A FEW WORDS ABOUT HELP

I hate to beat a topic to death, but questions about getting help with specific programs keep coming up. I don't like to keep reminding people about the Fourth Rule of Computing; "When all else fails, read the manual," but it still is appropriate.

Of course it used to be that "reading the manual" meant reading the book that came along with particular programs. Unfortunately this seldom is the case today. Manuals with programs have all but disappeared. It's too expensive to print a manual and they also become obsolete almost as fast as they are printed.

In their place manufacturers have been including Help sections within their programs. Clicking on Help in the Menu bar or hitting the F1 key brings up typically very good Help screens. And the Internet has a wide range of Help available in search engines like Google.

As an example, recently I was using Microsoft's Power Point to construct a presentation. One of the functions I was trying to use was to insert a PDF file into one of the Power Point slides. First I tried the Insert tab in the program's menu. But I couldn't find anything about inserting a PDF file. Following my own rules, I hit the F1 key (this is Power Point 2007 so Help is brought up by hitting F1). I searched for Inserting PDF or just PDF but nothing came up. Then I tried Google. I typed in the words "insert PDF Power Point." Up came 659,000 "hits." The first hit was a Microsoft Help and Support paper, "How to insert Adobe Acrobat PDF files … into a Microsoft Power Point slide."   Exactly what I was looking for. Google to the rescue. I highlighted the portion of interest and printed it out. I then followed the instructions and was able to insert the information I wanted.

On the subject of Help, I have to mention third party books. When I get a new program, or have a particular function I need, I look for a book on the subject. This again is because my memory is short. Usually I end up on Amazon to see if they have books available on the particular subject. One publisher I should mention is Peachpit Press (www.peachpit.com). They have many program specific books but one set of which I am particularly fond is their "Visual Quickstart Guide" series. These are relatively small, easy to understand guides to using programs. I have these guides on many of my programs and always have found them very helpful.

All of this is just a reminder that if you can't figure out how to do something within a program, there are many Help options available. I rely a lot on these Help

suggestions because I just don't remember how to accomplish specific functions because I may go weeks or even months without using a given program.

Good luck and remember, keep the neurons happy, synapses snapping and enjoy computing.