

March 2008



Vol. 27,  
Number 3

# MEGAPHONE

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL MARYLAND USER GROUP

## President's Message

### The Verizon FIOS Man Cometh

from Mike Kerwin

Well, friends and digital device mavens, this month I would like to share with you our initial experience with The Great Switchover. Yes we have converted from Comcast + Verizon to be Verizon Triple Play via FIOS service.

Over the 12+ years that we have lived in Columbia, we have watched and planned for several generations of PC Connectivity. We started with AOL's dial-up service, but we knew that accessing the Internet via the cable company was much faster and just around the corner. Indeed we paid extra to have both telephone and cable outlets in virtually all rooms of our house. Even that was not the entire extent of our actions to stay connected. I personally crawled up in the attic on several occasions to string first coax and then Cat-5 cables between the two primary PC nerve centers in our house. Those were the days when WiFi was just a dream. I'm glad that dream was realized before I had to string more cable from the cable modem/router through the attic to the downstairs family room.

During this interval we watched Comcast come through our neighborhood and bury their cables and later upgrade their connection to fiber optic. For a long time we were happy; we had the premier connectivity and were the envy of one and all. Oh there were a few glitches along the way, as when the ISP provider @Home went bankrupt and potentially leaving all of its subscribers stranded and Mary lost her favorite email address of [mtg@home.com](mailto:mtg@home.com).

Time marches on and recently we watched Verizon bury their fiber optic cable in our neighborhood, indeed right in our front yard. Then we started getting bombarded with mail, flyers, newspaper ads, online ads, etc. All of this to introduce the new FIOS approach to connectivity, which my work colleagues already had in Montgomery

county. Meanwhile the Comcast bills just kept getting higher and higher (and higher), and the service stayed the same or even degraded a bit despite long term promises to upgrade the features and quality.

So why did we switch? I don't know that there was a single overwhelming reason for switching, but there are a number of bits that add up. We got onboard for the \$99/month triple play back in December with the offer of a free HD-TV (which we have yet to see, one month in). We had Verizon for our landline so we expect to see some savings over \$200/month for cable and Internet + \$53 for landline; though again, we haven't seen our first bill yet. When we added all of the bits of extra hardware and programming + taxes it looks like about \$175/month for a slightly more TV services. Certainly the hardware is newer and has better features (like a "back 10 seconds" button, widgets on screen, seemingly more movie choices, etc). There was also the feeling that Comcast kept promising improvements in programming, hardware, and features but kept delivering the same-old, same-old at ever-increasing fees. Verizon has locked the rate for 2 years which sounds like a long time. We subscribed to the 5 MBS down/ 2 MBS up level of service and I have not seen a noticeable difference in most Internet interactions.

We have seen a few glitches; for example, HD (high definition) boxes are special and extra, and they don't share recordings like regular (analog?) boxes can do. This is different from the speaker and ads. We have not tried to show slides or



### Next General Meeting

Rob Pegoraro from the Washington Post was snowed out last month, but is coming this month to report what he saw at the Consumer Electronics Show in January, and discuss other computer news.

Wednesday, March 19, 7:30 pm.....Florence Bain Senior Center

### Next Windows SIG Meeting

Topic: More Useful Freeware

Tuesday, March 25, 7 pm.....Florence Bain Senior Center

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movies from the computer on the TV yet but this is supposed to be available and will be a more important option with downloadable movies. Another consideration is that the installer was literally here all day, spending most of the time on hold trying to get Verizon HQ to activate various features. It sounded like each feature was handled separately, and our initial order was messed up a bit; to be fair, he was prepared and got everything running before leaving.

Another minor issues is that "cable ready" TVs no longer can tap the cable without an adapter box (min of \$5/month). I believe this is due to the digital vs analog approaches; Comcast apparently sends down both analog and digital signals (currently) whereas FIOS is all digital. The "cable ready" functions appear to only operate on the analog signal so to get HD on one of those would also require a converter box. Then again who knows what will happen next February when analog TV is scheduled to disappear. Will Comcast downconvert the signals to pipe out to customers or will they only supply digital signals thereafter?

The FIOS system comes with a combo modem/wireless router that seems to be working fine. It even has the network name and security code stamped on the outside so this is easier than remembering or writing down the details. With FIOS one rents the modem (modem/router) which we did with Comcast anyway. This way if newer technology (maybe some year 802.11N will be accepted as a standard) comes along it will not cost us to upgrade.

The new system offers a one-month subscription to "TrueSwitch" which somehow grabs one's email from the previous provider and stuffs it into a folder on the Verizon.net email server. The online email seems a little less friendly than Comcast's as it displays relatively few messages on each screen which are otherwise filled with advertising. I prefer to download my email so I can archive it and view the bulk in larger chunks – all the easier to shift-Del those I am not interested in. I will set this up soon as I get some quality time.

We have rediscovered an unfriendly feature of Verizon – it is a bigger bureaucracy than the Federal Government, or at least it seems so at times. This is apparent when calling for issues which cross the boundaries of phone/Internet/TV; each seems to be a separate organization with separate 800 (or 8xx) numbers and separate hold queues. For instance I called about a billing question as we signed up for online bills and direct bank to Verizon payments. At first I got the voice-directed menu system that had no choice for this problem. Eventually I got to an operator who told me she could not help me but she could dial me into the tech support line; 32 minutes later someone picked up and got me through to our online bill, but could not help with the arrival of the Free HD-TV which required another call queue. Fortunately

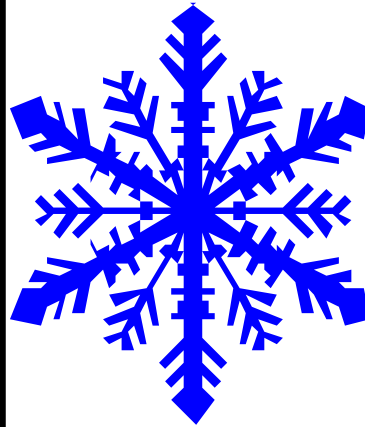
## Editor's Note

from Paul Van Bloem

Just a quick Editor's Note to cover news that isn't in Mike President's Message.

### Snow!

Well, no, there really wasn't any snow of significance, but the threat meant that we had to cancel last month's meeting. As we explain on the website (<http://mycmug.org>), the Howard county senior centers follow the schools, so when the schools announced that they were canceling after-school and evening activities, that meant the senior centers weren't open for the evening, either.



Fortunately, we got word to our planned speaker, Rob Pegoraro, before he headed up to the frozen wasteland that is Howard county. (I believe it was Andrew Rein who actually got hold of him; thanks, Andrew.) And even more fortunately, Rob

agreed to come to our March meeting, so Mother Nature will, in the end, fail to prevent us from partaking of Rob's wit and wisdom! Take that, Mother Nature! (I think it's safe to say that; we hardly ever get snowstorms in March.)

So, please come to the meeting next week, and hear Rob on what he saw at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, along with other fascinating stuff.

### Future Meeting Programs

While we're on the subject, let me mention a few upcoming meetings.

Our old friend Dave Methvin will be



this last queue was very short and the process is started to get the TV. Apparently, though, my call actually started the process, because no notification had been sent after the system was installed.

Well this is my tale for this month. Next month I will present the tale of the new scanner (specially designed to digitize slides).

Digitally,

Mike



presenting in April. Dave is currently a big part of PC Pitstop, and previously was Executive Editor at Windows Magazine, and PC Tech Journal. His talk will focus on Windows Vista, which is currently a little over a year old. I hope we'll also get an update on how things are going at PC Pitstop, and other projects Dave is involved in.

We are tentatively expecting another speaker from the Howard County Library for our May meeting. In January, Amy Begg DeGroff spoke about the library's work using open source software to both run the library and provide services for library customers. We'll have more details about the May presentation in the coming weeks.

Also on the topic of presentations, we are still looking for someone to coordinate our meeting programs. The pay isn't great, but you get to exchange email with interesting people like Rob Pegoraro and Dave Methvin!

In the meantime, have a good St. Patrick's Day, and I hope to see you next Wednesday at the Florence Bain Center.

- Paul Ye Ed

## Deals from the DealsGuy

by Bob (The Cheapskate) Click

### Great Shows!

The International Builders Show came to town again this year and I worked in it several days. It's the largest show held around here in the amount of freight (thirteen million pounds), and close to the largest in area. The dock basin was piled high with crates of all kinds. There were five beautiful modular homes set up on blocks in the parking lot for people to tour. The modules arrived a week before the show opened, but all the homes were assembled with the finishing touches in time for show days. One was a three-story 2700 square foot model worth over a million dollars, which was actually sold during the show. One home featured technology of the future such as calling you or sending you an email at work if



something goes wrong. I'll write a separate article about that which will be available on my website soon. Kohler had their million-dollar computer-controlled waterfall again this year, and it was fascinating to watch it making letters, words, ad phrases and other decorative things to fall, all completely out of water. Mr. Kohler himself flew in to look over the display.

Another show we worked was the Orgill Show ([www.orgill.com](http://www.orgill.com)). That is like a giant hardware store, but is a trade show (about 500,000 square feet of display area) with exhibitors showing their latest wares. Orgill is a large independent hardware distributor. Many exhibitors prefer not to take their

## Upcoming Meetings and Help Needed

As was announced previously, Andrew Rein has stepped down from his job as Program Director. So CMUG is in need of someone who can coordinate presentations for our general meetings.

The presentations are an important part of the educational mission of our user group. The Program Director acts as a central coordinator, and as liaison between the group and the speaker. So, this is an important job. On the other hand, it's not especially time consuming; we only have 11 presentations a year, after all, and most of the communication can be done via email. If you have questions about the workload or are otherwise interested, you might speak with Andrew (or one of the other officers) at the meeting.

**April 16:** Dave Methvin on Windows Vista

**May 21:** Howard County Library—details to be determined.

**June 18:** Elections; speaker to be determined.

## Windows SIG March 25 Meeting: "More Useful Freeware"

The Windows Special Interest Group (SIG) meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month, except in December. The SIG focuses on using and maintaining Windows, all platforms. We take questions, present tips and techniques, demonstrate freeware/shareware and even feature some web topics using a little trickery.

This month, our topic will be "More Useful Freeware." If you have a suggestion for a topic for a future SIG meeting, please email me at [mikes\\_line@hotmail.com](mailto:mikes_line@hotmail.com).

Remember that the meetings are at the Florence Bain Senior Center, and begin at 7 pm. See the CMUG website at <http://myCMUG.org> for maps and directions.

- Mike Hayes

booth's displayed products back home so some dealers come with large trailers and purchase as many products from vendor booths as they can carry, after the show closes. Some booths just leave their products, and volunteers from Habitat for Humanity collect as much as they can for that organization's projects. "Pallet pricing" and "coupon specials" are featured for dealers attending and the Orgill reps wear different colored blazers signifying their sales volume.

A coworker said an attendee was looking for me, saying he reads my column all the time, but my coworker unknowingly gave him incorrect location information and he never found me. I was very disappointed. It's not the first time someone has looked for me at a show, but they are often large areas and unless you know who to ask, getting together is difficult because most of us don't know much about where others were assigned to work, and my wife and I don't work all of the shows here.

March will bring the Electronic House Expo ([www.ehxweb.com](http://www.ehxweb.com)), one of my favorites. I won't be working it, but hope to look around. Central Florida Computer Society ([www.cfcs.org](http://www.cfcs.org)) has already made arrangements for their membership to attend at no cost. I recommend that one if you are in the area.

### Are You Ready to Tax Your Brain?

AlbyMedia has released version 1.1 of PIQE: Chain of Puzzles. It contains different types of challenging puzzles, has three difficulty levels and allows comparing your results with other players. It's a set of engaging puzzles giving you a real challenge. The game has progress check and result comparison features to provide you with detailed information on your development. The game has three difficulties, offering more sophisticated puzzles after you beat the easier ones. Please visit <http://piqe.albymedia.com> for a free trial of the product.

PIQE: Chain of Puzzles runs under Microsoft Windows and costs \$14.95 (USD) for a single-user license. AlbyMedia offers user group members 15% discount on the PIQE: Chain of Puzzles. Use the coupon code ALBY-JMGJ at <https://www.regnow.com/softsell/nph-softsell.cgi?item=15534-3>. Licensed customers get free technical support and free upgrades.

Direct download link: [www.albymedia.com/downloads/piqe.setup.exe](http://www.albymedia.com/downloads/piqe.setup.exe)

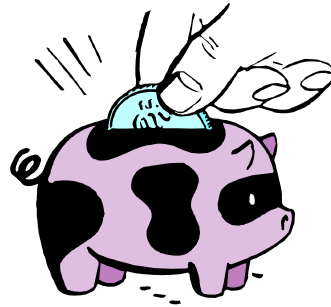
Company website: [www.albymedia.com](http://www.albymedia.com)

### Here's Another Freebie!

DVDVideoSoft, an Internet resource dedicated to free software, multimedia software guides and tutorials has just updated Free Video to Flash Converter. The new version features 30+ player skins and new easy-to-use Web integration, just copy and paste HTML code to the site or blog. Convert video files to flash (SWF and FLV). Convert the whole movie

or just a portion. Free Video to Flash Converter is available at [www.dvdvideosoftware.com/products/dvd/Free-Video-to-Flash-Converter.htm](http://www.dvdvideosoftware.com/products/dvd/Free-Video-to-Flash-Converter.htm) for free download. The program contains no spyware or adware. No activation or registration is required. Just download and use it.

Video to Flash Converter is already the 15th free program developed by DVDVideoSoft. They have a whole line of free tools: Free Video Dun, Free YouTube to iPod Converter, Free YouTube to MP3 Converter, Free YouTube to iPhone Converter, Free Video to iPod



Converter, Free Video to iPhone Converter, Free Video to MP3 Converter, Free YouTube Uploader, Free Audio Dub, Free YouTube to MP3 Converter, Free 3GP Video Converter, Free Video Flip and Rotate, Free Video to JPG Converter and finally Free YouTube Download (see

[www.dvdvideosoftware.com/products/dvd/Free-YouTube-Download.htm](http://www.dvdvideosoftware.com/products/dvd/Free-YouTube-Download.htm)).

All titles are available at [www.dvdvideosoftware.com/free-dvd-video-software.htm](http://www.dvdvideosoftware.com/free-dvd-video-software.htm) for immediate download. Also there are lots of guides and tutorials related to different video tasks like burning and ripping DVDs, making DVD copies, converting between all video formats and more. All our programs run under Windows Vista/XP/2000. We respect our users' privacy and there's no spyware or adware.

### Comfort Should Be The Golden Rule!

Comfort Software Group announces Comfort Keys 3.0, a successor to the popular hotkey management tool. The new version supports non-standard keyboard types (Ergonomic and Dell Inspiron 6000); speaks two new languages (Hungarian and simplified Chinese); has adjustable sensitivity for fast input of capital letters, spaces and other characters; has the option of hiding in the system tray and features an enhanced hotkey management window with a full list of hotkeys and new groups.

Comfort Keys is a multifunctional hotkey manager for Windows Vista, XP, and 2000. The integrated clipboard manager extends the capabilities of the standard Windows clipboard allowing you to save an unlimited number of copied objects and reuse them as much as you want; and makes sure your clipboard data is saved in case of a power failure or hardware crash. It also features an advanced task switcher, sound control tools and a virtual keyboard that facilitates the choice and configuration of your hotkey combinations. You can quickly switch languages, convert the selected fragment of text into another language (or case), run keystroke



macros, easily manage a window and even restart the computer using the keyboard.

Comfort Keys supports Windows Vista, XP, and 2000 operating systems. A personal license costs only \$29.95. A multi-user license ranges from \$21.95 to \$6.95. The company offers a 30-day money back guarantee on all orders. More information on Comfort Keys, as well as its free trial version, is available at [www.comfort-software.com/hotkey-manager.html](http://www.comfort-software.com/hotkey-manager.html).

Products can be purchased from Plimus, the official reseller of Comfort Software Group products. Major credit cards (VISA, MasterCard, Amex and Discover) are accepted. User Group members get 30% discount at: <https://secure.plimus.com/jsp/buynow.jsp?contractId=1711308&couponCode=dealsguy>.

### Wow! What a Clock!

ALSEDI Group announces version 2.6 of PerfectClock. It delivers any number of realistic clocks onto the desktop or replaces your wallpaper with clock wallpaper. PerfectClock lets you know the time in the most convenient way by looking at stylish analog or digital clocks. Enjoy having as many clocks on the desktop as you need, each displaying the time for the defined time zone. You can use the wallpaper clock as a screensaver. PerfectClock supports scaling. You can set a label to a clock and customize fonts, color, position and other parameters. The Reminder feature is also customizable. On the official website are dozens of clock and wallpaper clock skins. It allows you to adjust hue, saturation, brightness and contrast to reach optimal appearance of the clock.

You can manually create a unique skin without being a programmer. ALSEDI Group has prepared a special offer for all new customers. Everyone purchasing PerfectClock can order a Personal Family Photo Clock Skin at no cost. It only requires selecting a frame pattern, sending a photo or two, and the skin will be delivered to you in three days. This skin makes a great present for family events.

PerfectClock runs under Windows Vista/XP/2000. The Standard Edition costs \$16.95 for a single-user license and the Professional Edition, supporting the Wallpaper Clock feature, costs \$23.95. Licensed customers are entitled to the fully functional version of the product, free technical support and free upgrades. Further information on PerfectClock, as well as a free trial copy is available from [www.perfect-clock.com](http://www.perfect-clock.com). Get a 20% discount on the registered Professional version by visiting: <https://www.plimus.com/jsp/buynow.jsp?contractId=1717144&couponCode=GROUP20PERCENT> and 20% discount on the Standard Edition at: <https://www.plimus.com/jsp/buynow.jsp?contractId=1695221&couponCode=GROUP20PERCENT>. The company website is [www.alsedi.com](http://www.alsedi.com).

### That's All for This Month

Visit my website ([www.dealsguy.com](http://www.dealsguy.com)) for more new product announcements (most not offering a discount). Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound.

- Bob (The Cheap skate) Click

[bobelick at bellsouth dot net](http://bobelick@bellsouth.net)



## 2007 Tax Software

by Milton G. Gugenheim, via APCUG

### Personal Software

Most of us seem to put the dreaded tax chore off until the last moment and then find ourselves faced with incomprehensible IRS forms, shoeboxes of receipts, check registers, antacids and headache pills. The return must be filed by Tuesday, April 15, 2008 (you can file an extension to delay filing until August 15, 2008. But payment, without P&I, is due April 15, 2008 – the IRS is nice, but not that nice!)

Fortunately help is on the way in the form of a couple of good tax preparation programs from Intuit – TurboTax, H&R Block – TaxCUT and 2nd Story's TaxACT. This review covers the two most popular programs.

In addition to well-crafted interfaces and good online help, both TaxCUT and TurboTax include Microsoft's Internet Explorer Web browser for seamless integration with the World Wide Web for updating. An Internet connection is required to obtain updates as the software is released in December, before the IRS has completed all the forms, etc.

Even if you think that you need the skills of an experienced CPA in the preparation of your return, either of these programs will help you to become better organized and can help minimize accountant fees.

I found the following software tax packages for the 2007 tax year: TurboTax Basic, TurboTax Deluxe, TurboTax Premier, TaxCUT, TaxCUT Deluxe, and TaxCUT Premier, for Windows 98, 2000, ME, XP, Vista and MacPowerPC processor. Most of the local office supply stores and other retail and software outlets stock the software.

There are also free tax preparation programs on the web. Go to a search engine and enter "free federal income tax programs". TaxACT is a good free program. The program is easy to use and includes forms most taxpayers require. A paid version is also available for more complex returns.

### Features

TurboTax Basic is the basic package needed to file all





individual returns including professional or sole proprietor, and includes Internet Explorer on the CD. TurboTax Deluxe includes all the features of TurboTax Basic and one free e-file (after rebate). Deluxe also includes extra help for deductions – the deduction finder (library resources, tax planner, on-screen references and IRS publications, video advice and a financial planner). TurboTax Premier includes all the features of TurboTax Deluxe plus help for investments, complex taxes, Schedule C business and Rental Property.

TaxCUT Deluxe is almost identical to TurboTax including Internet Explorer 6 (IE6) on the CD. TaxCUT Deluxe includes all the features of TurboTax Deluxe, tax tips, on-screen IRS instructions and publications. All the programs will import financial data from most popular financial programs, and include details on preparing a return, reviewing a return, electronic filing (e-file) via a second party, planning for next year, plus help locations.

### Installation

All packages were easy to install following the given directions. TurboTax Basic requires 175 MB of disk space without the installation of IE. TaxCUT Deluxe requires 170 MB of disc space without the installation of IE.

### Manual

Both TurboTax and TaxCUT include an on-screen user guide with typical screens of the described function. All the usual files, edit, forms, tools and help are in the tool bar. TaxACT has almost as much on-screen help.

### General Overview

All of the packages have an easy step-by-step program to walk the taxpayer through the various steps required to do a return. The experienced taxpayer may prefer the forms method after completing a basic information page. The taxpayer selects the form and fills in the required information. Some have supplemental sheets for recording information, which is then transferred to the form. Help is available from any screen. All programs import from Quicken and Microsoft Money.

### Details

The latest tax changes are incorporated in the packages (at the time of release). Each package allows the taxpayer to enter data on various forms after completing the basic information sheet. The return is then saved. Be sure to give the file a name if more than one return will be prepared using the same program. The programs may be used whether you are the organized type or the shoe box type. The shoebox type should organize the various types of entries first.

### Printing

TurboTax and TaxCUT allow you to print an IRS return or select a form or schedule to be printed. The current computer printer setup does not have to be changed. Check to be sure you have the latest updates prior to printing the return for filing. Print a return for filing and a return for your records. The record return will contain detail sheets.

I haven't used these programs to file electronically (e-file), so I can't tell you anything about that.

## Photoshop Lightroom: a Review

by Tom Ekvall, via APCUG

Do you like to shoot plenty of pictures with your digital camera?

If you are like me, storing and organizing them is always a chore so that you can find the right picture when you need it.

Enter Adobe Photoshop Lightroom – the new kid on the block for handling your digital workflow. Designed specifically for professional photographers, Lightroom is equally fantastic and impressive for any photo enthusiast.

Lightroom is not designed to replace Adobe Photoshop or Photoshop Elements. However, it is the perfect complement to the programs, and for some who do not care for doing layers, may become the only product they need for digital imaging tasks.

While Photoshop is designed as a general-purpose tool to handle a variety of creative digital imaging tasks, Lightroom has only one focus: provide photographers with an effective, streamlined way to manage their photos, process them, and deliver a final product whether a print or web gallery.

The product incorporates many features I enjoy in Photoshop CS3, such as the state of the art black and white adjustment techniques and being able to edit JPEG and TIFF files in a non-destructive manner.



### Summary

The Basic package of TurboTax or Deluxe of TaxCUT is more than adequate for most users. The upgrade packages are great for users who like the “bells and whistles” that include lots of helpful literature, suggestions, etc. The street price for the basic packages is around \$20, TurboTax Deluxe, and TaxCUT Premier is about \$40 Each company has an extensive business program for about \$70 +. A new program is required for the each tax year. TurboTax and TaxCUT sites each sell the programs and it will cost more than the local stores.

### Helpful Hints

I suggest the return be prepared in all caps since the IRS prefers this. All returns are mathematically corrected based on the input data. Most of programs have promotion tie-ins, such as a money program, anti-virus, etc. Read carefully the conditions before buying the program.

### For More Info

- ↳ TurboTax: [www.turbotax.com/support](http://www.turbotax.com/support)
- ↳ Block TaxCUT: [www.taxcut.com](http://www.taxcut.com)
- ↳ TaxACT: [www.taxact.com](http://www.taxact.com)

*This article comes to us from APCUG, the Association of Personal Computer User Groups, of which CMUG is a member. Milton G. Gugenheim, Jr. is a member of HAL-PC ([www.hal-pc.org](http://www.hal-pc.org)) in Houston, Texas, and has been an AARP Tax Aide Instructor and Local Coordinator for over 12 years. He can be reached via email at [mgug\(at\)hal-pc.org](mailto:mgug(at)hal-pc.org).*





In fact, everything you do in Lightroom is handled in a non-destructive manner, so that JPG images do not diminish in quality over time as editing changes are made. I like the way Lightroom lays out the photo editing tools on the workspace so that everything is at hand. Edits can be undone in the future and new changes made without having to create separate files for each change. Information is stored in a separate file associated with the image. The information is there in a Managed Photos folder whether you import the images into Lightroom's library or leave them in the original location.

Lightroom in fact is a cataloger of your photos, with the user having the choice where to store the images. It will even recognize pictures on removable drives or external hard drives as part of the catalog, something most browsers will not do. I chose to store my pictures in their original location for now.

## The Program

When you start up Lightroom, you will notice a sleek, black interface with photos in the workspace depicted as slides.

The concept behind Lightroom is to provide a simplified workflow setup from shoot to finish with five modules identified on the top right hand section of the screen: Library, Develop, Slideshow, Print, and Web. Each module has a set of panels with pre-set information on the right hand side, task information on the left hand side, photo displays in the center and a filmstrip on the bottom of photos being reviewed. The filmstrip shows all in a particular folder, not just those opened up.

The **Library** is where photos are imported and cataloged with the ability to add keyword information, rate the photo on importance, and even mark it for rejection before a final deletion. It also includes Quick Develop controls that let you make simple edits with push button controls rather than sliders. Photos can be viewed in tandem to facilitate selecting, comparing, and ranking (stars and colors) photos for later processing.

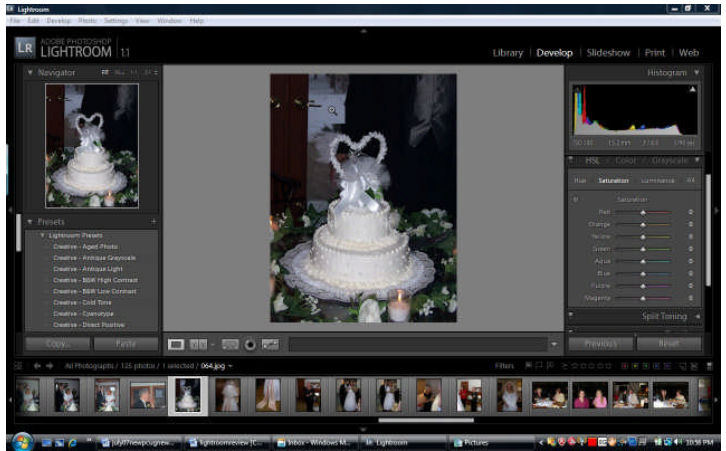
The **Develop** module is where you do the non-destructive processing of photos, including those in the .raw format. Whether you are in the library looking at a set of photos or in the Develop module, a histogram of the picture selected is always visible. This helps in evaluating which picture to keep or edit for printing.

The **Slideshow** provides a way to review photos or show them to someone else in an interesting format with the film strip of all the photos still showing on the bottom part of the screen.

The **Print** module provides all the choices for printing while the **Web** provides a tool for enabling the pictures to be viewed on the web either in html or in flash formats.

I love the way Lightroom is laid out on the screen (see accompanying image). Everything is so simple to use and user-friendly.

I also love the Color Adjustment sliders that adjust both the primary and secondary color ranges (all eight colors) with regard to the hue, saturation and luminance (HSL) characteristics of the image as well as the tonal controls including a new Tone Curve feature. Both allow you to make adjustments directly in the targeted photo.



Lightroom can probably handle most of my image-editing needs. However, there is still definitely a place for Photoshop CS3 for those things which Lightroom cannot do.

What Lightroom cannot do is apply layers, masks, and selective editing to a photo. It also does not allow you to do compositing and montages. It is not a "fix it" program when extensive retouching is necessary, nor does it have filters and brushes to create artistic effects, something I love to do. Lightroom also does not work with video, which is no big deal to me.

Lightroom does provide for exporting the photo to Photoshop, Photoshop Elements or other image editing programs so that further work can be done to the photo.

Lightroom sells through Adobe ([www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)) for \$299. A 30-day fully functional tryout version is available for downloading from their web site.

## Final Thoughts

This is definitely a must-have program for those who want to manage their photos and process them in a non-destructive manner. To me what sets this apart from other organizers/digital asset management programs is the quality and depth of the photo-editing tools. It is obvious the program draws upon the experience of Adobe staff in developing image-editing products such as Photoshop, Bridge, and Camera Raw.

The system requirements include Microsoft Vista or Windows XP, 768 MB of RAM (1 GB recommended) and a Pentium 4 processor. I installed the software on an Acer laptop running Vista with Pentium 4 dual-core processors (1.60 GHz speed), and 2 GB of RAM. No installation problems.

There are a number of books out on the market to help you learn more about the software. The one I use is Photoshop Lightroom for Digital Photographers Only by Ron Sheppard. I like it for its simplicity in presenting information in an easy-to-understand format. There are a number of other great books out there.

*This article comes to us from APCUG, the Association of Personal Computer User Groups, of which CMUG is a member. Tom Ekvall the newsletter editor and "Creative Imaging" columnist for the Northeast Wisconsin PCUG (<http://webpages.charter.net/newpcug>). He can be reached via email at [tekval\(at\)new.rr.com](mailto:tekval(at)new.rr.com).*



# CMUG MEGAPHONE

George Coffin  
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Columbia, MD 21045



Meeting:  
**Wednesday, March 19, 7:30 pm**  
Rob Pegoraro from the Washington Post  
will be speaking on what he saw  
at CES and other topics

## CENTRAL MARYLAND USER GROUP

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General meetings are held the third Wednesday of every month at 7:30 pm at the Florence Bain Senior Center, near the Harpers Choice Village Center in Columbia MD. The number there is 410-313-7213.

Membership in the user group is currently \$30 (cheap!). Membership includes a monthly subscription to the CMUG Megaphone, a membership directory, full access privileges to the Website, and drawings for free and review software at meetings.

<http://myCMUG.org>

