



MEETING TIME AND LOCATION

June 9, 2005, dinner (or just come to network) at 7:00 PM, presentation at 8:00 PM.

Denny's Restaurant
3315 N. Scottsdale Rd.
Scottsdale, AZ

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Vaughn Treude

Hello everyone. This month's message will be a software review. Since I've been spending all my time working on this lately, it was all that came to mind. :-)

Last month I mentioned that I was working with the new ".NET" version of Visual Basic. After spending some time working with it, I feel I can offer a reasonably well-informed opinion.

In general, it's an improvement. Microsoft has been trying to turn Visual Basic from a "toy" into a real language. One of the biggest problems with the old version was that it allowed really sloppy programming. I've seen code where every practically every piece of data was declared as "variant"; which means it can be used for numbers, text, or anything. It's easy for the programmer who writes it, but not for the next guy who tries to modify the code. It's also

an error-prone way to do things. The new version of VB no longer allows variants. It has very strict data typing, stricter than C++.

Some of VB's uniquely easy features have been removed to make it more compatible with the other dot-net languages. For example, you can't use it to create an array of controls any more. This was quite useful – you could treat a bunch of text entry boxes like a single control, referencing the different ones by number. Graphics operations were also easier in the old VB. Drawing a circle took just one statement. Now you need to go through hassle of creating a "graphics context", and using "pens" and "brushes" like in C++. But VB still has its advantages over other languages. You don't have to create a separate declaration statement for each public routine; the language handles that for you. That saves the programmer a lot of switching back and forth between source files and header files.

In many ways the new VB is like a junior version of C-sharp, Microsoft's knockoff of Java. Like Java, VB lacks the C++ language's flexible (and inherently bug-producing) pointer variables. The new VB also shares Java's feature of automatic garbage collection, which saves programming work and prevents error. It almost seems pointless to keep it as a separate language, which is probably what Microsoft intends.

The old Visual Basic was not a language I would

have selected for a serious software project. It was awkward enough that I have gone through the trouble of combining a VB-based user interface with support libraries written in C. I still wouldn't select VB over C, C++ or Java. But it's now powerful enough that I wouldn't need to extend it with C++, or be tempted to port an existing VB project to another language. The only sad thing is that it's not quite as useful as a "beginner's" language any more. But considering some of the VB code I've had to deal with, that's probably a good thing.

Well, I hope I haven't bored the non-software people too much. I hope to see you all at Denny's this coming Thursday.

Vaughn

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

by Clark Jones

I had a "house guest" for about a week, including Memorial Day weekend. A friend that I'd first met through an Amateur Radio program for "traveling hams" a couple of years ago when I was in Australia came and visited me. He made an around-the-world trip, visiting old school friends in the U.K. before coming to Arizona. We did see the Grand Canyon and the Meteor Crater in the Flagstaff area, and we had thought about

visiting the Titan Museum south of Tucson, but I really didn't want him to get the impression that the only interesting things in Arizona are holes in the ground! Other sites we visited were the Lowell Observatory, the Phoenix Zoo, the Heard Museum, the Hall of Flame, Monti's La Casa Vieja (seemed strange being there for something other than a PACN meeting), the Desert Botanical Gardens, the Challenger Space Learning Center, the Commemorative Air Force (they used to be called the Confederate Air Force), the Pueblo Grande Museum, and, of course, both Fry's Electronics stores.

Although we hit a lot of interesting places, this exercise brought home how many things there really are to do in Arizona. At the Heard Museum, we were given a flyer listing over 50 museums (I'm not sure I'd classify the Humane Society as a "museum", but it's on the list) from the Central Arizona Museum Association. They've got a web site of www.azcama.com which has a place to send e-mail for a copy of the flyer. We really do have a fantastic variety of things to see around here!

Note that Bill Morgan has a new e-mail address, and Mike Jordan has a new phone number.

See you Thursday at Denny's!

Clark

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