



Vol. 16 No. 1

The newsletter of the Ottawa PC Users' Group

January 1999

Software Review

StarOffice 5.0 *By Jocelyn Doire*

Introducing a new office suite to the market could be considered heresy given the dominance of the Microsoft Office suite. StarDivision, a German company and long-time producer of OS/2 software, has recently released version 5.0 of its office suite, StarOffice. StarDivision goes beyond its OS/2 roots with this release and has simultaneously released versions for OS/2, Linux, Windows 95/98/NT, Java and Macintosh. Why would anybody be interested in yet another office suite? Well, one possible reason is that StarDivision has released StarOffice 5.0 completely free for non-commercial use!

graphics, to start the mail client or the web browser and to perform other tasks. Also present are multiple tool bars that update as the modules change. The “explorer” can also be opened to show a multi-level list of samples, galleries, an address book and drives.

Continued on page 4

What you get

Now free software is nothing new on the Internet but I'm not aware of anything that includes so much in a single package—free or not. It includes everything most users will need to create documents, spreadsheets, databases, presentations, graphics, and more. Add to the package an Internet program group that includes a browser, e-mail client, news reader, http editor, and more. Then add a scheduler, a task manager, programming language, macros, equation editor—the list continues.

This large collection of modules is made possible by re-using extensively the components of the suite: making the integration between the modules very thorough. For example, in the same document you can include: text, web links, graphics and tables. Edit any one by simply clicking on it. Having a single engine helps to create a similar look and feel throughout the programs, making the learning easier.

The user interface

The interface is extremely configurable: for example, all the menus, keyboard, toolbars, events and colour schemes can be configured. You can even change the overall look and feel to mimic, for example, OS/2, X Windows or Macintosh.

When the program starts, after suggesting user registration (free and can be done online), you get a desktop similar to Windows 95. At the bottom left you have the “start” button which launches most of the modules. The desktop has objects to create new documents or

INSIDE

Coming up:

<i>January meeting</i>	2
<i>Meeting calendar</i>	2
<i>Museum Computer Swap</i>	4

Club news - Club life

<i>Fly West for questions and answers</i>	4
<i>Want a SIG?</i>	8
<i>Reuse, recycle</i>	8

Hardware

<i>Networking 101</i>	3
-----------------------------	---

Dunc Petrie's corner

<i>Hardware</i>	
<i>Wither Removable Storage?</i>	5
<i>Book Review</i>	
<i>The BIOS Companion</i>	7

Next meeting: **WEDNESDAY, January 6th, 1999**

Coming up in January

With the arrival of the New Year, this seemed like an appropriate opportunity to introduce a new operating system: Linux. Our Presenter, David F. Skoll, is actively involved in promoting Linux in his monthly column, Linux Stuff, in Monitor Magazine.

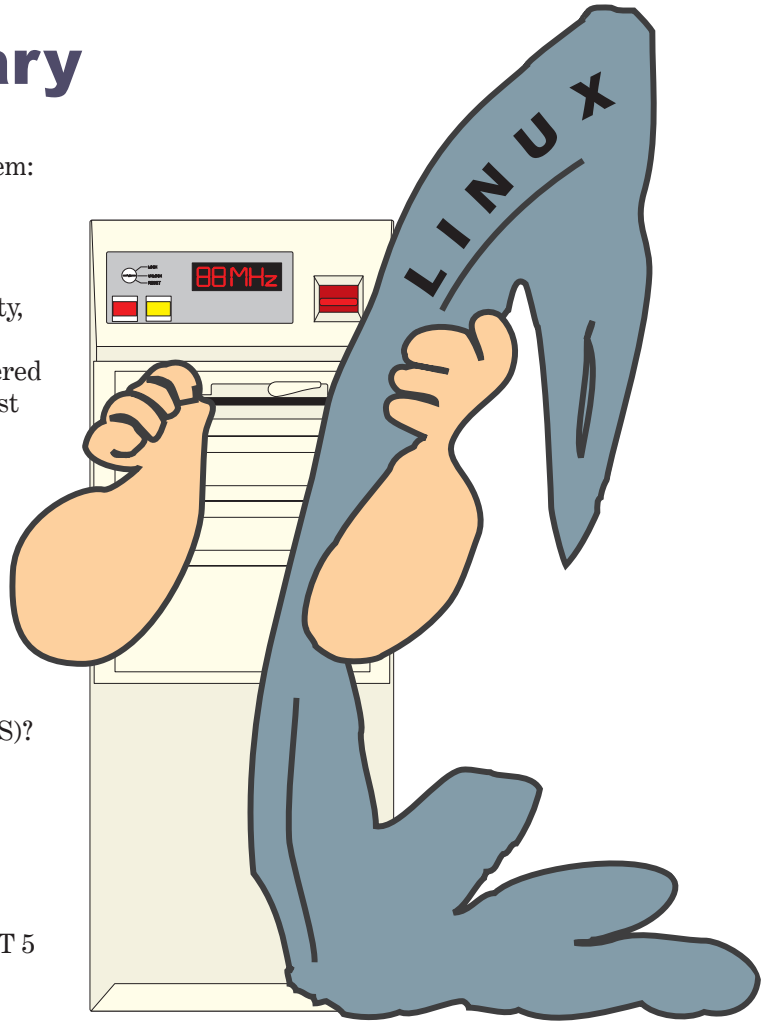
Linux has many pros: it is FREE (or almost), offers stability, runs on a wide gamut of hardware, is fast and offers a graphical Windows-like environment. Although not considered a mainstream operating system in many quarters, in the last year it has adopted a higher profile—is “Bill” afraid? Commercial companies have taken the “raw” material and developed installer utilities to make it easier for “newbies” to climb aboard.

David will provide an introduction to Linux that will examine its origins and answer many questions.

- What is Linux? This will include a brief history of Linux and UNIX.
- How does Linux compare to other OS's (Windows, MacOS)?
- What hardware do I need?
- See a live demo.

For those with less than blazing fast hardware, you may be surprised that there is still life in your “boat anchor!”

Come on out and listen. Yes, there is an alternative to an NT 5 upgrade.



Calendar

Meetings	Date	Time and venue
OPCUG General Meeting	January 6 th : Linux operating system See Coming up article above. February 3 rd : To be announced	7:30 p.m. - National Museum of Science and Technology, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd.
Ottawa Paradox Users Group	Third Thursday of each month	6:15 pm - Inly Systems, 1221a Cyrville Rd.
FOX Pro/Developers SIG	Early December	7:15 pm - Sir Jean Talon Building Conference room, Tunney's Pasture, Holland Ave. (north of Scott St.)
PIG SIG (or is it WING SIG?)	January 6 th After all the other SIG's - All questions, be they serious or not	“Good Times” cafe at Shoppers City West, Baseline and Woodroffe

Networking 101: the upgrade that makes sense

by Ken Fermoye

That was then...

First came “sneaker networking,” in the late 70s and early 80s, when we carried floppy diskettes from computer to computer. Then came “poor-boy networking,” using simple switches, null modem cables and software like LapLink and MacLink to share printers and transfer files. Often we simply plugged and unplugged cables. Macintoshes had the advantage of built-in network capabilities, although at just 230.4 Kbps transmission speed was slow.

I tried all of the above during the 1980s in my home office and as a partner in a small, pioneering publishing service bureau. A “real” network, with servers and client workstations, was out of reach.

This is now...

Things have changed! Low prices, simple peer-to-peer networks and support built into current operating systems now make it inexpensive and easy to link computers and peripherals in the home or small business offices. Today, you can enjoy the benefits of a true Ethernet network for about \$100 [Editor’s note: all prices are US funds] if you run Windows for Workgroups 3.1.1; Windows 95, 98 or NT; or Mac OS (and want more speed than AppleTalk provides).

Adding a simple network is especially attractive if you are adding a new computer. Don’t get rid of your old one. You won’t get much for it, and it can still be a useful asset. How? By linking it to the new computer via a simple network.

Consider these possibilities:

- First, you can keep all your pet programs, especially “legacy” 16-bit Win3x and/or DOS apps, on the older machine and use them as you always have. Use only 32-bit software on the new computer to improve performance.
- Second, you can eliminate duplication of programs. Why invest in a new word processor or spreadsheet, for example, if the ones you’ve been using still do everything you require? Save your new machine for up-to-date graphics, games or Internet-related programs that really benefit from better performance.
- Third, you can use each computer to back up the other one. It’s probably the easiest way to do backups.

One thought here: If your old computer has its hard drive(s) filled to bursting, consider adding another one just for backup use. New multi-gig hard drives are really cheap now, and it’s possible to find decent used 1.2 to 2.5 gigabyte drives.

Just do it!

To set up a network you need:

- A Network Interface Card (NIC) for each computer and appropriate driver,
- Thin coaxial or unshielded twisted pair (UTP) cabling in appropriate lengths,
- BNC connectors and terminators, if you use coaxial cables, and a
- Multiport hub. (Optional: unless you want to connect several computers or wish to use a high-speed protocol.)

UTP 10Base-T cables resemble ordinary telephone wire but use RJ45 connectors and have eight wires inside. Coaxial 10Base-2 cables look like those that connect TVs to VCRs, with similar twist-on BNC connectors. Prices will vary by length. Use cables that meet Category 5 standards to ensure top performance and future expandability. For networks with more than a few computers or for those using Fast Ethernet, experts recommend UTP cabling.

Getting started

To connect just two computers, it’s often cheaper and easier to buy a kit that includes two NICs, a 10Base-2 coax cable, connectors and terminators, driver setup software and detailed installation instructions. This is especially true for novice networkers. With a kit, you’re sure that components match, and you have a single source to contact should you need tech support.

You can add one or two computers to this type of network later, daisy-chaining them with additional NICs and cables. As your network enlarges you will require a hub and UTP cables.

Make sure the NICs have both BNC and RJ45 connectors to allow upgrades to a hub and twisted-pair cables if you decide to expand your network later.

Copyright 1998 by Ken Fermoye, Fermoye Publications, 22250 Capulin Ct., Woodland Hills, CA 91364-3005.

[Editor’s note] Ken Fermoye has written some 2,500 articles for publications ranging from Playboy and PC World to MacWeek, MicroTimes & PC Laptop. He was cohost/producer of a radio show on computers and a partner in a DTP service bureau during the 80s.

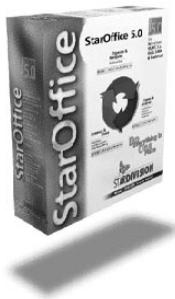


Major applications

The word processor, the database and the spreadsheet are very similar to Microsoft Office products; learning is easier for those familiar with MS Office. I have found all the major applications to be very complete and to work well. The suite includes numerous filters making the transfer between StarOffice and software from the other companies painless: the surprising missing filter is for WordPerfect. AutoCorrect will check spelling as text is entered; it also corrects errors such as “themselves” instead of “themselves.” AutoFormat is also available to capitalize the first word in a sentence or replace 1/2 with ½.

The drawing module is vector based like CorelDraw. I was not able to do everything I wanted—such as a dimensioned line—but it could be my lack of experience. Some neat features I found were the 3D tools and the textures that you can apply to objects. Based on the little I did, it felt quite powerful.

Also included is a pixel editor (like Corel’s PhotoPaint or Adobe’s Photoshop) with many tools and effects like “charcoal” or “relief.”



Internet ready

The web browser is complete; it provides support for all the expected features, including frames and JavaScript. Similarly, the news and mail clients are very complete. I had trouble finding the “outbox,” that is needed to start the mail client for the first time (right-click inside the “explorer” window—on the left, select new, then “outbox.”) Here, the help was useless: just saying that I needed to “create an outbox.” To select a newsgroup: choose new from the right-mouse menu, then news, then subscribe.

There are many more modules, but to cover each one properly I would need a lot more space than this article allows. Instead, new users should explore for themselves. I was pleasantly surprised: almost everything worked as advertised; the only “bugs” I found were minor: for example, the use of a French word (annulé) instead of the English one (cancel) during the installation, and a video problem while editing a bit map image.

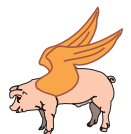
The package provides help in many ways. For example, moving the cursor over a button could: pop-up a short description, enable a context-sensitive floating help window or search the content (either in the index or in the full text) of all the help modules. The help text is clear and uses links for extra details; however, the latter were cursory in many areas. To obtain a users’ manual you must purchase the commercial edition but it costs \$169 US.

Conclusions

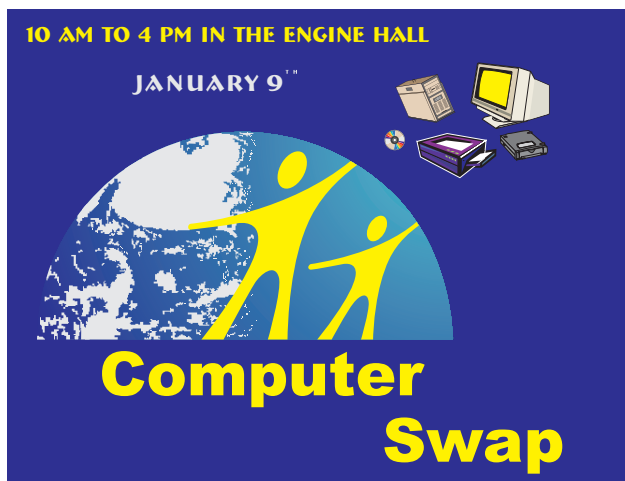
With such a large number of features, I have only explored a portion but, overall, I’m quite impressed with this software. Given the current offer to download it free, it could gather momentum: the most serious impediment for many would be the file size of 60-70 MB (platform dependent). To get more information or download it, go to: <http://www.stardivision.com>.



Fly West for Questions and Answers!



The “Good Times” cafe at Shoppers City West, Baseline and Woodroffe, for chicken wings and a drink after the General meeting: may be the best and most informative SIG meeting of the evening. See you there!



Have you sorted out all the unwanted hardware and software you are stocking in your cupboard that might make somebody else very happy? You have all the holidays to do this and get ready for the big Computer Swap at the Museum of Science and Technology on Saturday January 9th.

See you at the OPCUG table at this swap meet!





Whither removable storage?

Despite the recent demise of Syquest and Avatar in the removable media arena, the competition has heated up and other choices are in the works. Lets look at high capacity (hard drive replacements) and floppy drive upgrades separately.

High Capacity

Although the Syquest SparQ (1.0 GB) and the SyJet (1.5 GB) are gone (Resurrection is always possible: suitors are rumoured.), some potentially serious competition has appeared on the horizon. Iomega was a pioneer and the head-start provided a lot of momentum; however, will it remain? Iomega's 1GB Jaz drive and media are considerably more costly than those of its defunct competitor. Syquest's Sparq media was about one-third the cost for equal capacity (1 GB); its SyJet 1.5 GB media cost about the same but had 50% greater capacity. Syquest had also announced (but was not in production) a "monster" 4+ GB capacity drive that died with the company's demise.

Iomega also offers a 2GB variant of the Jaz. It doubles the capacity and offers increased data transfer rates although it extracts a hefty price: both the drive and media are significantly more expensive than the 1 GB format.

Castlewood Systems' (www.castlewood.com) Orb is the "new kid on the block" and could increase the pressure considerably: the drives should ship by end-98, sell for \$200 (US) and store 2.16 GB on a \$30 (US) cartridge. The company's founder is a veteran from Syquest and Seagate. The drive will be offered in SCSI, EIDE and parallel port variants: no USB version as yet.

High capacity floppies—Iomega's Zip

I just finished revisiting Iomega's (www.iomega.com) Zip drive. Unfortunately, that issue went to press too early to report Iomega's newest variant: a 250 MB capacity unit. It will provide backwards compatibility with the current 100 MB

media. Currently, the 100 MB media is \$16-20 (Cdn) and depends upon the manufacturer: Iomega's and Sony's are usually more expensive than media from other suppliers (Maxell or Fuji). A few system manufacturers are installing these drives (EIDE/ATAPI variants) as original equipment manufacturer (OEM) drives; given proper BIOS support, the Zip drive is bootable. The 250 MB drive and media would presumably be more expensive (drive about \$200 US; media unknown but a 30% premium (US) has been rumoured).

Iomega has also announced a 100 MB capacity USB version (no word as yet about a 250 MB capacity unit although this should be a mere formality). For users with USB ports on their computers and no SCSI adapter, this approach is faster and less trouble-prone than a parallel port unit. A hint for those lacking USB: a PCI bus expansion card is \$55-70 (Cdn) and offers a painless upgrade if your system can support it.

The company has also announced the Zip Built-In that enables connecting directly compatible scanners, printers and audio devices to the Zip without the need of an intervening computer.

Although the Syquest EZ 135 (135 MB), Syquest Flyer (230 MB) and Avatar Shark (250 MB) have ceased production, Iomega must still be feeling the heat of competition. Iomega has had the marketing advantages of: "first off the mark," an enormous installed user-base and model variants for every scenario (SCSI, EIDE, parallel, USB). The recently announced capacity increase will also help it to meet the competition. However, Iomega does have its detractors. First, it lacks backwards floppy compatibility. Iomega also stumbled with its handling of the "click of death" syndrome: initially, by dismissing it and subsequently by taking a hard-line approach (recently rescinded) to warranty obligations. The bottom line: it is arguably the one to beat—for the moment.



Continued on next page

Wither Removable Storage? (Continued)

The Zip's competition

Sony's (www.sony.ca) new High Capacity Floppy Disk (HiFD)—200 MB capacity and backwards compatibility with the 1.44 MB 3.5 inch floppy: not only read/write but also format—will begin to appear in the retail chain, by end-98, after two years of vapourware status. This unit is fast (both native and 1.44 floppy format) due to a blend of floppy and Winchester (hard drive) technology; the latter is the rationale for the 3600 rpm spindle speed and is a major contributor to the transfer rates. Media should cost about \$15 (US) each. Initial production will be an external drive that uses the parallel port connection (here, throughput is limited by this port's capacity) followed shortly by an internal EIDE drive (presumably bootable). Surprisingly, there is no mention of SCSI or USB variants. Sony merits the high speed medal but its hardware is certainly the most expensive (about \$200 US).

The Imation (www.imation.com) LS120 (also called SuperDisk) uses laser technology to position the drive heads but the data storage is magnetic. Compared to the Zip 100 it has greater capacity (120 MB) and backwards compatibility with the 3.5 inch floppy (read and write but not format).

Unfortunately, this floppy compatibility mode is slow; however, a recently announced upgrade is expected to improve this aspect significantly. (It is unclear if this upgrade would also apply to existing units.) Parallel port and EIDE variants (the latter presumably bootable) will be available.

The Caleb Technology

(www.caleb-bldr.com) UHD144 will offer 144 MB capacity and backward compatibility with the standard floppy. This EIDE/ATAPI device is bootable. Caleb has staked out the low-end: the internal drive is expected to cost only \$80 (US) and the disks are about \$5 US each. To date, this drive has only recently had mention in the media. Although it was scheduled for shipping in the second quarter of this year, PC World noted, in its November 98 issue, that its evaluation model remained pre-production.

Conclusions

- For speed, Sony is fastest, followed by Zip, updated SuperDisk and Caleb. These rankings are commensurate with the rotational speed of the disks (the largest single factor affecting transfer rates) using the same interface.
- For capacity, 250 Zip, Sony, Caleb, SuperDisk, Zip 100: note that the specifications usually refer to unformatted capacities.
- Media cost is expected to be least for the Caleb unit; next would be the Zip 100 and SuperDisk; finally, the Sony and Zip 250 are expected to be at the high end.

- For floppy compatibility, the Zips must be excluded. While all the others are 3.5 inch floppy read/write compatible, the Sony alone has format capability.

- Boot capability: most drives have this ability if the support is present in the system BIOS.

Buyers' considerations

The relative ability to share data among computers is related to market penetration. Since the Sony and Caleb units are not yet in the retail market, they are effectively excluded. To date, the Zip 100 has the largest installed user-base—primarily after-market. The majority of these drives is not installed as a bootable device but simply as an after-market add-on to provide a large capacity replacement for the generic floppy disk. A few OEMs (including, for example, Dell) do offer internal (presumably IDE) installations. This drive, due to its huge installed base, is the most common choice for those who routinely send large data files to service bureaus. Zips are the contemporary replacement for those old service bureau standards: Syquest and Bernoulli.

That the Zip 100 will eclipse is a foregone conclusion since files continue to increase in size. The Zip 250 may broker a respite for Iomega but the "Gig capable" (or larger) magnetic or optical media are the inevitable future.

The Imation has achieved significant OEM support: many large suppliers offer a SuperDrive as standard or as a low-cost

upgrade. Given the head-start of the Zip 100 and (to a lesser extent) the SuperDrive, the newcomers must score significant market presence quickly or risk niche status.

None of these units are cross-compatible: they cannot read media created on any other device—excepting, where applicable, standard floppy disk media. Which one will win? The answer may well be moot: the price point may move rapidly to favour larger capacity drives. As a long-time owner of a Zip I will continue to utilize the media; however, I would have to consider "long and hard" before committing to this route from scratch today.

Any discussion of high-capacity, removable media storage must acknowledge optical media. The prices of CD-Recordable (CD-R) and CD-Rewritable (CD-RW) hardware have dropped significantly. While the hardware remains more expensive (for the moment?) than these "floppy drives" the optical drives quickly recoup the difference in media costs—particularly for heavy users. The cost of CD-R blank media approaches the ridiculous

Continued on next page



Wither Removable Storage? (Continued)

(under \$2 each locally) but offers three to six times the capacity! Rewritable media, while more expensive, has also recently dropped ("name brand" blanks can be found locally for \$15-18). While slower in read and write modes than all the magnetic storage devices, they are useful for archiving or transferring large amounts of data inexpensively.

Consider: CD-R rationalizes the "throw-away" model. Given the cost, if CD-R were to achieve a significant foothold (perhaps only a "toehold?") in service bureaus then—strictly from a practical perspective—retrieving data-containing CD-R media (unlike Zip or Jaz disks) would be passé. On any computer more recent than a 286, a CD-ROM reader is a "given." The availability of a CD-ROM reader, for reading user-created CD-R disks (reading CD-RW disks presently has a few caveats), is more entrenched than the Zip. Examine your needs carefully and purchase accordingly.

If these capacities are too restrictive then consider the current summit: removable media hard drives are increasing their capacity and speed while the prices are falling. Shortly,

2 GB drives will become the norm. Given the market pressures, higher capacity, even faster drives are merely over the horizon. Of course, once DVD matures and standardizes its (re)writable formats much of this essay would become obsolete.

Indeed, from one perspective, the recent flurry of activity in floppy replacement drives almost seems, "too little, too late." Why purchase a "floppy"—for example, Sony's HiFD—with one-tenth the capacity of an Orb but at the same price (for the hardware)? Even the media costs are converging: while Orb media costs twice that of the Sony HiFD the former has ten times the capacity. Conventional floppy drives were, historically, the only boot option if the hard drive were to become disabled. Today, they are joined by this new crop of floppies, the CD-ROM and (some of) the removable media hard drives. Beware: many of these endeavours might be destined to join the ranks—surprisingly quickly—of the eight inch floppy.



Book Review

The BIOS Companion by Phil Croucher

Reviewed by Dunc Petrie

Have you ever wondered about those obscure BIOS settings? Do you know what is: "RAS to CAS Delay?" Do you need to know—probably not? Your user's manual—that enlightened gem of knowledge—helpfully suggests that it is used to set the "RAS to CAS Delay value" (whatever that might be). In many cases, the values set are optimal (Change them at your peril!) but if you must dig deeper then this book (subtitled "the book that doesn't come with your motherboard") has the answer.

This manual provides information at your fingertips about the settings for all the common BIOSes, the beep codes, cpu features, buses, memory and Plug and Play.

In fact, although this book is available as a spiral-bound manual I decided to purchase it on a CD-ROM. The text is held in an Adobe Acrobat (.PDF) file. This format provides excellent value: alone, the conventional book costs \$25 - 30 dollars. On the CD you receive—for essentially the same price:

- this book,
- The Hard Disk Database (settings for over 6200 hard drives plus connector pinouts, guides for expansion cards and peripherals),

- Communications, Networks and Windows (for the reluctant network manager),
- Motherboards (listing jumper settings for hundreds of boards), and
- The PC User's Handbook (subtitled "the book that doesn't come with your PC—for the reluctant computer user").



Granted, there is too much information for the casual user; however, if you need the information this CD-ROM (or the multi-volume book set) makes it readily available.

My only criticism: occasionally the page numbers in the tables of contents do not agree with the actual text.

The BIOS Companion and the other titles in the series are available locally as the book or the CD-ROM compendium. Alternately, send e-mail to michael.kuby@sympatico.ca or books@computerbooksforless.com to determine availability.



OTTAWA PC NEWS

Ottawa PC News is the newsletter of the Ottawa PC Users' Group (OPCUG), and is published monthly except in July. The opinions expressed in this newsletter may not necessarily represent the views of the club or its members. Deadline for submissions is four Saturdays before the general meeting.

Group Meetings

OPCUG normally meets on the first Wednesday in the month, except in July and August, at the National Museum of Science and Technology, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd, Ottawa. Meeting times are 7:30 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Fees

Membership: \$25 per year.

Mailing Address

3 Thatcher St., Nepean, Ontario, K2G 1S6

Telephone answering machine 723-1329

Web address

[Http://opcug.ottawa.com/](http://opcug.ottawa.com/)

Bulletin board—the PUB (BBS)

Up to 33.6 kbps V.34 228-0665

Chairman

Bert Schopf bert@blackbirdpcd.com 232-8427

Treasurer

Willem (Bill) Vandijk bvdijk@igs.net 256-3054

Secretary

David Reeves dreeves@iname.com 723-9658

Membership Chairman

Mark Cayer cayemar@statcan.ca 823-0354

BBS Sysop

Chris Taylor ctaylor@nrcan.gc.ca 723-1329

Newsletter

Duncan Petrie (editor)

gdpetrie@trytel.com 841-6119

(Mr.) Jean Vaumoron (layout)

vaumojav@magi.com 731-7847

(Mr.) Jocelyn Doire (editor and distributor, electronic version)
please contact via PUB:

Jocelyn.Doire@opcug.ottawa.com

Publicity

Chris Seal c_seal@fox.nstn.ca 831-0280

Facilities

Bob Walker skywalk@istar.net 489-2084

Beginners' and Windows SIG coordinator

Duncan Petrie gdpetrie@trytel.com 841-6119

DTP SIG coordinator

Bert Schopf bert@blackbirdpcd.com 232-8427

Fox SIG coordinator

Andrew MacNeill andrew@aksel.com 851-4496

Fox SIG web page: www.aksel.com/foxsig

Internet SIG coordinator

Bob Gowan gowanb@inac.gc.ca

OS/2 SIG coordinator

(Mr.) Jocelyn Doire; please contact via PUB:

Jocelyn.Doire@opcug.ottawa.com

OS/2 web address: <http://os2.ottawa.com>

Paradox SIG coordinator

John Ladds laddsj@statcan.ca 951-4581

Director without portfolio

Terance Mahoney terancep@cyberus.ca ... 225-2630

Club News

Want A SIG?

The club exists to serve the needs of its members. The feature presentations at the general meetings are chosen in part to provide a general view of “what is out there.” For those with more specific interests, there are several Special Interest Groups—more commonly called “SIGs.”

If you feel that your and your friends' interests are neglected, you should actively consider creating a SIG within the OPCUG. Consider its structure, meeting time, location and frequency of get-togethers. Many SIGs meet immediately following the general meeting; however, this is not essential. Can you find resource persons within your membership? The Internet SIG has recently reorganized and has begun a series of self-help tutorials on HTML coding.

The desktop publishing SIG has not been active for some time. If any members are interested in resurrecting it that could make a “New Year's Resolution!” Given the present interest (that is sure to increase with goodies under the tree) in image editing, image cataloguing, digital cameras and scanners, this arena has promise for a SIG that could attract a significant number of club members. This is merely an example.

Does the next SIG need YOU to act as the catalyst?



Club life

Reuse, recycle



Bring your old computer magazines, books, or any other computer paraphernalia you want to GIVE AWAY to the general meetings, and leave them in the area specified. If you don't bring something, you may want to TAKE AWAY something of interest, so look in on this area. Any item left over at the end of the meeting will be sent to the... recycle bin.



To receive the newsletter by e-mail, send the message “subscribe Newslettertxt” or “subscribe NewsletterPDF” (without quotes) to listserve@opcug.ottawa.com.

