

News Journal

Every once in a
while, a new
technology, an
old
problem,
and a
big idea turn
into an
innovation.

Dean Kamen



TRAVELING WITH ELECTRONICS

By Dick Maybach, Member, Brookdale Computer User Group, NJ

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When preparing for a trip, think carefully about what you really need. Every piece of gear you add is more weight to carry, another thing to protect, and another distraction from visiting and sightseeing. The goal should be to obtain the needed entertainment, communications, and navigation while minimizing your risk, inconvenience, and cost.

(Continued on page 4)

Partially Locked Laptop

Dan's Desk

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February 2019 issue, The Space Coast PC Journal

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This month I'll look at an interesting situation of a partially locked PC that I picked up at a recent auction. One of the features that all PCs share is the ability to set a supervisor, master or boot PC password.

This is usually done for one of two reasons: a) to prevent users from inadvertently making a change to the BIOS (Basic Input Output System) of a PC that makes it vulnerable or less secure on a business network or b) make it impossible to use if it is stolen. When booting up a PC, you can access the hardware BIOS by pressing a specific

(Continued on page 6)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Traveling with Electronics.....	1
Partially Locked Laptop.....	1
Lake County Area Computer Enthu.....	2
Phil's Ramblings.....	3
Birthday's.....	7
Honor Flight.....	7

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News Journal

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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!

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Phil's Ramblings



Hello, everyone! Looks as though summer has finally arrived. (Having our summer picnic in the air-conditioned comfort of the State Bank of the Lakes this July turned out to be a good thing!)

And, speaking of our picnic, a big “Thank You!” to Liz and Fred Barnett, Gail Garling and everyone else who brought food to share and helped with the set-up and clean-up! Lots of good stuff to eat and lots of good conversation. Mary, you obviously have trained Fritz well; he is an expert with the vacuum cleaner!

Looking ahead, we have lots of interesting topics to address in coming meetings. Thanks for all your input; Linda Rohlfing and I will be sorting through the various suggestions and looking for help from our members to serve as presenters. Meanwhile, we are offering a choice of topics for our August 17th meeting, to be decided at the meeting by attendees.

Please note that our August meeting will be on the 3rd Saturday of the month; in September and October, Liz Barnett has been able to snag the meeting room for the second Saturday. We will let you know as soon as possible about the date for November’s meeting, so that you can put it on your calendar. (Our annual Holiday Party is scheduled for the second Saturday in December (12/14).

Still not much in the popular or technical press about Microsoft’s Windows 10 May 2019 update, which I take as a good thing! I’ve updated both my desktop and laptop without a problem; hopefully, you also have had a positive experience if you’ve installed that update.

Cellular providers are continuing the 5G roll-out in selected areas. Not much in the news about their progress, which I assume is going slowly. As you may have read, this cellular service cannot use the 4G antennae already in place. Instead, it will require many more, smaller antennae, typically placed on light posts or other structures sprinkled throughout the service area. I’ve

already read about at least one community pushing back on a cell provider about the number and appearance of these new antennae. As a result, the provider has agreed to paint all their antennae within the affected community to match the color of the light posts they are mounted on. I expect that we will see more arguments like this as the roll-out progresses.

Hardware providers are beginning to roll out Wi-Fi 6 routers (802.11ax in the old nomenclature). They promise much faster data transmission within your home or business, and some providers are considering this technology as a competitor for Internet service, against fiber-optic cable from Xfinity or AT&T. You will need a new router to take advantage of this higher data transmission speed within your home network, but I wouldn’t rush out right now and buy one! (Prices on Amazon.com currently range from the \$300s to the \$400s.)

On a national note, I am seeing more and more articles that suggest the U.S. is behind the curve in cyber-security. You may remember that cyber-weapons were stolen from NASA a few years ago, and we are still seeing the repercussions of this theft in new versions of ransomware targeting large organizations. Meanwhile, questions have been raised about the security of our electric grid and other national systems being used to run major portions of our economy. The feeling expressed in these articles is that up till now we have not fully comprehended the security risks to our key infrastructure components, our secret information and our election systems and we must make “catching up” a major national priority.

In closing, let me remind anyone still using a Windows 7 PC that Microsoft will terminate all support for Windows 7 in the middle of January 2020 – about five months from now. You will still be able to use your Win 7 PC after that cut-off, but you are advised to avoid using it on the

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 1)

Begin by seeing what you can do with just a smart phone. If you are going overseas where roaming charges can be high, assume it's configured not to make calls. You can still use it for communications by using a Web communication service, such as Skype, when you are at a Wi-Fi hotspot. Its music player and e-book reader can entertain you en route, provided of course that you load the media before you leave home. It will also let you read your e-mail and surf the Web, although its small screen makes these less efficient than using a PC. You can also install apps to track your credit and debit card expenses, safeguard your passwords, and calculate currency conversions. Most cell phones include a GPS, but by default they continually download maps from the network. If you want to use this feature where you don't have cell-phone service, you must first download and install maps into your mapping app, such as Locus Map for Android. (Be aware that mapping apps can be complex and configuring them may require some work; start this well before you leave.) Finally, it has a camera to save your memories. Of course, you must install and configure the needed apps and become comfortable with them before you leave home. Expect to spend considerable time to get this right.

Thus, with a properly configured smart phone you can send and receive messages, access the Internet, navigate, secure your sensitive data, and take photos. However, you may decide that you want additional equipment to escape the phone's limitations and are willing to accept the additional baggage, the extra delays at security checks, the added effort to safeguard the equipment, and the financial risk of losing it.

Small and light laptops are not expensive but try to make yours do jobs besides the obvious e-mail and Web surfing. For example, you can upload data from your camera, cell phone, and GPS, so that you retain the data if one is lost or damaged. You can also use its USB ports to

charge your other devices and so avoid having to carry separate power converters. However, this will take more time than using a charger; check before you leave home.

If your hotel has wired Ethernet in the room you can use a travel router to provide better service than Wi-Fi__33. Some hotels limit the number of devices you can connect to their Wi-Fi__33 or charge separately for each one. If you connect your devices to Wi-Fi__33 through a travel router, shown in Figure 1, configured as a repeater, that is the only device registered, regardless of how many devices connect through it. See my article on travel routers in the November 2014 Bytes, available at <http://www.bcug.com/>.



Figure 1. Travel Router.

A pocket GPS with extra replaceable batteries will help you find your way longer than a smart phone and may provide more features and offer more choice of maps. (Use it before you leave so you can find how long it will operate on a set of batteries.) Many free maps of areas all over

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

the world are available, although most require that your device use Garmin-compatible map files. The same files are usable by PC mapping applications when you are at home.

If you are fond of reading, those e-book readers that display only black-and-white print have very long battery lives, making them practical even on long trips, and they often weigh less than a couple of books. However, those that display in color and play movies have battery lives comparable to small laptops. Be careful of media encumbered with Digital Rights Management (DRM) as this “feature” may not allow you to access it outside the U.S.

Think seriously about power. Your hotel room will probably have few outlets, likely in inconvenient locations, they may not fit U.S. plugs, and outside the Americas are likely to carry 220-Volt, 50-Hz power. Light-weight, ten-foot, two-wire extension cords with three outlets are widely available. (Three-wire cords are far too heavy to practical on trips, and few foreign outlets have three-wire connectors.) In many countries you will need a mechanical adapter to the local outlets; research this before you leave home. Take spare adapters; it’s easy to leave them plugged into the wall when you remove the cord. If any of your devices have three-wire plugs (laptops are the usual suspects) you will also need a U.S. three-to-two wire adapter. See Figure 2. Most electronic devices have power supplies that accommodate both 110- and 220-volt power, but CHECK BEFORE YOU GO. You will probably need bright light and a magnifier to read the tiny print, an example of which appears in Figure 3. Note the line “INPUT 100-240 V 3A 50-60 Hz.” The “3A” is the current drawn, which will vary among different devices; the important numbers are the power Voltage and frequency, “100-240 V” and “50-60Hz,” which in this case show that the unit can be used worldwide. While still at home, plug together everything you will take to be sure it fits. For example, I’ve found European

-to-US power-plug adapters that had two narrow slots for the US connector, instead of one narrow and one wide slot, meaning that they couldn’t be used with almost all US plugs.



Figure 2. Power Adapters (left) and a U.S. 3-to-2 Wire Power Adapter (right).



Figure 3. Power Supply Label.

Your cell-phone can comfortably play music for many hours, but if you use it to read an e-book its backlight will deplete the battery on a long trip, leaving you with a dead phone when you arrive. A solution is an external battery pack with USB connectors, and one can also recharge other devices that have USB charging ports; see Figure 4. The one shown has two USB output connectors and is recharged through the mini-USB in the center.

(Continued on page 6)



Figure 4. External Battery Pack.

If you have several devices that are recharged through USB cables, you may wish to purchase a power converter with multiple USB outlets, rather than a separate charger for each device. They will charge faster than using a laptop's USB connectors.

Finally, take spare batteries, as a charge may not last for an entire day. You don't want to spend a sunny afternoon in Paris looking for that oddball battery your camera uses.

(Continued from page 3)

Phil's Ramblings CONT.

Internet. One of the two videos to be decided on at our August LCACE meeting addresses this issue and recommends various alternatives for Win 7 users to consider after the service end date. If this video is not selected for presentation and discussion at our August meeting, you can access it from the APCUG YouTube video offerings and watch it at your leisure.

As always, lots to be aware of in our computing world! Time spent catching up on these various initiatives can save you time and angst down the road dealing with problems that may otherwise occur.

Enjoy the summer!

(Continued from page 1)

key during the display of the manufacturers logo. Once set, it can be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to change the BIOS settings if that password is lost. If the BIOS has been configured to only boot from the hard drive and to ignore any DVD or USB device, then it can be impossible to reload the operating system on the hard drive.

In my situation, the locked PC was included in a group of three Toshiba laptops that I won at auction. All of the PCs had their hard drives removed to protect the data of the selling organization from being accessed. All three were locked with BIOS passwords set to prevent the BIOS settings from being modified. Two of them were able to boot from a DVD but not from a USB device. Those PCs were able to have the new hard drives reloaded from a Windows 10 DVD. But one of them would not load from either a DVD or a USB device.

There is a way to clear the password if you have desktop PC, by moving a jumper located on the motherboard. Laptops do not have this capability however. Some laptops, like those from Dell, can be cleared by entering a master unlock password. Most Toshiba laptops can only be cleared by shorting out two connection points located on the motherboard. Toshiba does not provide documentation on the location of these connection points in their consumer accessible documentation for the specific model being worked on. The only way to get the password cleared on those models, is to take it to an authorized Toshiba service dealer, and pay about \$75 for the technician to spend literally 5 minutes to perform the shorting operation.

After almost giving up on loading the new hard drive on this locked laptop, I came up with a somewhat unique approach to solving the issue. As I had an identical model, that was reloaded with the latest version of Windows 10, I

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

decided to try cloning the hard drive to another drive. Cloning involves using a software program that will produce a duplicate copy of a specific hard drive. Once the clone was completed, I installed the new drive in the locked PC and booted it up. As the PC was set to only load from the hard drive, it booted up successfully. The license of Windows 10 is tied to the serial number of each motherboard, so the new drive needed to be reactivated with Microsoft. This was easily done once I was able to boot Windows. Once Windows was running, I could access the USB devices and the DVD through the OS, as needed to load any other software.

I guess my stubborn streak to never give up solving a problem can lead to imaginative solutions when required.

If you have suggestions for other topics like this, that you would like to see explained, please let me know!



Leslie D. Salsburg

George Becht

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11:15 a.m.-12:15