In Memory of Bob Kooi (1951-1993)

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Our community was saddened by the sudden death of Bob Kooi on October 5, 1993.

Bob received his PhD from Case Western University in 1980, where he studied the (then new) field of optimizers for relational data bases. After a brief stint at Lawrence Livermore Labs, he joined Relational Technology, Inc. in 1982.

He single-handedly constructed the cost-based optimizer for which Ingres is still well known. With only minor modifications, his design survives to this day. His Ingres co-workers remember his intense determination to deliver the best technology possible and his willingness to do whatever it took to make good on that goal. Even though he took a fair amount of kidding about it, it was not unexpected for early arrivers at the office to find him sleeping on the foam pad he kept under his desk when in the midst of this project. Some of this work was reported in [1]

Afterwards, Bob managed the Ingres/STAR distributed database development effort. Again, he is remembered for his focus and determination in building great products and, even when under pressure, his ability to take the time to work with new staff members to bring them up to speed. Bob was a pleasure to both work with and play with, although not everyone would take him up on his offer of a ride to softball games on the back of his motorcycle.

When he joined Oracle in August 1989, Bob was able to prove once again that as an all-round leader of a software development team he had few equals. He soon became the release manager in overall charge of the Oracle7 system. Although he shunned the limelight, he, more than anyone else, deserves to be identified with this substantial product. He is remembered by Oracle engineers for his dedication to technical excellence, his ability to balance theoretical elegance with real usefulness in real applications, his goal-orientation and modesty.

During 1993, Bob then embarked on an exciting new venture as director of a project to extend the Oracle product line with object database capabilities. Although he was not to see this through to completion, he has left behind a dedicated group with a clear long term vision.

All software engineers who came in contact with him learned from him, and quickly appreciated his sensitivity to other people. As a manager, colleague, and friend, he was one of the very best.

I would like to close with one vingnette which best summarizes my personal memory of Bob. We spent one day several years ago skiing at Squaw Valley together. This was right after a big snow storm, and Bob sought out the steepest ungroomed terrain on the mountain (Olympic Lady), where I spent the day in a desperate attempt to keep up with him. At the conclusion of each run, we would arrive panting for breath at the lift, at which point Bob would smile and say "lets rest on the chair on the way up". Bob skiied the way he worked; flat out.

Bob is survived by his wife Vicki and his children, Kevin and Carolyn, to whom we all send our deepest condolences.

[1] Kooi, R. and Frankforth, D., "Query Optimization in INGRES," IEEE Database Engineering, Sept. 1982.