

Vintage Computer Festival East will celebrate Unix milestone

If you ever worked in the computer field -- or if you ever used an iPhone -- then you've used an operating system Unix, which turns 50 this year and will be celebrated at Vintage Computer Festival East from May 3-5 at the InfoAge Science & History Center, 2201 Marconi Rd., Wall, NJ 07719.

Unix is a computer operating system, just like Microsoft Windows or Apple's MacOS. Most of the time Unix is behind-the-scenes, where it is massively popular in corporate data centers. But it's also the foundation for something called BSD, on which Apple's iOS is based, and also for Linux, on which Google Android is based. So, whether most people realize it or not, Unix is everywhere!

Unix development began in 1969 at Bell Labs in Murray Hill, New Jersey. Its two main developers were Dennis Ritchie, who died in 2011, and Ken Thompson, who is the VCF East keynote speaker on the morning of Saturday, May 4, right here at the former Camp Evans. Thompson will be interviewed on stage by another Unix historical superstar, Brian Kernighan, who was the VCF East keynoter a few years ago.

In addition to the Thompson/Kernighan talk, this year's edition of VCF East will also feature a huge hands-on exhibit called Unix Town. Over in Unix Town, visitors will be able to use dozens of different vintage computers running various kinds of Unix versions and applications. Brands represented will include Apple, Atari, AT&T, DEC, IBM, NeXT, Perkin-Elmer, SGI, and Sun Microsystems.

But Unix isn't the only milestone in computer history this year! It's also the 40th anniversary of Atari. Most people think of videogame consoles, however Atari also was a big player in microcomputers. The VCF East keynote speaker on Sunday, May 5 is Atari's Joe Decuir who worked on the 2600 console and the 400/800 computers, before moving to Amiga. Just like the Unix Town, there will also be a huge Atari exhibit covering everything from the original Video Computer System (2600) all the way to the Falcon 030 which was Atari's last product.

In total, VCF East will offer about 40 hands-on exhibits (way beyond just Unix and Atari!), 15 technical classes on Friday, a gigantic consignment sale, professional vendors, learn-to-solder workshops, and a single-board computer workshop by Glitchworks.

VCF East hours are Friday/Saturday (9am-6pm) and Sunday (9am-5pm). Friday is devoted to tech classes; exhibits and consignment are open on Saturday and Sunday. Please see <http://www.vcfed.org/vcfeast> for all the details. Proceeds benefit InfoAge and also the event producer Vintage Computer Federation. VCF is a 501(c)(3) educational non-profit organization.

If you can't make it to VCF East, fear not: all of the talks will be recorded and posted on the Federation's YouTube account. You can also visit VCF's computer museum at InfoAge year-round.

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