

The Open Pitt



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

Issue 8

January 2005

www.wplug.org

2004: The Year in Review by Beth Lynn Eicher

WPLUG's fearless leader looks back on the year that was.

The year 2004 was a very busy one for WPLUG.

Despite construction on the Carnegie Mellon campus, attendance at events has been better than ever. The program schedule was packed with a variety of topics for fans of Linux and Open Source. Indeed, the penguin waddles on. Following are highlights of last year's excitement!

Cutting Edge

On February 7, Frank Tallarico of Novell visited shortly after its acquisition of SUSE to explain Novell's Linux strategy.

Lights! Camera! Action!

The movie *Revolution OS*, a documentary charting the rise of Linux, Free Software, and Open Source, was screened at WPLUG. Raisinets and popcorn included!

Helping Our Neighbors

In order to support Erie's new Linux Users Group, many WPLUG volunteers traveled to Erie's first installfest

at Mercyhurst College on April 24. Since then, veteran WPLUG presenters Bill Moran and Mark Dalrymple have spoken at ErieLUG meetings. <<http://www.erielug.org/>>

Writing History

At the June General User Meeting, David Watson and Bryan Mills of Cobind released a new version of their Linux distribution, Cobind Desktop 0.2 beta. <<http://cobind.com/>>

Making the News

The first issue of WPLUG's monthly newsletter, *The Open Pitt*, was published on June 5. In fact you are reading the eighth issue right now!

New User Resources

In addition to hosting six installfests, WPLUG held two tutorials to review Linux basics. More advanced users were not left out, with tutorials on security and kernel configuration.

Party Time

The 3rd annual WPLUG picnic took place in August. Revelers came out to Snyder Park in the South Hills for food, fun, and balloon animals.

December Roundup

Dec. 4 General User Meeting: **Mark Dalrymple** of **Borkware** gave a presentation on using the DocBook markup language to create structured documents like the book he recently co-authored, *Core Mac OS X and Unix Programming*. While it has an initial learning curve, documents created using DocBook are highly flexible and can produce output true to your intent in numerous forms, from HTML web pages to printed books. An audio recording of the presentation

is available, as well as a PDF version of Mark's slides.

Dec. 11 Tutorial: **Rick Farina** and **Ted Rodgers** covered the ins and outs of configuring and compiling a Linux kernel. After explaining why you might want to do such a thing, and what you need to get started, they got into details like loadable modules and enabling security features in the kernel. They then performed a walk-through of a full kernel configuration.

Borkware - <<http://borkware.com/>>

DocBook - <http://www.wplug.org/meetings/one-meeting?wp_meeting_id=3145>

Penguin Hardware

The mail and web server, named penguin, failed in the beginning of September due to hardware trouble. We still hope to recover from the financial loss which is currently \$240.

On the Road

Twenty WPLUGers made the trip out to Columbus for the second annual Ohio LinuxFest. Four hundred Linux enthusiasts, including Jon "maddog" Hall, came from all over to attend. <<http://www.ohiolinux.org/>>

Structural Changes

A committee was formed after the November General User Meeting to draft revisions to the 2001 bylaws. Part of its mandate is to establish a formal membership structure. Keep up on the committee's progress at <http://mail.pghfree.net/mailman/listinfo/wplug-bylaws_pghfree.net>.

To review all past events, or see what is coming up, visit the meeting page at <<http://www.wplug.org/meetings/>>.

Coming Events

Jan. 15: General User Meeting, Topic: User Mode Linux. 10AM to 2PM, 1507 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU

Feb. 5: General User Meeting, Topic: Building and Using RPMs. 10AM to 2PM, 1507 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU

Feb. 19: Tutorial, Topic: System Administration. 10AM to 2PM, 1507 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU

Mar. 12: Installfest. 10AM to 5PM, 1507 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU

Mar. 19: General User Meeting. 10AM to 2PM, 1507 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU

The public is welcome at all events

From the Editors: Who's Supporting You?

On a recent Sunday, I got a phone call from a relative. Several months back, I had helped him set up his new Sony PC running Windows XP. When trying to log in, he was getting an error: "Entry Point Not Found" and the name of a DLL file, and a screen empty except for the wallpaper image. He figured out how to open the Task Manager, but wasn't really sure what to do next.

My knowledge of XP is limited, but I was willing to try to help. After trying some ideas with few results, I wasn't really sure of the best way to proceed, and it is tough trying to diagnose things remotely.

I suggested that he look for a rescue CD that came with the system. He found a card saying that there wasn't a CD; a rescue could be done by pressing F10 as the system booted. Trying this got a menu which basically only gave the option to wipe out the disk and perform a clean factory reinstall. I didn't want him to lose all his data and settings, and have to reinstall all his applications, so we bailed out of that option. Fortunately, he had his old PC networked into his cable modem. I suggested a Google search to see what came up.

The next call was more upbeat: "It's working again." He had found a set of instructions someone posted online. Seems that the problem was a particular hotfix that didn't install properly. After backing it out, his desktop came back. But the instructions had a second step; removing Service Pack 2 and rebooting the PC. At the same time he was confronted with a shiny blinking Windows Update notification icon. My opinion was don't mess with success—the instructions got him this far, and he should follow them to the end. I also have an inherent distrust of blinking shiny things. But he felt that Microsoft ought to know what's best for a Windows system, and wanted to try the update. I didn't protest too strongly, figuring at worst he'd have to back out the hotfix again.

Bad idea. After updating and rebooting, the PC was back at its prior

state: wallpaper with no Start Menu, and the "Entry Point" error. Even worse, when trying to repeat the procedure that worked before, the system seemed to think that the hotfix was still installed, but all attempts to remove it failed. At this point, he was considering just shutting the thing off for two weeks until I'd be back in his area. I felt that he could probably download and burn something like SystemRescueCd at work and save his files off the hard drive. So even if he had to do a clean reinstall, it would not be a disaster. I also suggested that he might want to call Sony support to see if they had any ideas.

We hung up and I went out for an afternoon hike. When I returned, there was a message on my answering machine that didn't sound good. I got the full story when I called. He had spoken with Microsoft support, which basically tried to walk him through the same set of instructions he had downloaded before. When that didn't work, they fobbed him off to Sony technical support, indicating that Sony could help him do a restore without losing his files. The Sony advice was simple: "Do the reinstall. No, there is no possible way to save your files and settings. Have a nice day."

At this point he was in the process of reloading all his applications onto his freshly-wiped system, and I helped him enter his e-mail settings into Netscape.

Afterward, I reflected a bit on the situation. Sony and Microsoft are two of the world's largest corporations, both with truckloads of brilliant programmers. He gave them over a thousand dollars for this PC. Why shouldn't he be able to rely on them more than a relative who's somewhat handy with computers or some random guy posting instructions on the Internet? The sad truth is he can't. He was lied to twice—first by the Microsoft notification that tempted him to try to install an update, and second by the Sony guy who told him that there was no way of recovering his data before doing a fresh reinstall.

The Open Pitt is published by the Western Pennsylvania Linux Users Group

<<http://www.wplug.org/top/>>

Editors: Elwin Green
Vance Kochenderfer

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/>>.

This newsletter was produced using Open Source and Free Software.

Copyright 2005 Western Pennsylvania Linux Users Group. Any article in this newsletter may be reprinted elsewhere in any medium, provided it is not changed and attribution is given to the author and WPLUG.

Proprietary software companies try to spread fear, uncertainty, and doubt about support for Open Source software. But in truth, their support only has to be just good enough to sell a box of software. To them, support is a cost, something to avoid. Companies selling Open Source (at least the successful ones) are big on support—they have to be when the competition has access to the same code.

Most of all, proprietary software can't match the level of user-to-user support which exists with most Open Source and Free Software. When it comes right down to it, *users* are the ones with the most at stake. A software package worth only a few hundred dollars in licensing fees to the publisher can cost the user a thousand times that in lost business and data if it malfunctions. Who's going to be more motivated to support it?

—Vance Kochenderfer