Open Source Initiative (OSI) Celebrates 20 Years
by Cal Esneault, Co-Editor, Workshop and SIG leader
Cajun Clickers Computer Club
March 2018 issue, Cajun Clickers Computer News
www.clickers.org
tsa70785 (at) gmail.com

"Open Source" is a computer term describing software for which the original source code is made freely available and may be redistributed and modified. "Proprietary" software generally only distributes the compiled binary code and forbids reverse engineering by restrictive licenses. Key milestones in open source development were creation and distribution of UNIX (~ 1975), the GNU movement (~1985), and the GNU/Linux kernel (~1991). The Free Software Foundation was formed in the 1980's and enforce s the GNU General Public License (GPL). One aspect of the GPL was the known as the "poison pill" provision which said that any new work using any GPL code, no matter how limited, force d the entire work to be covered by the GPL.

In the late 1990's, many software developers decided that sharing software needed to be more of a developmental method than including social philosophies espoused by the GPL approach. On Feb 3rd, 1998, the term "open source" was coined and the Open Source Initiative (OSI) was founded at a meeting in California. The OSI was established to promote the adoption of an open development process as a superior method vs. proprietary approaches. Although the OSI definition still includes the GPL license, the scope was expanded to better meet business needs. For example, copyright owners may freely give their rights away ("public domain"), or they may grant only certain rights ("permissive" restrictions). Examples are Apache 2.0 and MIT licenses. Users may use this free software and then combine it with their own software to create a new proprietary work with more legal protection.

Today the OSI is primarily known for its work in certifying open source software licenses. It also has a variety of member -driven working groups and incubator projects that help members and other communities create and share resources , and it focuses or furthering the open source movement. Individuals can join the OSI and benefits include free and discounted books, magazines, conference registrations, and other learning and training materials.

Non-profit and not-for-profit organizations can also join as affiliate members. Some of the member organizations are: Creative Commons, Debian, The Document Foundation, Drupal Association, FreeBSD Foundation, Linux Foundation, MariaDB Foundation, Mozilla Foundation, Python Software Foundation, and WordPress. Although there was initial resistance to OSI from many commercial entities, the success of the process es for more rapid software development has been recognized. For example, Microsoft joined OSI as a premium sponsor in September 2017.

OSI sees the future needing further consolidation of licenses due to the growing complexity and needs of computing software (Big Data, cloud computing, security breaches, the Internet of Things, and so forth).