

## FOSDEM 2006 in Brussels

# FREE SOFTWARE ON THE CAMPUS

Non-commercial, uncomplicated and ever popular, 3,500 developers met on the campus of the Free University of Brussels for FOSDEM 2006. **BY MATHIAS HUBER**

**R**aphael Bauduin has a big smile on his face: the event he launched in 2000 as a free software meeting at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) has just celebrated its sixth birthday. At the Free and Open-source Software Developers' European Meeting (FOSDEM) February 25 and 26, some 3,500 participants invaded the narrow corridors of the university buildings – not only developers from Europe, but many guests from the USA and all over the world.

In his keynote FSF President Richard Stallmann lashed out against software patents, which he referred to as a “threat to anyone who uses or develops free software”. Unfortunately, for most developers, avoiding or licensing patents were not acceptable approaches to handling patent issues, he continued. And most people just could not afford to battle over patent issues in court. This is what caused Stallman to call on Europeans to fight software patents on a political level. He went on to introduce the audience to the latest developments in ver-



**Figure 1: FOSDEM organizer Raphael Bauduin held a draw for two Nokia 770 handhelds among the sponsors of the event.**



**Figure 2: Michael Löffler, Product Manager OpenSuse, gave a sneak preview of Suse Linux 10.2 and gathered feedback.**

sion 3 of the GPL, calling on them to post their comments on the latest draft of the license at <http://gplv3.fsf.org>. The draft process will be entering the next round in July.

However, the heart of FOSDEM this year is not the big speeches in the big lecture theaters, but the discussions in the 16 developer rooms. On just one weekend, no less than 150 sessions took place here. Topics ranged from X.org and the free Java library GNU Classpath, via Linux on the laptop through to the use of the GCC Ada Compilers for mission-critical flight control applications.

Now that Novell has opened its Linux distribution as OpenSuse, they are free to join in with free projects. Product Manager Michael Löffler and developer Christoph Thiel gave the attendees a peek at Suse Linux 10.1, which includes Open Office 2.0, the 3D graphics server Xgl, and the Beagle desktop search engine. At the same time, the community provided feedback on the plans for version 10.2. Among other things Novell is

planning a standard installation with a smaller number of packages that will fit on three CDs.

The Debian community was well represented, as was evidenced both by the ubiquitous T-shirts with the Debian logo, and by a developer room that was full to bursting point. Frans Pop introduced the GUI-based Debian Installer for Etch. Following a lengthy period of development the beta version is now running smoothly. The beta ran 24x7 at the project booth, performing fully automated installations in various languages.

Although corporations now participate in many open source projects, FOSDEM is completely free of suits and elaborate corporate booths. This uncomplicated community event is funded by just a few sponsors, and by contributions from



**Figure 3: Fully automatic installations 24x7: the new Debian Installer.**

participants. There were prizes up for grabs for the sponsors, including 20 one-year subscriptions to Linux Magazine, and two Nokia 770 Internet tablets. Raphael Bauduin can look confidently to the year 2007: the core team of organizers has now grown from three to ten – the future is secure. ■