

Bits & Bytes

Arkansas' Premier Computer Club



April 2021

Bella Vista Computer Club - John Ruehle Center

Highlands Crossing Center, 1801 Forest Hills Blvd Suite 208 (lower level), Bella Vista, AR 72715

Website: <http://BVComputerClub.org>

Email: editor@bvcomputerclub.org

COVID-19 VIRUS ADJUSTMENTS

During normal times all meetings are on the lower level of the Highlands Crossing Center in Bella Vista. During the COVID-19 pandemic we will continue to suspend in-person meetings and classes and conduct on-line meetings using Zoom over the Internet.

To attend a Zoom meeting or class, you need Internet access and a device with the Zoom application installed.

MEETINGS

(Online) Board Meeting: April 12, 6pm, using Zoom

(Online) General Meeting: April 12, 7pm, "**Components of a Home Network**", presented by Joel Ewing. A Look at all the devices to choose from in setting up a your home network.

Zoom meeting access information will be emailed to membership the weekend before. Visitors or Guests may obtain Zoom meeting connection info from our website the weekend before the meeting.

Genealogy SIG: **No meeting** (3rd Saturday).

HELP CLINICS

No April Help Clinics at John Ruehle center

Members may request Remote Help on our website at <https://bvcomputerclub.org> at menu path **Member Benefits ► Remote Help** .

MEMBERSHIP

Single membership is \$25; \$10 for each additional family member in the same household. Join by mailing an application (from the web site) with check, or complete an application and pay at any meeting.

It is now also possible to Join or Renew membership on line on our website at <https://bvcomputerclub.org> at menu path **Get Involved ► Join/Renew** . Payment may be by Credit Card, or, if you have a PayPal account, by whatever means you have defined on PayPal.

CLASSES

(Online) "Introduction to GIMP" – Joel Ewing, Thursday, April 22, 1pm - 4pm.

Advance sign up required for each listed class: Contact Grace: email to edu@bvcomputerclub.org, text 469-733-8395, call 479-270-1643, or sign up at the General Meeting. Classes are **free to Computer Club members**. Class access information will be emailed to those signed up for the class the day before class.

Check the monthly calendar and announcements for any last minute schedule changes at <http://bvcomputerclub.org> .

NEW BVCC MEMBERS

We are reviving a custom from many years back of welcoming new BVCC members in the newsletter. This initial column will include all the new members since January 1, but in the future it will include new members since the previous newsletter announcement.

We are pleased to welcome the following new members since January 1, 2021:

Jan Snilsberg

Gloria Fry

Diane Sadowski

Julie Ritchie

Doug Godsman

HOW TO CHECK YOUR MEMBERSHIP EXPIRATION DATE

One of the things lost without in-person meetings was an easy way to get membership cards to new and renewing members. The main utility of a membership card was to serve as an additional reminder of when your membership renewal date was approaching. At the suggestion of the Board, support has now been added to the BVCC web site (<http://bvcomputerclub.org>) to allow you to check when your BVCC membership expires.

At the end of the first paragraph on the Join/Renew membership page there is now a "CHECK HERE" link to check your membership expiration date.



Clicking that link will

take you to a page to enter your last name for a search.

After entering your last name and clicking on the "Display..." button, your membership expiration date, as of the last released roster, will be

A screenshot of the 'Check Membership Expiration Date' form on the BVCC website. The form has a blue header with the BVCC logo and navigation links. The main heading is 'Check Membership Expiration Date'. Below it, there is a text input field for 'Last Name' with a placeholder 'letters only' and a 'case-insensitive' checkbox. A green 'Display Expiration Date' button is at the bottom left. The footer includes the last update time '03/29/2021 09:39:33' and the address '1801 Forest Hills Blvd, Bella Vista, Arkansas 72715 Lower Level'.A screenshot of the 'Display Membership Expiration Date' page on the BVCC website. The page has a blue header with the BVCC logo and navigation links. The main heading is 'Display Membership Expiration Date'. Below it, there is a paragraph of text explaining the roster update process. A table with two columns, 'Name' and 'Exp Last Day Of', is displayed. The table contains one row: 'Joel Ewing' and 'Aug 2021'. The footer includes the last update time '03/29/2021 10:18:21' and the address '1801 Forest Hills Blvd, Bella Vista, Arkansas 72715 Lower Level'.

Name	Exp Last Day Of
Joel Ewing	Aug 2021

displayed. The date of the latest

roster released by the Membership Chair is displayed in the first sentence. If that latest roster has a membership expiration date for you that has passed, but not by more than three months, then your expiration date will be displayed in yellow indicating "expired".

If you have joined or renewed on-line, the next roster released after that time should include the new expiration date. If you join or renew by other means (mail, in-person check), there may be some additional delays, but not longer than a month.

CAUTIONARY TALE ABOUT FREE VPNS

By Joel Ewing,
President, Bella Vista Computer Club
president (at) bvcomputerclub.org



One of the caveats in the VPN article in the March 2021 Bits & Bytes, also mentioned at the March General Meeting, was that free VPN services were not recommended. As if on cue, see the following article recently published by Malwarebytes Labs on "[21 million free VPN users' data exposed](#)".

A hack of several free VPN services revealed that not only were some services collecting user activity logs in contradiction of their advertised policy, but some were also collecting email addresses, passwords that were not encrypted, IP addresses, mobile device models and IDs.

The whole point of using a VPN with mobile devices is to avoid exposing non-encrypted data when using a public WiFi network; but if that data would have been non-encrypted on a public WiFi without VPN, then with a VPN service it is still exposed non encrypted within the server of your remote VPN service. If the service also requires a special app to be installed on the mobile device, then that app will also see any non encrypted data before it is sent to the VPN service and potentially have access to other data on the mobile device. A free VPN service is much more likely to be tempted to exploit their access to non encrypted data if that is their only way to profit from the free service.

One of the reasons for distrusting the security of a public WiFi network is that you can never know whether or not it is supported by secure hardware, or whether that hardware is properly configured to at least make it as secure as possible. Because of the limited number of users on one WiFi network, the motivation to expend much effort to hack that one network is not high; but if it shares an exposure common to many other WiFi networks using similar hardware, then it could be at risk. The users have no way of knowing the details of a particular public WiFi node, so it is wise to err on the side of caution.

A VPN service, on the other hand, may have hundreds of thousands of users. The possibility that a free VPN service may be engaging in questionable behavior and be holding sensitive user data on its servers makes it an extremely attractive target for hackers and data thieves, who can justify expending much time and effort to break in. That makes any collection of sensitive information by a VPN service a more serious concern. One of the suggestions made is that you should look for reviews of a VPN service by known and trusted organizations before deciding on a VPN service.

One of the interesting things that this data leak revealed was that there were a number of differently-named free VPN services that all appear to be run by the same company. That these were all supported by mobile apps that were gathering inappropriate data, combined with the attempt to disguise the true identity of the company, suggest that this was a deliberate attempt to engage in unethical behavior.

Caveat Utilitor.