## PRODUCT REVIEW

VLC Media player　*by Jocelyn Doire*

I've been using VLC for a long time basically because it can play every video and audio file I've tried, because it's fast, simple, ad free and it's free in every sense of the word.

But lately I found out that it can do even more; it can play also material from the internet, and to my surprise, there are a lot of choices out there, of every style conceivable, and many of them are pretty good.

For example, to play a selection of songs you can select "Free Music Charts" followed by "2012-01-30 MP3 Podcast", you will then get over 2 hours of music with occasional interruption by someone that seems to be talking in German (you can fast forward those bits).
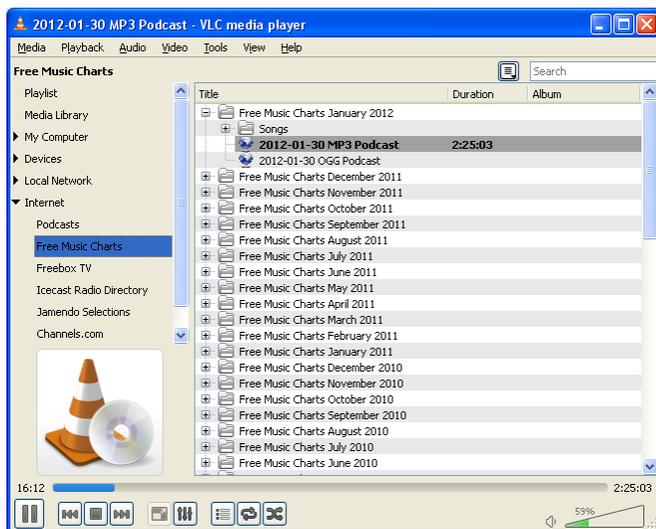
Another possibility is to listen to a radio station, if you like classic rock you can select "Icecast Radio Directory" and then "Classic Rock)(UturnRadio" (yeah, I know, the parenthesis in the name are weird), the first song I got was Stairway to Haven from Led Zeppelin.

Alternatively you can also select a Podcast from your favourite radio station, for example if you want to listen to Quirks & Quarks from CBC, go to CBC's podcasts web site and select the show, in this case http://www.cbc.ca/quirks/podcasts/. Then get the RSS link by moving your mouse cursor over the orange RSS logo, right click and select "Copy link", in my case I got http://www.cbc.ca/podcasting/includes/quirksaio.xml. Finally move your mouse over the word "Podcasts" in VLC, click on the "+", paste the link, and voilà! you will get a list a list of Quirks & Quarks that you can play whenever you want.
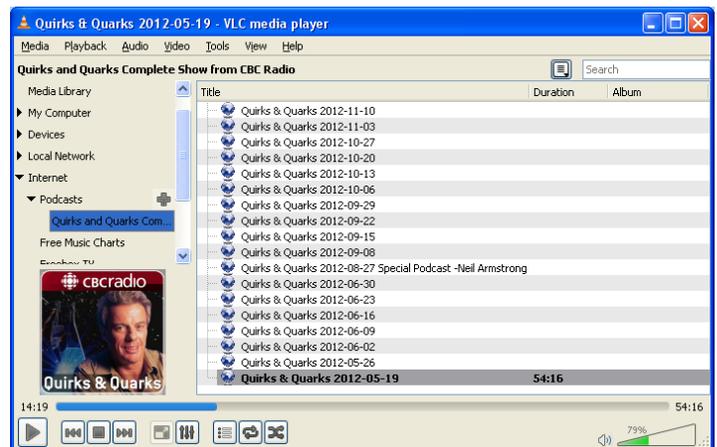
Just a little warning if your internet provider caps your downloads, even though sound takes a lot less bandwidth than video, you may want to watch from time to time how much you have downloaded to avoid a nasty bill at the end of the month.

The VLC web site can be found at http://www.videolan.org/

♦♦♦

Next Meeting: WEDNESDAY, March 13th, 2013

March Raffle

Courtesy of the McAfee Canada, we have a copy of **McAfee Total Protection 2013**.

Guard your PC, social network, identity, family, and home network with McAfee's ultimate protection against hackers, malware, thieves, phishing, and other online threats.

This prize is valued at $70

Tickets are, as always, a good deal at $1 for one, a great deal at $2 for three or the unbelievable bargain of $5 for ten!

February Prize Winners

Our raffle prize winner at the February meeting of the OPCUG was **Tim Hillock**.

Tim took home a copy of the McAfee Total Protection 2013 software.

Thanks again to McAfee for the prize donation.

Coming Up…

▶Wednesday, March 13, 2013

Speaker: Doug Drouillard of KRC (Knights Refurbishing Computers) INC.
Topic: TBA

Details of the presentation will be posted on the MEETINGS page of the OPCUG website when they become available.

Wednesday, May 8, 2013

Speaker: Bert Schopf, Blackbird PCD
Topic: Digital Imaging on the Run

2013 CALENDAR		
Meetings	**Date**	**Time and Venue**
OPCUG General Meeting	Wednesday, March 13th	7:30 p.m. Auditorium of the **Canada Science and Technology Museum**, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd. http://www.sciencetech.technomuses.ca/english/index.cfm
Beginners' SIG	Wednesday, March 13th	Immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting.
Linux SIG	Wednesday, March 13th	Immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting.
Beer BOF (Wing SIG East)	Wednesday, March 13th	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).		

ARTICLE

Phishing in my back yard *by Chris Taylor*

A relative phoned. He had just received a call from RBC about a suspicious transfer of $928 from his bank account. They were checking if it was legitimate. It wasn't. RBC locked his web access and advised him that he had malware on his computer and he must get it cleaned up before web access would be opened again.

To RBC's credit, they discovered this within hours of the occurrence. And they returned the money to the account.

The next day I began the laborious process of cleaning the computer. I ran complete scans with four different anti-malware programs. One was an offline scanner that runs from a bootable CD, DVD, or flash drive, making it very difficult for anything, rootkits included, to hide.

All four scanners gave the computer a clean bill of health. At that point, I was pretty sure the problem had not come from malware, regardless of the insistence of RBC security staff.

I had my suspicions. I used Windows 7's search feature to look for *RBC* and it quickly found a number of items; documents, IE favorites, a bunch of emails saying a monthly statement was available for viewing … and a recent email in the *Deleted Items* folder from *RBC Royal Bank*.

RBC Royal Bank

⚠ **Warning: Important Information**

▸Important Notice: Your Online Banking password was entered incorrectly more than 3 times. For the protection of your account we have suspended access to it. To restore access please Sign In correctly.

≫Previous notifications have been sent - we are unable to provide responses from this mailbox.

Be cautious! RBC will never ask you for confidential information through regular email. RBC employees will never ask you for your Card Details, PIN or Codes from your Activation Code.

Thank you for choosing RBC Bank.
Copyright Royal Bank of Canada © 1995-2013. All rights reserved.

Only it wasn't from RBC.

And the *Sign In* link wasn't blue, indicating it had been clicked.

Phishing emails that try to trick you into disclosing personal information, especially user names and passwords, are nothing new.

After talking about how **not** to click links in emails – especially those asking you to fix a problem with an account – I advised my relative to call RBC and let them know there was no malware on his computer and they could open web access to his account. I knew they would do a password change and hopefully advise him not to change the password back to the old one.

As an afterthought, I forwarded the phish to myself and brought up the web site linked to in the phish. I used a virtual machine with undo disks so that even if I was attacked, it would not likely cause problems with my computer. I was curious to see what it looked like.

The web site was quite realistic looking. It asked for an account and password. I was more than ever convinced that this was the source of the account compromise.

I almost closed down the browser at that point. But I decided to see what would happen when I put in some info. I put in random strings for username and password and the system thanked me.

But then, I was taken to another screen where I was asked to enter answers to security questions! These are the security questions that web sites use to allow you to recover your password if you forget it. There were about half a dozen - presumably every security question used by RBC.

Again to RBC's credit, when we called to get web access to the account re-activated, the person on the phone advised not to use the same password ever again and also to change the answers to all the security questions. She recommended that the answers given to security questions not be the correct answer. A very good recommendation. Some people are quite surprised about how much personal information can be found out about them on the Internet.

I advise people to use correct answers for security questions because that makes it easy to remember. Then append or prepend a secret word only you know. Use the same secret word for all web sites that have security questions.

Let's pretend your secret word is *pen.* If the question is "What was your first pet's name?" and it was *Rover*, you would use *pen-Rover* as the answer. If you were born in Kingston, the answer to the question, "Where were you born?" would be *pen-Kingston*.

As long as you keep your secret word truly secret, nobody is ever going to be able to answer your security questions. But because the portion of the answer other than the secret word is correct, you can remember it without having to resort to writing it down.

And I must say I am truly impressed with my relative's new password. It is about 15 characters long, has upper and lower case letters, numbers, and punctuation. And I am told it is meaningful enough that he will be able to remember it. But even if he forgets it, he is the only person on the planet who can answer his password reset questions correctly.

Stay safe.

ARTICLE

Backing it up
by Chris Taylor

Recently, there was a discussion on The PUB about the need for offsite backups. A news story about a house fire brought about the discussion. If you store your computer backups in the same location as your computer, a fire could end up destroying your backups along with the computer and the original data. Hence the need for backups being stored offsite.

Over quite a few years, I have given serious thought to safeguarding of computerized information. I developed a solution that provides an appropriate – for me – level of protection for my data and is convenient enough – again, for me.

It is important to not go crazy. There is no such thing as absolute security and it becomes more and more expensive and inconvenient to cover off increasingly unlikely disaster scenarios. However, each person must assess the value of their data and the costs to provide the level of protection you want. Your mileage may vary!

Type of Backup

First it is important to backup what's important in a manner that is easy enough and inexpensive enough that you will actually do it.

Some feel it is important to only back up your data. After all, you can always reinstall your operating system and programs if you need to. The only thing that is not recoverable is your personal data.

I disagree with this approach. There are two reasons; convenience and completeness.

When it comes to convenience, think

about what you go through when you buy a new computer. The process is similar to recovering from a disaster. It is very time consuming to install an operating system, then applications and finally transfer data from the old computer. And I find I never really end up with the way things were. I tweak settings in software over time to suit my needs. I download obscure programs that are hard to find again. I forget exactly how I had things set up. It is usually weeks before my new computer feels comfortable.

Completeness is also very important. You may think you know where all your data is, but do you really? I don't know about you, but I sometimes squirrel away data in strange places. How can you back up all your data if you don't know where it is all stored? Anyone who has used Outlook Express and backed up the data files associated with mail and contacts knows what I mean – Microsoft stores the files in the most obscure locations!

For both the above reasons, I advocate using software that will take an image of your entire hard drive. If you need to do a restore, an image backup will allow you to recreate the disk partitions to exactly the state they were in when the backup was started – operating system, applications, settings, and data all intact.

There are free imaging options, including the backup options in Windows Vista Ultimate and all versions of Windows 7 & 8, and the free version of Macrium Reflect (reviewed by Alan German - opcug.ca/public/Reviews/MacriumReflectFree.htm). As well there are modestly priced options such as the $45 or $59 versions of Macrium Reflect and the $50 Acronis True Image (available for $25 to members of the OPCUG) which add additional ca-

pabilities that can make things easier, such as the ability to create incremental images (using less space for your backups) and restore to hardware that is different than the original computer.

If you still want to backup only your data, you might want to read Alan German's article *File and Folder Synchronization Revisited* – in the Nov, 2012 issue of the newsletter - opcug.ca/public/Articles/1211.pdf. It can automate much of the process of backing up files and folders.

Onsite/offsite backups

As mentioned at the start of this article, having your only backups in close proximity to your computer is convenient, but won't save you in the event of some - not totally unlikely - disaster scenarios. However, making sure your main backups are stored elsewhere except during the backup process violates my rule of convenience – if it is not easy, it won't get done.

So my main backup drive sits on top of my computer case and is plugged into the same power bar as my computer - where an electrical surge will probably fry it just as quickly as it will fry my computer. And a fire or theft is likely to result in a similar loss of both the original data and the backup copies.

I use an offsite backup to take care of those threats.

My complete solution

I have a 2TB desktop USB external hard drive connected to my computer. My computer and the external drive are on 24 hours a day. I use Acronis True Image to take an incremental image of my computer once a day at 3:00 AM.

Backing it up *(Continued from page 4)*

About once a month, I move the current image set to another directory for safekeeping and allow a new full image to be created the following night. In this way, I can restore anything to the day from anytime in the past 6 months or so.

For offsite backup, I have a 2TB portable external hard drive I store in my car. I chose a *portable* drive because they don't need a separate power adapter and are therefore more convenient for me to use (remember the *convenience rule!*) My car is conveniently handy yet far enough away from my computer (I don't have a garage) to escape just about any disaster likely to harm my computer and the original data. About once a month, I do a full image all my computers, The PUB, my Dad's computer, my girlfriend's computers, and another friend's computers. I can generally keep two backup sets for all nine computers, so if by really strange happenstance an image is corrupted, I have a second shot.

In the discussions on The PUB, there was concern expressed about excessive heat or cold when storing a hard drive in a car. I have never had a problem. I always wait at least an hour to let the drive come to room temperature before using it. Coming from the cold, I leave it in its case while warming to prevent moisture condensation. But if you are concerned about storing the drive in a hot or cold car, just store it at a friend's or neighbour's house, or in your desk drawer at the office.

Think about the threats

When I developed this solution, I looked at the likely scenarios that would require a restore from backup. Here are mine and how my solution protects me.

Most likely scenario - I delete a file or folder accidentally. As long as the file existed at the previous 3:00 AM

backup, I can easily recover individual files and folders from the most recent backup. Since the backup drive is always attached, this takes just a minute or two.

2nd most likely scenario - I have a hard disk failure. I buy a new drive and install it. I boot from the Acronis recovery DVD and restore all the partitions. While this might take a couple of hours to complete, it is straightforward and painless. I will lose less than 24 hours of changes on my system.

3rd most likely scenario - I have a fire or other catastrophic event that takes out both my computer and the backup drive attached to it. I replace the computer and restore an image from the external drive I store in my car. I lose up to a month's worth of changes. This is the least convenient backup – schlepping a drive around and doing a manual image backup. However, I only do it once a month or so and it is the least likely scenario, so I am willing to put up with the inconvenience and the loss of up to a month of data.

Costs

You can use free imaging software such as that built into Windows Vista/7/8 or the free version of Macrium Reflect. Or you can spend $25 to $59 to get software that provides more convenience and flexibility.

Hard drive prices are finally falling again after the October, 2011 floods in Taiwan that wiped out half the world's production of hard drives, causing prices to rise dramatically. The sweet spot now seems to be 2TB & 3TB desktop hard drives and 1TB & 2TB portable drives. For example, on January 2, 2013, Future Shop had a 2TB Western Digital My Book Essentials desktop drive for $100 and a 2 TB Western Digital My Passport portable drive for $120. One of the things I like about Western Digital portable drives is

they come with password protection and hardware encryption. Since the portable drive is intended for storage offsite, it is nice to know if it is lost or stolen, nobody will be able to access my personal files.

All in all, a well thought out backup strategy, including offsite storage, is a small price to pay for the peace of mind of knowing you are very unlikely to lose all your personal information and you can recover from almost any disaster with an acceptable level of fuss and bother.

Other possibilities

There are some other things you can add to the mix when you are looking to safeguard information.

Recent versions of Windows allow you to save *shadow copies* of files. So if you delete a file or folder or make revisions to a file that you decide you don't want, you can easily restore a shadow copy.

Cloud storage is becoming all the rage. Services such as Google Drive and Microsoft's SkyDrive allow you to store files on a server elsewhere and recover the files in the event that you lose your local copy. Google will give you 5GB of storage for free. Microsoft will give you 7GB for free. There are lots of other similar services such as SugarSync, Dropbox, CloudMe, iCloud, and others. Think about encryption when storing sensitive information in the cloud and be sure to read the terms & conditions for the service.

Network Attached Storage (NAS) has become affordable and can be a nice way to backup multiple computers in a home. Many routers now include the ability to plug in a USB hard drive and share it out to all computers on the local network.

◆◆◆

Exploring Linux – Part 24 *by Alan German*

Over the years, I have struggled with the variety of digital image tools provided with default installations of Ubuntu. I never liked image viewers that wouldn't show me thumbnails of all the pictures in a given folder, or those that did not give me quick access to a simple editor in order to crop an image or make a slight change to its brightness. And, I simply hated photo managers that insisted on arranging my pictures chronologically, rather than having one folder hold all the pictures from a specific trip.

In fact, the only reason that I didn't undertake a systematic search for an appropriate alternative was that – horrors – Zoner Photo Studio Free (http://opcug.ca/public/Reviews/zoner.htm), in the (dual-boot) Windows' world, provided everything I needed. However, I recently came across gThumb, a Gnome-based image viewer, and found that this was my new Linux tool of choice.

Interestingly, this all came about after I read a glowing review of Mint 14 with the Cinnamon user interface. I downloaded Mint and installed it on a bootable USB memory stick. In trying out this distro, I discovered that Mint's default image viewer is gThumb. I liked my "preview" of this package so much I decided to install it on my production Ubuntu system.

The basic image viewer shows thumbnails of all the images in a selected folder, together with a tree directory of available folders in the left sidebar. The size of the thumbnails, and the information displayed alongside each (e.g. file name), are configurable. Similarly, double-clicking on a specific image can be set to display the image so as to fill program's window. Icons are available to show an extensive list of the image's properties, or to open an image editor in order to modify the actual image. While the available editing tools are not exhaustive, many useful items are provided, including

brightness, contrast and colour adjustment; image cropping, resizing and rotation; and red-eye removal.

Images can be downloaded from a digital camera although, in my view, this process isn't perfect. While a folder can be specified to hold all of the downloaded images, the program still creates a sub-folder, named with the current date and time, and places all of the images inside this sub-folder. However, it's now a simple matter to transfer all of the downloaded files into a specific folder of the user's choice. This is certainly much easier than having to combine files from multiple "days" into a single, user-defined folder.

The program has a multitude of other features including the ability to create slide-shows; to export photographs to social-media sites or web-based photo-albums; burn them to optical disks; or to print contact sheets. Many of these options are provided as plug-in extensions and additional features are available through this mechanism.
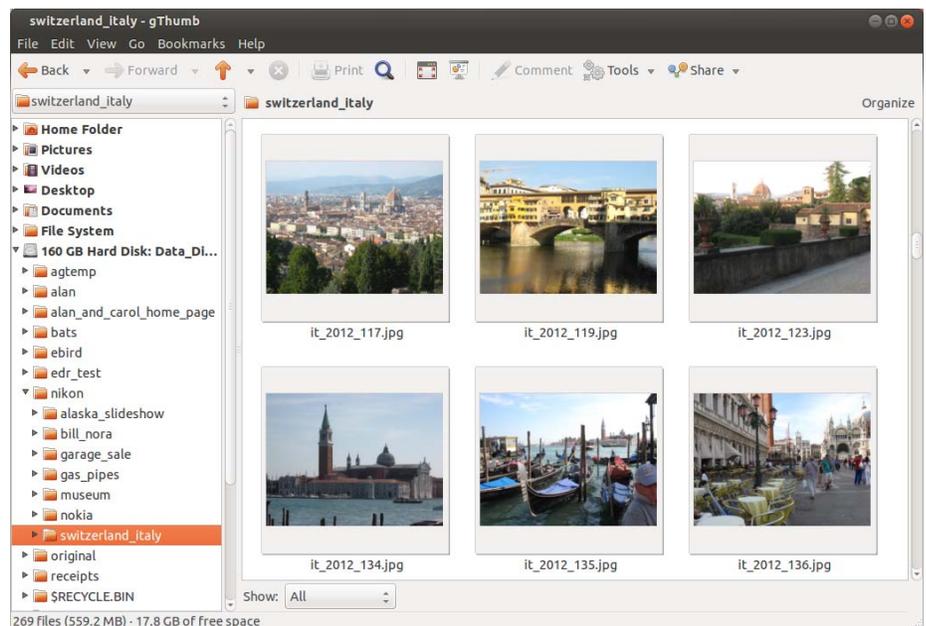
The program is highly configurable simply by editing a "preferences" menu. For example, one really useful feature, where screen real-estate is at a premium, is to change the location for the group of thumbnails that is displayed in the image viewer. By default, these thumbnails are shown across the bottom of the window; however, this severely restricts the height – and hence the overall size – at which the image selected is displayed. Switching the location to be "on the side" easily resolves this issue.

So, for my way of working with digital images, gThumb is certainly a keeper!

Bottom Line
gThumb (Open-source)
Version 2.14.3
Author: Paolo Bacchilega
https://live.gnome.org/gthumb

OPCUG Free Software Guide – Part 38

Compiled by Alan German and Micheline Johnson

This guide features an annotated list of free computer programs. The software mentioned has not been reviewed (except where noted) nor have any tests necessarily been conducted. Consequently, no guarantees are provided that the individual programs will perform as described. Rather the list of available software is provided for the information of our members who may find one or more of the programs useful.

Free PDF Image Extractor
This easy-to-use and powerful tool from iWesoft can help you extract images from a PDF file in seconds.
Current Release: Version 3.1.2.82
Web Site: http://www.iwesoft.com/pdf-image-extractor

VarieDrop
Resize a batch of digital photographs simply by dragging a selected group of files and dropping them into a panel on VarieDrop's main window.

Current Release: Version 1.1.4.0
Web Site: http://www.vieas.com/en/software/vdrop.html

FotoFlexer
Use this on-line photo-editor to achieve some remarkable results – all from inside your browser. Add special effects, fancy fonts, or use *Smart Scissors* to cut a person out of a background with just a few mouse clicks..
Web Site: http://fotoflexer.com/

MediaPortal
This open-source package turns your PC into an advanced MediaCenter/Home Theatre PC. It allows you to listen to your favorite music and radio; watch and store your videos and DVD's; view, schedule and record live TV, acting as a personal video recorder (PVR); and much more.
Current Release: Version 1.2.3
Web Site: http://ostatic.com/mediaportal

Greenshot
This lightweight software tool will let you quickly create screenshots of selected regions, specific windows, or the full screen. Edit a screenshot, save it to a file, send it to the printer, attach it to an E-mail, or upload it to a photo site.
Current Release: Version 1.0
Web Site: http://getgreenshot.org/

NexusFile
View two folders side by side to make compare and copy or move operations fast and effective. NexusFile uses tabs, has advanced file renaming, and supports FTP operations and many archive file formats. Customize the program's look with skins, or use it as a portable app on a USB drive.
Current Release: Version 5.3.3.5532
Web Site: http://www.xiles.net/nexusfile/

LAN Speed Test
This simple but powerful tool measures file transfer speeds for disk drives and both wired and wireless LAN's. It builds a file in memory, and then transfers it both ways (without effects of windows file caching), keeping track of the time, and doing the calculations for you.
Current Release: Version 3.3
Web Site: http://www.totusoft.com/lanspeed.html

Comodo Cleaning Essentials
This set of computer security tools will remove malware, rootkits, hidden files and malicious registry keys hidden deep within infected computers. No installation is required and the program can run direct from a USB drive.
Web Site: http://preview.tinyurl.com/bb6jxxe

HashCalc
Want to check that you have a valid download? Use HashCalc to quickly and easily compute checksums and HMAC's for files, as well as for text and hex strings. This program supports of 13 of the most popular hash and checksum algorithms.
Current Release: Version 2.02
Web Site: http://www.slavasoft.com/hashcalc/index.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 Science and Technology Museum, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd, Ottawa. Meetings are 7:30–9:00 p.m. and Special Interest Groups (SIGs) go until 10 p.m.

OPCUG Membership Fees: $25 per year
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Linux / Open-Source SIG
(vacant)

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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.

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Within a couple of minutes you will receive a confirmation message from the listserver.

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