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Editorial

BOOK BY 1st MAY!

Time is running out for discounted early bookings for the training and conference, so please complete and return the attached booking form as soon as possible. If you come with a colleague you both get an extra 20% discount, so bring a friend as well.

Most of this issue is devoted to the training and conference – and it is the fullest training schedule we have ever offered: there is an Introductory Course for complete beginners and those who are a bit rusty or out of date; and a concurrent Advanced Course for the more experienced SIR users. The conference programme has not yet been finalised but we already have some exciting titles and abstracts – see inside for more details.

But whether or not you can come to the conference, there is very good news from SIR Oz about training and future developments – see the SIR Futures section inside.

Hope to see you in June.

Kathy Brooks
Kathy.brooks@forvus.co.uk

SIR is at <http://www.sir.com.au>
UK SIR Users Group is at <http://www.soton.ac.uk/~sug>

Note from the Chair

Welcome to a New Year and a new copy of Reporter. We SIR users are in for a busy time this year. SIR2002 is about to hit the streets having been through a rigorous time in beta testing. Versions should be available by the time you read this from

<http://www.sir.com.au>

or more locally from

<http://www.soton.ac.uk/~sug/download>.

There are lots of new features that will make your pql easier to write and maintain, however you could just take the easy way out and export from your current version and import into SIR2002 and carry on as before. Probably a far easier upgrade than some database products I could mention.

If you want to find out more about the new features then why not come for some training in Aberdeen in June. Bring a colleague and get a 20% discount for both of you. See elsewhere in this issue for more details.

I hope to see many of you there learning about the new features and what you can do with them.

Finally an announcement: the bump has landed - Lisa Zaninetti gave birth to Peter Harry at 3am on Tues 18th Dec, 9lb 3oz (see below).

Dave Doulton



UK June Conference and Training 19-21 June 2002 BOOK NOW!

Discounted early bookings end on 1st May so please get your booking in now. You can use the attached form or book online at the address below.

Latest programme details and booking form are available at the User Group website at <http://www.soton.ac.uk/~sug>.

For the first time, we have pleasure in offering a conference with a full training programme with parallel introductory and advanced courses. Both training sessions will take place at Aberdeen University on Wednesday 19th and Thursday 20th, using their comprehensive teaching and computing facilities. Trainees will have opportunities for hands-on work and will receive a comprehensive course workbook.

The one-day conference will follow on Friday 21st at the Atholl Hotel, and feature a range of user papers and tips and tricks sessions.

Our course tutors are experienced both as trainers and long-term users and developers of SIR.

Full descriptions of the training programme and abstracts for user papers are given below.

Introductory Training

The introductory sessions will be run by John Lemon of Aberdeen University. John has been a SIR user for over 15 years, has trained students and members of staff in SIR for 15 years and has also worked for SIR as a converter.

This course is suitable for complete beginners, and will also be useful for occasional users who are rusty on some of the basics. At the end of the course you will be able to create and run retrievals, you will have an understanding of how to create a schema and therefore how to interpret an existing one, how to input data and will have an appreciation of the administrative functions used to maintain a data base.

| Wednesday 19th June | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 14.00 | Overview: History Concepts SiR command language SiR files SiR modules |
| 14.30 | Database & Record Schema definition: Need to understand structure to retrieve data Create structure diagram Convert to Data base and Record Schema Practical exercise |
| 15.30 | Tea |
| 16.00 | Data Entry: Forms 'Old' style vPQLForms Batch Data Input Update programs Demonstration |
| 18.00 | Close |
| Thursday 20th June | |
| 08.30 | Basic retrieval programmes: Introduction Basic retrieval Processing cases and records Practical exercise |
| 10.30 | Coffee |
| 11.00 | The 'right' and 'wrong' way to extract data Record Control phrases Practical exercises |
| 13:00 | Lunch |
| 14.00 | Further retrievals including procedures: Condescriptives Frequencies SPSS SAVE file Tabulate: One level Two level Three level Statistics Formatting (% etc.) Quick Report |
| 15.30 | Tea |
| 16.00 | Utility functions / Data Base Maintenance: Verify file / List stats Export / Import Unload / Reload Subset / Merge File dump Re-structure |
| 18.00 | Close |

Advanced Training

The advanced sessions will be run jointly by Tony Reardon and Tom Shriver. Tony is head of product development at SIR in Australia and Tom is a SIR user of many years standing; at one time he worked for SIR in the USA and was responsible for developing SIR/Easy, now he has his own SIR consultancy.

This course is suitable for more experienced users of SIR and will cover a variety of topics. It will be useful for those who have not yet moved to SIR 2002 and are daunted at the prospect, and for those who have converted and are ready to take advantage of some of the new features.

A basic knowledge of SIR is assumed.

| Wednesday 19 th June | | |
|---------------------------------|--|--------------|
| 14:00 | SIR 2002: What's new and how to use it | Tony |
| 15:30 | Tea | |
| 16:00 | Converting applications from 3.2 to 2002 | Tom |
| 16:30 | Introduction to menus in 2002 and developing a Gui interface to your database | Tom |
| 18.00 | Close | |
| Thursday 20 th June | | |
| 08.30 | Developing Dialogs and GUI interfaces using SIR 2002. Session 1 | Tony |
| 9:45 | Developing Dialogs and GUI interfaces using SIR 2002. Session 2 | Tony |
| 10:30 | Coffee | |
| 11:00 | Execution time tools vs compilation time tools | Tom |
| 11:45 | PQL Forms I | Tony |
| 12:30 | PQL Forms 2 | Tony |
| 13:00 | Lunch | |
| 14:00 | Web tools and SIR | Dave Doulton |
| 14:30 | Maintaining and integrating application code | Tom |
| 15:15 | Economies of operation | Tom |
| 15:30 | Tea | |
| 16:00 | DBA Refresher | Tom & Tony |
| 17:00 | Review and Q&A | Tom & Tony |
| 18.00 | Close | |

SIR Users Conference – Draft Programme

| Friday 21 st June – SIR Conference at the Atholl Hotel | | |
|---|--|---|
| 09.00 | Coffee and registration | |
| 10.00 | Keynote address: SIR 2002 | Tony Reardon |
| 10.45 | Data to get your teeth into | Michael Staley, ONS |
| 11.15 | Coffee | |
| 11.45 | Using XML and SVG from PQL | Dave Doulton, University of Southampton |
| 12.15 | Paper 3- TBA | Patrick Brown, Institute of Occupational Medicine |
| 12.45 | AGM | |
| 13.00 | Lunch | |
| 14.00 | Tips and tricks on lookup tables: secondary indexes, v tabfiles v dummy case v 2nd caseless database to hold secondary indexes | John Lemon, University of Aberdeen |
| 14.30 | Paper 5 - TBA | |
| 15.00 | A Baker's Dozen in a Button | Tom Shriver |
| 15.30 | Tea and close at 16.00 | |

Descriptions of each session in the Advanced Course and abstracts for the conference papers are included in the following pages.

Training Course Abstracts

What's new in 2002 and how to use it

An introductory session by Tony Reardon which will run through all the new features and give users a chance to try them out. Tony will include

- Database Secondary Indexes
 - New Grid Control with VisualPQL interface
 - Extended Strings with automatic compression of database strings
 - Redefinition of array dimensions and sizes and sorting array values
 - Binary files and formats on READ and WRITE for binary strings
 - Auto Increment Keys
 - LOOKUP command
 - Parameterized ODBC queries
 - Extra VisualPQL functions including tabfile schema
-

Converting applications from 3.2 to 2002

This session by Tom Shriver is aimed at all those users who are still using SIR 3.2 or older versions, or who have moved to the new GUI SIR but are still using old features like the execution window.

Attendees will walk away with a checklist of things to consider and worry about, and leave armed with some snazzy PQL tools which take Vertical Menu specs and create a dialog with a LIST, and convert menus.

Menus in 2002 and developing a GUI interface to your database

This session by Tom will form an introduction to the new GUI facilities. SIR2002 comes with a set of menu features used in the start menu and a pop-up menu feature. The session starts with an overview of "Possibilities Opened with Visual PQL", with a short discussion of the PQL behind GUI, the tools available to do these kinds of

things and some illustrations of things you might want to do to, including PQLForms, custom "Utilities", database navigation interfaces, etc.

This session covers how to use pop up menus, how to modify the start menu and provide a completely customised application interface. Tom will discuss some of the tools for developing menus and attendees will be given a copy of a menu manager tool he has developed.

Developing Dialogs and GUI Interfaces

This session consists of two 45 minute slots by Tony Reardon. He will deal with the fine detail of using all the new facilities to build dialogs and user interfaces. Tony will introduce the syntax and give examples, but these are workshop sessions where the emphasis is on users' hands on work.

Execution time tools vs compilation time tools

The continuing development of "execution time tools" (mostly through PQL) is a major feature of SIR. Over the past decade, for example, the number of PQL functions available to us has nearly trebled and option specifications on newly introduced commands accept run-time expressions as well as the hard-coded specifications we are more familiar with. The fact that "Interactive SIR" is now totally controlled by PQL programs is testament to the power. Understanding the difference between run-time and compilation-time tools is important. In addition to the conceptual overlay for all this, various specific tools would be discussed, including CIF and IFTHEN, DO REPEAT and FOR, CALL and EXECUTE SUBROUTINE and EX SUBPROCEDURE, Constant Values and Expressions, GLOBAL Variables and PQL Variables. And then there's the crown jewel in the Application Developers collection of run-time tools, EXECUTE DBMS. The tutor for this session is Tom Shriver.

PQL Forms

These two sessions cover the new PQL Forms. They are very hands-on where about 70% of the time is spent by attendees using the software and doing development. Tony Reardon will run these sessions.

Web tools and SIR

This session by our UK web guru Dave Doulton will cover the basics of setting up Microsoft's Personal Web Server and running the demonstration programs in the Sysproc file. Dave will explain the problems and give advice on getting started solving some of the likely problems.

Maintaining and integrating application code

Our failure to develop maintainable and understandable applications costs us in small everyday ways and burdens our successors tremendously. Tom Shriver will talk about the principal tools we have to help us organize, maintain and efficiently use the application code. These include the menu system, CALL, INCLUDE FILE/BUFFER, SubProcedures, SubRoutines, ProcFiles and alternate profiles.

Economies of operation

This session, with Tom Shriver, will identify and explain the major areas in which efficiencies might be gained, traded and squandered. Tom will use case studies to point in useful directions and pose alternate scenarios.

DBA Refresher

The basics of SIR database administration have not changed much for some time but this session will be useful reminder for all SIR users on the operations, scenarios and pitfalls. Tom Shriver will give some hints and tips on running utilities like Verify and Unload automatically during the night.

Review and Q&A

This session has been kept free to deal with users' specific requests and give extra time for hands-on work if desired. All the advanced course tutors will be on hand to answer questions and assist with problems.

User Paper Abstracts

Keynote Address

Tony will give the latest news from SIR on marketing and development, and discuss the current initiatives on developing an interactive training package.

*Tony Reardon
SIR Pty Ltd*

Using XML and SVG from PQL

This paper will show you how to use the latest 'in' technologies from within PQL. XML is the eXtensible Markup Language that is likely to be used everywhere soon for data interchange (see Microsoft .net for instance) like dif files and csv used to be but without the problems. It is also useful for creating dynamic web pages. SVG or Scalable Vector Graphics can also be generated from pql and can produce graphics and text that is able to be zoomed in and out. Handy for visually impaired or those who like large text and pictures or alternatively those who like to see lots on the screen no matter how small it may be. Both XML and SVG are just files of text so handling them from PQL and indeed any text editor is easy.

*Dave Doulton
University of Southampton*

Data to get your teeth into

Processing the National Diet and Nutrition Survey 2000/2001

The National Diet and Nutrition Survey has been run once every few years now across several decades. As the name suggests, its prime concern is mapping trends in nutritional habits amongst the UK population, and a detailed seven-day diary of food consumed is kept by the respondent. This involves not just the accurate recording of what foods are eaten, but also the weighing of the meal or snack before consumption, and the weighing of any leftovers. The diary data is then edited and analysed in terms of daily and weekly consumption of a range of nutrients, and checked against upper and lower daily intake bounds.

As well as diet, the NDNS also checks for various other related health indicators. In addition to the seven-day food diary, respondents also give a blood sample and a twenty-four hour urine sample. As if this was not enough, they also have to maintain a diary of bowel movements and a detailed seven-day physical activity diary. The blood and urine samples are sent away to a laboratory for analysis, and analyte data are produced.

SIR is used fundamentally to process the nutritional data, producing a vast range of nutritional derived variables and a few others besides – household type, region, etc - as well as some preliminary weighting on the basis of household composition. The SIR schema is produced from the Blaise questionnaire, with additional record types lovingly hand-crafted to hold the data for the food diary, the blood and urine analytes, and the physical activity diary. The data from these myriad sources are all loaded into the database. This heady data cocktail is then sent to the client for detailed analysis and the tracking of trends in nutrition and health.

This paper will give some background to the survey, focusing in particular on the derivation of the SIR database structure from the Blaise questionnaire and the subsequent processing of derived variables. A strong stomach would, as ever, be an advantage.

Mick Staley
ONS

**Tips and tricks on lookup tables:
secondary indexes, v tabfiles v
dummy case v 2nd caseless
database to hold secondary
indexes**

Lookup tables have always presented users with a challenge and now the new versions of SiR provide so many different solutions the user is faced with further problems. In the past it was easy – you only had dummy cases now with secondary indexes and tabfiles, which answer is the best. There is no perfect solution as each application is different and the user must choose which is best; this paper will try and highlight the advantages and disadvantages of the different approaches allowing users to make up their own minds as which approach to follow.

John Lemon
University of Aberdeen

A Baker's Dozen in a Button

A dozen independently useful SIR tricks are collected into one amazingly powerful SIR Programming Tool under the control of the thirteenth trick, a SIR Tool Bar Button that makes it all work.

A variety of PQL and DBMS application bits demonstrate how to create and use global variables, how to standardize and simplify interactive specification of dates, how to simplify standard Boolean controls for your database, how to control Master to speed up your read-only retrievals, how to cut retrieval writing time in half, how to handle the output once PQL has finished and even more, if you can believe it.

The Magic Button will be pressed and all the programming code will be discussed and given to attendees.

Tom Shriver
DataVisor

SIR2002

The previous Reporter announced that SIR2002 was available for Windows and we hope that many of you have downloaded it and like it. We have updated the on-line documentation and this is included in the current release.

We are in the process of producing new CDs and these should be available shortly.

We have created a new version for Sun Solaris and this is also available. By the time you are reading this article, there are likely to be other versions (e.g. Linux), please check the website.

There will be minor updates to SIR2002 during the next twelve months both to incorporate new features and to fix any SPRs. In fact the next version already has some extras including:

- Check for duplicate value labels
- Check for tab characters in variable and value labels (replaces with four spaces)
- Removes the limit of 20 text files from VisualPQL
- New SET ITEM FONT command which allows you to set the font and style (underline/bold/italic/big/small) of a dialog item
- Reads or inputs text files that have been transferred between Windows and Unix in binary mode
- LABEL option for headings on quick report (was always there but not documented)
- FORMAT options for fields output to CSV files (ditto there but undocumented)

So if you have any small features you would like to see in the software in the immediate future, don't hesitate to ask. For example, we are anticipating allowing a new Rich Text Format (RTF) control on dialogs.

We keep a list of SPR's on the website. If any of these are of immediate concern, or you want to report anything yourself, please email us. Even if there is not a new released version, we can send a new version to you by email or ftp.

We will let people know as and when new release versions are available and what they contain so that you can download them as necessary. If you have not had notification of new versions from us in the past and you would like to be on the list, please email us.

Our website is <http://www.sir.com.au/> and a general email address is support@sir.com.au.

Tony Reardon
Head of Product Development, SIR Pty Ltd

SIR Futures

Training

The last two releases SIR2000 and SIR2002 have been very major releases and have increased the functionality of the software quite dramatically. While they have also made the software much more intuitive and easier to use with menus and dialogs, screen painting, etc. SIR2002 is still a very large system and people need better methods to learn the system initially and to upgrade their knowledge as new features are released.

At SIR we are conscious of this and believe that now is the right time to do something about it. While we can think of many new features that might improve the software, we feel that the most urgent need is to develop training material that will help customers get the most out of the current system. So a major project for the next twelve to eighteen months is to establish a generic framework for this training and then develop the various individual courses.

The framework for the courses will be an on-line, self-paced system where individuals can work through the material. As well as simply reading the material, this will involve people in taking quizzes, working examples and using the actual software to gain a firm understanding of what they are doing.

New features for next major release

The following is an outline of areas we will be working on for the next major release:

- SQL in VisualPQL with a SELECT / END SELECT processing block or equivalent and a new PQL procedure equivalent to the current SQL display feature.
- Extended and improved backup / restore / journal capabilities to incorporate roll back recovery and incremental backup.
- Database schemas allowing multiple database files on multiple volumes.
- A PQLServer similar to SQLServer that takes PQL input, executes it and allows the client process to retrieve output a line at a time.
- A GUI based VisualPQL debugger. The debugger is the final text screen component

that does not have any alternative. We will continue to support the text screen features (commands in VisualPQL, forms, text editor) but would like to restrict these to old systems.

- XML input/output facilities with a generic way of mapping between SIR and XML.

We are always interested in what people want for the future releases and we always welcome ideas. Please submit any suggestions for desired features. Thanks for all the suggestions so far and for all of the testing and feedback.

I look forward to talking to you in Aberdeen and hearing your views on how we can help you get the most from SIR.

Tony Reardon
Head of Product Development, SIR Pty Ltd

AGM Agenda

The next AGM for the SIR UK Users Group will be held at 12.45pm on Friday 21st June 2002 at the Atholl Hotel in Aberdeen.

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting
3. Matters Arising
4. Chair's report (Dave Doulton)
5. Treasurer's report (Randy Banks)
6. Elections
7. A.O.B.

The committee currently consists of:

- Randy Banks (Treasurer), Dave Doulton (Chair), Michael Staley, Patrick Brown, Adrian Hodgson and John Lemon, who were elected at the 2000 AGM and are now due for re-election (Bylaws article 6(b))
- Charlie Owen, Kathy Brooks and Fran Williams who were elected at the 2001 AGM and are therefore not due for re-election until 2003 (Bylaws article 6(b))
- Mo Reardon who is the ex-officio member appointed by the SIR distributor (Bylaws article 5(b)).

There are thus up to 6 vacant positions to fill by elections (Bylaws article 5(a))

Randy Banks, Dave Doulton, Michael Staley, Patrick Brown and John Lemon are eligible to stand again for committee membership (Bylaws articles 5(c) and 6(d)). Other nominations for committee membership will be received by the current chair (Dave Doulton) up to 11am on 21st June 2002 (Bylaws article 6(e))

Silly Section

Virus Warning

If you receive an email entitled, "Badtimes," delete it. Do not open it.

Apparently this one is pretty nasty. It will not only erase everything on your hard drive, but it will also delete anything on disks within 20 feet of your computer. It demagnetises the stripes on ALL of your credit cards. It reprograms your PIN access code, screws up the tracking on your VCR and uses subspace field harmonics to scratch any CD's you attempt to play. It will program your phone auto dial to call only 0898 numbers. This virus will mix antifreeze into your fish tank. It will drink ALL your beer.

FOR GOD'S SAKE, ARE YOU LISTENING?! !!!

It will leave dirty underwear on the coffee table when you are expecting company. It will replace your shampoo with Immac and your Immac with chocolate spread, all the while dating your current boy/girlfriend behind your back and billing their hotel rendezvous to your Visa card. It will cause you to run with scissors and throw things in a way that is only fun until someone loses an eye. It will rewrite your backup files, changing all your active verbs to passive tenses and incorporating undetectable misspellings which grossly change the interpretations of key sentences. If the "Badtimes" message is opened in a Windows 95/98 environment, it will leave the toilet seat up and leave your hairdryer plugged in dangerously close to a full bathtub. It will not only remove the forbidden tags from your mattresses and pillows, it will also refill your skimmed milk with whole milk.

**WARN AS MANY PEOPLE AS YOU CAN. **

And if you don't send this to 5000 people in 20 seconds you'll fart so hard that your right leg will spasm, shoot straight out in front of you, sending out sparks, that will ignite the person nearest you.

Only in America...

A Charlotte, NC man having purchased a box of very rare, very expensive cigars, insured them against fire among other things.

Within a month, having smoked his entire stockpile of cigars and without having made even his first premium payment on the policy, the man filed a claim against the insurance company.

In his claim, the man stated the cigars were lost "in series of small fires". The insurance company refused to pay, citing the obvious reason; that the man had consumed the cigars in the normal fashion.

The man sued.....and won! In delivering the ruling, the judge agreed that the claim was frivolous. He stated nevertheless that the man held a policy from the company in which it had warranted that the cigars were insurable and also guaranteed that it would insure against fire, without defining what is considered to be "unacceptable fire", and was obligated to pay the claim.

Rather than endure a lengthy and costly appeal process, the insurance company accepted the ruling and paid the man \$15,000.00 for the rare cigars he had lost in the "fires"

HERE COMES THE BEST PART!!

After the man cashed the check, the insurance company had him arrested on 24 counts of ARSON!! With his own insurance claim and testimony from the previous case being used against him, the man was convicted of intentionally burning his insured property and sentenced to 24 months

SIR UK User Group Committee Members 2001/2002

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