IMHO

By Terry Holcomb

No, you are not on the wrong page! Our friend and long-time writer, Matt Schwartz, has asked for relief from writing his regular column. Because I have enjoyed his writing of the "Nobody asked me, but." column, I asked for the chance to carry on his work. Because he did such a good job, I believe that I need to leave his legacy and try to invent my own approach to the newsletter column.   My hope is that I will not only provide information that flows by my desk, but also hear from some of you on topics of interest and/or importance to PC users.

I will start my column by suggesting that you go to our excellent website (lwpcug.com) and reread Matt's last two columns. Last week my wife almost became the victim of identity theft. This came in the form of an email that appeared to come from Washington Mutual Bank. In the same week I realized that I had let the anti-virus updates on one of our three computers get out of date (read -I did not pay them on time) and found several pieces of spy software on that machine. All of these things we knew were important to watch out for, but a moment of carelessness left us vulnerable. Using software like that suggested by Matt, I believe we have removed the problems, covered most of our problems on ID theft, and can go on with our love of using computers (my wife suggests that I might say our "love-hate" relationship with them).

In my thirty years of teaching and using technology, I have learned the hard way that the most important things are quite often the most obvious things. It is sad that we must pay to protect ourselves from unethical/unthinking hackers, crackers and thieves, but it is a reality we must face. All computers linked to the outside world must be protected, just as you need to lock your house before going on vacation. If you use broadband or DSL the number of problems increase (i.e. your computer is more valuable and vulnerable to them).   The door locks you need are:

1)**anti-virus software** (hopefully this includes spam-blockers/pop-up blockers etc),

2)**firewall software** (the newest WinXP firewall is ok, but only blocks people from coming in. while most firewalls protect messages going out (via spy ware etc) also,

3)**good use of passwords**. Passwords should be 6-8 characters with both alpha and numeric digits.   And, of course, you need to remember them.   I use four PW's and change them about 1 time per year.

Please let me know what you would like to read in future columns.   I am in the lab most Monday afternoons if you want to stop by and talk. I am the chubby, old, partially-bald guy (that may not help much).   I and my fellow supervisors will be more than willing to talk to you about questions and concerns. We may even have the right answers occasionally. That's my humble opinion for this month!