

The Open Pitt



What's cooking in Linux and Open Source in Western Pennsylvania

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Notes from YAPC::NA 2006 by Scott M. Kriebel

The Yet Another Perl Conference—North America (YAPC::NA) was held on June 26-28, 2006 on the campus of the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. Scott provided this report from the event. You can find its web site at <<http://yapcchicago.org/>>.

YAPC has its roots right here in Pittsburgh. Started as a low-cost Perl conference, it was first held on June 24-25, 1999 at Carnegie Mellon University. According to Wikipedia, the first YAPC had 31 speakers on various Perl topics. The following year, YAPC 19100 (so named for the Y2K bug) was also held at CMU.

Though I've worked in this field for several years, this was the first conference I've ever attended. YAPC::NA brings the big names in Perl together. Larry Wall, Damian Conway, Mark Jason Dominus (MJD), brian d foy, Audrey Tang, Ingy dot net, and chromatic to just name a few. I must admit it was neat having a beer at the bar and striking up a conversation with a fellow that turned out to be Randal L. Schwartz, co-author of some of the books that I cut my teeth with when I first started learning Perl.

A complete list of the talks can be found at the web site listed above.

AJAX was a popular topic this year, obviously getting Perl hackers ready for the Web 2.0 world. Perl 6 updates were given by Damian Conway and Larry Wall. Unfortunately, the release date is still “around Christmas” with no specification of the year.

Here are my notes about some of the talks.

Larry Wall's keynote was a personal glimpse of his life. He showed pictures of his family, vacation, church and a hack-a-thon. He also spoke about being legally blind for a number of years. Finally, Larry made the point of how the Perl community can be “blind” about things. Well, at least that's what I picked up.

Jose Castro (cog) did an interesting talk titled “Perl White Magic: Special Variables and Command Line Switches.” He showed ways to reduce syntax to make effective Perl one-liners with switches and special variables. However, the presentation seemed rushed and was done nearly half an hour before his time was up.

A fellow by the name of Luke Cross did a presentation on “Automated Web Testing with Selenium.” Selenium is a cross-browser web application testing framework. Basically, it's a (well-written) Java server

with client hooks for multiple languages including, of course, Perl. The Java server launches a browser and runs your test on the actual browser. Perl modules for testing are available.

During the lightning talks, Casey West announced the Pittsburgh Perl Workshop to the audience. Jeff Bisbee gave a quick overview of his JavaScript::XRay module that looked interesting. Unfortunately, I don't do much Javascript right now. There was also an obviously unrehearsed skit to raise money for the Perl Foundation.

With over 60 talks, these notes just don't do justice to the event. I'm also skipping the jail cell-like dorm rooms, freezing air conditioning, problematic wireless, terrible airport delays, and observing an arrest for public urination. But with all that said, I had a good time and I suggest putting YAPC on your conference TODO list if you do any Perl hacking.

June Roundup

Jun. 10 General User Meeting: Instead of focusing on a single topic, a “Just Ask WPLUG” session was held where questions gathered from mailing list participants were answered. **Bill Moran** kicked off on the subject of using Ubuntu as a LAMP server. The question specifically asked how to place files on a machine so the Apache web server would find them. Bill described several ways of designating directories for web content and how to set the proper permissions.

Beth Lynn Eicher tackled a question on building graphical interfaces. She showed a partially-functional program for building shell scripts which was the project of a former Pitt student. As a more useful tool, she demonstrated Qt Designer which builds nice interfaces for C++ code. Last up was Linux on the Xbox. **David Ostroske** presented a response written by **Duncan Hutty** which described the software and hardware challenges of running Linux on this platform.

Coming Events

Aug. 5: General User Meeting. 10AM to 2PM, 3002 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU

Aug. 12: 5th Annual WPLUG Open Source Picnic. 1PM to 6PM, Snyder Park, Whitehall

Sep. 16: General User Meeting/ Nomination Meeting. 12:30PM to 4:30PM, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh—Squirrel Hill

Sep. 23: Pittsburgh Perl Workshop hosted by the Pittsburgh Perl Mongers. University Center, CMU (*pre-registration req'd at <<http://pghpw.org/>>*)

Sep. 30: Ohio LinuxFest. Greater Columbus Convention Center (*pre-registration required at <<http://www.ohiolinux.org/>>*)

The public is welcome at all events

Hot Off the Grill...

Here's a rundown of some recent software releases of interest:

Turbolinux FUJI Version 11, the newest product from the long-time Asian Linux distributor, was announced on May 30. Also available are tools to ease migrating from Windows systems and DVD playing software. www.turbolinux.com

The highly-anticipated release of **Ubuntu 6.06 LTS**, code named Dapper Drake, occurred on June 1. Separate CD images are available for desktop and server use. Enhancements include a new graphical installer, power and networking management, and easy installation for a LAMP (Linux, Apache, MySQL, PHP) server. www.ubuntu.com

On June 2, **KNOPPIX 5.0.1** was made available to the public. This granddaddy of the live CDs/DVDs includes up-to-date versions of the kernel and applications as well as an improved installer. www.knoppix.com

After months of hearing calls for a native Linux version, a beta edition of **Google Earth 4** was released on June 12. Warning: viewing satellite imagery of large portions of the planet can be a highly addictive time-waster. earth.google.com/earth4.html

On June 19, the minimalist **Damn Small Linux 3.0** distribution came out. This live CD squeezes a graphical desktop and applications into less than 50 megabytes. Improvements include ACPI power management and a new "penguin with a hat" theme. www.damnsmalllinux.org

If other web browsers don't satisfy you, give **Opera 9** a try. Made available on June 20, this cross-platform multi-language browser now offers BitTorrent support. It is a free download with paid premium support available. www.opera.com

Xandros Linux Desktop Home Edition v4.0 was announced on June 21. The release includes strong support for managing your music and photo collections. It supports writing to NTFS filesystems, making life easier when dual-booting with Windows. www.xandros.com

Personal and small business finance package **GnuCash 2.0.0** was released

on July 9. While there are a few new features, the main change was in moving to the latest GNOME graphical interface. www.gnucash.org

Showing no fear of version number inflation, **BLAG Linux and GNU 50000** was released on July 10. This desktop distribution containing 100% Free Software is based on Fedora Core 5 and fits on a single CD. www.blagblagblag.org

Also coming out on July 10 was a live CD based on OpenSolaris, **BeleniX 0.4.4**. Along with general fixes, the major improvement is faster CD access. www.genunix.org/distributions/belenix_site/

Years of waiting for IBM to produce a Linux version of its groupware product paid off on July 10 with the release of **Lotus Notes 7.0.1**. www.ibm.com/software/lotus

A major player in the virtualization arena, **VMware Server** was made available for free download on July 12. It creates virtual servers, giving the ability to run multiple guest operating systems. www.vmware.com

Aiming squarely at the business market, **SUSE Linux Enterprise 10** was released by Novell on July 17. www.novell.com/linux/

On the server side of the web, the **Plone 2.5** content management system was announced on July 19. Many speed improvements have been made and it now incorporates the latest Zope application server. plone.org

Location, Location, Location

Construction is progressing on a new computer science building on the Carnegie Mellon University campus. This—and a simultaneous increased demand for rooms—means changes in the parking situation for WPLUG events at CMU and the selection of some alternative meeting venues.

The August 5th meeting will take place on campus in Room 3002 of Newell-Simon Hall. The most convenient parking for this location is in the Morewood Gardens Parking Lot across Forbes Avenue (maps can be found on the WPLUG web site at <http://www.wplug.org/pages/wplugmap/>).

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What is Linux?

Linux is a *kernel*, the core of a computer operating system, created by Linus Torvalds. It is typically packaged as a *distribution*, which includes the extra programs necessary to make a computer functional and useful. Since 1991, it has grown from a one-man project which ran on one computer to one with thousands of contributors running on everything from personal organizers to million-dollar supercomputers.

What are Open Source and Free Software?

Open Source and Free Software provide you, the user, with the opportunity to see the source code of the programs you use. You are free to use it, share it with others, and even make changes to it if you wish. While the Free Software and Open Source communities differ in their philosophical approach, in practical terms they share nearly identical goals. Learn more at <<http://www.opensource.org/>> and <<http://www.gnu.org/>>.

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SimplyMEPIS 6.0, the first version of this friendly Linux desktop to use Ubuntu rather than Debian as a base, came out on July 21. It is equally usable as both a live CD and a hard-drive installation. www.mepis.org

The WPLUG nomination meeting will be held on September 16th at the Squirrel Hill Branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh located at the corner of Forbes and Murray Avenues. There is metered parking in the attached garage and also a mixture of metered and free parking on the surrounding streets. It is important to get as many WPLUG members as possible to this meeting and the following month's election meeting, so please make plans to attend.

Keep your eye on the page at <<http://www.wplug.org/meetings/>> for up-to-date details on dates, times, and locations for WPLUG events.