

The New York Oracle Users Group (NYOUG) celebrates 25 years of serving the greater
NYC area Oracle user community

2009 marks the 25th anniversary of the founding of the New York Oracle Users Group. It was formed in 1984 with the goal of exchanging ideas, providing assistance and support to users of Oracle software products. The organization consists of volunteer users, consultants, and vendors of Oracle-related products and services.

NYOUG is one of the oldest and largest Oracle user groups in North America. It all started simply enough. In 1983, Moshe Tamir read about this new “Oracle database product”, a commercial implementation of E.F. Codd’s relational database using the SQL language described in IBM’s research papers. Mr. Tamir, realizing that he had just glimpsed the future of databases, quit his job writing microcode for telephone switches and searched for a job where he could work with this amazing new software product. He landed a position as both DBA and developer at Hebrew National Kosher Foods, one of the first Oracle customers in the New York City area. At that time, Hebrew National was running Oracle Version 3 on Data General computers. Looking to share his experiences with Oracle and to learn from others who were using the software, Tamir asked Ken Jacobs (almost two decades before he earned the moniker “Dr. DBA”), who was the Oracle employee responsible for sales on the entire East coast, if he could provide contact information for others who were using Oracle on Data General hardware. That contact information became the mailing list for the first Oracle Users’ Newsletter, and the stage was set for the founding of NYOUG.

In 1984, Tamir began working at the New York Blood Center. Along with IT manager Ken Brown, they organized the first official meeting of NYOUG, which was held in a conference room at the United Nations and attracted 10 attendees. The group set up its initial steering committee, adding Richard Drechsler, the director of the computing center at the City University of New York’s (CUNY) graduate center, Carol Ann Greff, an engineer with Allied Bendix Aerospace, William Kinahan from Merck, and Martin Rosman from Ebasco Services. This committee organized meetings that featured many speakers from “Belmont,” the location of Oracle’s headquarters at the time. These speakers included Oracle’s top technical staff among them, the first manager of Oracle’s centralized Support Center, Mary Winslow, who told the group about the new 800 number they could use to reach her staff of 30 support technicians.

NYOUG has been in the forefront of the Oracle user community ever since. NYOUG meetings have been held at venues throughout New York City. Columbia University, Baruch College, the CUNY Graduate Center and St. John’s University have all hosted NYOUG general meetings. NYOUG has met in Merrill Lynch’s offices in the World Financial Center, New York Life’s headquarters, and in the auditorium of the Swiss Bank Corporation’s conference center (which was used as the set for Gordon Gecko’s office in the movie Wall Street). The keynote speaker at an NYOUG meeting at the Fashion Institute of Technology was Oracle’s president, Ray Lane. Mr. Lane and his walkie-talkie carrying entourage arrived several hours late and tried to cut his appearance short so that he could get to the meetings he had scheduled for later in the day. The membership of

NYOUG was anything but cooperative, asking question after question of Oracle's second in command until all hope of making those afternoon meetings was lost. NYOUG also met at the midtown offices of Morgan Stanley, hosted by one of the top research analysts following the software industry, Charles E. Phillips, Jr. Long before he became one of Oracle's presidents, Mr. Phillips (or, as his toll free number and website referred to him - "Mr. Chuck") would regularly host the NYOUG. He routinely polled the membership after returning from meeting with Oracle's executives on the West coast. "This is what they told me in California," he would say, "now what is the truth?"

In the late 1980's, some new faces appeared on the NYOUG Steering Committee. The NYOUG Newsletter, which disappeared after 1987, was revived in 1989, with Carmine Tedesco as editor and Anthony Ziemba as publisher. At the end of 1989, Michael LaMagna joined the steering committee as treasurer. After the first election of officers at the end of 1989, Tedesco and LaMagna remained in their positions. Tony Ziemba was elected chairman, and Carol Ann Greff, a founding member of the group became the first representative to the fledgling IOUG. While no president was elected, Meir Feig was appointed to serve in that role.

The early 90's saw huge growth in user group activity on the East coast. Ziemba, along with Mike Corey, the newly elected chairman of the Boston-based Northeast Oracle Users Group and Dale Lowery, chairman of the Mid-Atlantic Oracle Users Group formed a joint publishing venture to create and distribute a combined "super" newsletter. The three also began discussions regarding a regional users' conference. These talks led to the creation of the Oracle User Resource, Inc. OUR added the Southeast (SEOUG) and Eastern Canada (ORA*GEC) to the consortium and the first East Coast Oracle conference, ECO '91 was held in Washington D.C. in March of that year. ECO thrived as a smaller, less expensive alternative to what had become Oracle's premier conference, "International Oracle Users Week". For a decade, ECO consistently drew 500 attendees to what many felt was the best technical conference the Oracle world had ever seen.

At the end of 1991, two new officers joined the NYOUG Steering Committee - Carl Esposito from Merrill Lynch as Vice President and Michael Olin an independent consultant and Tamir protégé as Membership Coordinator. Moshe Tamir was once again given a title, this time as Vendor Policy Chair. The following year, Ziemba stepped down as chairman but remained in charge of communications. Feig left the Steering Committee and Esposito replaced him as president. The group went back to the New York Blood Center and recruited Jonathan Intner to serve as VP.

While Ziemba continued to publish the OUR newsletter, NYOUG restarted its own journal in 1993, with Tamir serving as editor. Dr. Paul Dorsey, a professor at Rider College joined the Steering Committee that year, as secretary. At the end of that year, Guy Yasika took over as editor and Dorsey became VP. There was only one NYOUG SIG at the time, the DBA SIG, chaired by Shaul Ganel. The SIG added a programming coordinator, Steven Zanone, towards the end of 1993.

Carl Esposito was a man with a mission. At every opportunity he extended an invitation to Oracle CEO Larry Ellison to come and speak to what he (Esposito) described as the largest and most dynamic of all Oracle Users Groups. Offers were made to schedule an NYOUG meeting around Ellison's travel schedule, so that he could meet with the group at his convenience, when he was already in New York. These invitations were regularly and routinely declined. When two speakers from Oracle simply didn't show up at the NYOUG general meeting on June 29, 1994, the fireworks began. Esposito fired off an indignant letter to Ellison the next day, with copies to Oracle's New York office. A reporter for Computerworld, the leading trade journal of the time, picked up on the story and ran a brief item about Oracle's snub of NYOUG. This led to Charles Wang, the CEO of Computer Associates (the Long Island, NY based firm that had just purchased Ask/Ingres an Oracle competitor), to track down Esposito at work. Wang called Esposito directly and offered to come and speak at an NYOUG meeting on any number of generic IT topics. Of course, the offer was preceded by some discussion between Wang and Esposito regarding the proper pronunciation of the CEO's name.

Wang: This is Charles Wong from Computer Associates
Esposito: Who?
Wang: Charles Wong. I'm the CEO of Computer Associates
Esposito: You must mean Charles Wang...

No matter how the name was pronounced, the turmoil generated by Esposito's letter, Wang's call, and the reporting of the entire incident in the trade press caused a rift between Oracle and NYOUG that required the intervention of at least three senior Oracle executives to repair. When Ellison appeared at an Oracle sales event in Lower Manhattan in December 1994, he referred to the NYOUG members in the audience as "spies."

NYOUG expanded its SIG offerings in 1994, adding a CASE SIG, chaired by Tony Ziemba. That year also saw Rachel Carmichael take over as chair of the DBA SIG. The following year, a Web SIG was added, chaired by Diane Hickry from Northrop-Grumman. She would be replaced by Jeff Bernknopf in 1996. Peter Koletzke joined the steering committee as Marketing Director and managed the release of the first NYOUG DBA Utilities Disk.

The next major organizational change for NYOUG occurred in 1999. Dr. Paul Dorsey took over as President, Zanone moved to Vice President, Tamir became Treasurer and Michael Medved joined the officer ranks as Secretary. Completing the shuffling of the ranks, Mike LaMagna became the group's first Webmaster. A Data Warehousing SIG was also added, with Rob Edwards as chair. As NYOUG moved into the new millennium, Jeff Bernknopf added the Vice Presidency to his responsibilities and Edwards took over the newsletter from Guy Yasika.

NYOUG had been holding most of its general meetings in Lower Manhattan throughout the 1990s. Meeting locations had varied, but most meetings were either held at Merrill Lynch's offices at the World Financial Center or at the Swiss Bank Corporation's conference center at the foot of City Hall Park. By the end of the decade, the College of

Insurance, two blocks north of the World Trade Center had become the regular meeting location. NYOUG had scheduled its fall general meeting at that location for September 12, 2001. When the first plane hit the World Trade Center, Steering Committee members started calling each other to discuss the impact that the apparent crash would have on our meeting the next day. By the time everyone was contacted, the magnitude of the attacks had become clear. Discussion of meeting logistics gave way to concerns about friends, family and NYOUG members who we knew worked in the Twin Towers. The group later heard from Guy Yasika who had gone down from his office on the upper floors to the cafeteria to get coffee with some colleagues shortly before the building was struck. Luckily, they emerged unharmed. There have been discussions since then about redesigning the NYOUG logo to remove the image of the World Trade Center towers. The Steering Committee decided that the towers should stay, as a reminder of who we are, and what we all lost on that day.

The fall 2001 meeting was rescheduled for March 2002 and moved uptown to Columbia University's Faculty house. NYOUG continued to meet either uptown or in midtown throughout the year. A Long Island SIG, with Jason Cohen as chair, was added to provide an opportunity for the growing membership in the suburbs to attend local events. A short-lived attempt was also made to create a local SIG for the northern suburbs, meeting in Westchester County and chaired by Arup Nanda.

At the start of 2003, NYOUG returned downtown to the former College of Insurance site, which had become the Manhattan campus of St. John's University. While the location is certainly convenient for members, it has bedeviled speakers from out of town. All too frequently, speakers who get into a cab at the airport and ask to be taken to St. John's find themselves frantically calling for directions when their cab driver takes them to the University's main campus in Queens.

The officer shuffle continued over the next few years. Rachel Carmichael left IT completely when she began working towards becoming a veterinary technician. Simay Alpoge, a longtime NYOUG member, took over the DBA SIG and later added the Long Island SIG to her portfolio. Rob Edwards was elected Treasurer, and Melanie Caffrey took over responsibility for the growing newsletter, now the "NYOUG Technical Journal." John McKenna took over the Warehousing SIG for a year or so before it landed back with Edwards. At the end of 2005, the shuffling seemed complete. Tom Petite joined the board as Secretary, Michael Medved became Venue Coordinator and Sean Hull took over Bernknopf's responsibilities as Vendor Coordinator. Finally, Coleman Leviter became chair of the Web SIG.

Paul Dorsey finally succumbed to the demands of fatherhood. At the end of 2006 he declined nomination for another term as President and was replaced by Michael Olin. This presented the group with a major crisis. While Dorsey had done a spectacular job in growing both the group's membership and prestige, none of that would have been possible without the extraordinary efforts of his right (and possibly left) hand, Caryl Lee Fisher. She was the logistical genius that had enabled the growth of NYOUG. The crisis was resolved when NYOUG hired Fisher as Executive Director. Now she had a title that

accurately described what she did for the group (which is pretty much everything). A few minor changes to the leadership of the group have occurred during Olin's (relatively) short tenure. Vikas Sawhney is now chair of the Warehousing SIG and Irina Cotler has recently joined the steering committee as Vendor Relations Chair.

NYOUG's members and officers have authored numerous books on Oracle related topics, presented at Oracle conferences throughout the world, and even taught database systems and Oracle to university students. Among the membership are Oracle ACEs, members of the Oak Table Network and even an Oracle "DBA of the Year" (2003) and PL/SQL Developer of the Year (2007)."

NYOUG's general and SIG meetings attract some of the top speakers and leaders in the industry. Past meeting keynote speakers have included Oracle's Ray Lane, Charles Philips, Ken Jacobs, Tom Kyte, Thomas Kurian, Dai Clegg, Roel Stalman, Vijay Tella, and Wim Coekaerts, as well as other leading Oracle gurus like Steven Feuerstein, Rich Niemiec, Michael Abbey, and Arup Nanda. While the regular general meetings routinely attract over 100 attendees, NYOUG's "Metro Area" events draw over 500. These events have been held on university campuses, in corporate auditoriums, on a boat cruising the Hudson River and New York Harbor and in Midtown Manhattan hotels. In addition to its meetings, NYOUG also offers its members exclusive training sessions and a Technical Journal full of useful white papers, tips and techniques from the meeting speakers and members. The entire archive of presentations from NYOUG meetings is available on the web (<http://www.nyoug.org>) and the group is exploring the possibility of podcasting meeting presentations.

Over the past 25 years, NYOUG has seen its paid membership grow to over 700 and its weekly email blasts reach over 4,000 IT professionals. Although part of the IOUG Regional User Group structure, NYOUG is a completely independent and self-funded group, supported by revenue from its membership dues and meeting vendor sponsors. NYOUG has been a resource for the Oracle user community for almost as long as there have been Oracle users. The group has accomplished quite a bit in that time and is well positioned for the next 25 years.