

Snapshot

Excel-erating the automation process

Ken Puls, CMA

There's a lot of truth to the saying that necessity is the mother of invention. Just ask Ken Puls, CMA, accounting supervisor and systems administrator at Fairwinds Community & Resort in Nanoose Bay, BC. Due to staff cuts in his department in 2002, Puls had to try to automate as many functions as possible to maintain the quantity and quality of work they produced. In the process, he became an expert in Visual Basics for Applications (VBA), the computer language behind the entire MS Office suite, including Excel.

Using his knowledge, Puls is able to automate many functions in Excel, and now helps others do the same through his website, ExcelGuru.ca. In fact, NASA programmers recently decided that they wanted to take reports for their power systems and automate the process that takes the Excel data and puts it into PDF format. They now use a modified version of a process developed by Puls to do so.

As J. Yimin, from the International Space Station Power Resource Office at NASA, said to Puls, "There was definitely no way that I would have been able to do this without your code, so thanks a million, we appreciate it."

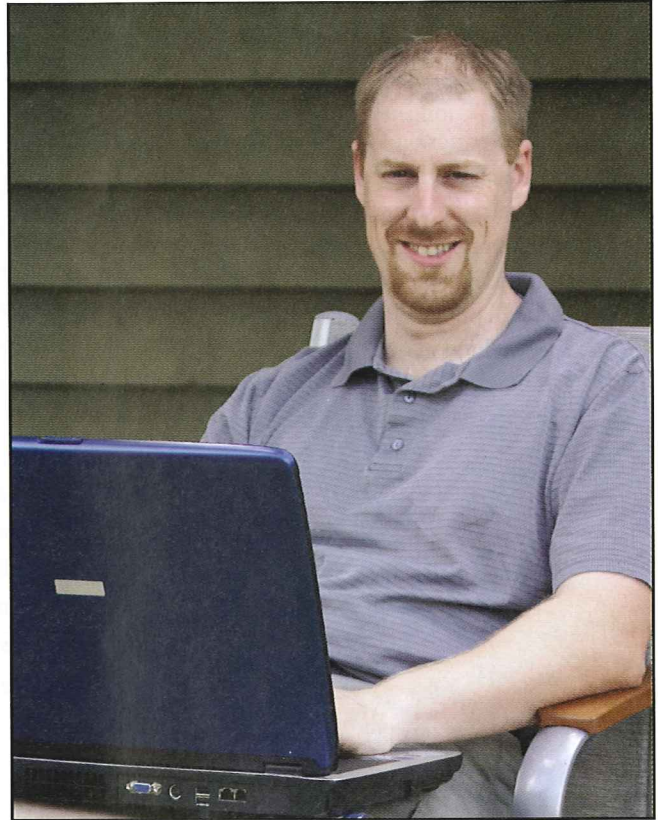
In 2002, when it all started, Puls was just trying to keep everything at the office running smoothly. "At first, it was really all about survival," he notes. "What really spurred me on was finding an online forum where I could exchange information with others. That was amazing. I found people willing to help me, and I became a bit of a learning addict. Eventually, I just wanted to give back as well, so I created my own website and blog to help others."

Puls firmly believes that, properly set up, a computer can process numbers and data far more efficiently and accurately than any human, and that human brainpower should be devoted to solving strategic problems, not data input.

Beyond his day job, Puls has done some consulting. "But I don't chase the work, it finds me," he says. "At least a dozen of my colleagues in this field are doing consulting work full time in the VBA area. There's definitely a market for it."

In Puls' experience, accountants don't use Excel anywhere near as effectively as they could.

"Accountants use Excel every day, it's at the heart of the work we do, but very few know the power that's sitting under



the hood," he insists. "I just taught a class in Excel, and not many people have any idea what's available to them."

"Generally we pick things up on the job but most accountants use about 10-20% of the power available in the program," he continues. "For instance, I taught a class in Nanaimo recently on creating a reusable spreadsheet, and only one person in the class had even used VBA code. Only half had ever used any type of lookup formula."

Puls volunteers in several online forums, as well as sharing his ideas with friends and colleagues around the world. He was awarded a Microsoft Excel MVP award in October 2006. There are currently only three Microsoft Excel MVPs in Canada and 90 worldwide. The award program recognizes and thanks outstanding members of technical communities for their community participation and willingness to help others. It is given to exceptional technical community leaders who foster the free and objective exchange of knowledge by actively sharing their real-world expertise with technology users.

Puls has been an active member of CMA B.C., having held the position of Upper Island Chapter Chair for three years. He is also a founding member of the Professional Office Developers Association, a fledgling association dedicated to promoting excellence within the Microsoft Office development field.