May 2011

Next Computer Club (BVCC) Meeting, May 9, 2011, 7:30 PM

May, 2011 Program

The meeting this month will feature election of Club officers for the coming year, Internet Shopping (Ebay.com & craigslist.org), E-Mail Basics, and Your questions.

Editor's Note

The BVCC Newsletter will be on vacation until September so this issue is a little larger than normal. See you in the fall.

Notes from Kent
Kroger Card Activtation

As you've seen on BVTV (Channel 99) and in the Bugle, we've helped with the reactivation of Kroger cards so that proceeds can go to the Bristol Village Foundation. This has largely been accomplished but we should clarify one aspect. If you have your own e-mail address, it is important that you do your own activation, or come to me for assistance. As noted on BVTV, I have been able to automatically handle the reactivation for all of the people who do not regularly use computers (the Club facilitated the creation of special accounts for these people and thus I know the user names and passwords, but those of you with your own user names and espe-

cially passwords, I have no idea what they are unless you ask for assistance. And, Kroger requires this reactivation once each year. So, if you have not done so, help your neighbor at no cost to you (in effect, a free lunch).

Ransomware Again & Again

Since last month's report, Bristol Village residents and club computers have fallen victim to ransomware programs. While no common thread has been discernible, one important cautionary prevention has become clear: update your anti-virus software. A big problem is that the purveyors of evil software (collectively, malware) are continually changing their software which means that the defensive software will always lag behind. But continually and conscientiously updating your defensive software (*Microsoft Security Essentials* is one recommended free example of defensive software) will keep that gap small and reduce your vulnerability. And, of course, don't click on a link in e-mail unless you have great trust in the sender. Should you err, the result may be a protracted stint of anti-virus programs to root out the persistent ransomware.

QR Code – *A Practical Application*

In his stimulating (even mind-boggling) presentation at the April club meeting, George Hartwell's grandson Will gave us an introduction to QR code (see also Len's article in the April Newsletter, p. 5) and how his company is using it. This had me on the alert when I read a report on a recent academic library conference. But a little background is

needed. As librarians and library workers (even here in the Bristol Village library) know, shelf-reading is a vital, exhausting, and thankless activity. In brief, it consists of checking all of the books on a shelf to assure that they are in the right order—so a potential reader can find what s/he is looking for.

One technological approach, RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) has some promise in addressing this painstaking task, although a no small cost. A brief introduction to RFID will follow, but we need to get back to the sheep (*revenon a nos moutons*) or RQ code. The exciting use of RQ code is being developed by William "Bo" Brinkman, an associate professor in the Computer Science And Software Engineering Department at Miami University. In an advance peek at the application being developed by Brinkman and an undergraduate research assistant, "ShelvAR," conference-attendees were wowed by the possibilities in AR (Augmented Reality). Using tablets running Google's Android operating system, a shelf-reader uses the tablet's camera to scan the shelves (reading dozens of books with QR codes on the spines at a time). When a book is discovered misshelved, the tablet screen will show where it should be reshelved. If the experimental project is successful, Brinkman believes that it would be inexpensive enough to be used by small libraries. An interview with Brinkman is available at http://www.libraryjournal.com/lj/newsletter-snewsletterbucketacademicnewswire/890243-440/augmented-reality_shelving_qa_with_miami-i.html.csp .

RFID – Radio-Frequency Identification

I didn't intend to get caught up in RFID but Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radio-frequency_identification) offers a lot of background. To extract that, RFID is a way to send radio signals that identify a specific object. The merchants' dream is that everything that you put in a bag (or even carry—shoplifters beware) would be recorded and then charged against your credit card when you leave the store, removing human

intermediaries (or the presently used scanners) from the process. Some of the concerns, such as accuracy, security, and privacy, are obvious. But there are practical concerns as well. So far, adoption RFID in the U.S. has focused on EZ-Pass systems for tollways and bridges.

Credit card providers in Europe have embraced RFID and largely abandoned the magnetic strips used on U.S. credit cards. One result is that someone with a U.S. credit card may face increasing problems in trying to use his/her card with merchants in Europe. This is discussed in an updated (for 2011) article by Public Television travel expert, Rick Steves, http://www.ricksteves.com/plan/tips/moneytip.htm . He notes the problem is greatest at unattended machines, such as train stations, parking garages, automated gas stations, and rural toll road exits. As yet, credit card issuers claim that the magnetic-strip cards will be accepted, as long as you can find a human to intervene.

The American Express Blue card reportedly now carries a form of RFID (also called "chip and pin" because a computer chip reads your PIN when entered and approves the transaction. Other card issuers are planning to introduce chip and pin cards for at least some travelers, with Chase reportedly among the first. One Bankrate.com writer advises travelers to Europe to carry extra cash (just in case) and to be prepared to tell clerks that your card needs to be swiped and that a signature is needed.

Craigslist

A verity of environmental awareness is to "think globally and act locally." While you are considering shopping online (or using your computer to aid with your purchases), craigslist is one way to follow this advice. http://chillicothe.craigslist.org/ is the local implementation of craigslist and, despite its name, listings usually include the greater Columbus area (as a second tier, with a note "Few LOCAL results found. Here are some from NEARBY areas...." as well as the greater Chillicothe area. "Greater Columbus" extends to Newark and Athens.

When I was selling a pickup truck a couple of years ago, I became aware that "classified ads" are largely disappearing from newspapers. When I asked a nephew what people used for "sale by owner," he pointed me to craigslist. I have used it on a number of occasions since (both as a seller and buyer) and greatly appreciate its strengths, such as permitting photographs (in fact, I find photographs are usually essential) and being free.

According its own fact sheet (http://www.craigslist.org/about/factsheet), craigslist began in early 1995 as an email list of San Francisco events. In 1999, it was incorporated as a "for profit" company and, in 2004, e-bay acquired a 25% ownership from a former shareholder. It receives over 20 billion views each month (not all of the Chillicothe site), it has more than 700 sites in 70 countries with 50 million users in the United States.

Its finances remain a mystery to me but the factsheet says there are ad fees for jobs in 18 cities, brokered New York City apartments, and therapeutic services—all offerings that I haven't explored. It also has some caveats. Since it really has minimal administrative structure, its ads are not policed and *caveat emptor* is the best rule. But then, the traditional newspaper classifieds were very loosely policed as well and they served us well for a century or so.

As essentially an online classified, prices are not the result of an auction (as they frequently are on e-bay) but constitute an initial offer to sell with the final price determined by the buyer and the seller. Also, in contrast to e-bay and PayPal, craigslist makes no claims that advertised products are what they are claimed to be. But usually, the seller is close enough that the product in question can (and should) be examined in person.

As one who uses craigslist just as I used classifieds in a bygone era, I have no comment on the accusations about the use of the "Personals" for illegitimate activities. In looking at the local "Personals,"

(or lack thereof) for this article, ads alluding to such possibilities are notable in their absence.

Kent Mulliner

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Web sites to try
by Len

If you have ever admired the photography in National Geographic magazine, you can now see their picture picks online at:

http://photography.nationalgeographic.com/photography/photos/best-pod-february-2011/
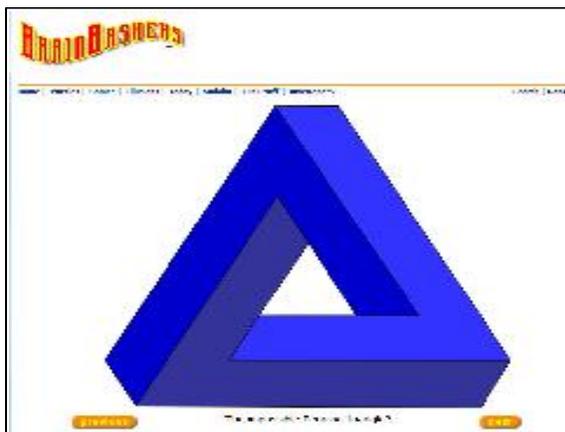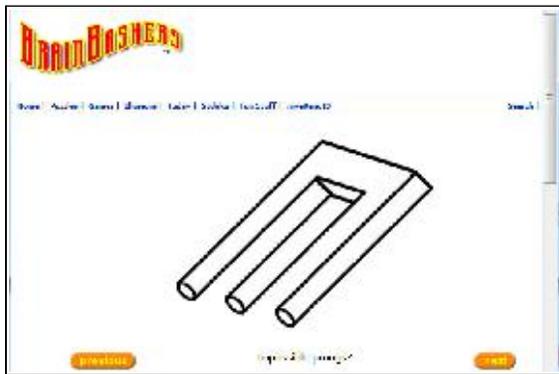

Optical Illusions

You have all seen these things that play tricks on your brain by way of your eyes. Here is a web site where you can explore a number of optical illusions.

http://www.brainbashers.com/showillusion.asp?134

A favorite from my drafting teaching days. We used to call the thing in the next illustration a blivet.

Ve resa till Sverige

We travel to Sweden

Diana and I will be traveling to Sweden this summer. If you would like to see live pictures of Sweden, you can visit these web sights.

http://www.webbkameror.se/index.php

The next link will take you to live pictures from Stockholm. You can watch the ferries, ships, and people come and go.

http://www.webbkameror.se/webbkameror/gondolen/webkamera_eriks_640_1.php

There are similar web cameras all over the world. To find them, Google *your place* **webcam**.

Email Basics

by Len

Here is a review of some email basics along with a few tips and tricks. There are *three things required for email.*

1. ISP (Internet Service Provider)

Before you can use email you must have access to the Internet through an ***Internet Service Provider ISP*)**. You may either pay for an ISP, or use a free publicly available service. Most public libraries provide computers connected to the Internet. Many motel chains provide a free Internet service in their rooms and lobbies. Of course, BVCC members can use the club computer room to access the Internet.

There are two main options for broadband (high speed) internet connections in Bristol Village; Time Warner Roadrunner (recommended) and Frontier DSL.

If you have a laptop computer, you can get on to the Internet through wireless access points. Many businesses such as Wendy's and other food chains, and motels provide free wireless connections. Some BVCC members have their own wireless access point that can in some cases be shared by a close neighbor. In any case, access to the Internet is the first requirement for doing email.

2. Email Host

The second requirement for doing email is to have an email address provided by an **email host**. The email host can be identified by the part of an email

address after the @. There are several ways to obtain an email address. BVCC members can obtain an address and email box in the form of your-name@bvres.org through the computer club.

ISP's typically provide an email address for their customers. There are also a number of free email hosts available such as Gmail, Hotmail, and Yahoo mail. These are provided for free in order to get users to view advertising.

3. Email Software

The third thing that is needed to send and receive email is an email program. Email programs are often supplied by the email host, for example Yahoo Mail and Gmail. (However, you do not have to use the email software provided by Yahoo or Gmail to use them as your email host.)

There are also email programs that are not related to an email host. The independent programs include Outlook Express, Incredimail, or Thunderbird, (our preferred program) and others. These email programs are referred to as *client* software. A *client* is software that accesses a remote service on another computer system.

Quick Review

The three things necessary for email are an **ISP**, an **electronic mail box**, and an **email program** to read and write mail. You may pay a fee to have an ISP connected to your computer, you might use an ISP at a public site such as a library or the BVCC computer room, or you might use a laptop connected to the Internet through a wireless connection.

Electronic mail boxes are supplied by ISP's, free mail hosts (for advertising considerations) such as Yahoo Mail, or by organizations such as BVCC.

Email software for reading and writing messages can be supplied by email hosts, or independent programs such as Thunderbird.

Where Does My Mail Live?

One important thing to consider when choosing email software is where email messages, address

books, and attachments are stored. When a message is sent to you it first goes to your electronic mail box located at your email host's computer. What happens when you open your email depends on your email program.

In the case of email programs supplied by Yahoo or Gmail, the messages, address books, and attachments are kept in storage at your email host. (When files or programs are stored outside of a local computer it is known as cloud computing and the software used as 'web mail.') Independent email programs have the option of moving the messages and attachments to your local computer as soon as you open your email program.

Once attachments and messages are stored in a local computer, it is possible to view them even if there is no connection to the Internet. If, for example, pictures are attached to an email message, and are not moved to a local computer, you can only view them when you are connected to the Internet.

Email Software Sample Displays

Programs used to read and write email messages are similar in appearance and operation. Here are some example email program screens.

Gmail In Box
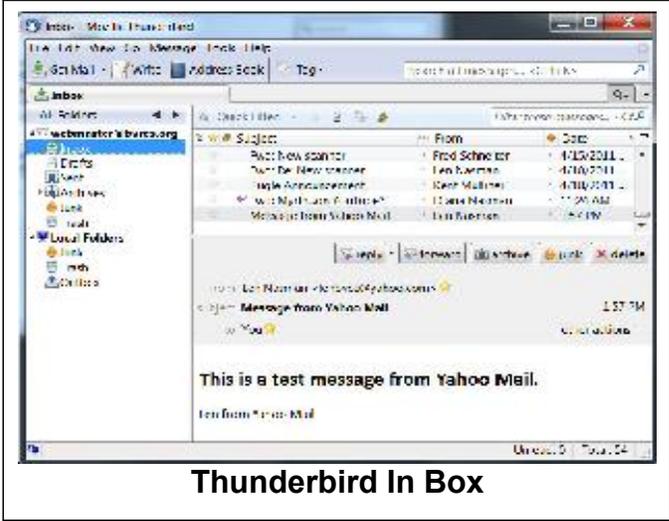
Gmail compose mail display

Different email programs deal with attachments in different ways. Yahoo Mail provides a thumbnail (a small graphic image) of the attachment. To view an attached picture, you have to download it to the local computer and then open it with a viewer or paint program.

Gmail allows you to see a quick view of the image in a new browser window, or you can download the file to a local computer.

Thunderbird embeds a copy of the graphic image in the body of the email message and also provides the option to open the graphic in another program or save the graphic file in a new location.
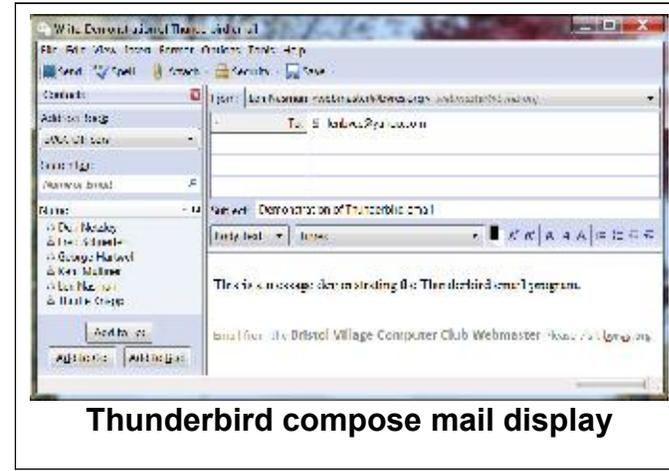
BTW, the above example screens were captured from the Mozilla Firefox web browser. External email programs such as Gmail and Yahoo Mail require the use of a web browser (a program that displays Internet web pages). This means that the web browser menus and tool bars use part of the display.

Thunderbird In Box

Yahoo Mail In Box

Thunderbird compose mail display

Yahoo Mail compose mail display

Observe that with email programs such as Thunderbird that are installed in a local computer, the email program connects directly to the email host without the use of a web browser. This means that the email program uses the entire display window with no space taken by browser tool bars.

Fred Notes

Fred points out the difficulty of seniors adapting to computer technology with this example of a senior word processing technique.

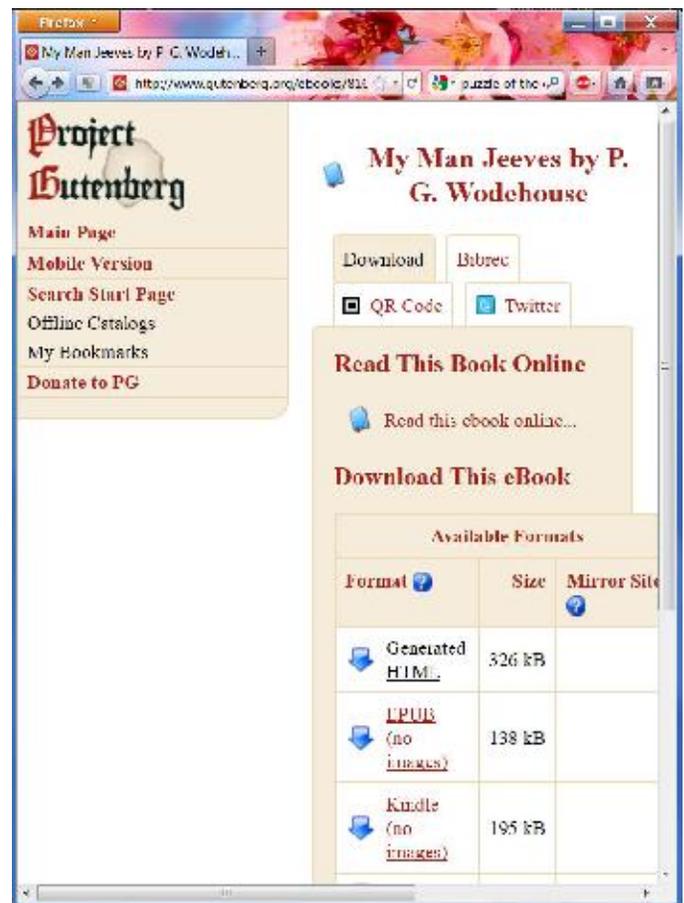*Fred Schneiter*

Speed Reading Trick

by Len

Want to improve your reading speed without enrolling in a class on speed reading? Here is a trick that will improve your reading speed with little or no effort.

As an example. I opened a free book on the Project Gutenberg web site.

www.gutenberg.org

I found '*My Man Jeeves*' by P.G. Wodehouse and opened the HTML version.

When the document is open it will fill the current window width. If your browser is set to a full screen window, the text will cover the width of the display.

Remember that you can change the displayed font size by pressing **Ctrl+** or **Ctrl-**.

These documents have a feature known as *word wrap*. This means that the text will automatically adjust lines of text to fit the current window width.
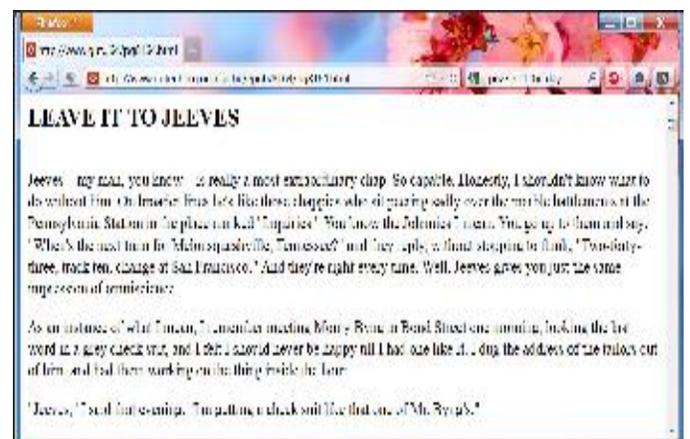
If your browser window is very wide, your eyes will have to travel from the right end of one line to the left end of the next line to continue reading from line to line. When the line of text is wide, your eyes have to track very carefully to move from line to line. (I'm sure you have observed book readers sometimes use a finger or even a straight edge to help focus on a line of text.

Here is the trick that will increase your reading speed. Make the browser window narrower by dragging an edge of the window toward the center. Dragging the window edge means:

✔ Move the mouse cursor over the edge of the window until the cursor becomes a double arrow.

✔ Click and hold down the left mouse button as you move the mouse .

✔ Release the left mouse button when the window is the desired width.

By reducing the width of the lines of text, your eyes will have less trouble tracking. Also, as the column of text becomes narrower, your eyes will do more moving down through the text, and less back and forth. This is easier on the eyes and helps increase your reading speed.

Someone once asked me why I used a two column format for the BVCC newsletter rather than one column. Imagine what fun your eyes would have if the daily newspaper had articles all in a single column. Tracking from line to line would be very difficult. I think the same thing holds true for our newsletter. Two columns reduces eyeball tracking problems and makes it a bit easier to read.

Firefox Personas

by Len

Many of BVCC members are using Mozilla Firefox as your Internet Web Browser. There are a lot of technical reasons to use Firefox. Here is a feature that is simply cosmetic.

If you study the borders of the screen captures in the Email and Speed Reading articles above, you might notice the different web browser borders. The latest releases of Firefox have included an option for changing the display appearance using what Mozilla calls a Persona.

There are thousands of these things to choose from. To change a Firefox persona, go to:

http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/customize/

As you move the cursor over each option, you will see a preview of it on your display. Change your Persona with the season, or to suit your current mood. Have fun!

Email Addresses Stolen

It was recently revealed that the database maintained by an Internet service company, Epsilon, was hacked, and information from thousands of customers was stolen. The list of companies includes Kroger, as noted in last month's issue.

At this point, it is not clear what the information might be used for. Since email addresses were included in the data, most expect that the addresses might be used to generate spam targeted at specific types of consumers. Here is a list of companies known to be affected.

- Kroger
- TiVo
- US Bank
- JPMorgan Chase
- Capital One
- Citi
- Home Shopping Network (HSN)
- Ameriprise Financial

- LL Bean Visa Card
- Lacoste
- AbeBooks
- Hilton Honors Program
- Dillons
- Fred Meyer
- Beachbody (Makers of TRX)
- TD Ameritrade
- Ethan Allen
- Eileen Fisher
- MoneyGram
- TIAA-CREF
- Verizon
- Marks & Spencer (UK)
- City Market
- Smith Brands
- McKinsey & Company
- Ritz-Carlton Rewards
- Marriott Rewards
- New York & Company
- Brookstone
- Walgreens
- The College Board
- Disney Destinations
- Best Buy
- Robert Half
- Target
- QFC
- bebe Stores
- Ralphs
- Fry's
- 1-800-Flowers
- Red Roof Inn
- King Soopers
- Air Miles
- Eddie Bauer
- Scottrade
- Dell Australia
- Jay C

More info at
http://www.securityweek.com/massive-breach-epsilon-compromises-customer-lists-major-brands

Have a nice summer!