

DHCP on the Web

by George Timson

Fifteen years ago the Veterans Administration (now the Department of Veterans Affairs) established the Decentralized Hospital Computer Program, which developed and deployed integrated medical information M[UMPS] applications throughout the VA system. But DHCP ("VISTA") software has had a broader scope than just the VA. As public-domain "free-ware," it has been used and modified by other U.S. agencies such as the Defense Department and the Indian Health Service, and by private and public entities around the world (see, e.g., "DHCP in Pakistan", *M Computing*, March 1997).

A fifteen-year-old human is a teenager, but a fifteen-year-old software system is a "legacy," a term perhaps suggestive of a slightly dotty older relative. Users of DHCP code are justifiably concerned about maintaining the vitality of their systems, as cyber-change keeps accelerating. And, with the VA scaling back the amount of effort it can devote to helping "outsiders," it is now particularly appropriate that these DHCP users take advantage of new Web-based tools to consolidate and enhance the work incorporated in their "legacy."

With the support of the MTA, therefore, a new website, www.hardhats.org, has been brought into being to foster the DHCP/VISTA "virtual community." The site offers introductory information and links, of course, but it also provides some resources of ongoing usefulness to MUMPSters involved in DHCP systems. There is a "forum" for discussion of DHCP-specific issues and problems. An on-line "patch" board makes available recently-developed code that may be of use to FileMan and Kernel programmers.

The VA FileMan team in San Francisco has done some innovative documentation in the past year, and

the result of their work is also available at www.hardhats.org. The FileMan User and Programmer manuals have been attractively "translated" into HTML and are available for reference on-line. Visitors may soon find that accessing the manuals via browser is easier than locating the equivalent information on paper.

The HTML documentation provides evidence that DHCP is still a vital, supported system. Those who bemoan the absence of a Graphical User Interface in DHCP should look carefully at the new utilities available in Version 21 of FileMan. The API "hooks" to enable a GUI DHCP are here! A major GUI-interface DHCP package has been up and running in a VA hospital in Alabama since last summer. As the web-linked community becomes more aware of itself, developments like these, inside and outside the VA, can be disseminated and leveraged to the benefit of all. Maybe DHCP can't really be called a "teenager." But at least now it has what every fifteen-year old wants—anew phone!

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