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Community Connector

A Biweekly Newsletter for SQL Server Professionals



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Dear Sandy,



Farewell

Joe Webb

At the end of each year, I like to take a moment to reflect back before looking ahead to the new year. I compare my accomplishments for the year with the goals I had set for myself twelve months earlier.

Now, I'm not a big proponent of New Year's Resolutions in the traditional sense; traditional New Year's Resolutions are frequently little more than fleeting wishes that seldom get attention after the first couple of months. No, I don't believe in New Year's Resolutions, but I do believe that it's important to set measurable goals and diligently work towards them throughout the year. Those goals, both personal and professional, help to keep my eyes on what is important in the various facets of my life.

As I look back and consider 2007, I achieved many of my goals and I can look back with a sense of accomplishment and peace. One area that I remember very fondly is the time I spent serving alongside the other volunteers of PASS.

This year completes my sixth and final year serving on the PASS Board of Directors. And as my time on the board comes to an end, I find that it's a strangely bitter-sweet feeling. I am certainly looking forward to the newfound free time that will accompany my transition off of the board. Serving on the board is a time consuming activity, to be sure. Anything worthwhile is. But, it is also one of the most rewarding and satisfying activities of my professional life. It has been a great honor and thrill to work with so many outstanding volunteers from around the world that give of themselves to make a more vibrant and lively SQL Server community. And I'm going to miss that tremendously when my time on the board is done.

Over the past year, the PASS volunteers have taken many steps toward our goals of being a truly global community of database

professionals working together for the common good of all. If you are a regular reader of this periodical or are involved with PASS in any substantial way, you already know of many of these initiatives. We have made major changes and improvements to our operations and administration; we're implementing a new IT infrastructure which will enhance the year-round benefits of being a PASS member; we're extending our reach in Europe, Australia, Central and South America, and Asia to add a broader perspective to the SQL Server community; and we're readying ourselves for the next release of the product we love; to name but a few.

Yes, we've come a long way with this past year and there is a bright future for the SQL Server community! And I'm glad to have been a part of it for the past six years. Although my role is changing, I'm still going to be active in the community that I am so passionate about.

So, as you think about your goals for 2008, remember that there is a place in the SQL Server community for you. Make it your goal to get involved.

European PASS Conference 2008

April 14th - 16th, 2008

The European PASS Conference is being held in Neuss, Germany in 2008.

It is a 2 day conference with 24+ technical sessions and an additional German track to choose from. The Keynote speaker this year is Greg Low. Spotlight speakers include James Luetkehoelter (Spyglass LLC), Allan Mitchell (Konesans), Remus Rusanu (Rusanu Consulting) and Chris Webb.

Two tracks of Pre-Conference seminars are also offered: BI with Reed Jacobsen (Hitachi Consulting), and DBA with Joseph Pilov and Bob Ward (Microsoft PSS).

Get a chance to deep dive into the new Microsoft SQL Server 2008 features - right after it's officially launched!

Click [here](#) for more information.

Interview with Andy Warren: SQL Saturday

Kathi Kellenberger



Andy Warren has been a long time supporter of PASS, speaking at the PASS Summit each year since 2000 and helping to start the SQL Server Standard magazine. Andy has been active in the user community, speaking at Code Camps and user group meetings in Florida, helping to launch SQLServerCentral.com and participating as an owner of the site through its sale in November, 2006. Andy and business partners Brian Knight and Steve Jones run Orlando based End to End Training, focusing on training beginning to intermediate SQL Server students throughout the country.

The Orlando SQL Server user group, oPASS, recently held the first ever SQLSaturday. Andy is the leading proponent of the event. I spent some time with Andy chatting about the SQLSaturday.

KATHI: First of all, congratulations on a job well done. Sounds like you had a great turn out and a very great success.

ANDY: Thanks Kathi. For a first event we were pleased with the results. Thanks to our volunteers, speakers, and sponsors everything went very smoothly, and we received a lot of positive feedback from our 200+ attendees.

KATHI: Please explain what SQLSaturday is.

ANDY: SQLSaturday is a free day of training with multiple tracks geared towards SQL Server professionals. It's very similar to the Code Camps that have been so popular in the .Net community. In addition to providing the free training, it's a way to have an annual membership drive and fundraiser for the local user group.

KATHI: What is the difference between a Code Camp and SQLSaturday?

ANDY: In a lot of ways there is not much difference. It is a free event; it's targeted at IT professionals, and it typically occurs on a weekend.

One obvious difference is that SQLSaturday focuses on topics related to SQL Server instead of .Net. Many of the Code Camps will have a few SQL Server sessions but they tend to be developer focused, and I would guess that not many DBA's would find those events as interesting.

A more subtle difference is that we work hard to be "sponsor friendly". The Code Camp philosophy is very non-commercial, but the reality is that free events have hidden costs. Rather than just solicit donations, we try to make a business case for why sponsors should spend money on our event and how we will help them see a reasonable ROI for that investment. I believe taking a more business like approach actually made it easier for us to get sponsorship money than it would have been if we just asked

for donations.

KATHI: What was the most challenging aspect of organizing the event?

ANDY: One of the things we struggled with was logistics. For example, how much soda do you buy? You have a lot of moving targets. You have a number of people who have registered, but you know only a percentage of those people are actually going to attend. Are they going to drink water? Are they going to drink Coke? How are they going to be fed?

KATHI: What aspect of the event turned out to be surprisingly easy?

ANDY: I would say getting speakers. Thanks to the fact that we have a strong network of communities here in Florida, and great support from Joe Healy, our local Microsoft Developer Evangelist, we ended up with more proposed sessions than we could use based on the room we had at the college.

KATHI: How did your call for speakers work?

ANDY: I put it in my blog. I sent out emails to everybody I knew including the people who ran Code Camps in Florida and our local group members. We made it easy to submit sessions online and to see all the sessions that had already been submitted. We also had a page that allowed attendees to post the name and level of a session they wanted to see at the event. This proved to be really useful for speakers who wanted to participate but didn't have a topic in mind.

KATHI: Many user groups are not set up as nonprofits and don't handle money. They might rely on sponsors to bring in food and door prizes for meetings. What advice do you have for groups who would like to host a SQLSaturday but are not in the position to deal with the money issues?

ANDY: I think someone has to be able to manage the money. Most user groups don't have that ability, so that means turning to a group member who has a business that would be willing to pass through the funds. As you know, my day job is running End to End Training, so here in Orlando I was in a good position to handle the funds for the event. We came up with a budget of \$4000 and let End To End Training provide that liquidity up front. As sponsors came on board, we were able to recoup that expense. It was easier to get sponsors since they were dealing with an actual company with a tax ID and that was able to take credit cards. We had a steering committee from oPASS that reviewed how the funds were spent and any remaining money is held for use by oPASS.

It's definitely a challenge if you don't have someone who can provide those services and that is something we're looking at to

see what we can do to help.

KATHI: Why did you choose a college to host the event?

ANDY: It was another case of borrowing lessons learned. The two Code Camps here in Orlando and the one in Tampa had been at colleges so there was a bit of a pattern established. We leveraged our partnership ONETUG (hosts of the Orlando Code Camp) to meet with Seminole Community College and it turned out to be a great fit. The college had just built a new mini-campus where a lot of their IT classes are held, and they were looking for ways to promote it.

KATHI: I noticed something on the SQLSaturday website about speaker workshops. Did you have the speaker workshops or is that something you plan to do for next year?

ANDY: End To End Training hosted several free four hour "How to be a Successful Technical Speaker" seminars. We plan to host the seminars three or four times a year and may expand to other cities. We are trying to grow local speakers, and this gives them the chance to practice and learn some tips and tricks. I think this is a smart thing for a user group to host. You can't learn this from a book; you need to get people in a classroom.

KATHI: You have a nice logo and a great name for your event. Will you make these available for other SQL Server user groups who would like to put on a similar event?

ANDY: Absolutely! Good branding will make it easier for everyone involved to understand the goal of the event.

KATHI: What do you see for the future of SQLSaturday

ANDY: We are still talking about the event and how we can make it better. We have pages of notes and ideas on what we can do better next time. I actually had lunch today with the people from the college to thank them again for the use of the facility and to ask them to book November 8th for SQLSaturday in Orlando 2008. Beyond that, I am doing some coaching for the Tampa event in January. Brian Knight, my business partner and current leader of the Jacksonville SQL group, is trying to plan one for mid to late 2008 in Jacksonville

That's really part one. My dream is to make this easier for people to do all over the country. Part of that is technology, having a website, making it easy to register people. That's the easy stuff. Some of the harder stuff - like what are the chances that we could provide liability insurance for anyone who wants to do one of these? Can we provide merchant card services? Can we provide checking account services? Can we provide liquidity? If someone like yourself comes to us and says "I've got five volunteers, and I think I can make this happen. I'm willing to do the work. Can I use your infrastructure?" we would love to be able to do that for you. That would really be a great thing to give

back to the community, and definitely not-for-profit.

There are hurdles figuring some of this out -- funding, the contract issues. The harder part is how we can coach those people. It really comes down to having one local person who makes a serious commitment of time, maybe 100 hours over three or four months for planning and marketing. We really need a good coaching plan.

I'm hoping over the next six months I can compile a very complete plan, maybe somewhere between a white paper and a book, which has a bunch of notes about what we did, what worked and what didn't. We would like to be able to hand you that really good document and say here is the checklist: you decide what you want to do for your event. The only way it is going to work is if there is a local person who has the fire, who wants to make this happen. But I think we could do a lot of things to help keep them on track.

This is a wonderful way to reach out to the SQL Server community and grow the local groups. I would love to see a dozen SQL Saturdays happen in 2008, and to see that number go up to 40 or 50 in 2009.

KATHI: Any final comments you would like to add?

I want to make sure that I thank Shawn Weisfeld, President of the Orlando .Net User Group, www.onetug.com. He was terrific about sharing all the lessons learned from their Code Camp to help us be successful. We went to many events over the last year to observe and take notes, but there is just no substitute for talking with someone who actually did it.

I also want to thank all the volunteers who did the real work. It's one thing to have a plan, something else to implement it. They went over and above the plan to really make the event work. If you've got good volunteers the rest is easy!

PASS Organization & Mission

PASS was founded by Microsoft and CA to provide users of SQL Server a peer network and to help build a body of expertise to help educate millions of SQL Server users around the world.

Currently, PASS is a global community for more than 25,000 SQL Server professionals. It is the first independent, user-run, not-for-profit association dedicated to providing SQL Server users around the world with the tools and knowledge to achieve unparalleled business results.

Our Mission:

- Provide a forum for SQL Server education
- Build and grow the SQL Server Community
- Facilitate member networking & provide an infrastructure to

enable the exchange of information within SQL Server disciplines- DBA/Developers, BI Professionals, etc.

- Work with Microsoft to influence the direction of the SQL Server product and services
- Publish high quality technical materials including the Connector & the SQL Server Standard Magazine
- Build the largest archive of user created SQL Server and Business Intelligence reference material

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