

## CHI Local SIGs in the Americas Outside of the U.S.

CHI Local SIGs are active or under development in many parts of the world (see <http://www.acm.org/sig-chi/local-sigs/> for a list of most of these). This column provides a peek at what is and has been happening with CHI Local SIGs in the Americas outside of the U.S.

### Canada

Canada is home to 4 CHI Local SIGs: one of the oldest Local SIGs; the first student CHI Local SIG; a Local SIG that became dormant for awhile but is thriving again; and a Local SIG in its early days of development.

**ToRCHI.** One of the oldest CHI Local SIGs is ToRCHI, serving the Toronto Region in Ontario. As Kate Ehrlich documented in her profile of ToRCHI in the January 95 Local SIGs column, Marilyn Mantei was responsible for ToRCHI's beginnings, and employees and students of academic institutions were key to ToRCHI's early operation and success.

William Hunt, ToRCHI's Co-Chair and Information Co-Director, describes ToRCHI's present goals as follows:

"The general goal of the ToRCHI executive is to serve the diverse HCI community by:

- 1. providing informative monthly meetings;
- 2. providing skill-learning workshops;
- 3. providing social events and times for enjoyment and networking;
- 4. providing a library of more in depth information;
- 5. providing electronic information of local and global events and jobs via a mailing list;
- 6. allowing ToRCHI members some exposure via our public electronic directory."

ToRCHI's collaborative workshops with CITO, a local government-funded institution, have been particularly successful and the primary source of ToRCHI income.

Another key to ToRCHI's success during recent years has probably been an increase in morale due to their decision to discontinue the annual Local SIGs CHI Conference Challenge -- a clever competition ToRCHI "sponsored" for a few years but always lost to BayCHI.:-)

**WatCHI.** On February 23 of this year, the University of Waterloo became home to WatCHI, the first chartered CHI student Local SIG. WatCHI's pre-charter days had been spent defining its direction, ensuring it did not encroach on ToRCHI territory, and figuring out the mechanics of running and promoting a Local SIG. Tom Carey provided faculty support.

Henry Chen, WatCHI's first Chair, has described WatCHI's primary objective as "mainly in education and promoting interest and awareness in HCI for students," and enabling communication among students of different faculties involved in HCI. The group presently has approximately 20 members and meets at least once a month to discuss HCI topics and weekly to foster social interaction outside of academic interests. (See the June 99 issue of ACM MemberNet for more information about WatCHI.)

**CapCHI.** Tina Groves, Co-Chair of the chapter in the Capital of Canada -- Ottawa, provides a peek at CapCHI's recent history and at some details of CapCHI activity and operations:

"Two years ago, CapCHI had "died." The previous Chair had been in a car accident the previous spring and had also started a new job. After running the chapter single-handedly for almost 2 years, he was burnt out.

When myself and a couple of others found out CapCHI was no longer active, we made some calls and managed to get a group of 8-9 people together to see what interest there was in reestablishing the local SIG. In January, 1998, we had our first meeting for that year. At the end of the year, we had a party for the executive and all volunteers agreed to stand for the next year.

This year has been hugely successful due to the program Mike Atyeo put together and coordination of the other volunteers. We re-instituted a formal membership. We charge \$30 a year for

10 meetings. Students are charged \$10.

At each meeting, we have posters for the next meeting available so that attendees can take them to their workplace/school to post. We also try to have a survey to hand out at the end of each meeting to get a meeting evaluation and information on a current topic. For example, the survey could ask if one is interested in volunteering or what topics one is interested in.

This year and last, we have had several sessions where the speaker was originally brought by a local company. However, CapCHI benefited because the coordinator also happened to be part of the CapCHI executive so the chapter also got a presentation without cost.

We also experimented with a panel this spring. Usability experts from the area were invited to give their views on usability testing and answer ques-

tions. Mike coordinated the panel and did an excellent job. Meeting attendance was 45+. I believe that involving the local community in this manner attracted both HCI leaders and the people who knew these people. People were attending because they wanted to hear “their person” speak.

With respect to public relations, we advertise in three, free publications and maintain a web site advertising our meetings. We also maintain an e-mail list of about 250+ names. Each month, a meeting notice is forwarded to all the people on this list. As well, a brief meeting reminder is sent two days before a meeting to further encourage people to attend.

This year, we will have some executive turn-over. My primary concern is how to maintain enthusiasm for those people who have volunteered for the past year-and-a-half and how to integrate the new volunteers so that they feel they are making a worthwhile contribution.”

**VanCHI.** A few years ago, lists of prospective chapters included a reference to a chapter in Vancouver BC, but very little ever happened to get the chapter going. Kori Inkpen, VanCHI Program Chair, tells us what has been happening lately and what is to come:

“We are pleased to announce a very positive and energetic revival of VanCHI. Our goal is to serve British Columbia's interface design, usability, and research communities by raising awareness of CHI activities, projects, issues and initiatives in the BC community, and to foster understanding of the importance of Human Factors in systems design. We plan to provide a forum to facilitate learning and professional development among the VanCHI membership and in the community.

VanCHI will have regular monthly meetings with expert speakers presenting new technologies, trends and issues in our industry and professional communities, with a particular focus on methodologies, approaches, and new research. All meetings will include an interactive period where

participants can share their own ideas, opinions, feedback, and experience.”

James Willock, VanCHI Co-Chair, reports that VanCHI's first three meetings since the announcement of VanCHI's revival have been great successes.

### **Brazil**

Raquel O. Prates describes the situation in Brazil:

“In Brazil, we have recently organized a geographically dispersed HCI community. One of the factors that helped us consolidate this community was the creation of a national prospective Local Chapter, which fostered interaction among HCI researchers all over Brazil. However, the problem with being a national prospective Local Chapter in a big country such as Brazil is that people are great distances apart and we are not able to have regular meetings more than once a year. Even this one meeting requires a great deal of organization and funding.

Creating a national Local Chapter plays an important role not only in consolidating the Brazilian HCI community. First of all, having support from SIGCHI/ACM has been very appealing to our new community, because HCI is still seen with some suspicion by some members of the Brazilian Computing Society. Second, the Local Chapter has offered an opportunity for us to interact with other people and communities linked to HCI all over the world and gain some international visibility.

Although members of the Brazilian HCI community agree that turning our Prospective Local Chapter into a chartered one is a most important step to take, we are having some problems in putting it into action. Our target is to foster international cooperation and have support from SIGCHI/ACM. Within the country, the members of our community are interacting well through a national HCI discussion list and the annual workshop (of which the Local Chapter meeting is part). The difficulties we are having are: 1) getting volunteers involved to actually keep up the continuous work, and 2)

offering some new kinds of interaction to the Brazilian HCI community, in order to keep people involved.”

### **Mexico**

Alfredo Sanchez describes the situation in Mexico:

“After about two years as “prospective member,” CHI-Mexico joined the group of officially chartered Local SIGs on April 27, 1999. A number of questions this event raises include:

- Why did it take this long?
- Why has the Mexican HCI community integrated so slowly in spite of its geographical closeness to the United States?
- Can CHI-Mexico build enough critical mass?
- Will the “chartered” status of the group foster increased awareness of the importance of HCI in Mexico?

Clearly, the major obstacles for becoming a chartered group are not exclusive to the emerging HCI community in Mexico. The Mexican computer science community as a whole is in the process of becoming more integrated and identifying areas in which there is a significant number of researchers doing relevant work. In 1997, we established a Special Interest Group in Computer-Mediated Interaction (<http://ict.udlap.mx/imc>) within the Mexican Computer Society (SMCC, <http://www.lania.mx/~smcc>). Around mid-September, 1999, the Mexican Computer Society will hold what will be its Second National Conference (<http://titan.udlap.mx/~enc99>). At this conference, the HCI community will have a chance to get together at a Workshop after two years (the previous conference was held in 1997). The HCI membership is small (20+ full members, 15+ student members). Many of our members are also participating in other SIGs. For example, those doing CSCW work are involved with the Distributed Systems SIG, whereas those working on user requirements or usability are often involved with the Software Engineering SIG. Considering the small size of the entire community, this often undermines integration efforts. Other related factors include the fact that most of the membership comes from

undergrad universities with heavy course loads which leave little time for research or even just volunteer community-oriented work, the small size of our software industry, and the high ACM membership fees (for people being paid in pesos).

Fortunately, things are changing. It is more common today to find an HCI area in software companies established in Mexico. There are some college study programs which include courses in HCI. The National Center for Evaluation (Ceneval), which designs tests for recent graduates, includes HCI as one of the major areas to be evaluated for Computer Science and Informatics graduates. Our SIG is

represented in the committee designing the tests. Most definitely, the recognition of our group by ACM comes to strengthen the presence of HCI in Mexico.

One of our main activities this year is the organization of the HCI Workshop referred to above. We will invite two international keynote speakers, and we hope our newly gained status will facilitate the tasks of contacting potential invitees and obtaining financial support for our dissemination activities in what we expect to be our group's consolidation stage. We are also participating in the organization of an International Workshop on Groupware (<http://cscw.cicese.mx/>

[~cscw/criwg99/](http://cscw.criwg99/)), which will take place in Cancun, Mexico. We believe support for this event can also be facilitated by our Local SIG contacts."

#### **Participation in the CHI 99 Local SIGs Workshop**

All of the Local SIGs described above sent representatives to the third annual Local SIGs workshop at CHI 99. More about that workshop and its many attendees will appear in the next issue of SIGCHI Bulletin.

*Richard I. Anderson, Local SIGs  
Chair  
rianderson@acm.org*