President's Report, June 2006

The year past has been a steady one for the Foundation, characterised by a gradual increase in both our membership and the assistance we have been able to provide for core development of Firebird. We had a mid-term spike in activity when, for the first time, the Foundation took on the organisation of the Firebird Conference.

Support for Development

During the year we have been able to increase not only the number of grant allocations but also the size of some. The project Lead, Dmitry Yemanov, was able to give up his day job and contribute his working hours almost entirely to Firebird and Alex Peshkov has been more than half-time. This year, Adriano dos Santos Fernandes took up an allocation for assisting with code scrutineering, becoming one of a team of two, with Claudio Valderrama, to spread a task that has become progressively heavier. The core team continues to receive assistance through grants for the work of Vlad Horsun as a core coder and Pavel Cisar in QA development, while a small amount of assistance for DotNet driver development and support continues for Carlos Guzman. Recently, Vladimir Tsvigun requested that his grant to assist his ODBC driver development work be discontinued temporarily, due to imminent changes at his place of work.

I ask members to recognise the excellence of the contributions by our developer grantees, as well as those by developers who do not receive financial assistance for their efforts. The interests of the Firebird Project are close to all of our hearts and we are indeed blessed with a team of exceptionally fine, dedicated technicians.

Conference

Last year, Holger Klemt, of H-K Software, handed over the role of organising and provisioning the third annual international Firebird Conference to the Foundation. Holger and his team were not far away, though, and provided the same excellent technical support to the 2005 conference as they had done previously. On the provisioning side, Pavel Cisar made all the practical arrangements in Prague and Ivan Prenosil was on hand during the conference for logistical support. IB Phoenix managed the finances and the Foundation took care of the presenters, papers and publicity.

At times there were concerns that the conference might not make the grade financially. Finally, however, after bills were paid, there was a useful surplus of about $2000 USD which H-K Software and IB Phoenix handed over to the Foundation as a "float" for the next conference.

The 2005 conference was voted an outstanding success by all who participated, notwithstanding the deficiencies in the services provided by the hotel. The Foundation is now preparing for the 2006 conference in November. It will again be in Prague but, this time, in a more appealing venue.

New Memberships

The year has seen a satisfying rise in new memberships: 11 full voting Corporate, eight full voting individual and 33 Associate members up to the financial cut-off date (June 9). A recent reminder campaign brought in several long-standing overdue subscriptions, too, for which we thank those concerned.

At last year's conference and in the committee room since, the issue of recruiting new members and sponsors was discussed. There is a widespread feeling that all members could fulfil a role here, by actively "selling" the idea of

membership to our customers. We can all do this with a small amount of individual effort, by placing our "Supporting Firebird" logos and Foundation links on our websites and by preparing brief introduction sheets that we can offer to those who buy our software. The payback from such small effort could be significant for the Foundation.

Sponsorships

Sponsorships, usually by corporations, continue to be an essential source of income to support our funding objectives. Currently, we have four gold sponsors (~ $6000 p.a.) in Broadview Software, IB Phoenix, Tabulex and DRB Systems, and two silver, in Stella Ltd and Morfik. (The Morfik sponsorship came in after our financial cut-off.) We have two bronze sponsors and a few "percentage of sales" sponsors that top up their contributions periodically.

On the down-side, we lost one silver sponsor, while another sponsor reduced its commitment. Some of the loss has been counter-balanced by donations from user groups and individuals and fund-raising at the conferences in Prague and Brazil.

Do I need to state the obvious - that there is no such thing as "too many sponsors"?

New Activities

Productive new activities initiated by Foundation members have been fairly inconspicuous during the past year, despite a groundswell of enthusiasm by Firebird supporters in the Firebird-General list to publicise Firebird's virtues and propagate multiple sources of information on the Web. Carlos Cantu took the baton earlier in the year and produced a short introduction brochure which he published on his website and made available to others. People seemed to prefer to "do their own thing", rather than use the Foundation's Connect! initiative as a hub for promoting Firebird in a coordinated way.

The FFMembers forum, supposedly where the grass roots of the Foundation exist, appears to have been observing a year's silence.

The possibility of funding the project's user documentation has come up for periodic discussion, both at the Prague conference and in the committee room. In summary, it seems apparent that the Foundation's funding capacity is not yet at a point where it could extend to a major grant allocation for the purpose of speeding up the completion of the main user docs. Earlier this year, the hard-working coordinator of the Firebird-Docs project, Paul Vinkenoog, agreed to participate in a committee discussion about what it would take to get the coal-face work done. Paul's strongest point was that the speed of progress was impeded much less by lack of funding than by lack of writers willing or able to stay on task. The committee discussed ways that the Foundation might help to initiate some form of incentive funding to attack the big task in small, progressive chunks. I hope that the Members' forum would wish to pick up this thread in the forthcoming months and formulate a practicable scheme to make this happen.

Conclusion

In concluding, I wish to thank the committee for its efforts during the year to keep things moving along smoothly. I want to thank all of the subscribing members for their continued support. The income from subscriptions is essential to the continuity of our funding support so we are especially appreciative of those who pay up promptly when renewal is due. Thank you to all of the sponsors and donors for your generosity and to the Honorary members for your presence in our midst and your marvellous work in developing and producing Firebird.

Paul Beach
President