

new faces

of FreeBSD

BY DRU LAVIGNE



This column aims to shine a spotlight on contributors who recently received their commit bit and to introduce them to the FreeBSD community. In this installment, the spotlight is on **Thomas Munro**, who received his src bit in October.

Tell us a bit about yourself, your background, and your interests.

- I am a hacker and committer on the PostgreSQL project, and I'm employed by EnterpriseDB. I've been doing open-source work from my base in Wellington, New Zealand, for about four years. Before that I did a decade or two of proprietary Java, Lisp, C and C++ work on many flavors of Unix, mostly in Europe, mostly in finance/trading technology. I'm interested in finding ways to make PostgreSQL and FreeBSD work together better in terms of performance, correctness, security, and observability.

How did you first learn about FreeBSD and what about FreeBSD interested you?

- I ran into FreeBSD years ago in various contexts, but I first installed it on my own hardware just three years ago because I wanted ZFS for a home storage box. I found myself spending more and more time logged into that machine to do all kinds of work, because it was more fun there. Before long I was using FreeBSD for several projects that needed web servers and database servers. I was also curious about kqueue and dtrace. FreeBSD is easy to use, well documented, actively developed, easy to contribute to, and has a really good book for curious newbie kernel hackers (*The Design & Implementation of the FreeBSD Operating System*). It has a critical mass and a vibrant community, but at the same time there is enough low-hanging fruit for new people to make meaningful contributions. Then there is the rich history of BSD and its gigantic contributions to the technology and culture of our industry. Finally, I can't deny that installing it for the first time felt like a small act of rebellion.

How did you end up becoming a committer?

- Once I had switched to FreeBSD as my main development environment for everyday work on PostgreSQL, I wanted to modify it to provide missing things. I managed to get four patch-sets committed: PROC_PDEATHSIG_CTL, setproctitle_fast(), shm_open()/shm_unlink() support for truss, and expose_authok for pam_exec.so. Humble beginnings and in quite different areas, but they scratched an itch relating to work I was doing, helped me learn the ropes and put me in contact with a couple of committers. I have a shopping list of further patches in development, and I was talking to one of my future mentors about some of them on Freenode IRC. He put my name forward as a potential committer. I accepted.

How has your experience been since joining the FreeBSD Project? Do you have any advice for readers who may be interested in also becoming a FreeBSD committer?

- It's early days, and my involvement will be sporadic due to other commitments, but I was happy to commit a patch submitted via bugzilla to fix a 30-year-old bug in pom(6). I'm also excited to make it to the BSD devroom at FOSDEM, which will be a first for me.

As for becoming a committer, I can only say what worked for me: find weak points in FreeBSD for your workload or area of interest. Hack. Submit patches. Respond to feedback and pay attention to the Project's way of doing things. Make your plans and interests known and talk to people. •

DRU LAVIGNE is a FreeBSD doc committer and the author of *BSD Hacks* and *The Best of FreeBSD Basics*.