

The Open Pitt



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

Issue 6

November 2004

www.wplug.org

Impressions from Ohio LinuxFest 2004

Here's a sampling of LinuxFest sessions, from WPLUGers who made the trip out to Columbus.

SELinux on Fedora

Colin Walters of Red Hat started with security challenges facing Linux systems. Perhaps most numerous are attacks on web applications. Facilities like *chroot* can keep an application exploit from compromising the system, but these have their weaknesses.

The National Security Agency funded development of Security Enhanced Linux (SELinux) to create an operating system enforcing mandatory access control. Colin demonstrated how the kernel partitions processes and files from each other, only allowing them to interact as prescribed by the system's security policy.

SELinux is now included in Fedora Core by default. Setting up a security policy can be a complex undertaking, so a "targeted" policy has been adopted starting with Fedora Core 3. Most of the system runs in an unconfined state, but the administrator can target selected daemons and potentially troublesome applications as needed.

BoF: MySQL

Jeremy Cole of MySQL AB held a birds-of-a-feather session on his company, the MySQL database, its emphasis on lightning-fast speed, its dual licensing model, and improvements made over the past few years.

MySQL didn't start out as a full relational database management system (RDBMS), and it still lacks many features larger databases offer, like views and stored procedures. But each new iteration has offered more of the features that users have come to expect, including transactions, prepared statements, and subqueries. Still, performance remains a top priority.

We got the chance to win books and "Transactions: check!" T-shirts. (My girlfriend won a shirt, then gave it to me as a gift. Thanks, Evelyn!)

—David Ostroske

BoF: The Art of the LUG

Anyone involved in organizing a Linux User Group (LUG) knows how difficult managing geeks can be. This well-attended birds-of-a-feather session led by WPLUG's Beth Lynn Eicher provided a forum for sharing ideas on management, preventing the death of a LUG, and legal issues of forming a non-profit organization.

In attendance were LUG members and organizers from as far away as Canada and locals from Cleveland and Columbus. Jon "maddog" Hall also shared his wisdom with the group.

Much of the discussion focused on keeping people interested and actively participating. One idea explored was adopting a project to give the group a sense of purpose. The difficulty of finding meeting space was discussed as well, with some suggesting brew-

pubs and the like as a place to allow the social aspect of a LUG to thrive.

The discussion showed how diverse the Linux community is and how difficult it can be to accommodate the different needs of all those involved.

—Chris Teodorski

BoF: PowerPC and Linux

Henry Keultjes described why desktop Linux and the PowerPC processor are the "perfect pair" to challenge the Microsoft/Intel duopoly, and showed off a demonstration model of his LinuxPC. Look for an interview with Henry in next month's issue.

Asterisk: VoIP for the Masses

Greg Boehnlein of N2Net detailed how Asterisk, fresh off its 1.0 release, can turn even a modest PC running Linux into a private branch exchange, voice over IP switch, voicemail system, and automated attendant.

The Asterisk philosophy is about connecting "anything to anything." If it has to do with telephones or voice communication, Asterisk will probably interface with it.

October Roundup

Oct. 9 General User Meeting: **Ryan Brown** from **The Burgh Live** discussed Asterisk, the popular open source telephony software. He went into topics like choosing a voice over IP provider and various system configurations, sharing his real-world experiences and examples. A PDF copy

of Ryan's slides and an audio recording of the presentation are available.

Oct. 16 New User Tutorial: **Beth Lynn Eicher** gave the latest version of her Linux basics tutorial covering the essentials of selecting, installing, and configuring a Linux system.

Asterisk - <http://www.wplug.org/meetings/one-meeting?wp_meeting_id=3141>
The Burgh Live - <<http://www.tblive.com/>>

Coming Events

Nov. 13: Installfest. 10AM to 5PM, 1507 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU

Dec. 4: General User Meeting, Topic: Creating Flexible Documentation with DocBook. 10AM to 2PM, 1507 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU

Dec. 11: Tutorial, Topic: Kernel Configuration. 10AM to 2PM, 1507 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU

Jan. 8: Installfest. 10AM to 5PM, 1507 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU

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

The public is welcome at all events

From the Editors: A Festivus for the Rest of Us

Most of this issue is dedicated to last month's Ohio LinuxFest. While not quite on the same level as the Ottawa Linux Symposium or LinuxWorld Expo, it's nevertheless a significant—and growing—regional event.

Several of today's hottest projects like Apache, Asterisk, and Samba were represented. Distributors Novell and Red Hat sent people as well. And

the final coup was having the closing address given by Jon “maddog” Hall.

But at the same time, the sessions were small enough to have an intimate feel, and the entire event was obviously community-rooted, not driven by marketing interests.

Instead of taking up any more space, we'll let the other articles speak for themselves. Enjoy!

Opinion: Who Cares? We Do! by Bill Moran

I had a great time at Ohio Linuxfest, and the talks I saw were very informative. A number of us from the Pittsburgh area made the journey to Columbus and I had the pleasure of giving a presentation.

Yes, pleasure. I really enjoy talking about what I do in front of groups of people. My presentation filled almost a solid hour, so I had to be sure I started on time and nothing went wrong.

The first thing to go wrong was that while I had requested a laptop for the presentation, one was not available. I can hardly blame the organizers for this minor oversight, with all they had to do. And the solution was to simply ask the audience for one to borrow. Regardless, this took a bit of time, and I got started late. It wasn't too late, and I figured I'd still be able to finish until the borrowed laptop froze up on the fourth slide. Another Good Samaritan stepped forward with his laptop, but switching over ate up more time.

At the end of the hour, an organizer got my attention and indicated that I needed to wrap up. Unfortunately, this meant rushing through the last several slides and glossing over some points that I considered rather important.

I was pretty upset about all this, because I felt like I let down the people who sat through my presentation. I felt like I hadn't done my job as a presenter well enough.

I discussed things later that day with Tom Rhodes of the FreeBSD project. He had involuntarily volunteered to lead a FreeBSD birds-of-a-feather session (don't ask me how that happened, just suffice to say that it seems to happen to Tom a lot). He felt he didn't do as well as he could have, that there were a lot of questions that he didn't have good answers for.

It may seem odd to start out saying what a great event it was, then go on to complain about all that went wrong. The point is that I *really* care about doing a good job. And I find myself very alone in that feeling in the world at large. Most importantly, I *don't* feel alone around other Open Source advocates.

It seems like Open Source people aren't like others. We seem to care more about what we're doing. See, I wasn't worried about being embarrassed in front of a lot of people, or getting in trouble for doing poorly. What was really upsetting was that I wasn't able to completely teach to others everything that I had learned.

Imagine if everyone were like this. If every time you called a support phone number, the person on the other end *really* cared about getting your problem solved. If every auto shop *really* cared about fixing your car *right*...the first time. Sure would be a different world, wouldn't it?

I'm not saying that our community is perfect. We certainly have problems and disagreements. But it is a welcome change from the average day-to-day community I live in, and I suspect that it is for many other people as well.

Many of the complaints you hear about the Open Source community are really our strongest points. We're called fanatics...I just think we're very passionate. Some gripe about fragmentation, yet a close look reveals that we refuse to accept that the first attempt at something is the best, and frequently fork our work to try other methods. Often the community itself is upset at the amount of infighting that seems to occur, but those flame wars are people standing up for different viewpoints. Imagine what you'd

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 2004 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.

think if you saw two mechanics arguing over the best way to fix a particular car up on the rack. I know I'd keep bringing my car back there.

Someone who understands people much better than I should write a book entitled *The Care and Feeding of People Who Really Care* and give us some advice on how to go on caring about things passionately, without driving ourselves crazy when it doesn't work out quite like we wanted.

I got a lot of feedback about my talk. It was all thanks and praise for providing so much useful information. Not one person even mentioned the technical difficulties or complained that I rushed through the last few slides. It's almost like I'm the only one who noticed. It really took the sting out of my disappointment in what happened.

It seems like when you really care about something, it cares back for you. In conclusion, I say care. *Really care*. It seems to be worth the risk.

Bill Moran runs Potential Technologies in Plum
<<http://www.potentialtech.com/>>.