

Bits and Bytes

Arkansas' Premier Computer Club

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How much do you know about your computer? There are a lot of folks using a computer who don't know much about their computer, while other don't want to know anything about their computer. All they want to do is send and receive e-mail. They don't know what operating system they have, what processor is in the computer or how fast it's running, how much Random Access Memory (RAM) they have, the size of the hard drive and how much free space is available, how to customize the computer to make it work the way they would like for it to work, what programs they should have installed on the computer, and worst of all, how to maintain the computer to keep in good running condition. Imagine for a moment what it would be like if these folks had the same attitude toward their car. "All I want to do is drive the car, I don't want to know anything about it." Well, after driving the car for a couple of weeks it would quit running. Since they don't know anything about the car they have it towed to the repair shop. After checking the car, the auto mechanic informs them that the car won't run because it's out of gas. Now the questions begin. What is gas? Where do I get gas? How much gas will I need? Do I have to pay for gas or can I get some for free? What do I do with the gas after I get it? Will I have to get more gas later and if so, how can I tell when I need more gas? Just a little knowledge would have saved a lot of expense and embarrassment. The same is true for your computer. A little knowledge can save you a lot of frustration, wasted time, and expense.

Where do you find information about your computer? Start by holding down the Windows key and tapping the Pause/Break key. If you're using a notebook and Windows + Pause/Break doesn't work, hold down the Windows and the Function keys and tap the Pause/Break key. Now you can see the operating system you're using (hopefully Windows 2000, XP, or Vista as these are the only operating systems that Microsoft supports). Also shown is the latest Service Pack that has been installed, the registered owner (XP), the processor (Intel or AMD), the speed of the processor, and the amount of RAM. To check the hard drive, double-click the My Computer (XP) or Computer (Vista) icon on the desktop. Right-click the C: drive and select Properties. Here you can see how much of the hard drive contains data (Used space:) and the amount of free space. The computer needs a small amount of free space to operate normally. If your hard drive is approaching full you should uninstall programs you no longer use and/or delete information you have stored on the hard drive that you no longer need. A couple of

alternatives would be to install a larger hard drive or a second hard drive. Never place a check mark in the check box to the left of, Compress this drive to save disk space. You need to know what programs and add-ons you should have on the computer. It's even more important that you know something about these programs so you can make sure they're configured properly. For example, your antivirus program should update every time you start your computer and be set to use heuristics. You need to immunize Spybot - Search and Destroy after updating the data base. If you have multiple programs that actively monitor what the computer is doing, you need to disable that feature in all but one of the programs. As a minimum you should have: one antivirus program, the operating system firewall turned on (XP and Vista), multiple spyware detection and removal programs, Adobe Acrobat Reader, Adobe Flash Player, and Sun Java. All of these programs and add-ons are free, so there's no excuse.

Over time useless information builds up on your computer. If not removed it can slow down your computer and could cause computer or program malfunctions. You need to know how to remove the "stuff" and keep your computer in good running order.

If your computer is running slower than it used to, do your home maintenance and get rid of the "stuff". If it still runs slower than it used to, then you probably have too many things starting when you start your computer. Or, if you're not running spyware detection and removal programs, you might have a serious spyware/adware/malware infection. If it has always run slower than you thought it should, then you probably could use more memory. Adding more memory to a computer is the easiest and least expensive ways to increase performance. It's a do-it-yourself project for the adventurous.

At the August membership meeting you will be voting on who you want to be the Club's next President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and one of the three Board members. Officers serve for one year and Board members serve for two years. If you or someone you know would be interested in running for one of these positions, call Dick Clark at 855-1968.

The August Getting Started With Computers class will use the Windows Vista computers. The computers used for a class from that point on will alternate between the Windows XP computers and the Windows Vista computers. To find out which computers will be used for a particular class, go to the Club's web site and check the monthly calendar.

Having a problem with your computer? Having a problem doing something on the computer? Stop by one of the Open House Help Clinics we have at the John Ruehle Center and see if we can solve your problem. These clinics are from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the first Saturday and the third Wednesday of the month. The clinics are open to the public so you can invite a friend or neighbor. There has been a significant increase in the number of people taking advantage of this service. If everyone arrives during the first hour there will probably be a wait.