Here we are – posing with the guys from MadCap – at the first Rochester Roadshow.

CALLING ALL PROPELLER HEADS!

How to start your own Flare user group

An interview with Nita Beck, founder and "propellerhead-in-chief" of the Rochester (NY) Flare User Group

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Why did you start the group?

- "Talk shop" with other Flare users
- Learn from other Flare users
- Have a strong mentoring / teaching streak
- Companionship
- Self promotion

What does a user group offer that can't be gotten elsewhere?

- Get feedback and advice about your Flare project in real time
- Learn about third-party tools to use along with Flare
- Benefit from guided exploration
- Gripe, in private
- Camaraderie!

How has RFUG helped its members?

- Can get the "skinny" on the latest version of Flare
- Development opportunities
- Synergy and evolution of ideas, best practices

How can a user group help newbies?

- Personal learning
  - Access to, guidance from expert Flare users
- Deep learning
  - Not only how, but WHY to use certain Flare features
- Industry learning
  - Best practices, workflows from others "in the trenches"

How can a user group help advanced users?

- Advanced users are expert in some – *but not all* – areas of Flare
- Collective knowledge is deeper than individual knowledge
- Get to see different documentation solutions

How did I get the word out?

- Talked with MadCap
- Posted at the MadCap forums
- Blasted emails to my local STC chapter
- Coincided the launch with the local STC chapter's annual conference
- Handed out a "business card," brochure
  - MS clip art logo
  - Vistaprint

Tri-fold brochure

Calling all Flare users in the Rochester area!

A One-of-a-Kind Resource

RFUG is the only established Flare

A Typical Meeting

- **Speed Check-In** – A fast and lively

Come network with other Flare users!

If you already use Flare, we need you to:

- Share what you know with fellow propeller heads.
- Mentor others on their way up that steep Flare learning curve.

If you're a new Flare user, join us to:

- Pick up tips and tricks to use back in the office.
- Learn from those who have made it over the hump—and lived to tell the tale!

"I was hooked from my very first RFUG meeting!" – *Sharon A. Ryan, Technical Writer/Editor, RailComm*

Propellus Maximus? Jr. Propeller Head?

If you know what those mean, the **Rochester Flare User Group** *is the place for you!*

- Got **ideas** to share?
- Have **sage advice** to offer?
- Want to **show off** your latest Flare project?
- Need colleagues who ***really*** understand what you're up against?
- Need a **place to practice** under the wings of expert Flare users?
- Just need to **talk shop**?

Join us today!

Anyone is welcome to attend RFUG meetings, and there is no fee for membership.

Just come to a meeting and wind up your beanie!

rochesterflaregroup @gmail.com

Facebook/Rochester Flare User Group

Twitter/ RochFlareUsrGrp

Although our goal is to help our fellow members enhance their use of Flare, the Rochester Flare User Group is not a substitute for MadCap Software training or technical support. And although we enjoy the friendship and occasional modest favors from MadCap Software, we are not otherwise affiliated with that company.

Rochester Flare User Group

Wish you had colleagues to help you up the steep Flare learning curve?

You do...

at the *Rochester Flare User Group*

Tri-fold brochure

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A One-of-a-Kind Resource

RFUG is the only established Flare User Group–*anywhere*!

Flare users in Western New York don't know how lucky they are! As we approach our second anniversary in May 2011, the Rochester Flare User Group remains the *only* one of its kind anywhere.*

Catch a monthly meeting.
We meet once a month in Brighton (at Twelve Corners), alternating Saturday mornings and Wednesday evenings. We start promptly, so come early to grab your coffee or tea.

Schedule of meetings

Saturday, 9:00–10:30 a.m.
Bagel Bin Café, 2600 Elmwood Ave.

4.16.11	6.4.11†
9.17.11	11.12.11
1.14.12†	

† Special extended session 8:30a.m.–12:30p.m.

Wednesday, 6:30–8:00 p.m.
Panera Bread, 1902 Monroe Ave.

5.11.11	10.12.11
12.14.11	2.15.12

Dates and locations are subject to change without notice. Follow us on Facebook to see the latest schedule.

*RFUG is mentoring a group forming in Reno, NV.

A Typical Meeting

- **Speed Check-In** – A fast and lively trip around the table to find out who's been doing what with Flare.
- **Tips-and-Tricks Exchange** – Member-led trading of techniques–with explicit instructions and examples–for getting the most out of Flare and related MadCap tools.
- **Discussions** – Member-suggested topics ranging from making the business case for moving to Flare-based development to devising strategies for handling reviews.
- **Demos** – Member-led demonstrations of tools (not limited to MadCap products) that support topic-based authoring methods.
- **Show-Offs** – A chance for members to brag about their best Flare work.
- **Sandbox Sessions** – Twice-yearly extended meetings for exploring and experimenting with Flare.

- Need a **place to practice** under the wings of expert Flare users?
- Just need to **talk shop**?

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Rochester Flare User Group

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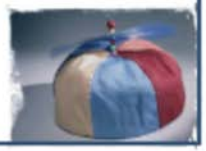
You do...

at the *Rochester Flare User Group*



Rochester Flare User Group (RFUG)

- Formed in 2009
- Has about 25 members
- 8-10 active members
  - Newbies to MAD-certified experts
- Meets monthly
  - September – June
  - Open to the public

How often does RFUG meet?

- September – June
  - Every other month, Saturday morning, 3-3 ½ hours
  - Opposing month, Wednesday evening, 1 ½ hours
- Ad hoc steering committee meetings
- Miscellaneous get-togethers

Where does RFUG meet?

- Saturdays
  - Used to meet at a bagel café with large tables and staff who didn't mind if we lingered
  - Conference room, cheap rental
- Wednesdays
  - Used to meet at a Panera Bakery Café
  - Noisy, tight

Where does RFUG meet?

- Now meet in a borrowed conference room
  - Quiet, comfortable!
  - Cafés are nearby
- Purposefully don't meet in a corporate setting

Are there challenges to starting a user group?

- Starting was easy; managing, sustaining are harder
- Running good meetings
- Finding, soliciting ideas
- Encouraging members' active participation
- Accommodating remote members
- Avoiding manager burn-out

Delegate!

What are RFUG meetings like?

1. Hearty hellos!
2. Old business / new business / announcements
3. Check-in
   - Speed check-in (Wed.)
   - Slo-mo check-in (Sat.)
4. Major activities
5. Looking ahead
6. Hearty farewells!

RFUG Agenda: October 10, 2012

Wednesday, October 3, 2012
3:34 PM

6:00-6:30 p.m.
Hearty Hellos!
Brian, Ann, Nita: And we met at Panera since there were only the three of us.

6:30-6:45 p.m.
Old/New Business
- Motion to record meetings and upload podcasts to our private Google site.
- Call for a meeting notetaker.
- Call for ideas for future meetings.
- Group picture for our Google site's first page?

6:45-7:00 p.m.
Speed Check-in!
- Whatch'all been up to?

7:00-7:55 p.m.
Members' Exchange
- Ann will explain how she uses "variable snippets" as part of her run-time merging technique, which we explored last month.
- Others?

7:55 p.m.
Looking Ahead
- Saturday Sandbox, November 10, 2012, 8:00-11:30 a.m. (Meeting begins at 8:30 a.m.)
- Got a tip-n-trick to share? Eager to demo some cool technique? Email Nita or add your idea to the Ideas for Meeting Topics page on our private Google site.

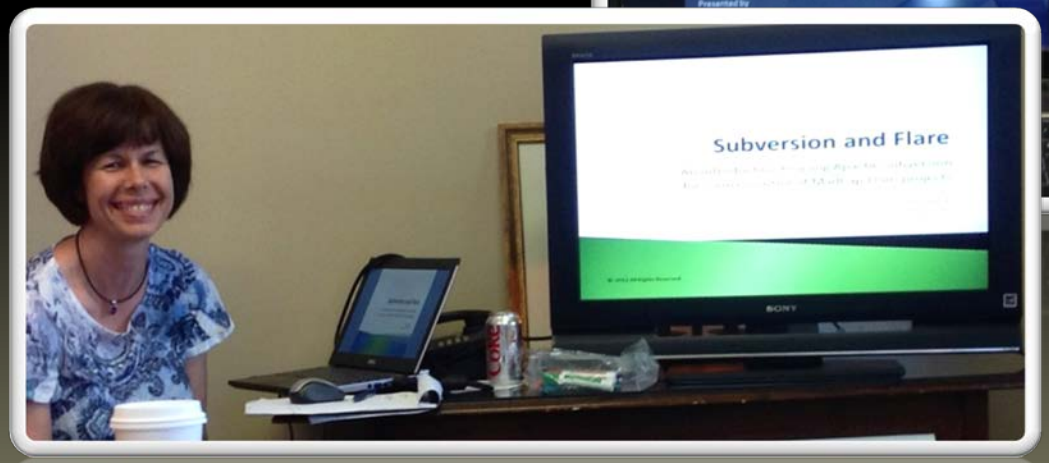
8:00 p.m.
Hearty Farewells!

Tip-n-trick exchanges

- "How-I-did-it" tutorials
- "Feature features"
- Lightning tips

Formal presentations

- Flare
  - Using with Subversion
  - Rapidly prototyping
- Localization
  - General guidelines for authors
  - Translating Flare projects
- DITA
  - Intro to
  - With Flare



Show-offs

- Members show off
  - Flare projects
  - Flare output
- Projects for MAD certification are especially enjoyable!

Discussions

- Formal discussions
  - Strategies for documenting design decisions
  - Making a business case for using Flare

- Free-form discussions
  - Surprisingly rich!

Tools demonstrations

- MadCap tools
  - Explore what's new in Flare Vx
  - See how to set up PDF output

- Third-party tools
  - "Diff" / comparison tools
  - Text editors
  - Search-and-replace tools
  - Mindmapping tools

Are any subjects off-limits?

- Grumbling is NOT off-limits.
- Do not violate non-disclosure agreements (NDAs)!
- Do not redistribute other members' materials w/o asking.
- Do not ask for tech support!
  Do not ask for training!

The Rochester Flare User Group is not a substitute for MadCap Software training, technical support, or user forums. It is not affiliated with MadCap, although it enjoys their kind attention.

How does RFUG use technology?

- For public use
  - www.facebook.com/RochesterFlareUserGroup
  - twitter.com/RochFlareUsrGrp
  - RochesterFlareGroup@gmail.com
- For private use
  - Google group
  - Google calendar
  - Google site

Questions?

- RochesterFlareGroup@gmail.com
- Nita @ 585-383-1992

"Thank you, MadCap Software, for giving me the opportunity to spread the word about the collective power and benefits of participating in a Flare user group!"

—Nita

- beck-communications.com
- inquiries@beck-communications.com

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APRIL 13-15, 2014

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Thank you for watching!

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