

Technology Corner 25
By: George Champine

Update on Over-the-air TV reception

In the last Technology Corner, I mentioned that the estimated cost of a converter for over-the-air digital TV programs was about \$200. Reader Bob Freedman has brought to my attention that because of newer technology, the estimated cost now is \$50 to \$70. There is also the possibility of a rebate from the federal government that would reduce the cost to \$10 to \$30.

Internet Listing of TV Programs

Who doesn't get frustrated waiting for the cable TV program listing to scroll by at a snail's pace. For those of you who get cable TV from Comcast, there is a better way. Go to: <http://tvplanner.comcast.net> . It instantly shows three hours for 12 channels on each screen, and you can customize the screens to show the channels you like best on the first screen.

Advances in wireless technology

Wireless technology (WiFi) continues to make significant progress. Wireless is a natural companion to laptops, as the wireless capability lets you sit anywhere and use the laptop. For exactly this reason the laptop is becoming more popular because of the mobility. If you travel, you can take the wireless-enabled laptop with you and make use of the large number of wireless Internet access points supported at public libraries, Starbucks, McDonalds, Internet cafes, and elsewhere.

The wireless standard that has been most popular and most affordable is the 802.11B (also called "wireless B") technology. This has a data rate of about four million bits per second and a range of about 100 feet. Recently, the 802.11G (wireless G) has become available at a somewhat higher price. The data rate is about 20 million bits per second and the same 100 foot range. Within a few months we expect that the 802.11N (wireless N) standard will be finalized and standardized and products will be on the market. The price is higher yet, but the data rate will be about 75 million bits per second and it will have a range of 250 feet. The standards are all compatible and interoperable.

To set up a wireless system at your residence, you need to purchase a wireless router. The leading vendor is Linksys, but there are many other excellent vendors such as Netgear and TrendNet. The router plugs into the cable or DSL modem. The PC must also have wireless capability, either built-in or with an add-in card.

Advances in laptop technology

Flash memory devices have been available for several years, initially as media chips for digital cameras, and now as USB memory devices. A one gigabyte USB flash memory device that cost \$70 one year ago now costs about \$10. This technology is now starting to be put into desktop and laptop computers. The result is a reduction in size, weight, power consumption, and boot times. There is a cost premium so far. Most new laptops come with two-level DVD burners which have twice the capacity (nine gigabytes) as the

one level. As with all new computers, laptops use the new Vista operating system which is somewhat better than XP and has media center functions as standard. I suggest that you get the "Home Premium" version of Vista, not "Home Basic". If you buy the laptop from a local store such as Best Buy or Circuit City they may try to sell you many add-ons and extended maintenance. You probably do not need any of them and I suggest that you resist buying them.

Late this year, wireless USB connections should be available. That means printers and other USB devices can be places up to 90 feet away.

Bluetooth

Bluetooth is another wireless technology that is becoming popular. It was named after a late tenth century king, Harald Bluetooth, king of Denmark and Norway. He is known for his unification of previously warring tribes from Denmark (including Sweden where the Bluetooth technology was invented), and Norway. Bluetooth likewise was intended to unify different technologies, such as computers and mobile phones.

Bluetooth is a short-range wireless technology intended to replace the cables connecting portable and/or fixed devices while maintaining high levels of security. Bluetooth provides a wireless way to connect and exchange information between devices such as: hands-free head sets, cell phones, laptops, printers, digital cameras, keyboards, mice, computers, and video game consoles. Each Bluetooth device can simultaneously communicate with up to seven other devices.

A device must have a Bluetooth dongle in order to be able to communicate with other Bluetooth devices (such as cell phones, mice, and keyboards). A dongle is a device that is able to transmit and receive Bluetooth signals. While head-sets, some laptop computers and fewer desktop computers already contain an internal Bluetooth dongle, most computers require an external USB Bluetooth dongle.

Intermediate Computer Training Course Announcement

The next training course for Intermediate Computer Usage will begin on Tuesday, September 18 at the Hudson High School 69 Brigham Street in room T110. All classes are held Tuesdays 2:30 to 4:00 PM. The instructor is George Champine.

The intermediate course has been expanded with four new sessions. The new sessions are: 1) taking and editing home videos, 2) computers and genealogy, 3) an expanded presentation of digital photography, and 4) the computer as an entertainment center.

You can get the full class schedule by sending e-mail to george.champine@computer.org. Register with Marie at the Hudson Senior Center, phone 978-568-9638.

Free Computer

I have a computer that I would like to give free to someone, preferably someone who does not have one. It is not terribly fast, but everything works and it has the latest XP

software. If you are interested or know of someone who could be, please contact me at e-mail: george.champine@computer.org .

The Quail Run web site is up and running and looks very good. Thanks to Mark Reid and Bob Reid for their work in putting it together. The web address is: <http://www.quailrunhudson.com> . There is a great deal of content, including the Board of Governors, legal documents, issues of the Quailrunner, photographs of people and events, the Quail Run calendar of events, and much more. We encourage you to explore it. When you go to the web page and the first screen comes up, it will ask you to register your e-mail address. If you have an e-mail address, we strongly recommend that you register so that you can receive timely notice of meetings, events, and important information for unit owners. This is a new Quail Run mailing list, and you should register even if you are on other Quail Run e-mail lists. If you have any problems, contact George Champine at 978-567-5982 or george.champine@computer.org .