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MCP Hall of Fame:
Visit to Redmond

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2005 was a good year for me. It was October 2005 when I won the first ever Microsoft Certified Professional Hall of Fame (international) organized jointly by Microsoft and Windows IT Pro. The grand prize for winning the award included a fully paid VIP visit to Microsoft Campus in Redmond Washington, a trip that I made during the week of the 17th April 2006.

As a techie who lives on Microsoft products, I will never forget the moment I stepped into Microsoft Campus. The campus came across as a super-sized university (just think of a very big university campus) and during my trip there, I realized that even the work culture reminded me somewhat of an undergrad's lifestyle.

Microsoft Campus: A Peek At The Culture
Microsoft employees are given the freedom to personalize their office (including the door facing visitors) and the results - diverse personalities are reflected in their working space. Interestingly, office allocation is based on seniority, not designation. That means the longer you work at Microsoft, the bigger and better your office gets.

The dress code is also quite flexible; basically you are allowed to wear whatever is comfortable (no ties or fancy suits). Working hours are flexible too, employees are allowed to define their own schedule as long as the work gets done, and they are even encouraged to work from home unless there's a need for one to be in the office (E.g. Meetings).

I was told that in situations where a meeting room is not available, people simply hold their meetings at the stairways (I guess that explains why the floor there was carpeted too). Another cool thing about Microsoft is that they provide free beverages. A huge variety of soda pops, various types of coffee and tea (basically everything you can find in the supermarket) are available for free at all their pantries and canteens.

Various posters and notices (including social events) decorated the buildings' interiors (there must be more than 60 buildings at the Redmond campus). One particular poster caught my eye – free certification for employees with a chance to win an Xbox while you are at it. I wish my company had benefits like these.

The People I Met
One of the requirements from Microsoft was that I sign an NDA (non disclosure agreement) so I'll refrain from revealing details that might be deemed 'inappropriate'.

The people I met are mostly from the Microsoft Learning Team as well as Product Managers of the various products groups (e.g. Windows Server, SQL Server). Most of the meetings I had with these folks were interactive two-way interview sessions where my opinions and suggestions were heard (I'll wait and see if they are implemented). These meetings also provided me a chance to find out more about how and why certain things are done.

I was fortunate to get a few sneak previews and 'insider' information (I loved the session on Longhorn) pertaining to the new products due to be launched as well as getting updates and understanding the changes made to the existing certifications. (I personally think there were some really good improvements).

One particular session with a MCP Communications Manager was extremely fruitful. We discussed how Microsoft can encourage more people to understand and take their certification programme, how effective information sharing are being done through community forums like MCMCSE.com, and how Microsoft can help contributors (like us) to help others. I was particularly glad to know that there are people in Microsoft trying to reach out to us on the ground level.

The Places I Went
Other than the various office buildings in Microsoft Campus, I had the opportunity to visit some interesting places that are limited to employees and invited guests only.

- Microsoft Museum (aka Microsoft Visitor Center)
  The Microsoft Museum features various interesting objects related to computing. From the very first personal computer to the latest technology for business and home (latest X-Box titles included). It also exhibits the history of Microsoft.

- Microsoft Center for Information Tour
  The Center for Information exhibits concepts of future technologies (prototypes and experimental software) that Microsoft considers five to seven years away from market.

- Microsoft Home Tour
  Similar to the Microsoft Center for Information tour, the Microsoft Home Tour exhibits concept of a futurist home 5-7 years in the future.

- Microsoft Company Store
  The company stores sells Microsoft products (and some geek toys not found elsewhere) at a discount price.

All In All
Overall it was an interesting and memorable journey. How often does the average techie gets a VIP visit to Microsoft Campus, meet with the key executives and have your opinions/suggestions heard?

The experience – priceless!

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