The SIGCOMM community

I first attended SIGCOMM in 1989 and recently spent the third week of August 2009 at SIGCOMM, spanning a period of 20 years. Two things strike me about that sentence. The first is that by the inevitable passage of time I seem to have become an 'old-timer.' The second is that like everyone else I have conflated the conference and the SIG. This editorial digs deeper into these two facts (and yes, they are related).

Looking back, what strikes me is that many researchers who I first met in 1989 still take the time to attend, are still active in research and are still making the annual pilgrimage to the conference. It is always a pleasure to run into someone I have met on and off for the better part of two decades.Some colleagues were graduate students like me in 1989 and we reminisce about the old times together. Others were graduate students when I first met them and are now full-fledged researchers. And yet others were students that I had the pleasure of supervising with whom I renew a long-ago relationship that has now turned into a friendship among peers. To see a fresh-faced grad student transition into a leading researcher and a pillar of the community is an unalloyed joy!

Now to the other thread, of conflating the conference and the SIG. For a long time, I did not think that the SIG had any role to play other than to organize the conference. So it seemed natural to refer to both as SIGCOMM, as most people still do. Actually, I think there is something deeper here. I think what makes SIGCOMM a community is our coming together every year to listen to the same papers, meet fellow researchers, and to participate in shared activities, such as the banquet, the demo and poster sessions, and to cheer and boo at the outrageous opinion session. That is, attending the conference is the act that binds us and makes us a community. It turns out that this technique of creating community is age old: in 600 BCE, the Buddha asked all his followers
to gather once a year and re-affirm the tenets of their faith. It worked then and it works now. And that is why the conference and the community are inextricable.

Conflating the conference and SIG, however, leads to some problems because there is more to the SIG than SIGCOMM and more to the community than attending the conference. Let me talk first about the other activities of the SIG (do also read Bruce Davie's editorial in this issue). The SIG sponsors several other conferences besides SIGCOMM, such as IMC, HotNets, SenSys, and CoNEXT. It also puts out this newsletter, makes awards, and provides a forum for community discussion by means of a blog and CCR Online. It is now gearing up to provide a forum for industry-academic collaboration through several initiatives. These activities of the SIG allow members to present papers, learn of cutting-edge research in the

field, and to get feedback on ideas from their peers.

There is more to participating in the community than attending conferences. The SIG is entirely run by volunteers. Volunteer duties include reviewing papers, helping with our website, participating in program committees, serving as CCR and ToN area editors, helping in the running of the various conferences, and liaison with the ACM and related communities. If you are interested in any of these, write to the Chair, Bruce Davie, or anyone on the executive committee. We are always happy to hear from you. Of course, some jobs--such as serving on the SIGCOMM TPC--are more sought after than others, but I am sure that anyone who wishes to contribute can.

Why bother participating? It is not just the joy of doing something to benefit others that gives a warm fuzzy feeling. It is also that volunteers in the community form relationships that are professionally and personally rewarding. If you want to learn about the latest advances in some area whose research leader is a member of SIGCOMM (which is nearly always the case) and you have met that member in the course of your volunteer duties, then you have a way to contact that person and get the inside track. Email from a person you have met and interacted with is much more likely to get responded to than email from a total stranger. Over time, meeting the same people in different roles opens doors to research collaboration, funding, and an added perspective on your research career. Volunteering has its privileges!

So there you have it. Attending SIGCOMM--the conference--for the last twenty years has made me keenly aware of the SIGCOMM community. I have gained much from being a part of the community. I encourage all of you to participate in the community and make SIGCOMM your own.