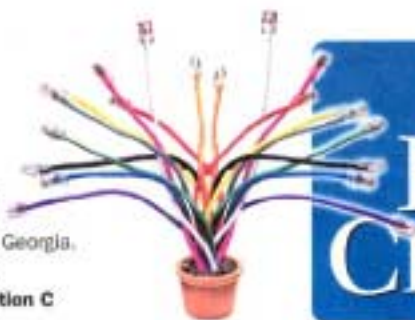


More than Atlanta

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Growth Strategies
Section B



BYRON E. SMALL

Conference: Steve Jeffery, left, and John Yates are planning the "Georgia Technology Celebration."

Technology 'celebration' planned

By Mary Jane Credeur

STAFF WRITER

"People will walk away with a clear vision of where our technology community has been and where it's headed."

John Yates
Morris, Manning & Martin LLP

These are not exactly celebratory times for most local technology employees, an estimated 40,000 of whom have lost their jobs since this recession began.

But the **Technology Association of Georgia Inc. (TAG)** wants technology leaders and innovators to stop dwelling on the recent downturn and instead celebrate the companies and individuals that have put Georgia among the top 10 technology hot spots in the country.

To achieve that, TAG is revamping its annual October showcase of the state's up-and-coming technology companies. Local technology leaders have held a fall conference each year for the past two decades, and the event started as a 30-day affair called "High-Tech Month."

This year's event is being renamed the "Georgia Technology Celebration" and it is a one-day conference scheduled for Oct. 21 that replaces the old three-day "Georgia Technology Forum."

Technology 'celebration' planned

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Organizers behind the celebration say this year's event will be more topical and relevant than ever before, and they are hoping to draw more attendees with lower admission prices.

"This is a departure from anything that's been done in the past ... and we think the old model ran its course" said attorney John Yates of **Morris, Manning & Martin LLP**, who is the chairman of this year's celebration and has been chairman of the past two GTF events.

"People will walk away with a clear vision of where our technology community has been and where it's headed," Yates said.

Interest in the old Georgia Technology Forum peaked in 2000 when the Internet craze was in full swing and companies didn't think twice about spending several thousand dollars on booths and gimmicks to promote their high-tech products.

But attendance at GTF has been on the decline for a couple of years, with about 600 in attendance last year, down from 700 in 2001 and 1,000 in 2000. Attendance peaked at 2,000 in 1999.

With admission prices cut from \$1,500 to about \$100 per person this year, TAG officials are hoping to draw 2,000 attendees, said TAG President Steve Jeffery.

Jeffery said the celebration will still be a fund-raiser for TAG, though "not on the same scale" as it had been in the past.

The GTF had raised \$500,000 or more during the boom years. TAG uses money from events to supplement other programs and meetings it holds.

"Everybody is looking for some direction and encouragement that this industry is getting up off its knees and moving forward again," said Jeffery, a former **Clarus Corp.** executive who was named president of TAG this spring. "People are looking to TAG for that direction."

The main differences between this year's event and ones in the past are:

■ Last year's attendees had to pay \$1,500 to erect booths in the main hall of the Cobb Galleria and attend events. This year's admission will be around \$100 per person and the only booths will be for

trade groups and associations.

■ A giant timeline will be compiled before the celebration that creates a sort of "family tree" of local companies, spin-outs, entrepreneurs and investors who have shaped today's technology community. The timeline will be displayed at the celebration.

■ The emerging company showcase, which promoted young tech companies for potential investors, will be replaced by a showcase of companies in just a few specific sectors such as Internet security, logistics, financial software, telecom or biotech. Large and mid-sized companies in those sectors will also be included to create a "role model" for growth of young companies.

■ TAG officials are creating awards to be named after past technology leaders. Those awards will be presented during a reception that concludes the celebration.

By naming awards after former tech leaders like John Imlay or Cam Lanier, celebration organizers are hoping to get those leaders to attend the event.

"It's not very often that you get the chance to bring the founding fathers and mothers of Georgia technology together in one room," Yates said.

Yates and Jeffery are also trying to get midlevel and upper-level managers from Atlanta's other large corporations, such as **United Parcel Service Inc.**, **The Coca-Cola Co.**, **Delta Air Lines Inc.** and **BellSouth Corp.** to attend the celebration.

They said every large company has an internal technology department and that companies like BellSouth or UPS may consider buying — or investing in — technology developed by younger companies.

"We're trying to get large companies involved in areas that are our core competencies, and that is very compelling for Coke or Delta or UPS," Jeffery said.

ISS Chairman and CEO Tom Noonan, who was chairman of last year's GTF

event, likes the ideas behind the new format. He said GTF's old format of promoting whiz-bang technology wasn't very relevant to today's market.

"We all lost a little blood in this war, and it's time to talk about trying to run a business in a really tough market," said Noonan, who initiated talks last year of changing the Georgia Technology Forum to make it more topical. "It's all about relevancy: growth, regulation, governance,

strategic partnerships, justification of expenditures. Big fluffy topics don't work anymore."

Noonan stressed that it's important for the executives and managers of large companies to support events such as the celebration.

"We all do business here and we have employees here, and there is some amount of

giving back that is just good citizenship," Noonan said.

At least one local executive and long-time business leader questioned the practice of focusing too much attention on individual Georgia-based companies during the Georgia Technology Celebration instead of focusing more energy on the new types of technology that those companies are inventing.

"The world is global now, and it's hard to pitch a city or a state versus pitching a product or job talent," said Leland Strange, chairman and CEO of **Intelligent Systems Corp.**, who has traveled with four governors and mayors in the past to promote Atlanta as a tech town.

"You do an event only if it's driven from the bottom by what people need and ask for, and those needs have changed a lot in the past few years," Strange said.

Yates and Jeffery said this year's celebration will meet the needs of tech companies of all sizes, and that people from all parts of the community will benefit from attending.

"This is for the betterment of Atlanta and for the betterment of the state," Yates said.

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