 *Stump the PC Club is a free tech-advice column written by members of the **North Orange County Computer Club**, which has been in existence since 1976. Visit the club's site at noccc.org.*

QUESTION: There have been so many Microsoft applications for working with pictures such as XP's Windows and Fax Viewer and Vista's Windows Photo Gallery, can you tell me what the best program is for working with pictures?

PC CLUB: This is an interesting question since there has been a change with each new version of Windows including Windows 7. This latest version of Windows includes the Windows Photo Viewer which only has a few simple features. One of the problems with using the programs built into Windows is that every time that Microsoft revises Windows, you have to make an adjustment and learn a new program.

One of the things that you can do to avoid this is to use the new, free Windows Live Photo Gallery. This program works with all versions of Windows so anyone with a Windows PC can use it. It's not great but at least you won't have to worry about upgrading from XP or Vista to Windows 7 if you use this program. It's available at http://bit.ly/livegallery.

Another potential problem exists for those Windows 7 users that use a Web mail program such as Yahoo Mail or Gmail. If you try to E-mail a photo using the Windows Photo Viewer or Windows Live Photo Gallery, for example, you may get a warning that you have no default E-mail program installed. The reason for this is that Windows 7 has no default E-mail program built in. However, if you have Outlook or Windows Live Mail installed this won't occur. Web mail users usually have to attach photos from within their E-mail application.

My suggestion, if you want to avoid the above issues and enjoy many additional features, is to try the free Picasa program available at picasa.google.com. Picasa's current version is 3.6 and it works with Windows XP, Vista and Windows 7. This program integrates well with Gmail for sending pictures.

In fact there are many free programs available for working with pictures including the following:
- IrfanView, www.irfanview.com
- XnView, www.xnview.com

- FastStone Image Viewer, http://www.faststone.org

For more programs of this type see http://bit.ly/freeimagestuff.

There are also other types of free programs that will allow you to make a slide show of you photos. With Windows Live Movie maker, available at http://bit.ly/freemoviemaker, you can combine stills and videos taken with your digital camera. Here's what Microsoft states about the program:
Publish your movie on YouTube right from Movie Maker. Or share your movie with friends and family in a variety of other ways—including DVD. Note that DVD's can only be burned with Vista Ultimate or Windows 7.

Don't confuse Windows Movie Maker with Windows Live Movie Maker. Windows Movie Maker was available in Windows ME, XP and Vista and was omitted from Windows 7. You can read more about this at http://bit.ly/livemoviemaker.

Another option is to use the free Microsoft program titled Photo Story 3. It's available at http://bit.ly/msphotostory. If you click the link titled "Burn DVD's for Photo Story 3" you will be taken to a site where you can download a neat plug-in for $19.99 that will allow you to burn DVD's with menus.

Following my first suggestion will make you immune from the various Windows revisions but if these programs don't have enough features, then the next step is to use one of the most popular photo editors from Adobe called Photoshop Elements. It's available for $79 and possibly for less if there is a special sale. You can check it out at http://bit.ly/getPSE8 where there is a link for a trial version.

Some of the free programs as well as Photoshop Elements can also provide information about most photos regarding which camera was used, the camera settings, if the flash fired, etc. This information is called metadata or EXIF data and is actually contained within the image file. In an upcoming article I will be answering a reader's question about this topic – stay tuned.

The above programs should give you a head start in finding the one that's best suited to your needs. *- Ed Schwartz, NOCCC member. View his Web site at* www.edwardns.com*.*