

Photo by Teri Reynolds

John Ruele, president of the Bella Vista Computer Club, checks some of his many E-mail messages at a computer in his home office. Ruele moved to Bella Vista from Karney, Mo., and has lived here for 19 years. His family includes a daughter, Gail Ann Warnaca and her husband, Phillip, of Neosho, Mo.; a son, John Richard Ruele II and his wife, Luann, of Portland, Ore., and grandchildren Brian and Leha Ruele.

## ***BV Computer Club tackles technology***



TERI REYNOLDS

Weekly Vista Staff Writer

In this day of high technology and the information super highway, it should come as no surprise that more than 500 people are members of a local computer club.

What might be surprising to some is the fact that 90 percent of those members are Bella Vistans — and most are over the age of 65.

The Bella Vista Computer Club meets at 7 p.m. the third Monday of every month at First United Methodist Church in Bella Vista. John Ruele is president of the club, which started in 1988 with just five members. When he took over as president almost five years ago, Ruele said, there were 40 members.

"The club ended 1998 with 525 members. There are now 550," he said. "I'd have to say we're the largest club of this type in Arkansas."

While the majority of the members come from Bella Vista, there are also

members from Bentonville, Gravette, Rogers and Pineville, Mo.

An average of about 200 members attend the monthly meetings, Ruele said, but the best attendance is normally at the "problem solving" meetings which are held in January and June. At those meetings, members write down questions they have or problems they have encountered, and a panel of experts address the questions.

Answers to the questions are also posted on the club's website ([www.bvcompclub.org](http://www.bvcompclub.org)).

There were too many questions to answer at the January meeting, so the problem solving session will continue at the February meeting, Ruele said.

"There is no such thing as a stupid question," he added. "Grandma and grandpa often get their son's or daughter's old computer.

"At Christmastime we got an influx of members who got computers for Christmas. The club is a way for them to learn."

Lectures at the monthly meetings are an important part of the club's agenda. Another important part of the its teach-

ing method, however, comes in the form of classes that members can sign up for.

Classes are offered in Basic Computer, Windows 95 and Windows 98, among others. Demonstration classes in Basic and Advanced Internet and Quicken are also available.

Special interest groups have also been formed, in order to provide yet another learning tool for members. The club offers an Internet special interest group, as well as a genealogy group. A Web TV group is now being started.

The club had a Macintosh interest group, which eventually branched out into a separate club.

"They have about 75 members," Ruele said. "All Mac users that contact us are referred to the Mac group."

Through the generosity of Gravette High School, computer labs at the high school are available to club teachers for classes that are held after school and evenings. To repay the favor, the Computer Club recently donated a color printer and 15-inch monitor to

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Courtesy photo

Earl Cummings, left, presented a 15-inch CTX monitor and HP laser printer to Harry Almond, computer instructor at Gravette High School. The donation was made on behalf of the Bella Vista Computer Club in appreciation for the support GHS has given the club and its members by making its facilities available after hours for instruction.

the school.

Although the club appreciates the opportunity to make use of the school labs, Ruehle said that eventually they will have to make other arrangements.

"We have to find someplace else or build our own labs," he said. "This is a project we have for 1999.

"Gravette is a 20-minute drive and people don't like to drive it at night. I'm expecting, by the year 2000, to have about 700 members."

Ruehle got his start in computers following 30 years in the U.S. Air Force. When he left the service he obtained a business degree and started a consulting firm. A new com-

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puter company hired him as a consultant, then rehired him as manager.

The "new computer" that he used at that time was quite different from the equipment he uses now.

"The keyboard and monitor were one piece and used 5-1/4" disks. It had 250k random access memory, and cost \$10,000," he said. "The printer, which was about the size of a desk, cost about \$5,000."

While manufacturers push new products, warning about old computers becoming obsolete, Ruehle said that a user should not be intimidated, particularly if their computer does what they want it to do.

"A problem today is keeping your computer current," he admitted, "but if you have an old computer and you're comfortable with it, keep it. Buy a new one if you feel you must."

Ruehle obviously has no fear of the new technology available. Through the club, he has recently acquired a phone tree program which is attached to one of the

machines in his office. The phone tree is programmed with the names and telephone numbers of all the club members. Ruehle records a telephone message to remind members of upcoming meetings or special announcements, then sets the program in motion.

The machine calls every telephone number. As soon as the phone being called is picked up, the recorded message starts. It is designed to wait for the beep on answering machines, and does not start its message until the beep sounds.

If an answer is not received at the phone being called, the name is sent to the end of the electronic list. The phone tree will continue to try the number until it is successful.

"With more than 500 people in the club now, it got to be too much for the telephone committee," Ruehle said. "I can even ask a question and request a pound sign (#) for yes or the star (\*) for no, and the machine will take a survey for me."

A new program called Dragonspeak is one that

Ruehle hopes to make use of soon — for a very special reason.

"With it, you talk to the computer and give it commands, just like on 'Star Trek,'" Ruehle said.

"I was asked by (club founder) Jerry Gaa to set up a program to teach the blind. There are five in the class — three are legally blind and two are totally blind. We can use the lab at the Jones Center, but the computers won't accept the Dragonspeak program."

The best advice Ruehle gives to those who are fearful of computers is to just jump in and get their feet wet.

"Most everyone at retirement age is afraid of computers, but if they can learn to work a TV and VCR, they can work a computer," he said.

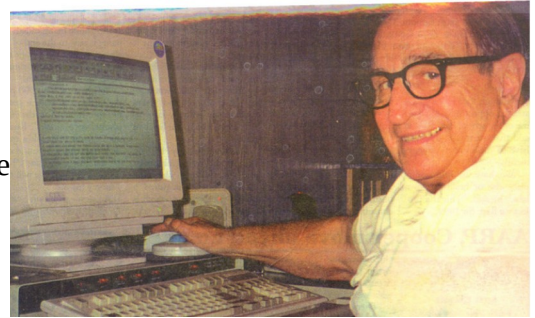
"The computer is a tremendous tool to accomplish a great deal of interesting things. The Internet makes it worldwide. It's not as difficult as people think."

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## HISTORY: BVCC IN 1999

By Joel Ewing  
Bits & Bytes, August 2023  
President (at) bvcomputerclub.org

An old article about BVCC recently came to our attention. This article, based on an interview with John Ruehle, appeared in the Weekly Vista, February 10, 1999, and was scanned and added to our archives in July 2023 from a laminated copy of the article borrowed from Gail Ann Ruehle Slinkard, daughter of John Ruehle and a resident of Bella Vista.



John Ruehle (1920-2005) was heavily involved with BVCC during its formative years and served as BVCC President for six years from September 1994 thru August 2000.

This article quotes John Ruehle about BVCC's creation in 1988. The historical records currently retained by BVCC only go back to 1995, when BVCC became more formally organized as an Arkansas non-profit corporation and an IRS 501(c)(3) organization. When asked for the origin date of BVCC we usually give the 1995 origin date of the corporation, as we lack documentation on BVCC's earlier years.

According to this article, in 1999 classes were conducted by BVCC in a computer lab at the Gravette High School after school hours, with General Meetings at the First United Methodist Church of Bella Vista.

Based on a pictures we have of John Ruehle standing in front of a "John Ruehle Center" and Board Minutes from 2000, in November 2000 BVCC established a Training Center at 1493 Forest Hills Blvd and named it after John. From the physical resemblance with the building in the picture, the building that Google Street View shows as "1485 Forest Hills Blvd" is a closer match, but the building Google shows for "1493" is clearly marked by a "1493" sign. That suggests either addresses on this part of Forest Hills have been renumbered since 1999 or the building appearance of "1493" has been altered.



The exterior sign used at that training center ("Bella Vista Computer Club, John Ruehle Center") was preserved and was moved inside our Training Center after the Training Center was moved to Highlands Crossing Center in 2004. General Meetings continued to be held in Becker Hall of the First United Methodist Church until November 2007, at which time General Meetings were moved to a Community Room at the Highlands Crossing Center. Then in December 2016 our General Meetings moved to our

present location in Room 1001 of Highlands Crossing Center, when Village House expanded into the old Community Room.

In 2023 it is hard to imagine a BVCC with the 1999 membership of 500 - 600 members and 200 members at a general meeting, but times were different then. In 1999, those people who did have Internet access were mostly using very slow dial-up access over telephone lines, at best 56Kbps (that's 0.056 Mbps), or even half that speed if you had an ISP that didn't yet support the latest \$200 dial-up modems introduced in 1998. Google was in its infancy. There was much less useful information or tutorials about computer-related topics available on the Internet, and what was there was harder to find. Access was too slow to support tutorial videos, or even large images.

Computer clubs played a much more essential role back then, not only in education and training, but in sharing information and software downloads and other items of interest via CDs that would have been difficult for everyone individually to find or download. Much had changed by 2006-2007, and BVCC membership was substantially reduced by more than half, to around 231. Our Training Center, providing Help Clinics and classes, have managed to keep BVCC relevant when other computer clubs with only monthly meetings have died.