

May, 1998

Editor's View

DevCon Is *The Place*

If you're serious about VFP development, come to Orlando in May. Plus, the entries in the VFP Excellence Awards demonstrate the width and breadth of VFP's capabilities.

By Tamar E. Granor, Editor

It was October of 1991. I'd been using FoxBase+ and FoxPro for several years, though I hadn't yet quit my day job (teaching Computer Science at LaSalle University). I gathered my nerve and got on a plane to Toledo, Ohio, to attend the 1991 Fox Software Developer's Conference, the third such gathering.

The headline on the conference binder reads "Focus on the Fox 2.0" and "See the Fox SQL," a truly awful pun. The speakers included such luminaries as Pat Adams, Menachem Bazian, Randy Brown, George Goley, Y. Alan Griver (what *did* the "Y" stand for anyway?), Cary Prague, Tom Rettig, Randy Wallin, Alan Schwartz, Lisa Slater, Nancy Jacobsen, and John Hawkins. The sessions focused on such topics as error handling, event-driven programming, performance, FoxPro's SQL sub-language, interface design, and more.

For me, it was the culmination of several years of participation on CompuServe's FoxForum, as well as a big step toward becoming one of those speakers myself. But, more importantly, it was my first chance to spend several days of intense learning with the FoxGang.

I've been to every DevCon since (as well as a lot of other Fox conferences), attended dozens of sessions and given more than a few myself. The cast of characters has changed some, though half a dozen or so of those 1991 DevCon speakers are 1998 DevCon speakers, too.

As a community, we're approaching our fifth major upgrade (FoxPro 2.0, FoxPro 2.5, VFP 3, VFP 5, Tahoe) in those seven years. We've moved from a powerful DOS database management tool to a cross-platform tool to an OOP programming environment and, finally, to a player in the component world. Along the way, both the language and the development environment have been seriously enhanced. I'm not sure the developer I was in October '91 could read the code I write today.

Fortunately, we don't have to make these transitions alone. In addition to the advice we bring you monthly in *FoxPro Advisor*, FoxPro DevCon is still *the place* to meet your fellow Fox developers, learn what's new with the product, make connections, and spend several days of intense learning with the FoxGang.

This year's DevCon takes place May 17 to 20 in Orlando. Sessions will focus on old standards like error handling, performance, and FoxPro's SQL sub-language (I'm giving that one myself), as well as newer topics such as web development, object-oriented

design, integrating VFP with other applications, and more. It'll be your first chance to learn about what's new in Tahoe, how it fits into the bigger picture of application development at the end of the twentieth century, and how to prepare yourself for what's coming down the pike. Sessions run the gamut from basic foundations to expert details, with plenty in between.

You'll find the complete list of speakers and sessions at www.advisor.com, along with all the information you need to make your plans to be at DevCon '98. If you're serious about VFP, Orlando is the place to be in mid-May.

Excellence Awards Update

I recently had the opportunity to review the entries in the Visual FoxPro Excellence Awards. I was astounded by the variety of applications. They apply to a wide range of industries, as well as a number of academic pursuits. They perform tasks from accounting (no surprise there) to contact management (again, not a surprise) to managing environmental data to aiding in curriculum design and much, much more.

The category that surprised me most was the one for packaged applications. It appears that there are specialized VFP apps available for a wide range of industries. (I was, in fact, reminded of the old FoxPro Resource Directory that contained listings of FoxPro consultants and developers, as well as applications developed in FoxPro.) The diversity of applications reminded me that I've noticed FoxPro and VFP apps in use at a number of places I've passed by lately, including a local office building, my doctor and my dentist.

Another part of the entries I found interesting was the section where the developers explained why they used VFP. Of course, many of them (especially in the Best Migration category) indicated that they were experienced with FoxPro and other Xbase products.

But the other reasons were more interesting. One idea I encountered a number of times in a number of forms was "we couldn't think of any other development environment that would let us complete this project by the deadline." Apparently, VFP is still the champ for rapid development.

Many entrants also mentioned the speed of FoxPro's data engine and VFP's OOP capabilities as key factors in their decisions.

Another part of the entry form asked for quantifiable business benefits. Many entries spoke of time and dollars saved. The one that caught my eye is saving a particular agency over a million dollars a year.

As editor of *FoxPro Advisor* and a frequent conference speaker, I do get to see some VFP applications. (In fact, we have a success story in this issue about a really exciting app.) But I never hear about as many or as wide a variety as the Excellence Awards let me see. If this is the state of the VFP world, we're in good shape. There are great programmers out there doing great things.

Next month's *FoxPro Advisor* will include a special section featuring the finalists in all six categories. The winners will be announced at DevCon. If you can't be there, watch future issues to find out who the winners are.