

# conference **REPORT**

by Joe Maloney



## vBSDcon ([www.verisign.com](http://www.verisign.com))

**vBSDcon** is a conference organized by Verisign with the help of other vendors. It occurs every two years on the East Coast and this year took place at the Westin Hotel in Reston, Virginia, September 10 through September 13, 2015.

I can tell you that my trip to vBSDcon contained more than a few surprises. When I arrived, I thought I could get away with hiding in the back of the room and remain more or less undetected. I figured I would probably learn a few things, and then sneak back home without ever having to say much to anyone. Well, that changed radically as the day progressed.

Before I knew what was happening, Dru Lavigne invited me to have a peek into a developer summit, which is normally for FreeBSD committers only. While some of the discussion was over my head—like the concurrency kit topic, it nevertheless gave me some valuable insight into internals I did not know about.

The next topic brought back interests I'd had in the past, but forgotten—for example, running FreeBSD on embedded devices and how to easily test porting to embedded devices using QEMU. There was also a very interesting discussion about compiler toolchain problems, and as a result of that, I now know where to start to build that custom image for my mikrotik router running the mipsbe platform!

I witnessed some side conversations during breaks where things really started to happen. Normally one would have to spend a lot of time researching the information that was freely shared at the conference. It was like 10 emails were magically reduced to 45 seconds of conversation with the right people. That was a very cool and unexpected experience!

Lunch was an excellent place for networking, and I had a great time socializing with some people who worked on Cisco products. The topic of intrusion prevention systems came up and I became immediately engaged in the discussion as this was something I had been working on. It was so great to get feedback on some of the different

options and to talk about the advantages of each.

Back in the lobby I found myself involved in a discussion about automation, where people were talking about projects like Puppet and Ansible. I was able to get a few questions answered and we discussed the pros and cons. This turned out to be valuable information that actually inspired me to begin some new projects when I returned to work.

Around 5:00 or so I met up with some of the Verisign crew. We had a short discussion about how I came to know about the conference through BSD Now. I could tell these folks were passionate about putting on this event for the FreeBSD Project. It was great to meet them and hang out, and I was impressed with their interest in giving back to the community. Around 6:00 I was blown away by the presentation in the dinner room. I grabbed a free beer and met even more interesting people. Popcorn shrimp and other appetizers were served to us while we were talking among ourselves, and we all felt completely spoiled!

I found myself involved in another conversation, this time about Samba. The fellow I was speaking with had a friend who did some work at the OpenBSD project, and when he showed up I did nothing but pepper him with OpenBSD questions—about the community, where the project is going, and how upgrades are done—and he was happy to answer all of them.

Finally, I took a quick stroll downstairs where I listened in on a conversation about Ethernet drivers in FreeBSD. Overall, I'd say it was like being on the FreeBSD mailing list without ever having to read. I gained a lot of insight into things I didn't know about like how drivers were being written and how things could be optimized.

Day two was when I began to hear about mat-



ters that specifically related to my work. The first talk was by Michael Dexter on bhyve. I asked a series of questions whose answers have helped me plan ahead for migrating virtual machines and solving current storage limitations with proprietary virtualization storage formats.

There were a lot of great conversations and talks, and I noted many ideas that I knew I would reflect on later. I used github to start a few repositories as well. I gained a lot of information that I

could take back to work from the hallway talks. It was so easy to just walk around and find an interesting conversation.

I spent some time in the hacker lounge debugging why the Surface Pro 3 wouldn't boot and received a lot of helpful tips about how to further debug the kernel. IX put together an excellent party that evening with great food and more great talks, as well.

If you're interested in the BSDs, whether you're an admin, developer, or enthusiast, vBSDcon is a great place to go. I'm planning to bring a friend next time around. I am more of an admin than a developer and this was my first time attending a BSD conference. I can wholeheartedly recommend this to non-developers, as it is a great way to network with the many other non-developers who will be present, and the developers were more than willing to teach anyone what they needed to know. Thanks to all involved in putting together this wonderful event. ●

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