

## INTERVIEW

# Richard Dice and Karen Pauley: "State of TPF"

*Renée Bäcker (RB):* Hi Karen, hi Richard! Thanks for taking the time to do our third interview about the state of The Perl Foundation (TPF). In 2009 loads of things happened in the Perl world. I like to speak about these things and what will or might happen in 2010. Our readers know Richard, so Karen can you introduce yourself?

*Karen Pauley (KP):* Hi Renée. I will try to introduce myself.

I have been involved with the Perl Community since the year 2000, although I've never worked as a Perl programmer: I had been a C and SQL developer until 1999 when I switched career to manage a team of Perl programmers. After that I ran a few small technology companies.

In March 2008 TPF made an open call for volunteers to fill the role of Steering Committee Chair. 16 months before that I had moved to Japan and had been reducing my time spent running businesses, so that meant I had more time to dedicate to a community project. I felt that the TPF role, which involved managing a variety of different projects, was a good fit. I applied and got the post. I still hold the post of Steering Committee Chair, as I imagine that my role of Vice-President will be temporary.

*RB:* Richard, Karen is the new vice president of TPF since your TPF grant was accepted and Jim Brandt - the former vice president - became the new president. Can you tell something about this grant and what you have done so far? How can our readers help you to achieve your goals?

*Richard Dice (RD):* Hi Renée. I'm happy to be interviewed by you again.

Your question about the grant skips some of the basic history of it, so I will describe some of that now. The Ian Hague dona-

tion that TPF received in May 2008 ([http://www.perlfoundation.org/ian\\_hague\\_perl\\_6\\_development\\_grants](http://www.perlfoundation.org/ian_hague_perl_6_development_grants)) was meant to provide support for two things: direct support of Perl 6 efforts, and to provide resources for TPF to improve itself. Regarding the second point, earlier this year I made an application to TPF to support my time to work on TPF improvements. This began a lengthy process that included both internal TPF Board of Directors discussion as well as a community feedback component. The process was finalized by the Board in July 2009, with the following outcomes: a task list of deliverables was created that TPF recognized would improve the organization; I would work on this list on a grant basis; and I would remove myself from the TPF Board and the position of President for the duration of the grant.

The work items are almost entirely TPF internal items which when completed will have almost no recognizable outside effects. They will however make TPF a more capable organization, and so what the Perl community at large will notice is TPF being a more capable, more active organization that is better able to support Perl and the community. The items are: improvements to donor relations and our donation system, improvements to internal budgeting procedures and budget projects, creation of a "federated" donation model, better organization of TPF internal documents, and press kit creation and creation of a press release procedure. What should be obvious looking at this list is that these items are most certainly un-sexy. They are the kind of boring, tedious, time-consuming administrative items that most programmers find highly distasteful. They are also difficult to accomplish within volunteer organizations like TPF. Basically, this work is the kind of dirt that accumulates in the corners of organizations gradually over time when no-one is looking, and eventually when it is noticed it's quite difficult to do anything about it.



Regarding receiving help from the \$foo readership -- your offer is appreciated, but for the most part it isn't something that can be done outside of the TPF organization. It is after all a list of internal work. There are two exceptions to this, though, one small and the other somewhat larger. The first exception is the press release strategy. I will need to make a public outreach to Perl community members everywhere for their input on what IT industry press exists in their locality (city, country, etc.) so that they can be contacted whenever a press release matter comes up. We will also need a standing pool of volunteer translators into local languages for press releases.

The larger item of help is the federated donation model. That is, we believe that there is a great deal of local information about Perl-using companies out there that TPF cannot reach out to itself, either because of language barriers or (more likely) because of lack of man-power within TPF. We need to create procedures to rely on "local champions" who can organize TPF outreach and donation-seeking activities in cities or countries around the world. Over the past several years of my involvement in TPF several times people have approached me asking how they can help TPF with fund-raising, and every time I've lacked the basic materials I needed to give them effective direction. This item of the grant is meant to address that. The first part will be to communicate with community members around the world to see who has an interest in being a local champion and to get their input and ideas on how they can help. Once this feedback is embodied in a set of procedures and policies, and supporting material is created for them, then we will need community members to put it all into practice. Help from \$foo readers could definitely be meaningful on this grant item.

The status of the work so far is still in the beginning stages. I suffered from my usual post-conference-season distractions until later in September; conference season was unusually long for me this year as it also included a week in Tokyo for YAPC::Asia this year. Time since then has been spent on some other projects which demanded more immediate attention. I hope to be putting myself into the TPF grant work soon, such that significant parts of it start coming online at about the same time as the Rakudo Star release.

**RB:** Karen, how important is that grant for TPF itself and for Perl?

**KP:** The grant is important for TPF because the goal is to improve the procedures and internal workings of the organization, which should make us more efficient. It is also significant because this is the first time that we have given a grant to someone to improve TPF. The grant does not directly affect Perl, but any improvement to TPF will have indirect benefits to Perl.

**RB:** So, now lets start to look forward. What will 2010 bring to Perl? Patrick Michaud announced at YAPC::EU 2009 in Lisbon that "Rakudo Star" (Perl 6 on Parrot) will be published in spring 2010. How does that change TPFs prioritization of Perl 5 vs. Perl 6?

**KP:** I'm not really sure that it will change those priorities, although it will of course affect some things. I am hoping to work with Patrick Michaud and Jonathan Worthington to start a fund raising drive for Rakudo \* as I would really like to see a Rakudo \* hackathon take place with all the key players in attendance. At the same time, however, I believe that one of the other TPF board members is working on a project to provide funding in some way to Perl 5. The discussions have only started so I can't really provide any more detail than that, but it does show that we are continuing to work on new projects for both Perl 5 and Perl 6.

**RB:** Apropos YAPC::EU: There was a programme called "send-a-newbie" that sent three persons to YAPC::EU 2009 who would not be able to attend the conference without the support. It was sponsored by many private persons of the Perl community. Would it possible to have a programme like this for other conferences as well?

**KP:** I thought it was a great programme and I believe that it would be possible to extend this to other conferences. I have spoken to Edmund von der Burg , who organized the first send-a-newbie program, and he would be happy to see this programme expanded and used at other conferences. Next year I would like it to happen at YAPC::NA.

**RB:** One thing in releasing Perl has changed. After Perl 5.10.1 was out - for which Dave Mitchell got a TPF-Grant - Jesse Vincent started to do monthly releases of Perl 5.11 (a developer release branch). What do you think about these regular releases?



**KP:** When it comes to this sort of change or decision I completely trust the community and people like Jesse Vincent to be doing the right thing. I mainly think about ways in which TPF could help Jesse in his goal as opposed to whether or not the correct technical decisions have been made.

**RD:** One thing I like about the monthly 5.11-branch releases is that it's an experiment that is being tried for the first time in the context of the Perl core. There have been opinions on the workability of monthly releases for Perl core debated loudly over the past year, but we'll only know the actual benefits and drawbacks to this approach given real-life experimentation. Certainly, it is most appropriate to do this on the 5.11 bleed branch and not on 5.10.

There is an element of the new monthly release strategy which is almost independent from the actual monthly releases, and that is having the technology in place to do a "push-button" release. That is, you run a simple script which has absolutely minimal manual intervention needed, and a full core release is produced. I know that creating this technology is what Jesse spent a lot of his time doing when he started up the process. This technology is helpful regardless of how often you run a release schedule, especially in the kind of distributed versioning and development environment that github hosting provides.

**RB:** We now have three bigger organizations in the Perl world: Enlightened Perl Organisation (EPO), TPF and Japan Perl Association (JPA). Do they work together or do they have different goals?

**KP:** I think mostly that they have different goals. For example, one goal of the JPA is to provide quality Perl training in the Japanese language. There are some things about the JPA that can look similar to TPF, like the JPA is now running YAPC::Asia and TPF is involved in the running of YAPC::NA, but in reality both organizations are actually quite different, even in their structure.

And of course there are other organizations involved in the promotion of Perl such as the Associação Portuguesa de Programadores Perl and the YAPC Europe Foundation (YEF). Individual Perl Monger groups have also been active in this area. The Birmingham Perl Mongers have created Birmingham Perl Mongers Limited which sponsored this year's QA Hackathon in Birmingham as well as being sponsors of CPAN

Testers. I don't know if Vienna.pm have actually created an organization but they have also been providing sponsorship to a number of Perl projects.

So, there are many organizations out there but I believe that there is easily room for all of them.

**RB:** What do you think about the "Iron Man Blogging Contest" of EPO?

**KP:** I think that it's fantastic; I even devoted a section to it in my keynote at OSDC Australia in November. It's a practical and effective programme, and they have made sure that it's incredibly easy for anyone to take part. I did join it myself a while ago, although I am embarrassed to say that I keep falling back to Paper Man status. But I believe that I am now blogging about Perl more than I had been for some time. It has also provided others with encouragement to write more, and some of the blogs are excellent; Yuval Kogman's blog in particular springs to mind.

**RB:** In late 2009 a new committee within TPF was founded: The Marketing Committee. Can you tell us something about the goals of this committee? Can our readers help? What activities are planned?

**KP:** In the past TPF has had one person responsible for PR and Marketing. We realised that it wasn't really possible for one volunteer to handle such a large role, so we created a Marketing Committee to allow us to get many more people involved, with the plan to divide the specific tasks and responsibilities between the committee members. Hopefully that will improve what we currently have.

We have managed to fill some of these roles. For example, Dave Cross was recently appointed to the Social Networking role. Not all the roles, however, have been filled and we are certainly looking for more volunteers. We would like to have volunteers working on blogs, website design, market research, and press releases.

As another part of the marketing drive we created a TPF Marketing mailing list to enable us to work more directly with the Perl community. One idea that has come out of this is that we should be promoting Perl at non-Perl conferences. At the minute Gabor Szabo has arranged for Perl stands at both FOSDEM and Ce BIT Open Source 2010. He is looking for



volunteers to help out with this Events project, and we are hoping that these two conferences are just the first of many non-Perl conferences that we can target.

**RB:** A last question to both of you: What do you expect for 2010? What might happen and what should happen in the Perl and/or the TPF world?

**KP:** A great thing about the Perl community is that our members often produce wonderful products unexpectedly. One such surprise in 2009 was Plack. In 2010 I'm expecting that Plack usage will grow and more systems will support PSGI. I still have a fondness for Perl web apps, and I believe Plack and PSGI are important parts of a welcome revival.

Of course, as we've mentioned already, I'm also really looking forward to the release of Rakudo \* in Spring. I believe that the official release should encourage more people to try Perl 6, and they in turn should give us some interesting feedback about the language and implementation. But more than that, I hope that this release will encourage the core Rakudo developers, who dedicate a lot of their time and talent to this project. And on that subject, TPF will be trying to find ways to improve our support for the Rakudo developers in 2010.

**RD:** I don't think there are any surprises coming up in 2010, just the steady progression of some excellent projects that have been underway in the Perl community for several years.

The thing I am most excited about is the release of Rakudo Star, which will happen (best guess) in April 2010. This coming along quickly now, but also a lot of the Perl 6 environmental support infrastructure is happening quickly now too, like some core Perl 6 modules, a few attempts at CPAN-like systems for Perl 6, and the all-important Perl 6 spec test suite.

I look forward to the progression of Strawberry Perl, and eventually Chocolate Perl too.

I think there is some excellent work going on in the CPAN Testers world, including some great work on the Perl Toolchain by many people.

And as you asked about earlier, I'm quite interested in seeing how the Perl 5 core world reacts given the progress in the 5.11 bleed branch and how much of that feeds back into 5.10.

**RB:** Thanks a lot and good luck to you!

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