The Year-Round CHI Conference

At a Local SIG Near You

Richard Anderson

Were you unable to attend CHI 96? Do you wish you didn't have to wait a year for the next CHI conference? Do you know that you may *not* have to wait?

Presentations and activities akin to those which occur at CHI conferences can be experienced most months of the year in an increasing number of locations around the world. The sponsors: SIG-CHI local chapters.

Look on the inside of the rear cover of this Bulletin. There may be an active SIGCHI chapter near you, or there may be the beginnings of an active chapter near you. If your area is not listed, there may be an opportunity to initiate or resurrect a chapter near you.

That you may have attended a CHI conference and not found out about local chapter activities or opportunities near you is something I hope to change.

CHI 96 Local SIGs Challenge

Some conference attendees encounter evidence of the existence of local chapters in the form of rumors about the annual Local SIGs Challenge -- a competition held at the CHI conference in recent years. Past challenges have included the CHI '92 Pacific Ocean "Standoff," the CHI '94 Charles River Swan Boat Race, and the CHI '95 Rocky Mountain Climb. At CHI 96, the challenge was a Canadian Moose Pie Throw, featuring a trek into the Vancouver woods and a frightening encounter with a local moose.

But are these only rumors? Have these competitions really taken place? And what is with the rumored rivalry between ToRCHI (the Toronto Region chapter) and BayCHI (the San Francisco Bay Area chapter)? Has BayCHI really won every competition with ease?

CHI '92 Challenge Participants Verify Survival of All Limbs
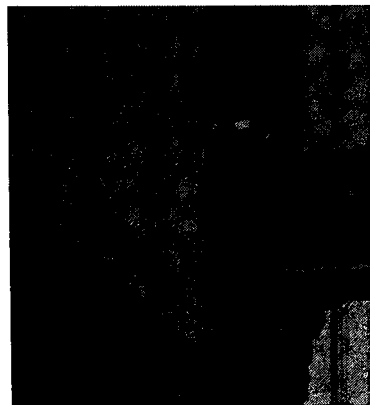
BuckCHI Joins the Challenge

A new competitor at the "rumored" CHI 96 Challenge was BuckCHI, a new chapter based in Central Ohio. Though new, BuckCHI's monthly programs have already included a range of formats familiar to CHI conference attendees: formal presentations (e.g., on applying communication-oriented design principles to WWW pages), a workshop (on low-fidelity prototyping), and a panel (on the future of WWW design). And at the time of this writing, plans were being discussed for Gary Perlman, initiator and advisor of the BuckCHI chapter creation process, to offer his CHI conference Practical Usability Evaluation tutorial.

Other local chapters (e.g., ToRCHI) have sponsored CHI conference tutorials this year, and BuckCHI's WWW programs have been paralleled by several WWW programs at other local chapters (e.g., KC-CHI -- the Kansas City chapter), matching the considerable attention the WWW received at CHI 96.

Similar, Yet Unique

The variety of topics that characterizes each CHI conference has also been characterizing local chapter offerings this year. CapCHI (the Ottawa chapter) programs have addressed usability testing, multidisciplinary design teams, and agents; Puget Sound SIGCHI programs have addressed field research techniques and virtual reality; Bay-CHI programs have tackled visual thinking and designing with and for kids; CHIFOO (the Portland chapter) has addressed the Windows 95 user interface; GBSIGCHI (the Greater Boston chapter) addressed shared drawing media; and a NUCHI (the Northern Utah chapter) program addressed total quality management.

CHI 96 Challenge Trophy Makes Its Way to San Francisco Bay Area

And local programs have often offered a character not always found at CHI conferences. For example, a coffee house has offered a greater intimacy for some Lone Star SIGCHI (the Dallas / Ft. Worth chapter) programs, and "conversations" with CHI notables (e.g., Alan Kay) and tips on travel through cyberspace from Karl and Carl have contributed to the special uniqueness of BayCHI.

CHI conferences provide job postings, opportunities to dine with speakers and other conference attendees, videos, demonstrations, and conference proceedings. Some local chapters have provided job postings, opportunities to dine with speakers and other program attendees, videos, demonstrations, and program proceedings (in the form of program reports) this year.

And both LA-SIGCHI (the Los Angeles chapter) and CapCHI compensated for inability to attend the CHI conference by providing a CHI 96 review, while MosCHI (the Moscow chapter) sponsored its own full-size conference (the 6th International East-West Conference on Human-Computer Interaction)!

A New CHI Conference Challenge: Greater Local SIGs Visibility

Did you know about all of this? Have you attended a CHI conference without learning about local chapter activities in your area or in areas to which you travel?

If you have any ideas about how to make local chapters more visible at CHI conferences, please let me know.

The CHI conference is outstanding, and you should all attend every year. But if you can't attend, or even if you can, look to supplement your CHI diet with a year-round CHI conference sponsored by local SIGCHI chapters.

Thank you, Kate

Local SIGCHI chapters have become far more visible via these pages and in other ways because of the efforts of Kate Ehrlich, Past Local SIGs Chair (and co-founder of GBSIGCHI). At CHI 96, the SIGCHI Executive Committee presented Kate with the SIGCHI Distinguished Service Award "in grateful appreciation of (her) dedication to SIG-

CHI and (her) support of our local SIGs program."

Many thanks to Kate, whose shoes I hope to competently fill.

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P.S. Thanks to Rhona Charron, Buck-CHI, Dave Rowley, & Ben Shneiderman for the images that appear in this column.

Kate Ehrlich, Past Local SIGs Chair, Offers Tips to a Prospective Coordinator of a Local Chapter for Kids