



OTTAWA

PC NEWS

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PRODUCT REVIEW

Exploring Linux – Part 1 *by Alan German*

Members may have noted my recent interest in all things open-source. So, from the title of this article, it might be tempting to assume that I am now documenting my switch away from the big-W and a move completely into the Linux camp. Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I'm not that brave – at least - not yet, I'm not!

But, I have always had a hankering to take a serious look at Linux. Unfortunately, I missed the club meeting where members of the Ottawa Canada Linux Users Group provided their demo. The good news is that one of our always-friendly OPCUG members provided me with a copy of the Ubuntu distro (a Linux distribution disk - see, I'm already into the Linux jargon!) that was handed out at the meeting, and so I thought I should start by giving this a shot.

If you have one of those red and grey cardboard folders, and have opened it up, you will have noted that there are two CD's inside. The text on the left side of the inside cover tells you that: "The default installation will erase existing software and data from your computer". OK – hands up – how many of you closed the folder and put it on a shelf somewhere to get dusty? Big mistake! You should have read the text on the right side of the cover that talked about the "Live CD". [In fact, you should have read the left-side text a little further and taken note that, while the "default" installation can delete

everything, there is also a manual installation process that avoids such dire consequences – but, that's a story for Part 2 of this article.]

I can't believe that it's so incredibly simple!

I can't believe that it's so incredibly simple to install and run a powerful operating system, together with a fully-featured set of applications programs. The Linux-Live CD's (the Ubuntu distro is only one such beast) are marvels of technology. Essentially they are boot disks that load the Linux operating system into the memory of your machine, and provide a wide range of system tools and applications that run directly from the CD, so that you can try many of the features of Linux on a temporary basis.

The process is simplicity itself. Put the live CD into the drive and turn the machine on. A prompt indicates that you should press Enter to boot the machine. Linux shows its command line roots with dozens of lines of information scrolling down the screen, as various processes load and work their magic. In reasonably short order, the strings of text give way to three prompt screens that ask you to specify the language you would like to use – English, your location (country) – Canada, and a keyboard layout – American English. Now sit back and watch as the installer detects the available hardware, loads additional modules, and configures vari-

ous options, preparing for the upcoming live session.

After a couple of minutes (depending on the speediness of your system) a screen opens with a graphical user interface (GUI) featuring an almost blank desktop, an icon for the CD-ROM, and menu-type bars across both the top and the bottom. The top menu is especially interesting as it has options for "Applications" and "System", plus an icon in the shape of a lifebelt that suggests Help. Hovering the mouse over the latter brings up a "Get Help with Gnome" message so it is evident that we are now using the Gnome GUI.

A special bonus is that you can run OpenOffice right from the Live CD

For me, the applications' menu proved to be staggering. The Ubuntu distribution provides access to loads of games, graphics packages, Internet applications, an Office suite, multimedia pro-

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Next Meeting: **WEDNESDAY, May 10th, 2006**

Raffle Prize Winner

Bob Walker won a copy of PhotoShop Elements 3.0 at the April meeting.

Thanks to Adobe for the prize.



Coming Up...

► May 10, 2006—Rob MacDonald, Corel Corporation: "Corel WordPerfect X3 and CorelDRAW X3"
<http://www.corel.com>

June 14, 2006—**Annual BBQ** ([see announcement next page](#)); Speaker: Rick Claus, Microsoft Canada, Topic: TBA
Winner of Best Newsletter Article to be announced.

CALENDAR

Meetings	Date	Time and Venue
OPCUG General Meeting	Wednesday, May 10 th	7:30 p.m. Auditorium of the Canada Museum of Science and Technology , 1867 St. Laurent Blvd. http://www.science-tech.nmstc.ca/english/index.cfm
Beginners' SIG	Wednesday, May 10 th	Immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting.
IT-Pro SIG	Wednesday, May 10 th	Immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting.
PIG SIG (Wing SIG West)	Wednesday, May 10 th	10:00 p.m. (after all other SIGs) at Chances "R" restaurant, Baseline Rd. at Woodroffe Ave. (College Square Shopping Centre)
Beer BOF (Wing SIG East)	Wednesday, May 10 th	10:00 p.m. (after all other SIGs) at Liam Maguire's, St. Laurent Blvd. at Innes Rd.

Please note that unless otherwise noted, SIGs meet at 9:00 p.m. (immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting).

CLUB LIFE

Coming Up in June—Annual BBQ!

June is our wrap-up meeting before we break for the summer. Continuing with tradition, we will be having our 5th annual barbeque. It will take place under the big tent near the main doors to the museum. There will be cold drinks, hamburgers, hot dogs and dessert. Make sure you let Brigitte know at brigitte.lord@opcug.ca how many people will be in your party and how many hamburgers and/or hot-dogs you will need. If you can help out at the BBQ (bringing a grill or flipping burs and dogs) please let Brigitte know. Those providing a grill (and fuel) for the occasion can take home a share of the leftover food.

The barbeque will start at 6:00 and run until about 7:00. After that we will head into the museum for our regular meeting, which will start at 7:30.

See you there!



Contest for Best Newsletter Article

The contest winner will get a Microsoft Notebook Optical Mouse and Microsoft's Age of Empires III. The winner will be announced at the June 14th general meeting and be presented with the prize.

The contest is closed. The deadline for submission of articles was April 16th.

Final list of 2005/2006 contestants and articles:

Doug Poulter: Firefox Extensions, October 2005
 Doug Poulter: FoxReader vs. Adobe Reader, October 2005
 Don Chiasson: Mind Hacks, November 2005
 Lionel Wagner: Are you ready for Linux? Linux is ready for you, December 2005
 Dunc Petrie: Beyond Making MP3's, December 2005
 Dunc Petrie: To (US)B or not to (US)B, That is the Question, Part 1:January 2006, Part 2:February 2006
 Gary Byron: Internet Annoyances, April 2006
 Sarah Gelfand: Windows XP Personal Trainer, May 2006

Find links to all the articles at <http://opcug.ca/public/Articles/contest2005.htm>.

Please show your support and vote. It's easy and it only takes a few minutes.

Voting Page: <http://opcug.ca/ques?BestArticle>. See the [April newsletter](#) or visit <http://opcug.ca/public/Articles/contest2005.htm> on how to register and vote.

CONTEST FOR BEST NEWSLETTER ARTICLE

Windows XP Personal Trainer a book review by Sarah Gelfand

From the point of view of a relative novice in the world of computer operation, this book is a user-friendly introduction to learning the XP Home program. Someone with no previous computer experience would find the language and the instructions clear and explicit. The illustrations are very helpful and there is a casual approach to learning. The step-by-step instructions are easy to follow, giving the learner a feeling of accomplishment very soon in the process. There are thirteen chapters, at the beginning of which the objectives of the chapter are outlined. The chapters are divided into short lessons. One follows the step-by-step instructions, after which there is a short summary of points called "Quick Reference". Therefore, if one has absorbed the steps, the Quick Reference acts as sufficient reminder of what has been covered. At the end of each Chapter, there is a *Lesson Summary*, and for the more studious, a *Quiz*, *Homework*, and *Quiz Answers*.

The first four Chapters are essential to the beginning learner: fundamentals such as logging on and off, looking at the start menu, and using the mouse and keyboard. Using the WordPad program, one learns how to start a program, learns the parts of a Window, how to change its size and location, switch between windows, tiling and cascading, etc. Again, using WordPad, one learns to use menus and toolbars, a dialog box, entering and editing text, printing a file, cutting, copying a pasting text, saving and opening files in different locations. The style of the text can be changed by knowing how to change the font and the size of letters, to underline, to use bold letters and change the paragraph alignment. Next, in the *Working with Files and Folders* lesson, the instructions encompass navigating through files and folders,

opening, creating, renaming, copying, moving, and deleting files and folders. One can learn to restore a deleted file and to empty the Recycle Bin. Searching for a file is also covered.

Chapters 5 to 8 inclusive: *Customizing the Taskbar and Desktop*, *Customizing Windows*, *Free Programs*, and *Working with Pictures and Multimedia* are in the "nice to know", not "must know", and can be left to some later time. Also in the "nice to know" are Chapters 11, 12 and 13: *Passwords*, *Log-ons and Accounts*, *Networking with Windows XP*, *Setting up a Network*.

More relevant are *Optimizing and Maintaining Your Computer* and *Exploring the Internet*. Optimizing and maintaining the hard disc is important and certain operations should be repeated on schedule such as scanning for disc errors, defragmenting and disc cleaning (e.g. removing temporary files). The hard disc should be freed to create as much available room as possible. Also, updating Windows XP should be done fairly frequently. It is also useful to learn how to restore your computer in the case of procedures that did not go well. *Installing, Adding and Removing Software*, and *Installing a Printer* are also very useful to know.

Exploring the Internet is something every computer user wants to do. Therefore, learning to browse, search, add favorites, and understand security and the Windows Firewall are particularly important. Then one is introduced to using e-mail, composing and receiving e-mail, using the address book, replying to and forwarding and deleting a message, all of which are essential to know.

In conclusion, this book rates a 10 for easy comprehension and is a "must have" for the beginner with the objective of learning to operate Windows XP.

Bottom Line

Windows XP Personal Trainer

by CustomGuide Inc.

(<http://www.customguide.com/>)

Publisher: O'Reilly Books

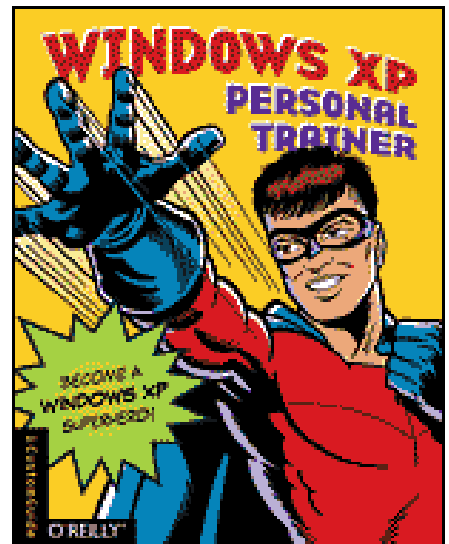
(<http://www.oreilly.com/>)

First Edition: November 2004

Series: Personal Trainer

ISBN: 0-596-00862-7

480 pages, \$43.95 CAD



Visit <http://opcug.ca/public/promos.htm> for a 30% OPCUG discount on this and other O'Reilly books.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

From the **March 1988** newsletter: Membership renewal notice and an IBM system for sale at a price that was probably fair at the time.

It's renewal time for OPCUG members

Twenty-eight members sent in their renewals by mail before the last meeting and another 38 renewed at the desk. There were also 28 new members registering at the desk.

At the end of December, there were 428 members in our Group. By the end of February, 135 had renewed and another 25 renewed by mail between then and mid-March. It would appear that more than 60 per cent of the membership intends to stand in line at the registration desk on March 30 to renew their membership.

While many have the same attitude towards paying income tax, there are considerably more people to process the tax returns than handle membership renewals at the OPCUG. There are two alternatives to a long wait for the remaining 268 members. The first one is to leave a completed renewal form together with the 'exact change' of \$20 dues in cash or by cheque (\$45 if you wish to subscribe to the Diskette-of-the-Month) at the desk as you come in. Your membership card will be available at the desk at the April meeting.

The other possibility... and by far the best one... is for you to send your renewal by mail using the form you will find on page 8.

While many have the same attitude towards paying income tax...

IBM - AT system for sale

IBM-AT Computer with 640K and fully loaded with a 20Meg hard disk and a 1.2 Meg floppy, Hercules card with IBM monochrome monitor, AST advantage card supports up to 2Meg of additional memory. Two serial ports, three parallel ports, game port and Microsoft Mouse.

Lots of software and manual including:

- DOS 3.2 with Technical Reference Manual
- IBM-AT Technical Reference Manual
- Basic Manual
- Macro Assembler
- Pascal Compiler
- PFS Graph
- SideKick... And more

All in excellent condition with original boxes...	\$3,600
EPSON FX-100 Wide Carriage Printer with extra ribbons and letter quality software driver...	\$350
TTX-1014 letter quality daisy wheel printer with extra wheel and ribbon...	\$250
VOTRAX personal speech system with 64K processor handles speech, music, and sound effects...	\$300
Koala Pad with drawing software...	\$25



Linux—Part 1 *(Continued from page 1)*

grams, and a host of system tools. The raft of available games includes the ubiquitous Solitaire, Minesweeper and Mahjongg, plus programs I have never heard of. The Graphics tab provides access to GIMP (GNU Image Manipulation Program), a couple of image viewers, a postscript file viewer and a scanning program. Internet applications include the Firefox web browser, mailer and chat clients. All the programs in the OpenOffice.org 1.1 suite of applications are listed under the Office tab. So, a special bonus is that you can run OpenOffice Writer, Calc and Impress right from the Live CD. If you want to play a music CD, run a DVD movie, rip or record some sound files, or control various aspects of sound reproduction, check out the selections under the Sound and Video tab. So, you can see that, not only can you very readily try Linux, you can also run many useful applications directly from the CD.

I have to say that, at present, I find

Linux's file system a bit of a mystery (but I haven't spent any time trying to find out how it works.) Under Applications – System Tools, you will find File Browser which is a Windows' Explorer-like tool. However, it wasn't immediately obvious how (or even if) I could access my machine's hard drive from the temporary boot setup. But, one extremely useful feature became apparent when I plugged in my USB key. A "262M Removable Media" disk icon appeared on the desktop, and a "usbdisk" window opened up displaying the file structure of the key.

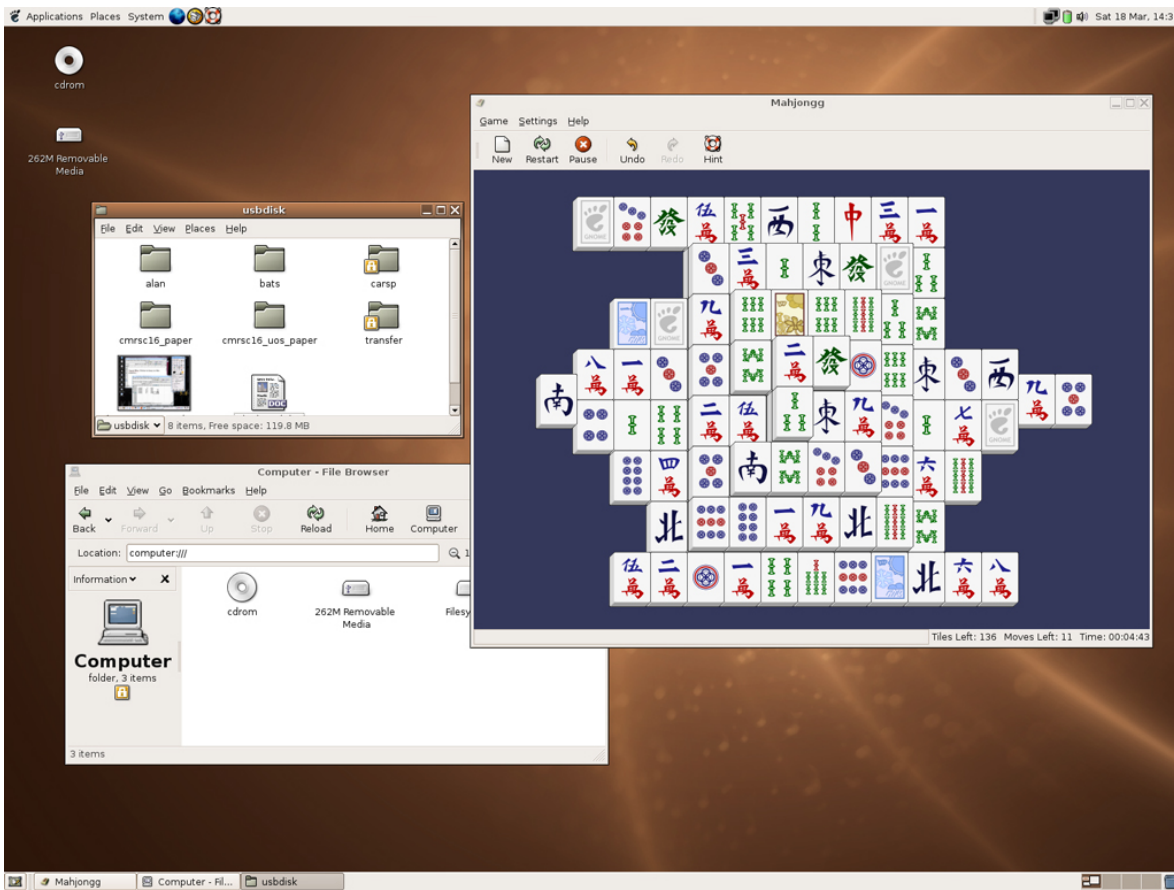
The reason for finding a writable disk was that I wanted to capture a screenshot of the desktop (so that you too can marvel at the Windows-like qualities of Gnome, the powerful applications, and the neat games that Ubuntu provides.) I tried running GIMP to see if it had a screen capture facility, which indeed it does. It was when I tried to save the resulting file that I ran into the problem of where to actually store it. But, while I was searching through menus, looking for a familiar disk, I also came

across System – Take screenshot. Evidently, Ubuntu Linux has this feature built-in. And, so it is, that you get to share with me the wonders of Mahjongg running under Linux from a CD-ROM!

The final thing you need to know is how to shut the computer down. Not too hard to guess. System – Log Out – Shut down – OK does the trick very nicely. A few more scrolling lines showing the system stopping modules, terminating and killing processes, and everything comes to a graceful halt and, next time, your machine boots back into your familiar Windows' environment.

Another famous Linux-Live distro is the Knoppix Linux Live CD, available for downloading from <http://www.knoppix.org/> through links to a number of mirror sites. However, be aware that the download is over 700 MB. Downloading the image and burning it to a CD-ROM gives you the live CD which works pretty well the same as described above.

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**Ubuntu desktop
and apps**

Linux—Part 1 (Continued from page 6)

The command lines displayed on boot-up are multi-coloured (some would say gaudily so). On my machine, the resulting desktop ran in a moderately-sized “window”, which I couldn’t expand by dragging a corner, as opposed to Ubuntu which ran in full-screen mode. The Knoppix desktop has more stuff visible, including a Konqueror window, a sort of web/file browser, offering instant help. Knoppix uses the KDE interface in which the main menu/task bar is at the bottom of the screen. This includes a number of icons linking directly to things like Firefox and OpenOffice. The screen shot shows OpenOffice Writer and Calc windows, and GIMP’s main window, open on the desktop. Note the multiple drive icons down the left side of the screen. These have names like Hard Disk Partition [hda1] (which is actually the C: drive).

This distro seems to offer even more applications than Ubuntu. The Windows “Start” item on the task bar is replaced by a capital K (for Knoppix or KDE?) which leads to many menus

and sub-menus. Several text editors, including Emacs and Xedit, are included on the Editors’ tab; the Multimedia tab includes Audacity (a sound editor), and the Graphics tab once again includes GIMP. But, in this case, the latter program isn’t pre-loaded; it requires installation.

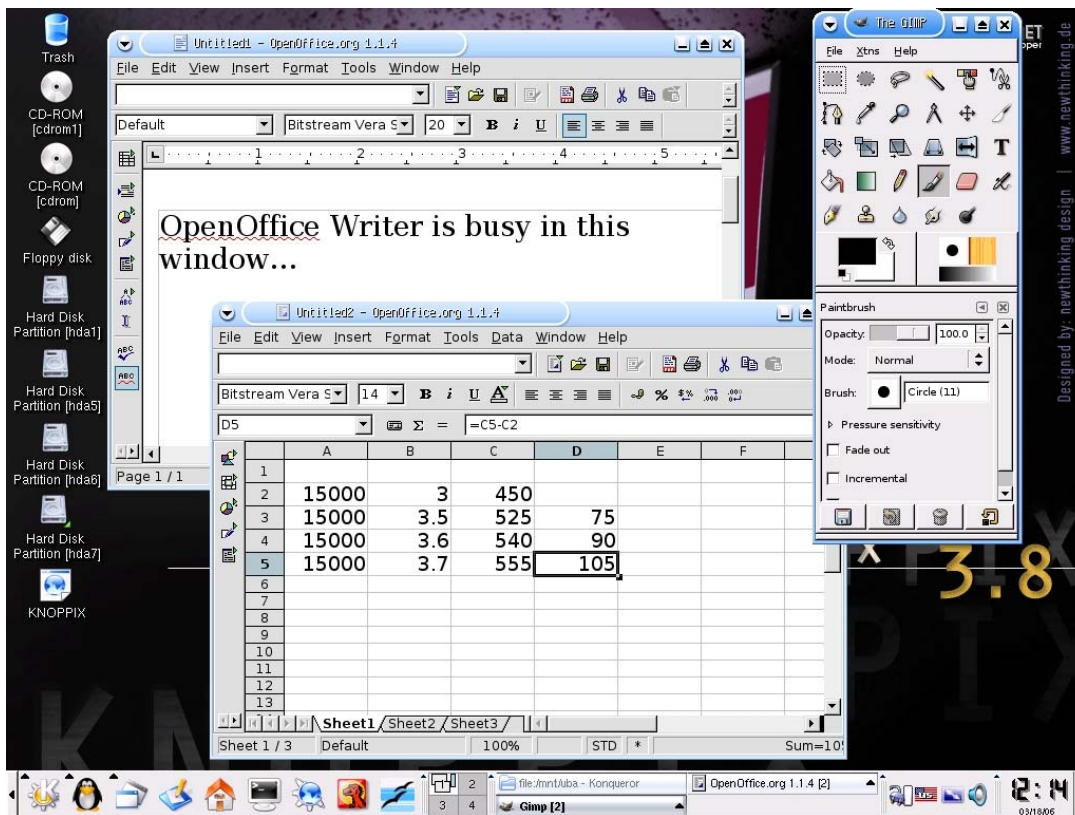
For this article, under Knoppix, I used GIMP to capture the screen shot and save it as a JPG file. Whatever GIMP needs in terms of installation is done in seconds and the program is ready for use. Capturing the screenshot was easy – File – Acquire – Screen Shot – Full Screen – Grab. However, now I needed to save the image as a JPG. Remember all those hard drive icons? It turns out that, under this Live-Linux regime, most of these are write protected. And, inserting my USB key didn’t pop up any windows, so I was initially unable to locate a permanent storage location for my image file.

A little searching on Google suggested that I should try inserting the USB key before booting into Knoppix and, sure enough, once I did this, a viable option to save the file became available. The USB key is “hidden” from mere mor-

tals as Hard Disc (uba) [/mnt/uba]. But, it isn’t too hard to guess that uba, being different from hda, must be a different sort of “hard disc”. And, indeed, running Konqueror provided a display of the familiar file structure of my USB key.

Saving the screen shot was then simply a matter of using GIMP’s Save-to-desktop option and then copying the file to the uba disk in Konqueror. There is no doubt a much more efficient way to do all of the above but, hey, I’m just learning my way around Linux! The good news is that, if you want to run applications from the Linux-Live CD, there are ways to save files generated so that they can be used elsewhere later – i.e. in a Windows-based image manager, a word processor, or a spreadsheet program.

So, don’t be timid. Trying Linux using one of these live CD’s is a piece of cake. If you like games, there are lots available on the CD. It’s even possible to use some of the Linux applications, such as the various modules of OpenOffice.org, to produce useful output files. Insert the CD into the tray, switch on your computer, and enjoy...



Bottom Line

Ubuntu – Linux for human beings (Open-source software) Version 5.04 for Intel x86 <http://www.ubuntu.com> To request free Ubuntu CD's, visit <https://shipit.ubuntu.com/> Current Version: Ubuntu 5.10

KNOPPIX (Open-source software) Version 3.8.2-2005-05-05 <http://www.knoppix.com> Current Version: V4.0.2-2005-09-23

Knoppix desktop and apps

OTTAWA PC NEWS

Ottawa PC News is the newsletter of the Ottawa PC Users' Group (OPCUG), and is published monthly except in July and August. The opinions expressed in this newsletter may not necessarily represent the views of the club or its members.

Member participation is encouraged. If you would like to contribute an article to Ottawa PC News, please submit it to the newsletter editor (contact info below). Deadline for submissions is three Sundays before the next General Meeting.

Group Meetings

OPCUG meets on the second Wednesday in the month, except July and August, at the Canada Museum of Science and Technology, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd, Ottawa. Meetings are 7:30–9:00 p.m. and Special Interest Groups go until 10 p.m.

Fees:	OPCUG membership:	\$25 per year
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