

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 month's column, the spotlight is on **Mitchell Horne**, who received his src bit in March.



Mitchell Horne

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

- I grew up on the east coast of Canada but am currently living in Ontario. I am a student at the University of Waterloo, where I'm in the final year of my undergrad studying computer engineering. I've been a computer enthusiast since I was a teenager when I began experimenting with GNU/Linux distributions. Since that time, it was always a goal of mine to contribute to the open-source world.

Outside of computing, I'm interested in performing arts such as comedy and music. I've done improv comedy for several years, and I teach it to Canadian high school students.

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

- Although I had heard of FreeBSD, I had never actually tried it until I was on the job. At the beginning of 2018, I was extremely fortunate to be hired as one of the Foundation's co-op students. During those four months, I was exposed to many different areas of FreeBSD and got to work on exciting projects such as the early version of `kcov(4)`, which would eventually enable the Syzkaller project (<https://github.com/google/syzkaller>) on FreeBSD.

There was some initial friction transitioning from a purely Linux background, but I very quickly realized that at its core FreeBSD is a really exciting system with a lot to offer. The cohesiveness of an entire operating system, great documentation, and a no-nonsense but welcoming community are just a few of the things that made FreeBSD a pleasure to work on during my co-op. It also opened my eyes to how much there was to learn, and this made FreeBSD something I wanted to keep working on beyond my co-op.

How did you end up becoming a committer?

- After my co-op ended, I didn't submit anything for several months—until around September 2018, when I obtained a machine I could dedicate to FreeBSD development. From there, I began experimenting with the RISC-V port and after some initial struggles getting set up, I began submitting small patches. I have

found this to be a rewarding area of the system to work on, since there is still a lot to be done with only a few people actively working on it. Plus, it was a good opportunity to learn about an up-and-coming computer architecture.

I continued making submissions, and the main feature I worked on was adding minidump support for RISC-V, which took me a couple months to complete. That project taught me a lot because it touched several areas and subsystems of FreeBSD, but thankfully Mark Johnston (markj@) and John Baldwin (jhb@) provided a lot of help when I needed it through reviews and questions on IRC. After that feature was submitted, Mark asked me if I'd like to be a committer, to which I enthusiastically said yes.

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?

- My experience since joining has been quite positive. The community is very welcoming, and it is a huge honor to feel that I am actually a part of it now. School has kept me very busy since joining, so I haven't been quite as active as I would like. Unfortunately, I had to miss this year's BSDCan due to school priorities but am looking forward to next year's conference where I will hopefully get to meet some of the committers and community members that I look up to.

My advice for anyone wishing to contribute to FreeBSD or to become a committer is to not get discouraged. When I first started, I found it incredibly overwhelming as the codebase is huge and there are so many different areas you could dive into. If you are not already an expert in a particular area (like I wasn't), then I suggest that in the short term you should learn to be happy with the small things—whether that means inconsequential bug fixes or simple documentation improvements, it all helps. Trust that over time you will build knowledge and familiarity with the system. I still spend much more time reading code than writing it, but I always feel like I am learning something new.

Additionally, I'd suggest asking for help as much as you can. I'm guilty of not doing so as often as I really should, but when I do, I end up learning more than I would on my own. There are a lot of really smart people in this community who are happy to share their knowledge with those willing to ask.

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