By Vaughn Dragland and Jane Jerrard

Attendees at the COMMON Fall 2005 Conference & Expo in Orlando, held September 18-22, were pleased with a new streamlined model of the conference schedule, and managed to pack in a full day’s worth of sessions Monday through Thursday. The conference featured a shorter day with no break for lunch, technical sessions scheduled during daytime time slots, and professional development sessions at the end of the day.

There was still time left over to visit the COMMON Expo and network at evening events! Here is a look at the conference highlights:

**A Soltis Start: Opening Session**

COMMON President Beverly Russell hosted the official start of the conference, where she announced some major highlights of the week ahead, along with some recent initiatives and developments outside the conference. She also introduced the two newest board members, Léo Lefebvre and Bruce “Hoss” Collins, and thanked retiring board members Charlie Massoglia and John Earl for their significant contributions to COMMON.

The COMMON Speaker Excellence Awards were presented by COMMON Conference Education Team Manager Bob Krzeczowski. Gold, silver, and bronze medals for top-rated sessions from the Spring 2005 Conference were distributed, as well as awards for best new session, best new speaker, best traditional lab, and best open lab. Russell then presented the Distinguished Service Award to Jim Fey for his years of dedication to COMMON’s conference education.

Next up was keynote speaker Dr. Frank Soltis, IBM Chief Scientist. Soltis started out by saying that he was recently talking with some young people about podcastaways.com, when he heard them referring to RPG programmers as “geek gods!” Unfortunately, he later realized that RPG stood for “role-playing games,” rather than the RPG we know. In a way though, the two groups have something in common, since the same technology can be found in the new iSeries processors as well as the latest gaming consoles. Plus, the very latest POWER chipset—the “Cell” chip (co-developed by IBM, Sony, and Toshiba, which will debut in the Sony PlayStation 3 next year) will eventually

Jim Fey, DSA recipient

(a) Cell processor block diagram and (b) die photo. The first generation Cell processor contains a power processor element (PPE) with a Power core; first- and second-level caches (L1 and L2); eight synergistic processor elements (SPEs) each containing a direct memory access (DMA) unit; a local store memory (LS) and execution units (SXUs); and memory and bus interface controllers – all interconnected by a coherent on-chip bus. (Cell die photo courtesy of Thomas Way, IBM Burlington.)
find its way into business systems as well.

The Cell chip incorporates a main POWER processor along with multiple IOPs on a single chip; in other words, “a system on a chip”!

This is in keeping with IBM’s five-year plan, announced this July, called the “IBM Systems Agenda,” which includes three basic elements: integrated, virtualized, and open standards-based architectures. In a nutshell, the iSeries, which already excels in those three strategic areas, will be the model upon which all IBM future systems will be based. As Soltis says, “The outlook is bright for iSeries” as we move into collaborative computing, enhanced visual capabilities, self-morphing software, and other future technologies. “The iSeries is right at the center of IBM’s strategy for future systems.”

Russell presented Soltis with one of the highest awards possible at COMMON—the 2005 President’s Award.

IBM Execs Next: iSeries Town Meeting

That same afternoon, Mark Shearer, General Manager of the IBM eServer iSeries, hosted the iSeries Town Meeting. He talked about the state of the iSeries and his continued plans. Peter Bingaman, VP of iSeries Marketing, and Maureen McGuire, Systems and Technology Group VP of Marketing, brought attendees up to date on marketing and some new awareness campaigns. The entire IBM executive team participated in the traditional Q&A, and attendees received free Welcome Packets.
Focus on Virtualization

In addition to more than 20 different Courses of Study covering everything from Linux to High Availability, the conference included a special educational focus on the hot topic of virtualization. Virtualization provides organizations with a consolidated and logical rather than physical view of data, computing power, and storage capacity. Special sessions and labs on this topic were available so that attendees could be among the first to get a solid education on one of the latest trends in the iSeries world.

An Exciting Expo

The COMMON Expo in Orlando was a racy one, with a racecar in the IBM booth and a Porsche on display just down the aisle. Nearly 90 exhibiting companies were on hand to answer questions and give advice, and there were plenty of tasty opportunities to browse the aisles, since a complimentary lunch was offered in the Expo on both Monday and Tuesday, as well as receptions on Sunday and Monday evening.

We Goofed!

In “Orlando Overview” in the August 2005 issue of COMMON. CONNECT, we listed the wrong professional development session for Randall Munson. He presented his award-winning session “The Serious Business of HUMOR!” for Professional Development Night at the Fall 2005 Conference.

In “Education for Execs” in the June 2005 issue of COMMON. CONNECT, we also attributed the wrong session to Randall Munson. At the 2005 COMMON IT Executive Conference, he presented “Success through Creativity and Innovation!” for executive attendees.

IT Executives

The fourth annual COMMON IT Executive Conference took place during the general conference, and drew rave reviews from the 20-plus high-level decision-makers who attended. Attendees of this conference-within-a-conference sat in special educational sessions, met with IBM executives, had a chance to visit the Expo, and networked among themselves.

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Have You Missed Our Email?

COMMON is using email more frequently now to communicate with our members. Our electronic messages include important conference updates, COMMON Board election information, and other organizational news.

Make sure you don’t miss out on these communications. If you haven’t received an email from COMMON lately, make sure we’re not on your “spam list.” Check the spam filter on your email and make sure common.org can get through. Or ask your system administrator to ensure that COMMON is not counted as a sender of spam.

If you have ever requested to be taken off our email list, then you won’t receive any messages from COMMON, regardless of the subject or the urgency. If you have requested removal from our email list in the past, please re-consider.

If you would like to receive messages from COMMON, contact the membership team at membership@common.org.

The highlight of Closing Session on Thursday evening was a special magic performance by Paul Tuohy.