

SEPG 2004 Showcases Enterprise Process Improvement in Orlando

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This year's Software Engineering Process Group (SEPGSM) 2004 conference was held on March 8-11, in Orlando, Florida, and attracted more than 1900 attendees, the highest number since SEPG 2001 in New Orleans. The conference theme was "Enterprise Process Improvement: Better Products, Dependable Services, Cultures of Excellence," and the presentations, tutorials, and panel discussions chosen for this year's conference all helped to advance this theme.

The conference attendees came from industry, defense agencies, and academic institutions, but all shared an interest in process improvement. A total of seven tracks were made available to this year's attendees: two dealing with process improvement, two with Capability Maturity Model Integration® (CMMI®), a special topics track, a Team Software ProcessSM/Personal Software ProcessSM (TSPSM/PSPSM) track, and a measurement and analysis track. SEPG attendees could select from more than 90 presentations and tutorials, which had been reviewed and recommended by 94 volunteers from the process community.

The keynote speakers at SEPG also came from diverse backgrounds, but each speaker emphasized his profession's commitment to process improvement in his keynote presentation. Dr. Jay Apt from Carnegie Mellon University's Electricity Industry Center discussed a failed space mission in "Ariane 501: Software Engineering Failure or Systems Engineering Failure?" Mr. Kevin Carroll, from the U.S. Army's Program Executive Office Enterprise Information Systems presented the unique process challenges in his organization and explained how process improvement has helped.

The conference location figured heavily in Dr. Thomas McCann's presentation. In "Behind the Magic: Science, Technology, and Process," McCann, the senior vice president for engineering at Walt Disney Imagineering, discussed process in his corporation and reminded attendees that process improvement happens in every organization. Dr. Thomas Wagner, from Robert Bosch, GmbH, continued this theme with his presentation, "Bringing Software on the Road," which discussed the auto industry and process.

"I think that people enjoyed being in Orlando and what it had to offer, especially to families," said Bill Peterson, the head of the SEI's Software Engineering Process Management Program. "I was pleased to see an emphasis on products and services, not just products and services delivered by the SEI, but by our SEI Partners. The tracks were more focused on CMMI and less on the Software CMM, and more on TSP but also measurement and analysis."

Dr. Caroline Graettinger, this year's program chair, agreed. "As process technologies have evolved over the years, so has the SEPG conference evolved. We are moving to encompass a broader set of process topics that pertain to the entire software-intensive enterprise."

Other highlights of this year's conference included the delivery of the first Japanese translation of CMMI. Representatives from IBM Japan and Japan's Information-Technology Promotion Agency were in Orlando to present Peterson with a printed copy of the model, which is available on the SEI's Web site at <http://www.sei.cmu.edu/cmmi/translations>. This is the first translation of the CMMI, but other translations are on the way, including a Traditional Chinese translation of the CMMI models.

Many SEI members came to Orlando and participated in new member activities at SEPG. In lieu of a special breakfast, this year's Member Assembly was converted into a luncheon, complete with guest speakers and an awards ceremony. Members also received access to a member lounge at the conference, which included daily breakfast.

"The conference was great for a number of reasons," said Julia O'Rourke, the SEPG 2004 conference manager. "One was the location, and another was the program, which was focused on enterprise process improvement related to systems and software engineering. We designed a program that was accessible to a lot of professionals, and I think they appreciated that."

Peterson supported this idea. "Generally, every year, the conference gets better. More attendees is one measure, but also I think stronger name recognition, stronger presentation content, and better understanding by people who've actually done process improvement using the newer products such as TSP, CMMI, and Six Sigma also contribute. I think that it gets better every year because more people have more experience with process improvement products and want to share those experiences and talk about them."

Over 80% of SEPG 2004 attendees gave the conference a rating of "excellent" when asked about their overall satisfaction with the conference, and almost half of all attendees surveyed said that they would be attending next year's SEPG conference. Attendees' comments were overwhelmingly positive, and reflected the conference effort to make process improvement accessible for everyone. "Being relatively new to process improvement, there was a lot of good information to absorb," remarked James Hastings, of Aspen Systems Corporation in Rockville, MD. Other attendees commented on the "diversity in complexity of levels" at the conference. "The presentations and tutorials were generally excellent," commented Lyn Elliott Dillinger of Process Improvement Associates. "I'm going home with really good ideas."

For additional information on SEPG, including copies of presentations given at the conference, the SEPG 2004 CD-ROM is available at <http://www.sei.cmu.edu/sepg> for \$50. Information about SEPG 2005, which will be held in Seattle, Washington, is available at the Web site. The conference theme will be "Deliver Winning Products Through Process Improvement."

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