Bits of Bytes

Newsletter of the Pikes Peak Computer Application Society, Colorado Springs, CO

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The Prez Sez

by John Pearce, President, P*PCompAS

I don't have anything particularly noteworthy to write about this month. I am still doing research on why the P*PCompAS PC will not update the UEFI security certificates through Windows Update.

Just in case you're interested… I have determined that the machine *probably* came with Windows 7 installed and UEFI and Secure Boot was not initially supported. With the update to Windows 10, UEFI boot was apparently not enabled. Same for the update to Windows 11.

The next question to answer is whether the disk is configured for MBR (Master Boot Record) or GPT (GUID Partition Table). It must be GPT for UEFI Secure Boot but that may not be the only reason the security certificates are not being updated.

Meeting Minutes

by Greg Lenihan, P*PCompAS Secretary

The 4 April 2026 membership meeting was started via Zoom by President John Pearce at 9:00 am. The meeting minutes from last month were approved.

OFFICER REPORTS

VP Cary Quinn said the presentation today would be a YouTube video from the Central Florida Computer Society about useful utilities.

Next P*PCompAS meeting: Saturday, 2 May 2026
A Zoom link will be sent out.
No presentation topic has been announced.

Treasurer Toni Logan is still waiting for a bill from Paul Godfrey for the Volunteers Luncheon. Right now we have $1463.50 for a total balance. She filed a form with the IRS that did not involve a payment.

Discord Server co-Admin Greg Lenihan said in addition to all the newsletters that are posted, he tries to put interesting articles and links in the around-the-room channel.

Newsletter editor Greg Lenihan said the deadline for the May newsletter would be 18 April.

Webmaster Greg Lenihan said the latest newsletter is on the website.

Membership Chair Ann Titus had nothing to report.

Librarian Paul Godfrey was not present for his report.

APCUG Rep John Pearce has been forwarding e-mails coming from the APCUG.

BOD Chair Bob Logan had nothing to report.

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS: None

ANNOUNCEMENTS

John Pearce believes he mentioned previously about the club PC getting certificate upgrades. While doing updates and looking at what has been installed, the certificates don't show up. While researching, he found the UEFI is not active on the computer and will continue to monitor the issue.

The next social breakfast meeting will be on Saturday, 18 April, at the Golden Corral, starting at 8:00 am.

Our next membership meeting is on Saturday, 2 May 2026.

AROUND THE ROOM

There was considerable discussion about the health of those attending the meeting and the procedures many have had recently. For privacy, those will not be mentioned here.

Ann Titus has a new computer and everything went to the cloud. She is still trying to retrieve things from the cloud to put on her new computer. John Pearce accidentally turned on OneDrive and watched everything sync on one computer to the cloud. Afterwards, he turned off OneDrive and had to copy everything back to his PC.

Cary Quinn has an old Dell laptop and has been trying to create a dual-boot install of Linux. One problem is that it turns on airplane mode so he cannot connect to the

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In This Issue

Articles

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Publicity: Vacant
Nominating: Vacant

Board of Directors

Bob Logan
David George
Greg Lenihan
Joe Nuvolini
Paul Godfrey

Zoom participants at the April 2026 meeting.

Digerati at the May 2026 breakfast at the Golden Corral

Reclaim Your Gmail Inbox in 2026. Turn OFF Gemini AI & Simplify Your Email

Ann Titus said she was getting tired of all the "unwanted help" from AI that she was receiving when opening her Gmail. If you agree, and want to turn the AI off, she points to a recent Tech for Senior segment at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFDHJIUuRY4

It starts around the 16:15 minute mark. ☺

Why Your Windows PC Gets Slower Over Time (And How to Fix It)

by Jorge A, Aguilar, reprinted with permission from HowToGeek.com

Original article at https://www.howtogeek.com/why-your-windows-pc-gets-slower-over-time-and-how-to-fix-it/

The once-speedy Windows PC you bought will eventually turn into a slow, unresponsive machine, suffering from long boot times and application delays. Many users blame this on aging hardware, the unavoidable decay of technology over time and in some ways it is, leading some to give up. However, the truth is much more subtle and fixable. Your computer wears out because of the digital clutter you install and the natural outcome of long-term operating system use. This systemic clutter exhausts available memory and storage space, severely reducing disk read/write speeds and slowing down your computer's overall responsiveness.

Why bloat happens

There are many reasons, but you are the gatekeeper

A Windows PC doesn't really slow down over the years because its hardware is getting old. It's actually the result of using the operating system for a long time, combined with how hardware companies market their products aggressively. When you first buy a new PC, it almost never comes as a clean, blank slate ready for you to make it faster. Instead, it's often heavily pre-loaded with a lot of unwanted software or bloatware that you need to safely remove.

This usually includes trial versions of antivirus programs, special tools from the manufacturer, and annoying promotional games. These unwanted applications are put on the computer at the factory, not to help you, but because Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) get paid by software companies to package these products. They intentionally set them up to run at startup to make money from advertising and subscriptions for the vendor.

Over time, as you start to install your own personal software to customize the machine for your daily needs, this basic level of congestion gets much worse. Many creators naturally want their products to feel instantly responsive, so many applications deliberately default to auto-start or background update modes to make sure they open quicker when clicked or stay current with the latest features without you having to do anything manually.

This deeply ingrained software behavior creates a huge, cumulative drag on your computer's CPU and RAM. As you continue to use the system for work and fun, dozens of hidden processes such as cloud storage syncing agents, hardware helper services, and continuous software updaters silently run out of sight, fiercely competing for your system's limited clock cycles and memory allocation.

How to fix existing bloat

Do some spring-cleaning on your hard drive

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Meeting Minutes (Cont. from pg 1)

network. Another problem is that the PC does not want to use a partition he created.

John Pearce said he could not get daily signatures to install on one Windows 11 computer. The error codes are 0X80070005 (KB2267602) and 0X800705B4 (KB4052623). He has tried Googling for a solution, but has been manually updating the signatures.

PRESENTATION

Cary Quinn played a video from the Central Florida Computer Society called "The Ultimate Tech Toolbox." It mentioned Obsidian as a powerful note-taking system for organizing and preserving AI conversations using markdown, along with helpful add-ons like web clipping and free synchronization options. Additional tools included Fertium for managing multiple AI platforms in one place, Sysinternals Autoruns for advanced startup management, One Commander as an enhanced file explorer, and Winaero Tweaker for customizing Windows settings. The session concluded with a highlight of MailStore Home, a free and easy-to-use solution for backing up and restoring email accounts, ensuring your messages are backed up and recoverable in case of loss. ☺

Slow Windows PC (Cont. from page 3)

To fix bloat on a sluggish Windows PC, you've got to step in and manually strip away the things actively draining its resources. It can go wrong, because that gradual build-up of digital clutter doesn't just eat up storage space; it is so ingrained that it actually burdens your computer's processing power and memory capacity.

The best first move is checking out the Startup tab in Windows Task Manager. When you install new software, lots of apps automatically set themselves up to launch the second you log in, running background processes that fiercely compete for your CPU and RAM before you even try to open a single program.

By opening Task Manager and carefully looking at the Startup tab, you can disable non-essential applications and services from loading when your PC boots up. This simple action doesn't delete the software, but it stops the programs from launching automatically, which can really cut down boot times and free up system resources for immediate use.

Installed software rarely just sits there passively on your hard drive, and even completely unused applications install invisible background services, registry entries, and scheduled tasks that may still be silently checking for updates or syncing data in the background.

As files are repeatedly written, modified, and deleted over time, their individual data blocks get fragmented and scattered across multiple physical spots on the spinning disk's surface. This forces the drive's mechanical read head to travel a lot further to piece the files back together, significantly degrading overall read and write speeds.

Defragmentation fixes this hardware latency by reorganizing these scattered fragments into contiguous storage blocks. However, mechanical drives need defragmenting, and modern SSDs need the TRIM command using the Windows "Optimize Drives" utility. Because an SSD must erase a previously used block before it can write new data to it, the TRIM command proactively tells the SSD which data blocks the operating system no longer considers in use.

Running the optimization utility makes sure the SSD's controller is managing data blocks efficiently, which significantly helps the drive's internal garbage collection processes and keeps future write speeds incredibly fast.

Preventing future bloat
Start taking gatekeeping seriously

Windows does not just get slow all at once; it happens slowly over time as software, files, and background processes build up and then collectively overwhelm your system's processing power and memory. Every program you install adds weight to your system because it introduces background services, startup tasks, and complex registry entries that run constantly.

To keep things from slowing down again, you need to become a strict gatekeeper for what gets to run on your computer. This starts with how you add applications to your system. Whenever you can, you should choose "portable" versions of apps because they do not need a formal installation. Portable applications run from a self-contained folder and do not need deep registry integration, so they prevent the OS and registry scarring that usually happens over years of adding and removing traditional software.

When you absolutely have to install a conventional program, it is really important to always pick the "Custom Installation" or "Advanced" option instead of just clicking through the default "Express" setup. Software installers are often packed with promotional bloatware, unnecessary toolbars, and secondary programs that consume important system resources and drastically slow down your computer.

The Express setup deliberately hides these bundled additions, letting them quietly embed themselves into your system to run silently in the background. By using custom installation menus, you can manually uncheck these parasitic additions and make sure that only the core software you explicitly requested gets access to your storage drive and system resources.

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Windows Administrator Explained

Why you are and are not the administrator of your own computer.

By Leo A. Notenboom, https://newsletter.askleo.com; published under the Creative Commons License

Why will your computer sometimes tells you "access denied" when you're the only user? Windows has a system of administrator account types that are easy to misunderstand. I'll describe which type of account you likely have, and what the other options can and can't do.

The concept of the “administrator” in Windows is somewhat confusing. It’s not uncommon for people to be disallowed from doing something on their PC because they’re not the administrator, even though their account is the only one on the machine.

Administration has several forms. Let’s explore what they are and what it means to be administrator… even when you’re not.

In Short

Administrator versus administrator-capable

Windows has three types of accounts.

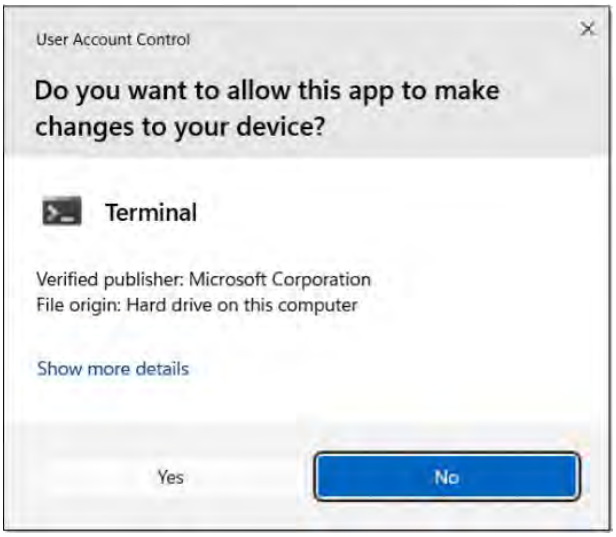
- Your everyday account is *administrator-capable:* it asks your permission (via a UAC dialog) before making big changes.
- A *standard* account works similarly, but its UAC needs an admin’s password.
- A hidden *true administrator* account exists, but it’s a security risk.

Administrator-capable

When you install Windows from scratch, the account you create is typically the one you end up using day-to-day. It’s what I call *administrator-capable*.

This means two things:

1. As you go about your business, the account does *not* have administrative permissions.
2. If you attempt to do something that requires administrative permission (say, install a new program), you’ll be prompted with the UAC, or User Account Control dialog. You have to say, “Yes, I want this change to happen.”



In some cases, attempting to do something requiring administrative privileges will fail, saying “elevation required” or something similar. An administrator-capable account can then either run the program “as administrator” or run it from within a Terminal/Command prompt (Admin).

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Slow Windows PC (Cont. from page 4)

When your physical memory gets overloaded by inactive tabs, Windows has to use much slower virtual memory on your hard drive, causing your entire system to lag and freeze. By strictly managing what is installed, securing your daily user environment, and ruthlessly trimming active and tasks, you can preserve the speed and responsiveness of your Windows PC.

A faster PC is on you. The biggest reason your Windows PC will inevitably slow down is the constant, systematic build-up of bloat. Your machine’s performance isn’t decided by time; it depends on how well you manage its system resources. You won’t get lasting speed just by buying new hardware; it comes from taking a proactive, disciplined approach to looking after it. Your Windows PC is designed to be fast for years, and by becoming the strict gatekeeper of your system, you’ll restore the machine to its designed, peak state, proving that with consistent, deliberate maintenance, a slow PC isn’t an unavoidable part of digital life, but something you can prevent. ☺

Windows Admin (Cont. from page 5)

The rule of thumb is simple: **the default user account created when you install Windows *can* run as administrator, but does not do so by default**. This makes it more difficult for malware to do bad things should it attempt to run.

Standard or limited user account

The other common type of account is referred to as a *standard* or *limited* user account. The account is not administrator-capable, yet it can still run software requiring administrative privileges with an additional condition.

In fact, it's amazingly similar to an administrator-capable account.

1. As you go about your business, the account does *not* have administrative permissions.
2. If you attempt to do something that requires administrative permission, you'll typically be prompted with the UAC or User Account Control dialog, but with an additional requirement.

If you're running a standard user account, UAC dialogs include the requirement that you provide the password for one of the administrator-capable accounts on the machine.

In other words, **a standard user cannot perform administrative actions unless they also know or have been given the credentials for an administrative account**.

These accounts might be given to someone who needs to use the computer, but shouldn't be making administrative-level changes on the machine.

The true administrator account

There is an account called *administrator* on every Windows machine.

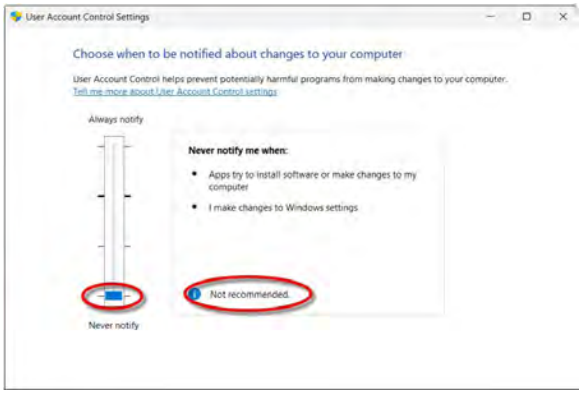
- It is disabled by default.
- It can be enabled by any administrator-capable account.
- When initially enabled, it has no password, meaning it's a huge security risk until you set one.
- When used, it runs "as administrator" at all times; no UAC prompts will appear.

It may sound nice to never have to deal with a UAC prompt and always be able to do whatever you want, whenever you want. The problem, of course, is that using the administrator account for day-to-day activity is a major security risk. Any **malware that makes it onto your machine while you're in administrator mode is also an administrator** and won't be stopped by any UAC notifications. Malware in this situation typically arrives and installs silently.

In reality, and for safety, there's rarely a reason to enable this account. If enabled, it should not be used for normal activity.

Disabling UAC

One approach some people use to make their administrator-capable account more like the true administrator account is to turn off User Account Control completely.



With this set to "Never notify", an administrator-capable account acts more like the true administrator account. You'll never see a UAC prompt; actions requiring administrative access will simply work.

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Read This Before You Call the Geek Squad

By Bob Rankin, http://askbobrankin.com, published through the APCUG

A worried AskBob reader looking for tech help asks: “My computer is very sluggish, and I think it might have a virus. There’s also a ticking sound inside the computer. I’m not very technical, so I’m thinking about calling the Geek Squad. Do you think that’s a good idea?” Here’s my advice...

Computer Tech Support - Who Ya Gonna Call?

When your computer starts acting oddly, running slower than usual, or breaks down entirely, you have a choice. Common problems such as viruses and spyware, lost or damaged files, flaky hard drives or failing power supplies can sometimes be hard to diagnose. Should you try to fix it yourself, or call a computer tech support service like the Geek Squad? Depending on how adventurous and/or geeky you are, there are several things you can do.

If the computer is still under warranty, call the warranty provider. That may be the manufacturer (Lenovo, HP, Dell, Apple, Asus and Acer are some of the most popular) or a third-party computer tech support company. Be prepared for finger-pointing (“Sounds like a software problem, your warranty covers only our hardware”) and long telephone hold times.

You can try to fix it yourself using software manuals and household tools. (I’m talking screwdriver, not sledgehammer or chainsaw.) If you can get online, you may find diagnosis and repair guides via Google or YouTube. And of course, this website offers a wide range of advice about fixing many common computer problems, but not everyone is a do-it-yourself type.

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Windows Admin (Cont. from page 6)

UAC “Never notify” is not recommended because it removes an important barrier that protects you from malware. With this setting, if malware makes it to your machine, it can run without notice. UACs force you to give permission for big changes to take place.

Linux equivalents

Since interest in Linux is increasing, it might be worthwhile to include that, with the exception of the UAC prompt, each of these types of administrator access has equivalents in the Linux world.

The administrator account is equivalent to the account called *root* in Linux. Sign in to Linux using the account root, and you have all administrative privileges all the time. Just like Windows, it’s not recommended to run as root all the time — not so much because of malware but because mistakes can have unexpected system-wide consequences. It’s sometimes referred to as the *super user* account.

Administrator-capable is equivalent to a Linux login that has been added to the “sudoers” files. This allows the account, normally running with restricted permissions, to “act as” root by invoking the “sudo” (“do as super user”) command and providing *their own* password (the one they already know and used to sign in the first place; this prevents other people from walking up to the machine and using sudo). Just like Windows, the initial account created by most Linux installers is administrator-capable and in the sudoers file.

Standard or limited user accounts are equivalent to a Linux login that is not in the “sudoers” file. They, too, can still perform administrative tasks, but only if they know the root (aka “super user”) password, using the “su” command.

UAC doesn’t have a direct equivalent in Linux. The closest equivalent is that if you attempt to do something requiring super user access, it’ll just fail. You’d then re-run the command with sudo if your account has that capability, or you’d use “su” to become root if you know the password.

Do this

Unless you have specific reasons to do otherwise, stick with using your administrator-capable account. The annoyance of a UAC interruption when you need to do something requiring administrative access is a very small price to pay for its additional security. ☺

Geek Squad (Cont. from page 7)

Calling your computer-savvy friend or relative is another option. They may or may not be available, or know what they're doing, or very motivated to spend hours fixing your problem for free.

Or, call a computer repair shop. But what kind of computer repair shop? There's the kind that says, "Bring your computer in and we'll take a look at it" just like a car repair shop. Nationwide computer repair shops, including computer vendors, tell you to "mail it in," which can get rather expensive and time-consuming. (You did save all the original packaging, right? Of course not.) There's also on-site service; a repair person comes to your home or business. Then there's the kind of computer repair shop that never looks at your problem in person; instead, they offer to "talk you through" your own repairs. These guys go by different names, too.

Computer help desk services are for when the problem is you. If your computer is fine but you can't figure out how to increase the font size in Microsoft Word, a computer help desk person will tell you over the phone. Such on-demand tutors are also called "computer support" or "computer technical support" services. Large employers have entire departments providing help desk and tech support to employees all day long. Independent computer support services take calls from anyone who can pay.

And of course, there are AI chatbots ready to take an educated guess at solving your computer problem. ChatGPT, for example, may be helpful in this regard. I asked ChatGPT: "My pc is making a ticking sound. What should I do?" The reply that came back included a step-by-step guide to troubleshoot the problem, with advice such as "Check to see if the fans inside your PC are clean and functioning properly"; "A ticking sound from the hard drive could be a sign of a impending failure"; "Use temperature monitoring software to check for overheating components which may cause unusual noises"; and "Consider taking your PC to a professional technician for diagnosis and repair." (If you do hear a ticking sound, immediately back up your important files to an external drive or cloud storage before attempting any troubleshooting. Continuing to use a failing hard drive can result in permanent data loss.)

Other free AI assistants like Claude, Google's Gemini, and Perplexity can provide troubleshooting guidance. These tools have become more sophisticated at diagnosing hardware issues, interpreting error messages, and walking users through step-by-step repairs. However, they still can't physically replace a failing hard drive or diagnose electrical problems.

That leads me back to the original question. Will the Geek Squad (or a similar computer repair service) be a good choice to help with a computer problem?

Computer Repair Services

Computer repair rates are comparable to car repair rates, although the cost of parts is generally lower for computers. Some computer repair shops charge a "diagnostic fee" of $50 or so just to figure out what's wrong and tell you how much more the fix will cost. Hourly labor charges for computer repair can run $30 and up.

Best Buy's Geek Squad popularized computer repair services with million-dollar marketing campaigns and logo-emblazoned company vehicles. Today, The Geek Squad offers all the types of computer tech support services discussed above, including some pretty trivial ones. Remote services start at $19.99 for basic tutorials. It will cost you $40 for other services such as "Operating System Tune-Up and Upgrade", or a basic "Software Setup or Troubleshooting". In-Store Services include "PC or Tablet Setup" ($39.99), "Virus Removal and Operating System Repair" ($149.99) and "Data Backup or Transfer" ($99.99).

If you want a Geek to come to your home, options such as "New Computer or Tablet Setup", "Home Wi-Fi Setup", and "Home Modem Setup" each go for $149.99. Geek Squad also offers an annual membership called 'Geek Squad 24/7 Support' for $179.99/year (or $9.99/month plus $99.99 setup), which includes unlimited remote support, unlimited virus removal, and priority service.

Other national companies offer computer repair and computer technical support services, too. Office supplier Staples offers "Easy Tech" computer repair services. A full range of diagnostic and repair services is available in the store, or at your home/office location. Support.com offers one-time fixes ($80), as well as monthly and annual support plans. They promise "A better tech support experience, Any device, Any issue, Any time".

Each of these well-known services will have computer techs trained to handle the most common computer problems, and should do a good job of fixing your computer. If you're outside the USA, and don't know of a local computer repair store, NerdsOnSite.com is an international network of local computer repair techs who make house calls.

That said... Local independent repair shops often provide better value and more personalized service than

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Your County Probably Got Your Property Tax Wrong. Here's How to Find Out in 10 Minutes.

from The Current Newsletter at Komando.com, 4/16/26

You have a pretty good idea what your home is worth. So does your county assessor. That number drives your property tax bill every single year. A beautiful system where strangers estimate your biggest asset, then send you an invoice.

They get it wrong. A lot.

Studies show 30% to 60% of American homes are overassessed. Which means the county thinks your home is worth more than it actually is, and you've been paying taxes on a made-up number.

Homeowners who formally appeal win about 40% of the time. The average savings? $300 to $1,500 a year. Not yacht money but absolutely "why did I let them keep that?" money.

Most people never try. The process looks complicated, the paperwork looks intimidating, and who has time for that?

AI removed every single one of those excuses. Nice to see it take a brief break from writing breakup texts and meal plans.

Here's What You Do

1. Find your current assessment. Go to your county assessor's website and look up your property. Write down your assessed value and tax bill. While there, look for your appeal deadline. Miss it, and you wait another year. Can't find the date? Google "[your county] property tax appeal deadline."

2. Find five comparable sales. Pull up Zillow, Redfin or Realtor and search for homes similar to yours in size, age and condition that sold in the last 12 months. You want homes that sold for less than your assessed value. Those are your ammo.

3. Let AI build the appeal for you. With the facts you got in 1 and 2, use this prompt with your favorite chatbot:

> You are a property tax consultant with 20 years of experience winning assessment appeals. I believe my home is overassessed. My current assessed value is [amount]. Here are three comparable homes that sold recently for less: [list comps with addresses and sale prices]. Write me a formal appeal letter to my county assessor that is professional, specific and makes the strongest possible case for a reduced assessment. Include the key comparable sales as evidence and explain why my assessment should be reduced to [target amount].

AI spits out a complete, results-driven appeal letter in under 60 seconds. Print it. Sign it. Send it certified mail before your county's deadline. Nothing gets me going like using a futuristic machine to fight a tax form from 1998.

The county is counting on you not doing this.

If your appeal window has already closed, put a reminder in your phone for next year. This is now an annual habit. And yes, I've always understood real estate. But I've never quite figured out what abstract estate is.

You know what they say, the house always wins. ☺

Geek Squad (Cont. from page 8)

than national chains. They typically charge less, don't push unnecessary services, and are more likely to actually repair rather than replace components. Many offer free diagnostics and won't charge if they can't fix the problem. Check local reviews and ask for recommendations from friends before defaulting to these others services. ☺

P*PCompAS Newsletter
Greg Lenihan, Editor
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Coming Events:

Next Membership Meeting: **2 May 2026 beginning at 9 am with login available by 8:45 am. Zoom links will be e-mailed out to all members on the roster.**

Next Breakfast Meeting: **16 May 2026 @ 8:00 am, Golden Corral, 1970 Waynoka Road**

Newsletter Deadline: **23 May 2026**

Check out our Web page at: http://ppcompas.apcug.org