

A Salute to John F. Covin

Outgoing Chair, MTA Board of Directors

by David A. Holbrook
Vice-Chair, MTA Board of Directors



John F. Covin

Johnny Covin describes his very extensive service to the MTA as a labor of love. It began with teaching "Introduction to M Programming" at the 1985 Annual Meeting — a course he offered at six subsequent meetings. For Johnny, these tutorials weren't just training for the students, they were an introduction to a community. They were among the most successful annual meeting tutorials ever presented.

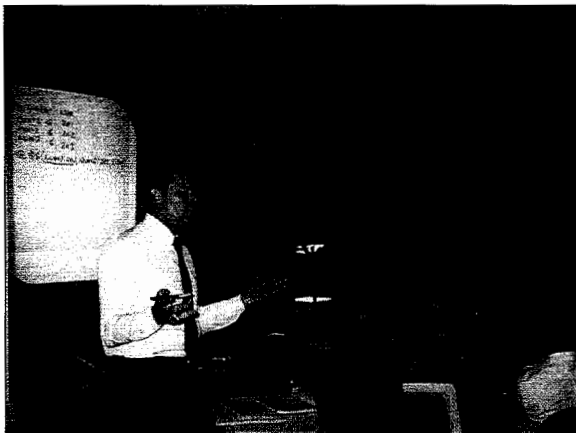
Classes are an effective way to reach small numbers of people, but Johnny wondered how the organization and the M community could do more to reach out to a wider audience. The answer was the MTA Promotions Committee, a volunteer group of M vendors with the objective of advancing M into the technological mainstream. Johnny chaired that committee from 1986 to 1995, and I can say from experience that he was the driving force behind the committee's work. He would say, however, that his role was not important: what was important was that our vendor community was talking and working together toward a common set of goals.

Time goes on and the world changes. Johnny recognized the need for fundamental change in our organization.

During his time on the Board (he began as Member at Large in 1987-1989), but especially as Chair from 1991 to 1998, Johnny taught us how to reinvent ourselves. He had experienced reinventing a company from his work at SciCor and believed that we could, and should, do it as well.

Perhaps the most visible change was in the Annual Meeting, which until 1996 had for 24 years been a private affair for our members. This arrangement was effective for the attendees, but it did not expose our technology to the world and did not expose our members to other technologies. Johnny was convinced our community needed to embrace other technologies if our own was to survive. The result: a partnership with DCI's Database and Client/Server World that gave our vendor and individual members a brand new opportunity to participate together in a mainstream computer industry event concurrent with the MTA Annual Conference.

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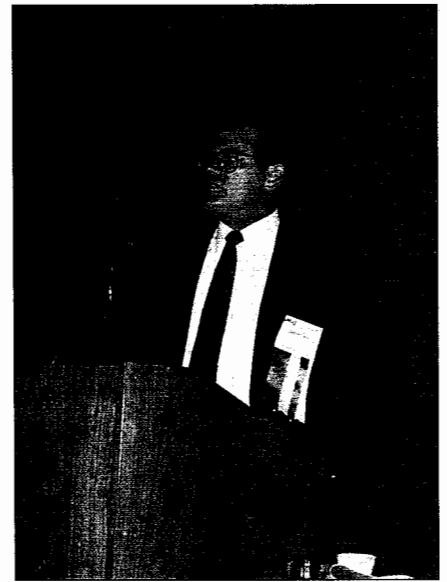


Johnny teaching his introductory MUMPS course in Atlanta, 1987.

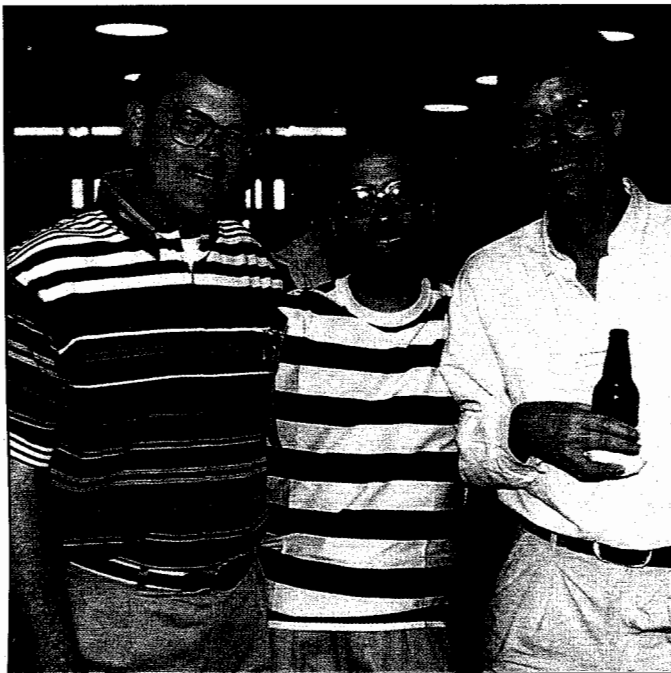
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Probably less apparent to the membership is the ongoing transformation in the relationship between the Board of Directors and the MTA staff. From the origins as the MUMPS Users' Group, the activities of this organization were primarily initiated by the Board and conducted by the staff under the Board's direction. Johnny understood that Board decisions have a profound effect on the staff, who live MTA on a daily basis while the Board plays a more limited part-time role. His goal has been to empower the staff with responsibility for MTA's destiny, and they more than ever are finding creative solutions that benefit our organization and community. He views good management as much more than a series of correct decisions: his goal has been to build a self-sufficient organization.

For me one of the pleasures of serving on the Board has been working with Johnny Covin and observing his unique management style. Johnny has respect and trust for the people he works with. He has been cautious in asserting his own will on the Board, and he is a good listener. I have often heard him say, "What I think I hear you telling me is this . . ." It is fascinating to watch him draw ideas from a group and the process has often led us in directions that no one could have predicted.



As Board Chair, Johnny convenes the Association Meeting in 1992.



Johnny with European friends Jon Diamond and Rob Bowran at the 1993 Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C.

To Johnny, making a good business decision and doing the right thing are just different ways of saying the same thing. While the Board has had to make some difficult decisions in recent years, they have made those decisions with openness and honesty.

As this year's election cycle approached, Johnny discussed running for another term as Chair with staff and Board members, and was prepared to run again if that was in the best interest of the organization. MTA's healthy fund balance and availability of talented candidates to fill vacant positions led him to decide not to seek another term. We are fortunate that we will continue to have his wisdom and experience as he serves the Board as Immediate Past Chair and helps the MTA deal with a new set of challenges.

Johnny Covin is Corporate Vice President and CIO of Covance, Inc.

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