

It's Almost Time to Cycle Down

Observations by Alan Sadowsky

Just a few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of attending the TPF User Group Conference up in Toronto, Canada. As it turns out, the hotel where the conference took place was also hosting another group of professionals at the same time – The American College of Surgeons. What I found most interesting was riding the elevators with some of these medical professionals. While there was constantly conversation between riders (and between floors), I couldn't help noticing that the doctors were never talking shop. There were lots of conversations about families, vacations, hobbies and the like, but never any “technical” talk. On the other hand, whenever a group of TPF'ers congregated at lunch, or at the bar, the shoptalk was incessant. The more I thought about it, the more I wondered why we transaction processing types were so fixated on the job. I think I know the reason why.

For almost all of us, TPF is not just a job. The vast majority of us have had the privilege of being in the business from the beginning. Maybe we weren't all there in the weaning days of the early sixties, but for the most part, we could be considered at least akin to those early pioneers of ACP. Some of us certainly were involved in the birthing process.

The point I think I'm trying to make here is that we're not a part of the technology. Rather, the technology is a part of us. TPF has artfully ingrained itself into our very being. Maybe not at a genetic level, but nonetheless it's become a part of all of us. Whether that's a good thing or not is debatable. The simple fact is our working lives do overflow into our personal lives, and I don't believe that this bond is broken when we choose to retire. Having said that, I have an idea that I'd like to propose – The TPF Retirement Home or, as I like to call it, “TPF Acres”.

Consider if you will a deluxe retirement facility for TPF people. Luxurious accommodations, all of the

amenities, lots of planned activities, and neighbors you've known for years. Granted, many everyday occurrences (planned or otherwise) would take on new meaning, and given the circumstance of age they would also present new challenges. For example, Commit/Rollback might now involve a rocking chair, performance problems might be confined to the bedroom, and taking a dump... well let's not even go there. Think of it. A senior citizens home for Senior TPF Programmers!

Applications people, Systems people, Operations people... folks from every discipline sharing a common history, and a common address. It's not as crazy as it sounds. You want great food? We'll have a four star kitchen serving the finest cuisine. You want golf? We'll have our own 18-hole course. You want services? How about onsite dry cleaning, and grocery shopping, and a library, and a pharmacy? Throw in a movie theater, swimming pools, combination clinic and health club/spa, tennis courts, gaming rooms, and every suite of living quarters wired for the latest technology. Of course I've saved the best for last - The Data Center. I'll come back to that in a minute.

By now, I'm sure all of you are thinking two very specific thoughts. One is that this all sounds fantastic. The other is “How the hell can I possibly afford something like this? Fear not children. All is well. All is good. Come into the light.

Think about what TPF Acres would really represent. What we would have, what we would all be a part of is the greatest collection of TPF knowledge and expertise in the world. Not just the people who worked in TPF, but the people who “created” TPF. The originators of Capture/Restore, the authors of VFA, the parents (if you will) of Recoup and TPFDF. The artisans, the developers, the best of the best!

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There isn't a TPF shop in the world that wouldn't pay us for our services. In fact I wouldn't be at all surprised if IBM themselves was our biggest customer. Application development, systems development, ongoing maintenance, installations and upgrades... there wouldn't be any contract that we couldn't handle, and handle well. And don't forget about your personal wish lists. Here's the opportunity, the time and the resources to work on that "idea" you've been carrying around in your head all these years. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you The Data Center.

Top of the line hardware on raised floor, running the latest software. TPF, MVS, VM, LINUX, NT, and anything else you need. Full redundancy at every turn, standby UPS, lot's of office space, and conference rooms that would put many corporate boardrooms to shame.

There aren't any of us that are getting any younger. The gray hairs are quickly outnumbering the darker ones, and if you take a look around your respective workplaces, you'll probably notice that the average age of your colleagues is in the 45-55 year range. The truth of the matter is that within the next 10 to 15 years, most of us will be retiring, and that loss to the TPF technical workforce cannot be replaced. The "kids" in our shops will obviously step up to fill the void, but the measure of knowledge and the talent isn't going to be there once we're gone.

I believe we have a golden opportunity to not only bridge that gap but to have some fun doing it, and at the same time generate enough income to pay for it all. You might want to give it some thought. It's not that far-fetched.

