

Duran Duran ain't no Linux distro

FOSS FEST

Top-notch presentations from new and seasoned speakers make OGLF worth the trek to Toronto. **BY EMMA JANE HOGBIN**

The mayor of Toronto proclaimed the last week in October “Toronto Open Source Week.” [1] The Ontario GNU Linux Fest [2] started off this celebration with its best-yet one-day conference. Although it is dubbed a “regional” conference, the OGLF is no small-town affair. At the pre-conference event, I met a newcomer who had extended his business trip to attend OGLF. As the conference unfolded, I was delighted to see that newcomer in multiple conversations with many different projects. The conversations were lively, and both sides were engaged and animated.

This year, attendees were treated to 26 presentations. I managed five, plus one for the hallway track. Topics this year ranged from hardware hacking to public relations, with a little bit of Ruby on Rails thrown into the mix. The hallway track this year gave me the opportunity to speak with Dru Lavigne about the BSD Certification Program [3] and her latest book project, *Beginning PC-BSD*. If you are an aspiring author, be sure to stop by the BSD booth and talk to Dru about licensing, contracts, and the publishing industry.

Although I'm not much of a gadget person, I was completely inspired by Leigh Honeywell's talk, “Arduino Hardware Hacking.” Typically, this is exactly the kind of thing that I'm NOT interested in, but the sub-title, “Hackers, TNG: Getting kids hooked on FOSS with hardware hacking!” and Leigh's recent blog post on GeekFeminism [4] made me think otherwise. The video of the talk is online [5]. If you're looking for ways to get the youngest of hearts interested in hacking, this is a great way to start.

With the basics of LED Throwies under my belt, I moved on to volunteer retention with Mel Chua [6] in her talk, “The Invisible Traceback.” This “com-

munity management” presentation was quite possibly one of the best I've seen. It taught participants how to behave by engaging them in activities that simulated what really happens to project newcomers. At the beginning of the presentation, Mel (pictured) asked all the “newcomers” to FOSS projects to raise their hands. Then she asked all of the projects looking for newcomers to raise their hands. Then she asked the newcomers to get up and go sit beside projects looking for volunteers. Throughout her presentation, she gave a series of talking points to the newly formed groups along with time to discuss. Mel didn't just talk about “how to do community management,” she taught people the skills necessary to move forward. If you are ever at a conference where she is presenting, go! You will learn so much more than how to read a bunch of slides.

Linux Pro Magazine's Associate Publisher, Rikki Kite, delivered “Her PR Problem: Tooting the Horns of Women in Open Source.” In her talk, Rikki explained how she got out of her comfort zone and stepped into the limelight in a local theatrical production. Since then, she's taken the courage gained from that experience to the conference circuit. No longer stuck in a booth, she is now showing the FOSS community how to get outside its comfort zone and deal with impostor syndrome. Rikki gives specific examples of how her blog has given her the opportunity to meet and promote other women in FOSS. I encourage everyone to read the extensive notes that Rikki has written up about this talk [7]. Promoting women in open source doesn't need to be harder than blogging, and these notes will show you how.

Joe “Zonker” Brockmeier wrapped up the presentations for the day with his



“Musical Guide to the Future of Linux.” If you're not sure whether Duran Duran is a distro or a rock band, be sure to watch this excellent talk as recorded at LinuxCon [8].

Even if you live farther than a few hours drive from Toronto, I highly recommend you make the trek out to Ontario GNU Linux Fest in 2010. Whether you're a newcomer extending a business trip or a seasoned FOSS nerd, the atmosphere of this conference is wonderful. It is small enough to be accessible but big enough to remain interesting year after year. I look forward to seeing you in my neck of the woods next year. ■

INFO

- [1] Toronto Open Source Week: <http://opensourceweek.ca>
- [2] Ontario Linux Fest: <http://www.onlinux.ca>
- [3] BSD Certification: <http://www.bsdcertification.org>
- [4] Hackers: TNG: <http://geekfeminism.org/2009/10/10/hackers-tng/>
- [5] Arduino Hardware Hacking: <http://www.archive.org/details/HackersTngGettingKidsHookedOnFossWithHardwareHacking>
- [6] Mel Chua: <http://blog.melchua.com/>
- [7] Her PR Problem: <http://www.linux-magazine.com/content/view/full/36869>
- [8] Musical Guide to the Future of Linux: <http://video.linuxfoundation.org/video/1555>