

TEX Northeast Conference



TEX Northeast Conference: Final Report

Stephanie Hogue

Last March, the penthouse suite of the Loews New York Hotel was the site of U.S. TUG “history in the making”. TEX users gathered for a non-annual-meeting, three-day conference. Held Sunday, March 22, through Tuesday, March 24, the TEX Northeast Conference was positioned both to follow the Seybold conference (held the preceding week) and to attract the local publishing community. With the theme “TEX/L^ATEX Now”, the Conference promised — and delivered — practical information for those whose working lives revolve around TEX and L^ATEX.

The TEX Northeast Conference grew from a general discussion at the 1997 Annual Meeting in San Francisco, concerning a decline in U.S. membership and the needs of people utilizing TEX and L^ATEX in their jobs. A group of people attending the San Francisco meeting stepped forward to take on the task of organizing a conference for March 1998; they were later joined by several more volunteers. Serving in various capacities on the conference committee were:

Nancy Chien	Texas A&M University
Don DeLand	Integre Technical Pub. Co.
Susan DeMeritt	IDA/CCR La Jolla
Alan Hoenig	<i>Program Co-Chair</i> , CUNY
Anita Hoover	<i>Program Co-Chair</i> , University of Delaware,
Stephanie Hogue	The TypeWright
Mimi Jett	ICC Oregon
Cheryl Ponchin	IDA/CCR Princeton
Stacey Sensenig	Cadmus Journal Services/ TAPSCO
Heidi Sestrich	Carnegie Mellon University

Due to the time crunch (about three months to arrange the program) and the practical theme of the conference, a different approach to soliciting papers was adopted. The committee gathered a list of suggested topics and surveyed the membership for their responses, as well as more suggestions. The final topic list was then incorporated into the “Call for Papers”. Additionally, committee members actively recruited potential speakers to present specific topics and to offer workshops. Several com-

mittee members agreed to give presentations and/or workshops themselves, in order to ensure that the conference met attendees’ expectations.

The conference committee also approached commercial vendors of TEX implementations, offering scheduled times for each to demonstrate the “latest and greatest” features of their products.

Lance Carnes and	
Ed Lajarza	Personal TEX Inc.
Richard Kinch	TrueTEX Software
Barry Smith	Blue Sky Research

accepted the committee’s invitation. Don DeLand also offered to demonstrate Scientific Word/Workplace on behalf of TCI/Brooks Cole. In addition to the vendors giving presentations, several providers of TEX-related services also had display tables:

Integre Technical Pub. Co.
Interactive Composition Corp.
TEXnology, Inc.

Blue Sky Research announced Textures’ newest feature — *Synchronocity* between input and .dvi files — at the conference, and provided a Macintosh running a demonstration. The glass-walled vendor display area quickly became the center of activity for conference participants.

The “recruitment” of speakers and vendors resulted in three information-packed, albeit long, days, each devoted to a specific topic:

Sunday, “All About TEX” The conference opened with vendor demonstrations and, for those who brought laptops, the opportunity to install a trial copy of PCTEX, Scientific Workplace, Textures, or the new TEX Live 3 CD, to “test drive” during the conference. Talks on general TEX issues and virtual fonts by Alan Hoenig and a BIBTEX discussion with Oren Patashnik completed the morning session. Workshops filled the afternoon, with sessions on moving from L^ATEX 2.09 to 2_ε, using the `amsmath` package, customizing L^ATEX lists, and using packages that extend the `tabular` environment.

Monday, “WWW and Interactive TEX” The second day featured TEX in combination with other packages and on the Web. Presentations of TCI’s EXP, IBM’s `techexplorer`, PC TEX’s new graphics features, `Mathscape`, and Mike Sofka’s



talk on tagged DVI files (not for the faint-hearted!) occupied the morning. In the afternoon, Ross Moore presented his L^AT_EX2HTML package, and Michael Downes reported on his work to develop an environment that will *automatically* break long equations. The day finished with a L^AT_EX2HTML workshop.

Tuesday, “T_EX in Publishing” The closing day was devoted to issues of professional publishing with T_EX. Designing books, supporting multiuser macro packages, developing database publishing systems, and designing for the Web as well as print were discussed during the morning session. The final session covered custom-designing a legal document with T_EX, controlling white space in T_EX, and using alternative math fonts, and concluded with an overview of John Hobby’s METAPOST language for producing PostScript graphics.

Each day during lunch, participants divided into groups for informal discussions of T_EX/L^AT_EX issues and the future direction of TUG. On the final day, participants’ names were drawn at random, and, thanks to the generosity of Personal T_EX and TCI/Brooks Cole, copies of the latest versions of PCT_EX, Scientific Workplace, and EXP were awarded. Other winners received advance copies of the **T_EX Live 3** CD, thanks to the efforts of Sebastian Rahtz and Anita Hoover, and the support of the University of Delaware.

The total number of participants for the full, three-day conference was 57. One-day registrations were also accepted; attendance was highest on Tuesday (63). Ross Moore undoubtedly traveled the farthest — all the way from Macquarie University in Australia! The enthusiastic responses of the participants, some attending their first TUG conference, made it clear that the T_EXNortheast Conference was a “hit”. The most frequently heard question was, “When’s the next one?”

If you missed the conference, you can check out the Web page:

<http://lib.stat.cmu.edu/~heidi/tug97.html>

or click on the link from TUG’s home page (<http://www.tug.org>). The daily agendas, brief abstracts of presentations, and the list of participants are still available.

Several of the committee members have “re-enlisted” to help plan the 1999 Annual Meeting. We intend to continue some of the innovations which made the T_EXNortheast Conference a success:

- Recruiting speakers for specific topics: The suggested topic list had more material than we

could cover in three days; we will use the list to help design presentations and workshops for the 1999 meeting.

- Surveying the membership: Feedback from the survey respondents enabled us to design a program that people wanted to attend; we hope for an even bigger response to the next survey.
- Parallel sessions: Although we were not able to arrange them at this conference, we think parallel sessions would allow us to accommodate those who need practical, how-to sessions, as well as those who prefer more theoretical discussions.
- Using laptops: While the use of laptops will require more technical support, it was apparent that this approach could lower the cost of providing hands-on workshops.

The T_EXNortheast Conference Committee wants to thank everyone who helped to make this conference such a success, especially the speakers and vendors who put together terrific presentations and workshops on very short notice. We particularly appreciate the developers’ efforts to explain their packages in layman’s terms and to provide concrete examples. No one present at Michael Barnett’s *Mathscape* presentation will soon forget his helpful and hilarious explanation of three-dimensional math.

While the committee planned to impart practical information to users, we were pleasantly surprised by developer Ross Moore’s comment that he, too, learned something from the workshops. It seems he found helpful information about how some of the packages are applied by users in actual work situations. We look forward to making the 1999 Annual Meeting an even more valuable exchange of information and ideas.

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