

DataCAD Boston Users Group

120 Trenton St., Melrose, MA 02176-3714 (781)662-0020 Tel. & Fax eshu@world.std.com

<http://world.std.com/~eshu/dbug.htm>

A Committee of the Boston Society of Architects

DBUG Meeting Notes

February 27, 2007

Host: *Geoff Langdon, ArchitecturalCADD*
Peabody, Massachusetts

Host Geoff Langdon welcomed a dozen DBUGers to his home and office in Peabody, Mass. After a hearty meal of homemade chili and general networking, the group enjoyed a slide show of Geoff and Cindy's recent trip back to Tahiti, where they stayed in a hillside/beachfront condominium complex (Francis Ford Coppola was one of the owners).

After introductions, a job opening was announced by Joan and Rich Correll in North Hampton, NH looking to hire someone skilled in DataCAD. You may contact them at <joanc@correllassociates.com> or 603-964-9523. Evan Shu announced that the next DBUG meeting would be at the BSA on March 20th and include a presentation by Mark Madura on his mission work week down in Biloxi, Mississippi as well as an update on DataCAD 12.

Second Life

Geoff asked if anyone had any experience as "Second Lifers" and hardly anyone had. Geoff described it as a merger of technologies between the video gaming industry and the Internet. He said that it had the potential to become the next big thing as a 3D virtual world wide web. If anyone has had experience with games such as SimCity, this is similar but on a much grander scale.

Second Life is open, largely free to explore, and run efficiently. It does have real world ramifications in that its currency (Lindens) has a real exchange rate (roughly 300 Lindens equals \$1) and so sales can be made, land can be bought, structures erected, interiors furnished, and businesses run. The amount of surface area in Second Life is estimated at 10 times the earth's. There are almost 5 million residents inhabiting this virtual community who spend the equivalent of almost \$2 million US dollars per day. To save time, Geoff said that his standard #1 answer to almost every question that the group might ask about what is possible in Second Life is "YES!"

To explore Second Life, you need to create your own "avatar" which is a virtual body you design that can walk,

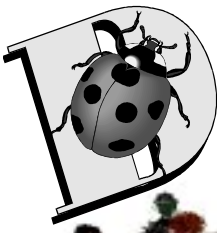
run, swim, or even fly (*Page Up* key) through Second Life space. Interestingly, there are more women who have Second Life avatars than men. Geoff told the story of a popular resident in Second Life who spends a lot of time there (often seen at various concerts) and whom many other residents seemed to know. He later checked her background profile and found out that she had been crippled in a car accident and was bound to a wheelchair in real life.

When you first get started there are good basic guides that give you the basics. Once you create an avatar for yourself, you are sent to "Orientation Island" which gives you a tutorial on the basics and where you can also collect a number for free items for your persona.

Geoff's avatar, architect *Keoki Marama* took us to a dock in Nantucket Harbor, where we took in a scenic view of the various boats. A sailboat race was scheduled for later that evening. From there we took a short walk down Water Street to a special DBUG/BSA storefront space (*see below*) that Geoff had announced to the DBUG forum would be meeting place for other Second Life travellers who might wish to join our tour. Three who met us were "Snickerfu Goodman," "Frogman Noel," and "Big Poultry." They tried to keep up with Keoki on this whirlwind tour but



Figure: DBUG Jumping Off Point in Nantucket at Second Life w/guide Keoki Marama.



DBUG Meeting
February 27, 2007
Page Two



unfortunately, were often left behind or wondering what in the Second Life world was going on half the time. It would have been nice if they could have listened in on some type of continuous audio stream but unfortunately, that is not easily feasible yet.

From that jumping off point, Keoki took us to a number of locations: an architectural landmark house by Crescendo Architects, a Starwood Hotel, and an outdoor concert. One very well developed urban area is downtown Dublin, which includes a number of familiar historic buildings. We walked down the street and entered a bar that included a number of rather rough looking characters that might have sent us running out of there in real life! From there we entered a museum to view the “Book of Kells” while actually being able to turn the pages to look at each leaf and enlarge it to full screen view.

Geoff explained that the secret to real time viewing of Second Life is that most 3D surfaces are texture-mapped rather than created in real 3D vectors. The basic box is the building block for most Second Life structures and, by using various texture mapping tricks, quite a number of complex-looking architecture can be created. Keoki took us to the equivalent of Home Depot, where various furnishings could be obtained. Next we went to Sears and looked at various appliances, which we might also want to collect to use at a future date for an architectural design. Autodesk is also working to unveil soon an “Autodesk Island” for AutoCAD designed structures.

The tour continued to the US Capitol where we went inside to see where our representatives sit. Apparently, you can watch actual live sessions of Congress in the Second Life space. We continued on to a shopping mall, where Geoff showed how to pick up various clothing items for Keoki, so that he could look in place for any setting from the beach to formal black tie only balls, such as at the Club Egret. Many items are free for the taking (add them to your wardrobe). A right-click on your avatar allows you to access your various libraries and collections as well as to alter appearance or perform other actions. Geoff maintained that at the various movie theaters you can view any movie ever made! (But how the copyrights are circumvented is unknown.)



Figures: Second Life menus and interior furnishings (above) and some typical avatar characters (left) at a Lawrence Lessig lecture.

The architects in the group, of course, wanted to know how one might go about actually building a structure in Second Life. First, he took us to a designated “Sandbox” area where you are allowed to build anything you want. You build it here, save it to your collection, then when you have obtained or rented Second Life land, you can situate your architecture in place. Geoff said the process was much like using *SketchUp*. You place a basic box, off which are shown three basic axes vectors. As in *SketchUp*, you push/pull at the basic box to create the shape you want. One common method is to create a slab of the right size, then place a texture map of a real floor plan and stretch the plan to match the sized slab. This plan now forms the template for creating walls in scale to build “from the ground up.” Doors are “scripts” that look closed but then open and allow passage (if permitted) when “knocked” on by an avatar.

Geoff explained that like real world zoning, there are designated areas for certain activities, e.g. G-rated vs. Mature vs. Military. But he foresees Second Life as having a big impact on how we conduct business in the future. The Crescendo Architects have a number of their designs that can be entered and explored from their office directory in Second Life. Geoff ran a video from them that demonstrated how they used Second Life to work on a real world design for a client that lived halfway around the world.

As Second Life develops and grows, we may all be looking to set up a shop in a Second Life location. Geoff gave many of us our first glimpse into the potential of that world on this DBUG night. With some regret, the DBUGers left Second Life to return to RL (Real Life) and depart for home (no more flying allowed) at around 9:30 p.m.

-- Meeting Notes by Evan H. Shu, FAIA