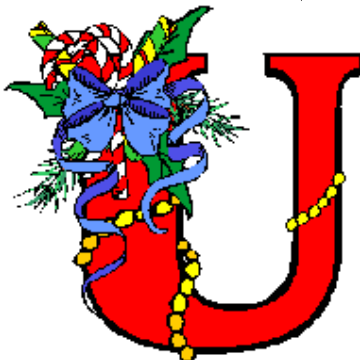
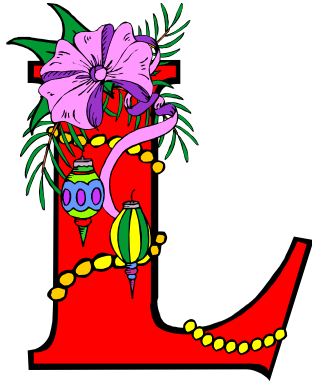


COMP

Communicator

DECEMBER 2011 A Publication of the Computer Operators of Marysville and Port Huron Vol. 29 No. 12



CHRISTMAS PARTY

at

The Dorsey House

**Wednesday
December 7th, 2011**

**6pm—Cocktails
6:30pm—order dinner**



President's Column

by Larry Mobbs

An idea for a Xmas gift for others or yourself might be the purchase of Nuance's Dragon Naturally Speaking (<http://nuance.com/dragon/index.htm>), the long time leader in voice recognition software. In the last year we have seen a proliferation of voice controlled software with the ultimate release being the Siri personal assistant from Apple. What is common to these applications is that the software recognition behind their success is Dragon.

Voice recognition has been the dream of software developers for years. In the early nineties IBM and Kurzweil tried to produce office software to ease the strain of typing by clerical workers. The idea was for the employee to use the software rather than a dictation machine, thus eliminating a large typing pool. What weakened those efforts was the slowness of the CPUs in that era.

When the software hears a word it has to understand the context to respond to the voice with the correct word. For example, if it hears "red" is it the color or does it mean the act of reading? The only process to be certain is to listen to the words around it to see what makes sense. If "red" is followed by "barn" is usage is apparent. This look-up process led to the delays in displaying to the speaker what the software was doing and the speaker would stop to wait and lose the flow of the dialog.

Another weakness of the process even with today's computers is that the speaker is assessing the quality of what was just said at the very moment he is speaking the next sentence. Nobody has overcome this tendency but extensive use of the software is the best remedy. Dictating a report is really quite different than a conversation over lunch.

Secondly, when a mistake is made the speaker has to go back to the error and make a correction. It is faster to let it go and correct it manually later but the software gets better and more accurate if the mistake is corrected verbally. Most mistakes are caused by the software misunderstanding the speaker. As the software learns the speakers' inflection it improves.

In today's computer world the CPU speed is way beyond the needs of the software and numbers of accuracy are typically in the high 90 percentiles. Larger hard disks allow a large vocabulary with instant access and we can witness the recognition software staying nearly with the speakers speed of delivery.

For families with kids in school, or work-at-home adults, Dragon Naturally Speaking might just be the ideal Christmas gift.

2011/2012 Executive Committee

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Vice President/ Program Coordinator	Jim Sanderson jim-donnas@att.net
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Club Website	www.bwcomp.org
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Flash Drive of the Month

by Norb Demmel

There will be no Flash Drive programs in December. The Flash Drive in January will contain programs for December and January.



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Too Scared to Buy Anything Online?

By Lee Seidman, Vice President, Business Professional Microcomputer UG, CT
November 2011 issue, The Help Key
www.bpmug.org
Lseidman (at) yahoo.com

Lots of consumers find purchasing goods online intimidating; news reports of identity theft, online piracy, and privacy concerns only deteriorates people's confidence in buying things on the Internet. Using free software tools combined with some education and common sense is all one needs to build to become a savvy and safe e-consumer.

The secure e-consumer first needs to recognize when a web site represents a reputable merchant. Using online reviews from epinions.com, bizrate.com, resellerratings.com, or even just a search on Google will help one gauge a vendor's trustworthiness based on the experiences of others. Peruse the commentary and read what people say and how they rate their transactions with that supplier; what may initially be perceived as a negative review may be little more than someone griping about something irrelevant or inconsequential (like it was delivered a day later than expected, which may be the responsibility of the transporting service instead). If there appears to be a pattern of complaints about a particular vendor, it is sensible to take that into account before ordering anything.



In the above example, we are "window shopping" on a popular technology vendor web site called [newegg.com](http://www.newegg.com). Note what the address bar reads at the top: <http://www.newegg.com>. This means the site offers no security presently; no sensitive information is being exchanged at this time.

When we decide on an item to procure, most web sites (like [newegg.com](http://www.newegg.com)) will request for the purchaser to sign in (some sites will offer an opt-out area for this, but many do not). IF YOU CREATE AN ACCOUNT ON THESE SITES, DO NOT USE THE SAME PASSWORD AS YOU WOULD USE TO ACCESS YOUR E-MAIL. Note the address bar has now changed to read <https://> and a lock appears in the browser as well (at least with Internet Explorer).

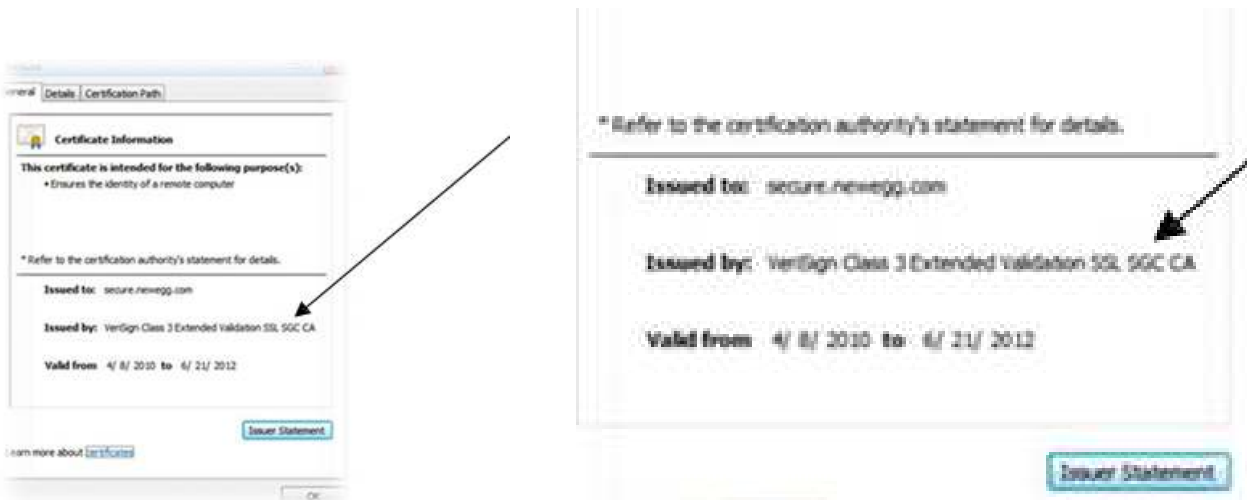
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Clicking on that lock reveals information about the web site and its security.

This tells the consumer that this web site has been verified as who they say they are and that the connection is encrypted (we are no longer just “window shopping”). VeriSign and a handful of other similar companies are the Internet’s certificate authorities (CA), which substantiate the identities of companies on the web. By viewing the certificate (which is how the web browser on your computer knows to trust the web site it is displaying), you can see its validity and when it expires. Once that certificate expires, your web browser will alert you that the site is no longer trusted as it once was (this should rarely happen with the big-name sites). Note that web sites that request any form of identification (like logging into a webmail, bank, or paystub account) or financial transaction should use https:// and certificates.



When it comes time to actually buy an item online, a credit card offers the best peace of mind available. Most of the major credit card companies offer “zero liability protection” for unauthorized purchases (read the fine lines carefully, MasterCard states on its web site that one’s account must be “in good standing,” the consumer “exercised reasonable care in safeguarding” the card from unauthorized use, and that there must not be more than two unauthorized events reported in the past twelve months). While the legal verbiage may present a chill, many issuers offer temporary credit card numbers specifically for use

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online (Citigroup calls their "Virtual Credit Card" while Bank of America markets it as "ShopSafe"). These temporary credit card numbers expire quickly or have whatever transaction limit you wish to assign. When it is time to purchase an item from an online merchant, open another web browser, log into your credit card issuer's web site, and look for the section to open the tool for a virtual credit card.

This virtual card number appears and functions as an authentic credit card to the vendor; its purpose is to keep its use limited to that particular transaction and to keep your actual credit card number a secret from that vendor. If the virtual credit card is compromised by an unscrupulous third party, it is not as much of an intrusion into one's financial existence as if the actual credit card number was used (there is no need to replace a credit card, change accounts, etc.) Using this tool satisfies the card issuer's requirement for "exercising reasonable care in safeguarding" the authentic credit number, limits the amount of uses it can be tried (usually just once), and makes online shopping less frightening. The web may present dangers, but using your savvy skills and online tools should take the fear out of shopping!



"Tell me Santa, is online shopping making you sad?"

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HDTV Resolutions 720p and 1080p Explained



By Sandy Berger, CompuKISS
www.compukiss.com
sandy@comupkiss.com

If you go into the store to purchase a new television these resolutions will be prominently displayed. However they might not be as important as you think.

This is especially true if you are moving into the world of HDTV for the first time. Compared to an old standard TV, just about any HDTV will look spectacular, no matter what the resolution. Many experts in the field will tell you that they consider things like contrast ratio, color saturation, and color accuracy to be more important than resolution.

That said, when you choose a HDTV, the resolution will be the first thing you see when you start shopping. The resolution is the number of pixels on the screen. All other things being equal, more pixels will produce a better, sharper image. A 720p television has 1280 horizontal pixels and 720 vertical pixels. A 1080p television has the same number of horizontal pixels (1280) but has 1080 vertical pixels, essentially giving you more detail in the picture. The "p" stands for progressive scanning which is superior to another scanning technique called interlaced scanning, which is represented by an "i". You don't have to worry about the "i" or the "p" because most televisions sold in the US today use progressive scanning.

1080p is the best resolution available today and you will pay a premium to get it. Having a 1080p TV, however, is only good if you have 1080p content to show on the TV. Unfortunately, currently there are no over-the-air television broadcasts in the United States that are transmitted in 1080p. Although television stations and cable and satellite providers have the ability to transmit in that resolution, few are willing to take that step because 1080p transmissions take up a lot of bandwidth. At this time there are only a few satellite provider that utilize the 1080p format and these are strictly limited to their pay-per-view movies.

So most people will find that the only way to enjoy the full details of a 1080p television is to purchase a Blu-ray DVD player. Blu-ray disks are formatted in the full 1080p resolution and will show off the full potential of a 1080p TV.

Whether you purchase a 720p or 1080p television, standard-definition content won't necessarily look any better. Although, depending on the television, the signal may be up-converted to make it look better. In some geographic areas, you can get hi-def signals over the air. You can also get hi-def stations through cable and satellite providers.

If you don't want to purchase a Blu-ray player, you can still use your old DVD player and your old movies will look better than ever. Standard DVDs, which are 480p in resolution, will be upconverted by a HDTV and will look noticeably better on a HDTV, whether it is 720p or 1080p.

One other thing needs to be taken into consideration when talking about resolutions. In order to see the extra detail that a 1080p TV provides, the screen size must be quite large. That is why HTDVs are generally quite a bit larger than the old standard definition televisions. Also, you need to site close enough to the TV for your eyes to actually be able to see the extra details.

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This is where it gets a little confusing. Basically, unless you have a very short distance between you and the TV, you will need a larger screen with 1080p than with 720p. That's one reason why most televisions in smaller screen sizes will be 720p rather than 1080p. Even with 1080p Blu-ray disks, the 1080p quality only begins to become noticeably better as the screen size increases.

You can see from these details that although 1080p is the premium resolution, 720p TVs are a lower-cost option, and may be perfectly fine depending on your needs.

Besides the options like plasma, LCD, LED, 720p and 1080p, there are plenty of other specifications that you can look at when purchasing an HDTV. Higher end televisions will also have things like better contrast ratios, extra HDMI ports for attaching additional equipment, and Internet connectivity. Higher ends LCD and LED TVs will also have higher refresh rates and better backlighting.

If you want the best hardware, look at the 3-D TVs. You may not want 3-D in a television. If you are like me, you may not even like it, but 3-D TVs have higher hardware requirements and will, in effect, be the best televisions, even without the 3-D.

Not everyone will want or need the best or costliest HDTV. Fortunately there are sizes and models available to suit the needs of almost everyone.

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Executive Committee Report

November's Executive Committee meeting took place 11/15/11 at Jane Wheatly's home. Present were EC members Larry Mobbs, Norb Demmel, Paul Cannon, Jane Wheatly, and Judy Callender.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

Attendance at SIGs has been low, so we discussed whether to continue holding them. Decided to drop the Video and Digital SIG, but continue the Explorer SIG with modifications. Starting January 2012, we will have an Explorer SIG once a month for the next 5 months, on different topics, at different locations, and with different hosts. After that we will re-evaluate whether or not to continue. Norb Demmel will be announcing details about the January Explorer SIG at the COMP Christmas Party, and the SIGs' topic and location will be announced each month at the General Meeting. (The Pig SIG and the Donut SIG will continue unchanged.)

Donation

The Club will be making a \$100 donation to the Community Foundation to thank them for allowing us to hold our monthly meetings at their facility.

Facebook


Discussed whether the COMP Club should have a Facebook site. The Executive Committee decided the Club should have a Facebook site, but it should not be tied to just one person—possibly will be able to set one up like a business would (so it can be accessed by several people). We do not have enough information or knowledge on how to do this, so we will be looking at how to set this up in the future.

Remuneration for Presentations

Discussed whether to pay for presentations at the general meetings. (The Facebook presenter was given a gift certificate as a thank-you, while members who have given presentations have received no payments.) Decided that members will continue to NOT get paid for presentations, while non-members might be paid for giving presentations—payment in such cases will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the Executive Committee. (Some non-member presenters might do so for free, in hopes of drumming up business. But the Facebook presenter had no expectation of an increase in business when she agreed to talk to our Club. And it may be possible to find future presenters that will do so for a fee.)

Presentations Topics

Discussed presentation topics.
January—iTunes on Your PC
Possible presentation - Tablet computers (info and/or comparison of Tablet computers)



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A Tablet for the Holidays

By Vinny LaBash, Regular Columnist, Sarasota PCUG, Florida
November 2011 issue, Sarasota Monitor
www.spcug.org
labash (at) spcug.org



The first thing you need to know about buying a tablet is that you are not going to get top dollar performance for a bottom dollar price. You get what you pay for. Buying one of these devices based on price is a guarantee of disappointment. Deciding on which tablet to buy, either for yourself or as a gift, should depend generally on what you plan to do with it.

Most people who buy these devices have some mixture of the following in mind: playing games or computer-specific tasks. E-readers do one thing very well; they are designed for reading magazines and books. Barnes and Noble's Nook Color has a seven inch multi-touch screen which is also great for web browsing and playing casual games. Bejeweled looks spectacular and the traditional Microsoft games work well. You can play Angry Birds too.

A nice feature is the ability to read magazines in full color. It's a much more satisfying experience than traditional black and white even though it doesn't improve content. The Nook Color is great for watching short videos. Even the biggest smart phone screen can't come close to matching it.

Amazon is scheduled to release an updated version of its Kindle e-reader in time for the holidays. It's not available now so we can't comment on it. What we can say is if an e-reader is something you are interested in, be sure to check out Amazon's new product before buying.

If you are sure you want a tablet, resolve to get a good one or don't bother. If you end up with a cheap underpowered unit with too little processing power or memory to save money, you will end up frustrated for as long as you own the device. You want a processor with a speed greater than 1GHz, lots of memory, and a responsive touch screen.

Good specifications are a must, but they are not the whole story. The decisive factor should be about how the tablet fits to the way you want to use it. If you're considering an Android device, get your apps from the official Google Android Market. It's the only way to be sure that the app is properly integrated with the Android software.

With seemingly every manufacturer on the planet trying to knock off the iPad, new ones are appearing in the marketplace almost daily. There is no way to keep track of all of them, so if you're dying to know what your options are, here is a general overview of the tablet landscape.

The iPad is king and unlikely to be dethroned in the near future. This tablet requires almost no learning time, and its ease of use remains unsurpassed. The number of apps, games and media available for it far exceeds that of any other competitor. It was designed as a cloud computing device, which means that data is not stored on it, making it inherently secure. You should try it before making any final decisions.

Android-based tablets offer the next most widely available set of alternatives if the iPad's price, size or capabilities fail to meet your requirements. They are also cloud based

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devices making them perfect for retrieving information anywhere an internet connection is available.

Tablets running Windows software have been around for over a decade. They continue to improve and evolve, but they are still inferior to the iPad and Android systems. They resemble laptops more than anything else with their wide variety of physical keyboards. If a Windows environment is what you're looking for, look no further. Microsoft plans to release Windows 8 sometime next year, and perhaps that will be the catalyst to propel these systems to a more prominent place in the minds of potential customers.

Before being carried away with the immersive experience of a tablet, it may be wise to consider why they might not be right for you. If you like the portability of a smart phone especially the ability to carry it in your pocket, that's an experience you won't get with a tablet.

Laptops have far more horsepower than the most powerful tablet. If power is what you need, a tablet may let you down. If computer power is your heart's desire, an inexpensive laptop is probably a better choice.

Common shortcomings among most laptops are lack of a replaceable battery, poor printer support, and awkward virtual keyboards. In addition, lousy business software smudgy screens, and compatibility problems with Adobe Flash are often cited among tablet users.

If your typical work day finds you heavily involved with creating and editing lengthy documents, large spreadsheets, PowerPoint presentations, and lots of email, visions of using a tablet productively may be delusional.

A high end tablet can go for around \$800. A decent laptop or smart phone can be picked up for less and probably do more. Forget price for a moment and take the time to evaluate what you expect from a tablet. Is it really a better value for you and a better fit than a good smart phone or laptop? If the answer is yes, then go for it.



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Special Interest Group News

SIGs are geared for members to share their interests and abilities in areas that range from intense study to coffee, donuts and conversation. Don't miss the opportunity to come early for dinner and tech talk.

Notice:

The Digital and Video SIGs have been terminated due to lack of attendance. The Club will continue with the Explorer SIG (with changes noted below), the Pig SIG Dinner, and the Donut SIG.



Explorer SIG

Starting January 2012, the location and host of the Explorer SIG will change each month. Topics will continue to vary to meet the groups' needs. Members will be able to bring their meals to eat if they come at 6pm; the meetings will start at 7pm.

Details about the monthly Explorer SIG's location and topic will be announced at the monthly General Meetings and in the COMP Newsletter.

Pig Sig Dinner

This social event meets at 5:30 PM before the club meeting. This SIG is located at Tony's Food Paradise, 502 Huron Avenue, in downtown Port Huron.



Donut SIG

Come for coffee and donuts or just to chat after the club meeting at Tim Horton's, 3829 Pine Grove Ave, Fort Gratiot, MI 48059.

Choosing a Smartphone



By Sandy Berger, CompuKISS
www.compukiss.com
sandy (at) compukiss.com

There are so many different smartphones available today that choosing between them can be difficult. Each phone and each operating system has many different pluses and minuses. So today, I'll give you a brief rundown of what you can expect in a smartphone.

Windows Mobile cell phones are just coming of age and they may well be a good choice in the future. However, right now the choice will probably come down to choosing between the Apple iPhone and one of the many Android phones that are now available.

The Android operating system is upgraded several times a year and new Android phones are released all the time. Apple, however only releases a new iPhone and a big update to their iOS operating system once a year. The new iPhone and iOS updates were released in October. The new Android phones running Gingerbread, the most current Android operating system, will be on the market this month (November 2011). So today we will talk about Apple and Android, and do a quick comparison of the current phones and operating systems for each.

Since it is so new, I haven't yet been able to review the new iPhone 4S. However, I have reviewed previous iPhones. I have also installed Apple's new iOS 5 operating system on my iPad, so I have been able to take an in-depth look at most of the new features that will be on the new iPhone. Now I am ready to make my list of the benefits of each.

There is no doubt that that the camera on the new iPhone is superior to almost all the Android phone cameras. The retinoid screen on the iPhone is superior to most Android phones. The exception is the Samsung line of phones with AMOLED screens that rival the clarity and crispness of the iPhone screen.

Apple's new iCloud service will automatically backup your iPhone to Apple's servers and let you sync your iPhone, iPad, and Mac computer. While using iCloud is easier than some of the Android syncing and backup solutions, there were things that I didn't like about iCloud. For instance, you can't actually see your data in the Cloud as you can with solutions like Amazon's or Google's online storage.

One of Apple's biggest features is iTunes and the iTunes store. iTunes makes getting music and video on your iPhone easier than any Android application that I've seen. At this time, both the Android Marketplace and the iTunes App Store have hundreds of thousands of apps. The iTunes App Store, however, makes it easier to find the apps that you want. Also because of Apple's stricter app reviews, Apple's apps are more secure. However, the Android Marketplace has a higher percentage of free apps.

Some of the new features on Apple new iPhone are already available on Android phones. The most prominent of these is the Notification Center that Apple just added. This is a feature of Android that has been around for a long time and that I love. Now in either operating system,

(Continued on page 15)

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you can just swipe your finger down from the top of the phone to see all of your alerts, notifications, incoming messages, and incoming email.

The most unique feature of the new iPhone is Siri, a personal assistant who will answer verbal questions that you ask. This would, no doubt, be very useful, entertaining, and truly state-of-the-art.

Android phones also have voice capabilities. They use Google's Voice Search. Most screens that popup a keypad for text entry, also have a small microphone. Just press the microphone and speak. It is amazingly accurate and you can use it for everything from entering email text to searching to navigating to a point on the map. Probably not as sophisticated as Apple's Siri, but it works well.

My biggest disappointment with the new iPhone is that it is a 3G phone. It does not take advantage of the faster 4G network. Right now the fastest phone for data will be the Android 4G phones that run on a 4G LTE network. If Verizon currently has a 4G LTE network in your area, you may want to consider a 4G Android phone rather than the iPhone 4S.

Android phones also have some things that I love that are not available on iPhones. The first of these is the fact that you can get a larger screen size on an Android. All iPhones currently have a 3.5-inch screen. Several good Android phones have 4.3-inch screens. My aging eyes really like the larger screens.

I also like the four buttons on the bottom of the Android screen. These are very, very useful. There is a Back Key, a Menu Key, a Home Key, and a Search Key. They are always available. They do not change when the screen changes. The iPhone has just one button. Some will argue that this makes the phone easier to use. Yet, this is not always the case. In some applications it is impossible to go back a screen. In others there is an on-screen back button but the location of this button varies with each application. With Android, you can always go back to the previous screen with just one press.

The Android operating system also is more customizable. With Apple, you are restricted to small square apps. With Android you can use many different resizable widgets as well as the standard apps. All of this gives you many different customization options, but also adds to the complexity of the phone. With the iPhone you don't get so many choices. This makes it a bit more restrictive, but also makes it easier to use.

Another difference is that most Android phones have user-replaceable batteries, while an iPhone battery must be replaced by Apple at a greater cost. While this might not be important to the average user it may make a difference to a heavy-duty user.

Well, there are just a few of the pluses and minuses you will have to assess when you buy a new smartphone. Don't worry though; it is hard to make a bad decision as almost all the smartphones on the market today are both capable and useful.





December's Calendar

**Wednesday 12/7/11—COMP Club
Christmas Party at Dorsey House,
6008 Beard Road, Clyde, MI 48049**

6:00pm—6:30pm Cocktails & get-together

6:30pm—??????? Order Dinner, eat, gifts

(SEE MAP ON FOLLOWING PAGE)

**NO Executive Committee Meeting in
December**

NO SIGs in December



Deadline

**The deadline for submissions for January's Newsletter is
Wednesday, December 28, 2011.** Submissions can be e-mailed to
callenderj2@gmail.com, subject heading: COMP Newsletter.

Dorsey House

6008 Beard Road, Clyde Twp. MI 48049

