

At COMMON as a First-Timer

By Alkarim Sachedina

The IBM iSeries community in Toronto, and Canada at large, was the host to the largest IBM midrange systems Users Group conference in the world – COMMON. It has been sixteen years since this event was hosted in Toronto. Living in the greater Toronto area and never having attended COMMON, I thought this would be an opportune time to register myself and experience what my conference veteran friends have tried to convey. Although I have attended our annual Toronto Users Group Technical Conference (TUG TEC), I was told that this will be a unique experience. They were right, from Sunday October 17 at noon to Thursday October 21 at 8:00 pm I was experiencing COMMON!



First-Timer, Alkarim Sachedina



Volunteers at the TUG / LUG table welcomed visitors to Toronto

In actuality, it started earlier with visiting the www.common.org website and reviewing the online session guide. The theme of this conference was Enterprise Application Modernization. I was overwhelmed with the variety of Courses of Study (COS) offered at the conference. From technical bits & bytes to professional development there were more sessions I wanted to attend than there was available time. With each COS, there is a focused roadmap that assists in choosing the necessary sessions that are related; as these sessions are scheduled to avoid timing conflicts for the attendees.

As a first timer, I was very appreciative of being able to build my own grid from the session guide. As I browsed through each session that interested me, I added it my personal grid. It was then time to review my grid and see what my week was going to be. This is when I realized the magnitude of this conference. I found myself attending more than one session at the same time. Knowing this would be impossible, it was just as impossible to choose one session out of many. For each day there are

over 20 session rooms and each room has six sessions. In addition, there are hands-on labs, IBM Certification testing and the COMMON Expo.

Armed with a printed copy of my grid and registration information I headed to the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, the location of the COMMON Fall 2004 Conference, in time to register and attend the opening session scheduled for noon. COMMON Executive



Bill Zeitler and Michael Borman unveiled the new IBM eServer i5 595

VP **Rares Pateanu**, a local Torontonian, welcomed all the attendees to the conference. President of COMMON **Robert Boyson** in his remarks also welcomed us all and mentioned that there were 372 of us first timers at this conference. He then introduced keynote speaker **Bill Zeitler**, Senior VP at IBM Corporation. Mr. Zeitler talked about IBM's commitment to the iSeries and to keep pace with technological and business changes.

He then asked **Michael Borman**, General Manager of IBM eServer iSeries to join him on the stage, where they unveiled the new i5 eServer model 595. This is the high-end model with 64 processors.

With the opening ceremonies concluding, I headed to the First-Time Attendee session. The speaker at this session was **Trevor Perry** and in his unique comedic way helped us ease into the coming week. That followed a random drawing of prizes and generous helping of ice cream for all first timers. This session was very helpful as it highlighted some of the resources made available to all attendees to assist in getting through the week. One such resource is the COMMON Conference Daily (CCD) publication. This is published every day of the conference and has the highlights as well as the entire grid for the day. I found myself cross



Photos by Léo Lefebvre

Popular COMMON speaker, Trevor Perry, will return to Toronto next April as Keynote Speaker for TEC 2005

checking my personal grid with the daily publication for any last minute changes – both my choices made earlier and any schedule changes.

Another resource was the Cyber Corner where 30 laptop computers were set up with Internet access. I was able to review session abstracts and adjust my grid choices through the week. Next on my agenda was the iSeries Nation Town Hall meeting hosted by **Michael Borman**.

In the Town Hall meeting, Mr. Borman reiterated IBM's commitment to the iSeries and the fact that it was the first

system to have the POWER5 processor chip. This is also the forum where attendees have a chance to pose their questions to the IBM iSeries Executives. I was impressed by the candid responses to the questions that were asked. With the conclusion of the meeting, I visited the Expo and enjoyed the food at the reception. Sunday's publication of the CCD stated it is the "World's Largest iSeries-Related Expo". It was a great opportunity to meet with vendors and learn about their products. Talking to suppliers of some of the products used in our shop was an added benefit in strengthening a business relationship.



Over 100 midrange exhibitors were on display at the COMMON Expo

– TUG MoM Review –

The October 2004 Special Meeting of (TUG) Members at COMMON

By Stephen Bingham

At the recent COMMON Fall Conference in Toronto, TUG held a special “extra” Meeting of Members, in association with the other local users groups in the region (i.e., COiN and MUGWNY).


We kicked it off with an introduction by **John Reed**, Director of IBM eServer iSeries Client Availability Solutions. John talked to us briefly about the recent announcement of two new models of the i5 and where the i5 will be going in the future, including enhancements to the Power 5 chip and the next generation Power 6 technology. On a lighter note, John told us about a Website where you can view some of IBM’s classic eServer television commercials. Check out: <http://www-1.ibm.com/servers/eserver/series/seriesmyseries/videos.html>.



Skip Marchesani

Using a simple SQL statement, Skip was able to go through every record in his database, remove the hyphens and convert the data to a decimal format. Conversely, we also saw how easy it is to go the other way. By simply isolating the various parts of the phone number and concatenating them to each other with a hyphen in between, and converting the string in to a 12 character field.

Lastly Skip showed us the power of SOUNDEX. Have you ever tried to find someone’s name in the phone book, but were not quite sure how he or she spelled it? Soundex is a tool that checks for a match based on phonetics. Skip showed us the results of some of his test searches and the results were impressive. For a copy of Skip’s presentation, please visit our website at www.tug.ca. Don’t forget to check out the link for TEC 2005.

I hope to see you at our next MoM, at Woodbine Racetrack on Nov 17th. 

Learning about other products that could be useful is just as beneficial. The day ended at the COMMON User Discussion Social (CUDS).



Jim Sloan

The theme at CUDS was “Ask the Experts”. Tables were designated with areas of expertise where IBM experts and session speakers made themselves available for one-on-one discussions and questions on topics of interest to the attendees. A long day ended with anticipation of what the rest of the week would be like.

For the rest of the week, each day started at eight in the morning and ended at five in the evening with numerous sessions. There were several special sessions during the evenings. On Monday there was a Local Users Group (LUG) special event where TUG members were invited to participate; full registration



Our guest speaker for the evening was **Skip Marchesani** with his presentation: “I didn’t know you could do that with SQL.” In just under one hour, Skip demonstrated the power of SQL. For his examples, Skip used a database of phone numbers that were stored in an Excel spreadsheet.

The phone numbers were formatted as a character field; and the area code, exchange, and phone number were separated by hyphens. The database had been uploaded to the i5, but Skip wanted to remove the hyphens and make it a packed data decimal field of (10,0).



Lynne Schwartz (Executive Director of COMMON) with Wende Boddy (Association Manager of TUG)

to COMMON was not required. **John Reed**, Director of iSeries Product Development and Business Operations, gave a brief outline on his priorities. All in attendance were then given privy to one of the sessions by **Skip Marchesani** – (See sidebar.)




Volunteers: Ed Jowett & Glenn Gundermann

On Tuesday evening, the Canadian iSeries Brand Executives from IBM met with Canadian customers. This was another unique opportunity to meet part of IBM's management team. **John Pratt**, iSeries/i5 Business Unit Executive, explained his responsibilities and future direction. Each of the eleven members of his team introduced themselves and gave us a brief summary of their functional responsibilities in Canada. We had a chance to ask questions that were more specific to Canadian needs and business issues.

Wednesday evening gave all members of COMMON a chance to attend the COMMON Meeting of the Members (MOM) and hear reports from the Board of Directors. Members had the opportunity

to direct their comments or questions to the Board. I stood up to comment, as a first-timer, that this was a great conference and question: when would COMMON return back to Toronto? **Rares Pateanu** commented: "That's a great question!" The week ended with Closing Session on Thursday evening. This was a last chance to meet with friends – both those I've known and those I met this week...

What a week this was! What an experience! In this conference I attended sessions that directly have an impact to my daily responsibilities at work, sessions that will help me personally and sessions that gave me a different perspective to our i5 (a.k.a. iSeries and AS/400) community. 

Alkarim Sachedina is a Business Systems Lead at Mattel Canada Inc. He is currently serving as the Treasurer for the Toronto Users group. Alkarim can be reached at alkarim.sachedina@mattel.com.



Beverly Russell, newly elected COMMON President

Photos by Léo Lefebvre



*Opening Session, Fall 2004 COMMON Conference and Expo
Metro Toronto Convention Centre, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Sunday, October 17, 2004*