



## March 1, 2001 Meeting Announcement MP3

The March DVPC meeting is all about MP3. What **IS** MP3? [From MP3.com](#): "MP3s are digital audio files that have been shrunk down while still maintaining their original sound quality. Before there were MP3s, digital audio files took hours to download. But on a 56K modem, most MP3s can download in just a few minutes. MP3s are widely recognized as the most popular format for storing and listening to music on the World Wide Web." ... "MP3 is short for MPEG Audio Layer 3. MPEG refers to the Moving Pictures Experts Group, an organization that sets international standards for digital formats for audio and video. The file-shrinking technology itself was developed by the Fraunhofer Institute in Germany." [From Epinions.com](#): "Unlike traditional search engines, or MP3 websites, [Napster](#) virtually guarantees you'll find the music you want, when you want it. It works by making the libraries of other MP3 listeners accessible to you directly, only listing those files available right now." MP3 depends on an Internet technology called "peer-to-peer" that allows you to make files on your computer directly and securely available to others using a service like Napster. There's nothing about peer-to-peer that makes it specific to music files, but that's its number 1 use today. Come and learn all about MP3, Napster, peer-to-peer, and the legal wrangling surrounding this technology at the March DVPC meeting.

DVPC meetings are held in the lobby conference room in Building B at the Bank of America Technology Center office complex in Concord, located near the northeast corner of Clayton Road at Galindo (see the Map to Monthly Meetings on page 15). Please use the main entrance of the building, which is in the center of the front of the building that faces Clayton road.

Doors open at 6:00 p.m. and the meeting starts at 7:00 p.m. We will have the next installment of **PC 101**, our New Users SIG class run by [Craig Peterson](#) on how to use the computer, at 6:15 p.m. "Spreadsheet Formulas, or How to Make Money at Home in Your Spare Time" will be the class continued from last month. The classes are open to all members.

We'll also have the Networking Table from 6:30 to 7:00; if you have something to sell or trade, need technical help, or just want to exchange views, visit the Networking Table. We will have one of our pre-meeting games, with a great prize for the winner! Also, as usual, we'll have library disks and those great DVPC mugs (version 2) for sale, SIG news, random access, and some of our usual great door prizes. See you at the meeting!

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### President's Corner

by [Alan Mildwurm](#)

Sometimes a newer version of something isn't always better. I'm sure any of you who have purchased an upgrade to something have learned that sad lesson. That certainly is the case with this article. I uploaded a President's Message to Ron on Friday with all the latest meeting info only to learn that my email went to that place where all undelivered email goes. Strangely, a second email that was sent to Ron a few minutes later made it. Go figure. I have this bad feeling about PacBell DSL email. To this day, Hot-mail only sporadically can pull email off that account. I digress. Anyhow, all my meeting info is at the office and I am writing this replacement article from home. Sorry Ron — about this holding up getting *Diablo Blue* off to the printer!

Our meeting in March will be on MP3. This new music format has certainly taken the

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## **Ken's Kompendium** by [Ken Hopkins](#), Sacramento PC Users Group

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*Buying a New Computer – Part 2 of 2. Part 1 appeared in the February 2001 issue of Diablo Blue.*

### **Expandability**

Ideally you should get a computer that has all the gadgets you desire already installed and ready to go from the vendor. That may be possible, but new gadgets are popping up all the time. In some cases, the new gadget may require a drive bay and/or an expansion card slot. For that reason, I recommend that you buy a computer that has at least one empty drive bay and one empty expansion slot. The ISA bus, long the standard expansion slot, has all but disappeared. The winning technology is the PCI slot. You will need to match the card and the slot. An AGP slot is useful even if the computer has video built into the motherboard. This allows you to add a new video technology in the future.

### **Monitors**

There are three types of CRT (cathode-ray tube) monitors currently available, and each has its advantages for various applications. There are also LCD (liquid crystal display) and liquid plasma monitors available if you have a large budget.

#### **Dot Pitch**

The dot pitch of a monitor is the distance between adjacent sets of red, green, and blue dots. The smaller the distance, the sharper the image. A sharper image is easier on the eyes. Do not even consider a monitor that has a dot pitch number larger than .27 for a shadow-mask monitor or larger than .25 for an aperture-grille monitor.

#### **Display Sizes**

How big a monitor do you need? That depends on your usage and your budget. Just to confuse you, monitor sizes are measured diagonally (just like TV screens). To make things even tougher on you, the measurement is the tube size, not the viewable size. The image skews near the edges and so that area is not usable. When you compare monitor size, compare the viewable size instead of the tube size. Higher resolutions let you see more information. Running a display at a resolution higher than the ones I describe will result in eyestrain. You can move down a notch or two if you have vision problems.

##### *Monitors Smaller Than 15"*

Do not buy one of these, they are just too small. I know they look like a good value but you probably not be happy using it. This size will look best at a resolution of 640 x 480 pixels (picture elements, or dots). I have seen some software that will not run at this low resolution.

##### *15" Monitor*

This size is suitable for word processing or spreadsheet applications. The only advantage of this size is the low cost. This will look best at a resolution of 800 x 600 pixels.

##### *17" Monitor*

This is a good size for web browsing and other Internet applications. It will also work well for word processing and spreadsheet applications. This will look best at a resolution of 800 x 600 pixels and may be okay at 1024 x 768. The price for this size of monitor is just slightly above the 15" monitors.

##### *19" Monitor*

This is the size for the amateur graphics designer or the hardcore gamer. This will look best at a resolution of 1024 x 768 pixels. These monitors take a lot of desk space. There are now short-length monitors that eliminate that problem. Be sure to measure your desk space before buying one of these.

##### *21" Monitor*

This is the size of choice for professional graphics designers and people that need a lot of windows visible at one time. I find that this size is great for programming because I can have lots of debug windows open. This size is normally run at a resolution of 1280 X 1024 or even 1600 X 1200.

#### **Refresh Rates**

The refresh rate of a monitor tells you how frequently the screen is redrawn by the electron guns within the CRT. This number is measured in hertz (Hz), or cycles per second. A refresh rate of 70 indicates that the screen is redrawn 70 times per second. If the refresh rate is set too low, you may notice some flicker on the screen. This is especially true when working under fluorescent lights (which operate at 60 Hz). You should increase the refresh rate until you find one that does not flicker. The possible refresh rate may vary based upon the resolution, with higher refresh rates available at lower resolutions. You should be able to find a comfortable range between 67Hz and 85Hz.

Do not try to refresh at a rate higher than the monitor manufacturer specifies. You could damage the monitor with a bad setting. Fortunately, the expensive monitors include circuitry to protect them.

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## Ken's Kompendium...

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### **Flat or Curved?**

Most monitors have a curved front to them but some of the more expensive have a flat screen. Why would you pay more for the flat screen? The flat screen will have much less glare. A flat screen will have more usable screen space than the same size curved screen. There will be less image distortion on a flat screen. When you first look at a flat screen, the image will look funny, as though the screen is bowed out. You will get used to it quickly.

### *Dot-Trio Shadow-Mask CRT*

The most common type of monitor tube uses a thin sheet of perforated metal in front of the CRT to create discrete phosphor dots. Look for a dot pitch—the shortest distance between phosphor dots of the same color—of 0.27 mm or less. This CRT style is well suited for text.

### *Aperture-Grille CRT*

Sony invented aperture-grille CRTs, sold by Sony as Trinitron and by Mitsubishi as DiamondTron. Aperture-grille uses an array of stretched wires (instead of the hole filled metal plate) to create images using phosphor lines. Look for a stripe pitch of 0.25 mm or less. Aperture-grille designs boast improved brightness and contrast over shadow-mask tubes, without a loss of focus. This style CRT is best for image editing and is not as sharp for text work.

### *Slot-Mask CRT*

NEC invented this combination of shadow-mask and aperture-grille designs called ChromaClear. It uses a 0.25-mm mask with elliptically shaped phosphors. They claim that it provides good images for both text and graphics.

### *LCD Panel*

It is a pity that LCD panels are so expensive because everyone should be using them. LCD panels consist of a thin panel of liquid crystal shutters that open and close to let the appropriate color of light through them. There is no cathode ray gun firing at you, so they do not emit much in the way of radiation. As a bonus, they take up very little desk space. They provide a rock-solid display that is easy on the eyes. This style is suitable for text work and general graphics but may not have enough color depth for photo work. This display technology is not quite as fast as CRT technology and so may not be suitable for some games.

There are two styles of LCD monitors, digital and analog. The digital model requires a special video card that outputs the appropriate digital signal. A normal video card creates a digital signal and convert that signal to an analog one that is sent to the monitor. An analog LCD converts this analog back into the digital signal required to drive the screen. The digital-only version will provide a sharper screen since it avoids an unnecessary translation.

LCD monitors are available in various sizes with each larger size being significantly expensive. The reason is that the display is really a large integrated circuit. There is a lot of surface area where problems can occur during manufacturing. If more than a couple of dots are bad, they have to scrap the display. We end up paying for the cost of the scrapped displays.

If you can afford the price, buy a digital LCD panel; you will love it.

### *Liquid Plasma*

Liquid plasma screens are large and expensive, but beautiful. I do not know anyone who has one on his or her desktop. They are normally used for conference rooms or tradeshow booths.

### **Bottom Line on Monitors**

This is an important component of your system. You spend a lot of time staring at it and it will have a lot to do with your satisfaction with your system. You should sit in front of the potential monitor and use the computer for a while to determine if you really like it.

It is possible to spend more on the monitor than the computer. If that is what it takes to be comfortable, do it. I use an expensive 21" ViewSonic that is very comfortable to work with. I have used cheap monitors (that normally came with the computer they were hooked to) and could not wait to get away

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## **SIG NEWS** Compiled by [Nick Chase](#), SIG Coordinator, DVPC, 680-4211

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**Be sure to see the DVPC Calendar on [page 16](#) for the date and time of each SIG meeting, and any changes in meeting location or schedule.**

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### **Access/Visual Basic SIG** [Ron Ogg](#) (283-7900 Ext. 201) and [Ted Armstrong](#) (939-4096) SIG Co-Leaders

The Access/Visual Basic SIG meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. We are meeting at the San Francisco State University Extension at 1990 N. California Blvd., Suite 20, in Walnut Creek across the street from the Walnut Creek BART station and upstairs from the Federal Express office. Everyone who is interested in Access, Visual Basic, and VBA is encouraged to attend the SIG meetings.

### **Advanced Developers SIG** [Ron Ogg](#), SIG Leader – 283-7900 Ext. 201

The Advanced Developers SIG is a learning co-op. Every month we choose a topic and let people know where they can learn about it. We then get together and go over the information on a computer with a projector. We hope that if everyone learns a little on their own, and when we get together everyone can learn a lot. If you are an advanced developer you are invited to join the ADSIG. Beginners will want to get some serious development experience before joining the SIG.

We meet on the 3rd Thursday of each month at 2000 Crow Canyon Place, Suite 185, in San Ramon. Take the Crow Canyon exit off of 680 and go east to the first signal. Turn left and go to the third driveway on your left; there is a large sign at the driveway entrance that says "2000". Turn in and enter into the building at your left.

### **Advanced Users SIG** [Jeff and Sharon Noyer](#), SIG Co-Leaders – 778-4348

The Advanced Users SIG meets on the third Thursday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at 4208 Amargosa Drive in Antioch. Directions: Go east on Highway 4 through Antioch to the Hillcrest Avenue exit. At the light at the end of the exit ramp, go right onto Hillcrest Avenue, and then stay towards your left. At the 3rd light, Hillcrest Avenue turns to the left. Go left and stay on Hillcrest. (Landmark: "The Crossings" Shopping Center is at intersection). At the 4th light, go left onto Wildhorse Drive. (Landmark: 7-Eleven on corner at intersection). At the 2nd left turn, go left onto Meadow Lake Drive. At the 4th right turn, go right onto Amargosa Drive. 4208 Amargosa Drive is the 3rd house on your right, blue and white one-story. The Advanced Users SIG is for anyone interested in discussing advanced topics such as hardware and software issues, cutting-edge technologies, networking, Windows NT Server and Workstation, troubleshooting, etc. Please join us to participate in this very informative and educational forum. We hope to see you at the meeting!

### **Genealogy eSIG** [Peggy Johnson](#), SIG Leader – 676-7522

The DVPC Genealogy SIG is a group of computer genealogists who share helpful websites, databases and source information found on the internet. It's an opportunity for members seeking help to put forth a question or problem to the SIG and receive suggestions and advice. When you locate a useful website, database or visit a research facility, please email the group of the details so we also can take advantage of this information. If you wish to be included in this Genealogy SIG, please email Peggy Johnson, [pegszone@aol.com](mailto:pegszone@aol.com).

### **Education and Entertainment SIG** [Alan Mildwurm](#), SIG Leader – 510-770-5770

The Education & Entertainment SIG usually meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month at Montevideo School in San Ramon at 7:30 p.m. Check the DVPC web site ([www.dvpc.org](http://www.dvpc.org)) for information about each month's meeting. The E&E SIG is oriented to exploring the best in education and entertainment software for the PC. Come back in the fall when everyone is invited to attend our meetings, and bring your kids along - they'll have a great time, too! Directions for our next meetings: Take 680 to Bollinger Canyon Road, go west to San Ramon Valley Blvd., go south to Montevideo Rd. and turn left. Proceed east on Montevideo about 3 blocks to Broadmoor and turn left. The school is 1 block on the right. We meet in Room 22.

### **Internet SIG** [Craig Peterson](#), SIG Leader – 671-7025

The Internet SIG meets at 7:00 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month at Computer Renaissance, 959 Contra Costa Blvd. in Pleasant Hill. We cover everything about the Internet, [\(Continued on page 5\)](#)

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## SIG NEWS...

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from browsing and email to creating your own web site and the tools for doing so. For more information, please call Craig Peterson by email at [compmail@pacbell.net](mailto:compmail@pacbell.net) or by phone at 671-7025.

The SIG would like to recommend the following sites: For Procrastination Week (3/5-11): [www.onlineorganizing.com/](http://www.onlineorganizing.com/). For St. Patrick's Day (3/17): [www.ireland.com/events/st.patricks/](http://www.ireland.com/events/st.patricks/). For Johann Sebastian Bach's birthday (3/21): [www.jsbach.org/](http://www.jsbach.org/). If you like these sites or have others you would like to share, come to the next Internet SIG meeting. There you can find and share all that is out there in the "wild, wild web".

**Linux SIG** *Mark Allen*, SIG Leader (680-7746)

The Linux SIG meets on the fourth Thursday of each month in the Fireside Room of the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Concord at 7:00 p.m. The SIG will be exploring the usefulness of Linux, primarily for the power computer enthusiast on the workstation, but it will also be sponsoring special emphasis nights exploring the web server and administrative server, skills development for expanding Linux markets and workshops for advanced computer tweaking strategies. Our own InstallFests for people who can experiment with their equipment are inevitable. I'd like to see as many current DVPC members who have an interest in the possibilities of Linux at the meetings as possible, to see what directions we should concentrate on. We should have some seasoned Linux system testers on hand to speak, plainly, about what is possible and what currently isn't on the hardware and software sides and what areas of the computer world market Linux is likely to be useful in. We would appreciate it if you would read some of the materials on the Linux SIG News page on the DVPC website for directions to the meetings, site links, and member white papers on different aspects of configuring, learning, and using Linux.

**Microsoft Project SIG** *Elias Asmar*, SIG Leader – 299-8500

The Microsoft Project SIG meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the third Monday of each month at InterPro ADF's office at 3569 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Suite 210 in Lafayette. Park in the lot behind Radio Shack. The entrance to suite 210 is at the back of the building. Enter through the door marked "210" at the parking lot end of the walkway from the street and take the stairs to the second floor. Everyone who is interested in Microsoft Project and project management is invited to attend. If you plan on attending, please call Elias Asmar at 925-299-8500, Fax 925-299-8511, or send an email message to him at: [elie.asmar@iadf.com](mailto:elie.asmar@iadf.com).

**New Users SIG** *Bill Earl*, SIG Leader – 939-5874

The New Users SIG holds its meetings at 6:30 p.m. prior to the regular DVPC monthly meeting on the first Thursday of each month at Bank of America building B. We discuss whatever is confusing or puzzling new PC users. If you are a new user of PCs who would like to meet with other new users – and some experienced users who can answer your questions as well – then join us at the New Users SIG meetings at 6:30 p.m. prior to each DVPC monthly meeting. Also, remember that PC 101 (a class on how to use the computer; see the Meeting Announcement on page 1 for more information) will start at 6:15 in the back of the room. The classes are open to all members.

**Photo SIG** *Chuck Graham*, SIG Leader – 680-1333

The Photo SIG usually meets on the third Tuesday of the month at 7:00 pm at Graham Family Photo, 5100-35 Clayton Road, Concord. Vineyard Center at Ayers Road next to KMart. Call for directions at 925 680-1333 or check out our map at [www.grahamphoto.com](http://www.grahamphoto.com). Please bring anyone that is interested the Photo SIG. Please continue to let me know what your interest are. Also be sure to see our page on the DVPC web site at [www.dvpc.org/photo.html](http://www.dvpc.org/photo.html).

**Real Estate SIG** *Bill Thompson*, SIG Leader – 693-0174

The Real Estate SIG meeting location is still being researched, so meetings are postponed until a new location can be finalized. The relocation is required because the Insurance Commissioner's office is prosecuting 5 other title companies for current RESPA violations. My

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## **SIG NEWS...**

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*(Continued from page 5)*

boss and I are trying to figure out how to side step the commissioners office and make our efforts legal. If you have any ideas they would be appreciated. Contact SIG Leader Bill Thompson at 925-998-8530 or email at [thompson@dlsnetwork.com](mailto:thompson@dlsnetwork.com) for additional information.

**Windows SIG** [Ron Ogg](#) (283-7900 Ext. 201) and [Walt Parsons](#) (934-0775), SIG Co-Leaders

The Windows SIG usually meets at the Community Room at the Concord Police Department Building on the first Monday of each month at 7:30 p.m. Everyone who uses, is interested in, or is curious about Windows on their PC is invited to attend.

Directions: The Concord Police Department is at 1350 Galindo Street in Concord. From the 242 Freeway take Clayton Road east to Galindo and turn right; the Police Department building is 3 blocks south on your left. From Highway 24 take Monument Blvd. east and continue on Monument Blvd. to where it changes to Galindo; the Police Department building will be on your right a short distance past the signal at Cowell Road.

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*"I am a real computer person and as such recognize the ultimate reality of the **'Paperless Society'**. In keeping with this spirit and in an effort to help DVPC reduce overhead costs, I say "Nay" to a written newsletter. Give it to me electronically, I want to get my copy of DVPC's Diablo Blue off the Web. (I can always print it out on blue paper and don't even have to admit that I did!)"* Turn in this form at the monthly meeting – or email to:

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## DVPC Board Meeting Minutes by [Nick Chase](#), DVPC, AD-HOC Secretary

**Meeting Date:** February 6, 2001 **Time:** 7:00 p.m. **Location:** Alan Mildwurm's house

**Bank Account:** \$1,200 (approximately)

The Board meeting started promptly at 7:00 PM with Alan, Stan(!), Craig, and Nicholas present. Charlie and Ron were in other time zones. Tom missed the meeting due to confusion over the last-minute change in meeting date.

Pizza was the usual fare, well received.

I delivered a check to Peggy to renew my membership for 2001. If **your** membership renewal is due, this is a good time to mail a check to the address on the back page of this newsletter.

Discussion rambled from the Volkswagen suspended from the Golden Gate Bridge, (Craig immediately went to [SFGATE.com](http://SFGATE.com) and downloaded the photograph of the dangling bug), to feedback from Craig and Nicholas on the [PowerQuest](#) presentation by Gene Barlow at the February meeting. It was well received and much product was purchased to the delight of Gene. I purchased the bundle of Partition Magic 6.0, Second Chance, Drive image, and Lost and Found for \$99.00.

### New Business:

Our next meeting will be an MP3 presentation. You'll learn all about the MP3 technology, as well as a discussion about Napster and peer-to-peer networking.

Craig reported that the 'Maiden-Flight' of the pre-meeting game was well received by about 15 participants, and one individual had recorded 81 instances of words extracted from the HEWLETT PACKARD code word.

Alan related that INTUIT (Richard), had not responded since confirming at COMDEX on his pending presentation.

Stan related that he would be interested in speaking with INTUIT, as it was causing grief to his Check-Free account, in multiple payments to same account, same month, skipping monthly payments and other problems. Stan also showed us his new TRG Palm-compatible hand-held device. He said he has a brand-new Palm-Pilot at home which is unused.

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## Email Meeting Notification Available by [Ron Ogg](#), DVPC

We're providing an Email Notification service for the DVPC monthly meeting, and for SIGs as well, for all current, paid-up members. If you're interested in receiving an email message announcing each monthly meeting, and for the SIGs you attend, fill out this form and mail to the address on page 16 of this copy of *Diablo Blue*. Note that there's no separate notification for the New Users' SIG since it's held on the same night as the monthly meeting.

*Send me Email notification of each monthly DVPC meeting:*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

*Also send me Email notification of each of the SIG meetings I've checked below:*

Access/VB SIG	<input type="checkbox"/>	Linux SIG	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced Developers SIG	<input type="checkbox"/>	Microsoft Project SIG	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced Users SIG	<input type="checkbox"/>	Photo SIG	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education and Entertainment SIG	<input type="checkbox"/>	Real Estate SIG	<input type="checkbox"/>
Genealogy eSIG	<input type="checkbox"/>	Windows SIG	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internet SIG	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

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## DVPC Board Meeting Minutes...

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Ruth Mildwurm visited the meeting to show us her clever 'participle-book' school project, and share the delicious double-layer chocolate fudge cake with whipped cream frosting dessert.

Craig said he would have the pre-meeting game again at the March DVPC meeting on the 1st, with a new topic.

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## Ken's Kompendium...

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*(Continued from page 3)*

from them. Do not be afraid to buy a system that does not include a monitor so that you get a good monitor separately.

If you bought a good monitor last time and want to use it on your new computer, that is okay too, unless it is wearing out. Compare the quality of your old monitor with the latest models and be sure your monitor is still worth using.

### **Recommendation**

The tough part about recommending a system is that no two companies offer the same options. In addition, the recommendation system would be different, based upon the intended application. This recommendation is for typical home use (word processing, spreadsheets, Quicken, e-mail, and Web browsing). It will work fine for most games but it will not be the fastest on the block. It will work fine for Webcams but it is not necessarily a good video editing system. It could serve as a workstation but would not make a good server.

- 500 MHz to 1 GHz processor (Intel or AMD)
- 10 GB Ultra DMA hard drive
- 64 MB SDRAM memory
- CD-RW drive, 1 floppy drive
- 10/100 Base-T network card
- 1 USB port, 1 serial port, 1 printer port
- V.90 K56/flex modem
- AGP graphics card
- 17" Monitor
- Keyboard, Mouse
- Sound card and speakers

The price of such a system will vary based upon the processor selected. I calculate that the base price for the system above without the processor and motherboard would be \$900. To that we need to add in the cost of the processor and the appropriate motherboard. Based upon pricing at the beginning of September 2000, here are the prices you should expect to find for any given processor:

- The sub-\$1000 systems will probably be based upon the AMD K6-2 or a low-end Intel Celeron and run close to 500 MHz. By Christmas, expect that same amount to get you a 600-700 AMD Duron or Intel Celeron system instead.
- A system with a speed range of 600 MHz to 700 MHz of processor should cost under \$1100. The processors could be AMD Duron, AMD Athlon, Intel Celeron, or Intel Pentium III.
- A system with a speed range of 700 MHz to 800 MHz of processor should cost under \$1200. The processors could be AMD Duron, AMD Athlon, Intel Celeron, or Intel Pentium III. This is the best buy area. You get more power for your dollar in this range of system.

*(Continued on page 10)*

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## Ken's Kompendium...

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*(Continued from page 9)*

- A system with a speed range of 800 MHz to 900 MHz of processor should cost under \$1600. The processors could be either AMD Athlon or Intel Pentium III. This is a good range for power users. I am not sure you could discern a difference between these machines and the much more expensive gigahertz computers.
- A system with a speed range of 900 MHz to 1.0 GHz of processor should cost over \$2000. The processors could be either AMD Athlon or Intel Pentium III. These computers will probably also have lots of memory and large hard drives, bringing the system cost closer to \$2500.
- The top-of-the-line computers are in the 1.1 GHz to 1.2 GHz range, and will cost almost \$3000. The processors could be either AMD Athlon or Intel Pentium III. This range is just for the user who has to be the fastest on the block. These computers will probably also have lots of extras, bringing the system cost closer to \$4000.

### **Watch Out for That Rebate Scam!**

When you look at the prices in the advertisements, you will see prices that are \$400 less than the prices I quoted. This is because of a rebate from MSN, Prodigy or Compuserve. These are not good deals, do not do it. To get the rebate, you must sign up for a 3-year commitment to the ISP at \$21.95 a month (a commitment of \$790.20 over 3 years). That price is a little high for the Sacramento area; most ISPs will give you equivalent service for less money. It is the possibility of higher bandwidth connections that really sours the deal. If you finally get DSL or cable modem service in your home, the MSN, Prodigy, or Compuserve service is just money you are throwing away. I believe that most of us will have a high-speed link within the next 3 years.

### **Tip: The best time to buy a computer**

There really is a best time of the year to buy a computer. That time is a few early morning hours on the day after Thanksgiving. On that day, stores like CompUSA will have sales that feature computers as loss leaders. These are computers that they are selling below cost. They will only have a few available (maybe 10) and they will be gone before Noon. If that sale computer is close to your desired computer in specifications, wake up early and buy it.

*Ken Hopkins has been involved with computers since the early seventies and has collected more computer information than he is willing to admit. He currently serves as layout editor for SacraBlue, the magazine of the Sacramento PC Users Group. Send topic ideas to [ken.hopkins@sacpcug.org](mailto:ken.hopkins@sacpcug.org).*

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## Star Lancer – A Software Review by Alan Mildwurm, DVPC

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Star Lancer is a space combat game released by Microsoft and Digital Anvil, the creators of the Wing Commander series. The game is set about a hundred years in the future and is based on the premise that the Cold War just turned hot again. The Russians and Chinese launch a surprise attack on the rest of the solar system.

The graphics are very good – bordering on great (especially the explosions!) but the game is very similar to many other space combat games. The scenarios are very standard: escort duty, interceptors, dog fighting, etc. There are some unique features like special shields and thrust reversers that add to the game play. At this point, I have not had much experience with the multiplayer options.

This is a good game for someone new to the genre, but I would expect that a hard core gamer would feel this to be an “average” game.

When we demonstrated it at the Education and Entertainment SIG it was very well received. The main criticism that I heard was that the joystick control was a little irregular and that the viewing system (used for targeting) and radar were a bit cramped.

All in all, a good game – but not a great game.

**Get Involved! Learn!**  
**Join a SIG today!**

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**COOL!** by [George Griffin](#), DVPC

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Computer cooling: what does that mean to you? For most its just a couple of fans and a mini heat sink, that's it. But to the nerds in the crowd, power users, and over-clockers [over clocking is when you operate a computer at a higher speed than it was designed for], it is becoming a serious problem. When you promote the accelerated performance of the movements of electrons, excess heat is a byproduct. With the newer high performing computers this problem must be solved, or you soon fry your mother board and/or other adapter boards.

One of the solutions is to use bigger CPU [central processing unit] fans, and their cooling heat sinks. However, on some mother boards this does not work because the bigger fan and/or heat sink will not fit because of protruding capacitors etc. ASUS [the motherboard manufacture], have designed a huge heat sink and fan on their new motherboard for Intel's Pentium 4 CPU that's rated at 1,500 MHz. It's so heavy that they have resorted to a steel plate that is sandwiched with a rubber sheet to the motherboard, so the heat sink has a firm foundation.

There is a whole catalog of options that can be taken. Some manufacturers have even resorted to water cooling, a bit like an automobile engine. Another more exotic solution is the use of the Peltier effect. Peltier cooling works a little like a household refrigerator. It's made of layers of ceramic-type materials. When a electrical current is passed through the result will be hot on one side and the opposite side will be quite cold. The heat then is removed with a fan and a heat sink. This set up can lead to some fancy duct work. Also you have to have a separate power source because this setup takes a lot of juice.

The heat problem is not exclusive to the CPUs. Because hard drives have been jacked up to 10,000 RPM, heat has to be dissipated by various fan arrangements. Your upgrade video card, also comes under heat design scrutiny, and higher performing models have their own fan and/or heat sink.

The irony of this is that a lot of over-clockers spend more for cooling, than the cost of computer parts that are designed for the newer technologies. But theirs' is all ego and bragging rights: "I did it".

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**Pre-Meeting Game** by [Craig Peterson](#), DVPC

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Lat month's winner was Harold Lubbock. Of his 90 entries, he got a final score of 81. Harold will be able to pick up his prize, a copy of "Age of Empires," at this month's meeting. Honorable mention goes to John Burnitt with a score of 74.

Join us this month for the next game. When you come to the monthly meeting, See Peggy, Stan, (or whoever is at the table when you enter) and get your puzzle. Be sure you turn it in before the first speaker (yes, those who come early get more time to work on it), and one member will get a prize. Good luck!

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**Curmudgeon's Corner** by [Walt Parsons](#), DVPC

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***Dell Computer Corporation***

Up until now I've been a supporter of Dell Computer but recently they've had an advertising campaign which gives them a bad name.

About once a week they've been running a ¾ page advertisement in the Contra Costa Times titled "Save up to \$300". Being that I am sort of interested in upgrading my Laptop I was interested in their Dell Inspiron 3800 for \$999. To find out more information I immediately went to their web site and entered the E-Value code given only to have a notice on the screen that the E-value code was either out of date or no longer available. Mind you, this was done the morning that the advertisement appeared in the local paper.

After calling Dell's 800 number, with the usual wait in queue, I was told that you had to be a business to get that price and that the advertisement had run in the "Business" section of the paper. Apparently Dell is under the illusion that only business people read the "Business" section of the Contra Costa Times.

*(Continued on page 12)*

## **Curmudgeon's Corner...**

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*(Continued from page 11)*

After mulling that information over for awhile I thought that since I have done some consulting why not claim I was a business.

Back I went to the web page and clicked on the business icon. No luck. Apparently once you access the Dell web page and click on one of the three choices, Home, Business, or Government, they put your e-mail address in their data base and you are forever more locked into that category. There does not appear to be anyway to change your status in Dell's data base and, more importantly I would have to pay \$300 more than the price advertised in my local paper if I wanted that particular laptop.

I've already written to Dell Corporate on the subject but have not received a response. This is no way to treat a customer. Maybe that is why their business has dropped off and they are currently downsizing.

### ***Microsoft Natural Keyboard.***

I demonstrated this problem to the people at last month's meeting but repeat it here.

Several years ago I purchased one of Microsoft's ergonomic keyboard for about \$99.00, and was very pleased with it. Recently, however, it began showing signs of wearing out, with various keys occasionally not working, so I began looking for a replacement. Visiting CompUSA I was very pleased to see the keyboard "on sale" for only \$29.00. What a deal! So, of course, I bought it and brought it home.

#### ***MISTAKE!***

The keyboard only *looked* like the original keyboard. When I hooked it up and started using it I found that it skittered around the keyboard shelf, something the old one never did. So I decided to start looking for reasons why this happened. Here are my findings:

- The new keyboard is about ½ the weight of the old keyboard. The old one weighed over 4 pounds, the new one was barely 2 pounds.
- Next I noticed that the new keyboard's function keys were much smaller than the old keyboard. A nuisance if you touch type.
- There were also other key re-arrangements, such as the cursor keys and the page up/page down keys.

I feel that if Microsoft felt that they had to meet the competition's prices they could have at least changed the name of the keyboard. In a nutshell, this new Natural Keyboard is definitely **not** the quality of the old Natural Keyboard.

That's all for this month.

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## **President's Corner...**

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*(Continued from page 1)*

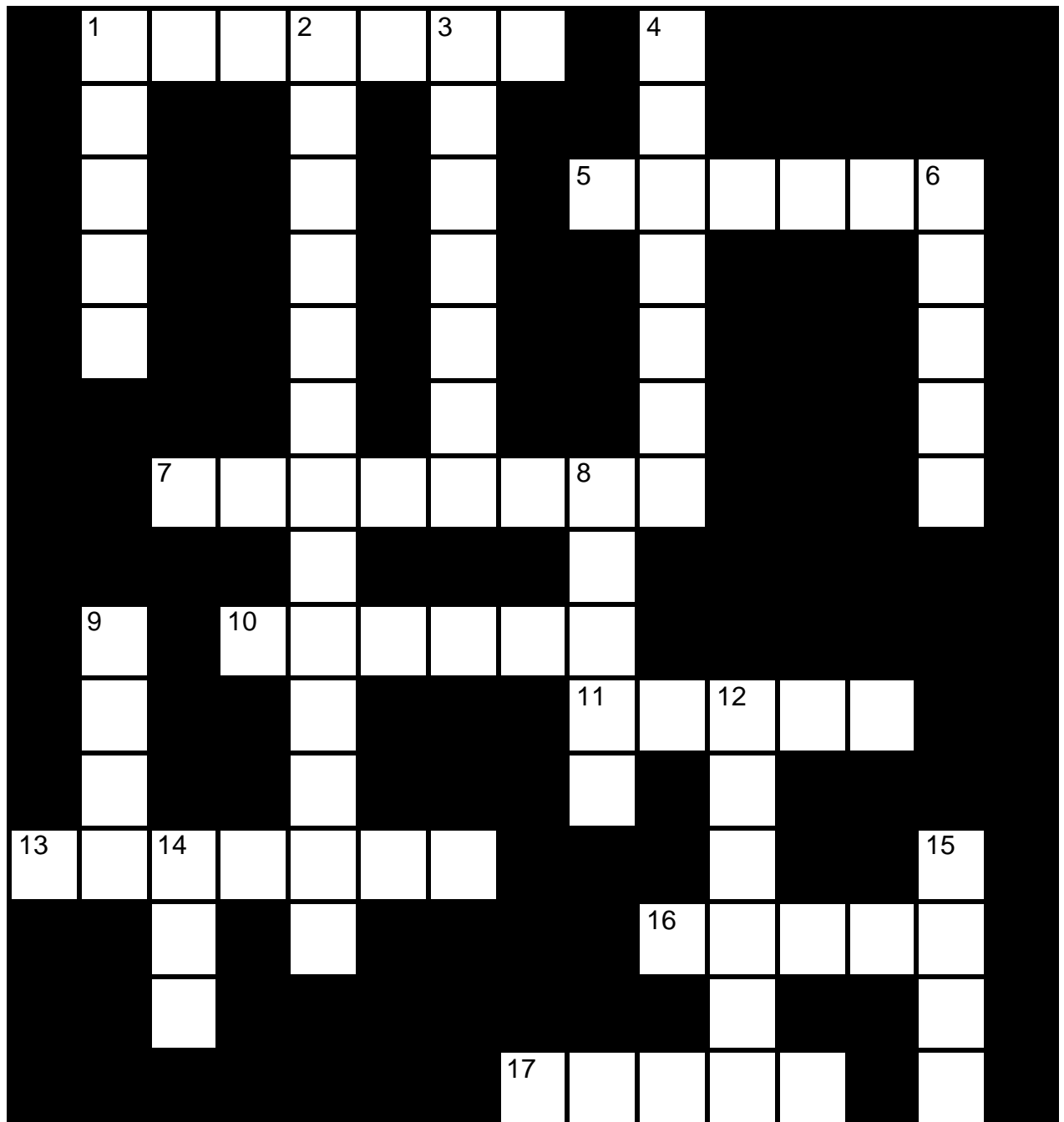
world by storm. MP3 players are proliferating everywhere to the point where they are built into everything. (At Comdex we saw several digital cameras with MP3 players built in.) Don't be surprised if your next car or home stereo will have a built in MP3 decoder. This compressed music format gives you virtually CD quality recordings in a very compressed file (depending on the compression size you select). I have put over 200 songs on a single CD in this format.

In April, I hope to have Intuit give a presentation, but my hopes are fading as I wait for confirmation that, so far, has yet to arrive. I spoke with Intuit back in November to get this organized for April – so keep your fingers crossed.

Finally, in April we will hold our annual elections for the DVPC Board of Directors. We have some seats to fill on the Board, and as always are looking for volunteers. Extra help and fresh ideas are always welcome! The work is minimal, the rewards even more minimal (pizza at the monthly Board meetings), but the contribution you can make to your club is extraordinary.

**Computer Crossword  
"Procrastination"**

by [Craig Peterson](#), DVPC



**Across**

- 1 Halting a process in a manner that allows resumption (7)
- 5 Where you don't want to fall while on a project (6)
- 7 What a computer does when it needs to "think" about conflicting data (8)
- 10 What you like to do when surfing the web (6)
- 11 What your boss claims you do when you are claim you are doing #10 across (5)
- 13 What most birthday cards are (7)
- 16 What your computer or car should NEVER do (5)
- 17 To stay for a while (5)

**Down**

- 1 To avoid the work you promised you would do (5)
- 2 What has happened when version 2.1 comes out before

- you install version 2.0 (13)
- 3 What our spouses claim we do to them while we are on the computer (7)
- 4 What most projects become (7)
- 6 Type of circuit that deliberately changes the time of delivering a signal (5)
- 8 Moving slowly (5)
- 9 Arriving after the expected time (as in PS2 systems to the store) (4)
- 12 To wait until your co-workers produce their portion of the code for the project (6)
- 14 The time difference from when the signal is sent to when it is received (3)
- 15 What our computer is compared to the new ones that just came out (4)

**About the March Crossword Puzzle** by [Craig Peterson](#), DVPC Librarian

**Procrastination:** Observing National Procrastination Week (March 5th through 11th) for last year, I rushed around at the last minute to get this into the newsletter. Good luck solving it, someday.

## Diablo Blue Article and Ad Information

Diablo Blue needs articles from the members of DVPC. See your name in print! Achieve fame and fortune! (Well, maybe just some limited fame in Contra Costa County...) We are particularly interested in product and book reviews and articles about your PC experiences.

Commercial advertising is available in Diablo Blue. Prices are \$75 for a full page, \$40 for a half page, and \$25 for a quarter page for one insertion — or get three consecutive insertions for the price of two. For more information, call editor Ronald Ogg, at 283-7900, Ext. 201 (days). Members of DVPC can submit personal classified ads that will be printed in Diablo Blue for three insertions at no charge. The rules are simple: up to 9 lines (as we typeset it), material must be suitable for publication (the editor is the sole judge of suitability), the member must be in good standing (current dues paid), and ad space is available on a first-come first-served space available basis only. If you want fewer than three insertions note that on your ad copy. If members want their business card reproduced, the rate is \$10 for one insertion, or \$25 for three insertions. The card must be horizontal and must be scannable.

Send your articles or member ad copy as email attachments to the [Newsletter Editor](#). See the deadline information in the Calendar on page 15 of each issue of Diablo Blue.

## DVPC on the Internet

DVPC has a web site on the Internet - thanks to our Web Team: Ron Ogg and Stan Umlauf. You can surf your way to our own domain and home page by starting your favorite Web browser and typing the following URL; be sure to save it in your browser's hotlist so you don't have to type it each time: <http://www.dvpc.org>

## DVPC Officers and Directors

Alan Mildwurm, President/Programs 510-770-5770 (work)  
Mark Allen, Publicity 680-7746 (home)  
Nicholas Chase, SIG Coordinator 680-4211 (home)  
Charlie Crothers, At Large 829-2237 (home)  
Peggy Johnson, Membership Secretary 676-7522 (home)  
Tom Krauss, Secretary 689-9960 (home)  
Jessica Mildwurm, Treasurer 829-5858 (home)  
Ron Ogg, Newsletter Editor 415-281-0431 (work)  
Craig Peterson, Librarian 671-7025 (home)  
Stan Umlauf, Web Site 458-5560 (home)

The Board of Directors usually meets on the Wednesday evening following the general meeting each month. Check the DVPC Calendar on page 16 of each issue of *Diablo Blue*, or the DVPC home page on the Internet ([www.dvpc.org](http://www.dvpc.org)) for the meeting date, time, and location. You can reach any of the officers and directors by talking to them at the DVPC monthly meeting, or leaving a message on the DVPC voicemail System.

## DVPC Voice Mail System

DVPC has a computer-based voice mail system. The phone number for the DVPC VMS is 925-556-1449. This communication vehicle provides members with up-to-date information about monthly and SIG meetings, potential new members with information about DVPC, and a message center for Board of Directors members and SIG Leaders.

*Diablo Blue* is the monthly newsletter of the Diablo Valley PC Users' Group.

Editor: Ronald Ogg, Mailing: Peggy Johnson

Please submit articles and columns to the Newsletter editor by email at [rogg@value.net](mailto:rogg@value.net)

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DVPC is a member of [APCUG](#), the Association of PC Users Groups

DVPC is a certified member of [UGN](#), the User Group Network



Support **DVPC** — Get a friend to join!

### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Enclose a check for \$30.00 for one year's dues with printed edition of *Diablo Blue*, or \$25.00 for one year's dues with access to the Internet edition of *Diablo Blue* (\$20.00 for students who must enclose a copy of current Student ID), made payable to **DVPC** and mail to:  
**DVPC User's Group, PO Box 3244, San Ramon, CA 94583**

Renewal \_\_\_\_\_ New Member \_\_\_\_\_ Referred by current member? Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Company/School: \_\_\_\_\_ Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

On occasion DVPC publishes a list of members **for distribution to DVPC members only**. Please check how you would like to be listed: **No listing** \_\_\_\_\_ **List Name and Home** \_\_\_\_\_ **Work** \_\_\_\_\_ **phone number(s)** \_\_\_\_\_

I'm also interested in these SIGs: \_\_\_\_\_

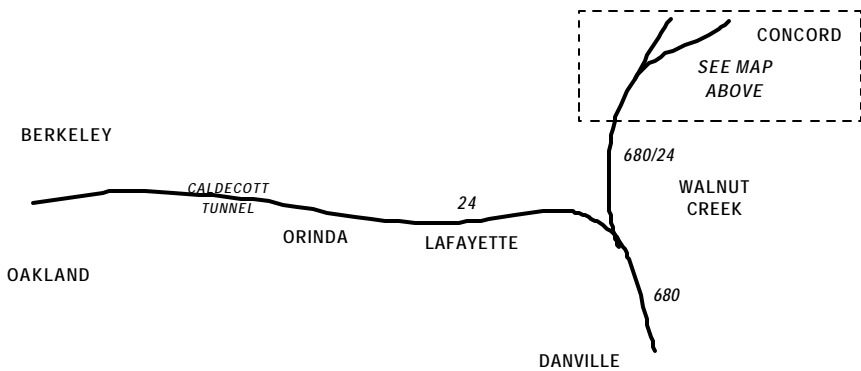
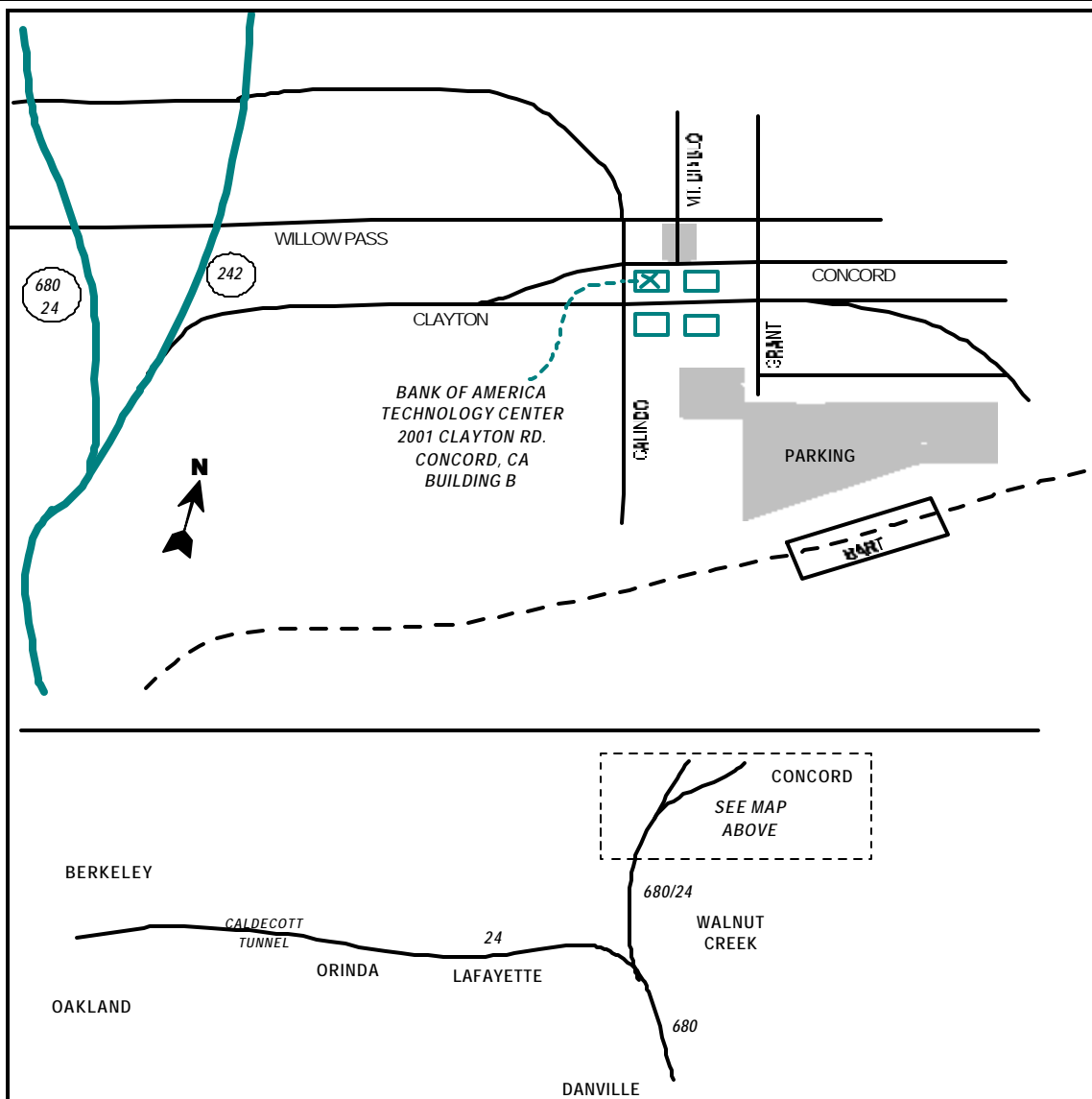
### Directions to Bank of America Building B in Concord

Take the Clayton Road exit off of the 242 Freeway, and go east on Clayton Road. After about 1½ miles you'll come to Galindo, and you'll see the Bank of America complex of four high-rise office buildings.

Building B is the first building on your left, at the northeast corner of Clayton and Galindo.

**Parking:** Turn right on Grant Street (the first block past Galindo), then right into the BART parking lot at the back of the BofA complex. Or turn left on Galindo then right onto Concord Avenue to find street parking.

**Be sure to observe parking regulations! Concord parking officers are very efficient!**



## DVPC March 2001 Calendar

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
<p>See SIG News starting on page 4 for more information about SIG meeting dates, times, topics, and locations</p>			<p style="text-align: right;"><b>1</b></p> <p>DVPC Monthly Meeting 7:00 p.m. PC 101 Class and New Users SIG 6:15 p.m.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>2</b></p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>5</b></p> <p>Windows SIG 7:30 p.m.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>6</b></p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>7</b></p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>8</b></p> <p>Board Meeting 7:00 p.m. Alan Mildwurm's house</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>9</b></p> <p>Real Estate SIG <i>No meeting this month – see the DVPC web site</i></p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>12</b></p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>13</b></p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>14</b></p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>15</b></p> <p>Advanced Users SIG 7:30 p.m. Advanced Developers SIG 7:00 p.m.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>16</b></p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>19</b></p> <p>Microsoft Project SIG 7:30 p.m. Genealogy eSIG <i>See SIG News on page 4</i></p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>20</b></p> <p>Photo SIG 7:00 p.m.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>21</b></p> <p>Internet SIG 7:00 p.m.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>22</b></p> <p>Linux SIG 7:00 p.m.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>23</b></p> <p><i>Diablo Blue deadline: Email articles and ads to the Newsletter Editor: rogg@value.net</i></p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>26</b></p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>27</b></p> <p>Access/Visual Basic SIG 7:30 p.m.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>28</b></p> <p>Education &amp; Entertainment SIG 7:30 p.m.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>29</b></p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b>30</b></p>

**FIRST CLASS MAIL**

**TO:**

Diablo Valley PC User's Group  
 PO Box 3244  
 San Ramon, CA 94583