

January, 2004

Editor's View

DevCon. The word evokes images of excitement, of late nights and early mornings, of free-flowing ideas. While the nights weren't as late for me this year as they used to be, DevCon '04 still had excitement and ideas.

The conference opened with a marathon keynote, which included memories of the past, the launch of VFP 9, and lots of demos by the Fox team. The session, which lasted two and a half hours, was hosted by VFP product manager, Ken Levy. In the first part of the session, Ken challenged the audience to identify two bundled-up figures in a photo. They turned out to be David and Amy Fulton.

David Fulton, generally known as Dr. Dave to the Fox community, founded Fox Software and, with his team (including his wife, Amy), created FoxBase and FoxPro, before selling the company to Microsoft in 1992. He retired from Microsoft in 1995. Former Fox Software and Microsoft employee Susan Graham, who was a surprise attendee at DevCon, ran into the Fultons when she took a cruise to Antarctica last year. This chance encounter led Susan, who's now involved with documentary filmmaking, to film an interview with Dr. Dave. Excerpts from the interview were shown at both the keynote and closing sessions. In one of them, Dr. Dave talked about the inspiration that led to the Rushmore query engine and the excitement of building it. I look forward to seeing more of this intriguing interview.

The launch of VFP 9 included unveiling the packaging, complete with a human-sized replica. Keep in mind that for Microsoft, launching a product isn't the same as shipping it. The VFP team expects to release VFP 9 to manufacturing late this year. Once it's released, it'll become available for download by MSDN members within a few days, and show up for sale about 6 weeks later.

The bulk of the keynote was devoted to demos of VFP 9. As is often the case, it was the little things that got the most applause. (Oldtimers may remember the cheers when Dr. Dave picked up the Command Window and dragged it around the screen at DevCon '91.)

The next morning, after too little sleep, the breakout sessions began. The speakers included a mix of VFP experts from the community (lots of FoxPro Advisor writers) and quite a few members of the Microsoft VFP team. Session topics varied from introducing new VFP 9 features

(no fewer than four sessions focused on the changes to the Report Designer) to combining VFP with various elements of .NET to business problems like managing team development. A number of vendors offered sessions to demonstrate their products. There was even an optional lunch time session to tell people how to become FoxPro Advisor writers.

The trade show gave attendees a chance to learn about products to enhance their development process. Microsoft staffed a booth (adorned with the life-size product box), which allowed those present to talk to members of the Fox team, get help troubleshooting problems, and share their ideas for where VFP should go next. An evening reception in the trade show featured good food and the chance to mingle with speakers, other attendees, vendors and the members of the Fox team.

As usual, the closing session offered a panel of speakers taking questions. What wasn't usual was that almost none of the questions focused on VFP's political situation; they were technical questions.

One important political item was asked. When VFP 8 came out, many developers were upset to discover that buying an upgrade version meant that you had to uninstall VFP 7 (or whatever version you used for the upgrade) before installing VFP 8. (See my column in the June, 2003 issue.) Ken Levy was asked if that would be true for VFP 9 and clearly stated that it would not. Even if you buy an upgrade, you'll be able to run the new and old versions side by side.

Why do I go to DevCon? To see what's new, to visit with my friends (after more than 15 years in the Fox community, I have plenty of them), and to recharge my Fox batteries. DevCon '04 took care of all three. Although I've been working with (and writing about) VFP 9 for months, I saw some new things. I had a chance to catch up with people I only see a couple of times a year, and I brought home some new ideas.