



microCHIP

the Newsletter of the **Mid-Hudson Computer User Group Inc.**

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October Main Meeting

Dragon Naturally Speaking with Ray Polivka

By Ron McDermott

Having been privileged to be a part of the Star Trek generation, the allure of being able to carry on a conversation with my computer has remained with me to this day. So it was with high expectations that I attended Ray Polivka's presentation on voice recognition software; given during our October general meeting.

Ray demonstrated Dragon NaturallySpeaking; a tool he himself uses to generate text documents. He did a brief overview of the software and its layout, and then took us through an interactive demonstration of the technology using MS Word. It rapidly became clear that performing a presentation on voice recognition is a complicated undertaking when the software insists on trying to write out everything that you say, whether intentionally or not! Understandably forgetting at times to put the software into sleep mode, Ray often treated us to an assortment of verbal asides that then had to be removed from the generated text. I suspect Ray found that rather less amusing than did some of us in the audience!

Ray did some dictation, along with more editing than he wished, using a combination of commands designed to tell the software how to navigate with the cursor, highlight and format text, and delete, substitute, and replace text. He also demonstrated that the program can read text back to you, and if it is text you dictated, it will do so using your own voice. In response to questions, Ray indicated that voice recognition software will typically operate with any program that generates text: word processors, email editors, spreadsheets, etc. In addition, they also

have the capability of interacting with the operating system, allowing navigation, the opening of folders, the initiation of programs, etc. He did a brief example by instructing the operating system to move the mouse to a particular screen grid coordinate and then double-click an icon.



Ray Polivka demonstrating Dragon Naturally Speaking

Although we didn't get an opportunity to observe in much detail, Ray also showed us a little of the built-in voice recognition capabilities of Microsoft's VISTA, and presumably Win 7, operating systems. Although also present in XP, it is in VISTA that we first got a really versatile implementation of voice recognition. Ray also indicated that although he is much less familiar with VISTA's built-in speech recognition software, he did feel that its integration with the operating system itself (navigating the mouse pointer,

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opening folders, etc) was probably superior to what you can accomplish with a third party application.

Basically, the voice recognition process involves teaching the software to recognize your voice sufficiently well that it can determine which words you are saying, and then accurately produce the equivalent text. The background of how that is accomplished makes for interesting reading, but was not a part of Ray's presentation. Current voice recognition technology does not allow for the use of unfamiliar voices, so trying to make a transcription of a taped meeting, for example, is not supported. And there are other limitations as well. Any change in your voice, a cold, a noisy background, will have an adverse effect on the software's ability to produce accurate text. In commenting, Dick Kranz shared that he uses three different identities to accommodate for such things as background noise while dictating in his moving vehicle.

I have to confess that I was personally disappointed, perhaps unreasonably, by the frequency with which Ray's dictated speech was misunderstood and inaccurately transcribed. As mentioned earlier, perhaps this can be explained by background noise, or perhaps by some level of stress that may have crept into Ray's voice. Whatever the cause, the program made a LOT of errors; enough, in fact, to make it unusable under those conditions. While the program demonstrated an ability to determine proper usage of homonyms in context, I noted that such things as quotation marks and some punctuation was not similarly detected in context. For example, something like: Mary said, "That certainly is a nice lamb you have there", would be likely to be missing both the comma before and the quotation marks before and after, unless you specifically instructed the program to put them in.

Nevertheless, I'm sufficiently inspired to give VISTA's built-in voice recognition a try, and I'm sure I reflect the feelings of those in attendance in thanking Ray for his efforts at enlightening us as to the potential of speech recognition as an integral part of our daily computer usage. □

Technology Workshop

By Harry Elder

We're back at the Guardian storage facility. Next month we'll still be here, but in a different room.

Going around the room, we polled members for questions or comments.

Gim Lee mentioned that wireless 'N', and USB 3, are upon us (or nearly so). With that, what are the critical factors that will govern the use of these new technologies? Jeff Dowley replied that the hardware is the controlling factor. He's only aware of one vendor that plans to use USB 3. It has to be attached to the PCI/e (express) bus, which runs at 30-40 gigabytes per second. Regarding wireless N, Jeff reports that it has been finalized, but he doesn't know of any wireless vendor that has released 'N' firmware. Jack Marsella says 'be careful using 'N' early', presumably until the technology proves itself to the general public.

My turn. I brought in a power supply tester that I got from Tiger Direct, unopened and untested. I also brought in a PC power supply that I won at our Chinese Auction at our club's main monthly meeting in September. We took the tester from its packaging, and attached the 24 pin motherboard connector to the tester. I then plugged in the power supply. All of the applicable LEDs lit up, showing that the tester worked, and that the power supply was good. I then tested the molex connector, and the floppy power connector. So far, so good. The tester also had inputs for PCI/e, P4/EPS, and SATA power. I'm sure that they're fine, but I couldn't test them there. It's made by Ultra, and cost about \$20. One club member voiced a personal concern. He said that he's never had any luck with power supply testers. Of course, they're not without limitations. This model says it's not rated for power supplies over 1000 watts.

Dan Sullivan told us about Gmail's labels. Gmail (Google email) doesn't use traditional folders to organize email. They instead use labels – basically color-coded tabs to delineate email according to your preferences. I've had a Gmail account for many years (along with Yahoo and my ISP's email). I've been happy with Gmail, but

haven't used its features, such as labels. Dan is sold on them; perhaps I'll try them too.



Harry Elder setting up a power supply to test against the Ultra Power Supply Tester (below). Behind, left to right - Ed Terpstra, Jeff Dowley, and Dan Sullivan.



Gmail is a 'cloud' email service, where your email is stored on Gmail's servers. I just checked, I'm getting over 7GBs of free space for my email. Free for me, that is. The service is supported by ads. For example, I just opened a 'Happy Halloween' email someone sent me. On the right, various Halloween ads (costumes, haunted houses, etc.) appeared.

Two club members, Alex Kurylo and David Dunlop, had similar problems with thumb drives recently. It seems that their systems lost track of the drive while copying folders and files to it. The only way that the drive would reappear would be through a reboot. I've had my own experiences with failing thumb drives. We still need them, however. There isn't a more convenient, portable storage device that I know of. Considering that they hold large amounts of data (Alex's thumb drive holds 16 GB), they're small, get moved around a lot, and sometimes get knocked into when attached to a PC or laptop, they're still generally reliable. Check your thumb drive manufacturer. They may offer support via phone, chat or email, and also free replacements under warranty.

Marty Feldberg can't see pictures in a folder as thumbnails. We suggested that he try various options under the 'views' pull-down on the top of the folder. Marty reported back that it didn't help. Perhaps the next step would be to select Organize -> Folder and Search Options -> View. Then check settings related to thumbnails, or simply select 'Restore Defaults'.

We spent part of our meeting discussing Microsoft's release of Windows 7 this month. Dan mentioned that students and teachers can get a great deal on Windows 7 – only \$29.99. I checked Microsoft's website, and there it was. The offer ends in January. <http://www.microsoft.com/student/en/us/software/windows-7.aspx>.

Thanks to all club members for a great meeting. Please join us at our next MHCUG Technology Workshop on the third Monday, November 16 at Guardian Storage Business Development Center, 3 Neptune Rd. Town of Poughkeepsie. Please note: the room location will be changed. Contact Technology Workshop leader Dick Kranz for additional information. □

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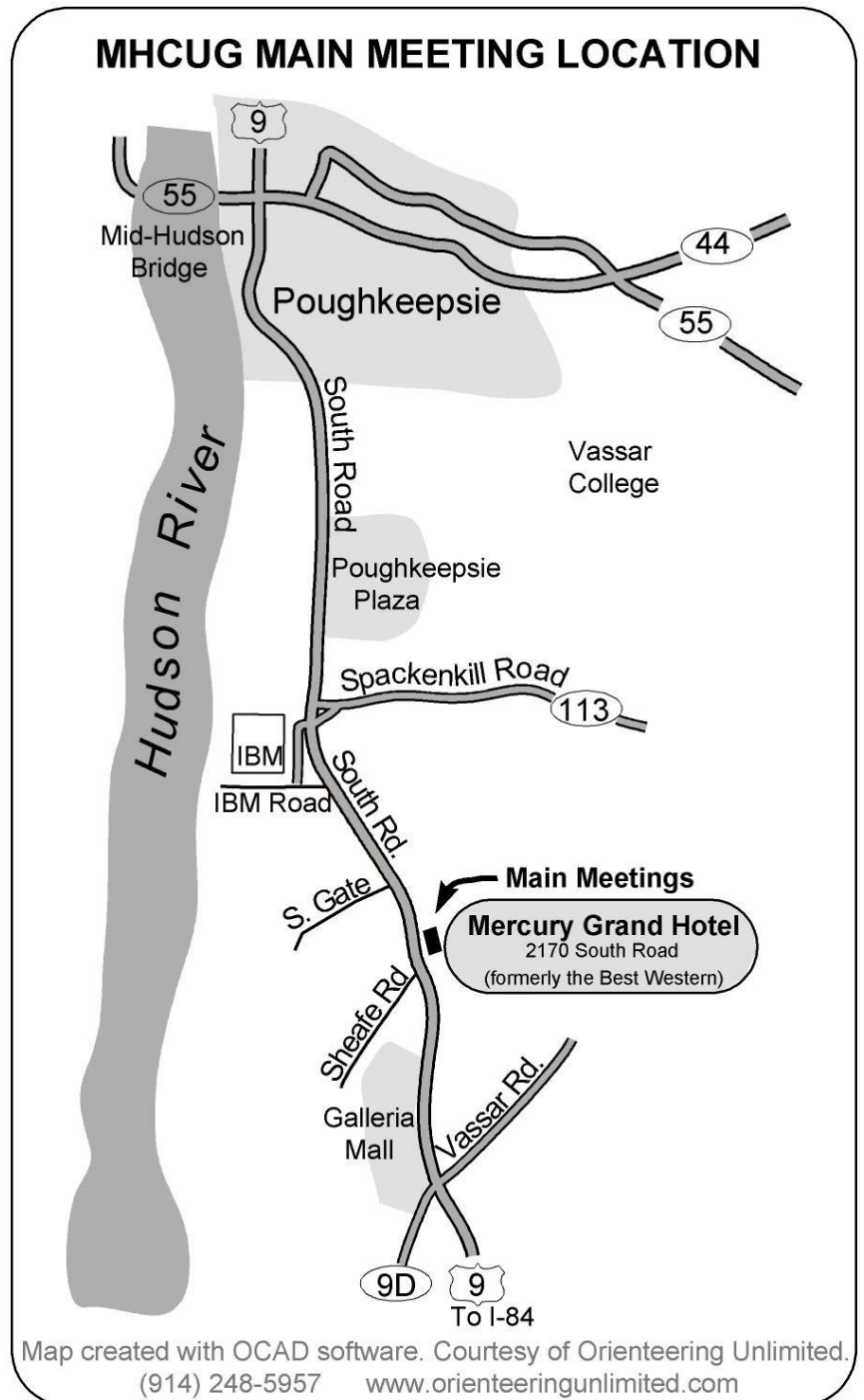
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Computer advice given is based on a general question on computers. Every computer is set up differently. Be sure to backup before making changes. MHCUG does not accept any responsibility for the use or misuse of the advice provided. □

Upcoming November Main Meeting

Sandy Coulter of geekmeup.com will lead a presentation and discussion concerning various online selling techniques at the Mid-Hudson Computer User Group open public meeting at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, November 12 at Mercury Grand Hotel (formerly Best Western Inn) 2170 South Road, Route Nine, town of Poughkeepsie, NY. Sandy is past president of RocklandPC User Group. For more information, contact Dick Kranz, MHCUG VP, Programs. □



From the President

By Dan Sullivan

November and December are the Holiday months for me and I expect they are for most of you, regardless of religious or political persuasions.

My wife and I will be traveling to Chadsford, Pennsylvania for Thanksgiving with some of our families. Family get-togethers at this time of year have caused the cancellation of the Multi-media/Digital Photography SIGs in November and December. However, you should have some great photo opportunities to share with us in January!

The Board and I are continuing to explore ways that we can lower our club expenses. One result is that our General Meetings held the on second Thursday of the month will begin meeting in the Hudson Room at the Mercury Grand Hotel (formerly the Best Western) instead of the Regency Room. Another room change, not of our doing, is in the Guardian Storage building where we will be moving from Conference Room B to room A23B1, which will become the new Conference Room B. This move is part of Guardian Storage management adjusting to ongoing expanding business needs. Directions to these new locations will be given in the email reminders for our November meetings.

We continue to search for ideas for making MHCUG more informative and interesting. If you have a topic or theme that you wish we would include in our meetings, either in our General meeting or in our Special Interest Groups (SIGs), please contact Dick Kranz or me.

A presentation that you would like to present as part of a group or by yourself could be very interesting for the club. Also, we haven't added a new SIG for some time.

If that is of interest to you, please bring it to the Board's attention. □

Minutes of the October 2009 MHCUG Board of Directors Meeting

by Jim Walsh

Dan Sullivan, President, called the October meeting of the MHCUG Board of Directors to order at 7:03 p.m. This meeting is regularly held on the first Thursday of each month in Conference Room B of the Guardian Center at 3 Neptune Road, Poughkeepsie, and is open to the public.

Officers and Board members in attendance were: Eli Cohen, Jeff Dowley, Dick Kranz, Ron McDermott, Bob Morales, Jim Peabody, Ray Polivka, Dan Sullivan, Ed Terpstra and Jim Walsh. Jack Marsella, SIG Chair, was also in attendance.

Dan Sullivan called for a motion to accept the Minutes of the September Board meeting as distributed to the Board in the proof copy of the *microCHIP*. Ron McDermott proposed that the Minutes be accepted and Jeff Dowley seconded the motion. The Board unanimously voted to accept the motion.

Linda Ritch, VP/Activities, was unable to attend, but had communicated to some Board members that she did not believe that the "Chinese Auction" format had resulted in as successful an event as the "White Elephant Sale" which had been held in a previous year. Dan Sullivan and Dick Kranz stated that they would meet with Mercury Grand Hotel personnel to explore options for a holiday party at the Annual Meeting in December.

Eli Cohen, Treasurer, reported the Net Worth of the MHCUG as follows:

Monthly Income/Expenses - 9/1/2009 to 9/30/2009

INCOME

| | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| Drawing | \$ 137.00 |
| Interest Income | \$ 3.00 |
| Membership Dues | \$ 315.00 |
| TOTAL INCOME | \$ 455.00 |

EXPENSES

| | |
|----------------|-----------|
| Meeting | |
| General Member | \$ 200.00 |

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| | |
|----------------|-----------|
| Board | \$ 20.00 |
| SIGs | \$ 60.00 |
| TOTAL EXPENSES | \$ 280.00 |
| OVERALL TOTAL | \$ 175.00 |

NET WORTH as of 9/30/2009

| | |
|------------------------|-----------|
| Cash and Bank Accounts | |
| CD - I2 - 6 month | \$ 586.44 |
| CD - I2.2 - 6 month | \$3080.07 |
| HVFCU S1 Savings | \$1179.40 |
| HVFCU S9 Checking | \$1137.14 |
| TOTAL Cash and Bank | \$5983.05 |
| TOTAL ASSETS | \$5983.05 |
| LIABILITIES | \$ 0.00 |
| OVERALL TOTAL | \$5983.05 |

Dan Sullivan asked Eli to prepare a list of the MHCUG fixed expenses as a reference for him. Ron McDermott moved that Treasurer's Report be accepted and Jim Peabody seconded the motion. The Board unanimously agreed.

Dick Kranz, VP/Programs, confirmed with Ray Polivka that he was ready for his presentation at the upcoming general meeting and with Jeff Dowley that he was ready for his presentation at the November meeting. Jeff also suggested that, because of all the expected operating system upgrades, a presentation on using MS Windows Easy Transfer could be of great interest.

Jeff Dowley, Membership, reported that membership was slightly up, with the number of new and renewed members currently balancing the number of members still up for renewal.

Harry Elder, Newsletter, was not present but had completed the current issue of the *microCHIP* and distributed it to the proofreaders for final comments. Ron McDermott offered to tabulate the results of the poll question from the general meeting and submit them for publication in the newsletter.

The SIG reports will be published in the *microCHIP*. Dan Sullivan reminded the Board that the possible meeting location for the Ulster Computing Workshop identified by Jeff Dowley had still to be inspected by Bob Morales.

In his President's Report, Dan Sullivan recog-

nized Harry Elder for his efforts in finding a free Wi-Fi alternative at the Guardian Center. Initial testing during the Board meeting showed sufficient signal on a full-size laptop but no connectivity on a Netbook. There will be further testing. Despite tests of various locations as a cost-cutting effort, the current consensus was that SIG's should continue at the Guardian Center using what had been the standard schedule of past years. The issue will remain under continuous evaluation. Dan Sullivan will send out meeting notices with the appropriate dates.

Under Old Business, Dan Sullivan and Dick Kranz will handle the renewal of the contract for meeting space at the Mercury Grand Hotel.

Under New Business, Ron McDermott proposed a motion to authorize Jerry Clark, MHCUG Webmaster, to pursue linking commercial affiliates to the MHCUG website. Discussion suggested *Smart Computing* and *MaximumPC* as potential candidates. Jeff Dowley seconded the motion and the Board unanimously agreed.

At 8:50 p.m. Bob Morales moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Ron McDermott and unanimously approved by the Board. □

All submissions for the Micro-chip must be in the hands of the editors by the Thursday following the General Meeting. Any articles or information received after that date will be held for the following Month's publication. E-mail editor (at) mhcug.org

Mid-Hudson Computer User Group, Inc.**PO Box 1962****Poughkeepsie, NY 12601-0962****Officers**

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Membership: Open

Monthly Meetings - Scheduled the second Thursday of every month. Check www.mhcug.org for possible changes to gen-

eral and SIG meetings. Local radio stations will be advised if a meeting is cancelled unexpectedly.

microCHIP staff

Harry Elder, Editor, e-mail: editor (at) mhcug.org

Advertising

Peter Dowley, Ad Manager, e-mail: pdowley (at) juno.com * 889-4850

Ad Rate Sheet: www.mhcug.org/library.htm

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Upcoming November Meetings

Thursday, November 5, MHCUG Board meeting 7:00 p.m. Guardian Storage Building

Monday, November 16, Guardian Storage - Technology Workshop 7:00 p.m. Guardian Storage

Second Thursday, November 12, MHCUG General Meeting 6:30 p.m. at Mercury Grand Hotel (formerly Best Western)

Third Thursday, November 19, Ulster Computing Workshop 7:00 p.m. Town of Esopus Library

Fourth Monday, November 23, Upgrade and Repair 7:00 p.m. Guardian Storage Building

Digital Media is cancelled November and December. □

Poll Question

We polled attendees of the October main meeting with the question :

Do you plan on purchasing Microsoft's new operating system, Windows 7, in the next six months, either by itself, or included with a new computer purchase?

(I assume that also includes upgrades of their current Windows - ed)

Out of roughly thirty people in attendance, ten responded, with four votes of 'yes', and six votes of 'no'.



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