Volume 11, Issue 4

July 2010

The Computer Club At Willow Valley

Special points of interest:

- How to check your Facebook privacy settings on page 5 in the electronic version.
- Firefox browser extensions that will help keep your computer secure and make your browser easier to use on page 6.
- Staying secure while traveling with your laptop on page 5.
- Secure communications can be subverted. See page 13.

The President's Pen by Sid Paskowitz

Membership Your Computer Club has 531 members at this writing, including 104 lifetime members.

Time to grind some old axes: Despite my requests and Willy's excellent column in the last Newsletter, we have not added new volunteers to our list of Computer Room Monitors or computer class instructors. Smooth operations of Computer Club functions depend on volunteers and it is not fair that only a few members shoulder the work while the great majority sits back and enjoys the benefits of others' contributions. I understand it takes a certain level of expertise to teach computer classes, but being a Computer Room Monitor does not require expert knowledge – and we will be happy to have classes for Monitors who want to sharpen their computer skills. Any Computer Club member with basic computer skills who is willing to spend a couple of hours each month as a Computer Room Monitor is requested to contact Dick Dressel at 464-6508 for the North Computer Room or Gene Simasek at 464-4605 for the Lakes Computer Room (E-308). Let Dick or Gene know if you would like training

(Continued on page 2)

Inside this issue:

Casual Cursor by Willy Webster

Another Bike Rolled Up Into The Kitchen

Harry has had an inventive knack ever since childhood for mixing parts to create useful oddities.

Back when he was a kid, he collected old, discarded bicycle parts in his folks' basement. A pile of fenders, gears, handlebars, wheels and pedals would be his toy box. It led to a variety of climaxes starring Harry pushing a wheeled concoction up the cellar stairs and into the kitchen.

"What's that?!" his mother would demand. A very proud Harry would proclaim it's a bicycle for some friend down the street. "Well, get that dirty thing out of my kitchen," his mother would order and out would go the "new" bike, replete with different-sized wheels, super-elevated handle bars and mismatched fenders.

"Does it work, Harry?" his mother would ask as Harry went out the door. But she knew the answer already.

Even Harry's father began using one

(Continued on page 3)

Coming Programs

July, 2010
Summer Break

August, 2010
Summer Break

September 2010
Kristen Hambleton, Mgr. Sales
Willow Valley's Facebook

All programs are held in the Education Room at the Cultural Center

President

(Continued from page 1)

to help you feel more comfortable as a Computer Room Monitor.

Security I also feel the need to emphasize some of the points Al Williams makes in these Newsletters on computer and Internet security: Instead of my saying what I think others should do, let me tell you what I do and then you can make your own decisions. Any time I get an email that I am not expecting or any time I need to do searches or open new Web sites on the Internet, I use one of the Willow Valley Kiosk units. Just in case someone used the Kiosk before me and did something to put malicious software on the Kiosk, I use regular Windows Restart procedures to re-boot the Kiosk unit and remove any possible malicious software that might have been put there. Then I check my email and do my Internet access. If I find information in an email or on the Web that I want to put on my own computer, I copy that information and paste it into a text email that I send to myself. When I am done on the Kiosk, I use regular Windows Restart procedures to re-boot the Kiosk unit and remove my information so a later Kiosk user cannot inadvertently access my information. When I return to my apartment, I open any emails I sent to myself and copy the desired information from those emails and paste it into appropriate files on my computer. I know this process takes time, but it is nowhere near the time it takes to clean up a computer that has been infected by malicious software.

Catalog Choice Catalog Choice at www.catalogchoice.org (or click on Cancel Catalogs in Information Central) will be adding features that allow Catalog Choice members to cancel other kinds of unsolicited mail such as credit card and insurance applications. Check out their site if you would like to reduce the stuff that appears in your mailbox.

Electronic Registration Improvements have been made to the Electronic Registration System. Computer Room Monitors will be invited to special training sessions to learn about the changes. We may be having a program later in the year at a Computer Club meeting to cover all aspects of the Electronic Registration System.

Lakes Computer Room Update

My thanks to Gene Simasek for his efforts to make the new Lakes Computer Room in E-308 a state-of-the-art facility. It now has six Windows 7 desktop computers and high speed Internet connection. The new telephone number for the Lakes Computer Room is internal extension 2423 (not a 464 number). The Willow Valley Retirement Communities Computer Club Speech Recognition Center has been moved from the Spring Run Computer Room to the Lakes Computer Room so all Windows Speech Recognition equipment and documentation will be available in one location.

Comcast The list of Comcast TV's frequently changing channels is up to date on Information Central. Thanks to Ron Dillon. •

Casual Cursor

(Continued from page 1)

of Harry's boyhood creations and continued using it on the Ocean City boardwalk long after Harry had left the nest, earned his engineering degree, and wound up with a NASA-related job retrieving returning rocket ejections to earth.

Harry's now retired and living in a very active retirement community full of career-experienced has-beens with all sorts of interests. Recently, Harry has noticed an increasing trend among his retirement community friends. They always seem to be losing things. In fact, so does Harry himself. They tell of trying to remember where those keys are, or that document or that box of bandages or that book.

It's a muddled process finding things, full of frustration and delayed success at best. Friends may offer possibilities to consider, but it's still like hunting that needle in a haystack.

Could that hunt be more complete and better organized, at least within the community? Harry has pondered that. How about a data base of commonly lost items, and places within the community, residence or personal containers where those items are often taken or kept. It would be a comprehensive generic list of possibilities for a loser to consider for each type of lost item, with listings of precisely how and who to call.

It might be cross-referenced with a recent itinerary, entered by the loser and further pinpointing possibilities. It could also be cross-referenced with a central listing of all found items in the community, offering sufficient description and location. That would be fed by finders via a computerized system.

Although Harry, in his later years, has worked mostly on computer hardware, a way of locating lost things might be more a software challenge. But, "hard" or "soft", it's still a way for Harry to create something.

If this solution could be realized, the climax would be like another bike rolled up into the kitchen. •

Willy Webster, who aims his column primarily at those less-acquainted with computer use, lives in Willow Valley, but you won't find the name "Willy Webster" in the directory. Willow Valley Computer Club president Sid Paskowitz isn't Willy, but he knows where to find him, so send any comments, protests, suggestions via Sid.

Computer Security for Everyone by Al Williams with Mac input by Bob Handler

The highest priority task to keep your computer secure is to keep the software on it up to date. Users of Linux derivatives such as Ubuntu have an advantage. If they use the Package Manager to download and install first and third party software, the Update Manager will notify the user of any updates. The user should install all updates.

Users of Macs also have an Update Manager that keeps track of Apple software. There is a free program on CNET at www.cnet.com/techtracker that is very helpful for third party software.

For Windows, Microsoft will either automatically install updates or notify the user of waiting updates but very few other software applications notify the user of available updates. There is, again, a free software application that will notify the user of updates for many, many software applications, including updates to Microsoft software. Download Secunia PSI at secunia.com, install it, let it notify you of outstanding and new updates for your software, and install them. If you need help, ask a computer room monitor. •

The Equipment Corner by Ed Dahrsnin

Refurbished Systems The following refurbished systems are available:

#193: Gateway K7-600, tower, Windows 2000 SP4, 600MHz, 8.91GB free space, 64MB RAM, and HP Deskjet 940C printer

#204: Dell 2400, tower, Windows XP Home SP3, 2.40 GHz Intel Celeron, 34.98 GB Free, 768 MB RAM, Compaq IJ1200 Inkjet Printer

#205: Gateway Essential 450, tower, Windows 2000 SP4, 450 MHz Intel Pentium III, 7.96 GB Free Space, 192 MB RAM, Lexmark Z615 Printer

#206: Dell 2400 MB51, tower, Windows XP Home SP3, 2.80 GHz Intel Pentium 4, 34.59 GB Free, 766 MB RAM, HP DeskJet 952C Printer

#207: HP 533x, tower, Windows XP Home SP3, 2.00 GHz Intel Pentium 4, 25.21 GB Free, 256 MB RAM, HP DeskJet 5900 Printer

#208: Gateway E3600, tower, Windows XP Home SP3, 1.60 GHz Intel Pentium 4, 32.11 GB Free, 1280 MB RAM, HP 845C Printer

Miscellaneous We have 3 volt CR2023 batteries (suitable for motherboards to keep the system clock running) and a variety of CD-ROM's, floppy disk drives, keyboards, 2-button mice, various power supplies, and assorted cables. Please contact Ed Dahrsnin at 464-6591.

Donations We are once again accepting the donation of used, working, tower and laptop computers (with power units and batteries) from club members along with all software CDs. You may deliver them to the North's Computer Resource room on the first floor of M building after 1 pm on Monday through Friday. No Macs or parts, see Lee Wermuth. •

The Mission

The Mission of the Willow Valley Computer Club is to:

- Provide the means to educate beginners or interested non-user on how to use a computer.
- Arrange for speakers to talk to the Club about subjects that would be of interest to those with some background and experience in computer use.
- Provide a forum for interchange of computer information among members.

For more information about the Club, contact Sid Paskowitz at 464-2127 or wvrccc@Yahoo.com

The Leadership

Officers

President: Sid Paskowitz

Vice President: Dan Drummond

Secretary: Gert Skelly

Treasurer: Dick Dressel

Community Representatives

Manor: Robert Kemp

Lakes: Gene Simasek

Committee Chairpersons

Program: Dan Drummond

Training: Bob McRobbie

Equipment: Ed Dahrsnin

Technical Support: Larry Gallagher

Website: Sid Paskowitz

Publicity: Wally Gordon

Newsletter: Al Williams

Mac Interest Group: Lee Wermuth

Room Coordinator: Dick Dressel

Microsoft Liaison: Ed Dahrsnin

Past Presidents

Larry Gallagher

Facebook Privacy Setings by Al Williams

Recently, Facebook decided to change the privacy settings for all users so that some previously private information was now available to anyone and some additional information was available to selected Facebook partners. The result was a firestorm of protest with articles in Time, various newspapers, and an indication that a Congressional hearing might be conducted.

Facebook partially relented and provided a new settings control intended to make it easier for users to determine what personal information they wanted to keep private. Very little has been said about that control and its capability since.

Before the current flap occurred, Facebook expert users have said that privacy settings on Facebook are very confusing. Therefore, the rest of us have almost no chance of changing our settings to provide the privacy we want.

Fortunately, a settings check feature is now available from www.reclaimprivacy.org that tells users if their settings provide privacy. Their web site provides three steps to viewing your settings. I found those instructions to be too sparse and discovered that clicking on the "Check our help page" link provided detailed information. That information was insufficient for the Firefox browser but at the bottom of that page are links to videos. The Firefox video was excellent.

If you don't care what personal information is available to everyone, then you should leave your Facebook privacy settings alone because Facebook has already exposed much of your information. I used reclaimprivacy.org and my privacy settings are now secure. •

Laptops On The Road by Al Williams

You may know that McDonalds now offers free WiFi to everyone and so does Starbucks. It is now easy to find a WiFi spot to use while traveling. Unfortunately, we all need to be careful when using those hotspots. Because they are open (unencrypted), anyone with a packet sniffer can see any network traffic at that site. That means that logins, passwords, sensitive comments, and everything else can be read by the sniffer.

There are ways to protect yourself while using those hotspots. You may connect back to your home computer and then out to the Internet using a VPN solution or you may connect via VPN to a commercial service that provides access directly to the Internet. The first solution currently requires a high degree of technical expertise (until the forthcoming CryptoLink is available).

The available commercial solutions for the second option are readily configured. There are two that are well known: HotspotVPN and Witopia. They offer several options—number of months and degree of technical sophistication. I recommend that you select an option that includes VPN and not just PPTP because not all WiFi hotspots will allow PPTP.

PC World recently recommended the free Hotspot Shield. I tried it. The terms state that they will insert ads into every web page that you read and that they may forward your personal information to any ad that you click on. The next time my antivirus software scanned my system, it declared Hotspot Shield to be ad-ware and deleted the application from my PC. I concur and strongly recommend that you not use Hotspot Shield.

While using either HotspotVPN or Witopia you should verify the validity of the SSL certificate. See the articles on Subverted SSL and Serious Security Problem for Unencrypted Wi-Fi Connections in this issue. •

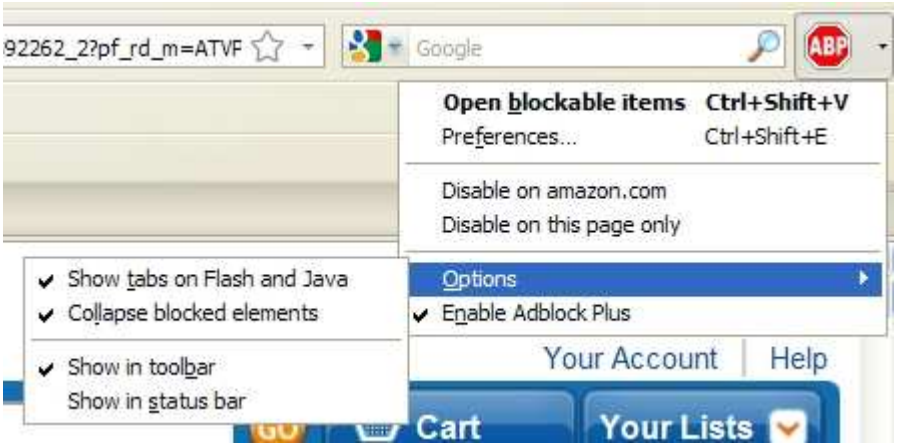
Firefox Browser Extensions by Al Williams

In the May issue, I presented an overview for some advanced computer security principles for the lay person. In that overview I recommended the Firefox browser because extensions to the browser make it very secure and also make it easier to browse.

Firefox allows both plug-ins and extensions. Plug-ins are associated with software applications on your computer and extensions extend the features of the browser. See the two figures on the next two pages for the plug-ins and extensions in use on my PC. For example, the Garmin Communicator plug-in is used with the Garmin software on my PC that is used to update the maps and software on my Garmin GPS unit. Firefox gives you the option of permitting installation of plug-ins or denying installation.

I have added several extensions to the Firefox browser to enhance security and provide convenience. In alphabetical order, they are:

Adblock Plus This extension will keep ads on a web site from appearing thereby making it impossible for a malicious ad to execute its malicious code and also will avoid clutter from ads. The image below shows the options for controlling *Adblock Plus*. The image was captured while looking at amazon.com which is why the option of disabling on amazon.com appears. The *Open blockable items* selection will allow ads to appear. The *Preferences* window (image not included here) shows all the current filters for ads. It allows one to add or edit filters and is very technical.



AOL Toolbar *AOL Toolbar* is a toolbar for the browser that I use occasionally. It is grayed out because it is disabled.

BetterPrivacy Because people have become more aware of cookies and either are not permitting or are deleting the cookies, some companies are using a different type of cookie known as a flash cookie, a super-cookie, or a local shared object (LSO), which are stored in a different area and are not visible using cookie detection and deletion software. *BetterPrivacy* detects LSOs and gives the user the choice of keeping or deleting LSOs. The image below shows the *BetterPrivacy* message. The options for *BetterPrivacy* are selected by going to *Tools* on the Firefox menu, selecting *Add-ons*, selecting *Extensions*, clicking on *BetterPrivacy*, and then clicking on *Options*.

Flashblock Many web sites use flash animation which automatically executes as soon as you go to the site. Because flash animation can be malicious, *Flashblock* keeps the animation from

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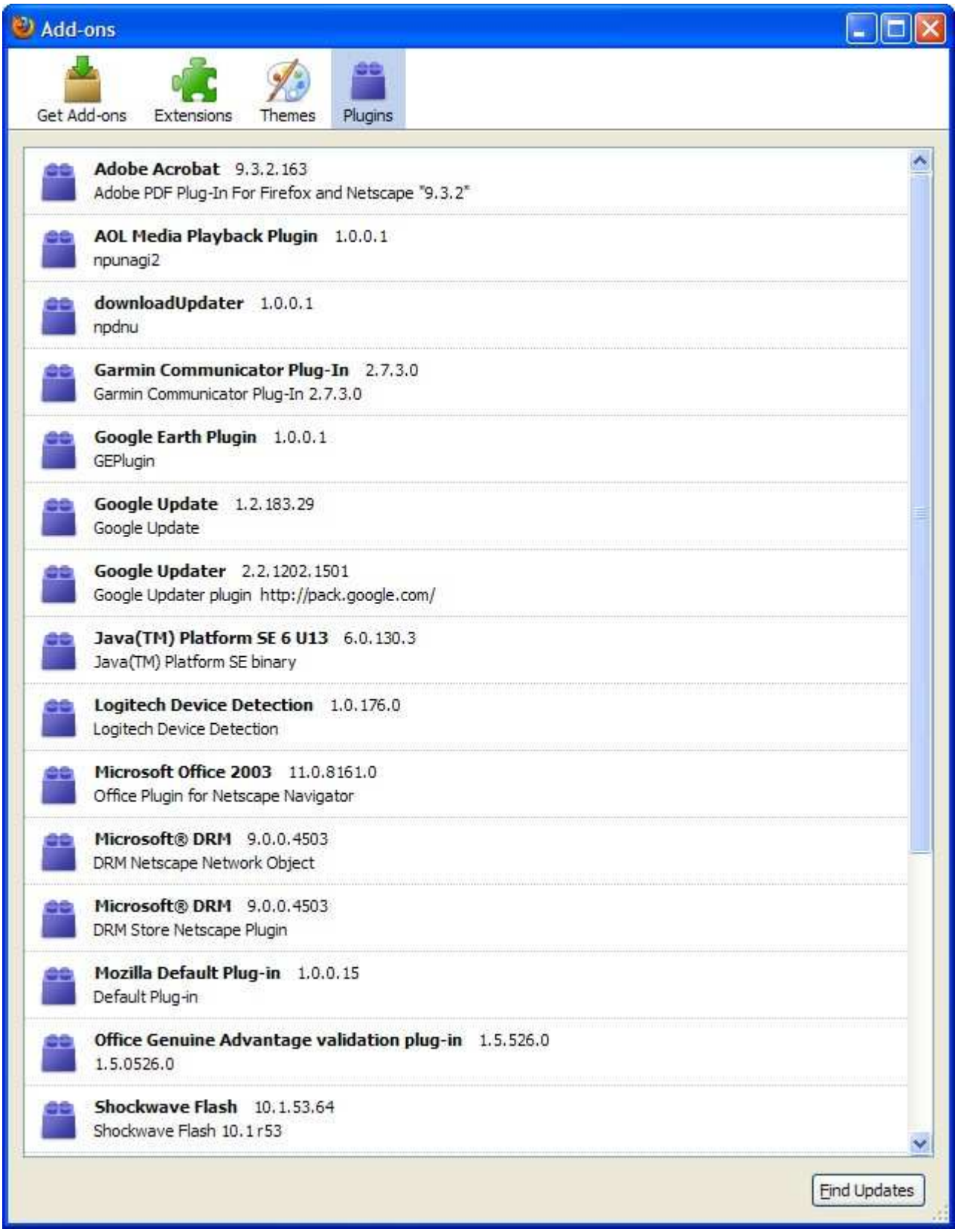
Firefox Browser Extensions



Firefox Browser Extensions

Firefox Browser Extensions

(Continued from page 6)

executing unless the user explicitly permits it. The problem is that it always blocks flash animation, even on trusted sites. *NoScript*, however, will block untrusted sites while allowing trusted sites. For that reason, I have disabled *Flashblock*.

Key Manager *Key Manager* is an extension that allows the generation of keys but more importantly allows the user to see what keys are stored in the Firefox browser. To understand why a user may want to know that, see the Subverted SSL article in this issue. To see the keys in your Firefox browser, click on Key Manager (see first image below) and then click on Authorities (second image below).

Logitech Device Detection The Logitech Device Detection extension is an exception to the rule about applications using plug-ins. Logitech wanted to insert this extension to help keep track of the keyboard and mouse and I allowed it.

Microsoft .NET Framework Assistant Another exception to the rule. This extension is used to support a Microsoft technology.

NoScript The *NoScript* add-on blocks an amazing array of bad scripts and other bad features. You can see the list as you read the *NoScript* FAQs. As a user, the most important feature is that you con-

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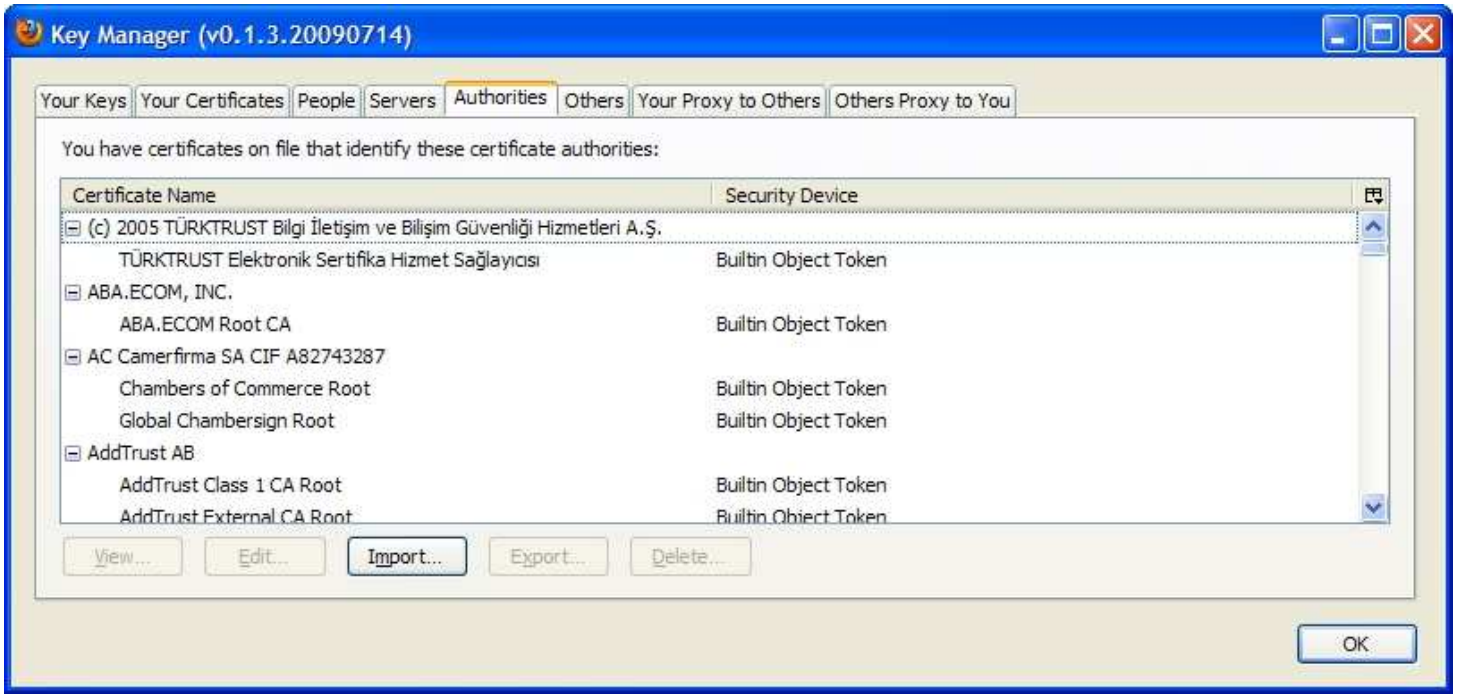


Firefox Browser Extensions

(Continued from page 9)

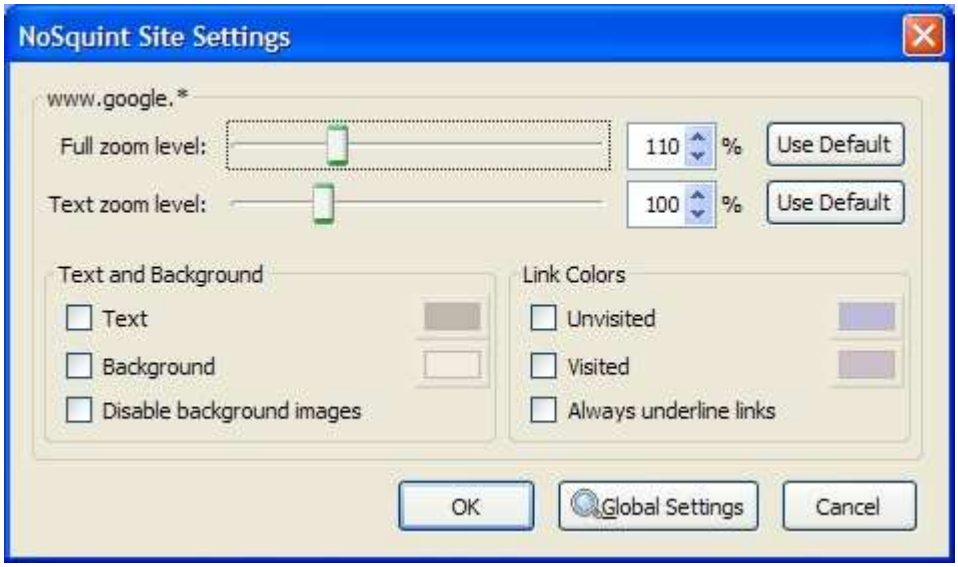
trol which web sites you trust and which you don't. For example, you may want to trust amazon.com. The *NoScript* icon in the image below is between the letter C and the magnifying glass. Clicking on that icon displays ALL of the web sites that amazon.com would like to use to support its retail efforts. I have found that allowing amazon.com and images-amazon.com is all that is necessary for the amazon web site to work. This image is recent and does not show the other sites that amazon.com wanted to allow in the past.

If you do not *Allow* or *Temporarily Allow* a web site, none of the scripts from that web site will execute.

The best approach is to experimentally determine what web sites must be (temporarily) allowed in order for a web site to work. I recommend that you temporarily allow web sites unless you are certain that you will always trust the web site.

The FAQs include instructions on downloading and installing the *NoScript* add-on into Firefox but the easiest way to download and install is to select *Get-It* from the list that is first displayed by Googling *NoScript*. Then, click on the *Add to Firefox* command button.

NoSquint As I've gotten older, I've found it increasingly more difficult to see the monitor. *NoSquint* allows you to adjust the text-only and full-page (both text and images) zoom levels as well as color settings both globally (for all sites) and per site. In the image on the left side of this page is a magnifying glass to the left of the percentage. The percentage indicates that I have chosen 120% magnification for the web site which also provides 120% magnification for the text on the web site. The image below shows the *NoSquint* site settings when you click on the percentage.



Permit Cookies This extension sets cookie permissions for the site you are viewing. For best usage, disable cookies in Firefox using *Tools-Options-Privacy* and then only permit cookies from sites you trust. The image on the next page shows the *Permit Cookies* settings. For each web site, you can permanently allow cookies to be written to your PC, allow them to be written only for this session, block the web site, or remove cookies written by the web site.

Tree Style Tab The *Tree Style Tab* organizes tabs vertically in a tree-like structure to the left of the web

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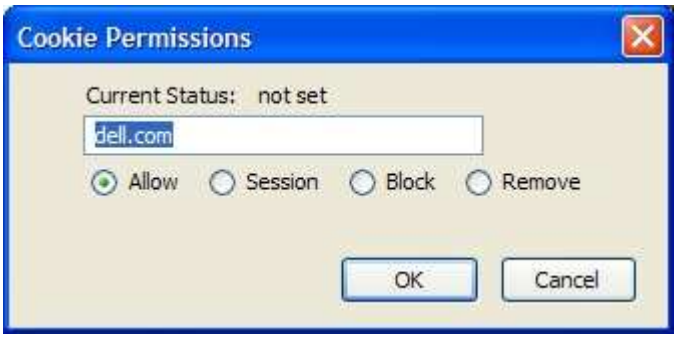
Firefox Browser Extensions

(Continued from page 10)



page. Tabs opened using *Open Link In New Tab* are indented making it possible to readily find your way through a complex series of tabs. Unfortunately, this extension conflicts with *NoSquint* forcing the desired web page off to the right. The below image shows an example of an indented tree. I opened the *New to Ubuntu* web site and then opened three other pages using *Open Link In New Tab*. The three new tabs are indented. If you like to have many tabs open at the same time, this extension makes it much easier to see the open tabs.

Web of Trust The WOT add-on shows you which websites are recommended as trustworthy for safe surfing, shopping and searching on the web. The image at the bottom of the page shows the result of a Google search. The web site has a green circle next to the title indicating a trusted web site. A red circle indicates that the site is not trusted. Clicking on a link with a red circle results in the image shown on the next page. The WOT is the result of votes by users as to the trustworthiness of a web site. Because the trust is based on votes, a few votes for a web site could result in the site being not trusted, or trusted, when a larger group of votes might result in a different conclusion. Still, a negative vote means that caution should be exercised.

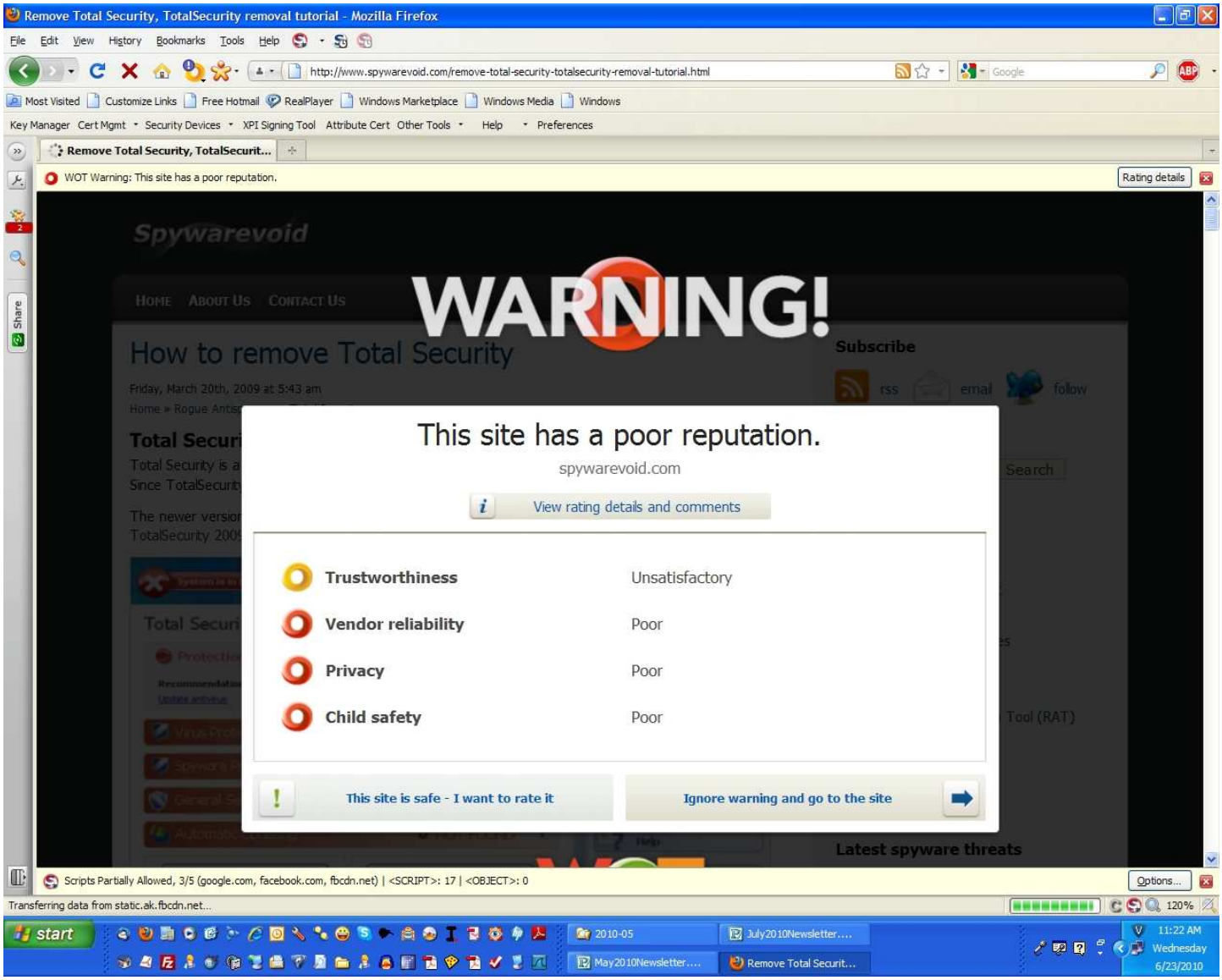
Yoono Yoono is free software that allows you to connect and share with all your social networks and instant messaging services in one place. It works with Twitter, Facebook, and many others. I use it with Twitter, as shown.

Your Plug-ios and Extensions You can see the plug-ins and extensions on your Firefox browser by selecting *Tools -> Add-ons*. To add an extension, click on *Get Add-ons*

(Continued on page 12)

Firefox Browser Extensions

(Continued from page 11)



and then select from the *Recommended* list, or click on *Browse All Add-ons* and choose from the thousands of available add-ons.

Screenshots The screenshots in this article were captured using *Lightscreen*, a free, open source, program. *Lightscreen* captures screenshots using hotkeys: *Print* for the screen, *Alt+Print* for the current window, and *Ctrl+Print* for a user selected area.

Credits I became aware of these extensions through multiple sources including Steve Gibson's SecurityNow podcast (www.grc.com/securitynow), and various articles in PC World. •

Subverted SSL by Al Williams

SSL, Secure Socket Layer, is the name of the protocol used to provide secure communications between you and another person, company, or organization. It is frequently used for banking and secure e-mails.

SSL works because it provides both secure communication and authentication. As the user, you are relying on both features to ensure the overall security of your communications. A man-in-the-middle problem, identified several months ago and described elsewhere in this issue, reduces the likelihood of secure communications on unencrypted networks—until the problem is fixed.

Authentication proves that the person, company, or organization are you communicating with is exactly who they claim to be. Authentication relies on the concept of root authorities, or root certificate authorities, who are trusted by everyone. An example of a root authority is Verisign, a widely known and trusted root authority. There are many other root authorities, including the Hong Kong Post Office, Chungwa Telecom, and Baltimore CyberTrust.

These root authorities issue SSL certificates to the people, companies and organizations with whom we communicate. The concept is that the root authorities are trusted and are also trusted to thoroughly vet everyone to whom they issue SSL certificates. It is those certificates that provide the authentication that we rely upon.

Unfortunately, it has been discovered that cases have occurred where a root authority has issued, or has been forced to issue, an intermediate root authority to entities such as government agencies. Those agencies have in turned issued bogus SSL certificates for organizations such as Google, Vanguard, Bank of America, etc. This means that the government agency can spoof the user, be a man-in-the-middle during communications, and eavesdrop on all communications with that organization because the certificate looks like the real one.

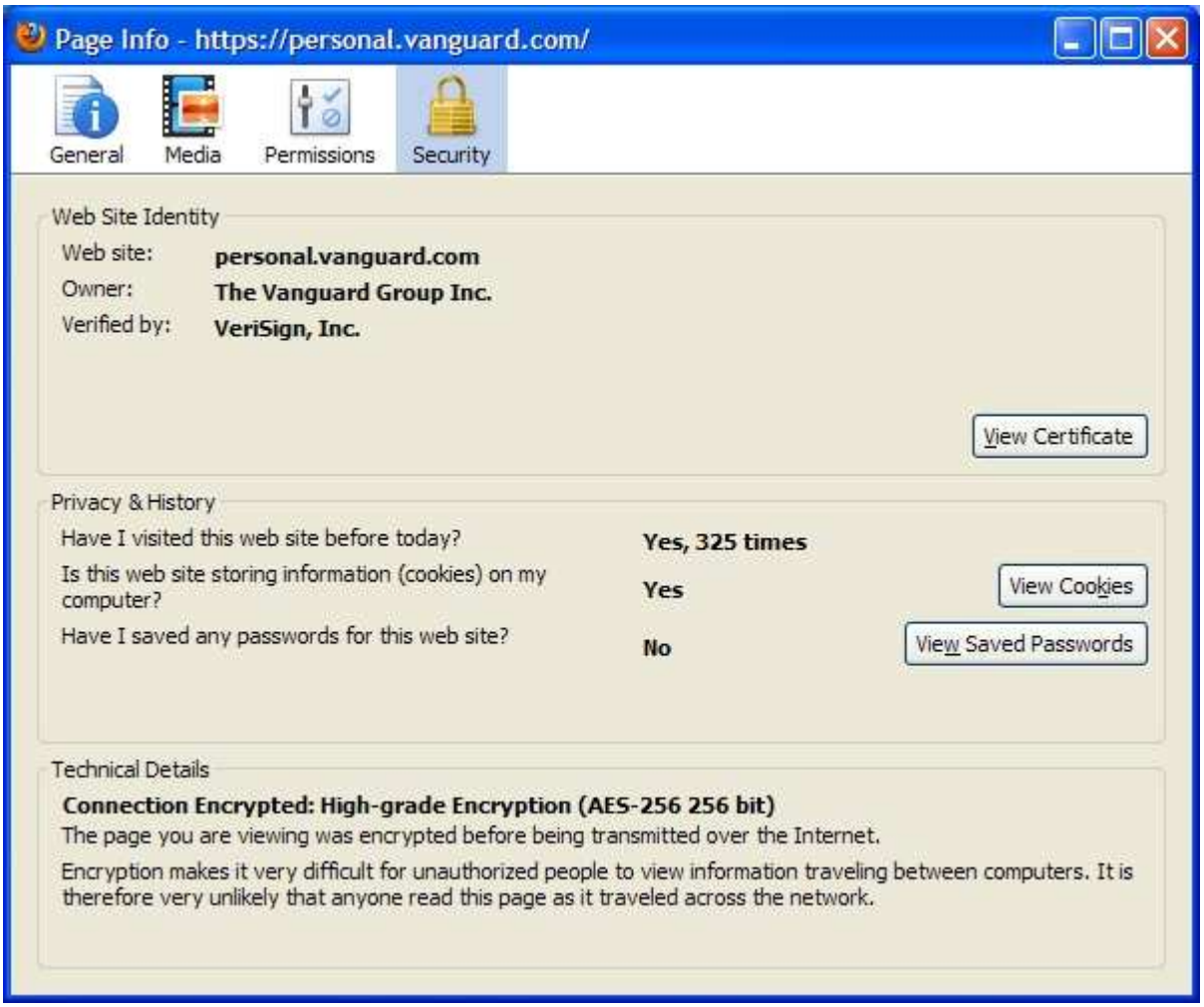
In the Firefox browser, you can see the SSL certificates being used during secured communications. In the image below, the padlock icon indicates that an https link has been established with the web site. The web site that I have chosen to connect to is Vanguard. Clicking on the padlock brings up the *Page Info* for that web site. Clicking on *Security*, presents *Web Site Identify, Privacy & History, and Technical Details*. Clicking on *View Certificate* displays certificate information. The *General* tab displays the intended use of the Certificate, to whom the Certificate has been issued, who issued the Certificate, its validity period, and a set of hashes that uniquely identify the Certificate. See the images on the next two pages.

It is a good idea to check SSL certificates when you are concerned about secure communications. If the root authority is not an organization that you trust you should not continue with secure communications. But, remember that if the root authority allows the intermediate root authority to use the root authority's name and identifying information then you cannot tell that impersonation is happening, that your secure communication is compromised, and that someone is reading everything – password, username, etc. If you are suspicious, don't use the secure communications. It is much better to call the person, company, or organization to discuss your concerns and determine an acceptable way to communicate. •

Endnote:

[1]www.grc.com/securitynow, Steve Gibson, Security Now, "State Subverted SSL", April 3, 2010, transcript pages 2-3 and 18-26.

Subverted SSL



Subverted SSL

Serious Security Problem for Unencrypted Wi-Fi Connections by Al Williams

In mid-November of 2009, it was revealed that there is a serious problem in the Secure Socket Layer/Transport Layer Security protocol that is used to establish and ensure secure connections from your computer to on-line retailers, banks, investment firms, and any other web site where security is desired. Hackers have discovered how to conduct a man-in-the-middle attack at a hotel or motel room (using either a Wi-Fi or hardwired connection), or via an unencrypted Wi-Fi connection such as at a hotel lobby, airport, Community lobby, home, apartment, or the Cultural Center.[1]

An attack is invisible to the user. Until the flaw is fixed, users should do on-line shopping, banking, or investing using only their DSL or cable connections or an encrypted Wi-Fi network that uses WPA and AES (not WEP). When the flaw is fixed, an update stating the flaw has been fixed and describing any steps that the user must take, if any, will be in this newsletter. •

Endnote:
[1]www.grc.com/securitynow, Steve Gibson, Security Now, "A Security Vulnerability in SSL", November 19, 2009

Key Willow Valley Web Sites

These are URL links to key Willow Valley web sites. Please copy the URL to your browser's URL space, open the site, and then add them to Favorites/Bookmarks or create desktop icons.

Information Central: http://eventregistration.willowvalley.org/kiosk/cclub/index.asp

Kiosk Home Page: http://eventregistration.willowvalley.org/kiosk/default.htm

Resident Phone Directory: http://eventregistration.willowvalley.org/kiosk/cris%20files/phonesearch.aspx

Service Request: http://eventregistration.willowvalley.org/kiosk/wo.htm

Computer Club Newsletter: http://eventregistration.willowvalley.org/kiosk/cclub/p/Newsletter.pdf

Reviewer Acknowledgment

The following individuals kindly reviewed this issue:

Dom Buttiglieri

Bob Handler

Sid Paskowitz

Wendy Williams

Thank you to all,

Al Williams

Interested in reviewing the Computer Club newsletter before it goes to press, or providing advice about the content? Please contact:

Al Williams at atwms@comcast.net