

General Delivery

Opening words

Christina Thiele (Outgoing President) and
Michel Goossens (Incoming President)

This first column for 1995 marks the transition between myself and Michel Goossens, TUG's new president. I am delighted to share this column with him — and even more so to pass it on to him!

Passing the baton

While this first issue of 1995 should normally have been in your mailbox last March, thus before the spring election, the delay in getting it out to you has been such that it is more reasonable to acknowledge “real-time” events.

Having a real election for the position of TUG president was very important to me, since my own term was not the result of an election by TUG members but a make-do solution to an interim situation (although I had been elected as a board member in the first elections in 1991).

In 1991, the board decided that all board members should be elected by the membership, including the president. Malcolm Clark served as interim president for one-and-a-half years, to allow the election cycle to begin properly. However, no candidates stepped forward in the fall of 1992, and so the board was forced to find a president from amongst its own members; the result was that I took on the job of president. I have therefore viewed my role these past two-and-a-half years as being more of an administrator (“paper-generating bureaucrat” might be another term for it!), focusing on internal infrastructure more than on external leadership issues.

This latter role is what TUG now needs to focus on — indeed, one could argue that this role was needed already a year ago. Perhaps. But the climate a year ago was less calm, more agitated. Now, however, I believe Michel, as new president, has a much better context in which to be a strong leader for TUG, and by extension, to better represent TUG in the general T_EX community.

Looking back

Since this is my last column, I would like to take the opportunity to look back over my past seven years on TUG's board, beginning in 1988 at the Montreal annual meeting. I've seen the board move from being an appointed group to an elected body, from a

group of keen implementors and developers with little administrative involvement to one where most development work is now done outside the board, even outside TUG, and administrative issues have seemed to consume the board's time and energy. In fact, most of the faces from when I first joined the board are no longer there. But this should not surprise anyone unduly.

The T_EX community of today is very different from that of 7 years ago, much less 16 years ago when TUG began. The program is mature, the users are world-wide and experienced, network access and network-based resources have increased to the point where almost everything is available electronically: help, information, sources, documentation — and fellow-users. Finding a useful role in the current electronic and economic climate is very difficult for all organizations in computer-related activities. To my mind, TUG is now swinging away from the administrative focus of recent years towards more of a collaborative and coordinating role in the community at large. This is not to say that the efforts made to provide a solid administrative infrastructure have been for naught — but they only need to be done once, and after that it's more a matter of introducing refinements and improvements. The main focus can thus move elsewhere.

I'd like to think that this is where I've most usefully expended my energies for TUG — in the occasionally unimaginative and plodding business of documentation, guidelines and general information. Drafting guidelines for the proceedings, which TUG first began publishing in 1987, was one of my first ventures — mainly to provide some sort of reference point for myself as editor of the 1988 and 1989 proceedings, and of course, to also give authors some help in preparing their submissions. The guidelines have since become a regular component in the proceedings editor's arsenal of files; and each editor has been steadily improving and revising the document over the years. Which is what good guidelines should have to undergo — growth and change — to address new situations. Similarly, the four years I spent working on TUG meetings led to drafting conference guidelines along with Peter Flynn, who had experience with the Cork 1990 meeting. Other guideline writing duties I've shared include those for presenters, vendors, joint memberships, and elections.

Last year saw the introduction of “info-sheets”, short one- or two-page documents which can be useful sources of information: `tug-info.tex` (general info about TUG) and `usergrps.tex` (list of all user

groups) are two of the first ones.¹ They are presented later in this issue, for everyone's information. The source files can be found on CTAN in `tex-archive/usergrps/tug` and are updated as necessary. In the works are info-sheets on CTAN and on T_EX implementations for various platforms.

TTN was the biggest project, though, that I undertook: and even then, only with the substantial and informed contributions from regular columnists such as Peter Flynn, Peter Schmitt, Jeremy Gibbons and Robert Becker, was it possible to keep up a rhythm of four issues per year for three years. That publication is now also evolving, under the new editorship of Peter Flynn.

Indeed, most all of what I've worked on in TUG has been something that others have had just as big a role in, or have taken further along the road. With the right combination of people, who can make any job seem do-able, any problem solvable, and any pleasure share-able, there's really nothing like collaborative work to make you feel useful, particularly as volunteer work doesn't bring much else!

Most of what I've learned about what they call 'people skills' and all that—it's been learned by working within TUG and the T_EX community. Perhaps not always well learned, but certainly it's been the best exposure to all kinds of issues, situations, and people one could wish for. Not at all what I expected to learn when I sent in my first membership form in 1986, that's for sure, or when I attended my first meeting in 1987!

TUGboat is back!

One major infrastructure concern is of course *TUGboat* production. This issue you are reading is therefore also significant in that it marks the second of what will be a "five-step program"² to getting TUG back into normal contact with its own membership, and by extension, serving notice to the entire T_EX community that we are alive and well and working like mad to regain our members' respect and renewed membership. It has come as no surprise that our 1995 membership figures are down from last year; a big factor has been the non-appearance of our flagship publication. A major concern has therefore necessitated a major change in production.

With this in mind, as well as the growing difficulties being experienced by the TUGboat editor to devote as much time and energy towards *TUGboat* as in the past, a change in the production environ-

ment had to be made. As president, I was able to initiate discussions on the feasibility of a team approach, and in conjunction with Barbara (*TUGboat* editor), Mimi Burbank (chair of the Publications Committee), and Michel Goossens (incoming president), we were able to quickly find a new production route to follow.

The utter dependence upon one person, Barbara Beeton, to not only edit but also deal with T_EXnical production had to change.³ *TUGboat* 15,4 was the first result of the new production approach: a team of people working under Barbara's sharp eye, each one bringing a great deal of experience in different aspects of T_EX as it now is used and understood by the community. This issue (16,1) is the first one which joins the team approach with a new production site (SCRI), and will, we believe, allow for much greater scope and flexibility in the future.

SCRI support critical

The team approach has been greatly aided by the generosity of the people at Florida State University's Supercomputer Computations Research Institute (SCRI), who have allowed us to share half of a new 4GB disc in order to undertake *TUGboat* production. Mimi Burbank deserves the credit for having made this possible; and we are deeply grateful to SCRI for the additional technical and logistical support which they have provided. The disc now makes it possible for team members to access all *TUGboat* production files, lend speedy assistance and advice on problems which inevitably arise, and generally provide a solid support group for *TUGboat*'s long-standing editor. For more details, see Barbara's column elsewhere in this issue.

TUG's new president, Michel Goossens, vowed at the recent annual meeting to see that, between now and the end of the year, members will see *TUGboat* issues appearing in very short order, to get us back to the normal schedule. You have received 15,4 (the last 1994 issue). This is 16,1. You will receive 16,2 (guest-edited by Malcolm Clark) and 16,3 (the TUG'95 Proceedings, edited by Robin Fairbairns) before the end of the calendar year; the December

³ And that T_EXnical aspect has done nothing but become more complex with each new article—proving that *TUGboat* authors are amongst the most devilishly creative group anyone should ever have to deal with! I would hasten to reiterate a point that Barbara has repeatedly made in the past: that this is *not* the aim of *TUGboat*—to be for the T_EXnically devilish! There is a desperate need for solid entry-level articles that will help all users better understand and apply T_EX for all purposes—not just the generation of fantastic new code and fonts!

¹ The idea came from a one-page overview that I picked up at the 1994 annual meeting of the LSA (Linguistic Society of America) in Boston.

² Five issues—five steps: 15,4; 16,1 to 16,4.

issue, 16,4, will be out in early 1996. The work is already well in hand; elsewhere in this issue you will find information on what's coming in 16,2 and 16,3. We are convinced this is the best solution for the current and long-term survival of both *TUGboat* and TUG: without the one, the health and viability of the other is also drawn into question — not only by current and former TUG members, but by the \TeX community at large.

And with this longish message, I now pass the President's Column over to Michel Goossens, TUG's incoming president.

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Moving forward

Christina Thiele, TUG's outgoing president, has explained clearly what has happened in the last year or two, stating the facts and putting them in an objective perspective. As noted previously, the problems with *TUGboat* have, amongst other things, contributed to a drop of about 20% in the membership of TUG with respect to the 1994 figures. As I announced in my inaugural speech, I am making it my first task as new president to get *TUGboat* back on schedule. In the production team that we have set up, a real spirit of cooperation has developed, with each of the team members contributing in an area where she or he feels most comfortable or has particular expertise. I am confident that this approach can be made to last, and that *TUGboat* will now arrive on time and at regular intervals on our readers' desks.

New horizons

But is it not enough to just "carry on", saying that it'll soon be "business as usual". The world of electronic publishing does not stand still; on the contrary, it is caught in a whirlwind. If \TeX wants to survive, it will have to adapt to this new and changing environment. Hypertext, HTML and SGML, PDF (Portable Document Format), publishing on the Net, document re-use, CD-ROM, dialing the global village, surfing the Internet, using multiple master, GX or TrueType fonts — all of these are only some of the buzz-words that we encounter on walls, in magazines, on our computer screens, and in the books we open. And what about Windows 95, NT, or other Unixes, can we just ignore them? No, we have to deal with them, adapt to the real world, profit from these developments, borrow the good ideas, use cross-fertilization to take what we need in order to make our tool of excellence — \TeX — even better, and adapt it more ideally to the text processing

needs of the year 2000. Recent developments such as Ω , ϵ - \TeX , NTS, \LaTeX 3, TDS, hyper \TeX , ASTeR have shown that \TeX is alive and well, and that many enthusiastic developers in various parts of the world are actively working on extensions in functionality to better integrate \TeX into the window environments that are becoming commodity items in our daily life. TUG has to set up efficient communication channels, and the means to make coordinating all these activities possible. In particular, *TUGboat* will carry articles addressing these important issues so that everybody can be kept truly informed.

All together now

Many — I should say most — \TeX users in the world are not members of TUG or of any other local or national \TeX Users Group. Yet they all can profit from \TeX 's fantastic typesetting abilities. They are working in far-away places, on small personal computers. We should not forget those writing their thesis in Russian, research report in Chinese, perhaps a love letter in Armenian, or a poem in Swahili. *TUG per se* is not the prime aim of the game, it is not organizations that make history, it is people. Knuth gave \TeX to the world, and asked TUG to look after it, to make sure that \TeX and METAFONT can be used to the benefit of the whole of mankind as the only truly generally and freely available text-processing system in the world. Therefore we should all continue to work together, in trust and good faith. TUG depends on you, TUG needs your active support, and all those hundreds of thousands of \TeX users depend on all of us. Let us not disappoint them!

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