

August/September 2021

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My turn.....

Henry Winokur, Editor, (editor@patacs.org)



Guilt trip time: Unfortunately, I received almost nothing from my request for you to tell me what you'd like to see in *your* newsletter. One response out of nearly a hundred isn't very helpful. I'm bummed. I had hoped for a better response...

That being the case, what else is going on out in technology land? Well, Windows 11 is coming. Will you update your computer? Here's what I know as of 8/28/21:

1. Windows 11 won't run on every computer. As usual, it needs to meet certain hardware parameters. But maybe it'll run on more than originally specified.
2. Microsoft has a tool that will help you evaluate your computer. But right now it's only been released to Windows Insiders (aka beta testers). 😞 When I tried it took me to a web page telling me, sort of, about Windows 11. Certainly not the guidance I was looking for. It's why there's no link here.
3. This just in from [PCMAG.com](#) (8/31/21): Windows 11 will be released on October 5th.
4. If your computer doesn't pass muster, there's no need to worry. Microsoft has promised to support Windows 10 until 2025.

What about cell phones? I'm old school and admittedly, cheap. I can't see the need to spend lots of money on a cell phone. I have a Motorola G6, which is now about 3 years old and probably by this time next year will have been replaced—unless I just get the battery replaced—since that seems to be the issue. I think it runs Android 8. Unlike most folks, I rarely use it to take photos. I have an actual, excellent 35mm full-frame (digital) camera for that. I have another excuse, too: I have a bit of a tremor in one of my hands and cell phones, because of their lack of thickness are hard to hold *still*. 😞 On my camera, which is a good sized chunk and easy to grip, I can adjust the shutter speed, aperture, or ISO way more easily than a phone, to get beyond that problem.

Do you use "smart" technology? If you do, how about sharing your experiences *in writing*? 😊 Send your musings to me at editor@patacs.org.

Remember Looney Tunes ® cartoons? Remember what was said at the end? In case you've forgotten: "That's All Folks"...at least from me for now! Until next time.

Editor's Note: Article accuracy is the responsibility of the author, and while we check, it's not our primary responsibility.

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In the image below, “**Dawn Patrol**” lifts off at the Albuquerque (NM) Balloon Fiesta, in October, 2015. Image ©Henry S. Winokur.



Personal Audio Support In Live Meetings

Your portable device and earbuds (or headphones) can help you hear

By John Krout, Potomac Area Technology and Computer Society (PATACS)

INTRODUCTION

During a group effort to upgrade audio-visual tech in the once-and-future classroom meeting space for PATACS in Fairfax City, VA in June 2021, the president of PATACS casually mentioned that some audience members may need extra help hearing instructors and other speakers at meetings.

The room has six public-address loudspeakers installed, all conveying the microphone of the instructor. The audio volume on those speakers is necessarily limited to avoid audio feedback through microphones used by instructors.

I decided to look into it. I chose to focus on astute use of audience smartphones and tablets. Bring along your headphones or earbuds, run an app to receive meeting audio, and adjust volume to suit personal needs.

Since all PATACS meetings are made available to members via Zoom, initially I thought of using Zoom apps on portable devices while attending live meetings. I have had the Zoom app installed on my phone and tablet for more than a year.

AUDIO DELAY TIMING TESTS

However, there is an issue worth considering: Zoom audio is delayed a bit. When attending a meeting remotely, that delay is no big deal. I wondered if it would be annoying in a meeting while watching an instructor.

I did some timing tests to quantify the Zoom audio delay, using three different approaches: phone running Zoom and connected via WiFi, phone running Zoom and connected via the cell phone network, and phone not running Zoom but dialed in to the Zoom phone number for audio. I hosted a meeting on my desktop PC, and connected to that meeting using my smart phone and each of the three methods.

The smallest delay was **0.38 seconds**. I think that is excessive. I set out to find other options.

I tried using the free **VLC application** on a computer to live-stream audio on Wi-Fi. Used the free VLC app on my Samsung Galaxy S10 phone to receive the streaming audio. I quantified that delay too: **0.781 seconds**, using HTTP protocol and MP3 transcoding. FLAC transcoding also worked, but resulted in progressively increasing delay, starting at **0.8 seconds** and growing to **1.02 seconds** after 60 seconds of audio. Neither offers smaller delay than Zoom.

Then I thought about this: why not have the portable device simply pick up meeting audio using its microphone?

There are apps for that.

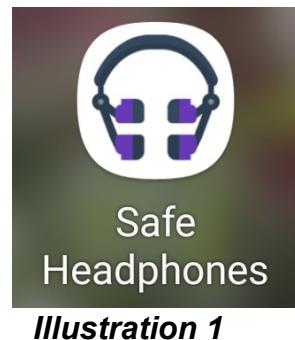
SOUND AMPLIFICATION APPS

The apps for smartphones and tablets were created for several different needs. Some are specifically intended to be used by a classroom teacher, using the teacher's smartphone to amplify the teacher's voice in a traditional classroom environment. Some apps offer audio recording capabilities for meetings. But all do the work required: pick up meeting audio via the smartphone microphone, and provide that audio through headphones or earbuds, enabling the user to adjust the personal audio volume to suit their own needs.

I tried two apps. The good news is the audio delay using these apps is about **10 times less** than the most minimal Zoom audio delay.

AN APP FOR ANDROID PORTABLES

The app I tested for Android devices, is **Safe Headphones**, published by jApp. You can see its icon in **illustration 1**.



The main screen of the app, shown in **illustration 2**, below, is very sparse and contains a small on/off switch. The switch is circled in the illustration. Tap that switch to turn on the audio feed from the device microphone.

The text on the screen (**illustration 2**) points out that this particular app is designed to let you listen to music on earbuds or headphones while also listening to the ambient sounds around you. However, the app also works well as a room sound amplifier when no other apps are producing sounds.

Since I had developed a system for testing audio delay, I used it for this app on my Samsung Galaxy S10 phone; the delay was **0.014 seconds**. Much better! Note that as of mid-2021, my S10 is not the current top of the line from Samsung; later models with faster chipsets may further reduce the delay.

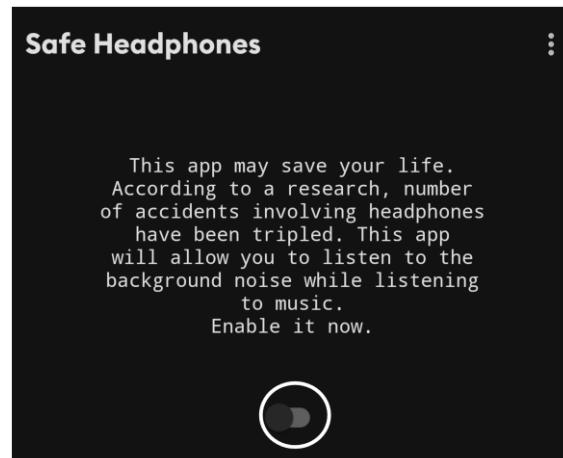


Illustration 2

AN APP FOR IOS PORTABLES

The second app, for Apple devices, is **Megaphone**, published by Netviking. You can see its icon in **illustration 3**.

The main screen of the app, shown in **illustration 4** (far right), depicts a cardioid microphone with an on/off switch, which is circled in the illustration. Tap the switch to hear what the device's microphone hears.



Illustration 3



Illustration 4

(continued...)

BATTERY CONSIDERATIONS

If the meeting you attend is very long, you may wish to carry along a power bank battery for charging your smartphone while using it to amplify meeting sound.

Another way to conserve battery power on your smartphone is to use a different device, such as a tablet or a retired smartphone, to run the app of your choice for personal audio support.

OTHER METHODS

There are at least two other methods of audio distribution for personal use that could be tried. Both of these methods require some effort and expense from the meeting organizer.

Low-power FM radio transmitters are available online. These became very popular during the pandemic, especially for church services in church parking lots. The basic problem in a meeting room is on the audience side: portable FM receivers are no longer very popular. However, portable FM receivers are available for as little as \$10 online. Some MP3 players, such as the Sandisk Sansa Clip and iPod nano, have FM receivers built in.

FM receivers are great to have on hand when the phone network is down. I recall that the phone voice network was down in Washington, DC for a couple of hours after the 2011 earthquake. While the phone voice network was down, the cell tower data service was overloaded, so I could not use my smartphone to check news sites. I would have been very pleased to have a portable FM receiver in hand for listening to the all-news radio station while forced to stand outside my office building for a couple of hours.

Another approach uses induction coils to transmit sound directly to the T-coil inductor contained in some hearing aids. The IEEE.org web site provides an article describing in detail a do-it-yourself approach, but the cost of even that approach is hundreds of dollars at a minimum, and not every hearing aid includes a T-coil. There is also a physical challenge: installing the transmission coil close to the audience but isolated from other electronic devices that might be affected by the transmission coil.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: John Krout has been writing about creative uses of personal computers since the early 1980s, and now covers portables including smartphones, tablets and digital cameras. He is retired from a long career as a C/C++ software engineer, and lives in Arlington, VA, with many computers, digital cameras, and too many cats.

##

Alerts, Notifications, and Alarms - Oh, My!

By Dorothy Fitch, Editor, GVR Computer Club, AZ

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I have started using alerts, notifications and alarms to get my attention. Some of these come to my phone and some by email. Most of the time, I can choose what works best for me for each purpose. Of course, there are notifications that you get even if you didn't specifically ask for them, such as doctor appointment reminders, books that are ready for pick up at the library, and many others.

Here are some of my finds and handy tools.

Alerts:

My bank's website allows me to set up alerts for activity related to the bank and credit card accounts. For example, whenever my credit card is charged, either in a store or online, I immediately get an email. If that card is ever stolen or hacked, I will know right away. I can also set up alerts for payments due, deposits, balances, etc.

We have a smart **indoor** thermometer that alerts us to temperature changes outside a specific range that we set up. That way we can tell from wherever we are reading email if the house gets too hot or cold.

Notifications:

The US Postal Service offers a free [Informed Delivery](#) service to let you know what mail is coming to your mailbox. As mail is scanned in the postal processing center, an image is sent to your email address. (Lately, my email keeps showing me a picture of a postcard from the USPS that says that mail may be delayed. Ironically, that postcard still has not yet arrived!)

UPS's [My Choice](#) system tracks your packages and notifies you of their delivery. It's fun to check the map that shows the exact location of the delivery truck when it is in your neighborhood! FedEx has a similar [Delivery Manager](#) system and offers to deliver the package to a secure location where you can pick it up if you don't want it left outside your door.

On Election Day, I learned of the phone app from [The Guardian](#) that sends alerts to the "lock screen" of my phone when breaking news occurs. The Guardian is a British newspaper with a great reputation and worldwide coverage. So during the evening on 11/3, as election results

started coming in, I would hear the distinctive tone I set up for my phone. That sound would prompt me to go look at the television to see the latest results. It was very handy. I am still enjoying the breaking news. I'm using the free version of the app, though a premium version is also available.

I have also subscribed to the free [New York Times Morning Briefing](#) and "breaking news" emails. (I usually get the Guardian notifications about 5 minutes before the NYT ones!) Their Morning Briefing has a summary of news headlines and a mini crossword puzzle. To read the entire article or enjoy the full crossword puzzles, you need to pay for a subscription. Lately, the headlines have been enough for me!

The weather station on our roof sends us an email every day with the day's high and low temperatures, wind speeds, and other data (the rain measure has never worked well, so its rainfall reports are rather suspect). It even has its own website, which I can access from my phone. If we ever get to travel again, we'll be able to see what the weather is like at home!

Alarms:

Alarms aren't just for waking you up. They can be great reminders to take your medicine, walk the dog, or whatever suits you. I use the Alarm feature of the Clock app on my Android phone and expect that an iPhone offers the same functionality.

Once a month, my husband needs to submit data for his [Rainlog](#) project, where citizen scientists report the amount of rain received in their rain gauge. So, that alarm goes off on the first day of each month at noon as a reminder for him to do that. We have it on our shared Google calendar as a recurring task, but do we ever look there anymore? That calendar is rather empty these days.

It's nice that you can set up and customize multiple alarms to recur on specific days and times.

There are so many possibilities out there that you can subscribe to or set up. Give it a try.

#

Keep goin'...there's more.....

Apps and Applications – Mobile and Desktop

By Phil Sorrentino, Newsletter Contributor, Sarasota Technology Users Group

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When we talk about computer software nowadays, we typically use the term “apps”, referring to any software that is running on a computer, smartphone, or tablet. The term **applications** was originally used for software other than the **operating system**, but that seems to have changed over the last few years with the advent of mobile devices (smartphones and tablets). Also driving the change has been the migration towards the “Client – Server” architecture, where smaller apps running in a client device (smartphone or tablet) can control a much more elaborate collection of application software running in a much larger server (in the cloud). Computing has been moving in this direction ever since the internet and the World Wide Web have become available to us. The term "app" has become very popular. In 2009, technology columnist David Pogue even proposed that the new mobile smartphones be nicknamed “App Phones”.

And in 2010 **app** was listed as the “Word of the Year” by the American Dialect Society.

Here are some definitions, at least for this discussion: A **computer program** is a generally structured collection of instruction sequences that perform a specific task when executed by a computer. (How's that for a “Nerdy” definition?) **Software** is a general term and will refer to all types of computer programs for all types of computers. An **operating system** is a collection of computer programs that manage computer hardware and software resources and provides common services for application programs. An **application program** is a computer program designed to perform a group of coordinated functions, tasks, or activities for the benefit of the user, for example, a word processor, a spreadsheet, an accounting program, a web browser, or even a computer game. These applications are designed to run on the computer hardware with the assistance of the operating system (like Windows 10, macOS, Android, or iOS), which is mainly involved with managing the computer’s hardware.

Before the smartphone, circa 2007, we only had desktop applications, because we only had desktop computers. Yes, I know laptops were available and they could be easily moved around, but basically, they were just portable desktop computers. So, desktop applications is software intended to be run on a desktop (or laptop) computer. Then came the smartphone (and shortly later, circa 2010, the tablet), and these devices were very different in that their screens were noticeably smaller and there was no mouse for selection/navigation, only a touch-sensitive screen. Applications that could be used in this new smaller environment had to be created specifically to run on a small screen using your finger as a pointer/navigation

device. These applications are software (programs) intended to be run on a mobile computer, a smartphone, or tablet, with limited input and output capabilities. A mobile app is a computer program designed to run on a mobile device, like a smartphone or tablet, with the assistance of the mobile operating system (like Android or iOS, or even Windows 10 for tablets).

Desktop applications are usually "fuller featured", whereas the mobile app equivalent is usually smaller, "lesser featured", simpler, and may or may not be easier to use. This should not be unexpected when you consider that most desktop apps are built to be used with the more capable input and output devices (a mouse, a keyboard, and a much larger display), whereas mobile apps are intended to be used with only a finger and a much smaller screen.

With the arrival of mobile devices, many popular desktop applications were the basis for new mobile apps for the new mobile devices. Many Google desktop applications have been recreated for mobile devices. Your Google email can be accessed from the desktop application or the mobile app. Both devices will provide the same information from the Google email server. But, as we have noted, mobile apps are different from desktop applications in that they have to run on a much smaller device with limited input and output capabilities. Not only is there a display size and input/output capability difference, but the mobile devices are different at the hardware level, particularly the central processing units, most of which are slower than their desktop counterparts. Many applications exist as both desktop and mobile versions. Microsoft Word is available in a desktop version, the one that most of us learned word processing on, and Microsoft has released a mobile version that is available for both Android and iOS devices. This also holds for Excel and PowerPoint. Adobe Photoshop image editor is a desktop application and Adobe Photoshop Sketch is a mobile app that lets you draw and paint on a mobile device and is a condensed version of Photoshop.

Besides the apps that have migrated from the desktop world, there are hundreds of thousands of apps that have been developed for mobile devices that take advantage of the fact that these devices are mobile. These apps use the power of the server to provide capabilities to the user that could never have been accomplished with only the processing power of the device itself. Maps and navigation immediately come to mind. The memory and the processing power required for these capabilities, at least with the current technology, would never fit into a device the size of a smartphone. And some apps take advantage of the fact that they know your location; remember smartphones have GPS and other techniques for location determination. For example, **Glympse** lets you send your current location to another device, so the user of that device will know where you are (for as long as you choose to give that information). There are even some apps that use your location to notify you if one of your

friends (or contacts) is nearby. The capabilities that can be developed for the mobile devices have only scratched the surface. It almost looks like the software development emphasis has moved from desktop Applications to mobile Apps.

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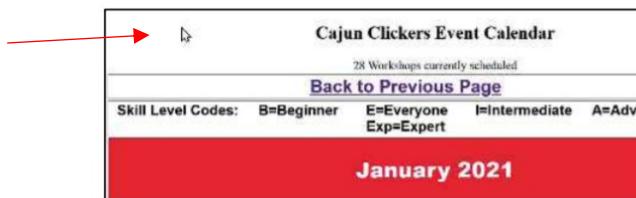
Changing the Mouse Pointer (Ed: but only in Windows)

By Cal Esneault, former President of CCCC and leader of many Open-Source Workshops & SIGs; February 2021 issue, CCCC Computer News

Cajun Clickers Computer Club: www.clickers.org

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A key item in the Windows desktop graphical interface is the “pointer” (controlled by either a mouse or by a laptop touchpad). Since we use it often, finding it quickly makes our sessions more efficient. The default setting has a white pointer with a black outline. It can take time to locate when on a white background (see screenshot below):



Windows 10 (as with previous versions) gives us an easy way to customize this pointer. From the “Settings” menu, chose the “Ease of Access” item (see below)

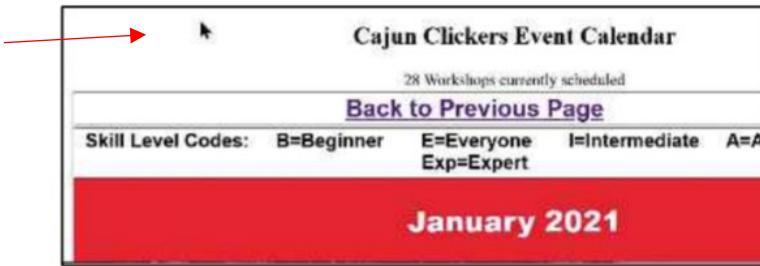


Pointer options are shown to the right.

You can change the color of the pointer to any other basic color that you desire.

For example, the cursor has been changed to a black fill (with white outline) over the same screen as seen earlier. This may allow for improved recognition. Other colors can be selected based on your preference (for example, green or yellow).





You can also choose the “inverted” option. This changes the color of the pointer depending upon the color of the background. Thus, better contrast is automatically selected, but you must reconcile your mind-muscle connection to accept the fact that the cursor will not always be the same color.

In the mouse pointer dialog, there is also a slider to change the size of the pointer. By default, it is set to “1”, but you can make it larger (for example, “2” or “3”) using the slider. This improves recognition, but it takes some getting used to having a large object constantly moving on your screen. (Editor’s note: making the mouse pointer too big results in obscuring items you may need/want to see.)

As with any personalization setting, results vary based on your perception of what is “better”. Give it a try to see if this helps. There are many other ways to customize the screen, text, taskbar, dark mode, etc. Search the internet to see if you can find some that improve your situation.

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For you Apple-ites: Notes from Aaron Davis...

Apple is mere weeks away from brand new major OS updates, including:

macOS 12 “Monterey” <https://www.apple.com/macos/monterey-preview/>

iPadOS 15 <https://www.apple.com/ipados/ipados-preview/>

iOS 15 <https://www.apple.com/ios/ios-15-preview/>

watchOS 8 <https://www.apple.com/watchos/watchos-preview/>

Folks can get a head start learning about the new releases at
<https://www.takecontrolbooks.com>.

New **Take Control** books about macOS 12 Monterey, iOS 15, and iPadOS 15 are available.

Your iPhone, iPod touch, or iPad gain all new features and interface changes with iOS 15 and iPadOS 15. In [Take Control of iOS 15 and iPadOS 15](#) by TidBITS Managing Editor **Josh Centers**, you'll learn what's new, what's coming soon, and how to get more out of your Apple mobile devices with these operating systems.

macOS 12 Monterey builds on the changes in Big Sur, making your Intel or M-series Mac even more powerful and easier to use. This book ([Take Control of Monterey](#)) teaches you how to prepare for a smooth transition to the new version of macOS—and what to do once you've upgraded. Learn your way around, find out about new capabilities (and a few pitfalls), and improve your privacy and security.

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And from Geof Goodrum on things [Linux](#):

A great resource for Linux info is <https://distrowatch.com/>. Geof states that he found this recent article about the **Linux 30 year anniversary** on 25 August 2021, which you might be interested in: <https://www.gamingonlinux.com/2021/08/happy-birthday-to-linux-30-years-strong>.

#

Some **links to articles I have found** over the last couple of months which you might find of interest (or you can send me some you've found...):

Fix slow Chrome: <https://www.makeuseof.com/fix-slow-chrome-issues>

Use Brave browser to earn cryptocurrency: <https://www.makeuseof.com/use-brave-browser-earn-cryptocurrency>

Can't upgrade to Win11? How staying on Win10 will work: <https://www.makeuseof.com/cant-upgrade-to-windows-11-how-staying-on-windows-10-will-work>

Simple design rules for Professional MS Word documents:

<https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/design-rules-word-documents>

How to ID the best headphones...10 important terms to know:

<https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/10-terms-you-should-know-to-identify-the-best-headphones/>

Best free Excel alternatives: <https://www.reviewgeek.com/42195/the-best-free-microsoft-excel-alternatives/>

Is this too “young” for us? Great(?) party games for your PC:

<https://www.reviewgeek.com/44084/12-great-party-games-for-your-pc-2/>

Video Streaming Services which have free trials: <https://www.reviewgeek.com/89709/which-video-streaming-services-have-free-trials/>

Spring & Summer Meteor Showers, etc.: <https://www.reviewgeek.com/75025/here-are-the-2021-spring-and-summer-meteor-showers-and-other-events/>

Own an EV? Need the smell of gasoline in your life? Ford has you covered:

<https://www.reviewgeek.com/92334/ford-made-a-nasty-perfume-that-smells-like-a-gas-station/>

How to download and install older versions of macOS:

<https://www.howtogeek.com/737510/how-to-download-and-install-older-versions-of-macos/>

From Consumer Reports, safety systems coming “down the road”:

<https://www.consumerreports.org/car-safety/whats-next-in-car-safety>

How to fix a dented bumper: <https://www.consumerreports.org/car-repair-maintenance/how-to-fix-dented-car-bumper-diy>

Free digital libraries for free ebooks: <https://www.makeuseof.com/digital-libraries-download-ebooks-free>

Safest Free Mac Software download sites: <https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/download-safe-secure-mac-apps>

How to clean your dirty MacBook: <https://www.makeuseof.com/how-clean-dirty-macbook>

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Monthly Circulation: 100

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Posts is an official publication of the Potomac Area Technology and Computer Society (PATACS), a Virginia membership corporation, a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions are gratefully received and tax deductible.

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TEMP-RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

First Class

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The monthly schedule of meetings via Zoom

Arlington General Meeting	7:00 - 9:00 PM	1 st Wednesday
Technology & PC Help Desk	7:00 - 9:00 PM	3 rd Wednesday
Board of Directors Meeting	7:00 - 9:00 PM	3 rd Monday
Fairfax General Meeting	12:45 - 3:30 PM	3 rd Saturday

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Physical Meetings Canceled
Sessions via Zoom – Meeting Access
Will Be Sent Via Email

PATACS Event Information
Call 703-370-7649 for Meeting Announcements
Web site: <https://www.patacs.org>