



brian smiga

ACCELERATORS IN LONG BRANCH

THIRD TEDX CONFERENCE SET FOR APRIL 11

LONG BRANCH — We've been all over eastern Monmouth's own TEDx conference since it began two years ago.

This is about as triCity an event as you can get — creating a gathering place for the most broad-minded people in our region to exchange ideas with noted speakers from all over the country.

Even better, the conferences have connected people throughout eastern Monmouth who should know each other as we all continue to transform the triCity region into a suburban area like no other, where the creative and the alternative are ascendant — and conformity is increasingly a dirty word.

Called TEDxNavesink, the ideas conference has accelerated in growth and attendance in its first two years. And the theme of the third conference scheduled for Saturday, April 11 is — quite appropriately — “accelerators.”

That theme refers to how people create systems that grow and spread in all different fields that will determine our future.

“We live in a time of just incredible change — big data, innovative startups, artificial intelligence, changes in health care,” said Brian Smiga, executive director of TEDxNavesink. “All of this is going to change our lives and especially our kids' lives. TEDxNavesink is a conversation about how to navigate accelerated change.”

Note that TEDx Navesink just barely sold out its first conference in a 350-seat auditorium at Brookdale, but then quickly sold out the 350 capacity Two River Theater last year. Now they've moved to the 700-seat Pollack Auditorium in Monmouth University this year to better accommodate the growth of the conference.

Acceleration indeed. And we congratulate this Monmouth County-based effort which is a spin-off of the popular TED conferences held world-wide. The TED

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parent organization licenses the TED name for people all over the globe to have their own TEDx conferences, so long as they adhere to certain standards of the TED organization.

[Visit TEDxNavesink.com for all you need to know about this year's conference, including speakers, ticket purchases, sponsorships and how you can contribute or volunteer.]

It's always great stuff, with about one-third of the speakers from around the country, one-third from New York City and one-third locally at this year's TEDxNavesink, said Smiga, who is also one of the founders of the conference.

Just as at the TED events of the parent organization, speakers at TEDx conferences give "the talk of their lives" which go up to 18 minutes. At TEDxNavesink, speakers have included people in tech, media, entertainment and non-profit work, as well as many other fields. This year, Monmouth University can provide a range of expanded facilities to make the conference even better. For example, lunch will be served in various lecture rooms where conference speakers join local moderators to create more interaction with attendees. That's a perfect midday break.

And the dinner reception at the end of the conference will take place at stunning Wilson Hall, the 1920s era mansion on campus. It's a bargain at only an additional \$25 with food, wine and beer, entertainment and a great group of people. Dinner will be served "standing up" which will facilitate interaction and mingling. [Of course there will be chairs for those who want to rest their feet, but it's meant to be more of a party setting, rather than set seating, so people can interact and connect more informally.]

TED conferences of the parent organization and locally-organized TEDx conference like TEDxNavesink are also popular on YouTube. TedxNavesink speakers for the first two years have received 600,000 views of YouTube videos, and Smiga is confident that this year's conference will put the group over one million views.

[Of course, that doesn't compare with the 3.6 million views of TriCity Publisher Dan Jacobson's debate at the 2013 TED Davos conference in Switzerland with Tumblr founder David Karp, Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes who owns the New Republic and Amazon founder Jeff Bezos who bought the Washington Post. The topic? "Print media jujitsu — using the new media's strengths to defeat it." Afterward, media critic Michael Wolff wrote that "Jacobson, emerging out of nowhere from the heartland (OK, he's actually from the New Jersey Shore), stunned these new media titans. He threw their own hubris back in their faces — arguing that their ultimately self-cannibalizing online business models for news create an opening for low-overheard print operations. The key, Jacobson says, is to provide unique content exclusively off-line. He makes a convincing case that those using dead trees to disseminate information can survive financially, and potentially thrive, in a new media world — if they 'embrace a fierce contrarianism and belief in their exclusive content'...At the end of the debate, Bezos said to Jacobson 'I think you should have bought the Wash-

ington Post', to which the Asbury Park, N.J. newspaper publisher responded, 'Jeff, they already destroyed and cannibalized that paper long ago by giving it away on-line, but may I suggest that home delivery by drone might yet save it.']

Anyway, enough about our brilliant Publisher. Let's get back to this year's TEDxNavesink conference on April 11.

Tickets start at \$55 for general seating and \$75 for reserve seating. There's a discount for millennials born 1980 or later. Again, the dinner reception is an additional \$25. There are also reduced ticket prices for students.

Smiga, a partner in Alpha Venture Partners who's founded several tech startups himself, said that TEDxNavesink was started by people who all met commuting on the ferry to Manhattan and live in the northeast section of Monmouth. It's then expanded out from there to take in people throughout the triCity region.

Echoing a triCity view of life, Smiga said that organizers wanted to build the conference for three reasons.

First, they wanted to meet and connect similarly broad-minded people around here. The conference — especially this year's with the lunch programming and the dinner reception — will give people a community hub to meet and network. We know that many friendships and collaborations have grown out of the first two conferences. It's been a pleasure for this newspaper to see many of the different people we write about meet in person through TEDxNavesink. That's how we further build our community.

The second reason is that organizers understood, as we've been preaching for 16 years, that you don't have to go to New York for ideas and culture. There's plenty here, and there's no reason why organizers couldn't attract the best and most talented speakers to a TEDx in the triCity region. Smiga noted that there has always been a music scene here, as well as other groups that you often read about in these pages. A TEDx conference is an ideas conference and organizers wanted to build an "ideas scene" here to go along with everything else our region offers, he said.

Finally, organizers wanted to establish "non-fiction" theater in our region. "Theater is great, but we think theater of ideas is also great," said Smiga.

And finally, we've got to recognize some of the conference's lead sponsors. The Sawtooth group, an advertising and marketing firm in Red Bank that we love to write about has been terrific, Smiga says. They provide meeting space for organizers, creative services and a financial contribution.

Also now a main sponsor is Monmouth University, which is providing its facilities as well as faculty for moderating at the lunches and a financial contribution. Smiga also noted the help of sponsors Barnabas Health at Monmouth Medical Center, Phone.com, United Teletech federal credit union and the New Jersey Economic Development Authority.

the team of organizers for the TEDxNavesink conference at the Sawtooth marketing firm in Red Bank photo by jennifer bennett

