



OTTAWA

PC NEWS

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PRODUCT REVIEW

Exploring Linux—Part 4 *by Alan German*

As you will have noted from the earlier articles in this series, I haven't learned that much yet about actually using Linux, but I have gained considerable experience with boot disks and partition managers!

However, following some further exploration of the vagaries of the Linux installation process, I found that it is actually quite easy to install a new version over the top of an existing version. The simplest method seems to be to run the Linux installation CD-ROM, and select the manual partitioning method when it comes to preparing the hard disk. Any previous Linux partitions can then be deleted, which normally produces a block of unallocated space that can, in turn, be used for the new installation. Of course, this blows away any data on the pre-existing partitions, but since we are in trial mode, rather than using a production system, this really doesn't matter.

Recently, I have used this method very successfully to install both Version 5.10 and Version 6.06 of Ubuntu. The latter release installs somewhat differently than previous versions, giving an initial option to "Start or install Ubuntu". This effectively loads the Live-CD version of the operating system, with a resulting desktop that includes an icon to complete the installation process. Installation then consists of a very simple, six-step wizard, requiring the usual answers on language; city (time zone); keyboard; user name, userid and password; disk preparation (partitioning); and, finally, a review of

the selections for all of the above - prior to commencing the installation routine - which then runs on autopilot. In fact the installation process is now so smooth that it's time to stop installing and start using!

My basic yardstick for computer use is that I have to be able to write documents, run spreadsheets, print the resulting files, access the Internet, and send and receive electronic mail. In all of these respects, Ubuntu Linux is more than ready for prime time. The installation process is simple, the user interface is largely straightforward, and the bundled applications programs are highly usable.

In particular, one of the reasons for upgrading to a newer version of Ubuntu was that it includes OpenOffice.org 2.0, giving access to this powerful suite of office applications. In addition, Ubuntu also provides the Firefox web browser, and an E-mail client named Evolution. So, let's see how these all work and what roadblocks, if any, Linux throws in our way.

With OpenOffice, we have a word processor (Writer) and a spreadsheet (Calc), as well as other program modules such as a presentation manager (Impress). What we need now are some data files to work with. In addition, we Windows' hold-outs, who opted for a dual-boot installation, need a way to transfer working files between the two operating systems. Perhaps the simplest way to achieve this is to use

removable media, either a floppy disk or - more likely - a USB memory stick.

Ubuntu has a built-in auto-mount feature

Inserting a memory stick into a USB port produces a "usbdisk" icon on the desktop, with a Nautilus (Windows Explorer-type file browser) window showing the files and directories present on the device. In the bad old days, Linux insisted on users typing DOS-like commands to mount and unmount such removable devices. This results from the fact that, under Linux, mounting the removable device makes it an integral part of the user's file system. Essentially, the device appears to be a directory, located at a specific mount point, on the tree structure of the file system. Mercifully, Ubuntu has a built-in auto-mount feature that makes

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Next Meeting: **WEDNESDAY, November 8th, 2006**

November Raffle

At the November meeting, thanks to the generosity of Microsoft Canada, we have a copy of **Microsoft Money Deluxe** for the raffle.

Get a handle on those bounced cheques and never be left guessing concerning your bank account balance with MS Money Deluxe.

Raffle tickets are \$1 for one, \$2 for three, or \$5 for ten.

Coming Up...

November 8th:

Are you getting tired of the recurring costs of maintaining "the latest and greatest" software on your computer? Are you aware that there is a wide range of legitimate, high quality software that may be used freely?

Join us at the November meeting of OPCUG for a series of presentations by club members on a few of their favourite "open source" or "freeware" software applications. You'll also learn what is meant by "open source" and where to find the types of applications you may wish to try.

Our tentative lineup for the night includes the following speakers and topics:

Don Chiasson - Open Source definition/ Source Forge
 Alan German - Filezilla (file transfer)/ Sunbird (calendar-scheduler)
 Chris Taylor - SpamBayes(spam control) / UltraVNC (remote access)
 Harald Friese - CDex (CD ripper), Ewido (anti-spyware), Foxit (PDF reader),
 Foobar2000 (media player).

And coming up in December...

Tentative: Harley Bloom of **Bloom MicroTech** is expected to make his annual visit with a Santa bag full of goodies. See you all December 13th.

October Prize Winners

At the meeting on Oct. 11th, **Jocelyn Doire** won the raffle copy of Microsoft Digital Image Suite 10 and **Harald Freise** took home the door prize package containing a book on Windows Vista as well as a Vista T-Shirt and Ball Cap.

Thanks to Microsoft for the prizes.



CALENDAR

Meetings	Date	Time and Venue
OPCUG General Meeting	Wednesday, November 8 th , 2006	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	November 8 th , 2006	Immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting.
IT-Pro SIG	November 8 th , 2006	Immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting.
PIG SIG (Wing SIG West)	November 8 th , 2006	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)	November 8 th , 2006	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).		

PRODUCT REVIEW

NoteWhen – An electronic pad of “sticky notes”

by Alan German

Do you forget to return your library books on time, can never pay bills by their interest-free deadlines, or have trouble remembering when OPCUG monthly meetings are held? If so, you need some funky on-screen reminders - and the “sticky notes” provided by PC Magazine's NoteWhen utility might just do the trick.

This utility program gives you the ability to place little yellow notes on your display screen. Yes, I know that you can do that with a pad of almost-sticky notepaper purchased from the office-supply store. But, with NoteWhen you won't have to buy any more pads, and you will be helping the environment by not cutting down any trees. In addition, the notes are fully electronic, so they can be in any colour, use any font that your monitor will display, and can be scheduled as timely reminders.

In normal use, the program can be run from an icon on the taskbar. The user interface is quite straightforward. The “Add Note” button pops up a new note with a “Your text goes here” message that can be overwritten by typing any text.

By default, the note is set to be “Vis” (i.e. visible) such that, when NoteWhen is closed, the note is left on the screen. So, the basic process is just like writing on a sticky note and placing it on the screen.

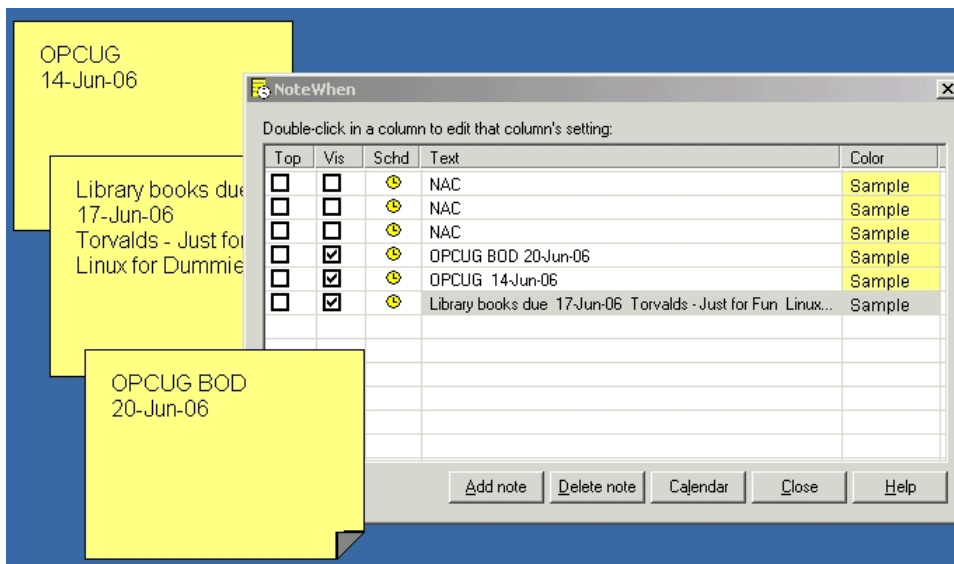
You can make the notes as big or as small as you wish, and place them anywhere on the screen. The latter process isn't too intuitive but is very simple

once you now how (i.e. once you have read the program's help menus). Placing the cursor on a side or a corner of the box lets you resize the note. Placing the cursor between the border of the text box and the actual text changes the cursor to a hand that lets you drag the note anywhere across the screen.

Of course, the best part about electronic notes is that they can be linked to the computer's clock and scheduled for display at some point prior to the event. The scheduling process is quite flexible, providing settings for display of the note at a specific date and time, daily, weekly, or monthly. You can set dates when the message is to be displayed and when this display is to be terminated. You can even assign a sound file to be played to act as an audible alarm.

leave it on display, or go into NoteWhen's main menu and uncheck the “Vis” box which turns it off until the next day. In this way I get notices of the up-coming meeting each day, commencing two days prior to the actual day of the meeting.

Modifying any aspect of a note can be done very easily through the program's main window. Alternatively, left-clicking on a note allows direct editing of the text, and right-clicking provides a menu that includes options to change the colours and/or the font, and to modify the display schedule. Other features of the program include the ability to set a given note to always be “on top” of the display, delete an unwanted note, display a calendar with a list of all the notes for a given date, and provide a brief yet comprehensive set of help menus.



In the good old days, PC Magazine's utilities were free for anyone to download. In today's world of E-commerce, they are only available by subscription. However, for the princely sum of just US\$ 7.97 you can download one utility of your choice (such as NoteWhen!). Alternatively, US\$ 19.97 gives you unlimited downloads from the utility software library for a period of one year.

I like to have multiple reminders of an event, such as the fact that an OPCUG monthly meeting is about to take place. So, I set a daily schedule for the message reminder, starting on the Monday prior to the meeting, and ending on the Wednesday of the meeting. I then uncheck the “Vis” box for the message so that it doesn't display until the first date comes around. Once the message comes on screen, I can either

Bottom Line

NoteWhen Version 1.2 (Proprietary, US\$ 7.97)

Steven E. Sipe, PC Magazine

<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1895,81461,00.asp>

Linux—Part 4 *(Continued from page 1)*

the files on a USB memory stick immediately available. The only thing to remember is that to safely remove the stick one has to right-click on the usbdisk icon on the desktop, and select the “Eject” option, which effectively writes any pending data to the device, and unmounts it from the file system. When the desktop icon disappears, it's safe to remove the USB memory stick.

Under Linux, the Writer and Calc modules of OpenOffice both function in precisely the same manner as their Windows-specific cousins (see **Another Day at the Office** - <http://www.opcug.ca/public/Reviews/openoffice20.htm>). Files can be readily opened from the memory stick, modified, and saved back to the memory stick or, if we so choose, saved to a directory on the Linux disk partition for subsequent processing directly from the local hard drive. To be able to print a document, it's necessary to configure the system printer before using Writer or Calc. This is achieved in a manner similar to that used in Windows. The menu sequence – System – Administration – Printing – Printer – Add Printer – produces a wizard to help set up the printer. The process is as simple as selecting a local or a network printer; then, either a specific printer that is automatically detected or a printer port, manufacturer and model; and, finally, giving the printer a name. The print command then routes material to the selected printer. Thus, our first hurdle is easily overcome. We can definitely undertake word processing and spreadsheet tasks on the Linux platform.

As noted earlier, one of the good things about Ubuntu is that it includes the Firefox web browser. For me, the really great thing about Ubuntu is that running Firefox allows establishing a connection to my ISP through my modem/router, and the instant ability to browse all my favourite web sites. I find it hard to believe that one can install a brand new operating system and have instant access to the Internet, but Ubuntu Linux really does make this happen. Although I am only a casual

Firefox user under Windows, it seems to me that the Linux version works in much the same way as its Windows' equivalent. In particular, the menu bar, command icons, tabbed browsing and Google search box are the same in both versions. One minor difference that I did note is that in Linux one accesses the browser's settings through Edit – Preferences, while under Windows the equivalent menu item is Tools-Options.

The different piece of software that we yet have to explore is the Evolution mail client. Clicking on the icon on the Linux task bar launches a configuration wizard which leads us gently by the hand through the various steps to set up access to the account on our ISP's mail server. As with many such programs, a set of dialogue boxes requests information such as E-mail address, the type of mail server (e.g. POP), the server's address, username and password, the frequency of checking for new mail, the server type for sending mail (e.g. SMTP) and its address, and finally the time zone. In addition, data can be entered into various optional fields and check boxes, such as a descriptive name for the account being set up, and whether messages should be left on the server. Once this basic setup process was complete, using Evolution was a piece of cake, since its look-and-feel is very similar to many other mailers. So, I was easily able to send and receive test messages to and from my ISP and OPCUG mail accounts.

So, Ubuntu more than meets the gold standard for my computing world. Put a CD-ROM into the disk drive, answer a few simple questions, wait a few minutes for the installation program to do its job, and then instantly run office applications, access the web, send and receive E-mail. Magic!

So far, everything has been rosy. But, there has to be a glitch somewhere-right? Well, shutting down and rebooting the system does provide us with a slight change of pace.

Ubuntu more than meets the gold standard for my computing world

Both Windows and Linux believe that they are the “chosen” operating system. Windows won't even recognize the existence of Linux partitions and, although Linux will include a bootable Windows' partition in the grub boot loader menu, it selects the Linux partition as the default system for boot-up from the latter. This “feature” is a bit of an inconvenience for those of us who are familiar with Windows, but want to try Linux in a dual-boot configuration. Sure, we have a ten-second window to select the operating system of choice, but we probably want to use this time to think about whether to boot into Linux and, under normal circumstances, have our familiar Windows' system load by default. But, we don't know anything about grub, so how do we change the situation? It's time to dig a little deeper into some of the idiosyncrasies of Linux and, in particular, find some useful reference material to guide us through the haze.

A Google search for grub +default +Ubuntu produces a number hits, one of which is the very promising “Unofficial Ubuntu Starter Guide” (<http://ubuntuguide.org/wiki/Dapper>). Sure enough, digging through the links on this site locates “How to change default Operating System boot-up for GRUB menu” which, in rather terse text, provides the requisite information. We need to issue the command `sudo gedit /boot/grub/menu.lst` and change default 0 to default X_sequence. But what does this actually mean?

The Linux equivalent of Windows' Notepad is a program named gedit (Gnome's official text editor). It's simple enough to open the file `\boot\grub\menu.lst` and view its contents using gedit. We can even edit the text – but – we can't save the changes,

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Linux—Part 4 *(Continued from page 4)*

because `menu.lst` has opened as a read-only file. Here is a Linux roadblock (for the uninitiated Windows user).

The problem is that `menu.lst` is a system file that belongs to “root”, the Linux superuser. Root has given mortal users permission to read the file, but not to write to it (i.e. save a changed version). Clearly we need to become root in order to edit the file and change the default boot option. Now for a second roadblock.

Root is so powerful (some would say omnipotent) that Ubuntu disables both root's password and root's ability to access the system from the main logon screen. (And, they call this an operating system for a “personal” computer!) Instead, and what to me amounts to the same thing, Ubuntu provides the `sudo` (superuser do) command to allow the user created at the time of installation to issue Linux commands as though they were root. Normally, commands are issued in a terminal window (a command shell session) through the menu sequence – Applications – Accessories – Terminal. Thus, we need to open a terminal window and issue the command `sudo gedit /boot/grub/menu.lst`. This pops-up a dialogue box that requires us to enter our logon password in order to run `gedit` on the `menu.lst` file with root's file permissions. Now we will be able to modify the file's contents and save the changes.

The file `menu.lst` contains pure text. Many of the lines are comments that describe what the various command lines do. In particular, one such comment indicates that the line “default num” causes the num'th grub menu entry to be the default selection at boot-up. Armed with this information, and from a review of the command lines in the file, it is easy to see that that “default 0” is causing Linux to be the default selection for the operating system, and that changing this to “default 4” will make Windows our default menu selection.

So, all that to say that we need to edit `/boot/grub/menu.lst` as root to change the line default 0 to read default 4 and forever after have ten seconds to select

Linux or else have good-old (?) Windows boot by default. Now, that was easy, wasn't it? So, what's so hard about using Linux?!

The above narrative should have provided two basic pieces of information. Firstly, installing Ubuntu Linux is so simple that anyone can do it; the user interface is relatively clean but very intuitive; and the system provides an exceedingly useful set of software applications. Secondly, some of the details of Linux are fairly complex and will need a little, or perhaps a lot of research, if you want a certain element to function in a specific way. To some extent, the latter situation reminds me of the (good) old DOS days where just about anything was possible – if you knew how. Fortunately, there are lots of reference books available on Linux, and vast amounts of information posted to the web, so there should be an answer to every question – somewhere.

So, you can take your pick. Install it and forget it. Just use the system as-is, which should be a very acceptable proposition for most users. Alternatively, the inquisitive amongst us will want to delve further into the mysteries of Linux and figure out precisely how to make it do what we want it to do. Either way, Ubuntu Linux is a really neat system, and well worth a try. And – hey – who couldn't love a piece of computer software named Dapper Drake?

Bottom Line

Ubuntu 6.06 LTS (Open Source)
<http://www.ubuntu.com/>

Reference Material

Documentation for Ubuntu 6.06 LTS (Dapper Drake)
<https://help.ubuntu.com/>

Unofficial Ubuntu 6.06 (Dapper Drake) Starter Guide
<http://ubuntuguide.org/wiki/Dapper>

PDF Newsletter Notice

by Jocelyn Doire

The OPCUG distributes its newsletter in a number of ways including a PDF file attached to an email.

Lately some people reported that they didn't receive their PDF newsletter attached; instead they received a bunch of cryptic characters that was inline with the rest of the message.

To find out how big the problem was, I sent a message asking all those that had subscribed to the PDF newsletter whether they received it attached or inline.

Of the 78 people that have subscribed, 26 reported that it was attached, 3 said it was inline, and 1 said that it was not received.

Despite a lot of investigation, we never found out why some are receiving the PDF newsletter inline, though one reported that he fixed the problem by possibly installing Eudora.

How to get the Ottawa PC News by e-mail

Want to get the newsletter electronically? There are two formats available: plain text and Adobe Acrobat PDF. Simply send a message to **listserve@opcug.ca**. Leave the subject blank and in the body of the message, type:

subscribe newslettertxt
(to get the plain text version).

Or:
subscribe newsletterpdf
(to get the Adobe Acrobat PDF version).

And if you decide you do not need the printed version mailed to you anymore, simply let Mark Cayer (membership chairman) know. He can be reached at general meetings, as well as by e-mail at Mark.Cayer@opcug.ca. You might want to wait until you have successfully received at least one issue electronically before opting out from the printed version.

CLUB LIFE

Linux SIG for OPCUG *by Don Chiasson*

The Ottawa PC Users Club, OPCUG runs several SIGs or special interest groups. I propose starting a new SIG, the Linux SIG. This group would focus on FOSS, free and open source software, of which Linux is the best known example.

Why run a SIG on this topic? Software is software, is it not? Yes, but the marketing is different in that no one sells – in any meaning of the word – open source software. Go to a store and a sales rep will push a certain brand, plus you can read what is on the box. With FOSS, information is available on a web site, but often it is hard to evaluate. To choose FOSS, you need someone to talk to: that is the primary intent of the Linux SIG. Some important points:

- Free software implies two things, free as in beer and free as in freedom. Both matter. Read some of the writings of Richard Stallman (RMS), the founder of the free software movement or Eric Raymond (ESR), a strong advocate.
- FOSS software comes with no guarantees but read the legal disclaimers on commercial software to see what guarantees come with commercial software. Nor is there a guarantee that open source is free of malware, but having the source available makes it much less likely: all it takes is one curious person who is puzzled about something. Plus malware has been known to appear in commercial software.
- With FOSS, there are no issues of conflict of interest. For example, you may use Windows, but Microsoft is selling other products and services and they will promote these through Windows. With proprietary software, trust is a major issue with DRM (digital rights management), and the freedom to browse and control your computer. Remember, open-source software is software created and owned by users, with no hidden agendas, no secret alliances and no back-room marketing deals.
- There is a difference between Free Software and FOSS. I use Zone Alarm on my computer and it is free, but only as long as Zone Labs wants it to be so. Some free software may come at the cost of advertisements, or malware. Rules may change with little notice.
- Finding resources often takes a bit of a boost, knowing where to look and what to look for.
- The SIG should be able to burn CDs and DVDs for people who do not have high speed Internet.
- A major advantage of FOSS is that you can try software at no cost. The SIG should be able to help by having common software available, e.g. Linux, Open Office, Firefox, Gimp, Audacity, Eclipse, and others.
- The SIG will also allow you to experiment with different Linux distributions and exchange opinions with other users.
- The software base is huge.
- If you have the source code, no one can take the software away from you
- If a piece of software is not quite right for you you have the option of improving it.

The downside to FOSS:

- There is no manufacturer to whom you can address complaints. (But how many manufacturers pay attention to you? Plus, many FOSS software authors are glad to get feedback.)
- There is no single central source of information, but there are many secondary sources and Google works!
- Some FOSS is poor quality: it is not withdrawn from the market, but stays forever on Source Forge.
- Sometimes FOSS is posted on the web site of the author, and (s)he loses interest and the web site goes away.

You can do most things you need with FOSS and free software. For example, Refurb Computers, a used computer store in Ottawa offers a free CD with each computer purchased. This contains:

1. Open Office (word processor, spreadsheet, presentation program, and data base),
2. AVG (anti-virus),
3. Zone Alarm Basic (firewall),
4. Ad Aware (ad remover),
5. Spybot Search and Destroy (spyware remover),
6. Firefox (web browser),
7. Adobe Acrobat PDF Reader,
8. Photo Album / Organizer, Adobe Photoshop Basic.

For \$20, they install it. Other used computer stores may offer to install Windows XP at the OEM price of \$120.

Suggested web sites:

- Source forge: <http://sourceforge.net/>
- Fresh meat: <http://freshmeat.net/>
- GNU (GNU's Not Unix): <http://www.gnu.org>
- Information, RMS / Free Software Foundation: <http://www.fsf.org> and his personal web site, <http://www.stallman.org>

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Linux SIG for OPCUG

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- Information, ESR: <http://www.catb.org/~esr/>
- Distro Watch: <http://distrowatch.com>
- Linux reviews: <http://linuxreviews.org>
- And more.....

Linux / FOSS provide new opportunities for using your computer at zero cost. An OPCUG Linux SIG will be – to use a word rarely seen in PC jargon - exciting.



open-source software -- software created and owned by users, with no hidden agendas, no secret alliances and no back-room marketing deals.

An optimist says the glass is half full.
A pessimist says the glass is half empty.
An engineer says the glass is twice the size it needs to be.



President's Message New Executive Board Member

At the October 17th board meeting, Gail Eagen accepted an appointment to the board to take over as Secretary, now that Jocelyn Doire has left to pursue a new career in another city.

Over the years, Joc has contributed much to the smooth running of the OPCUG, including being the Secretary on the board, managing the electronic distribution of the newsletter every month, presenting at annual workshops, contributions to newsletter content, maintenance of the history section of The PUB, being a SIG coordinator, maintenance of a section on our web site for the board, and more. My apologies to Joc right now for surely failing to list some of his many activities.

Thanks very much for all your selfless contributions. You certainly embody the OPCUG motto "Users Helping Users".

Joc has graciously offered to continue some of these functions from a distance. On behalf of the full membership, may I just say, "Whew!! Thank goodness."

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Gail to the Board of Directors.

Chris Taylor



Ottawa PC Users' Group
**Computer Hardware
& Home Networking
Workshop**

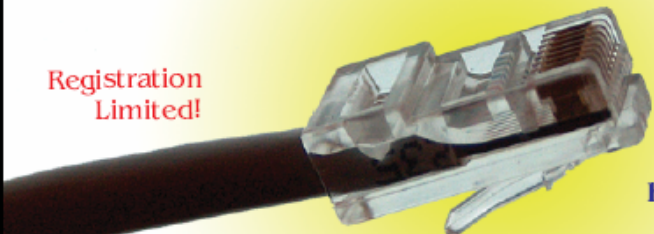
Saturday, November 18, 2006; 9 a.m.–4:30 p.m.
Heron Road Community Centre (1480 Heron Road)

Our hardware expert will discuss **current and future computer hardware** and will build a computer from scratch — right before your eyes!

Our networking expert will describe the basics, **build a network** in real time, and discuss **security issues** for wireless networks.

Registration fee of \$50 includes: lunch and coffee breaks, a one-year membership in OPCUG (\$25 value), and a CD-ROM containing all the presentations and reference information.

Registration Limited!



REGISTER AT
<http://opcug.ca>

For details go to <http://opcug.ca> or see the **October issue** of Ottawa PC News.
A copy of the registration form is on the website and on page 8 of this newsletter.

OPCUG Workshop 2006

Saturday, November 18, 2006
9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Heron Road Community Centre
1480 Heron Road, Ottawa, ON

Registration Form (Please print neatly)

Name: _____

Address (complete address,
please): _____

Tel : _____
(_____) _____

E-mail: _____

I wish to register for this workshop which includes lunch, the presentations and associated material on a CD-ROM, and a one-year membership in OPCUG.

Please find enclosed my cheque in the amount of \$50.00, made payable to: OPCUG.

Mail the completed registration form and your cheque to:

OPCUG Workshop 2006
3 Thatcher Street
Ottawa, ON, K2G 1S6

The OPCUG has established a Privacy Policy in compliance with government legislation. The purpose of the policy is to safeguard your personal information. Your workshop application constitutes your acceptance of this policy:
<http://opcug.ca/public/privacy.htm>.

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
Mailing Address:	3 Thatcher St., Nepean, Ontario, K2G 1S6	
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