

The Newsbyte

THE TRI-COUNTY COMPUTER CLUB

September 1999

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Editor's Corner

Microsoft Office 2000 is coming to the Tri-County Computer Club this month! Microsoft will not be able to have a presenter at the meeting, so the presentation will be member given. It will cover (most likely) Word, Excel, Access, Publisher, PowerPoint, Outlook, PhotoDraw, and FrontPage.

Bring friends along to our October meeting! We will be having a computer fair, with presentations on many new technologies and important parts of new systems. These presentations will be given by various local computer vendors. It will be finalized by the time of the September meeting hopefully, but the meeting probably will start at 7pm.

I want to thank everyone who is helping out by reviewing software for the Newsbyte. Jim Pfaff and Tom Zimmerman are working on the Microsoft Office 2000 Premium review, which will probably appear in the next issue of the Newsbyte. Willis Troyer, Amy Besancon, and Pat Johnston have also signed up for reviews. We still have a lot of software available for review. Please see the article on the next page for more information.

NEXT MEETING

September 14, 1999 – 7:30pm
OSU-ATI Skou Hall Room 101
1328 Dover Rd., Wooster OH

Program

Microsoft Office 2000
Premium Demonstration

TCC T-Shirt Ordering

Member Raffle: \$15

Review Software



Visit TCC Online!
www.tricountycc.org

Treasurer's Report

Balance as of 8/10/1999 —	\$494.84
Income —	\$4.50
Expenditures —	\$17.84
Balance as of 9/14/1999 —	\$481.50

Club Membership Report

Current Membership → **21**

Members Joining/Renewing in August
None

All new 1999 memberships expire on December 31, 1999. Visit TCC Online at <http://www.tricountycc.org/joinus/> for more info.

Software for Review

Club members are needed to write reviews for publication in the Newsbyte. You don't have to be an expert about computers to write. Reviewers install the program and test the features of the program. When done, they write an article on what they thought of the program, how easy it was to use or install, and its strengths and weaknesses.

If you are interested in writing a review of software, contact Brian Powell via e-mail at reviews@tricountycc.org or via the telephone at (330) 828-8365.

T-Shirt Ordering

We have received a quote for our TCC t-shirts. They will be ash (light) gray t-shirts with a small version of Mr. Disk and the club name on your upper left chest. The back will feature a blowup of Mr. Disk, the club name and web site address.

The shirts will cost about \$13 each for adult sizes small through extra-large. The price may be lower depending on number of requests. Contact Brian Powell at members@tricountycc.org to order.

Secretary's Report

August 10, 1999 Meeting Minutes
Submitted by Amy Besancon

Eleven members and four guests were present at the he August 10, 1999, meeting of the Tri-County Computer Club. It was brought to order at 7:30pm by president Willis Troyer. Minutes were ready by Amy Besancon. The treasurer's report was given as \$494.84 by Pat Johnston. Both were accepted as read.

A Beginner's Corner program on deleting temporary files was given by Amy Besancon.

The 50/50 raffle winner of \$4.50 was Brian Powell. The name drawn for the member's raffle was Don Westfall, who was not present, making next month's drawing \$15.

Brian Powell introduced some software for members to take home, try, and review for the newsletter.

The upcoming schedule of events was discussed. The tentative schedule is as follows:

September -- Office 2000

October -- Computer Fair

November -- Microsoft eXtreme Part 1

December -- Microsoft eXtreme Part 2 and Y2K party

January -- Microsoft Windows 2000

The next meeting will be September 14, 1999.

Web Site of the Month

SETI at Home

setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu

Join the search for ET! Club member Jim Pfaff suggested that this site be profiled. As part of a program by University of California at Berkeley, you can download a screensaver that analyzes downloaded radio signals from space for signs of extra-terrestrial intelligence.

The Next Generation of Consumer Windows: Simplicity and Ease of Use

For years, people have criticized Microsoft for creating operating systems that are buggy, bloated, and not particularly friendly design for the beginning user. Windows 3.1 was a good move by giving a graphical alternative to DOS. Windows 95/98 greatly improved the situation with a much improved interface.

Now, Microsoft is developing the next generation of Windows that will make the PC easier to use, expand hardware support, and improves boot time.

The first part of Microsoft's Easy PC joint initiative with Intel, it will only use technology like Firewire (IEEE 1394), USB, and Device Bay for expansion. While making upgrades easier, it affects backward compatibility with older technologies like the ISA motherboard bus. It appears that a relatively new computer may be required for this new version of Windows. Microsoft has not released any information on requirements as of yet.

Also known as "Consumer Windows in 2000", Millennium will be based upon the Windows 98 kernel and is due out in 2000. A following version, codenamed "Neptune" will be based on the Windows 2000 (ex-Window NT 5) system and should be available in 2001.

In the upcoming "Millennium" release, Microsoft will focus on upgrading four key areas: home networking, a better online experience, digital media, and simplicity.

Since it will most likely be at least a year before this new Windows appears, people looking for the latest Microsoft operating system should either get Windows 98 SE or wait for Windows 2000 Pro, which is due out near the year's end.

AMD's Fast New Processors

AMD has released a new processor that is faster than Intel's current offerings. The new Athlon chip (formerly K7) will be available in 500mhz, 550mhz, 600mhz, and 650mhz versions.

In tests by PC World magazine, found the Athlon-650 test system was 3-5 percent faster than the average Athlon-600 and an amazing 14% faster than the average Intel Pentium III-600.

To help boost the Athlon's speed, AMD included 128kb of L1 cache, four times more than was Intel installs on the Pentium III. AMD also enhanced the chip logic to speed up complex operations and enhanced the floating point units. The new FPU's allowed the Athlon-650 a 27 percent speed advantage in the FPU-heavy AutoCAD test.

The best thing about these new processors is their lower price compared to Intel's offerings. A fully loaded Athlon-650 system should be available for about \$2100-\$2400 not including a monitor. This is about the same cost of a comparably equipped system using a slower Pentium III-600.

If you are creating multimedia applications, working with scientific calculations, or doing 2D or 3D modeling, then the Athlon-650 is definitely the way to go. People who crave power but are on a budget should look at the Athlon-600. It is just slightly slower, but should cost about \$200-\$300 less.

Systems based on these new Athlon processors should be available by mid-September. Manufacturers for systems including these new chips will include IBM, CyberMax, Compaq, Polywell, and TigerDirect.

Finding and Fixing Y2K Problems

Part Two: BIOS Testing and Fixing

by Ray Isenson, Central Coast Computer Club, Santa Maria CA

This is Part II of a multipart article on preparing one's personal computer for a smooth transition into the year 2000 (Y2K). The preceding part was a general overview of the several aspects of the problem. This part addresses that which is generally described as the hardware aspect, the BIOS chip and the "real time clock."

Disclaimer: For the protection of the Tri-County Computer Club and the Central Coast Computer Club and their respective members, the following disclaimer is established: Testing and upgrading your PC to achieve Y2K compliance will require running some programs and adding software patches and making other changes to your system. Within the several sections of this document various programs are identified as being designed to correct the deficiencies that you may find to exist in your machine. The software and patches come from generally reliable vendors. They have been tried in machines belonging to members of the Central Coast Computer Club without creating any observable, unfavorable consequence. Introducing the programs into your machine shouldn't cause any problems, if properly done. However, neither the Central Coast Computer Club nor the Tri-County Computer Club can accept any responsibility for losses to your PC, hardware, data files or software, resulting from such introduction.

Bios Testing And Fixing—In the preceding part note was made that devising a software program to test the ability of a computer to roll smoothly into

the twenty first century or to compensate for inadequacies in the RTC/BIOS isn't outlandishly difficult. Having made that observation it was not surprising then, that during the course of preparing this article more than a dozen such programs were found on the Internet all free to the private user. Of these about half that, for one reason or another evoked interest, were downloaded and tested to see if they did work as promised. The programs were run both on computers known to be noncompliant with Y2K problems and on computers that were known "good." All of the programs identified and offered to repair noncompliant systems.

However, all but one failed to recognize fully compliant systems, specifically, those equipped with the Award 4.50G BIOS. Several of them reported that only by replacing the RTC and BIOS could the system be brought into compliance. On that account, because there is a reasonable probability of being misled by such a program if your computer is compliant, it is strongly recommended that you perform a manual test before even trying one of the programs. The recommendation applies only to the cases where the computer operating system is DOS 6.22 or Windows 3.x or Windows 95 and where you don't know that the BIOS chip is the Award 4.50G (or, possibly, an Award 4.51).

Note: At this point another caveat is required. Certain few major PC manufacturers use proprietary BIOS chips that require manufacturer provided "Set Up" programs to set or reset the clock features built into some of their products. Before attempting the following procedures

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Fixing Y2K Problems

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check the documentation that accompanied your computer to insure that your PC isn't among that few.

To simplify the test and minimize any chance of disrupting the WINDOWS Registry in the computer the test should be run in the DOS mode. If the computer normally boots to Windows start it with your emergency boot floppy or Win 95 Start-up floppy in the A:\ drive.

Note: If you don't have or can't locate such a floppy, one is very easily prepared. For Windows 3.x, from the MAIN program group select MS/DOS and enter. Your screen will show: C:\Windows. Type CD.. and press the Enter key to change the command prompt to simply C:\. Place a floppy in the A:\drive and, still at the C:\ prompt, enter the command, format/s a: and press Enter. That's it. The result will be a very rudimentary, but adequate, start-up disk for the tests. For Windows 95 you'll need your original program CD-ROM disk. From the desktop select My Computer, then Control Panel, then Add/Remove Programs. When the new window opens, click on the right most tab, Start-Up Disk, and follow instructions. When you see a message complaining that the computer can't find certain software double check to insure that the location specified in the small window reads "d:\Win95," where "d" is the label for your CD-ROM.

For the Y2K compliance test, having booted your computer from the floppy the command line prompt should read, "A:\." At that prompt, type in DATE and press Enter. The computer will respond with the current date and ask that you enter a new date in the specified format. Type in 12-31-1999 and press Enter. Then type in TIME. The computer will respond with the time and ask that you enter a new time. Type in

12:58:00p and press Enter. Now, turn your computer completely off and go get a Coke or a cup of coffee or whatever. After about 10 to 15 minutes reboot your computer, again using the floppy. When you see the A:\ prompt, type in DATE and enter. If the computer responds with "Sat 01-01-2000" your machine is compliant with the roll over. If it responds with either 01-04-1980, 01-01-1980 or some other 1980 date, that machine needs a new BIOS or one of the corrective patches. In either event the question about the ability of the BIOS to recognize that the year 2000 is a leap year must be resolved.

This could be done manually. The advantage of allowing one of the following programs to do the job is that they check several years, not just 2000, and do generate a report. Whether compliant or not, go through the DATE and TIME routines once again, resetting the computer to the current time and date.

For non-compliant RTC/BIOS combinations, should you opt for a software patch, you have two basic options. You can introduce the patch manually using one of the downloaded programs discussed below or buy an inexpensive program like "Year 2000 PC Hardware Fix"[4] SRP \$29.95 [described later in this section.] Five of the "freeware" downloaded test and fix programs were evaluated. Only one, YMark2000, a program offered up by the National Software Testing Laboratories (NSTL) of McGraw-Hill[5]. (*Note: the number indicates location in the appendix listing.*) The BIOS/RTC were tested for Y2K compliance only. The laboratories sell the "fix" part. It, however, is included because the report generated was above average in completeness and it did recognize the presence of the Award 4.50G BIOS without calling for a BIOS chip.

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In our judgment these testing and patch programs should be conducted in the DOS mode. Their function has to do with the hardware and when invoked as a software patch they go to work before the Windows system is functioning. We see no point in risking a software conflict by running them in Windows. YMark2000 does satisfy that criterion.

Two others of those examined also satisfy it. The first, Yes2k[6], a product of the Safetynet Year 2000 Internet Center is a very attractive program but may be needlessly large and powerful for the individual with just one or two computers. It can be used to test and fix a stand alone PC or for a network file server or for automatic testing of a network of work stations. To gain the flexibility needed for the multi-purposes, and probably to satisfy potential users who fear DOS command line control, the authors have opted to include a Windows mode.

The second, made up of Test2000[7*] and Year2000[7*], are products of the Right Time Clock Company, authorities in timing and control devices. Year2000.exe is a slightly older version of the now commercial program, Fix2000 Pro contained in the package, Year2000 PC Hardware Fix referenced above. The two, Test and Year, require that the user type in one command to run the test and, if found to be necessary, one more command to install the software patch. The tasks are simplified further with the commercial version, requiring only that the entire program be loaded and screen- presented instructions be followed.

Norton 2000 is a very powerful program that tests and can fix the BIOS but also tests and reports upon the likely Y2K compliance of the many application programs that might be on hard drives.

Symantec Corporation has made the BIOS test and fix software available for free download as NBFIXALL.EXE[8]. NBFIXALL.EXE is a DOS program that downloads as a 1.3 Mb self-extracting file. Upon extraction it creates a program which, in turn, can create a bootable floppy BIOS Test Disk The test program, if it finds the BIOS to be noncompliant, installs a BIOS fix driver. The program works easily and well. NAI was invited to submit a copy of McAfee's Toolbox 2000 for review in this presentation but didn't respond in time to be included. This program does a BIOS test and fix and, similar to the Norton program, makes use of a built in file of the names and characteristics of the more popular application programs, comparing the programs in the tested PC with that list and reports on their likely Y2K compliance. Also, as with Norton, NAI has made the BIOS test and fix portion available as 2000hard[9] a downloadable file from the Internet.

Otherwise the ease of using the RightTime products warrants that they be adopted. If you get the software by way of a download, unzip the package and copy the elements to a floppy disk. The procedure to test and fix, if necessary, is as follows: Boot from the A:\drive as described for the manual test. Replace the boot floppy with the RightTime floppy and, at the A:\ prompt, type runtest and press the Enter key. A screen will appear asking whether to continue. Type in Y and Enter. Follow the instructions throughout the test. The result will be a report on the screen and a file copy of the report in the root directory (folder) of the C: drive that states whether the BIOS/RTC combination are Y2K compliant with regard to roll over and leap year. Caution: if you failed to run the previously suggested manual test and missed the fact that you have an Award

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4.50G BIOS the results will be misleading.

If you are satisfied that your BIOS is non-compliant, at the A:\ prompt type the command install and Enter. A few seconds later you should have a Y2K compliant system. Rerun the runtest portion, if you like, to satisfy yourself that the fix does work.

Prior to leaving the discussion of making the RTC/BIOS compliant into the next century, a very important point must be made. All of the tested BIOS fix programs make use of what is known as a TSR. That is, a program is loaded into the lower one megabyte of memory during boot, where it remains until the computer is turned off. This causes no problem for Windows programs.

However, if you try to run large DOS programs or games you may see an "Out Of Memory" error message and be unable to run that program. The larger the program used to patch the BIOS problem the greater will be the probability of running into the problem. Of those tested the RightTime program left the smallest footprint in memory.

There are only two solutions to work around the problem of RAM utilization. Either replace the BIOS chip with an update that is Y2K compliant or do nothing until the first time you use the computer after New Year 1999/2000. At that time boot up in DOS. From the A:\ or C:\ prompt enter DATE and return. Type in the correct date and Enter. In most cases that will get your hardware system working properly until at least 29 February, when you may have to reset it just once more for the next four years.

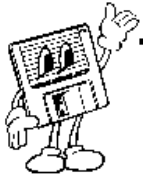
Appendix (for Fixing Y2K Problems: Parts 1 & 2) Software Patch and Upgrade Sources:

- 1) Award BIOS; www.award.com/tech/y2k.htm
- 2) AMI BIOS; www.megatrends.com/y2k/default.html
- 3) Microfirmware (many brands); www.firmware.com; Phoenix BIOS; www.phoenix.com/support/y2k.html
- 4) "Year 2000 Hardware Fix"; Tiger Direct, 800/888-4437, order #R100-1000, \$29.99
- 5) YMark2000 Natl Sftwre Tst Lab; www.nstl.com/downloads/y2000.exe
- 6) Yes2K; Safetynet year2000; www.pcmag.com/download (search for: Yes2k)
- 7) Test2000/Year2000; www.righttime.com
- 8) NBFIXALL.EXE; Norton2000; www.symantec.com/sabu/n2000
- 9) 2000 Toolbox Hardware; McAfee; www.zdnet.com (search for: 2000 Toolbox)

Y2K Countdown:

4 Months

Until January 2000



The Newsbyte

THE TRI-COUNTY COMPUTER CLUB

MS Windows "Millenium"

Finding and Fixing Y2K Problems: Part Two

Next Meeting

Tuesday, Sept. 14
at 7:30pm

OSU-ATI Skou Hall
Room 101

Microsoft Office 2000
Premium Demo

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