

The

Computer Link

October 2011

The Newsletter of the Northern Neck Computer Users' Group

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submissions to Editor
→**DEADLINE**←
for **NEXT ISSUE**,
One week after meeting

Linux - the "Other" PC Operating System

Richard (Dick) Rounds, the speaker at the September NNCUG Membership Meeting, has been a **user and strong advocate of the Linux operating system** for the last 10 years. He retired from the Navy as a captain after 23 years of service, and now lives in White Stone, VA. Linux is an alternative to the Windows operating system for personal computers. Dick **discussed the differences in philosophy of Linux, and Windows, reviewed the strengths and weaknesses of each, and recommended a strategy that uses the best aspects of each system.**

Linux is an operating system that is similar in concept and purpose to Windows and Apple Macintosh operating systems. Linus Torvalds originally derived it from UNIX. **Linux is "open source" software that allows users to modify the source code** and redistribute the soft-

ware in accordance with the GNU ("GNU's Not UNIX") General Public License. **Dick presented some amazing facts about Windows and Linux.** Windows has 80 percent of market share, is used on 16 percent of servers, as well as 1.2 percent of super computers, and has

about 2 million malware programs that attack it. On the other hand, Linux has a 2 percent market share, is on 71 percent of servers, 91 percent of super computers and is attacked by only 800 malware programs!

Dick indicated that the **basic philosophy of Linux is that software should be free and that users help each other** in using Linux and resolving issues. As we all know, Windows certainly is not free and it is a proprietary product.

Why use Linux instead of Windows for your operating sys-



Richard Rounds
Photo by Alan Christensen

tem? First, Linux based operating systems are **more secure** than Windows. Access rights to the system can be strictly limited. Dick noted that while his eight-year-old grandkids have no problems using Linux, they can't make any changes. Furthermore, anti-virus and anti-malware programs are not normally needed (as in the case of Windows operating systems).

Second, Linux is **free**. Not only is the source code freely available, but also the operating system and hundreds of programs are available at no cost (except for possible distribution costs).

Dick explained that Linux versions are called "distributions". Each variation comes with the Linux operating system and a bundle of applications that are chosen by the distribution sponsor. Some of the more popular distributions include Ubuntu, (easiest to use), Mint (like Ubuntu on steroids), Damn Small Linux (small enough to fit on a memory stick), Fedora, SUSE (owned by Microsoft!), Mephis, and Puppy. Each distribution has its strengths, and the variety allows a user to choose what will best meet their needs.

There is a **wide range of application programs that are available under Linux variations**. The Internet can be accessed using browsers such as Firefox and Chrome. Other browsers are available, but Microsoft Internet Explorer is not. All distributions have an office software program such as "Open Office" or "LibreOffice" that includes at least a word processor, spreadsheet and a presentation manager. In other words, these programs are the functional equivalent of products sold by commercial vendors such as Microsoft. E-mail programs such as Thunderbird, Evolution, and Kmail are provided. Distributions also include "Synaptic" (an application package containing approximately 33,000 free packages that can be installed), and CD/DVD burner programs such as Brasero or K3b. **Usually there is a Linux application program that**

is comparable to a Windows based one.

Information about Linux and software is readily available on the Internet and from other sources. "linuxquestions.org" contains reviews, downloads, forums, tutorials, and if you are a member, you can ask questions. All major Linux distributions, such as Ubuntu and Mephis, sponsor forums. If you become a member (usually free), you can ask questions in these forums. Many distributions on "Live" CDs or DVDs can be purchased from OSDisk.com for approximately \$2.35 to \$5.95 each. Finally, Dick suggested getting a copy of Linux (all-in-one desk reference) for Dummies, from Amazon.com for about \$26.

How can you try Linux? Pick the flavor that you want to try and get a "Live" version of the distribution. **"Live" CDs don't write anything to your hard disk drive**, and give you the opportunity to try Linux. If you like it, install it. (Books about various Linux distributions may also include a CD and installation instructions. – Ed.) **However, be cautious in doing so**. Dick showed us what an Ubuntu distribution would look like, and even had a supply of "live" Ubuntu CDs to distribute.

What are the options for using Linux? Dick indicated that the best option in his opinion was to **install Linux along side Windows in a dual boot configuration**. He indicated that this would give the best of both possible worlds. Select which operating system to use at boot up time. He suggests using Linux when going to the Internet for security reasons, and using Windows for favorite programs or those that Linux does not run well such as Quicken, Turbo Tax, or Dragon Naturally Speaking.

Another option is to **run Windows programs in Linux** using WINE (free) or a commercial version of WINE such as Codeweavers (not free – costs \$50-\$80). Note that not all Windows programs will run with these Linux programs.

Finally, Dick suggested **using Linux programs that are comparable to Windows versions.** For example, use GRAMPS instead of Family Tree Maker, GIMP instead of Photoshop, and Impress instead of Powerpoint. He said to go to "Linux.com" to review a list of Windows programs and their Linux equivalents.

When installing a Linux distribution, Dick was very clear that the new Linux user should have help readily available! He indicated that unless you were going to use your entire hard drive, (i.e., erasing Windows), get help. If you install Linux on the same hard drive as Windows, the hard drive must be partitioned prior to installation of Linux. Dick also suggested using a "live" distribution because it will search for drivers for any equipment that is attached to the computer, or use WINE to install drivers. (If you like to experiment, buy a cheap used computer, and dedicate that to installing and learning a Linux distribution.) Finally, **ALWAYS back up the hard drive before making changes!**

In conclusion, Dick noted that **Linux is a powerful, safe (more secure), fast, and less costly alternative to many Windows applications.** Furthermore, the Linux source code is freely available for anyone to look at, and develop fixes to problems that may be encountered. He noted that, except for accessing the Internet, there is a learning curve to Linux.

Brian Reilly, NNCUG Vice President, **found a great starter guide to Linux at Linux-questions.org and developed it into a handout that was distributed at the meet-**

ing. See the NNCUG web site if interested.

Dick and Brian many thanks to both of you for giving a very interesting presentation on the "Other PC Operating System"! **Ed.**

September Photo SIG

Linda Boyatzies contributed the photograph of Sidney Harbor, Australia for members of the Photo SIG to experiment with.



Please go to the NNCUG web site to see how **Marilyn Jurkops, Bruce Mc Millan, and Joe Moeller** interpreted this photo.

Ed.

Network Access Storage (NAS)

Rob Mink, of Northern Neck Computer Consultants, will speak at the **October 15th meeting of the NNCUG at RW-C.**

Rob will discuss the use of **NAS devices in a home or small office settings.** NAS devices allow multiple computers to access a central storage device for common files such as music or movies.

Coffee and donuts at 09:30 am, meeting at 10:00. Ed.

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Should You Try Linux? (Well, it depends on....)

By Dick Maybach
n2nd(at)charter.net

There are many good reasons why you should.

➤ It's **fast**. Every time I use Windows I can feel myself growing older as it creeps through booting up, shutting down, and starting a new program. My wife had an old laptop with XP that had become unusably slow under XP. She replaced the operating system with Linux, and it's now back to its original speed.

➤ It's **free**. Not only is Linux free, but so are the great majority of its applications. Such things as office suites, desktop publishing, Web page design, photo, audio, and video editors, computer aided design, and games (to name a few) are there for you to try out and use. Many of these can import and use Windows documents, such as from MS Word, PowerPoint, and Excel.

➤ It's **more secure**. While no software is absolutely secure, Linux is far ahead of Windows. This is partly by design and partly because PCs running Windows are far more common than are those running Linux. Malware designers tend to target the most common configuration. Linux users must keep their systems up-to-date (a one click process) and must use the built-in firewall, but they very seldom worry about computer viruses.

➤ It's **more fun**. Linux users are continually trying new programs. They are free, so why not try to find which you like best. Linux is also much more customizable; you can make your desktop look like Windows, like a Mac, or like something only you could love. Finally, because it's open, you are free to poke around its guts to figure out what is really going on under the hood.

Good reasons for caution. There are also good reasons why you might not want to.

➤ Linux is **not Windows**. It doesn't run most Windows applications. (There are ways around this, but they are more trouble than most Linux novices will find comfortable.) Worse, some Windows applications have no Linux counterparts. For example, although it may change, today you can't watch movies on-line from Netflix in Linux, and there is no Linux program equivalent to TurboTax.

➤ **Some hardware doesn't work** with Linux. Again, there are ways around this, but they require some experience with Linux. The most common offenders are printers, scanners, and anything made by Apple. This isn't a problem if you are buying a new machine; you just buy only the devices you know are Linux compatible.

➤ Most PCs come with Windows and not Linux installed. You will **have to install a new operating system**, which is something most PC users

have never done. Despite what you may have heard, installing Linux isn't difficult (in fact, it's much easier than installing Windows), but it does require some care.

Let's suppose you've decided to look into Linux. How should you start? First, find a Linux user who is willing to help, not because Linux is so difficult, but because it's new to you. He or she will probably recommend the toe-in-the-water approach. Many versions of Linux are available as a live CD, which lets you run Linux without writing anything to your hard disk. Shut down, remove the CD-ROM, and your machine boots Windows and has no idea it had been running Linux.

Set up your boot order

To do this, set up your PC to boot from a CD-ROM, insert a Linux live CD, and turn on the power. You will most likely have to select between trying Linux (right!) and installing Linux (wrong!). CD-ROMs are much slower than hard disks, but you can see exactly how Linux works with your hardware. Keep in mind that unless you copy your results to a read/write device, anything you do in the live session will be lost when you log off.

The next level of commitment is to install Linux in a dual-boot configuration. Here each time you boot, you choose either Linux or Windows. For instance, you might choose Windows to watch a Netflix movie, work on your taxes, or sync your iPhone and choose Linux to surf the Web, re-touch your photos, or update your Web page. Again, the installation will be much easier with the help of a Linux-savvy friend. Just be sure to back up your files before you begin. Another good approach is to replace Windows with Linux on an old computer.

Linux is a rather large clan of operating systems, the most common of which are Ubuntu, Red Hat Fedora, and SUSE. However, I recommend that you first try Linux Mint, which is a variant of Ubuntu. Its appearance closely resembles Windows', and you will probably be comfortable almost immediately. It shares Ubuntu's compatibility with hardware, which minimizes the chances of problems during and after installation.

There are hundreds of other versions of Linux, and each one has its niche, for example to recover files from damaged disks, to be fast on old and slow hardware, to accommodate children, to run on netbooks and smart phones, and one even lets you use an old PC as a TiVo type video controller.

Give Linux a try. You will probably like it, and if you don't, at least you will have better reason to use Windows other than being ignorant of everything else.

September 17 Meeting Notes

MEMBERS ATTENDING: 22.

TREASURER'S REPORT: 104 members.
Treasury Balance: \$3684.44.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT: **Chris Christensen** reported that the Photo SIG enjoyed using the large projection screen donated by the NNCUG to the Lancaster Community Library for the first time. It is a big improvement in visibility and viewing the image quality of photos that are shown.

SIG REPORTS:

PHOTOGRAPHY: The group meets on the **second Tuesday of the month from 9:30** to 12 at the Lancaster County Library in Kilmarnock. **B.J. McMillan** described the photo of Sidney Harbor, Australia, that was the editing assignment using Photoshop Elements at the September meeting. Members share how they achieved their results and this serves as a starting point for the discussion. **Joe Moller** demonstrated sharpening photos. **Bruce Mc Millan** demonstrated

the Smart Curves program (Windows only) that adds the curves adjustment function to some versions of Photoshop Elements.

GENEALOGY: **Ann Thompson** presented an overview of three alternate online subscription services for genealogists other than Ancestry.com at the September Genealogy SIG meeting. The SIG will **meet November 10, 1:00 p.m., at RW-C. Ellen Hollister-Messick** will present resources at, and research tips for, the Daughters of the American Revolution Library in Washington DC.

Q & A TIME: If one gets malware on the Windows partition of a dual-boot Windows/Linux system, will it affect the entire hard disk? No – affects only the Windows partition. If one has a dual boot Windows/Linux system, will different drivers have to be installed for each system? Yes. What are the secrets to getting faster start up times on a Windows system? First, defragment the hard drive. Second, examine the start up function and reduce the number of items that run on start up. (Can use the free “Solutio” program to see what is starting on

Membership Report - October 2011

Welcome- Richard (Dick) Rounds

RENEW October 2011 - Don Beard, Alta Miller

RENEW September 2011 - Sandra Armstrong, Geraldine Holmes, Gerald Stiles, Beverly Wellford, Linda Williams

Membership dues are \$20 annually. Please send to:
George Cadmus, Treasurer, NNCUG, 150 Pine Drive,
White Stone VA 22578

boot up, and turn off items not needed.) Third, add more memory to the system.

SPEAKER: **Richard (Dick) Rounds** gave a detailed presentation on Linux, the “other” operating system for PC's.

RAFFLE WINNERS: **George Cadmus** - SanDisk 16GB Flash Drive with case, **Bruce Mc Millan** – iPod and iTunes for Dummies and a Sharper Image MP3 player, **Tom Duke** – Brother P-Touch Labeling System.

Ed.

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Northern Neck
Computer
Users' Group
150 Pine Drive
White Stone, VA 22578

NNCUG Meeting Dates

NNCUG GENERAL MEETING
Third Saturday, 10:00 a.m.

Rappahannock Westminster-Canterbury Meeting Room

BEGINNERS SIG

*Meets three times a year. Those interested, contact
B.J. McMillan at 580-8666*

GENEALOGY SIG

*Meets bi-monthly, 2nd Thursday, 1:00 p.m.—RW-C
Contact Ann Thompson at athompson@kaballero.com
to get on the mail list for announcements.*

PHOTOSHOP SIG

*Second Tuesday, every month, 9:30 a.m.
Lancaster Community Library, Kilmarnock
For more information, Call Jim Sapione, 804-462-5831
or message Bird@kaballero.com*



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Coming Attractions

*Membership - Oct 15, Rob Mink, Network Access Storage
Genealogy - Nov. 10, Daughters of the American Rev. Library
Photo SIG - Oct. 11, 09:30 am, Lancaster Community Library*