

by Jim Caristi

It recently occurred to me that I'd been attending a certain extremely expensive conference for quite a few years now (8 to be exact). OOPSLA (Object Oriented Programming, Systems, Languages, and Applications) is a conference that attracts over 1000 people each year. Usually it meets somewhere on the west coast (San Jose, Seattle, Vancouver, etc.), but last year it was in Montreal and this October it's in Nashville. Most of the attendees are from software companies, consulting firms, and large corporations. But a few dozen professors also attend an Educators Symposium, and, with a scholarship or lots of money, the whole conference as well. I've been fortunate enough to receive scholarships every time I applied, including for this year. Good thing, too, because registration for the whole conference, including the Educator's Symposium and a couple of tutorials, comes to over \$1400. The scholarship makes that all free, and provides \$700 for travel expenses.

The conference focuses on the object-oriented approach to programming and system design, and anything that is at all related to that. This is where I found out about things like design patterns, Alice, extreme programming and other agile approaches to software design, open space, and test-driven development. One of the interesting things they do at OOPSLA is called "DesignFest". This is where a group of strangers (conference participants) come together to design a solution to a problem that is made known to them at the event. The group does not program anything, but they use design languages to describe a solution that a group of programmers could actually implement. I've done this a couple of times, and even led groups a couple of times. It's especially interesting because the members of the group come from all over the world. Each group seems to have at least a couple of people from Europe or Asia. Their English may be terrible, but their UML is excellent. This year I'm presenting a poster at the Educators Symposium on how I'm teaching our first course in computer science. We're using Alice for the first three weeks, and then moving to Java using Eclipse, and we are following a rigorous test-driven development approach. An interesting thing happened the other day in class. I walked in a few minutes early to set up the equipment and looked up to see a class full of women! Well, six to be exact. And there were four guys who hadn't arrived yet. But this was so unusual (to see a computer science class that only had women) that I took a quick picture with my smartphone, and sent it to computer science educators around the world. It's such an unusual thing because there are so few women enrolled in computer science courses everywhere. I'm still getting responses from people about it. You can see the (poor quality) picture yourself at <http://faculty.valpo.edu/jcaristi/image.jpg>.