A Review of the APL2000 Users Conference

23–25 October 1996

*—A Review by **Ray Polivka***

APL2000, the company which purchased APL★PLUS software from Manugistics, hosted their first Users Conference in Orlando Florida on the 23rd to 25th of October 1996. In October 1995 APL2000 came into being as it acquired ownership of the APL★PLUS DOS, APL★PLUS III, and APL★PLUS UNIX products from Manugistics. One year later, Eric Baelen, president of APL2000, was hosting their first APL2000 Users Conference. The goals that they set for the conference were to:

* impart a sense of a larger community,
* update the attendees' APL skills,
* expose people to productivity enhancing software based on APL,
* have an opportunity to hear about some "world class" applications written in APL,
* have a chance to see what enhancements are being developed, and
* have an influence on the future of APL2000 development.

In addition to these goals set by the conveners, there were the goals set by the attendees. Two of their goals were:

* to determine the extent of the commitment of APL2000 to APL, and
* to fraternize and get to know other APL folk in the wider community.

To briefly summarize, both sets of goals were achieved in a very amicable way in pleasant surroundings.

In more detail, the Users Conference was divided into two parts. The first two days were given over to presentations and the last day was devoted to tutorials sessions. During all three days, except for six general sessions the days had three parallel tracks. There were a total of 13 different presentations made. Of these, five were repeated on the second day. Often one is frustrated by the fact that two interesting presentations fall into the same time slot. Repeating several of the presentations did a lot to relieve that situation. It was a good idea.

The character of the presentations ranged from straight forward to quite advanced material. The titles of the topics presented and their presenters were:

Many of the presentations were quite technical and oriented toward the changes that windows, objects, and WIN95 were making to APL+WIN. APL2000 is also incorporating more of the language features. This appears to be happening uniformly in all of their products. Bill Rutiser, in his presentation *New Language Features*, reported that Version 2 of APL+WIN will contain the following language enhancements:

* N-wise Reduction,
* Ravel with Axis,
* Dyadic Scalars with Axis,
* Partition,
* Partition with Axis, and
* □AT.

The six general session presentations were:

* *Chart View: A Medical Records Management System* by Chris Lee,
* *What's New at APL2000* by Eric Baelen,
* *LEX2000 Financial Reporting System* by Michael Steiner,
* *PTS2000: An Insurance Industry Portfolio Management System* by John Heinmuller
* *APL in the Client Server World* by Mark Osborne and Michael Steiner, and
* *An Investment Analysis and Evaluation Tool* by Yaron Avitov.

Four of these extended presentations, Chart View, LEX2000, PTS2000, and An Investment Analysis and Evaluation Tool, were discussing full-blown applications ("world class" applications to use Eric Baelen's term).

Most of the attendees were very interested in Eric Baelen's talk, *"What's New at APL2000."* After introducing his growing staff which has more than doubled in the last 18 months from eleven to over twenty, he emphasized that APL2000 Products and Services was established to supply language services to APL users. The APL2000 Products sector was focusing on software development. The APL2000 Service sector was offering consulting services which include:

- Legacy conversions,
- Application development,
- Software design, and
- Training and general support.

He also gave product updates for APL+DOS, APL+WIN, and APL+UNIX. Besides the APL2-like language extensions and the uniform incorporation of control structures, he described the multitude of GUI window features newly available or soon to be. They have a very full plate. One of his stated goals (and challenges) is to have all the information with respect to APL+WIN in one book. (I will bet that I will need two hands to lift it.). As part of the conference package they included an update to APL+WIN Version 1.8, demos, utilities, and material related to some of the session presentations.

Three of the presentations, Business Graphics and APL+WIN, APL+WIN and Delphi, and RAIN, were by vendors discussing their products built upon APL+WIN. While these products were relatively new applications built upon APL2000 products, several other products discussed at the conference namely Chartview, the medical records management system, by SoftMed; LEX2000 by APL2000; and PTS2000, a system for actuaries, by SS and C/Chalke, are also such products. It was noted by John Heinmuller that PTS2000 having been available since 1984 is now in Release 96.2.

Several of the presentations were tutorial in nature. In particular, Brian Chizever's *"Window Design Guide"* presentation gave some excellent pointers with respect to the design of a window interface. His topical subjects touched upon such points as:

- Remember the user is in control,
- Be consistent,
- Consider forgiveness (not a bad idea universally),
- Don't forget feedback,
- Keep it simple but not simplistic,
- Consider user expectations, and
- Don't reinvent the wheel.

In detailing these items and others, he provided sound advice. He addressed "What" rather than "How To." This was especially valuable since many attendees were inexperienced window developers. Much of what he said needs to be said repeatedly; maybe even at the next Users Conference.

One of the useful things that occurred regularly in most of the presentations was brief definitions of terminology. Many of us welcomed that since the field is evolving so quickly at least with respect to the invention of new terms and acronyms. For example, OCX, VBX, OLE, CLSD, ActiveX, IPX, Thin versus Fat Clients (*Gosh, do I have to weigh myself before I run my application?*), three-tier client/server, and sockets are just some of the terms that get bantered about.
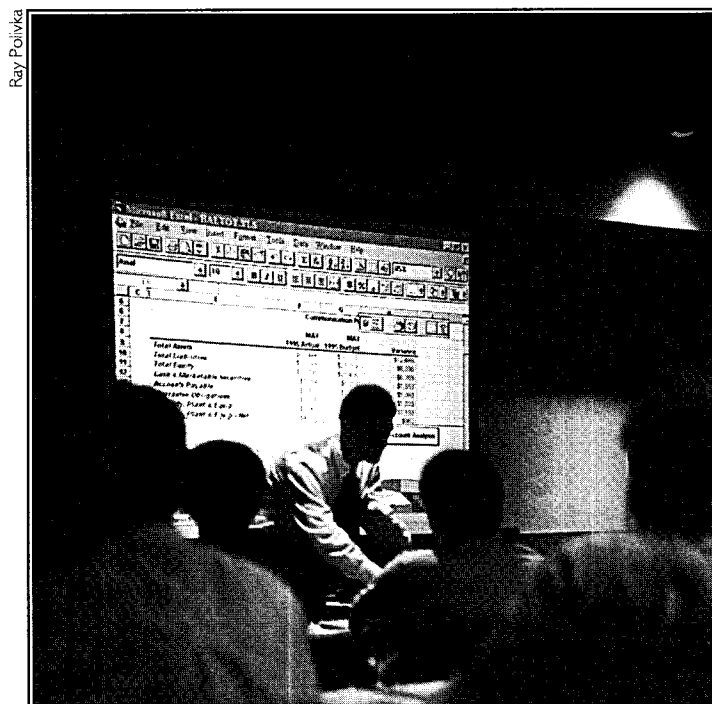
The last day, to which one could subscribe separately, was devoted to training sessions. The available sessions were:

- Introduction to Programming in APL+WIN (part 1 and 2),
- New Controls in APL+WIN 1.8,
- Calling the Windows API and Third Party DLLs, and
- Advanced Windows Programming using Callbacks and Filters.

All but the first were done by APL2000 people. The *Introduction to Programming in APL+WIN* done by Rick Butterworth was a bit misnamed. It really was an excellent introduction to "Windows" programming with APL+WIN. Through a series of evolving examples he illustrated the various facilities that APL+WIN provided to create a window interface. This was largely done through the system function $\square WI$. The material he provided as part of the conference proceedings was excellent.

Finally, the environment in which this conference was held was very cordial. The meeting facilities were quite adequate for the number of attendees, which exceeded 80. The food provided by the hotel at the dinner and for snacks was quite good. The variety was very wide and thus able to satisfy everyone. Of course, being in Florida you will see a lot of citrus fruit. The banquet entertainer, a mind reader and memory expert, was thoughtfully selected to entertain everyone in the audience. The weather was obligingly mild. (The Floridian would say, *"Of course, this is Florida."*) Looking at the whole conference from the point of view of a participant, it appeared to run very smoothly. This is due to the staff of APL2000, especially, I believe, to Sonya Beekman. I'm sure that many are looking forward to the next APL2000 Users Conference.

In closing this conference, Eric Baelen summarized APL2000's role when he said, *"We are dedicated to your success. If you don't make it, we don't make it."* ∎

From this darkened classroom come enlightened APL users