Vancouver Community Network

Issue # 1 - April 2009

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THE VCN USER NEWS...

YOUR VANCOUVER COMMUNITY NET 'ON-LINE' NEWSLETTER

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YOUR VCN BOARD AT WORK!

VCN already at work for you in 2009! ...Board members & staff discuss ongoing projects for this year at our HQ at the Vancouver Seniors Centre, 411 Dunsmuir at Homer St, in Vancouver...
A Tony Photo

VCN TODAY… By Jim, the Chair…

Greetings from the Board of Directors!

We're very pleased to distribute this newsletter to all VCN members, which hopes to provide a useful and interesting way for you to see what VCN does, to fulfill it's mission to make the many benefits of the 'Information Highway' freely accessible to everyone.

A copy of each new edition will be permanently available on the VCN website. Go to the "newsletters" link at the left side of our home page: www.vcn.bc.ca.

I'm happy to say this first, is mainly a good news edition!

*   Financially, VCN is in good shape. We're told that the city of Vancouver will renew our grant, and it looks like the federal funding for our CAP (Community Access Program) will also be renewed. (http://cap.vcn.bc.ca/) With continued donations received from you, the members, we'll have the funding needed to maintain, or improve our services.

So, 'Thanks to all of you for your generous support.

*   VCN's staff and our dedicated volunteers do an outstanding job of keeping all of VCN's balls in the air. Without them, VCN would be nothing. More on that elsewhere…

*   The Board continually explores ways to provide improved services to the community. For example, we plan to deploy an experimental wireless mesh network in a housing co-op.

We expect to demonstrate to apartment and townhouse residents, that the benefits of high-speed wireless internet access may be enjoyed by simply sharing a few connections, at a fraction of the cost of having separate commercial accounts.

To improve member access, the Board is exploring individual high-speed service through one of the local commercial providers. In return, VCN would receive a small fee to support our budget, and subscribers would benefit from high-speed access. The cost savings may not be any less than purchasing directly from a commercial provider, but some features might be better.

This newsletter comes thanks to our newest board member, and new editor, Tony Swain. When you elected Tony to the board at the November AGM, we suggested he might take on the job of improving our communications with the members and users. He's never looked back. Without Tony's energy and initiative, you wouldn't be reading this.

We look forward to future editions, with new features, and better ways for members to "talk back" to the board and staff, so we can get a feel of how we're doing and what might be done better. …For now, though, send such feedback to Tony, at editor@vcn.bc.ca.
...Reported by Jim, VCN Chair.

NOTES FROM JANUARY…

With some directors unable to make the January Board Meet, and though short of a quorum, we were able to bring new members Tony and Brendan up to speed on VCN procedures and ongoing projects in 2009. After clarifying items on the financial statement to the new members, we moved on to general discussion of the circulated agenda, that suggested we set up some standing committees for things such as recruitment, fund- raising, wireless project equipment, a VCN Website, newsletter, personnel policies, and a heads-up about possible Election Act issues re VCN hosted sites.

New System Administrator, Chris, is responsible for Web team Liaison. Program Co-ordinator Kalia arranged delicious Sushi Take-out to sustain those coming straight from work without supper. Tony, a retired person, complained he'd just scoffed a huge hamburger and fries before catching the bus downtown, and thus could not properly enjoy the official pickings... Sigh!

Tony agreed to work up a VCN Newsletter, and Brendan agreed to help. Various ideas were bandied about to build on. A concern was that such a newsletter might attract overwhelming feedback, as with blogs and Facebook. We shall see.

After over three hours of useful discussion, the meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm.
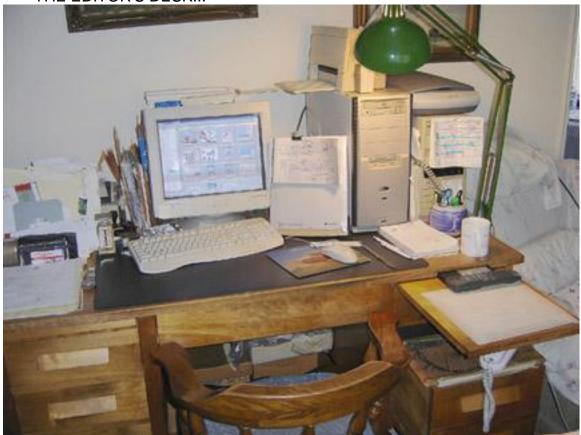
THE EDITOR'S KEYBOARD   … By Tony the Ed

Well fellow VCN-ers, this is our first attempt to put out an entertaining, informative and useful newsletter to our users. As you should be aware VCN runs almost entirely by volunteers, supported by very few paid staff. ...It's important to understand that VCN Board members are volunteers who believe the service VCN provides is critical for none profit and low income users to communicate in a useful modern way.

I am just a regular computer user, who badgers sophisticated digital friends for help when things go bits-up on my screen. Many years ago I started with an XT and Multi-Mate at work, and bought a Radio Shack R100 to work at home in ascii. It was magic! Using DOS programs like Lotus 123, DBase IV and whatnot... Such heady days. ...Sigh!

From there it was up to a 486, a Roland 9 pin, VCN, to Windows 3.1. Eventually, Big Engineering Co., where I was a draftsman, went digital, and insisted we learn Autocad. …I rushed about for a cheap home version with no luck.

Then, Fortuitously, a friend in Calgary sent me his old Windows 95 set-up. And LO... Computing life took off. I now use a Windows 98 desktop, AND the old 486, which still has a bunch of Multi-Mate files. Under the bed is a 486 laptop, and behind the sofa is a long ago donated IBM XP Notepad, with an iffy screen, no CD writer, and a trash battery. So there you have it! I'm a couple'a steps behind the leading edge.

THE EDITOR'S DESK...

The VCN Editorial Desk! ... Showing the 'Creative' Windows 98 desktop, Microtek 486, Canon Bubble-Jet, and old Epson scanner. The vintage 9 pin printer is behind the file stuff on the left. All mounted on a retro gover'ment bureaucrat desk.   A Tony Photo…

The Editor and his Desk look forward to input from volunteers, staff and users, for appropriate content for VCN NEWS! So Cheers... Waddaya think? ...Over to You...
 Comments welcomed to… editor@vcn.bc.ca

Tony the Editor, VCN USER NEWS

FROM THE HELP DESK...
This is a message from the VCN Help Desk to all 'regular users' of modem lines at 604/638-0189
Formally, a regular user had to redial the phone number many times before getting through to an unused modem. This was because there were far more users at any one time than the 47 available modem lines. In order to reduce the frustration of getting on, we enabled the community group line 604/638-0195 to be available to regular users between the hours of 6PM and 6AM Monday to Friday, and all day during the weekends. This means that another 47 modems are be available.
In the past, the group line was exclusively for community group accounts even in the 'off-hours' and the weekend, when few groups were using it. We realized that by making a few adjustments to the authentication database we could allow regular users to use both modem pools during the off-hours. Group users will continue to get exclusive use of 604/638-0195 between 6AM and 6PM, Monday to Friday, in order for them to do their non-profit activities.
To use both lines in the most appropriate way, it's best to set up on your computer a second Dial-Up Networking (Windows 95/98) session for the group line. In the evenings or on the weekends, try one or the other session to dial in. It's important to note that not all regular users need to use the alternate number; as long as a critical number take the opportunity, they'll create less of a queue for the regular number. We have set up a website where the number of dial-in users are monitored and updated every five minutes.
The website is at http://www.vcn.bc.ca/mrtg. All types of accounts, including regular users, group users, and Langara students, are shown in separate sets of graphs. By periodically checking the website, you'll be able to see the daily and weekly patterns of usage and perhaps adjust your own usage accordingly.
For more details about the changes, or if you need help changing the dialling set-up of your computer, please phone the help line or send a message to help@vcn.bc.ca. …or…
Help Desk, Vancouver Community Network, Help line: 604/257-3811
Office hours: 10AM to 4PM, Monday to Friday

BROKEN & BREAKING NEWS...
At The Vancouver Institute in February... ...The 'Mr. Richard Stallman Lecture'....
"Copyright vs. Community in the Age of Computer Networks".
Mr Stallman spoke to a packed audience at the Vancouver Institute in February at the University of British Columbia's Woodward Instructional Resources Centre
This lecture was co-sponsored by the Faculty of Law at UBC.
Richard Stallman launched the development of the GNU operating system (see www.gnu.org) in 1984. GNU is free software—everyone has the freedom to copy it and redistribute it, as well as to make changes either large or small. The GNU/Linux system, basically the GNU operating system with Linux added, is used on tens of millions of computers today.
Further, Mr. Stallman received the ACM Grace Hopper Award, a MacArthur Foundation fellowship, the Electronic Frontier Foundation's Pioneer award, and the Takeda Award for Social/Economic Betterment, as well as several honorary doctorates. He is President of the Free Software Foundation in Boston, Massachusetts. You Linux enthusiasts would have enjoyed this!
PROGRAM NEWS… by Kalia
A summary of non-technical news. Upcoming articles might tell members the latest on the future of our Community Access Program CAP, and CAP-Youth Initiative, and talk about our collaboration with community centres.

Income Tax Time: Protect yourself from Spam… by Kalia

In this busy season of filing taxes, VCN warns its members to watch for any Spam messages claiming to be from Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). Usually, the aim of such Spam message is to get your personal information. In return, the message may promise to give you a quick refund or any false benefit.

By the first look, the email may look legitimate. However, be aware that CRA would never send an email with a request for personal information. If you happen to receive such an email, that looks quite legitimate, do not click on any links or download attachments. Just report the Spam message using DSPAM and delete it from your inbox. If you are still unsure about the legitimacy of the email, the best way to verify tax related emails is to contact CRA directly.

If you file your taxes online via NETFILE, keep your access code a secret. After filing your taxes on a computer used by other people or public, always clear the Cache on your Internet browser…. Good luck with filing your taxes.

THE FEATURE ARTICLE…

A feature article on one of our main services or activities (a different one each time). We could eventually cover, in whatever order… dial-up access, - email accounts, - web sites, - email lists, - training programs,   - recycling equipment, - CAP and CAP-YI, - web design,   - wireless projects, - staffing and volunteers, - governance (the board) and   - funding.And etc, etc, etc, etc, ...

TECHNICAL NEWS… A column by Chris or Steven…

Will tell members what's been done to improve the system, and explain in general terms, recent major service problems. A good topic for the first one could be the sudden drop in spam the last few months, why it happened, and whether it's likely to continue or not.

 Revolutionary New Laptop! …With No Keyboard???
  Chairman Jim passed along this newby. The MacBook Wheel lets you do every-day tasks like typing, with just a few spins and clicks of a wheel. A boon to 'one finger' merchants!
... Crave No Keyboard ??? Check it out at...
 <http://www.tonetgate.com/clicks.php?coid=282708&cid=289&url=6322>

MEMBER'S NEWS… Member Stories how they use VCN…

   A future column invites members to submit an article about something related to VCN... How you use VCN services, or might use new services, whatever. There'd be a cap on article length.

Interesting responses should provide members a wealth of fresh ideas and insights, and after some vetting by our experts, would provide a basis for 'in depth' articles at a future date. Your VCN NEWS welcomes comments and story ideas… Send to… editor@vcn.bc.ca

COMMUNITY NEWS…

All about allied groups
Like Free Geek recycling or VONIC, with a focus on collaboration with VCN. Some items might be contributed from outside VCN.

The Free Geek Store...

A customer discusses a recycled desktop with Adam & Tyler at the Free Geek Thrift Shop at 1820 Pandora, in Vancouver. A more detailed story next issue.

Another Tony Photo

LETTERS TO VCN….
A "letters" feature where people can write about anything vaguely related to VCN. We'd publish the best 2 or 3 contributions each issue.
…Send to… editor@vcn.bc.ca

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And finally, a reminder…

MEMBERSHIPS & DONATIONS…
Your membership in the Vancouver Community Net is important to us, and we thank you for your financial support. As part of this community initiative you help provide affordable public access to new information technologies like email and the Web. In 2009 we introduced easier online registration, a new "What's On?" page and are working hard to provide more trouble free 'dial-in' access by upgrading our modem pool. Your membership entitles you to vote at our Annual General Meeting, or even run for our Volunteer Board of Directors. This is normally held in October or November, here at 411 Dunsmuir Street in downtown Vancouver.

You'll find the Vancouver Community Net useful and pleasant with a wealth of information. …We'll let you know when your annual membership is due.

Yours sincerely, VCN Board and Staff

Memberships are: $25 Regular, $40 Family, $15 Low Income, $75 Premium
 $10/month Sustainer and $200 Really Special!

*** Donations of $25 and over are tax deductible***

Please make credit card payments at
http://www.canadahelps.org/public/content/Donate/DispCharityProfile.asp?cid=49308
   Or mail a cheque payable to Vancouver Community Network, at 411 Dunsmuir Street, Vancouver, BC, V6B 1X4.
   Please note your phone # and Login ID on the cheque. If we are in error about your membership status, simply email a correction to… help@vcn.bc.ca

IMPORTANT NOTE…
   You should know that our VCN Community e-mail & Web service is ideal for seniors who have bought, or been given, a used computer to enjoy the magic of being on line. We just tell people to simply look up the number in the phone book. I know I did. …Sad to say, the VCN phone book listing is currently wrong, showing only our dial-up line, which gets them a 'Fax whistle'. Not much good when looking for information! …Sigh! Even the address is for the Vancouver Library, not for VCN HQ at 411 Dunsmuir.
   So please advise prospective VCN users to call our contact number 604 257 3811, or to visit us at the Senior Center, at 411 Dunsmuir, in downtown Vancouver. Thank you! And that's it!…
               CHEERS!!! …Tony, your VCN Newsletter Chair

And Now... The FINE Print...
The VCN USER NEWS is presently an occasional publication by the Vancouver Community Network. Contributions in the form of articles, news items, letters and photo's are welcome, as are any comments. No payment is offered for any manuscripts, etc, submitted for publication here-in, and the opinions or advice are those of the authors.
   The Editor reserves the right to edit such submissions for brevity and clarity, without intentionally altering the meaning there-in. ...All rights are retained by the authors.