

TUG 2003 Opening Message



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Welcome to sunny Hawaii, and greetings from a cold and rainy Oregon! Thank you all for attending this conference celebrating TEX's 25th anniversary. Unfortunately I can't be there with you in person, but Wendy graciously invited me to give this opening address anyway. I am honored to do so in my capacity as the next president of the TEX Users Group.



A silver anniversary conference is a time for reflection. I first became aware of TEX in 1983, when I was an undergraduate at Dartmouth College. The college had just bought its first Unix system (a hot new VAX 11/730), and the computer science department had just hired a new professor out of Carnegie-Mellon, and he brought with him a 1/4" magnetic tape of software distributions, notably including TEX. (The only other software I remember from that tape was Gandalf, a structured editor for Pascal and other languages.)

Professor Sherman turned me loose, informing me there was a README file in the top level directory, and I should read it. I happily started trying to understand how all these crazy .web, .ch, Makefile's, and everything else tangled together. I eventually managed to get things installed, more or less, since fortunately BSD 4.2 came with a Pascal compiler.

We couldn't actually see any output, though, since the only output device we had was a QMS laser printer. (Bitmapped screens were not even a dream, all our work was on Zenith z19 terminals. At least we'd graduated from yellow-paper teletypes.) So my next project was to adapt an existing DVI driver (unfortunately I've forgotten which one). A week or two of hacking later, and the first page we saw was A.U. Thor's Short Story. Ah, bliss.

The next job was to get the latest version of .web. Dartmouth didn't have a direct ARPAnet connection at the time, but it was on CSnet. Professor Sherman typed some magic incantations to get to his account at CMU, and from there he typed

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ftp score.stanford.edu
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and what the computer said back was: Welcome to sunny California. I turned to him with my mouth open and said, what? Really? He just shrugged, being an old hand at this network stuff, and said, sure, that computer's in California. Wow!!, I said.

Well, that was then and this is now. Here we are in the 21st century, and as we all know, the computing world has changed enormously. TUG has changed and grown, from its beginnings at the developer conferences in Stanford in TEX's early days to an organization with over two thousand members from about 70 countries. (I'll be especially sorry to miss Nelson's keynote address and the TEX heritage session at this conference, to learn more about TEX and TUG's history.)

During my term as president, I hope to make TUG more accessible and attractive to TEX users worldwide, collaborate wherever possible with other TEX user groups, and serve its current members better. We have an excellent infrastructure in place, both technical (the tug.org server now located in Denmark, thanks to Kaja Christiansen and Århus University) and human (our excellent office manager, Robin Laakso), to support any TUG activities.

Some steps along this path have been taken already. First, TUG was finally given tax-exempt charitable status, after much effort by Robin, Mimi Jett, and our lawyer Amy Silliman; this means most contributions to TUG, at least within the US, are now tax-deductible. Also, we awarded the first set of grants from a new TEX Development Fund earlier this year.

We were especially grateful to receive donations to this fund from over 100 individuals and institutions around the world. We're also slowly making progress with getting TUB caught up- we've published three issues so far this year, and are hard at work on more. We continue to support the annual software distributions of TEX Live and CTAN (coming soon for 2003!). And, last but far from least, supporting conferences such as this one remain a priority.

In the final analysis, though, TUG is whatever its members and the TEX community makes of it. So if you have any ideas for other activities to undertake, or changes to propose, please speak up, so we can all work together toward our shared goals.

TEX itself has also changed and grown dramatically in 25 years, of course. Despite occasional rumours of TEX's demise, as far as I can tell such reports are greatly exaggerated. Its mathematical typesetting remains unsurpassed, there are always new projects underway to make the TEX system ever more powerful and friendly, and most importantly, new users and programmers still appear with some frequency.

One of the most interesting recent developments is Mac OS X, based on a Unix kernel, which is bringing TEX to a large new population of computer users. This conference will dedicate an entire day to Mac OS X work. All in all, I personally remain hopeful about TEX, and believe its future remains promising.

However, since this is a read-only presentation, I'll have to ask you to contact me separately if you have questions, comments, or suggestions. For the next two years, you can email me as president@tug.org. I never would have guessed it on that day back in 1983 when I first encountered TEX.

In closing, I'd like to thank Wendy, Patricia, Hans, Robin, and all the other volunteers and organizations who made this conference happen; Malcolm Clark for the great poster, the Hawaii Tourism Authority, and corporate contributions from Addison-Wesley, Apple, W.H. Freeman, Integre, Kensington, Math Game House, and RoadTools.

Also, the even larger group of volunteers who have done so much to support TEX and TUG over the years, including my fellow directors on the TUG board and the board members of all the other TEX user groups around the world. Also my fellow developers, who keep sticking to the details to make all the software actually work. And finally, of course, Donald E. Knuth, without whom the world of typesetting over the last 25 years would have been quite a different place. Happy birthday to TEX!

Thank you for putting up with this recording, and have a great conference.

