

science & TECHNOLOGY

THE BATTALION

Cleaning tips to make your motherboard proud

By STEVEN PIWONKA
The Battalion

As the spring semester begins, you might remember the old days at your parents' house when your mom or dad would try to use the spirit of the season to trick you into cleaning your room. Well, it is still winter for a few more weeks, but a few useful cleaning tips can help protect and improve the life of a very important investment: your personal computer.

Your computer's biggest fan

As any student living in a residence hall can tell you, if you leave something out overnight, it will have a thin layer of dust on it in the morning. The air in residence halls is full of dust, and your computer may be suffering as a result.

Your computer's processor generates a lot of heat, and that heat is removed through either passive or active means. In other words, either your computer uses a fan to blow the heat away, or it uses something that absorbs the heat. If you can hear your computer running, there is a fan inside.

Over time, dust can build up on fan blades and reduce cooling efficiency. It may even cause the fan to stop functioning altogether. This loss of cooling can result in excessive noise, random errors and crashes. In some cases, it may even cause death (for your computer, not you).

Fans that cool the processor are also aided by case fans, usually located on the back of the computer case. These fans bring in cool air from the exterior of the computer, so do not forget to clean them.

"These case fans are very important," said Jon Southern, a senior electrical engineering major. "The internal fans can be running fine, but if the case fans aren't working, then the internal fans are just circulating hot air, which is pointless."

Southern said cleaning the case is easy. "Just go to any local computer store, and spend three bucks on a can of compressed air that is com-

puter safe," he said. "Just turn the computer off, open the case and spray out the dust, paying attention to any fans."

Cleaning the fans may be enough, but if you want to be careful, follow the advice of Karl Rister, a sophomore personal computer supervisor working at Texas A&M. "Once you've cleaned the case out, spin the fans with your finger to make sure they are spinning freely," he said. "If not, don't oil them — replace them. They don't cost more than \$10. If you put oil on them, you run the risk of throwing oil around the case and causing a short or starting a fire."

To further test the fans, try turning on your computer with the case off and making sure all fans are spinning and moving air. If everything looks fine, and the fans are running fairly silently, you are done for the year. If you think it might still be running hot because of hardware upgrading or replacement, consider adding more fans.

Adding fans is as easy as looking inside your case and attaching fans wherever space and power cables permit. Most cases have spots for fans in the front and back. Just make sure they are blowing in the same direction to keep a steady flow of air in and out of the case.

Cleansing the inner self

If you are running a Windows-based operating system, you can make your computer run better by deleting old files and rearranging existing ones.

Start by right clicking on your hard drive (My Computer icon) and click Properties. The tab labeled Tools has two utilities to help you. Disk Doctor can look for errors and fix physical problems with the drive and Disk Defragmenter can clean up your programs and make them run faster.

Disk Doctor inspects the hard drive itself for symptoms of corruption or deterioration. If it helps you out, it will correct errors, not make programs run faster.

Disk Defragmenter works differently. It rearranges files in a logical order so the computer can find what it is looking for.

"Say you're working at your desk. Whenever you get something new, it goes on top of everything else," Rister said. "Eventually, it all gets mixed together, and you can't find what you want without effort. You can clean it up, and everything is great until it becomes cluttered again, so repeat every so often."

Running Disk Defragmenter every few weeks or months should be sufficient; running Disk Doctor every month or two will keep you covered. If you are running a newer version of Windows, there may be a utility to clean out your temporary Internet files, which can really save space and speed up performance.

All in all, cleaning up your computer can extend the life and functionality of an important investment. The average personal computer needs to be

replaced every two to three years, and the normal college student needs it to last four or five, so be sure to keep it in good health.

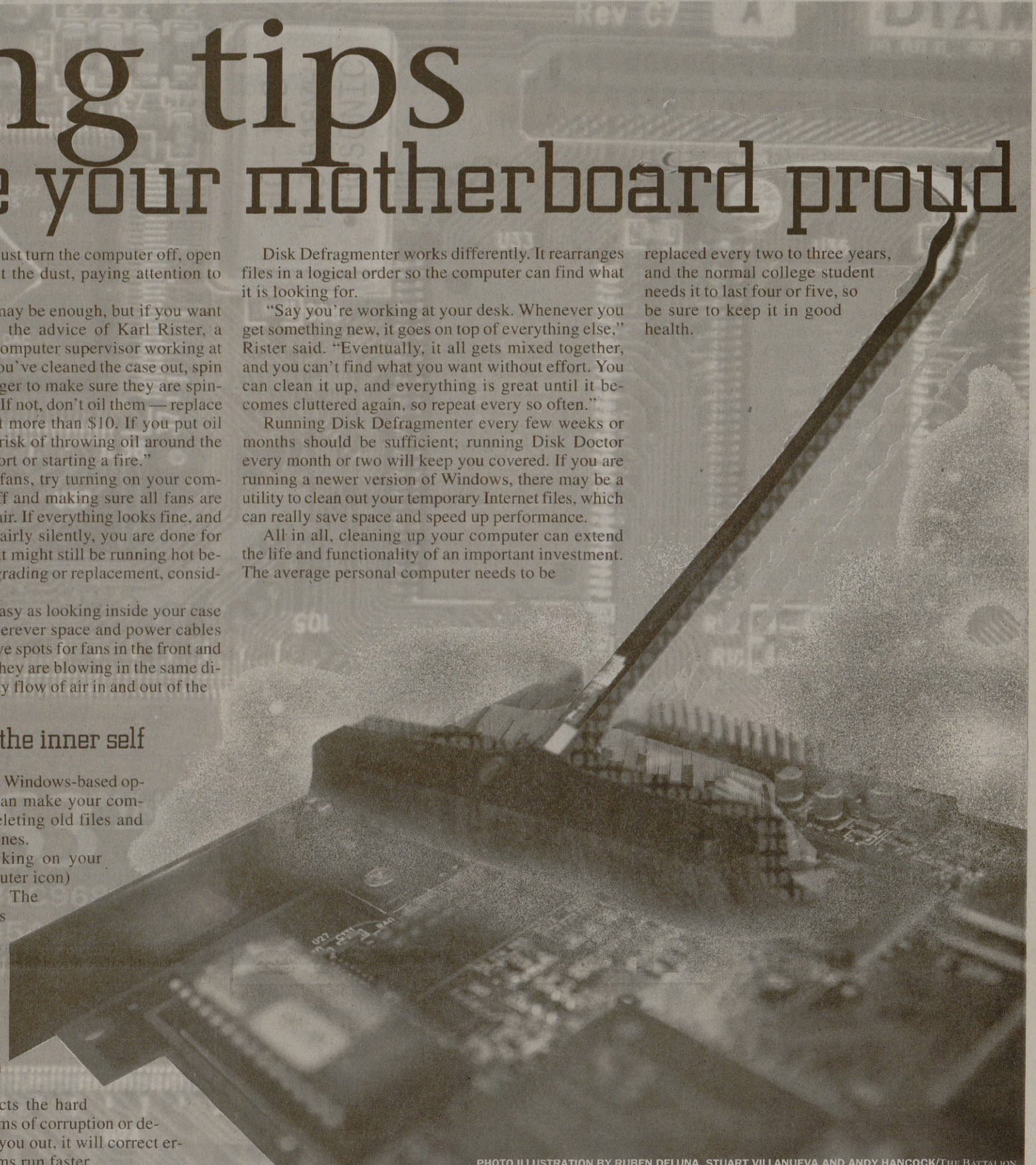


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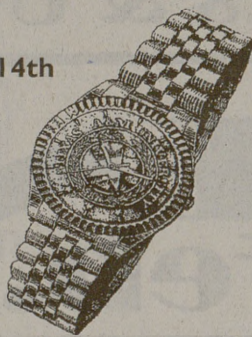
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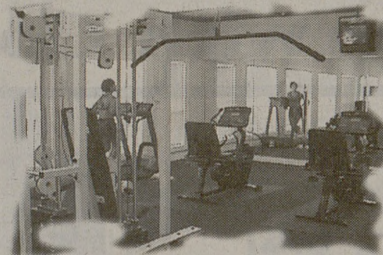
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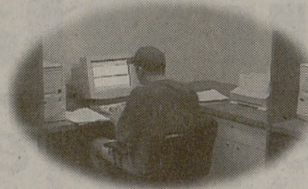
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