

Lake County Area Computer Enthusiast
News Journal



Volume 35, Issue 2, May

"Members helping Members"

Congratulations to the 2018-2019 Board of Directors

**Your can submit
your article to**

Editor@lcece.org

Membership Dues will
be accepted at the May
Meeting

Demo
Digital Assistants

The new L.C.A.C.E
Board of Directors.

- Phil Bock
- Linda Busch
- Judy Dunham
- Bobby Jacobs
- J.J. Johnson
- Linda Koudelka
- Linda Rohlring



Alexa... What can you do?

By Phil Sorrentino, Newsletter Contributor

December 2017 issue, Sarasota Monitor

www.thestug.org

philsorr (at) yahoo.com



Alexa is a Digital Assistant. If you have access to an Amazon Echo or Amazon Echo Dot, ask Alexa "What can you do?" Alexa will tell you "A lot. You can tell me to turn up the volume, play music, create a To Do list, or look up a topic on Wikipedia." Finally, it will suggest, "To find out more, check out

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Members"
(since 1983)*

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Computer Enthusiasts

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News Journal

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Membership

LCACE membership is open to all individuals and families interested in personal computing. Annual dues are \$20.00 per individual/family. Applications for membership may be obtained at the monthly meeting, by request on the club hotline, and are now available on our web site at <http://www.lcace.org>.

Meetings

LCACE meetings are usually held on Saturdays at the Grayslake Area Public Library, 100 Library Lane, Grayslake, Illinois. The meeting room opens at noon and the formal meeting begins at 12:30 p.m. All meetings are open to the public. Bring a friend!

Newsletter Submissions

Club members are welcome to submit classified ads, reviews, tips and other articles for publication, to our newsletter editor in Microsoft Word format (.doc).

Publication deadline is the 20th of the month for all ads and articles.

Please do not use tabs or special formatting.

Newsletter Advertising

Ad rates per issue: Full page - \$25, Half page - \$15, Quarter page - \$10, Business Card - \$5. Discounts are available on advance purchase of multiple issues. Please send camera-ready copy and payment to the club address by the 15th of the month preceding publication. For more information on ad pricing, please call our Hotline. Ads are **FREE** to all paid members.

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Membership

History

Membership Chairperson Report

As of 4/21/18
Members = 52
Attendance = 48%

THANK YOU FOR JOINING
None

THANK YOU FOR RENEWING
Lester Larkin
Robert & Linda Roudelka
Phil Bock
Eric & Judy Rehberger
Henry Henriksen
Donna Kalinoski
Fritz & Mary Krause

THANK YOU FOR VISITING
None

Will Return
Next Month

Happy Birthday

Stephanie Risinger

Linda Roudelka

Thomas Krissek

Judy Dunham

Phil's Ramblings



Hello, from our State Capital, Springfield! (I've been on a seven-day road trip to attend our granddaughter's college graduation in Nashville, visiting points of interest on the way home. After today and tomorrow, I should be an expert on Lincoln!)

But, back to our favorite topic – computers. By now at least some of you should have received an invitation from Microsoft to install the 2018 Spring Update to Windows 10. If time permits at our coming meeting, I'll ask volunteers to share their experiences installing this update and any tips they care to offer to other members as they go through the installation process. (I've installed this update on three Windows PCs so far, with only a minor hiccup, but have not yet had a chance to dig into the new features it brings to the table. On the other hand, all the normal computing functions I was using prior to the update are still working OK – so that's good news!)

The far-too-frequent bad news about data breaches, ransomware and phishing exploits is continuing. No need to repeat the bad news here, but by now it is very clear that we must continually be on guard when we are on the internet or using our smartphones. The comparison that comes to mind is walking through a bad neighborhood at night, by yourself. If possible, you want to avoid doing that; if it is unavoidable, you want to be as cautious as possible. If we keep this vision in mind as we use our electronic tools, we will have a greater chance of avoiding potentially serious problems.

I'm looking forward to J.J.'s presentation on Saturday about digital assistants and associated “smart home” features. This technology is offering us more and more services and options; not surprisingly, businesses are jumping on the bandwagon with all sorts of related offerings. The more we can learn about these tools, the better we will be able to sort through all the news, ads and innovative products out there. (As a personal example, I bought a Fitbit watch / activity tracker about a year ago for \$129; Amazon now offers a variety of competing products – with the same or more features – for as little as \$29.95! It does not take very long for competitors to emerge in the electronics field; check out virtually every new product six months to a year after introduction and you will probably find similar products from companies you may never have heard of, at lower prices.)

On the LCACE front, we will discuss meeting room options at our May meeting. As I have written separately, we are running into problems trying to schedule the Grayslake Public Library meeting room on the second Saturday of each month. One option is to switch our meeting to the third Saturday of each month – when the GPL calendar has been more open. Other options will be welcomed!

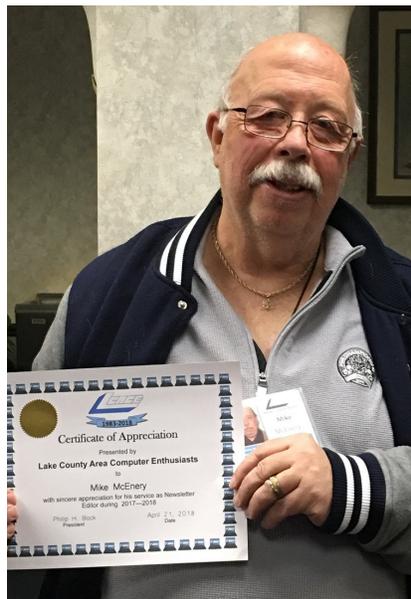
Also, we have our annual picnic coming up in July. As we did last year, we are planning to hold this year's picnic in air-conditioned comfort at the State Bank of the Lakes. We'll solicit input at the coming meeting about format. Last year, at the request of some members, we included a computer-related presentation with the food, conversation and fellowship normally associated with a picnic. Since then, I've received some feedback suggesting we forego a computer-related program and simply relax and enjoy ourselves. We need your input as we plan this year's get-together.

See you Saturday!



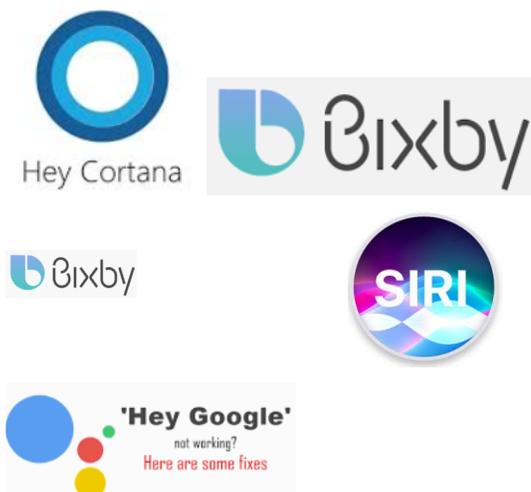
Thanks J.J. for 35 years of L.C.A.C.E.
Excellance





the Things to Try page in the Alexa App.” (If you don’t have a device, befriend someone who has one and give it a try.) When you go to the Amazon Echo App and choose Things to Try, you will see quite an impressive list headed by “What’s new?” (new things Alexa can do), and Echo Show (an ad for the new Echo Show device). And 28 more topics, alphabetically arranged, starting with “Ask questions,” “Calling and messaging,” and “Check your calendar.” These are many of the things that you can try after you get over asking: “Alexa, what is the temperature,” “Alexa what time is it,” and “Alexa, tell me a joke.”

A Digital Assistant is a complex piece of software that can perform many tasks or services for the user. A Digital Assistant typically includes access to large databases and includes Artificial Intelligence (AI) capabilities. The Digital Assistant software runs on a Server, aided by the App running in the local device (smartphone, computer or dedicated device like the Echo). Remember Client-Server Technology? Digital assistants typically are voice controlled and provide verbal and/ or action results (like answering a question or turning a light on or off). Amazon’s Alexa is just one of the digital Assistants that are finding their way into regular use. Others that you may be familiar with are Google’s “Ok, Google,” Apple’s “Siri,” Microsoft’s “Cortana,” and Samsung’s “Bixby.”



(Siri has been around the longest and appears to have the largest user base, followed by Google and Alexa.) All of these can provide answers to basic time and weather questions, and even basic information lookup questions. Alexa is unique in that it is accessed by use of the Amazon Echo, Echo Dot, or Echo Show devices, not by a computer or smartphone (though you need a smartphone to setup many of its capabilities). Google’s Assistant, which is like Alexa, can be accessed by a smartphone (or tablet), and the Google Home device. The Google Home device is like the Amazon Echo device.

Going back to Alexa’s list of “Things to Try,” there are many things that can be very useful in your daily routine, such as Control of smart home devices, Control music, check your calendar, setting alarms, timers and reminders, Creating ToDo and Shopping lists. Some of these things are inherent and are part of Alexa, and some of these require additional support in the form of “skills.” Skills are Amazon’s term for additional support from a source other than Alexa or the Alexa App. To see a comprehensive list of these skills, just Google “Amazon Skills,” and select “Amazon.com: Alexa Skills.”

- Setting a timer is built into Alexa. All you have to do is say “Alexa, set a “Name of timer” for “number of minutes,” for example: Alexa, set a “Cook the rice” timer for “15 minutes.” In 15 minutes, Alexa will announce “Cook the rice timer” is done.” Alexa will continue to announce it until you acknowledge it by saying “Alexa, Stop.” (I know battery operated kitchen timers are cheap and reliable, but you typically can’t set them by voice.)
- You can also set Alarms for specific times, like “Alexa, set an alarm for 7 in the morning.” The alarm, when it occurs, is a pleasant sequence of gentle tones.

Again, to stop the alarm tones, just say "Alexa, Stop."

Another nice feature built into Alexa is the ability to create and maintain a To-Do list and a Shopping list. To add an item to the To-Do list just say, "Alexa Add "Item name" to the To-Do list, like "Alexa add Check the Oil" to the To-Do list. And similarly, to add something to the Shopping list, just say "Alexa, add "Food name" to the Shopping list, like "Alexa, add Butter to the Shopping list." After you make either of these requests, Alexa will respond and indicate that the item has been added to the requested list. Creating a list is all well and good, but the nice benefit here is that when you look at the Alexa App on your smartphone, your Shopping and To-Do lists are there and immediately updated. So, now your shopping list is available the next time you are at the food store, and your To-Do list is available when you get to Home Depot parking lot and wonder why you drove there.

Another feature I found useful was the ability to check and maintain my calendar. Alexa can be set up to use many calendars, including the Google Calendar. Once the calendar is set up, you can inquire about the activities on your calendar just by saying "Alexa, what is on my calendar for today," or "Alexa what is on my calendar for the next two days." (Alexa can report the activities on your calendar for today, tomorrow, or even four days from now, but will not report activities that happened in the past.) You can even add items to your calendar just by saying "Alexa add "Appointment" to my calendar," like "Alexa, Add "Dentist next Tuesday at 10 in the morning" to my calendar." Alexa will respond that the appointment has been

added for the desired date and time. And just as you would expect, when you look at your calendar, on your smartphone or computer, you will see the new appointment. And of course, you can delete items using Alexa. And, you still have complete control over the calendar with your computer or smartphone.

Home automation is another area where Alexa can be very useful. Home automation can take the form of controlling lights, locks, thermostats, and a security system. To accomplish these types of tasks, an appropriate Alexa compatible device and a "skill" for that device will have to be set up. But, once these things are in place, Alexa (as well as your smartphone) can control those devices. I set up a tp-link, Alexa compatible, LED light and obtained the tp-link skill, and once set up I was able to control the light just by saying "Alexa turn on (or off) the living room lamp". (Very cool, sure beats the old X-10 control system.) Maybe an Amazon Echo or a Google Home can help you with some of your daily activities.

Basic iPhone Skills

By Jim Cerny, Forum Leader, Sarasota Technology User Group, Florida

November 2017 issue, Sarasota Monitor

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The iPad by Apple is becoming more and more popular. It is really a full computer that is easily portable and so helpful for many every-day tasks, communication, entertainment, etc. Having taught many iPad classes, here is a list of the BASIC skills every iPad user should know. If you would like more information on any of these,

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please ask Google! By the way, these tips are helpful for the iPhone as well:

1. You should know and have written down your Apple ID Account and password (so you can purchase and download apps, even free ones). Also, if you use a “passcode” to access your device, write that down too!

2. Verify that your iPad is on Wi-Fi or not. Touch Settings and see that Wi-Fi should display the network name or ID if you are connected or “not connected” if you are not.

3. Check for any software (apps) updates. See if there are any numbers on your “App Store” icon. If so, touch icon and download the updates.

4. Organize your apps icons on your screens. Touch and HOLD on any icon until they all vibrate. Now you can DRAG any icon to any place on any screen. Drag icon to left or right edge of screen to place on another screen. (Note the small white and gray dots toward the bottom of your screen shows the number of screens you have.) Let up finger to place icon. Hit HOME button to exit the “vibrating” mode and get back to normal.

5. Getting a new app: Open the “App Store” icon and enter a search word or two in the “Search” bar at the top of the screen. Try it! (golf game, maps, movies, puzzles, news, etc. are all samples of search words, try your words).

6. Before downloading or trying a new app: In the App Store, touch any app to learn more about it.

7. To DELETE an app you no longer want, touch and HOLD the app icon until it vibrates. Touch the small “X” that appears in the upper left of the icon and your app will be deleted from your device. If there is no “X” you cannot delete the app. Sorry, you do not get your money back if you purchased the app.

8. Close previously used apps from memory. Double-click the home button and your previously opened app pages will appear on the left side. Drag UP each app to remove it from memory.

9. Turn your iPad completely off periodically by HOLDING down the off/on button until “Slide to power off” appears. Then do it. HOLD the off/on button down until a white apple appears to turn on your iPad after a power-down.

10. Know some basic symbols such as for Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, battery, airplane mode, and the “busy” rotating symbols.

11. Backup your important apps on iCloud. In Settings, touch your name/account, then touch “iCloud” (it has your account name under it), in the list that appears, turn “ON” the iCloud for each app, such as Contacts, Calendars, Notes, etc. These will be backed up for you on iCloud.

12. Adjust brightness. In Settings, touch “Display and Brightness”. I like using “AutoBrightness” so I have that turned on.

Learn something NEW about your iPad often. Talk to friends, take a class, and, most important, use the Safari app that comes with your iPad or ASK GOOGLE (you can download the Google app for free). Here are some sample

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questions to ask: How do I stop my iPad screen from rotating? How do I change the text size on my iPad? What is Bluetooth on my iPad? How do I use Google Earth on my iPad? I hope this will help you enjoy your iPad even more! Good luck!

TECH TALK

Should you leave your computer on 24 HOURS A DAY?

By Joe Isaac, Member, Central Kentucky Computer Society

March 2018 issue, CKCS newsletter

www.ckcs.org

newsletter (at) ckcs.org



NO! I shut my computer down every night. If I'm going to be gone several days I not only shut it down, I unplug the computer from the wall and unplug the phone line from the wall.

You are wearing your fan motor out and pulling dust thru your computer. Your hard drive may be running more. If you get a big surge of electricity that jumps your surge protector, it may save your computer by having it turned off.

Your surge protector is passive and works whether it is turned off or on. When it is off, the surge must jump the switch and the surge protector to get to your computer.

The only good thing about leaving your computer on is that you can get rid of the dust bunnies,

the fan will pull them into your computer and your utility company will love you.

With the increased use of always on – DSL and Cable Internet and with the growing threat of hackers and worms, it makes even more sense to shut your computer down when not in use.

A computer not running and not connected cannot be hacked.

OTHER GREAT REASON TO CUT YOUR COMPUTER OFF AT NIGHT.

- It's not unusual to get low on system resources after you use Windows for a long stretch, especially if you open and close programs frequently. Adding a bunch of RAM doesn't help. System resources are stored in fixed memory blocks that reside in your System RAM.
- Programs store certain routines inside your system resources. Some programs don't reallocate or release the memory, so after a while your machine gets full. You must restart Windows to free up memory again.

That's why Windows feels more reliable if you start it up fresh every day

Hello,
Hopefully you all are not flooding. Anyhow, the meeting is this coming Saturday, May 19, 2018.

The presenter will be:

J. J. Johnson and the subjects will be:

1. Digital Assistants (Amazon Echo, etc.)
2. Associated Digital Hardware (Ring Video Doorbell)

See you all there.

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Chief Cookie Baker

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