

# PC Surfing Safari

**W**hen my partner and I agreed to do a computer education workshop at the Boys and Girls Club in Hillsboro, Oregon, it seemed like a natural step for us. Ralph Bond and I—calling ourselves the *PC Dads*—had been doing volunteer workshops at Beaverton elementary schools since last April. The Boys and Girls Club offered us a chance to reach new audiences. We were also eager to try out some new wrinkles in our “PC Safari” presentation, a guided tour through the technical “jungle” of the computer.

## The Fun Was Just Beginning

**I**nside the cavernous Boys and Girls Club building, about 20 kids were running around and whooping it up, playing pool and other games. Several club attendants raced around, wearing tired smiles. It was 6:30 p.m., and the staff had already endured a full day. But the kids looked like they were just warming up. Even as we spoke about the wonders of the PC, two boys continued to bang on their video arcade game, oblivious to our presence.

Another chapter of a strange odyssey was about to be written.... We didn’t start out with lofty intentions. Our aim was simply to help a few local schools out by providing useful information about computers for teachers and parents. We knew many people were confused. But we needed a name. *Mark and Ralph from Intel* didn’t spark much excitement. We needed something catchier.

Then it hit us. We had five kids and more than two decades of parenting between us. “Why don’t we call ourselves *the Dads*?” said Ralph. “No one’s going to take us on for being a *Dad* except our own kids. Why not *PC Dads*?” I said.

## A New, Uncharted Path

**A**s we ventured out and conducted our workshops, we began to see what non-Intel people thought about PCs. A few patterns emerged:

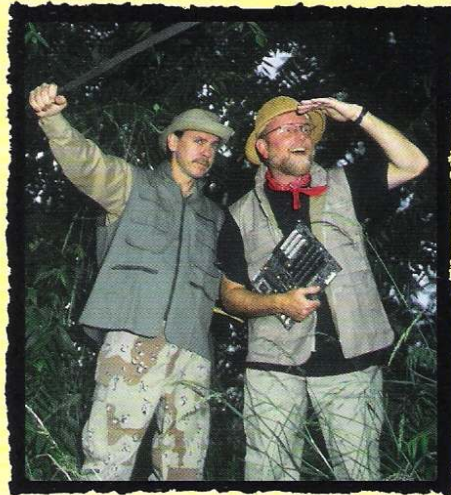
- *Many people are frustrated with the technology, and some are completely bewildered.* An elderly man asked us, “I don’t even know what a CPU [central processing unit] is. Is it the same as a hard drive?” Another man asked, “Do you plug a modem into an electrical outlet or the phone?”
- *People don’t want to grapple with arcane technical points. They just want the thing to work.* One payroll manager explained that she had spent days trying to solve a software problem that had screwed up her construction company’s payroll records. “I’m dealing with a tough crowd; three of them are ex-convicts,” she said. “They don’t want to hear about memory conflicts. They just want their money.”
- *People will ask questions; always expect the unexpected.* Of the 20 to 25 people who generally attend, at least 2 or 3 know something about PCs and are more than eager to fire questions. “What about the PowerPC\* [chip]?” was a frequent question. Others wanted to know about the iCOMP® index.

The feedback led us to an obvious conclusion: The information

needs to be fed out in small, easily digestible doses. Techno-babble had to go, along with our Intel identities. We had to start (ouch) talking like “normal” people.

That called for new safeguards. When one of us drifted off and started doing techno-talk again, the other would blow a police whistle. Loudly. This had the effect of keeping us on track, and it kept the audience wide awake. We also added some other humorous touches: horns, games and so on. We gave away Intel keychains and other trinkets to anyone who asked a question. Then we went into our new Safari presentation, dressing up like Indiana Jones in vests, camouflage pants, helmets and boots.

Educators and parents were especially grateful. Oak Hills Elementary school hung big “Welcome PC Dads” banners in the halls and sent home newsletter features on us with every child. “Parents are in a quandary over this technology. This is just what many of them need,” said Marlene Wheeler, who manages the business-schools partnership for the Beaverton school district, the second largest district in Oregon. “You’ve managed to demystify the PC,” she said.



Keeping up with Intel’s Indiana Joneses—Mark and Ralph talk PC.

## Chainsaws and Toolboxes

**T**he session at the Boys and Girls Club was typical. About half of the 24 people were in their 20s and 30s, but there were also two elderly couples, an executive from Horizon Air, and at least one teacher. We did a quick survey and found that only two people had Intel486™ processor-based PCs, several had Intel386™ processor-based PCs, and no one had a Pentium® processor-based system. Three people owned 8080/8086 processor-based PCs—we gave them prizes for “hanging in there.”

Then there were the six kids, between 9 and 13 years old. Bubbling with energy, they sat in the front and peppered us with questions. We put them to work handing out flyers and keychains. When it came time to play the “Memory Game,” we made three of them “volunteer” to play-act what happens when a game is loaded into memory. They loved it.

With the video games now silent, the program proceeded smoothly and we ended the night without any major glitches. We spent the last 25 minutes answering questions. Some people couldn’t get enough information. As we were leaving, the deluge of questions inspired Ralph to come up with a new idea: the “PC Clinic.”

“We’ll dress up like surgeons and operate on a PC. We can bring in some technical experts to assist,” he said. “I may even bring in a toolbox and chainsaw, and....”

That’s when I blew the whistle. “Maybe in the fall,” I said. “I’m still recovering from the Safari.” Being a PC Dad has its moments. ■

*Ralph Bond is a multimedia information manager at Intel. Mark Ivey is a senior corporate writer in Employee Communications who is currently working with Public Affairs in Oregon to establish a speaker’s bureau using some of the PC Dads’ material.*

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