

# ITSO Residencies

By Garth Tucker

I don't know about you, but without Redbooks like the System Handbook and Builder, my life would be a lot more difficult. Have you ever wondered where those oh-so-handy Redbooks come from? It's no great mystery—they are written by industry professionals just like you and me, at the IBM ITSO (International Technical Support Organization).

## History

According to the ITSO website, last year more than 1100 ITSO residents, from over 50 countries, produced more than 220 Redbooks and Redpapers as well as other critical skill materials in the form of workshops and presentations.

IBM began operations in Rochester in 1956 with 174 employees working in a 50,000-square foot leased facility. The current site was first occupied in 1958. Three years later, the company expanded its Rochester operations to include a development laboratory. Since the development lab was established, Rochester inventors have been awarded more than 2,700 U.S. patents for product innovation.



The ITSO has locations in several sites throughout the US and the Rochester ITSO is where the majority of the System i Residencies take place, but other sites such as Poughkeepsie, Raleigh, San Diego and Austin also produce materials. Predominantly, residencies are fulfilled by IBM employees from around the globe, but selected Residencies are open to IBM Business Partners as well as IBM customers and the ITSO encourages everyone to apply.

## Being a Resident

ITSO residents acquire outstanding practical experience and skills growth in new technologies, techniques and solutions. Being an ITSO resident offers a stimulating challenge together with the opportunity to explore, network, and publish.

A typical workday at the ITSO starts between 7 and 7:30 am and runs until 6 or 7 pm five days a week. They do let you out for coffee and lunch-breaks, but a high standard is expected and you must not view your Residency as a vacation.

The ITSO gives you the option of hotel living or in an efficiency apartment which includes cooking facilities. I have always opted to stay where I can buy groceries and cook most

of my own meals. Spending a few nights or a week in a hotel can be a nice getaway from daily chores, but spending a month in a hotel gets to be tiresome, even when you can cook your own meals or grab a midnight snack without having to get out of your pajamas. The ITSO picks up the tab for your expenses while you attend a Residency, so your meals, hotel, car rental, gas and airfare are all reimbursed after the Residency concludes.

## The Application Process

To be accepted for a residency, you must submit a nomination through <http://publib-b.boulder.ibm.com/Redbooks.nsf/pages/residencies>.

This site also contains links to information about Residencies, including a Residency Checklist which outlines your responsibilities and expected level of competency with the topic(s) of the Residency. Keep in mind that while you are there to learn, they expect a certain level of knowledge from the candidate.

The ITSO states that the selection of residents from the nominations is a competitive process. For this reason, every year the ITSO declines many nominations of extremely competitive and talented individuals. The ITSO notifies all candidates by email and provides accepted candidates an explanation of the residency procedures and project details. A very

Today, IBM occupies about 3.6 million square feet of owned and leased space in Rochester (equivalent to about 78 football fields). It remains the largest IBM facility in the world under one contiguous roof.

important detail is ensuring that you have your manager's approval before submitting a nomination; it can be very frustrating for a Residency Leader to accept one candidate and turn down equally qualified candidates only to find out at the last minute that they won't be able to attend because they did not have management approval.

## My Experiences

My first Residency was helping write the V4R4 Technical Overview in 1999. At the time it was a little daunting to think that I would be going to the home of the AS/400—Rochester, Minnesota—to work with the people who design and build our beloved system, but I figured it was just hard work (which has never scared me) and I would do my best.

As it turned out, I was part of a team of six, plus the Residency Leader, **Jim Cook** and we all worked together over a period of six weeks to build presentations on what was new and enhanced for the OS and hardware. I was assigned to several topics based around my experience and I got to take the new OS and features for test drives, making note of my experiences, and then either building from existing marketing presentations or creating new ones where none existed. We met with people from the development labs as well as from the marketing teams and were able to discuss our experiences with the products to that point as well as ask questions on the new enhancements.

Since that first Residency, I have since been involved in the Technical Overviews of V4R5 and V5R1. Every Residency I have attended has been a lot of hard work, but has paid off greatly with the knowledge gained.

Currently, I am here in Rochester helping write the Technical Overview of V6R1 and this time it's "on my own dime." Previously, I attended residencies as an employee of ASTECH Solutions ([www.atech.com](http://www.atech.com)). The owner, **Mark Buchner**, recognizes the value of ITSO Residencies to his business and clients and has made huge investments in his staff by sending them off (with pay) for up to six weeks, during which time they are not generating revenue. Now that I am a business owner myself, I agree with Mark's outlook and have made the investment of my time to keep current with the new technology. I encourage everyone to consider this and what it can mean to your business.

## Residency Leader Profile – Jim Cook

Jim Cook has been (and continues to be) a Residency Leader with the ITSO for the past 17 years. Originally from Ohio, but raised in the Chicago area, he moved to Rochester 41 years ago to begin work with IBM.

Jim believes that the best reason to attend a Residency is for the opportunity to expand skills with minimal "outside interruptions" from your typical day-to-day grind, as well as developing your network of technical experts, both inside and outside of IBM.

When reviewing Residency nomination forms, Jim looks for experience with the product(s) being covered, but does occasionally



Residency Leader Jim Cook

accept "newbie" nominations to help someone get their career started (thankfully, or I would never have gotten accepted to my first Residency).

In addition to his role as a Residency Leader, Jim has taken part in the Technical Forums for many years and despite the hard work, the camaraderie with the presenters and attendees has made it worthwhile. →



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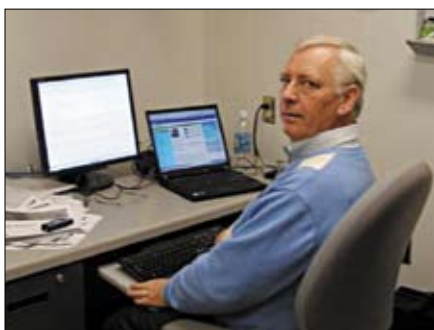


Eric Montgomery

### Resident Profile – Eric Montgomery

**Eric Montgomery** is an IBM employee based in Houston, Texas and originally from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. For the past six and half years, he has been involved in development of the i and p Series server hardware and the OS is very new to him.

This is Eric's first Residency and he was very pleased with the knowledge and skills he gained in a short period of time. In his words "This has been one of the best professional experiences I have had thus far. The in depth knowledge and experience with the Operating System that I am getting is invaluable to my professional development and technical vitality related to my current position. Aside from that, the people I have met and had the pleasure of working with are truly professional role models. They have raised the bar of what I consider an acceptable level of knowledge on the System i. I am truly better positioned to do my job and have the tools to get much better at providing my customers IBM pre-sale and post-sale technical support."



Jos Vermaere

### Resident Profile – Jos Vermaere

**Jos Vermaere** has been with IBM Belgium for 28 years and has been working with the platform for 24 of those years. He is

easily considered one of the top OS/400 & i5/OS experts in the world and provides architecture support to many of IBM's large customers in Europe.

Starting in 1987, Jos began attending ITSO residencies and has participated in more than he can remember as well as leading 24. A quick search of his name in Google will show you the depth and breadth of his experience, from COMMON Europe to published Redbooks.

Jos takes his Residency attendance very seriously due to the benefits it can bring his client base through early acquisition of technical expertise that allows him to propose valid solutions as quickly as possible.



Louis Cuypers

### Resident Profile – Louis Cuypers


Another Belgian IBM'er, **Louis Cuypers** has been with IBM since 1976 and has been working with the System i and its predecessors for the majority of his career. He attended his first Residency in 1994 and has taken part in 21 since that time. If Louis' name sounds familiar, take a look at pretty well any of the System Handbooks and Builders from over the years and you will find his name on them as an author.

He feels that the networking, communicating with the lab, first hand information, and learning as you go are the principle benefits to him as a resident. As well, getting in touch with residents from all over the world and hearing their various opinions are also benefits

that he states. To quote Louis' own words, "Too many good things to contain in a couple of sentences."

### Conclusion

At the end of a Residency, you are definitely ready to head home as the long hours and constant brain overload have beaten you to a pulp, but this is tempered by the great sense of accomplishment and honour you feel at being allowed to participate.

Once the new operating system has been officially announced by IBM, I will be able to share some of the insights that I gleaned while in Residency. This will provide for further article in future issues of the TUG magazine. 

**Garth Tucker**, the managing director of i3 Tech Group and Dynamic Disaster Recovery of Aurora, is an IBM System i Specialist and Business Continuity Planner. IBM Certified for V4R3 through V5R4 as well as being CompTIA Linux+ Certified. He has many years of experience with AS400, iSeries and now i5 and helped write the Technical Overviews of OS400; V4R4, V4R5, V5R1 and V6R1 with the IBM ITSO. In addition, he has written numerous articles for the Toronto Users Group, Midrange Magazine and COMMON.CONNECT magazine and has presented sessions at COMMON, the Toronto Users Group's TEC conference and Meetings of Members.

