

Software trade group plans computer conference

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GRAND RAPIDS — A West Michigan computer software group is attempting to ensure the oft-quoted "talent exodus" does not actually occur in this region.

XP West Michigan is a Grand Rapids-centered trade association focused on learning about software development. It is dedicated to improving the competitiveness of Michigan's software development community by sharing agile software development practices. XP was founded in fall 2003.

"Atomic Object founded XP to create better competition in the information technology business in West Michigan," said Carl Erickson, president of Atomic Object, a custom software development and consulting firm. "It's in all of our best interests to be globally competitive."

XP meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month, from September through May at Atomic Object on Wealthy Street in Grand Rapids. Meetings usually draw 35 attendees. As many as 90 have attended the more popular sessions. Erickson estimates that employees from 100 West Michigan companies have attended an XP meeting.

Meeting topics center on the simple theme of making better software. While other computer groups are dedicated to a particular technology or company, XP deals with the entire software development process.

"It's been fantastic for spreading the word about how to improve software," said Beverly Mapes, an XP board member and simulation test lead at Smiths Aerospace.

As part of the effort to grow and retain talent in West Michigan, XP and the American Society for Quality have organized the Great Lakes Software Excellence conference in Grand Rapids on Oct. 25-26. The 2006 GLSE Conference is hosted by the Calvin College computer science department and will be held at the Prince Conference Center at Calvin College.

The conference offers world-class keynote speakers, hands-on tutorials, and presentations that address real issues in software development. Developers, business analysts, testers, engineers, and development and project managers can learn and network with other professionals.

"We've attracted speakers from other parts of the nation," said Mapes. "This is not Chicago or Denver – it's Grand Rapids. It's putting this area as a dot on the map for quality software development."

The conference theme is "Compete Globally, Act Locally." The globalization of the information technology business has focused on value, hourly rates and ignoring quality. This conference will discuss shifting the criteria of competition to delivered value, as well as techniques to improve the speed and quality of software.

The GLSEC agenda promises to tackle the most challenging aspects of the profession: How do you go about analyzing customer needs? How should software be tested? What is the right amount of documentation? How can companies attract and retain talented staff?

"We put together a fabulous opportunity for West Michigan," Erickson said. "This is an opportunity to make a connection with the thought leaders of our industry. People who are out there on the edge, thinking new thoughts, helping the industry grow."

Go to www.glsec.org for registration and conference information.

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