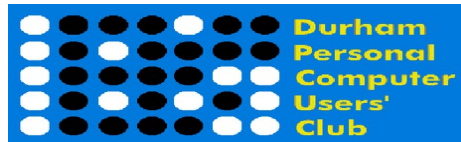**Feb 2025**

PC MONITOR

Durham Personal Computer Users' Club Newsletter

DPCUC General Meeting

**Our Club meets monthly on the second Thursday of each month.
All meetings are currently held using Zoom.**

We hope some day in the future to be able to meet in person again.

Please visit the Club Web Page for all the latest links and information
http://www.durhampc-usersclub.on.ca/

Next Meeting

**Accessibility –
Help! Can't see, can't hear, can't touch**

**by Judy Taylour
President, SCV Computer Club;
Member, APCUG Speakers Bureau**

On ZOOM – Thursday, Feb 13 2025, 7:00PM

FYI   - By Dan Delong

Facebook is changing.

One recent change, in particular, caused me grief. This situation may arise for only those who signed onto Facebook a long time ago... probably decades ago. At that time, Facebook's registration form assigned new users an ID that was actually an email address (xxxxxx@facebook.com). That email address, along with a self created password, became your username. Within the last two months, Facebook has changed the username to omit the part of the username that was the "@facebook.com" suffix. Only the original prefix text (the xxxxx before the @ sign) is now the username. No users were informed of this change, even though Facebook had long ago shut down their facebook.com mail server to outsiders.

How did I learn about this? Well, I installed the Firebox browser extension, called "**Facebook Container**" on a regularly used desktop. Facebook immediately asked for my login credentials again, which it just as suddenly refused. Even after uninstalling the Facebook Container extension, the same error messages continued, refusing readmission to Facebook. This was particularly confusing, since I had used the full Facebook email address and password successfully, as recently as two months ago, to login on a new smart phone. Restarting the browser, restarting the computer, using a different browser... nothing worked. The solution came by chance.
Fortunately, all other devices, on which I had recently accessed Facebook, still worked (maybe they used a session token, still valid).

Therefore, while in Facebook, on another computer, I was able to discover my current username, in my **personal Profile**. It was simply the old ID, or **the prefix to my defunct Facebook email address**. *What a time waster!!*
Those who decide to explore the Facebook user interface more deeply, will notice many other unannounced changes. One announced change is the removal of fact checking, to be replaced by individual users, filling out notes, challenging the veracity of a particular post.

Grok is a Musk AI Chatbot

X worked quickly to build a **Large Language Model,** consisting of thousands of GPUs, so as not to be left behind in this new field of AI. Science Fiction readers will note that "*grok*" is a term introduced in Robert A. Heinlein's 1961 book, "Stranger in a Strange Land", to mean "*understanding" "instinctive knowing*", or even "*agreement*". It is a somewhat nebulous term, similar to "**woke**" (in modern usage) with its conflicting meanings.
The **Grok app** may now be available on some Apple phones and tablets. It can answer queries, carry on a conversation, make summaries, and create a limited number of AI generated images. A beta web version is at...**Grok**

Show for Kids Moving to Netflix

Not everyone on cable, or antennae, can watch good kids' shows. But, anyone, with Internet and a screen, can get suitable shows online, through streaming.
Public broadcasters, like the CBC, are in the forefront when it comes to streamed content. So is YouTube, which also allows contributors to own their own content (music in particular) and make some money. One YouTuber, whose show is directed to young children, has 13 million subscribers (paid and unpaid). **Ms. Rachel** is so successful, that Netflix has enticed her to its paid subscription only streaming service.
Ms. Rachel's moving to Netflix. The YouTube star toddlers love is part of a revolution in kids' TV | CBC News

DeepSeek Chinese AI

American dominance in AI now faces a Chinese challenger... one that required less computing power and energy to create. Results compare well to Open AI's **ChatGPT.** The source for training data, for this **LLM**, was not disclosed, although the source code is open, including the method used to speed up data processing. That's why North American stock markets took a deep dive on the day **DeepSeek** went live. Of course it is still a China-based service; hence, able to record all online actions of its users. *[That's a security risk some countries are unwilling to take.]*
As I understand it, the DeepSeek's methodology is akin to chemical distillation, or perhaps it is like early childhood brain development, in the sense that a smaller AI model prepares output for a more sophisticated model. Programmers liken it to the distillation process, where fractioning of a base chemical produces other chemicals that are reconstituted to make more complex molecules.

[Or, perhaps, it is like a brain, developing a larger vocabulary as one section of brain communicates results to a different section of the brain. This is just personal speculation, here.]
Heavy users of basic ChatGPT pay $20/mnth, for basic, while pro users pay $200/mnth. The battle between ChatGPT and Google Gemini is causing both companies to bleed money.
What is DeepSeek? The Chinese OpenAI rival sparking chaos in tech markets | CBC News

"Nothing" (the company) Makes AI Earbuds (and advanced phones)

In a deal with ChatGPT, some Nothing products will become smart enough to chat with you, answer question, and guide you travels. **Nothing earbuds** cost around $200.

> **"'Nothing' confirmed in an X post that ChatGPT integration will be available across the following devices:**
> - **Nothing Ear 1**
> - **Nothing Ear Stick**
> - **Nothing Ear 2**
> - **CMF Buds**
> - **CMF Neckband Pro**
> - **CMF Buds Pro"**
>
> https://www.uniladtech.com/gadgets/new-nothing-earbuds-introduce-chatgpt-integration-357250-20240514

The **Nothing Phone (2a) Plus** will also offer a pre-installed ChatGPT.

SNOWSKY Retro Nano – Bluetooth DAC, Headphone Amplifier

Despite looking like a cassette tape player, the **Retro Nano** simply improves audio quality while listening on headphones or earbuds. It is also battery operated, with dual physical audio jack ports, and built-in Bluetooth DAC (Digital Analogue Conversion).

SNOWSKY is a sub-brand of **FiiO**.

Battery recharging can to be done with a separate device. However, when using USB-C, battery power is not needed. One side of the Retro Nano has play, pause, advance, and volume buttons. "**Retro**" refers to the 8 sound presets, able to mimic older recordings. Adding the app to your phone will integrate with the audio output from the phone.
[The Retro Nano is so new that Amazon.ca does not provide a price, nor does the FiiO website. However, the website warns about (and lists) unauthorized sellers of their products.]
Bluetooth DAC and Headphone Amplifier -RETRO NANO

Windows January Updates May Kill DACs

Audiophiles who enjoy the extra quality of sound from **Digital Audio Converters** may be out of luck... not permanently though. Microsoft is working to fix this bug in the latest Win11/10/Server update, causing DACs to stop working, especially those plugged into a USB1.0 port. This bug does not effect the existing computer's main audio output port, just those on external USB devices.
https://www.tomshardware.com/software/windows/january-windows-security-updates-are-breaking-audio-on-pcs-using-external-dacs

PowerToys updated to version0.88.0 with ZoomIt

Highlights:-
- "New utility: **ZoomIt** - a screen zoom, annotation, and recording tool for technical presentations and demos. This utility from **Sysinternals** has had its source code released and included in PowerToys. ZoomIt will still continue to be updated and shipped by **Sysinternals** for users who prefer to have it as a standalone utility outside of PowerToys. Thanks @markrussinovich, @foxmsft and @johnstep for contributing the original code and reviewing the PowerToys integration!
- Video Conference Mute has been deprecated and was removed from PowerToys.
- .Net 9.0.1 fixed many issue in WPF, improving stability for PowerToys Run."

Those who have been using the Sysinternals version of ZoomIt, with the one-click mute feature, will need to install it as a standalone, to regain this function.
https://www.xda-developers.com/powertoys-absorbs-iconic-power-tools-from-microsofts-advanced-toolkit/

Waterloo to the Rescue

Apparently the Linux kernel has doubled in size over the last decade, causing some to believe Linux should trim it down, by deprecating support for a lot of rare or old hardware.
However, despite its size, the installation process only installs support code for hardware it recognizes; on that machine, thereby keeping the installed size within reason.

Waterloo "brainers" did not reduce the size of the Linux kernel. Instead, they enlarged it by 30 lines of code. This tiny addition to version 6.13 makes it possible to run servers more efficiently, and at a significant energy saving. Large operations, already hungry for more and more electricity, can trim their demand by up to 30%. **Large Language Model** (**LLM)** training and **Bitcoin** problem solving are eating up increasing amounts of power, to the detriment of world climate. This improvement puts a potentially big dent in future, costly, power demands.
https://www.techspot.com/news/106501-linux-kernel-upgrade-promises-up-30-energy-savings.html

Android Auto Annoyance

Google's recent change is causing problems for drivers. Whereas, the view seen by drivers was generated to show current location, and move the map along with the car's movement, it now requests a destination to see the real-time map. The only work around appears to be hiding the destination menu, before driving away. Or, you can switch to **Waze** (also Google owned)**.**

https://www.androidpolice.com/android-auto-google-maps-centered-view-issues/

Viewsonic PJ-WPD-700

Known first for monitors, then for digital projectors. **Viewsonic** now sells a smart phone ,USB-C dongle, that transmits video to a large screen TV.
 Viewsonic provides this list of features...
- Cast content instantly with plug-and-play technology
- Peer to peer connectivity delivers greater security and stability
- Broadcast content from up to 98 feet away
- Connect with up to 8 transmitters simultaneously
- Up to 1080p FHD resolution with minimal latency
- Cast DRM-Protected content from Disney+, Netflix and more

https://www.viewsonic.com/us/pj-wpd-700.html

Defending Against AI

Not everyone is happy about AI! Of course, the big players (OpenAI. Google, Facebook, X, DeepSeek) and government spy agencies, love it. The acquisition of training data carries a huge dollar price, not just for the web crawlers collecting it, but the to each of the large databases supplying up-to-date information to requests. Repositories are another unsuspecting payee for data acquisition. Newspapers and archives, must pay for the increased bandwidth cause by web crawlers. They try to resist by placing a **robots.txt** file instruction on websites, specifically instructing "**Do not crawl**!"

These LLM web crawlers simply ignore such requests. They continue to digest content, and reformat/plagiarize it as 'intelligent' responses, never paying for the use of this information.
Programmers, who do not like the way the web is going, in terms of legality, political policies, and social damage, have created a partial technical solution, in the form of a digital poison,called a "**tar pit**".
Once a crawler is trapped in the tar pit, it can't get out. It's stuck in a loop, gobbling up digital babble... wasting time and money.
https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/01/ai-haters-build-tarpits-to-trap-and-trick-ai-scrapers-that-ignore-robots-txt/

$60 3D-printed Microscope

Popular Science compares this microscope to far more expensive, lab quality devices. Construction requires a special material for lens printing, Adding a Raspberry Pi, with camera, permits digital image storage.

https://www.popsci.com/technology/3d-printed-microscope/

"Axis of Evil"... oops "Axis of Easy"
Mark Jeftovic, puts out a regular editorial to customers of **EasyDNS**, called "**AxisofEasy**".usually covering security breaches. In his most recent post, he reiterates the exposure of student data back as far as the 80s, from an American firm hired to hold this data. **PowerSchool** is the name of the firm. The breach exposed personal information about millions of American and Canadian students. Why are we hiring American companies to control such sensitive services? Off the top, I can think of My Chart (health records), smart metres (electricity and water), consulting for nuclear refurbishing, our school curricula (along with text books), and, thankfully, the defunct Drive Clean program.
https://mc.easydns.com/email/view/679d953d87602783085195

Avoid Google Search AI results in Chrome

The default Google search engine is the AI version, which yields a conversational set of top comments, **created by AI.** However, some of these comments may be wrong.
To go back to the old web based results, requires tweaking.
In the **Chrome browser,** this is achieve by creating a new site search, based on additional Google search parameters.

Finding the appropriate entry fields (that is, finding the deeply nested editing location) is non-trivial.

1. While in **Chrome**, you may get to the ***Add Site Search*** field by typing the following in Chrome's top field.
chrome://settings/searchEngines

Or, try clicking on the three vertical dots in the top right, to then click on Settings. [I did not find a way to add special google search parameters in Edge or Firefox. This works only for Chrome.]
Then choose ***Search engine,*** and "***Manage search engines and site search***".
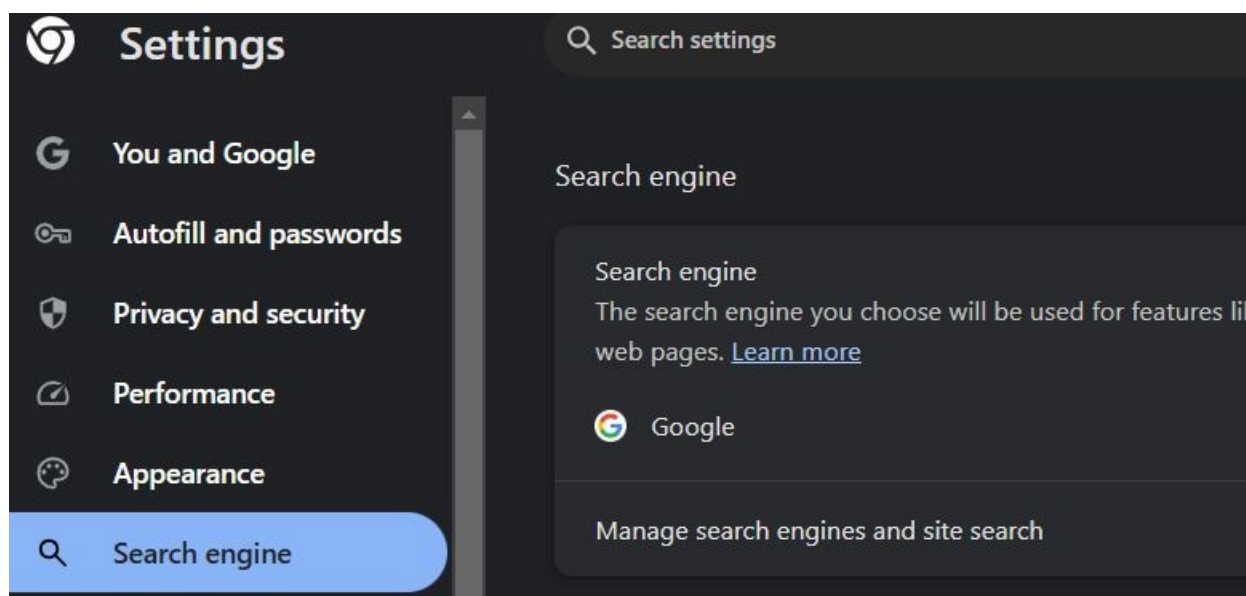
2. Followed by scrolling down to – *Add* a *Site search.*
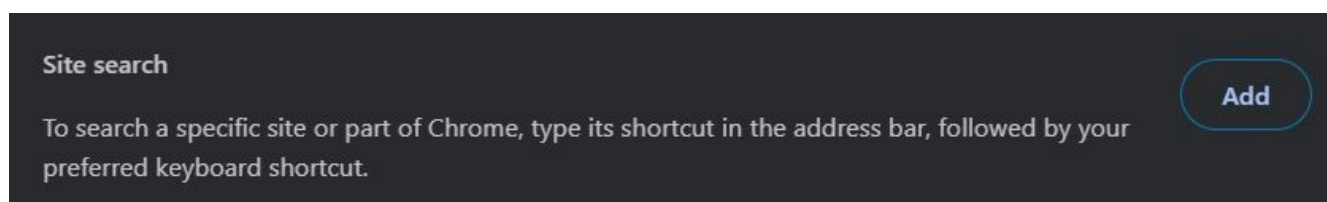
3. After clicking on the **Add** button enter the following texts in the appropriate fields. (***google.com*** is for all countries; *google.ca* should lead to only Canadian results, but will be refused in this setting.)

Use curly brackets... ***{google:baseURL}/search?udm=14&q=%s [Leave out any http:// if it appears]***
And, ***Save.***
4. Once added, **make it the default search engine by clicking on the 3 vertical dots** and selecting "Make default".

5. When opening a new tab, the screen should contain a Google Search Field, but searching from the browser bar should also work.
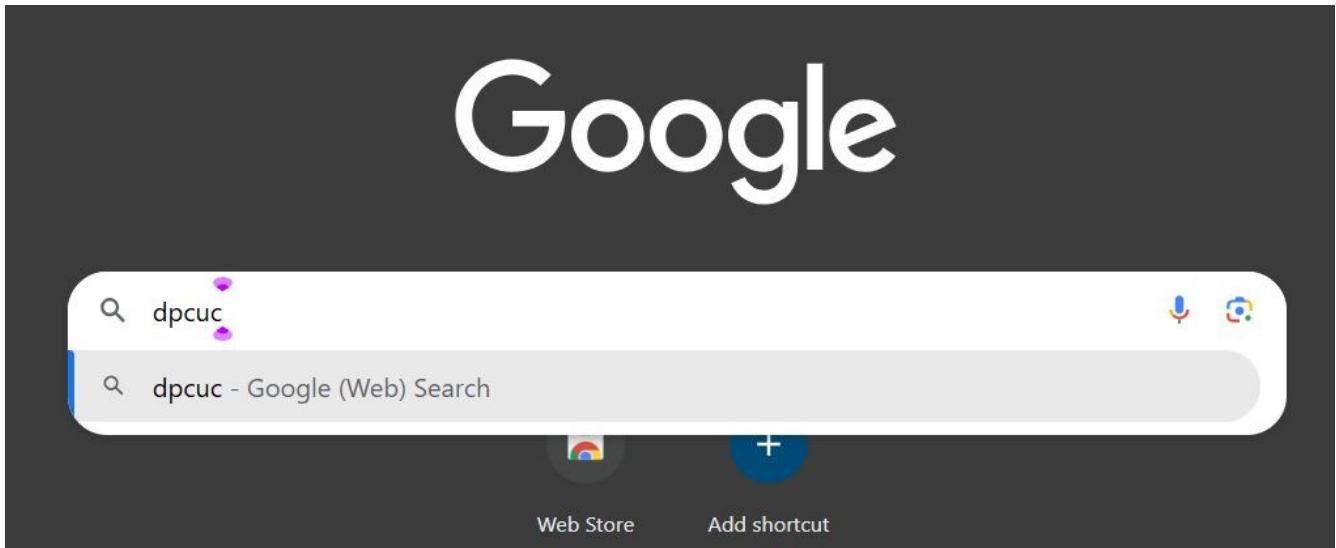
[This new **Google (Web)** search may work, for some, only if **Chrome** is the default browser. But should work anytime Chrome is used as the browser.]
*[*If so, **Edge** *may protest a little at being changed from the default.]*

*[Users of **Firefox** will note that Google is already the default search engine in that browser. Firefox is paid, by Google, to make it so.]*

[NOTE: Much of the content for this item was gleaned from a Tom's Hardware How To video –
"*How to get rid of Google's AI overviews*".]

Kodak Smile+ 2 in 1

Kodak is back, with a new camera that can print photos on larger sticky-backed sheets. (3.5x4.25 inches) They will not smudge.

Use a phone app to edit before printing (optional) and/or share to social media (supports augmented reality).

Connectivity is by Bluetooth. The rechargeable battery should last for 35 prints per charge. Add an SD card for storage; or, sync with the phone for storage.

ZINK is the printing technology used, at a cost of about $1USD per print ($60CAD for 40 sheets). The camera itself costs $150USD\$200CAD.

https://www.kodak.com/en/consumer/product/cameras/instant-print/smile-classic/

DPCUC President's Notes   by Peter Camilleri

This has been a cold and difficult winter, especially for me. I want to apologize that illness prevented me from writing my message for the January newsletter. I was focused too much on trying to get better.

On the Windows 11 front, it seems that Microsoft may be coming to its senses, at least a little bit. From what I hear, they have relaxed their severe requirements for upgrading older computers. This probably has something to do with the fact that Windows 10 installations continue to increase at a faster rate than Window 11.

Still, Windows 11 brings along so much junk, spam, and spyware that a cottage industry has sprung up offering software to remove it all! I think that the club will have to do a talk on "Cleaning up Windows 11". Or maybe we could publish cleanup tips and tricks? I know I spent more than 2 weeks, on and off, removing stuff that I did not want on my new Windows 11 machine. The only thing is that I didn't write any of it down so now I'm struggling to remember what I discovered.

In the "Finally some Good News" department, we can all celebrate the cease fire in the Gaza conflict. Hopefully, the parties involved will honour their commitments to peace, and the long and difficult task of rebuilding can commence. Maybe next time, people should not vote in a group that has "Holy War" as the major plank in their platform.

This just leaves the unending strife in Ukraine. As always, Pray for Peace.

Peter Camilleri, President DPCUC.

Linux in the News   by Alex Morrison

GStreamer 1.24.12 Improves Performance Across Platforms

GStreamer 1.24.12 multimedia framework is a bug-fix release that resolves crashes, improves compatibility, and enhances reliability across platforms.

GCompris 25.0 Open-Source Educational Suite Released with Five New Activities

GCompris 25.0 introduces five new activities including "Sketch", an activity for drawing freely with multiple tools to let children explore their creativity, and "Calculate with ten's complement", the continuation of the existing ten's complement activities to help the children to swap the numbers to easily compute a sum.

Krita 5.2.9 Brings Stability with Key Crash and Performance Fixes

Krita 5.2.9 free and open-source digital painting app brings major bug fixes, improved EXR handling, and enhanced stability for digital artists.

Mozilla Firefox 135 Is Now Available for Download, Here's What's New

1 Comment Posted in **Apps** / **News**

Mozilla Firefox 135 open-source web browser is now available for download with XZ packaging on Linux and other Linux changes. Here's what's new!

Ditch Microsoft's Windows 11: Nitrux 3.9.0 is the faster, more secure Linux alternative you need

- **betanews; By Brian Fagioli (Posted by Scott_Ruecker on Feb 3, 2025 12:13 AM EDT)**
- **Groups: Microsoft, Linux; Story Type: News Story**

Windows 11 has been making headlines for its AI gimmicks and strict system requirements, but let's be real, folks -- if you want speed, security, and customization, Linux is where it's at. Nitrux 3.9.0 just dropped (download here), and it makes Microsoft's operating system look downright pathetic.

- **Full story**
- **Read more**
- **0 threads and 0 posts**

Linux –   Nitrux OS

After reading about Nitrux OS, which was mentioned in the Linux in the News section, I though I would try it in Virtualbox to see how it performed.

First however – here are some of the features of Nitrux OS.
I seldom boot into Windows so it is difficult to compare it to Windows 10 or 11.
Nitrux offers a KDE environment with it's own customized desktop look and feel.

Nitrux offers a very attractive desktop look and feel. The system is Immutable!
What is Immutable about?
Immutable Linux distributions come with a read-only core system. This means the base operating system, once installed, cannot be modified during regular use.

Because since the core system is read-only, it's far less vulnerable to malware and tampering. If you can't add anything to the operating system, you can't corrupt it. In addition, immutable distributions use containerization for applications.

This further isolates programs from the core system and each other. So, even if you do have a bad application, it has far less access to the underlying system than, say, a Windows application does to Windows.

Most of the applications offered by Nitux come from app images. App images are self contained programs that run without the need of any system supporting files.
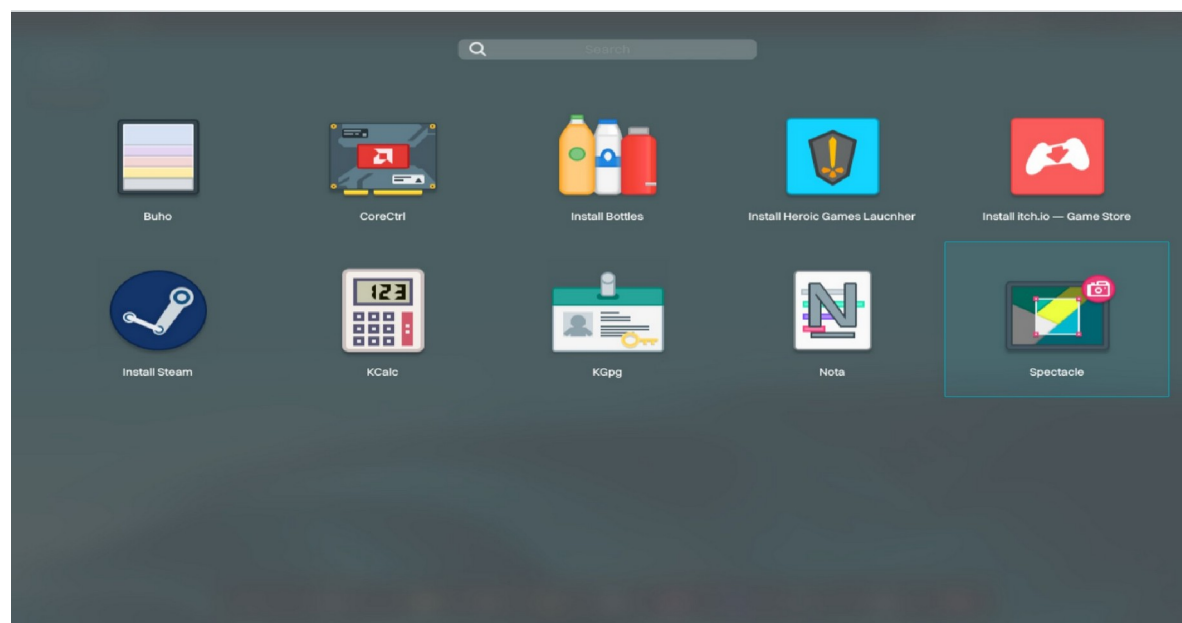
Here is the starting Desktop without any changes.

Here is the desktop when I click on the Start menu button.
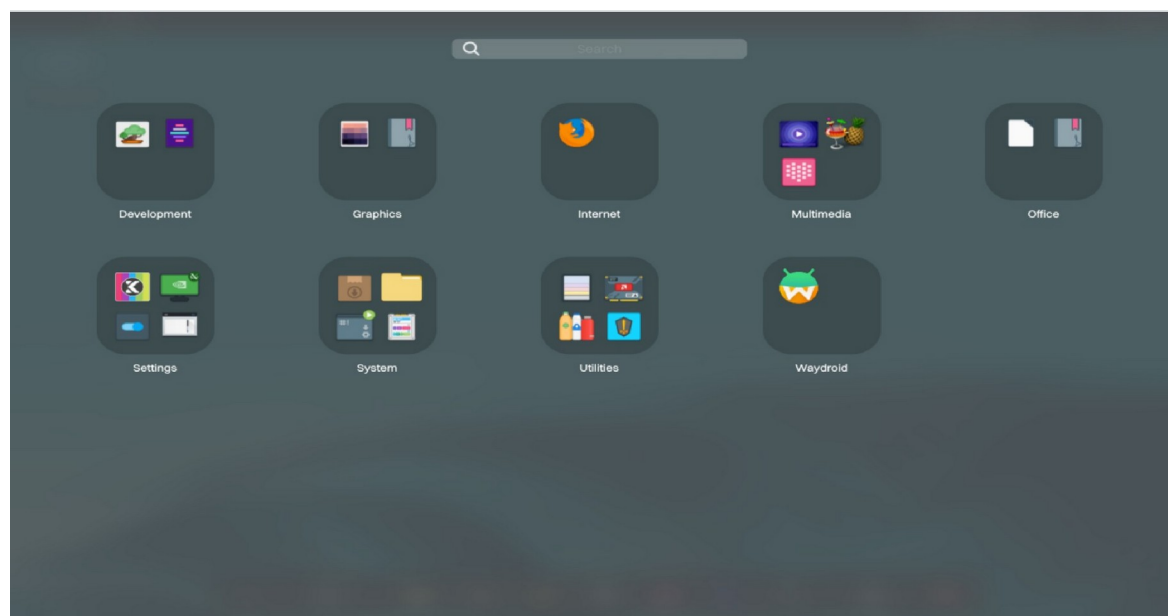
Now I click on the Utilities folder in the illustration above. Here is the result.

Nitux also offers the program called Bottles as shown in the image above. A bottle is a container for a program or a game or even an OS [like Windows]. Bottles is similar to Virtualbox or Vmware but is able to run programs without an operating system. The programs are safe to run and will not affect the OS.

Nitrux by design is secure and fast. I will demonstrate Nitrux at the next Linux meeting if any of you want to see it.

Sudoku   FEB 2025   by Alex Morrison

EASY

		6	2			9		7
					9			
		1	3					2
	8			6	2			
		3						
	2		8	4	3	9		
	6				1			4
			4	5			3	1
7			6			5		

Sudoku

The game boards on this page were produced using **Sudokuki** on PC Linux 64 Bit running KDE Plasma.

The objective is to fill in the missing numbers ensuring that every 3 X 3 grid has the numbers 1 through 9 with no repeats and every full column or row has the numbers 1 through 9 again with no repeats.

If you have troubles solving the puzzles send an email to me and I will send you the solution.

Have fun! Alex

MED

			9	8		4	6	
7	9							
8						9		
6			4	3			8	
				5	7			
	2						9	
9			7	2	3	8	4	
	2		5	6				

HARD

	9			1	4		7	
						6		
			7			3		
	8	6		3	2			
2				4		1		
1		9		7		8	5	
5					8			
4	6			2				3

IF you don't Like Sudoku puzzles – try these pages

https://www.boatloadpuzzles.com/playcrossword

http://www.freegames.net/puzzle-games.html

https://www.cryptograms.org/play.php

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS SIG's

Special Interest Groups are for members only.

SIG's are really free monthly
seminars with question and answer sessions following the presentation(s)

Members of SIG's enjoy a feeling of community and share common goals and interests.

Most SIG's are informal and members who attend them set the agenda for the meeting based on their own needs.

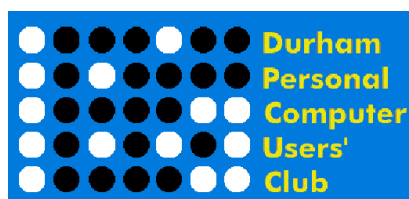### Special Interest Groups

Durham Linux User Groups

Coordinator: Ed Goudge

Our Linux group meet on the first Thursday of every month.

All meetings are currently held using Zoom.

We hope some day to meet again in person.

DPCUC EXECUTIVE

2022-2023

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HOME PAGE   --- http://www.durhampc-usersclub.on.ca/

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