

The Bielenberg Institute
at the Edge of the Earth
25 Congress Street
Belfast, ME 04915

INFORMATION AND
APPLICATION PACKAGE

Project M 2008

June 1-27
Hale County, Alabama

“I could help you if I
knew what problem
you were trying to
solve.”

-Bob Dinetz

ABOUT

In 2000 I had the extreme good fortune to hear architect Samuel Mockbee speak. Samuel co-founded The Rural Studio for architecture in Alabama and won the MacArthur Prize for his work inspiring young architects to design and build homes and community buildings in Hale County Alabama. As I sat watching Samuel's presentation, I thought "why isn't there anything like this for graphic design?"

By 2001, I had moved from San Francisco to the coast of Maine intent on creating a program inspired by The Rural Studio.

2003

The first group of designers arrived in Maine for a month-long investigation into "Thinking Wrong" in May of 2003. During that inaugural program, we produced a publication that pushed the traditional form and expectations of a book. The American Institute of Graphic Arts selected the book as one of the 50 best designed of the year.

2004

Project M traveled to the Guanacaste Conservation Area in Costa Rica to do a communication project for Dan Janzen, the area's founder. The amazing book that resulted from this is finished and will, hopefully, be published soon.

2005

In addition to working on a project with The Womens Trust, which does micro-financing in Ghana, Project M purchased a used

ambulance and converted it into a rolling design studio. Our first expedition was to deliver donated equipment and supplies to Gulf Coast designers displaced by hurricane Katrina.

2006

Our project involved a trip in the ambulance to East Baltimore. Our project, the "This is not grass" book was printed in February and will be distributed soon. It is designed to encourage donations to build parks on abandoned urban lots in East Baltimore. See www.thisisnotgrass.com

2007

This was a breakthrough session for Project M where we actually produced something during the 4 week program. Our Buy-a-meter campaign has been very successful and you can check it out at www.buyameter.org.

BUZZ

Articles about Project M have appeared in GOOD, STEP, HOW, ID, CMYK and Metropolis magazines.

PURPOSE

To inspire young graphic designers, writers, photographers and other creative people that their work can have a positive and significant impact on the world.

PLACE

This summer we'll be working on projects with HERO and The Rural Studio in Greensboro, Alabama.

FORMAT

One session in 2008 for 8 young creative people starting June 1 and finishing on June 27.

PROGRAM

Together, we will pick at least one significant project to conceive and produce during the 4 week session.

Guest advisors will help with critiques, guidance and will make hands-on contributions to the project.

THINKING WRONG

The human brain tends to think along pre-determined linear thought pathways. Such linear thinking can inhibit true innovation and creative exploration. Project M will encourage, and provide techniques for, "thinking wrong" to generate new ideas and design directions.

TUITION

Project M is not a school and has no tuition. Every attending person will share the expenses of producing Project M. The expenses for 2008 will be \$2000 each. Some M'ers have been very creative about raising this amount.

Travel to and from Greensboro, AL and daily meals and incidental expenses are in addition to this amount.

WHO SHOULD JOIN PROJECT M?

This program was developed for passionate young creative people (although all ages are welcome to apply). Attendees should have training and skill in either design, writing, photography or film/video. (Hopefully, more than one)

HOW TO APPLY?

1. Please tell and show me anything about you and your work that you would want me to know or see. (This can be as long or brief as you need)
2. Explain why you are interested in Project M 2008. Please be clear and honest. (This is the important part of the application)
3. Draw nothing. (This doesn't mean send a blank sheet of paper)
4. Please mail or email this to me by April 15, 2008.

Detailed information about logistics and procedures will follow upon acceptance.

Thank you so much for your interest. Feel free to contact me with any questions.

John Bielenberg
Project M Founder and Director
john@c2llc.com
207-323-0792 (cell)

JOHN BIELENBERG

Since 1991, John has produced an ongoing series of projects under the pseudonym Virtual Telemetrix, Inc. that address issues related to the practice of graphic design and Corporate America. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art has acquired 6 of the VT projects and staged a Virtual Telemetrix exhibition and mock IPO (Initial Public Offering in 2000.

In addition, John was recently nominated for 2 National Design Awards from the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, served on the AIGA National Board of Directors, taught at California College of the Arts in San Francisco and has written articles on design for Communication Arts Magazine, Critique Magazine, "Looking Closer 2-Critical Writings on Graphic Design," and "Design Issues- How Graphic Design Informs Society."

John is a member of AGI (Alliance Graphique International) and is the Vice President and Director of the Pop!Tech Institute, which strives to inspire people to change the world by fostering visionary conversations about the future.

In 2001, John co-founded C2 in San Francisco with Erik Cox and Greg Galle.

2007 PROGRAM ADVISORS

For the past 5 years, a group of advisors has been helping to conceive, define and inspire Project M. They are designers, artists, writers, photographers, and thinkers. They're all smart, accomplished and I am deeply grateful for their time and interest in this program.

ERIK ADIGARD

Erik Adigard is co-founder of the design studio M.A.D. with partner Patricia McShane. He has produced graphic design and imagery for organizations such as Microsoft, Wired and Stop AIDS Project. Since 2001, he has been working on the visual identity of IBM software. Aside from corporate communications, he also experiments on new media projects. His work has been shown in various locations internationally including SFMOMA, the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum and the Sundance Film Festival. More information can be found at <http://www.madx.com>

BOB AUFULDISH

Bob Aufuldish is a partner in Aufuldish & Warinner and an Associate Professor at the California College of the Arts. fontBoy, (www.fontboy.com) a digital type foundry, was launched in 1995 to manufacture and distribute his fonts. He has participated in a number of exhibitions, including, "Icons: Magnets of Meaning", at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and has lectured across the US.

His work has been included in competitions and publications sponsored by the usual suspects. He has a BFA and MFA in graphic design from Kent State University, Ohio.

RICH BINELL

Rich Binell is a fly-fishing fanatic who does writing and marketing to pay for his fishing trips.

He earned an honors degree from Harvard University but his mother won't give him the parchment because she's afraid he might lose it.

He spent 8 years as a writer at Apple Computer where his major accomplishment was to help establish and maintain Apple's method of talking about complicated products in simple and friendly ways.

He's won enough writing and advertising awards to really not care about them. He hates bios. Especially writing them.

KIM BLANCHETTE

Kim is a former police officer and owner of Blanchette Press in Vancouver, Canada which is commonly acknowledged to be one of the best printers in the World.

ADAM BRODSLEY

Adam co-founded Volume Design Inc. at the dawn of the new millennium with the intent of creating a multi-disciplinary studio focusing not on project medium but on communication of a client's unique story. The goal: to emotionally engage audiences and allow our client to stand out in a sea of sameness. Thus the studio's projects are in 3D architectural environments as well as print, packaging, identity, and web.

Adam graduated from the Art Center College of Design and worked with the renowned April Greiman in Los Angeles. He studied in Switzerland and in Paris at the Sorbonne. He also holds a degree from the University of California, Santa Barbara. He spent a number of years as lead designer at Mauk Design where he created identity systems, print, packaging and a multitude of large-scale environments. Past clients include Levi Strauss & Co., Sony PlayStation, Volkswagen, Microsoft, RockShox, Rainbow Media, Square-Enix, Intel, and Apple Computer. His work has been awarded many times over by organizations (e.g. IDSA and Business Week, D&AD, AIGA, Exhibitor Magazine) and he has been widely published. Adam is also an Adjunct Professor of Design at the California College of the Arts (formerly CCAC).

MICHAEL CARABETTA

Michael Carabetta is creative director of Chronicle Books, a San Francisco-based publisher. Chronicle Books projects he has directed have received recognition in the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) 50 Books/50 Covers shows, and in Graphis Books I and II; have appeared in many design publications, including Communication Arts, Critique, and I.D. magazines; and have received awards from the San Francisco Ad Club, New York Art Directors Club, and the Western Art Directors Club.

He attended the Paier College of Art, and received his M.F.A. from Cranbrook Academy of Art. Before joining Chronicle Books in 1991, he worked for ten years with Landor Associates, directing corporate identity projects in their San Francisco, London, and Hong Kong offices. He is an occasional contributor to the AIGA Journal, and has guest-lectured on design at Cal State Chico and San Jose State universities. He has been a speaker at the Stanford Professional Publishing Program and has taught design at California College of the Arts. He collects 20th century first editions and is a member of the board of directors of the San Francisco Center for the Book.

ART CHANTRY

Art Chantry has gained international prominence in the design field as a practitioner, educator, critic, advocate, etc. Since being established in Seattle in 1978, his firm—Art Chantry Design Company—has evolved into a multi-disciplinary studio with expertise in posters, record packaging, identities, and a buncha other weird crap. He is author of the book "INSTANT LITTER: Posters from Seattle Punk Culture", and a monograph of his work, "SOME PEOPLE CAN'T SURF: The Graphic Design of Art Chantry" was recently published by Chronicle Books. He has been honored with hundreds of awards for his design work, including a Bronze Lion from The Cannes Festival. His work has hung in many museums and collections notably the Museum of Modern Art, The Cooper-Hewitt (Smithsonian), The Louvre, and The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

BRIAN COLLINS

Brian Collins is the Senior Partner, Executive Creative Director at Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide, where he leads the Brand Integration Group, the agency's design and brand experience division. Brian runs the group as nothing less than a laboratory for imagination and storytelling.

Made up of artists, designers, strategists, filmmakers, playwrights, architects and writers, BIG works with some of the world's most prominent brands, including American Express, IBM, The Miller Brewing Company, Dove, Jaguar Cars, Coca-Cola, Hershey Foods, and Kodak. Steve Heller, writing in Print, called BIG "the leading incubator of design talent in advertising... Collins refuses to sanction timeworn notions, and indeed BIG's output never seems less than original."

ERIK COX

Erik is a co-founder of C2 in San Francisco and his work has been recognized with national and international design awards from The American Institute of Graphic Arts, Communication Arts Magazine, Critique Magazine, Type Directors Club, American Center for Design, the AR100 Show and the Mead Annual Report Show.

MARC DIAMOND MD

Fundamentally, I am curious; I like to know how things work. I studied history in college to understand the evolution of our society; I went to medical school pursuing an interest in human biology; I trained as a neurologist because the brain fascinates me; I became a scientist because I wanted to find out the molecular basis of certain neurodegenerative diseases, and cure them. In my work I struggle with the tension of being practical and productive versus creative and significant.

NILUS DE MATRAN

- an Assyrian who moved to San Francisco in 1989
- educated in London at the Architectural Association
- studied under Zaha Hadid
- started nilus designs: 6 years ago
- has since been involved in projects of various sizes and scope, ranging from residential renovations/additions to commercial projects such as the master planning of a new technology campus located at the historic Shenandoah Plaza at Moffett field
- additional commercial projects: regional head quarters for a tech company, restaurant, professional photography studio, and art gallery
- also been involved in international, interdisciplinary collaboration for a series of global, institutional retreats
- has been published in varied magazines including Metropolitan Home and an ongoing series in Dwell. Other publications include Interiors, and San Francisco Magazine
- Additionally, completed projects have been used as location sets in print and television campaigns as well as being features in cable television, and home and garden series (HGTV).

KAREN FISS

Karen Fiss received her Ph.D. from Yale University in 1995 and is currently assistant professor of visual culture and design at the California College of the Arts, San Francisco. Her recent publications include "The Emperor's New Graphics," Print magazine (December 2002), and "In Hitler's Salon," Art, Culture, and Media under the Third Reich (University of Chicago Press, 2002). She was co-editor of Discourses: Conversations in Postmodern Art and Culture (M.I.T. Press and The New Museum, 1990) and is now completing a book manuscript entitled Grand Illusion: France, the Third Reich, and Cultural Politics, ca. 1937. She has received fellowships from the Getty Grant Program, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts.

MARK FOX

Mark Fox is an Associate Professor and the Assistant Chair of Design at the California College of the Arts in San Francisco where he has taught courses in graphic design since 1993. He served as president of the San Francisco chapter of the American Institute of Graphic Arts from 1995–1996, and has operated his studio practice, BlackDog, since 1986. His most recent article on design, "Logos = God", was published by Communication Arts in 1999.

GREG GALLE

Companies (2)

Teams (6)

Books (5,1)

Largest (5, 170, 80,000, 200, 70, 2,000,000,000)

Co-founded two companies: C2 and 3 Billion

Established and directed 6 brand and communication teams: The Understanding Business, Aaron Marcus and Associates, Wells Fargo Nikko Investment Advisors/Barclays Global Investors, b2, 3 Billion, C2

Contributed to 5 books on Brand, Communication Design, and Graphical User Interface Design: The Brand Gap (Neumeier), Comparison of Graphical User Interfaces (Marcus), Graphic Design for Electronic Documents and User Interface (Marcus), Human Factors and Typography – Making Programming More Readable (Becker, Marcus), Information Anxiety (Wurman). 1 hand made book in the permanent collection of the New York Museum Modern of Art (Suicide Book)

Largest brand consulting client: Barclays

5 business CEOs, 170 top executives, 80,000 employees, 200 businesses in 70 countries (oh yeah, let's not forget the 2,000,000,000 sterling pounds annual profit)

FERKO GOLDINGER

Ferko Goldinger has been deeply involved in the paper side of the graphic arts industry since 1982, working for merchants, mills, and paper stores. Currently the marketing manager for Appleton Coated, Ferko traces his enthusiasm for paper to a watershed moment at the Robert Rauschenberg retrospective in 1972 when he saw hand-made paper for the first time. He was 9 years old. Ferko resides in Wisconsin with his family and is a member of the AIGA.

ERIC HEIMAN

Starting in the hunter-filled woods of rural Pennsylvania, Eric Heiman embarked on a labyrinthine journey through the Carnegie Mellon architecture program, late nights of DJ spinning, record store employment and week-long vows of silence in the mountains of Maui that eventually led him to design school in the Bay Area. At the dawn of the new millennium he founded Volume (www.volumesf.com) with Adam Brodsley. Volume's work has been extensively exhibited, honored and published around the world, and Eric's writing on design has been published in Emigre, Letterspace and the AIGA's online journal, Voice. Eric is also a Professor of Design at the California College of the Arts and was awarded the college-wide Excellence in Teaching award in 2003.

JAMIE KOVAL

Jamie Koval joined VSA Partners in 1990 as a principal and is currently the president of the firm. With offices in Chicago and New York, VSA has built a reputation as a multi-disciplinary office with expertise in strategy, planning, naming, identity, corporate communication, packaging, interiors and web. Jamie's work has been recognized internationally and is included in the permanent collection of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. He has been a guest instructor at The Art Institute of Chicago and frequent lecturer. VSA's client roster is a cross-section of American business, and includes such companies as Cingular, The Coca-Cola Company, Harley-Davidson, and IBM.

BRUCE LINDSEY

Bruce Lindsey is Professor and Dean of the College of Architecture and Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Design at Washington University at St. Louis. Prior to coming to Washington University Lindsey was Professor and Head of the School of Architecture at Auburn University and along with Andrew Freear was the Co-Director of Auburn's Rural Studio. Lindsey served as Associate Head and Associate Professor of Art and Architecture at Carnegie Mellon's School of Architecture for nearly fifteen years. He has been a visiting professor and critic at a number of schools. He has extensive experience in beginning design education and has written and lectured widely on the role of digital technology in design. His book Digital Gehry: Material Resistance Digital Construction was published by Birkhauser in 2001.

Lindsey is a practicing architect, craftsman, and aspiring blues man. He has received numerous awards for his design work including a number of AIA design awards. The Pittsburgh Glass Center completed in 2002 in collaboration with Davis + Gannon architects is a Gold rated LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) building that was just cited by the AIA's Committee on the Environment as one of the top ten green buildings for 2005. This project also received an AIA Design Honor Award. Lindsey has received no recognition for his musical abilities.

MICHAEL MABRY

Michael Mabry Michael received his BFA in graphic design from the University of Utah and worked for SBG Partners as a senior designer until starting his own firm in 1981. He has served on the faculty at the California College of the Arts and guest lectured at various designer/art directors organizations throughout the country.

His work is included in the permanent collections of the Library of Congress and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Michael's work was also featured in a solo exhibition in Osaka, Japan and a group exhibition on California Design at the Museo Fortuny in Venice, Italy. In 1997 Michael was included in the International Design Magazine's issue- "40 Design and Technology Innovators on the West Coast."

Michael has served as the President of the San Francisco Chapter of the American Institute of Graphic Arts and on the National Board of Trustees of the American Institute of Graphic Arts. He is currently a member of the Alliance Graphique Internationale.

JIM MCNULTY

A general theme in my life to date has been looking into the creative state as a communicable process and various applications into the world of materials. My working background includes fine art sculpture and photography, culinary arts, commercial studio, industrial, portrait and nature photography, Tibetan Buddhist sacred sculpture, commercial printing management and conga drum restoration. I have deepened my view and interaction with life through study and practice of Buddhism over the last 20+ years. I currently work as a print producer and consultant in the graphic design and publishing community. I am a husband and father with two teenage daughters everyday.

JENNIFER MORLA

In addition to teaching thesis design at California College of the Arts, Jennifer is President and creative director of Morla Design in San Francisco. Over the past 24 years, Jennifer has created 68 posters, 4 Swatch watches, 20 books, 26 retail stores, 6 fabric collections, 380 web pages, 18 television openings, 9 magazine covers, 108 catalogs, 48 pieces of furniture, 94 packages, 38 paintings, 3 tons of steel sculpture, 2 daughters, and way too many logos to count.

Her work is a part of many permanent museum collections, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Jennifer has been honored with solo exhibitions at both the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and DDD Gallery in Japan. She is a former National board member of the AIGA, previous President of the San Francisco chapter AIGA, and a member of Alliance Graphique Internationale.

VICTOR JOHN PENNER

The "accidental" Mennonite photographer and race car driver from Vancouver.

LANA RIGSBY

Lana Rigsby is best known as an outspoken thinker and practitioner in the field of communications design. Her firm, Texas-based Rigsby Design, applies its expertise to communications for all kinds of organizations, from corporations to social and artistic causes.

Lana's work has won numerous international awards and is included in the permanent collections of the Cooper-Hewitt/ National Design Museum and the Library of Congress. Rigsby Design was recognized by Communication Arts magazine as one of the most influential US design firms in the magazine's forty-year history. Lana has served as a national director for the American Institute of Graphic Arts, and chaired its 2002 national design competitions "365: The Year in Design."

LAURIE ROSENWALD

Laurie Rosenwald is the World's Most Commercial Artist and sole proprietor of rosenworld.com, an overfed, underfed, government-subsidized multinational with wholly owned subsidiaries in Gothenburg, Sweden and TuCan, an up-and-coming New York neighborhood formerly known as "Too Close To Canal Street." Rosenwald's motto is "no job too big, no job too small, no job too medium." Rosenwald teaches a workshop in design schools all over the world in how to make mistakes. Lets just say it has no name, so the students don't know what to expect. They show up, they put on garbage bags, and...

GREG SAMATA

Greg Samata formed Samata Associates in 1975 and subsequently co-founded SamataMason Inc. with partners Pat Samata and Dave Mason in 1995. His work has spanned across three decades of all creative media and disciplines from print to film making. Greg has been published in every major design and industry publication and honored with hundreds of awards for his work in competitions worldwide. Currently Greg is a board member of the Evan's Life Foundation, a non-profit organization that aids children at risk. Greg also founded the film production company NoisemakerFilms where he creates, directs and produces documentaries and feature films. Greg lives in the Chicago area with his wife Pat, son Parker, twin daughters Lane and Tate and Frank and Stella, six-year-old sister black labs.

STEFAN SAGMEISTER

Stefan Sagmeister formed the New York based Sagmeister Inc. in 1993 and has since designed graphics and packaging for the Rolling Stones, David Byrne, Lou Reed, Aerosmith and Pat Metheny. His work has been nominated four times for the Grammys and has won most international design awards. In 2001 a monograph about his work titled "Sagmeister, Made you Look" was published by Booth-Clibborn editions.

THOMAS SEVCIK

Thomas Sevcik, born 1969 in Wettingen, Switzerland, went to schools in Switzerland. He has a degree in Architecture from the Technical University in Berlin and is co-founder and CEO of Arthesia. Arthesia has offices in Zug and Los Angeles and empowers companies to capitalize their "Emotional Assets" via atypical and innovative communication projects. Thomas Sevcik is the mastermind behind diverse projects such as Volkswagen's "Autotstadt" corporate themeworld in Wolfsburg, Germany and other major experience-oriented narrative environments (built and virtual). He is a well-regarded thinker and speaker and serves on several executive and advisory boards and committees in the communication and arts industry. Thomas regularly gives lectures and writes articles. He is married and lives in Zug, Switzerland.

CHRISTOPHER SIMMONS

Christopher Simmons is a designer, author, educator, design advocate and principal of the noted San Francisco design office, MINETM. MINETM designs identities, books, consumer products, packaging and print and interactive collateral for scientific visionaries, educational reformists, best-selling authors, museums, entrepreneurs, telecommunications giants and Hollywood producers. Christopher teaches graphic design at the California College of the Arts (CCA), is the author of three books and writes the regular column My First Time for STEP magazine. He is a past president of the San Francisco AIGA, the professional association for design. On completion of Christopher's tenure, Mayor Gavin Newsom issued an official proclamation declaring San Francisco to be a city "where design makes a difference."

MICHAEL VANDERBYL

Michael Vanderbyl has gained international prominence in the design field as a practitioner, educator, critic and advocate. Since being established in San Francisco in 1973, his firm – Vanderbyl Design – has evolved into a multi-disciplinary studio with expertise in graphics, packaging, signage, interiors, showrooms, retail spaces, furniture, textiles and fashion apparel. Michael is the recipient of the Gold Medal award from The American Institute of Graphic Arts; he is a member of the Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI) and presides as Dean of Design at the California College of the Arts.

JAMES VICTORE

James Victore was born in 1962 and is a self-taught, independent graphic designer. Victore's work ranges from publishing, posters and advertising to illustration and animation. Clients include Moët and Chandon, Amnesty International, The Shakespeare Project, The New York Times, MTV, The Lower East Side Tenement Museum and Portfolio Center. Awards include an Emmy for television animation, a Gold medal from the Broadcast Designers Association, the Grand Prix from the Brno (Czech Republic) Biennale, and Gold and Silver Medals from the New York Art Director's Club. Victore's posters are in the permanent collections of the Palais du Louvre, Paris, the Library of Congress, Washington, DC and the Museum für Gestaltung, Zurich among others. His work has been featured in solo exhibitions and magazines around the world, and recently a book of his design work was published in China. He also teaches graphic design at the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Victore and his family escaped New York City and have moved to the Hudson Valley. He is a member of AGI.

MIKE WEIKERT

Mike Weikert is Co-chair of the graphic design department at Maryland Institute College of Art and Principal of Weikert Design in Baltimore. He also runs Small Roar, a baby clothing line, with his wife Stephanie. Recently, he served as Partner/Creative Director at Atlanta-based Iconologic and as a design consultant to the International Olympic Committee. He has also taught graphic design and branding at the Portfolio Center in Atlanta.

His work has been recognized in the following publications: Communication Arts, Graphic Design USA, Graphis, How International Design Annual, How Interactive Design Annual, Identity, Print's Regional Design Annual, Show South, and Typography 24 as well as the following books: Design Alliance, D.I.Y. Design It Yourself, Print's Best Invitation Design, Print's Best Logos & Symbols 6, The Nature of Design, The Olympic Image, and White Graphics.

CHRIS WILLIAMS

Chris Williams is an experienced technical writer, software documentation editor, and QA consultant who worked many years in the NATO defense simulation and US healthcare clinical systems industries. As such, he has more than a passing familiarity with the absurdity of text. Mr. Williams celebrates his eleventh anniversary as CEO of Virtual Telematrix, Inc. Prior to joining VT, he spent about 24 years at a number of secure institutions wherein he developed a proven track record of forward-looking statements and the occurrence of unanticipated events.

ANDREW ZOLLI

Andrew Zolli is a forecaster, design strategist and author, working at the intersection of culture, technology, and futures research. He specializes in helping people and institutions see, understand and act upon complex change. Andrew directly Z + Partners, a foresight and strategic planning think-tank, and is the Futurist in Residence at Popular Science magazine, a regular contributor to Wired Magazine and a commentator on NPR's Marketplace. Andrew also currently curates the annual Pop!Tech conference.