

TECHNOLOGY

Moving conference 'was a bold risk'



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Cal Evans from Zend Technologies speaks at the Northeast PHP 2016 conference in Charlottetown. It was the first multi-day technology conference focused on web technologies held in the Maritimes.

Northeast PHP holds first Maritime conference in Charlottetown

The decision to move the Northeast PHP 2016 conference, which was already well established in Boston, to Charlottetown was a bold undertaking.

Originally conceived by PHP user groups in Boston, Vermont and P.E.I., the annual Boston conference drew top speakers and IT participants from North America and beyond to discuss issues related to the PHP web development language that runs some 80 percent of websites globally. Led by the efforts of Charlottetown-based Lincoln Maskey, president of the Atlantic PHP User Group, and Peter MacIntyre, co-chair of the Northeast PHP conference, P.E.I. was selected as the venue for 2016.

"It was a strategic risk," said Maskey. "Boston is a great city and easily accessible, but we were looking for a unique spot that would have tremendous impact and attract people who'd never attended before. This is the first time a multi-day technology conference focused on web technologies has been held in the Maritimes. It points to the vitality of P.E.I.'s IT sector that we could host it here."

With a "razor-thin" budget, but valuable contacts from past events and the willingness of speakers to travel to P.E.I. at their own expense, the August conference attracted 113 participants, many of them local, and 16 public- and private-sector sponsors. Companies represented included Google, Oracle, AOL, American Express, and Wayfair.

Presenters from the United Kingdom, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Boston, Atlanta, Dallas, Toronto and Ottawa included keynote speakers Anthony Ferrara (Grove) and Cal Evans (Zend Technologies). Together, they tackled key issues involving machine learning, PHP integration with emerging technologies, containerization, and robotics.

"PHP is a free open-source general-purpose programming language for web-content management systems many of us regularly access, including Wikipedia, WordPress, and the user-facing portion of Facebook," says MacIntyre. "The PHP community constantly fosters it and educates through conferences globally." The Atlantic PHP User Group (www.atlanticphp.org), based in P.E.I. with 30 members, meets bi-weekly to discuss related issues

and projects and provide mentorship.

It was recently announced that the 2017 Northeast PHP Conference next August will return to P.E.I.

"We went to P.E.I. to validate an ambitious proposition, but now we know we can do this," says MacIntyre. "There was an overwhelming interest in coming back to Charlottetown."

The 2017 conference will be a day longer with a continued focus on international topics and speakers with the intention to attract an even larger audience. "Word of mouth from our speakers and participants was inspiring," says Maskey. "There's so much potential here, but it takes time for people to discover it."

In 2017, there'll also be more opportunities for attendees to enjoy the P.E.I. lifestyle.

"This year, some people toured the Island, and they're eager to return next year with their families. Many had heard of P.E.I. before, but hadn't had the chance to experience it. We'll give them a reason to come back again and again."

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