

News from LinuxWorld Boston

TEPID TEA PARTY

LinuxWorld Boston experiments with a parallel conference and a new location.

BY JOE CASAD

The world of Linux assembled in Boston on April 3-6 for this year's East Coast US LinuxWorld Conference and Expo. At least some of the world assembled – both the number of visitors and the number of exhibitors seemed down this year, although the organizers speculated that they might break even on total attendance. Part of the reason the show *looked* under-attended was that it underfilled its larger new location at the Boston Convention and Exposition Center (Figure 1).

Conference and Keynote

The conference sessions took on a technical tone. There was fewer of the hype-charged business-speak sessions (for me, that is good). On the other hand, the events I attended seemed kind of safe and uninspired, as if the speaker were reading out of a textbook. I never did get that feeling of excitement you get when you're learning something totally new and unexpected. Of course, to be fair, I could only attend a fraction of the events

occurring simultaneously around the center.

The keynotes were a high point. The conference started with an address from Nicholas Negroponte, founder of the famous One Laptop Per Child (OLPC). OLPC is working on an ambitious plan to produce low-cost laptops on a massive scale for children in developing countries.

The basic facts of the \$100 laptop project are well known to many Linux watchers. The audience was more interested in learning about the evolving specifications for the small, rugged computers, which are designed to operate in village-sized WiFi mesh networks on less than 2 Watts of power.

Another keynote came from Dell's Kevin Kettler, who spoke on virtualization. Kettler and Negroponte were both way better than the PR-packed "Ain't we doin' well" keynotes from Novell VPs that have gotten to be too common.

The most significant change to the conference agenda was the appearance of OpenSolutions World Conference



Figure 2: A quiet moment at the Slashdot couch.

tracks. OpenSolutions World was presented as a separate event sharing the same expo space with LinuxWorld, and it was even possible to buy a separate ticket to the OpenSolutions World conference.

One of the themes resonating in the halls this year was the idea that "open source" has a

meaning beyond the politics of operating systems. The separate OpenSolutions World conference was perhaps an effort to tap into that sentiment. By most indications, however, the effort did not succeed, since the number of exhibitors and the general energy of the show was down this year.

Final Thoughts

At his press-only "State of Open Source" address, open source evangelist Bruce Perens had plenty to say about the usual topics, but he saved a measure of his consternation for the show itself. "Is this show a disappointment?" he asked, and he answered, "I kind of think so."

Whether it was the new exhibit space, the OpenSolutions fragmentation, the smaller budgets from big vendors, or just a general lack of direction, this year's LinuxWorld Boston was missing some of the excitement it had last year. Perens argued for moving next year's show back to New York. I'd be happy with just moving it back to its previous Boston location – a smaller space closer to the hotels and centered in a more pedestrian part of the city. Whatever the solution, I hope the organizers act swiftly to put some new life into next year's East Coast LinuxWorld – a perennial favorite, and an important spot on the social calendar for both vendors and visitors. ■



Figure 1: A view from the top of the escalator at this year's LinuxWorld Boston.