



## About PPCUG

### General Meetings

Second Monday of the month at the Lawrenceville Library.  
Route 1 and Darrah Lane.

7:00-7:45 PM: Social Time / Tech Corner

7:45 PM: Meeting Comes to Order

8 PM: Featured Presentation

For information about upcoming meetings or joining PPCUG call 908-218-0778 to leave a message.

### Board Meetings

For Meeting Location, Date and Time, call 908-218-0778

Board meetings are open to All.

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Vic Laurie ..... 609-924-1220

Kim Goldenberg ..... 609-671-9188

Sol Libes ..... 609-520-9024

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Hospitality:

Bill Hawryluk ..... 609-655-0923

Member Records:

Paul Kurivchack ..... 908-218-0778

Newsletter Editor:

Paul Kurivchack ..... 908-218-0778

Program Coordinator:

Sol Libes ..... 609-520-9024

Web Master:

Jon Abolins ..... 609-883-8126

### Web Site

<http://www.ppcug-nj.org>

### Annual Dues Rates

Normal dues rate is \$30 per year.

New Members Only: after February, the rate is \$2.50 per month times the number of months remaining in the year.

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## Coming Events

### March 11, 2002 - Add a Second Hard Drive to your System!

Paul Kurivchack will demonstrate how easy it is to install that second drive you desperately need.

### April 8, 2002 - Windows XP

Alan Goldberg of Princeton University will speak about Windows XP, a different perspective.

### May 4 & 5, 2002 - Trenton Computer Festival 2002

Help out at the PPCUG Parcel Pickup Area and See the show.

### May 13, 2002 - Surge Elimimators - Zero Surge, Inc.

Rudy Harford and Peter Oesterwinter will present the latest in surge suppressors including a live demo with a 6000V surge generator. See the sparks fly!

### June 10, 2002 - Upgrading to Windows XP

Vic Laurie & Paul Kurivchack will cover the ins and outs of upgrading to this OS.



## Presidents Message

by Paul Kurivchack

What can I say about January's meeting other than "wow"! With the help of Sol Libes and the publicity he did, we had over sixty members and guests in attendance to hear Cass Lewart's excellent Palm Pilot presentation. Cass taught many of us that night that there is truly more to the Palm Pilot than contacts and calendar. I knew about the GPS and some other add on's but not aware of the many other things that can be done with the Palm. I was truly impressed along with many in attendance with the Palm emulator application. Running this application on your PC allows for testing Palm apps on your PC before loading them onto your Palm or for demonstrating them to a group like ours without the need of a video. In fact I was wondering how Cass was going to show the small Palm screen to the group and was pleasantly surprised that Cass did not even need the Palm Pilot. The emulator software running on his laptop took care of that. Maybe with all the interest in palm top devices we can find another speaker to do a presentation on the Pocket PC. (As a side note, I have been playing with a Windows CE2.0 Cassiopeia (old model) for the past couple of weeks and now know why Palm beat up on the early CE devices so badly.)

I wonder if any of our members miss the "Time To Renew" blurbs in past years newsletters. Well that hopefully will be a thing of the past. The mailing of the renewal form is an outstanding success. Last year we had a total of seventy-eight registered members. To date sixty members have renewed. This is the best we have had in many years. As we still have a handful of holdouts, a second mailing will go out to the remaining members with only the February meeting announcement (no newsletters sent after January) to try and get them to renew. If you know anyone who has not renewed, please ask him or her to continue with our group. 2002 is shaping up to be an exciting year.

Coming up this month is the presentation by Matt McCann of the user group support from Intuit. I have seen Matt present in the past and all I can say is, you have to be here on the 11<sup>th</sup> to see him in action. He not only knows the ins and outs of Quicken, but he is very entertaining and funny. It should be a truly fun night. Also, if you haven't purchased the new version of Quicken Deluxe yet, don't. Matt is going to have a great user group price for us that night. So bring some cash, checkbook or credit card so you can take Quicken home with you that night.

I look forward to seeing you all on the 11<sup>th</sup>. PS: bring a friend with you. Let's repeat the sixty plus attendance again.

# Windows Tips: The Power of the Right-Click (III)

By: Vic Laurie - PPCUG

In this article we will continue our exploration of the many facets of the right-click that we began in <http://pages.zdnet.com/hampsi/Articles/right.htm> and <http://pages.zdnet.com/hampsi/Articles/right2.htm>. Here we will look at the bounty of information and actions in the properties sheet.

## The Properties Sheet

Right-clicking almost any object will bring up a context menu with an entry "Properties" at the bottom. Not only files and folders but also many special objects such as the Desktop itself, the Internet Explorer desktop icon, My Computer, Network Neighborhood, and the Taskbar have context menus with a Properties entry. Clicking (right or left) on that entry will produce a window or box containing details about the object and also sometimes certain possible actions for the object. The exact nature of the contents of the property sheet varies with the object. For example, Figure 1 shows the sheet for a text file and Figure 2 shows the sheet for a Word document.

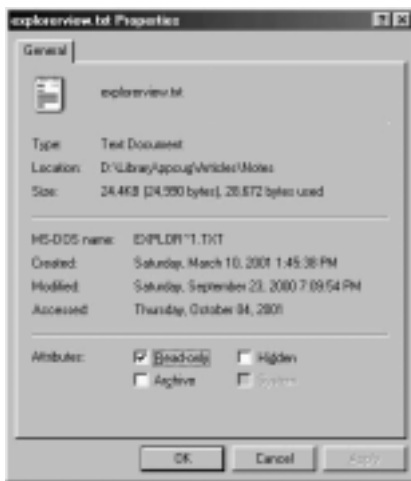


Figure 1. Properties sheet for text file

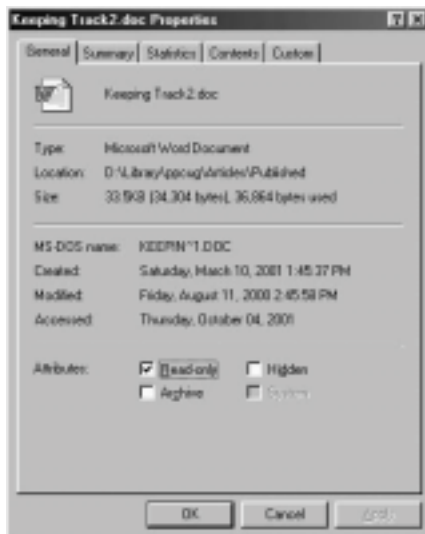


Figure 2. Properties sheet for Word document

Both contain vital statistics like attributes, size, and date modified. The Word sheet also has extra tabs whose function is specific to Word and is beyond our scope here. Other varieties of files can also have tabs specific to their types. An important type is DLL files and an example of its property sheet is shown in Figure 3

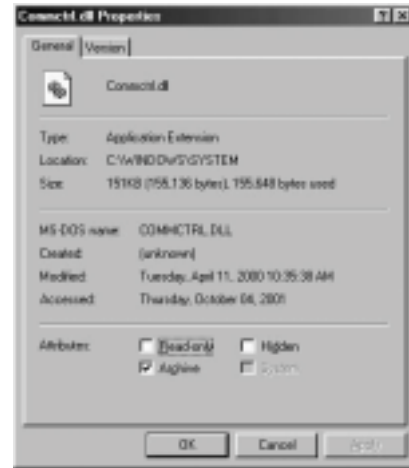


Figure 3. Properties sheet for a DLL file

As anyone who has struggled with the problems caused by the many different versions of the same DLL file will know, the version number can be critical information. The problem of DLL versions constitutes a topic in itself so here we will limit ourselves to pointing out the tab "Version".



Objects other than files also have properties sheets. For example, the properties sheet for the Taskbar is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Properties sheet for Taskbar

In addition to settings for the Taskbar, customizing of the Start  
Windows Tips continued on page 6

# Microsoft Train Simulator

## Software Review

By: Paul Kurivchack - PPCUG

As someone who rides a commuter train daily into Manhattan, the operation of the train always intrigue me. I have wanted to ride up in front with the engineer not only for the view of the tracks ahead but the technique of the operation. Like operating an automobile, a train takes a lot of finesse to provide a smooth and comfortable ride. Some days the engineer does a good job and others, well what can I say, just try not to sleep!

Microsoft's Train Simulator comes pretty close to the experience of operating a real locomotive without the bumps and jolts of a real train. Nor do you have to worry about steering like in an auto simulator or keeping the plane in the air like Flight Sim's. You just sit back, pay attention to the signals and truck merrily along down the tracks, hopefully. I say hopefully since Train Simulator may seem like an easy simulator to operate, keeping to the schedule, avoiding oncoming trains and just getting it to stop at the correct location in a station is a lot harder than you think.

Train Simulator comes on two CD's and takes up to 379 MB of space. Not bad considering many Sim's take up over 600 MB so Train Sim is relatively small. It will run on a Pentium II 266 MHz / 32 MB RAM but prefers a faster machine such as a Pentium II / III 350 MHz and up. I am running Train Sim on a PIII 450 MHz with 256 MB RAM with a Diamond Stealth III with 16 MB Video RAM (This is where a 32 or 64 MB Video RAM Gamers 3D Video Card will really shine at 1024 x 768 resolution). But without all the high-end gamers hardware, Train Sim played just fine. Read or print out the PDF Engineers Handbook for details in tuning your system for optimum performance.

### Getting Started

Launch Train Sim and you are offered to take an Introductory Ride, learn to operate the locomotives Tutorials or just go off and Drive a Train. At this point is useful to print out the 91 page Engineers Handbook that provides train operation basics, the routes and terminology needed to operate the simulator.

I started off running the locomotive tutorials just to get a basic understanding of the proper operation of the various locomotives. The Electrics and Diesels seemed to be the easiest with the Steam Engines requiring more education. All the tutorials were very good in explaining the operation of the major controls and proper use in controlling the train. Follow up with reading the Engineers Handbook to fill in any gaps and rein-

force the train operations. After running through the lesson, I was ready to operate my train. My only complaint with the tutorials and it may just be my system, is that the narration portion was drowned out by the background operation sounds. Turning up the volume helped somewhat but it was annoying.

### The Locomotives

There are three major types of locomotives in Train Sim. Electric (Northeast Corridor – Pantograph), Diesel-Electric and of course the Steam Engine. Within each type of locomotive are two different models of engines, each with its own type of controls. The Amtrak Acela Electrics are the most modern engines in the fleet with digital displays and easy to operate controls. I still am unable to stop the trains properly in a station for the passengers to get off, but who cares, they don't need to get off the train when I'm running it. I found the GE Dash 9 diesel-electric to be quite interesting to operate, as is the GP38-2 when working in the train yard. I have not tested the Japanese locomotives but would assume that they have the same level of detail as the North American locomotives. I just started working with the Steam Engines and was able to get it to move forward but not much more. The Steam Engines seem to have a higher level of experience needed to fully master all the operations required. Practice makes perfect so I have to keep at it.

Attention to detail of the operator cab is very good. Look out ahead onto the tracks, view the controls in front of you, and



look out the side windows to view the passing countryside. The level of realism is only limited by your video card and size of the monitor. At 800 x 600 the view is quite acceptable. Higher resolution provides a higher level of detail but could impact performance. All operations are handled via the keyboard from increasing the speed to braking, adding coal to the fire in the steam engine. A very easy to use keyboard shortcut table is include and in the event you lose it, you can print another one from the PDF manuals included on the CD.

### The Routes and Activities

There are quite a variety of routes to pick from. My favorite so far is the Northeast Corridor from Philly to DC running the

Train Simulator continued on page 6

# Things to consider when purchasing a Digital Camera

By: Jim Topper - Another Baltimore Computer Users Group

Since we are entering the holiday season with gift giving on our minds, I thought it would be a good idea to write about some of the things to consider when purchasing a digital camera. This is a list of items to consider when planning to purchase a Digital Camera. This is not an all-inclusive list. It does contain the features and other considerations I believe should be high on one's list of considerations before making a purchase.

## Image size, "mega pixels", 2,3, 4, or 5

The higher the number of mega pixels, the larger the image file will be. This will allow you to print the images at a higher ppi (pixels per inch) resolution. Generally speaking even a 2-mega pixel digital camera should be able to print an 8x10 picture with decent detail. 3, 4 or more mega pixel cameras will allow you to print larger images if you wish or give you even more detail at smaller picture sizes, i.e. 4x6, 5x7, or 8x10. Zoom lens type and "reach", i.e. 3x, 4x, 10x... you get the idea. Digital cameras have two types of zoom lenses, digital zoom and optical lens zoom. It is best to buy a digital camera with an optical zoom lens. Almost all digicams have digital zoom in addition. However a digital zoom degrades the image quality since it interpolates the image information for the zoom effect. It is best to NOT use digital zoom unless you cannot get a picture any other way. For optical zoom, I'd recommend at least a 3x zoom, a higher zoom ratio lens if you can afford it.

## Type of storage medium

There are 3 types of storage medium currently that are widely used in digital cameras. These are: Compact Flash cards, Smart Media cards, and Memory Stick cards. All types can be had in sizes up to 128 MB, with Compact Flash cards available at much larger sizes. My picks for storage media would be either Compact Flash cards or Memory Stick cards, which are used, in most current Sony digicams. The Smart Media cards are somewhat thinner and more flexible and are more prone to damage during handling if one is not careful. Also look for a digital camera that has a USB interface for downloading pictures from the camera. Some cheaper or older models still use serial port connections and they are very slow downloading images compared to USB. Finally most digital cameras ship with rather small memory cards included. You will want to purchase additional card(s) of at least 64 Meg size, as your finances allow, for extended periods of picture taking.

## Type of batteries it uses

Digital cameras can use several types of batteries for power. Some models use proprietary batteries, which tend to be expensive. Other digital cameras will use AA size batteries. Be warned, the only type of AA batteries to use in a digital camera are NiMH (nickel metal hydride) batteries, which are rechargeable. Other types will not last in a digicam, such as alkaline batteries. Sony in particular uses its own batteries which are expensive

but have a great feature included, circuitry that will tell you how much time is left in battery power before it needs to be recharged. In any case, you will want at least 2 batteries or 2 sets if using AA type batteries. Most digicams only will ship with one, so you will want to purchase a second one, or set.

## Optical viewfinder or LCD only

Some digital cameras have both types; others only use a LCD screen located on the back of the camera body. For bright sunlight picture taking you will want to consider buying a digicam with both types, since almost all LCD screens are unusable in direct sunlight. However you can purchase a separate LCD shade which would help if the digicam you get only has a LCD screen.

## Size / Weight and how it feels in your hand

Two of the more important considerations are the above. You will want to buy a digicam that feels good in your hands and has controls that are easy to reach and use. Weight is important too since you may be carrying the camera around for several hours at a time. Most newer digital cameras weigh less than 1 pound and have a neck strap for carrying when not using the camera. I'd be leery of a digicam that only has a wrist strap, since wrist straps make carrying the camera more difficult over a longer period of time.

## Filters

Some digital cameras have screw threads on the lens body for adding filters. If the digital camera you purchase has this feature, be sure to buy a "skylight" or "UV" filter for the camera. This will protect the lens from dirt, fingerprints and scratches. It is much easier to clean or replace a lens filter than the camera's lens!

## Flash

Almost all digital cameras have a built-in flash. A nice feature to look for is one that has a "red eye" reduction feature. A few of the higher end digicams also have provisions for adding an external flash on a "hot shoe" bracket, or have a jack to plug in an external flash unit. For general picture taking, the internal flash will be OK. However you should know that almost all internal flash units have a range of +/- 10 feet. Digital cameras that can add an external flash unit will double or even triple that distance for a high power flash unit.

Jim Topper is the Newsletter Editor for Another Baltimore Computer Users Group and may be contacted by email: [jimt@cablespeed.com](mailto:jimt@cablespeed.com)

This article is brought to you by the Editorial Committee of the Association of Personal Computer User Groups (APCUG), an International organization to which this user group belongs.

Menu can be done here by clicking the “Advanced” tab. Interestingly, I find that many people are unaware that the Start Menu is very easy to edit and that the Programs menu is only shortcuts and not actual program files. The contents of the Start Menu are actually determined by shortcuts contained in the folder `\Windows\Start Menu\` which in turn contains a subfolder **Programs**. The items in the Programs folder can be customized directly in Windows Explorer or by way of the Taskbar properties sheet. If desired, additional subfolders can be created by the computer user and program shortcuts can be grouped in categories according to an individual user’s preferences.

Right-clicking on an empty spot on the Desktop will bring up a context menu whose Properties Sheet is the same window that is obtained by opening “Display” in Control Panel. In fact, the properties sheet for several standard desktop objects corresponds to an applet from Control Panel (but not for those objects that are shortcuts, as is discussed below.) The sheet for the *Internet Explorer* desktop object is the same as **Control Panel | Internet Options**, for *Network Neighborhood* the same as **Control Panel | Network**, and for *My Computer* the same as **Control Panel | System**.

Shortcuts have their own type of properties sheet as shown in Figure 5. The “Target” line allows you to see the actual file being referenced and the “Find Target” button lets you go that file



if you wish. The “Change Icon” button can be used to pick a different icon for the shortcut if you prefer.

Figure 5. Properties sheet for a shortcut

All in all, the various types of properties sheet provide a wide assortment of information and actions. Taking advantage of these resources and methods can make using the computer faster and easier.

Acela Electric’s. Plus the Northeast Corridor trains can run really fast. Then there is the Marias Pass in Montana which is a fairly difficult run using diesel-electric locomotives, two Japanese lines and lastly two 1920’s era steam runs in Northwest England and Austria. Within each route are additional activities from making up a freight train in the yard to full extensions and much more in between. This makes Train Sim a multi dimensional simulator where different locomotives can be used, time of day and weather conditions within one activity. I have operated trains in snow, rain and at night, which increases the challenge. Another thing I found very interesting is that Microsoft provides the average time to complete an activity so you can pick relatively short activities that are easy to perform to very difficult ones that could take an hour or more to complete. Also all activities can be save so you can continue later.

## Operations

While just playing around in Train Sim can be fun, the real test is in operating the train to a fixed schedule, obeying the signals and operating rules and completing the run. The Engineers Handbook covers all aspects of proper train operation from when to sound the horn and bell, to switching tracks to coupling and uncoupling cars. Using the different view windows allow you to see what you are doing at all times. Want to couple up to a boxcar. No problem. Train Sim provides a view of the couplers coming together along with a superimposed side view of the cars as they come together. Make sure you don’t come in too fast so you don’t damage the couplers or worst, knock the car off the tracks (you then start Train Sim over). Learn what the signals mean, how to prevent accidents at grade crossings and avoid the wandering cow on the tracks.

Once you start an activity, there is the activity briefing. It covers the timetable; any special work orders are given (drop off passengers or pickup cars) and at the end of the activity, the evaluation (how well you did or did not do). While Train Sim is not intended to be a guide to operating a real train, it probably comes very close to what model railroaders do with their elaborate sets running multiple trains. Microsoft all you need on your computer screen. One thing they should do in future releases is multi-screen support so you have a engineers view with another outside view.

## Conclusion

While it may lack the excitement of a shoot-m-up game, Train Simulator is one very interesting and addictive game for the PC. So if you just want to while away the time watching the countryside go by or the mental challenge of putting together a freight train, Train Simulator is the game for you. I have enjoyed the hours I have played the simulator and I know you will to.

For additional information visit: <http://microsoft.com/games/trainsim>.



# PRINCETON PC USERS GROUP

<http://www.ppcug-nj.org>

## PPCUG Member E-mail Directory

Name Last	First	E-Mail Address	Name Last	First	E-Mail Address
Abolins	John D.	jda-ir@njcc.com	Kurivchack	Paul	kurivchp@optonline.net
Adler	Seymour	syadler@aol.com	Landis	Houston E.	judge@alumni.princeton.edu
Arrowsmith	Donald L.	donaldarrowsmith@yahoo.com	Laurie	Vic	hampsi@yahoo.com
Axelrod	Albert	aaxelrod@erols.com	Lazar	Joseph	joelazar@nerc.com
Best	John J.	jjbest57@alum.mit.edu	Lewis	Lloyd N.	Budnorth@juno.com
Bolge	Eleanor	embolge@jersey.net	Libes	Sol	sol@libes.com
Briggs	George R.	grolbriggs@aol.com	Markward	Margaret	mteragram@aol.com
Canavan	Thomas	tcanavan1@aol.com	Metzler	Joseph	76116.3117@compuserve.com
Caris	Paul D.	pd_caris@csi.com	Middleton	Frank	ftmprob@nerc.com
Carman	Thomas	tom_carman@compuserve.com	Miller	Douglas E.	D.N.Miller@worldnet.att.net
Chilton	Neal W.	chilforce@aol.com	Mintz	Herman	hmintz4@aol.com
Cohen	Jon	jon@njcc.com	Montani	Linda	l.montani@worldnet.att.net
Colucci	Frank E.	DasWeb1@aol.com	Mooney	William P.	wmo8350722@aol.com
Crossley	Helen M.	CrossleyHM@aol.com	Mosho	Martin	martinmosho@att.net
Davis	Perry J.	perrydavis@compuserve.com	Oldenburg	Thomas A.	oldenburg-ta@worldnet.att.net
Dinkins-Belton	Joyce	Joyce8NJ@aol.com	Olson	Gaylord	go@electrim.com
Dodge	William B.	b-mdodge@juno.com	Papier, Jr.	Philip B.	papierp@bellatlantic.net
Duggins	Marsha	msd@gfol.noaa.gov	Phadke	Laxman G.	lgphadke@home.com
Edge, Jr.	Lewis A.	lewis@edgeassoc.com	Pitcher	Barbara	bpitcher@ets.org
Einthoven	Bella	einthoven@mail.eclipse.net	Rothstein	Rick	rich_web@email.com
Foulkes	Frank	ffoulkes1@aol.com	Shinkfield	David	d.shinkfield@worldnet.att.net
Gibson	Dawson H.	gibbygib@worldnet.att.net	Sked	Bill	billsked@aol.com
Goldenberg	Kim	kim	Stegman	Robert	stegmann@optonline.net
Gunther	Bruce W.	bg1509@hotmail.com	Stockwell	Hunt	hunt.stockwell@cornell.edu
Hansen	George	gphansen5@yahoo.com	Suber	Michael J.	mpsuber@juno.com
Hardy	Wayne	wayne99@att.net	Tayyabkhan	Mike	tayyabkhan@aol.com
Hawryluk	Bill	hawr@compuserve.com	Walker	Clarke	Clarke_Walker@compuserve.com
Henry	Chuck	chenry@eclipse.net	Tenner	Edward	tenner@clarity.princeton.edu
Holly	Lois	lois@audet.com	Walthall	Ronald K.	ronwalthall@prodigy.net
Johnson	Florence	kredit@erols.com	Weinberg	Robert	bweinb@att.net
Juelch	H. Karl	karljnj@nerc.com	Weiss III	Edward A.	eweiss@nerc.com
Kerlake	David	AcuraOwner@aol.com	Williams	Ken	krw1948@worldnet.att.net
Ketchel	Joseph	buddyjoe227@aol.com	Willis	Robert S.	rsw9999@cs.com
Keinerman	Irma	rafiki@iopener.net	Willis	Lloyd	llwillis1@prodigy.net
Kleinerman	Milton	kukumafi@Juno.com	White	Jonathan A.	jawhite@yes-llc.com
Konvalinka	John W.	jkonvalinka@msn.com	Shah	Sonal	sonals@microsoft.com
Koosman	Milton	miltonk2@aol.com	Stroiney	John	johnstro@microsoft.com
Krisak	Bill	BobKrisak@worldnet.att.net			

(Last Update: February 3, 2002)

Send Updates to [kurivchp@optonline.net](mailto:kurivchp@optonline.net) for inclusion in this listing.



## Important!

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### Consultants Corner

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#### Consultants Corner

You can advertise your consulting business for \$25 per year in addition to your normal membership fee.

# Minutes for the General Meeting

January 14, 2002

By: Don Arrowsmith

Questions taken from the attendees included topics such as reconnecting to Optimum Online after having to reinstall Windows, inability to shutdown Windows 98, curing a Dell P4 running WinMe from being unable to see a modem and USB ports, using GoBack alongside Norton SystemWorks on a Gateway, among others.

At 8:05 Cass Lewart was introduced to begin his presentation on the Palm PDA. He is a user from Monmouth County, not associated with Palm. Covered were hardware and basic software, 3<sup>rd</sup> party software, Internet access, games, graphics, office utilities, printing, GPS, book readers. A Palm emulator that executes on a PC was demonstrated running several PDA programs. Cass offered to make his 27 slide Power Point presentation available by emailing him at [rlewart@monmouth.com](mailto:rlewart@monmouth.com).

Following his talk, Cass's wife, Ruth, displayed a CD that the Brookdale Computer Club is producing and making available to their members. The CD contains a photo directory of the membership, a listing of email addresses, a listing by city for car pooling and a description of club activities. All files are in PDF format and Adobe's Acrobat Reader program is included. The CD was described with the thought that PPCUG might wish to do something similar.



Princeton PC Users Group  
P.O. Box 291  
Rocky Hill, NJ 08553