

# LRDC Computing Services

Computing Services Newsletter

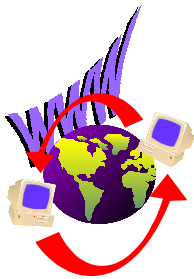
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## **Overview of CSSD's Recent Network Improvements**

by Karen Bassett and Gary Wilde



CSSD has recently made several major upgrades to PittNet, the University of Pittsburgh's network, in order to address computer network problems. To help alleviate problems caused by the general University community competing for the same bandwidth as the students, additional bandwidth was purchased exclusively for the residence halls and computing labs. To improve remote access, the modem pool was upgraded. CSSD also announced the selection of an Internet Service Provider (ISP) partner, Stargate. Unlike other ISP's, Stargate's fee-based Internet service will give you the same access to PittNet as you get by logging in through the modem pool. See next page for details.

CSSD is also currently implementing their "Gigabit Ethernet Upgrade" plan. The ultimate goal of this upgrade is to move PittNet from a FDDI ring backbone (200 Mbps) providing shared 10 Mbps connectivity to the user's desktop to a switched Gigabit Ethernet backbone (1000 Mbps) capable of supporting 100 Mbps connectivity to the desktop. Simply put, with switched Ethernet your network activity does not affect other users. With shared Ethernet, multiple ports are sharing the same 10 Mbps, so if one user downloads a large file, it will cause a network slowdown for users in neighboring offices.

CSSD has completed the PittNet backbone upgrade and is now upgrading one building at a time. Because the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of LRDC was experiencing sporadic periods of extreme network slowdowns, especially in the afternoons, we felt this warranted a request to CSSD to upgrade LRDC as soon as possible. Our request was successful. In fact, we were the second building on campus upgraded, and the upgrade was completed ahead of schedule. As of March 22, all ports at LRDC were moved to a new 10/100BaseT switch.

Please note, however, that even though the new switch is 10/100BaseT, CSSD initially sets all ports to 10BaseT. Nevertheless, the upgrade should give us a more reliable and stable network, with the ability to have faster speeds in the future. Only users on the 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and

8<sup>th</sup> floors should notice a marked improvement, as the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> floors were already on switched 10BaseT Ethernet.

CSSD is installing the 10/100BaseT switches at no charge to departments, but will charge for each existing 10BaseT port moved to 100BaseT. This will require both a 100BaseT port activation request and a 10/100BaseT network card. Many computers purchased within the past two years already have 10/100BaseT network adapters. We are currently evaluating several brands of network cards and will keep them in stock to be charged back to projects as ports are moved to 100BaseT.

CSSD has not yet approved a cost model for changing an existing 10BaseT port to 100BaseT. Until prices are approved and published, there will be a freeze on installing 100MB ports. Since the price difference between a 10BaseT activation (\$345.00) and a 100BaseT activation (\$395.00) is \$50.00, we anticipate the charge will be \$50.00 or less. When the prices are announced, we will meet with Jack Aug to determine if LRDC has the budget to upgrade the entire building, or whether only the projects needing higher speeds will be given the option to pay to upgrade select ports. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact either Karen Bassett (x4-7037) or Gary Wilde (x4-7042).

## CSSD Announces ISP Partnership with Stargate

by Tim Cooper and Eric Fussenegger



Recently, CSSD began enforcing the following modem pool restrictions for current University dialups: connection time is limited to two hours during peak periods (5:00 P.M. to midnight everyday); connection time is limited to four hours during non-peak periods; and multiple, simultaneous logins to the modem pool are prohibited.

For those who prefer dialup access without these restrictions, but still need access to PittNet, there is now a fee-based alternative. Through a new ISP partnership with Stargate, all current University faculty, staff, and registered students can sign up for dialup Internet access (56kbps) for \$16.95/month, a 20% discount. DSL service is also available in certain areas, starting at Stargate's standard subscription rate of \$39.95/month. To see if DSL is available in your area, go to [http://www.stargate.net/html/home\\_dsl.html](http://www.stargate.net/html/home_dsl.html).

In addition to unlimited Internet usage, Stargate offers a much larger local calling area that includes western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, and portions of Maryland and West Virginia. There is an 800 number (6 cents/minute) for areas with no local access number. The main advantage of selecting Stargate over another ISP is you will have access to PittNet through a Virtual Private Network. When you log into Stargate with your Pitt Primary Computer Account, your access will be the same as if you were on campus or logged in through the modem pool. You can access the LRDC file servers and restricted areas of PittNet— such as PittCat and CSSD web-based resources—from almost anywhere in the United States.

To register, visit <http://www.stargate.net/pitt>. Note, you must have a Primary Account. The deadline for the special promotions (announced in a recent campus mail flyer) has been extended until April 15, 2001. You may also call Stargate directly at 1-877-570-7827.

## Windows Me: New Features Aimed at the Home User

by Eric Fussenegger

With the introduction of Windows Millennium Edition (Me), Microsoft has made an attempt to package a few nice upgrades to Windows 98 as a new operating system and they may have missed their mark. For the home user, Windows Me has new wizards to make networking and sharing Internet connections easier. Aimed squarely at their competition's multimedia savvy new boxes, the most notable additions to the OS are MovieMaker and Media Player 7.

MovieMaker is a home video editing program ala Apple's iMovie. It provides a decent set of basic tools, but most PC users will lack a means of getting the video into their machines for editing. A video capture card is a necessary part of the equation, and the software that comes bundled with most cards is more full featured than MovieMaker. Media Player 7 is an upgrade to the previous version of Media Player that came bundled with Windows 98. It provides a new user interface, along with better support for a wider variety of file formats. Media Player 7 is available for free from: <http://windowsupdate.microsoft.com/>.

On the system side, Microsoft has introduced several new features that are intended to improve performance, protect critical system files, and make it easier to restore your machine in the event of system difficulties. One new feature helps prevent system difficulties by disallowing users, viruses, and rogue applications from deleting or altering critical files.

A second feature, System Restore, is a neat little utility designed to take "snapshots" of the Windows Registry any time software or hardware is added to your system. You can also specify restore points through scheduling options or manually set one at any time. This allows you to restore your system to a previous working state should things ever go wrong. However, during testing I was only able to successfully restore my system 3 out of 5 times. The reason for these lackluster results is that system restore points are automatically created only by software that supports the most current Microsoft Installer technology. Others have reported having better luck with this feature than I did.

Another feature is the elimination of DOS from the startup process, which allows for faster boot times. However, the elimination of DOS forces you to rely entirely on Windows Plug and Play to recognize system hardware. Coupled with weak support and a lack of driver updates from hardware manufacturers, we have a recipe for disaster. There have been numerous reports from people who experienced problems when they upgraded to Windows Me, especially when attempting a clean install on an older machine. Most problems stem from the fact that Windows Me has built-in drivers for the newest hardware, but virtually no support for hardware made before 1998. Hopefully this situation will improve as hardware manufacturers develop new drivers for Me.

Despite Windows Me's rather cool multimedia additions and improved networking for home users, our best advice would be to wait before upgrading. Give the hardware developers time to create new drivers and let Microsoft release a Service Pack or two. Until then, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

## Windows 2000 Professional: Upgrade for Windows NT 4

by Tim Cooper

Windows 2000 Professional (Win2k) was released less than a year ago as an upgrade to Windows NT 4 workstation (not Windows 98). NT and Win2K are designed for advanced users familiar with administration and security. NT users should find Win2k to be a more stable and secure operating system. Win2k is compatible with most existing Windows software, but not everything. This is also true with hardware. If you would like to know if a particular computer model, software package, or hardware device is compatible with Windows 2000 Professional, you can check Microsoft's online compatibility list at <http://www.microsoft.com/windows2000/upgrade/compat/default.asp>.

Note, particular care needs to be taken when upgrading older computers. Even if Windows NT currently runs flawlessly on a machine, Win2k may not. You should only consider running Win2k on a machine with at least a Pentium II processor, 128MB of RAM, and 2GB of hard disk space for Win2k (with an additional 4-20GB for applications and data). Even if your computer exceeds these recommendations, be certain to carefully check Microsoft's compatibility list to make sure your computer model, hardware, and any critical software packages are on the list before you upgrade.

So far Microsoft has only released one service pack for bug fixes and updates. Until Win2k has more service releases, we can't be confident that the major compatibility issues and security bugs have been fixed, so we advise against upgrading at this time.

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