by opening a document containing them and having the Vocabulary Expander examine the text and then prompt you to read in any unfamiliar words or terms. That procedure goes quickly and is an excellent way to expand ViaVoice's 22,000 word shipping vocabulary.

The bottom line here is that we really are on the brink of a new paradigm in computing. (Microsoft is seeking to make future versions of Windows voice-capable.) But we're a long way from sci-fi versions of speech recognition ("Computer, is the Captain aboard?")

Still, if you've got about \$125 and 125MB of available hard disk space, Windows 95 with 32MB of RAM or NT 4.0 with 48MB RAM, a sound card and CD-ROM drive, and at least the equivalent of an Intel 150MHz with MMX processor, **ViaVoice Gold** will really let you capture the flavor of what computing is going to be like in the very near future. ■

# MORE CONTINUATIONS

## Upgrade *(continued from page 5)*

new motherboard support Turbo operation? Will the keyboard and mouse connectors on the new motherboard line up with the machine-drilled holes in the old computer case and will the connectors be compatible? How do you install the new motherboard and have your operating system recognize its new capabilities without a complete operating system reinstall?

After the correct purchases have been made and the parts are in hand, replacing a motherboard can prove to be a formidable task, involving as much as six to eight hours of work in a tight environment. One-and-a-half to three hours would be more typical, but you can never know how long such a job will take until the job is done. Again, this is a task that is best left to the professionals.

Despite all these considerations, the improvements in performance resulting from a combined motherboard and CPU replacement may be impressive and often turn out to be well worth the expense involved. ■

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## President *(continued from page 2)*

In order to facilitate this happening, I am announcing my unambiguous intention to not run for any RPCUG elective office in 1998. I have reached this decision on my own, with no urging (in either direction) by family or friends. I will have served RPCUG as president for the last eight years and actively participated in other leadership capacities for an additional four years (as treasurer, meeting director, program chairman, and perpetual volunteer). My health doesn't allow me the freedom to engage in as many activities as I once did. I need a rest and decreased responsibilities.

I don't plan on fading into the woodwork. I look forward to supporting the next RPCUG president and seeing (and assisting in) RPCUG's continued growth and service to our membership and the community.

My decision is irrevocable. "If nominated, I will not run—if elected, I will not serve" aptly describes my position.

Let's see more new faces assuming the leadership of RPCUG.

## January Meeting

Citibank showed our January meeting attendees their Direct Access (personal) and Business Access (SOHO—Small Office/Home Office) online banking software. We saw that all users of

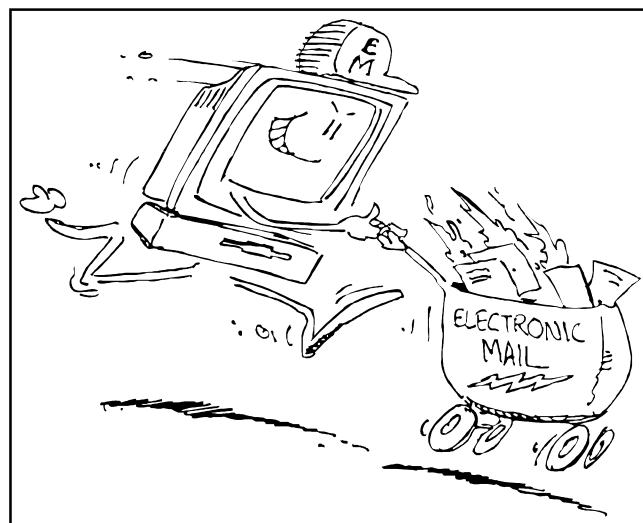
their services can pay bills electronically, transfer money between accounts, see when checks (or bill payments) have cleared, obtain electronic statements, view account activity, enter stop payment instructions, view banking holidays, contact customer service, and enter brokerage transactions. It's all online and all free—there is no charge for either the software or the online services. (Of course, one must have checking or other financial accounts with Citibank to use their online banking services.) As I stated last month, I am a longtime user of Citibank's Direct Access services, and I highly recommend that you consider making this online banking service one of your valued financial tools.

## February Meeting

A very important topic that is often overlooked in most individual (and many businesses) computing practices is backup. Backup of data files. Backup of application programs. Backup of the operating system files and configuration information. How many times have you seen a computer advertisement that included a tape (or other) backup device? How many computer systems have you seen at a computer fair that include a backup capability? How many computer salespeople have insisted that a backup device must be included in your planned purchase? The answers to the preceding is probably none—or at least a very, very small number.

Come to our February meeting and hear what Mel Zeiger (an RPCUG member and a representative of Exabyte Corp.) advises about PC backups.

See you on Tuesday, February 10 at 7:30 P.M. at the Rockland Conservatory of Music, 7 Perlman Drive, Spring Valley, NY. ■



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