The Expert

By **Elmer Bourque** and **Ian MacPherson**

IT WAS THE BEGINNING of desktop computers, and files and file management on desktop computers. Ian MacPherson was in Load Forecasting and was one of the lucky ones who had a computer assigned to his job position. Since he took care of lots of important files and more and more of them were on the computer, Ian decided he needed to have a reliable backup.

It was widely recognized that files needed to be backed up as Windows 3.1, and early computer equipment were not always totally reliable in keeping things safe. Also, 5 1/4" floppies did not always release the files entrusted to them. Indeed, even the hard drives were more apt to fail than today.

So Ian sat down and wrote a nice "BACKUP.BAT" file. This batch file looked at all the files in the monitored directories and if the archive flag was not set the batch file would set it and copy the file in the backup location. This program worked very well. People started hearing about Ian's backup program.
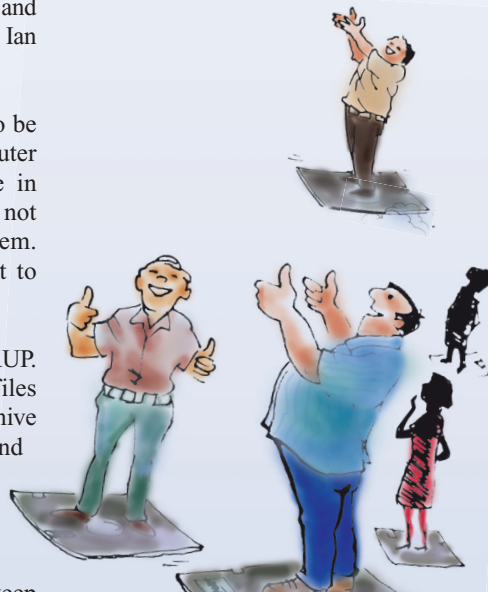
I set up the program on my computer to keep track of a few (user selected) directories. Some of my co-workers did the same. Soon MacPherson at head office was the expert. He was being consulted by even the highly skilled and highly paid staff of the Point Lepreau Nuclear Generating Station. From far and wide within NB Power, the MacPherson backup was getting considerable acceptance.

So I approached Ian and asked how he had become such an expert as to be consulted by the whole company. Well, he said, I needed a backup and looked around to see how to do it and this is what I came up with, after I read what the DOS instructions could do. It works. All the tools are there: attribute tests, and pipes to transfer files that have changed since the last backup. I'm not an expert, Ian said, I was simply the first one to read the book and do it. They think I'm an expert, but that is only because I was the first to do it in our company.

I went back to my desk and dug up the DOS manual. Just like Ian said, it was pretty clear what could be programmed into a .BAT file. With the right commands, new files could be automatically copied to the designated drive, or existing ones revised. The essence of a backup.

So there you have it. The expert is simply the one who does work that needs to be done. Then, because he knows how, he becomes ipso facto, the expert. ∎

Elmer Bourque (LSMIEEE) is currently associated with Kestrel Power Engineering of Toronto as a senior engineer. Following graduation he developed numerical control software for the New Brunswick Research and Productivity Council. In 1974, he joined New Brunswick Power where he worked for 31 years as a system performance engineer responsible for power system stability and proper control by commissioning and maintaining fault recording equipment, area generation control, generator excitation, stabilizers, and governor systems. He is recipient of the 2012 IEEE Canada J.J. Archambault Eastern Canada Service Medal.

Ian MacPherson is a retired accountant with over 30 years of experience at NB Power and the New Brunswick System Operator. At various times he worked in the Distribution, High Line Construction, and Rates & Load Forecasting areas. His longest stint was as the Senior Load Forecaster, developing computer models to forecast the long-term demand for electricity in the province.