In many ways the Debian GNU/Linux project is unique among all the distributions that dot the Linux landscape. Apart from putting out a high-grade distribution, it has served as the base for a number of others - Ubuntu and Knoppix, to name just two - which have had a big impact on the growth of the Linux ecosystem.

The project has long, fiery discussions and every little bit of it is on the web for all to see; it has survived the predictions of a great many prophets of doom and naysayers and emerged stronger each time.

The annual elections are also a unique feature. A few days back, the project concluded its elections for the year and Steve McIntyre emerged as the victor in a three-cornered contest. McIntyre may well be the most watched elected official of a non-profit group - the direction the project takes is of vital concern to a great many businesses.

A month short of 34, McIntyre has been a Debian developer for the last 12 years. Raised in the northwest of England, he studied engineering at the University of Cambridge where he was first exposed to Linux. He initially used Slackware and later Debian, gradually spending more and more time on the operating system rather than his studies.

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