

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

PERSONAL TECHNOLOGY

Sunday, Dec. 12, 1999 P3

CYBERSCENE

BILL HUSTED  
e-mail: bhusted@ajc.com

## Accessing of groups can ease into hunt

What image comes to mind when someone says Internet? Nowadays, for most people, it's the World Wide Web.

And while the Web has become (other than e-mail) the most popular way to use that giant pipeline for information called the Internet, it's not always the best way to get information.

Long before there was a Web, there were newsgroups. Unlike the highly graphical Web, these are basically message areas. You post a message, usually a question or a comment, and all the other members of that newsgroup can see it and comment.

Using the newsgroups is easy with the right software, and you'll find out today how to get the news reader programs you need. For highly specialized topics, newsgroups are still the place to find the real expertise on the Web.

Newsgroups are organized according to topics and — no matter what your interest — you'll probably find it there. Parents, however, should be warned. The newsgroups also include some topics areas that would be offensively sexual or obscene, even for the most liberal.

While your Web browser offers the ability to read and create newsgroup postings, a dedicated news reader works best. The best place to find that reader is [www.tucows.com](http://www.tucows.com). Whether you use a PC running Windows or a Macintosh, or even an Amiga or a machine running Linux, you'll find a reader here.

Simply select the operating system using the pull-down menus and then type in the search word "newsgroups" without the quote marks. You'll be zapped to a page describing the news readers for your particular operating system. There's a description of how each works so you can select the one that suits your fancy. Keep in mind that the listing usually will have both shareware readers (which means that you are supposed to pay for it if you decide to keep it) and that some features may be disabled until you do pay and freeware readers (no payment is ever made).

If you're new to newsgroups, you may have a difficult time finding the ones you're most interested in. Things are still sort of nerdy out there. All newsgroup readers will — the first time you use them — load in the names of the newsgroups available to you. You can then use search terms to find the groups that you care about.

But you have to get an exact hit to find the right newsgroup this way. For instance, if you want to find a newsgroup that sells amateur radio equipment and you use the term "ham" — as in ham radio — you won't get a hit if the newsgroup's proper name uses the word "amateur" instead of "ham."

There is a way around this. And we'll get back to the Web for that. A search engine called Deja.com ([www.deja.com](http://www.deja.com)) does an excellent job of searching the newsgroups. Just like the search engines you use to find Web sites, you type in the search term and Deja will ferret out the newsgroups where that topic is discussed.

Using the search engine is an excellent way to find the sort of newsgroups you'd enjoy. Just type in search words, make note of the newsgroups where the term appears and try them out. You can click on the links that Deja brings up to check them out, too.

One last newsgroup tip: Be aware that if you do post a message, your e-mail address appears. Some people choose to use one of the free e-mail services such as Hot Mail or Yahoo to avoid getting both junk mail to your main account and revealing your main e-mail address to the casual newsgroup browser.

SITES IN THIS ARTICLE:  
► [www.tucows.com](http://www.tucows.com)  
► [www.deja.com](http://www.deja.com)

GAMES FOR KIDS

## Freddi Fish takes on Wild West

By Yusuf Davis  
FOR THE JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

The fourth in the Freddi Fish series of activity software lets families get into the swim with a collection of brain teasers and fun challenges.

Freddi Fish and sidekick Luther are saddling up for a Wild West adventure to rescue prize-winning hogfish that have been trapped by rustlers. Kids 3-8 help Freddi and Luther find the hide-out, catch the rustlers and restore justice to Briny Gulch.

To gather clues for this mystery, players must first explore underwater locations and interact with such characters as Sheriff Shrimp and Salvatore Stella.

"I like it a lot," said Rebekah Harris of Austell, who reviewed the game, which is designed to teach and encourage logical thinking, problem solving, deductive and inductive reasoning, and listening skills. "It's not too hard to play, and it's not too easy."

Playing with either her mother or her 5-year-old cousin Ryley, Rebekah sometimes had difficulty gathering clues.

"It's a little difficult, even for a 5-year-old," said Rebekah's mother, Joy Harris. "Sometimes she gets frustrated, because it's easy to forget where you've been."

Rebekah's older brother, Joseph, 9, also tested the waters of Briny Gulch. "Some of it was kind of complicated," said Joseph. "I'm not really a Freddi Fish kind of guy, so I didn't play it much."

The Families report that advances in technology have made the graphics, music and sound effects much richer and fuller than a previous version of Freddi Fish they own.

"It's pretty cute, and we've had fun playing it together," Joy Harris said. "We'll have to try it many more times before we get all the clues. I guess that's good. If it were too easy, you wouldn't get your money's worth."

**'FREDDI FISH 4'**  
The Case of the Hogfish Rustlers of Briny Gulch  
Developer: Harmonious Entertainment  
Format: PC and Macintosh  
Price: \$19.99  
Rebekah's grade: B-plus

THE GAME ZONE

## Some all-time greats to place under the tree

By Vox Day  
FOR THE JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

The holidays — it's that favorite time of year again for gamers and game publishers alike.

Not only do the days off allow a person to sleep in after an untimely bird-chirp playing session, it's the one time of year that non-gamers will go out of their way to buy games for gamers.

I still remember how excited I'd get on Christmas morning when I'd see a thin, rectangular package that bore an unmistakable likeness to the shape of an Intellivision game box. I'd always save it to open it last, savoring the excruciating suspense of whether it might be "NASL Soccer," "Donkey Kong" or "Star Strike."

So if you've got a gamer on your list, don't worry that he won't be excited about "yet another game."

Trust me, if it's the right game, he will. Here's my list of games worth getting excited about this holiday season.

The two best sports games are easy. They are "FIFA 2000" on any system and "Madden NFL 2000" for the PlayStation. Despite its graphics, I'm not wild about NFL 2K on the Dreamcast, but NBA 2K looks a little more exciting, especially in comparison with the relatively pedestrian basketball efforts on the other game systems.

Online role-playing has really taken off in the last two years, and "Everquest" is the one in which I'm most interested. But longtime Ultima fans would probably prefer a subscription to Ultima Online — six months will

The Web is full of great reference sites, including those focusing on unclaimed financial assets long forgotten.

By Anne Meyers  
FOR THE JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

Every day I see and hear news stories, advertisements or conversations about Web sites. When I learn about a potentially interesting site, I jot the address down. I aim to visit the URL before I lose the piece of paper with the address.

A site that caught my attention was described in a radio news story. The site is the National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators ([www.unclaimed.org](http://www.unclaimed.org)). It sounds pretty "right" (I am sometimes easily amused).

The site was developed by unclaimed property experts to assist the public in efforts to search for funds. There is no charge for claiming property.

The NAPCA site provides links to individual state Web sites. The Michigan Department of Treasury calls its site Money Quest. The explanation given is that there are millions of dollars in lost or forgotten assets from dormant bank accounts, unclaimed checks, stock certificates and valuables left in safe deposit boxes. So it lives up to its name.

"Because these properties were considered abandoned and unclaimed by the bank or company entrusted with them, they are turned over to the state, as required by law," the site explains. "The Michigan Department of Treasury is the custodian of these assets and returns them to their owners (or the owners' heirs) when they are rightfully claimed."

In most states, there is no time limitation for filing a claim. I plugged in the names of friends and family members on a few appropriate Web sites. I checked none after name and came up with a bundle of money that belongs to friends and relatives. It sounds like an odd way to

run about \$60. Speaking of subscriptions, Computer Gaming World is still the premier industry magazine despite the loss of Terry Coleman and the Rev. Johnny Wilson, and any gamer would appreciate its appearance in his mailbox.

"Breakback: The Order of the Flame" is an adventure game that looks very appealing and features the ability to ride dragonback, which is a must for anyone who's ever read McCaffery's Pern books.

"The Wheel of Time" is a surprisingly good action adaptation of Robert Jordan's interminable series, which can only benefit by making the imperious Elyase the central character instead of the whiny Rand al'Thor. But there's no action like "Quake III Arena," although this is really for gamers who like to play multiplayer over the Internet.

Hardware is a toss-up between among a Sega Dreamcast, a USB hub and a CD-writer. Of the three, I'd go for the CD-writer (with USB). And a USB hub is now officially a requirement for computer gamers with notebooks.

"Crash Team Racing" is my favorite PlayStation game now; it may be a ripoff of "Mario Kart," but it's a really good ripoff. If you've got more time than money, I'm sure any gamer would love a complete download of all 1,900 arcade game ROMs turned into a CD complete with MAME 0.36 to run them.

And those who wish to remember the religious nature of the season should take a look at Saints of Virtue, at [www.saintsofvirtue.com](http://www.saintsofvirtue.com).

# FamilyTech

SMART WAYS TO MAKE HOME LIFE EASIER

## A different kind of state lottery

The Web is full of great reference sites, including those focusing on unclaimed financial assets long forgotten.

By Anne Meyers  
FOR THE JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

Every day I see and hear news stories, advertisements or conversations about Web sites. When I learn about a potentially interesting site, I jot the address down. I aim to visit the URL before I lose the piece of paper with the address.

A site that caught my attention was described in a radio news story. The site is the National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators ([www.unclaimed.org](http://www.unclaimed.org)). It sounds pretty "right" (I am sometimes easily amused).

The site was developed by unclaimed property experts to assist the public in efforts to search for funds. There is no charge for claiming property.

The NAPCA site provides links to individual state Web sites. The Michigan Department of Treasury calls its site Money Quest. The explanation given is that there are millions of dollars in lost or forgotten assets from dormant bank accounts, unclaimed checks, stock certificates and valuables left in safe deposit boxes. So it lives up to its name.

"Because these properties were considered abandoned and unclaimed by the bank or company entrusted with them, they are turned over to the state, as required by law," the site explains. "The Michigan Department of Treasury is the custodian of these assets and returns them to their owners (or the owners' heirs) when they are rightfully claimed."

In most states, there is no time limitation for filing a claim. I plugged in the names of friends and family members on a few appropriate Web sites. I checked none after name and came up with a bundle of money that belongs to friends and relatives. It sounds like an odd way to

pass the time, but the results made several friends and relatives happier for the holidays. Try this out yourself. Go to the site. Click on the state or states that you have resided in. Type in your name and see if you have left anything behind. The Ohio site is my favorite because it tells the amount of the find.

Another useful site helps me set my watch. When I was a kid I used to call the recording that stated the exact time. Now, I click on [tycho.usno.navy.mil/what.html](http://tycho.usno.navy.mil/what.html) when I want to set my watch.

(Then I add another five minutes to try to fool myself into being on time.) Check the time in several other time zones and say aloud, "at the click of the mouse, the time will be..."

There may never be enough

reference sites. As the parent of an elementary-schooler, I need all the reference help I can get.

I really like [www.onebook.com](http://www.onebook.com) to look up words online. The site searches several dictionaries to provide the most accurate and comprehensive definition.

Parenting a curious student requires gracefully accessing answers when I need them. Based on instructions from her teacher, my 6-year-old asked me to name Georgia's state flower, tree and bird.

Those were questions I never thought to ask when I relocated here. I was more confused by things like Spaghetti Junction, the ad valorem tax and sweet tea. I was sitting at my computer

and should have used the quick resources available at [infoplease.com](http://infoplease.com). Instead, I failed miserably at the flower and tree questions.

For the bird I guessed Falcon, Hawk and then Thrasher. "Yes," she said. "It's the Thrasher. I knew you would know it." (Thank goodness for Atlanta's new hockey franchise.)

Infoplease can help parents and children with all types of homework questions. After I failed the test, I did a quick search and found the state flower is the state flower is the

Cherokee rose. The tree is a live oak. The bird, as we all know, is the brown thrasher.



Anne Meyers is a free-lance writer living in Lawrenceville. E-mail: [anmemeyers@yahoo.com](mailto:anmemeyers@yahoo.com)

## RCA, first big name with MP3 player, disappoints with nonintuitive Lyra

By Mike Mungro  
WASHINGTON POST

Several MP3 players have hit the market, but RCA's Lyra is the first with a recognizable consumer electronics brand name behind it. It's also the first to also play songs digitized using the RealAudio 2.0 format and the first to come without built-in memory (instead, you load sound files onto a memory card, then shuffle it from an adapter attached to your computer to the Lyra itself).

But the Lyra is also the first

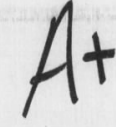
MP3 gadget confusing enough to force me to break down and open the manual. Nothing seemed very intuitive with this product. It requires two different cables — one connects to the (conflict-prone) printer port, the other to the keyboard port. It's full of puzzling error messages — trying to use the included RealJukebox software to listen to files that I'd moved from the player to the computer yielded "missing plug-in" and "unknown file type" alerts.

It balks in unpredictable ways — when I started converting some

songs to digital files while offline, I couldn't figure out how to get the software to download the CD track info when I got back online. Even when things work properly, you wait a lot. An annoying little "Loading software — please wait" notice occasionally pops up when you turn the device on to play music. I suspect that there are more rough interfaces like this on the way as companies bring the first line of secure music devices to the market. I dread that development.

Bottom line: Hit it hard, not

Details: Win 95/98, \$200.



## BellSouth.net®

### Internet Service earned an A+ rating.

(We thought you'd like to hang it on your fridge.)

BellSouth.net® Internet Service earned an A+ rating for connecting its users to the Internet.\* Which means that BellSouth gets more people up and surfing on the first try than most other companies do. So if you're looking to get a PC or just want to switch your Internet service, go with a proven leader. Call today for Internet hook-up and receive the same reliable service you expect from BellSouth.

**Sign up for BellSouth.net® Internet Service and receive \$20 cash back or free computer software. So call 1-800-4DINET or visit [www.bellsouth.net](http://www.bellsouth.net).**

**BELLSOUTH**

BellSouth.net® Internet service is not available in all areas and is subject to BellSouth.net Service Agreement terms and conditions. Pricing plans include BellSouth's charge for connection to its local Internet network and the Global Service Provider (GSP) charge for connection to the global Internet. GSP service is provided to users by providers' unaffiliated with BellSouth, and subject to the GSP's terms and conditions. An account setup fee may apply. Some restrictions apply, see online registration process for complete details. Offer ends February 29, 2000. Not all orders can be processed online. Computer software available while supplies last. \*Source: Visual Intelligence® - October, 1999. All trademarks and services marks contained herein are owned by BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc. ©1999 BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc. All rights reserved.