MUUGLines

The Manitoba UNIX User Group Newsletter

December 2011 Volume 24 No. 4

Next Meeting: December 13th, 2011

Seasonal Topic #1: Round-table, Mingling & Munchies

As the holiday hustle and bustle gets into high gear, we'll take it easy this month, with a longer-than-usual round-table session (if there's a need for it), followed by a time for mingling and nibbling on munchies (instead of the usual, short coffee break). The food will be pot luck, so bring some of your favourite goodies along.

Seasonal Topic #2: Food Bank Donation

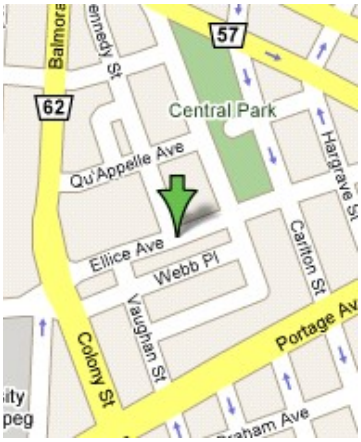
This month we will have a food bank drive. Bring your contribution for Winnipeg Harvest. Here are the top ten food items needed:

1. Canned fish and poultry – tuna, or salmon (packed in water) chicken or turkey
2. Canned fruit and vegetables (packed in own juice)
3. Canned stew, chili, brown beans
4. Peanut Butter
5. Baby Food - jars of chicken, beef, vegetables or fruit, infant cereal such as oatmeal, barley or rice, Formula with added iron (While donations of infant formula with added iron are needed, Winnipeg Harvest supports breastfeeding.)
6. Whole grain pasta/whole wheat pasta
7. Rice – brown, converted or parboiled
8. Canned spaghetti sauce or tomatoes
9. Cereal – high fiber, non-sugar coated
10. Canned soup – lentil, pea, vegetable

Seasonal Topic #3: The Original UNIX Manuals from Bell Labs

We will auction off an original two-volume set of the UNIX manuals from Bell Labs. This includes all of the original man pages in one volume, and seminal papers by original authors of the operating system. Published originally in 1978, there are 1000 pages of interesting reading that reflects the thinking of the time. The proceeds from this auction will go to Winnipeg Harvest.

Where to Find the Meeting



Meetings are held at the IBM offices at 400 Ellice Ave. (between Edmonton and Kennedy Streets). When you arrive, you will have to sign in at the reception desk. Please try to arrive by about 7:15pm, so the meeting can start promptly at 7:30pm.

Limited parking is available for free on the street, either on Ellice Ave. or on some of the intersecting streets. Indoor parking is also available nearby, at Portage Place, for $5.00 for the evening. Bicycle parking is available in a bike rack under video surveillance located behind the building on Webb Place.

Meet Your New Board

The MUUG Board for the 2011-2012 year was elected by acclamation at the November general meeting, and consists of the following members:

1. Sean Cody
2. Trevor Cordes
3. Gilbert Detillieux
4. Michael Doob
5. Robert Keizer
6. Katherine Scrupa
7. Doug Shewfelt
8. Adam Thompson
9. Brad Vokey

A big "thank you" to all the nominees who let their names stand for election.

The new board held their first meeting on November 24th, and elected the following executive officers for the current year:

President	Katherine Scrupa
Vice-president	Brad Vokey
Secretary	Gilbert Detillieux
Treasurer	Doug Shewfelt

Adam Thompson assumes the role of Past President. The board also appointed a banking committee made up of Doug Shewfelt, Gilbert Detillieux and Kevin McGregor.

The board looks forward to serving you over the next year. If you have any questions or requests, feel free to contact them at <**board@muug.mb.ca**>.

What Moves Ya, Baby!

Your board has been coming up with a great variety of presentation topics for years. Have we missed something that you'd like to know more about? Just let any board member know, and we'll put it in the queue. You can also contact us at <**board@muug.mb.ca**>.

New MUUG By-laws

There were revisions to the MUUG by-laws enacted at the last meeting. The up-to-date revised version is available at **http://www.muug.mb.ca/pub/bylaws/bylaws-nov2011.pdf**

BBC Micro at 30 Years: As the Beeb Tells It

The system was built by Acorn Computers as part of the BBC's Computer Literacy Project.

It ran a new programming language, BBC Basic (beginners all-purpose symbolic instruction code), and helped bring computing into people's homes and schools.

However, trying to establish an "official" launch date is trickier than it sounds.

Although the computers were demonstrated at trade exhibitions and reviewed in the press in 1981, a production snag pushed back deliveries.

A circuit, which controlled the "high definition" screen display, was found to have a higher than acceptable failure rate.

A redesign was ordered and as a result only a few hundred computers out of a planned batch of 3,000 were ready in time for the start of The Computer Programme when the first episode was broadcast in January 1982.

This initial hiccup proved far from fatal. After Acorn overhauled its production system, the Model A and the more expensive Model B went on to sell more than 1.5 million units, wildly exceeding expectations.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-15969065

BYTE from 20 Years Ago: December 1991 (372 pages)

Epson to Build New LCD into Color Notebook

Epson America's upcoming color notebook computer is the first to use a new screen technology developed in Japan by Seiko/Epson. Called metal-insulator-metal (MIM), the patented technology is a new twist on the active-matrix designs of other color LCDs.

Like a thin-film-transistor panel, which backs up each pixel with one or more transistors for rapid switching and sustained power levels, Epson's new MIM panel has a miniature diode behind every pixel. MIM uses only two or three photo masks, and the metal layers used to etch diodes can be sputtered onto the LCD glass. The color panel measures 9 inches diagonally ane will support 256 colors from a palette of 4096.

Although the 7.9-pound color notebook Epson showed at Comdex was a prototype, the final version is expected to use a 25-MHz 386SL, include 4 MB of RAM, and sell for roughly $8000.

Epson wouldn't say how much the display alone might cost. For now, Epson is the only company with MIM technology, but it may license the patents to others.

---Andy Reinhardt

Dennis Ritchie: A Great UNIX Pioneer Passes On

On October 12, 2011 the world found itself without Dennis Ritchie, one of the great pioneers of the UNIX environment. His lasting contributions can be appreciated from this extract from the obituary in the New York Times, where Steve Lohr wrote:

In the late 1960s and early '70s, working at Bell Labs, Mr. Ritchie made a pair of lasting contributions to computer science. He was the principal designer of the C programming language and co-developer of the Unix operating system, working closely with Ken Thompson, his longtime Bell Labs collaborator.

"The tools that Dennis built — and their direct descendants — run pretty much everything today," said Brian Kernighan, a computer scientist at Princeton University who worked with Mr. Ritchie at Bell Labs.

Those tools were more than inventive bundles of computer code. The C language and Unix reflected a point of view, a different philosophy of computing than what had come before. In the late '60s and early '70s, minicomputers were moving into companies and universities — smaller and at a fraction of the price of hulking mainframes.

Minicomputers represented a step in the democratization of computing, and Unix and C were designed to open up computing to more people and collaborative working styles. Mr. Ritchie, Mr. Thompson and their Bell Labs colleagues were making not merely software but, as Mr. Ritchie once put it, "a system around which fellowship can form."

C was designed for systems programmers who wanted to get the fastest performance from operating systems, compilers and other programs. "C is not a big language — it's clean, simple, elegant," Mr. Kernighan said. "It lets you get close to the machine, without getting tied up in the machine."

BYTE from 25 Years Ago: December 1986 (440 pages)

Perpendicular Technique Puts 100 Megabytes on 5 ¼-inch Disc

Maxell had developed a disk it says can handle 100megabytes of storage using a perpendicular recording technique. The new disk provides a more magnetic surface than conventional media by standing the magnetic particles so they're perpendicular to the substrate plane instead of putting then flat on the surface. The disks have a recording density of 100 kilobits per inch, the company said.

The 5 1/4-inch disks won't work in current drives but, according to the spokesperson for the company, current drives can be retrofitted to handle the 100-megabyte disks. Hitachi Ltd. Has designed drives for the new disks; those drives are now in prototype form. The drives will show up in machines next year, the spokesperson said.

BYTE from 30 Years Ago: December 1981 (544 pages)

More for the TRS-80 Color Computer

The 8 K-byte CMEMORY cartridge for the TRS-80 Color Computer can be divided into any combination of 2 K blocks or RAM (random-access read/write memory) and/or 2716 EPROMs (erasable programmable read-only memories). The cartridge can be filled with RAM while debugging a program and then replaced by EPROM once debugging is completed. The CMEMORY occupies the unused address space hexadecimal C000 to E000 normally reserved for plug-in game cartridges. By adding a jumper, the Color Computer can automatically execute a program in EPROM whenever the Reset button is pressed. The CMEMORY cartridge without any memory sells for $24.95 from Mirco-Labs Inc, 902 Pinecrest, Richaredson TX 75080.

Circle 550 on inquiry card.

BYTE from 25 Years Ago: December 1986 (440 pages)

At "32-Bit Shootout," Speakers Take Shots at DOS Benchmarks

Motorola's new 68030, NEC's new V60/V70 chips, and everyone picking on Intel's 80386, three topics dominated the one-day symposium billed as "The 32-Bit Shootout": the future of MS-DOS in the 32-bit world, the value of benchmark results, and compilers.

From Intel's perspective, compatibility with existing 8086-family software will be the driving force in establishing the 386 as the leading 32-bit CPU in the microcomputer market. As one speaker said, "Six million PCs are the lowest common denominator and software will continue to be written for them."

Motorola's Jeff Nutt countered by stating that the influence of MS-DOS will lessen and UNIX will gain prominence. However, he also said that the 68020 will eventually run DOS 5.0.

Of the six chip makers participating, only Motorola refused to release benchmark statistics. "We'll run whatever applications our customer base wants and give them the results," Nutt explained. Manufacturers and panelists agreed that benchmarks aren't meaningful to the user unless they are uniform and repeatable; instead, what is really needed is a series of marker-specific evaluations, and the buyer had better run those tests. Just about everyone agreed that "benchmarks don't lie, but liars do benchmarking." George Morrow, former chairman of Morrow Designs, concluded that "magazines that support the industry should act as watchdogs" and do benchmarking for their readers.

Sending Us E-Mail?

Due to the amount of e-mail MUUG receives, we've set up an auto-reply to give you jaunty feedback, and redirect some of the e-mail to the appropriate places. Why not look here first?...

http://www.muug.mb.ca/about.html#contacts