

# CONFERENCE REPORT

## Canadian Club

Francesca Thorneloe

There was a core impression of tighter unity and better understanding among this year's *Virus Bulletin* conference delegates. In fact, from the start of the event at 9am on Thursday 30 September my first Editorial Address to all the attendees embraced that concept with the subject of sticking together and working as a symbiotic unit. It soon became apparent that I was not alone in my thinking.

### First Impressions Last

Conference Manager Jo Peck mentioned in her post-Gala Dinner speech that this was a year of firsts for *VB*. *VB*'99 was her first opportunity as primary organiser to take control of the conference co-ordination and the result was a slick and seemingly effortless couple of days set amongst the most stunning scenery in the Pacific North West.

It was also Fraser Howard's first conference since coming on board as Technical Consultant for the magazine. Characteristically, he relished the challenge, delivering a universal and candid retrospective of the year, throwing in his confident predictions for the coming Millennium.

Despite this having been *Virus Bulletin*'s ninth international conference and tenth anniversary year, for this particular *VB* team it is only the beginning.

### Rocky Mountain High

The venue certainly did its bit to help. The Hotel Vancouver opened its doors to the biggest *VB* conference to date, and we were admirably looked after. Wednesday evening's Welcome drinks reception in the spectacular Roof Room showed off the city of Vancouver to its greatest advantage. Old friends were given a chance to introduce themselves to new faces aided by plentiful and exotic finger foods and local beer and wine. From the off, lively and proactive discussions seemed the order of the day. Debates were often to carry over from presentations into typically British Columbian breakfasts and lunches.

Taking timely advantage of the wealth of experts gathered in one place, extra-curricular meetings such as those for the *ICSA* and *The WildList Organization* took place between sessions. This year also witnessed a marked increase of partners at the event, a welcome development which culminated in as even a match as we have seen on the dance

floor on Thursday night. Wives and girlfriends confessed to feeling part of the AV family and the Swimmer baby made an awful lot of friends!

The Gala Dinner and Dance took place in a truly celebratory style. Clutching their champagne flutes, slightly suspicious but good-humoured delegates were issued with black trilby hats and sunglasses on entering the stunning Pacific Ballroom prior to sitting down to a sumptuous five course meal. The Blues Brothers Band took over and, as they say, the rest is history.

### United We Stand

The conference itself was seamlessly executed and extremely well-attended. Huge multi-national conglomerates such as *Boeing*, *Shell*, *UPS* and *Ford* rubbed shoulders with Government agencies like *NATO*, *NASA* and the armed forces. Software giants *Microsoft*, *Compaq* and *Intel* were well represented, as were charitable organizations including *Imperial Cancer Research*.

This year's press contingent was the largest so far, with delegates from US, Japanese, German and UK publications registering. Educational establishments sent participants from a wide selection of schools and universities across America, England, Poland and Denmark.

*SARC*'s Chief Researcher Carey Nachenberg kickstarted the proceedings with the keynote paper on computer parasitology which managed to be simultaneously dynamic and hilarious, serious and premonitory. The audience, technical and corporate, was united in appreciating his humour and his controversial predictions, not to mention his stochastic simulation.

When visa problems prevented the participation of scheduled speakers Costin Raiu and Adrian Marinescu from *GeCAD*, Romania, the unity continued. Sarah Gordon and Richard Ford, *VB* old-timers and always enthusiastically received, appealed to both corporate and technical audiences with their timely and relevant discussion about information sharing into the 21st century.

### Speakers' Corner

Having made the difficult and painstaking decision of paper selection back in the spring, we were confident that our speakers – from Dave Phillips, Computer Virus Control Officer for the *Open University* to Dave Black, a Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman – reflected the diversity and



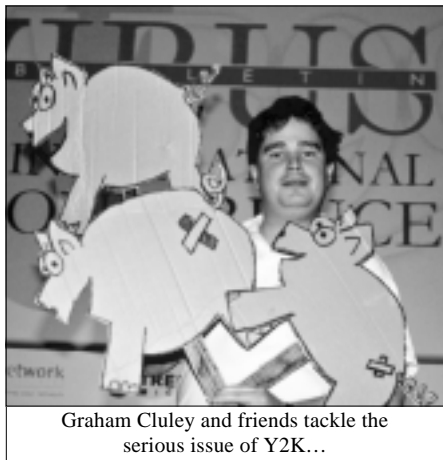
Now you see it, now you don't – with *VB* Technical Editor, Jakub Kaminski...

scope of the conference delegates. Topics covered the spectrum from mathematical algorithms to *EICAR* test files by way of Java and network-aware malware.

Old familiar favourites like *IBM Research's* Ian Whalley and *Sophos's* Paul Ducklin were joined by newcomers to the *Virus Bulletin* conference circuit. Two representatives from *Kaspersky Labs*, Andrews Nikishin and Krukov, *Symantec's* Eric Chien and *Data Fellows's* Katrin Tocheva joined Marius Van Oers from *NAI* for the first time on the speaker's podium.

There was something for everyone. Audiences were treated to tutorial-style sessions from *Computer Associates's* Rob Stroud and Christine Orshesky from *i-secure Corporation*, while timely discussions on *Office 2000* were delivered by *Norman's* Righard Zwienberg and *Symantec's* Darren Kessner. An impromptu technical panel session resulted in a suggested open letter to *Microsoft* published on p.4 of this issue. Vesselin Bontchev's controversial paper 'The WildList – Still useful?' can be found at the following URL: <http://www.complex.is/~bontchev/papers/wildlist.html>.

There were the usual highlights and gems which give *VB's* conferences their individual flavour. This year's classics included Nick FitzGerald's spontaneous and emotional rant against application designers and Graham Cluley's 'dancing pigs', one of which just happened to be his boss, Jan Hruska of *Sophos Plc*.



Graham Cluley and friends tackle the serious issue of Y2K...

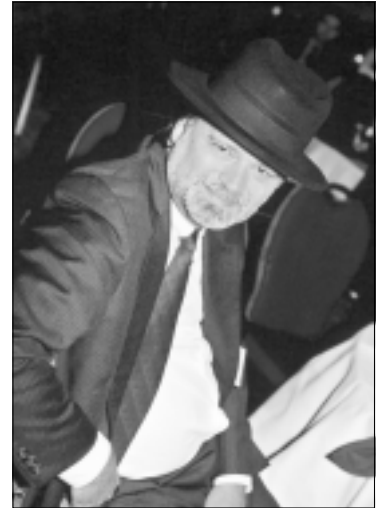
The well-placed and bustling exhibition had its share of firsts too. The big names were all there, joined for the first time by *Sybari Software* and *Panda Software*. Raffles, freebies and demonstrations served to make coffee breaks interactive and entertaining for all.

Always a firm favourite at *VB* conferences, and an opportunity for all the attendees to reunite, the closing speakers' panel session was professionally overseen by *IBM Research's* Steve White. Playing to a full house, Graham Cluley, Sarah Gordon, Péter Ször, Rob Stroud, Carey Nachenberg and Ian Whalley took questions from the floor.

AV heavyweights Jimmy Kuo and Dmitry Gryaznov got the session off to a provocative start with their reactions to the annual enquiry 'will your virus problem be worse or better this time next year?'. The old chestnut of the relationship between virus writers and anti-virus companies also came

up, but even this, usually accompanied by hot tempers and flare-ups was friendly in nature and conciliatory in tone.

Attendees of *VB'99* are urged to fill in their assessment forms and post them back to *Virus Bulletin*, so that we can improve on this year's conference. Early records of conference assessment forms already submitted reveal an energetic, comprehensive audience eagerly anticipating *VB 2000*.



An exercise in cool. No wonder we asked Steve White to chair the Speakers' Panel session...

Indeed, CDs of this year's proceedings (see the News page) are still selling fast. Not featured on the CD are Dmitry Gryaznov's technical paper 'Upconversion 2000' and Graham Cluley's presentation, which can be found at the *VB* Web site <http://www.virusbtl.com/>. Hard copies of Robert Vibert's corporate talk '101 Criteria to Consider for Enterprise-Level Anti-virus' are available by special request from *Virus Bulletin*.

After much consideration and a substantial recovery period, 'Men of the Match' for this year's event have been elected based on the delegate assessment that we have managed to gauge so far. They are, unanimously, key note speaker Carey Nachenberg, Graham Cluley and Péter Ször, the latter presenting the most popular technical paper on 'Memory Scanning under Windows NT'.



Ian Whalley asks 'What happens if I press here?' Carey Nachenberg is keen to find out...