

# System i Academic Initiative Goes to South Africa

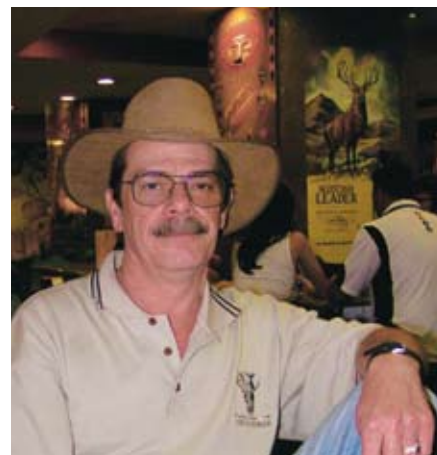
By Jim Buck

The phone rang one afternoon while I was preparing for my evening EGL (Enterprise Generation Language) class. Linda Grigoleit, Program Director for the IBM System i Academic Initiative program, was on the phone. She said, "Hi, Jim! How would you like to go to Johannesburg?" My mind was deep in EGL. I replied, "What state is it in?" With a laugh, she said, "Johannesburg is in South Africa. I thought you knew that!" That is how it started—one of the most fascinating experiences of my life!

IBM needed someone to go to Johannesburg in short order to teach RPG IV for a few weeks and possibly meet with college educators as well. Linda knew that Bryan Meyers and I had recently completed the fourth edition of the *Programming in RPG IV – 29<sup>th</sup> Street Press* book. She also was aware that I was an advocate of the WDS*c* product and that I taught WDS*c*, and the latest RPG techniques, in my classes at Gateway Technical College ([www.gtc.edu](http://www.gtc.edu)) in Kenosha, WI. In fact I had worked with Linda to teach this at the Academic Initiative Summer School in Rochester last summer to fellow professors.

IBM asked me to teach the Intermediate RPG class the first week and Advanced RPG class the second week to a number of IBM customers in South Africa. I say South Africa instead of Johannesburg because students were also coming from Capetown, South Africa, and the country of Botswana. At first I was apprehensive about the trip. I had never taught these classes before, and time was limited for me to acquaint myself with the material. Once I received the materials, every moment not dedicated to my regular classes at the college was dedicated to familiarizing myself with the "Joburg" class materials. I am probably the only person ever to review RPG classes while flying over the Atlantic and Africa.

Reading the materials for the two RPG classes, I noticed that even though WebSphere Development Studio Client (WDS*c*) was not used in the intermediate class, it was suggested that students take a WDS*c* class before the advanced class. I decided to spend the first day of each class acquainting the students with WDS*c* and Code Designer, and then reinforce the use of the IDEs throughout the week. Most of the students had heard of WDS*c* but I



Jim Buck in South Africa

was surprised that not one of them had ever used Code Designer. Do you know that some people in this world still use RLU? Once they learned how easy it was to design screens and print files in Code Designer, the students swore they would never use RLU again. At first intimidated by WDS*c*, by the end of the week most of the students felt that there was good reason to start using WDS*c*.

My students were all professional programmers and their interest focused on the new RPG. They wanted to learn about procedures, subprocedures, and service programs. Their questions focused on the advantages of the new techniques. All of the students were still coding in fixed format. I asked that they code all of the labs in free format and they were surprised at how easy it was to pick up. One of the things that stood out was that most of the students were early for class and wanted to stay late.

The last day of the advanced class had a section on CGI & WebFacing and this was the high point of the week for many of them. They could not believe how easy it was to develop a web application using their current skills. I explained the Developers Road Map, the importance of updating their skills, and RPG code to take advantage of these new tools. But all the students commented on the difficulty of getting training in South Africa in these new technologies.

The last Friday I was in Johannesburg, Craig Zieseniss (IBM System i – Systems & Technology Group) asked if I would go with him to meet with one of his largest customers. I was under the impression that we would be meeting with one manager for a short conversation.



IBM Johannesburg


Imagine my surprise when we entered a meeting room with approximately twelve people. They were interested in two areas: what is IBM planning on doing with System i & RPG and how can they get entry level people on the platform. I quickly stated that I don't work for IBM and I can't speak for IBM's plans and that I teach at a college that teaches System i curriculum. One of the people in the room stated that they knew that I was the president of the Wisconsin Midrange Computer Association ([www.wmcpa.org](http://www.wmcpa.org)) and I should know what companies are doing in the US. For the next two hours, I fielded questions like what is the future of the System i and RPG (I referred them to the IBM experts such as **George Farr** in Toronto) , what types of training are available in the US and what can be done to interest young people in the platform. I suggested that they help IBM develop relationships with colleges and universities in South Africa, and they all agreed what a good idea that was.

System i curriculum is not currently taught in colleges in South Africa, but



IBM Johannesburg

IBM is working on changing that. Simultaneous to my trip, the Academic Initiative program was planning for **Cally Beck**, System i Academic Initiative Program Manager for Europe and South Africa, to visit and meet with several educational institutions in South Africa early in 2008. As an instructor actively involved with this initiative, I'll do anything I can to assist her! Judging from my experiences in Johannesburg, there are some great opportunities for colleges to teach students about the System i; more importantly that the opportunities for students that know this platform and especially RPG are unlimited.

I did not get much time to see much of Johannesburg or South Africa. The people were very friendly and the food was great... what more could a person ask for? And the IBMers that I met in Johannesburg were great. I want to especially thank **Jacqi de Bruijn** ( Learning Delivery Manager SA) and **Kevin Grimwood** for their support while I was in Johannesburg. I hope to see them again. 

### About the Author

**Jim Buck** has held a career in IT for more than 25 years, primarily in the manufacturing and healthcare industries, and is the recipient of the 2007 IBM System i Innovation – Education Excellence Award. He is currently the programmer/analyst instructor at Gateway Technical College in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and 2004 – 2007 president of the Wisconsin Midrange Computer Professional Association (WMCPA). Jim has been instrumental in developing evening classes and one-day seminars in IBM's latest programming software, creating an advisory board with recruited local professionals to help design and update the System i curriculum at Gateway, and opening networking opportunities for students. Jim can be reached at [jbuck1@wi.rr.com](mailto:jbuck1@wi.rr.com).



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