

Subject:[SCC_Active_Members]

Al Kossow becomes the Chairman of the Software Preservation Group

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Software Preservation Friends

I am very pleased to announce that Al Kossow has agreed to become the Chairman of the Software Preservation Group.

Over the last few months Al and I had been discussing the goals of the Software Preservation Group and his current efforts at software preservation. It became clear that we should expand the scope of the activities of the Software Preservation Group. The group should support and nurture projects like Al's specific preservations efforts, the passionate volunteers collecting efforts (illustrated by Paul's Fortran and Lisp projects or the NLS project with Phil, Kathe and Jonathan) that are continuing with CTOS, SNOBOL etc, other projects like the Greenstone pilot project and many more including workshops, outreach to other software collecting communities, etc.

Given this ambitious list of projects and the need for more volunteers' help especially in the actual saving of "software bits and documents" which Al has so greatly pioneered it only made sense to create a different support structure. So after a very short transition Al will become the Chairman of the Software Preservation Group and I will continue on as a volunteer on new Software Preservation projects under this new umbrella. Starting with the June 27 meeting Al will create the SPG agenda and run the meetings. Beyond the continuation of the existing pilot projects the expanded Software Preservation Group will also focus on "software bits and documents" projects as described below

Currently, the Museum has tens of thousands of disks, tapes, etc. that need to be read so that their contents can be verified and put into a long-term repository. This is a very large effort that requires hardware and software development as well as manpower to actually do the transfers. Through the proactive collecting efforts that have been going on, we are acquiring media at a rate faster than can possibly be processed without a significant volunteer effort. We also have the SAP collection to process this summer, which has a significant collection of documentation and media to sort and catalog.

In addition to reading media, a large effort is required to annotate and verify the media that has already been read, or is being made available to the Museum in machine-readable form. Verification of the digital contents require the expansion of the media format library that is already in progress, as well as additional interpretation and simulation programs.

Once the software has been read, and verified, it needs to be combined with references and annotations by people who are knowledgeable about the software, so that the artifact can be put into a historical context and be made available for restoration teams, exhibit designers, curators, and external researchers or hobbyists.

We both hope that these new projects will attract new volunteers who will join the existing group of volunteers.

At the time of this transition I would like to reflect on the tremendous

progress that we have made in software collecting and preservation since the creation of our predecessor group, the Software Collection Committee. First credit should be given to Len, John and the board for committing to this software project 4 years ago at a time when an exaggerated big iron image seemed to indicate that software was not a concern of the museum. Our first step was to organize a first workshop on Software collection and preservation that benefited from the pioneering work that Grady Booch had done. It gave us an initial road map for the work of the Software Collecting Committee. Now, four years later, after a name change, more than 33 meetings with 15 to 20 attendees per meeting, and a distribution list of more than 110 members our commitment to Software Preservation cannot be questioned.

We have established a very active community that has created a small web site (established by Sellam Ismail and maintained by Mike Powell) illustrating some of our pilot projects (Fortran, Lisp, NLS etc). We understand better the challenges and unique factors associated with Software preservation and interested parties can take advantage of our accumulated expertise, learn from these pilot projects or read transcripts and email threads of our various discussions. We are in the final steps of establishing a standard legal agreement with several major software companies allowing the museum and its patrons access to their historical software source material. We have benefited from the generosity of the Robert N. Miner foundation which is sponsoring the Software Curator position held by Al Kossow.

As a small but very significant example of all the great contributions of the volunteers and staff I would like to mention the (Second) Software Preservation workshop held a year ago whose transcript and slides have been posted recently on our web site. My thanks to Dag, Paula, Kirsten and the participants for a very interesting transcript that always gets excellent reviews from its readers.

I am afraid that I will not have enough room to recognize in few lines all the other great participants to this preservation efforts, so to all of them thanks for the road traveled. Much remains to be done but these first steps are impressive and we should all be proud of our accomplishments.

Bernard L Peuto

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