

Feature

What does one do after leaving the Data General nest?

You join the few, the proud...

The Grey Eagles

The membership roster reads like the who's who of a prestigious MBA program. It's an elite group that includes presidents of some of the most well-known companies in the computer industry.

They hold annual reunions and have annual dues. The alumni newsletter includes class notes of alumni accomplishments.

At reunions, they reminisce of the old times—before their hair turned grey—when they thought they would soar above the rest. And an impressive number have. While they may only see each other once a year, their bonds of friendship are strong, going far beyond nostalgia for the good old days.

They are the Grey Eagles, also known as the National Association of Data General Alumni.

As Bill Adams, a Grey Eagles' founder and a former Data General regional sales manager, explained, "The reason we get together is because of the camaraderie we developed. Not since Data General have I experienced such a feeling of camaraderie. The DG experience was extremely intense; we were in deep competition with DEC, but it was the sheer willpower of the DG sales force that got DG there. We felt that DG employees were the best, and we became very proud and cohesive, developing a genuine love that goes beyond business. We developed a tremendous sense of pride in the early '70s at Data General. I accepted an offer in 1969 and started in 1970. In the early '70s, it was the fastest growing company on the New York Stock Exchange, with a compounded annual growth of greater than 50 percent. We were proud of DG, particularly since the



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minicomputer industry was so competitive at the time. We formed The Grey Eagles because of a bond that we just wouldn't let go and which still remains."

The Grey Eagles represents a unique phenomenon in the computer industry, according to one of its early presidents, Bill Jobe, president of MIPS Technology Development Group and a former DG vice president of North American sales. While alumni of some other companies have attempted to form similar organizations, none have sustained themselves as intensely or as long as The Grey Eagles, now in its 11th year.

The Grey Eagles was conceived by four DG sales managers—Bill Adams, Chris Robert, Mark Leslie and Stan Joseph—when they were in Westboro for a regional sales managers' meeting in 1979. Over drinks one evening, they started discussing future plans. They all knew that they would be leaving the company at some point, and made a pact to keep in touch as a group after they went their separate ways. Or, as one of the founder recalls, "We made a bet that we would be out of the company within a year and whoever wasn't would pay the airfare for the rest of us to get together."

The first Grey Eagles' meeting was held in 1980 in California. The group was known informally as the Data General Alumni Association, but as word began to trickle out, other former DG employees were asked to join and the Grey Eagles were recognized as an official organization.

Adams was elected the first president at the first "official" meeting held in Houston during the 1980 National Computer Conference. This meeting attracted 148 members. At that time, the group was dubbed The Grey Eagles, a nickname coined by Mike Paul, one of the early members. "It was a rather memorable meeting," Adams recalled, "as it took years for the group to be able to afford to pay for the hors d'oeuvres and drinks which we enthusiastically ordered."

When Rick Bennett, former DG marketing communications director, became president, he renamed the group FGBU (Former Grey Bastards of

the Universe). This name was derived from the now infamous, but unpublished advertisement, "The Bastards Say Welcome," designed when IBM decided to enter the minicomputer industry.

As legend tells it, when Bill Jobe assumed presidency of The Grey Eagles, he decided to restore the Eagles to an era of respectability and the more dignified name, Grey Eagles, became permanent.

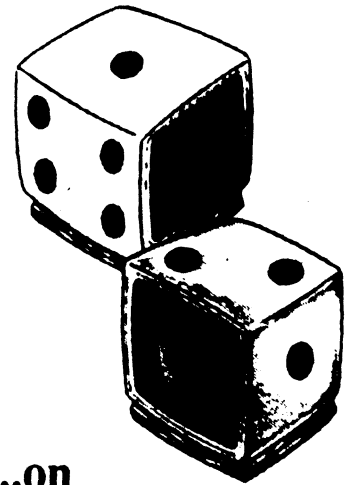
The name, Grey Eagles, conveys some of the mystique and uninhibited enthusiasm prevalent in the early years of the company. Contrary to popular belief, the name does not designate Eagle, the code name for the first Eclipse MV/Family machine. Eagles was chosen to connote the pride and arrogance among early alumni that "DG Alumni will soar above the rest." The name "Grey Eagles" is used by retired test pilots and, according to one of the early members, it seemed an appropriate choice since they all flew. "Grey" refers to the fact that the members are a little older than when they started at Data General.

The Grey Eagles also like to reminisce and swap "war stories" about their tenure at Data General—like when they found out early on that football tickets to entertain customers cannot be charged to expense reports. They also laugh about some of the jokes they played on potential employees—like when a future sales executive went for an interview at a local hotel, but was greeted by three guys sitting in a booth wearing identical dark glasses and suits.

And while memories fade over time and stories become taller in each telling, most agree that it was the intensity and the can-do spirit of the DG experience that contributed to the unique, high-level achievements of DG alumni. It was this entrepreneurial style that gave The Grey Eagles the impetus to go out and do exciting things on their own. And it is this same spirit that contributes to the continued success of The Grey Eagles today.

Robert, now president of Epoch Systems, left DG in 1980 to form Corporate Software. "We are an aggressive group and that can be attributed to the

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spirit of DG during the '70s," he explained. "DG created a tremendous amount of team spirit and a winning attitude. This has translated into the outstanding achievements by former DG employees after leaving the company."

It was this enthusiasm, combined with hard work that created the drive to succeed that so many of The Grey

Eagles exhibit. According to Jobe, "When we hired people, we looked for real talent and we got top-notch players. We were the Marine Corps of the computer industry, and like the Marine Corps we got broken in."

The structure of The Grey Eagles is very loose. The group prides itself on its ad hoc, irregular meetings. The National Meeting is held about once a

year. There are two branches: one in San Francisco and another in Boston. The meetings are very informal with no set agenda. Generally, members just wander around, circulate and have a good time. Meetings also provide an opportunity to do business.

Members characterize the group as gregarious, fun-loving and hard-working. The group reflects the qualities that made DG a success early on.

The current national president is Bob Washburn, vice president of Avatar Computer. In characteristic Grey Eagle fashion, he arrived late for his election to office. Like a true Grey Eagle, he was not present for his election as president of the New England Chapter.

A retrospective of past presidents includes major accomplishments, such as "\$1,000 short for party, collected most dues and most humorous newsletter."

The alumni newsletter, *The Beak Speaks*, edited by Steve Gaal, is distributed on a sporadic basis like other Eagles' activities to a mailing list that has grown close to 1,000.


The Grey Eagles identify themselves by their badge numbers. As Mark Leslie, president and CEO of Veritas Software, said, "Everybody remembers their DG badge number. Even though I left DG in 1980, to this day I remember my badge number is #1490."

The group is proud of members' achievements. At a Grey Eagles' party in 1989, pewter Highest Flying Grey Eagle awards were presented to outstanding members to recognize their achievements in founding high technology companies which successfully went public: Bill Foster (Stratus Computer), Jim Dow (Microcom) and Chris Robert (Corporate Software).

The highlight of Data General founder Edson de Castro's going away party was his induction as a Grey Eagle. In recognition of his induction into the association, de Castro (Badge #1) received the highest Grey Eagles' tribute of all—the Gold Grey Eagles' statue—a seven-inch engraved gold eagle perched on a pedestal. ■

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