

TEDx conference to be held at Penn State

Innovative thinkers will gather at an upcoming conference to discuss new ideas in the fields of technology, entertainment and design.

By Joshua Glossner
FOR THE COLLEGIAN

As Mark Poblete watched a Technology Entertainment and Design (TED) conference for the first time during his junior year of college, it inspired him to get organize a TEDx event.

During Blue and White weekend, Poblete, TEDxPSU communications director, helped organize an executive committee to start planning for the event.

"Just like [the Interfraternity Council/Panhellenic Dance Marathon] and Homecoming, TEDx is one of those events that take a year to plan for," Poblete, Class of 2007, said.

TED allows anyone who has creative and innovative ideas to speak about them at the conference.

As long as applicants have a new big idea that has never been brought to attention, Poblete said, they would get a chance to speak about it.

Steve Garguilo, TEDxPSU executive director, said he wants to have people share their ideas to open the minds of the audience watching.

"It's a great way to showcase people who are in the community who have unique ideas," Garguilo, Class of 2009, said.

The committee is still finalizing who is going to speak at the conference, said Garguilo.

"We will choose anywhere from 15 to 20 speakers," he said. "We will announce who those speakers are within the next few weeks when it is closer to the fall semester."

Sam Revello (freshman-premedicine) said the conference sounds very interesting and caught her attention.

"I think it's a really cool way to give us a unique and fresh perspective on different topics," Revello said.

On October 10, 2010, TEDxPSU will be held in the Schwab Auditorium for the

whole day. Poblete said the executive committee, which makes decisions on the TEDx plans, decided to hold the conference on Homecoming weekend since students and alumni will be in town.

People will be able to see the talks live at the Schwab Auditorium, but those who are unable to attend can tune in, too.

"We will have a live stream of the conference on our website," Poblete said. "We will also have viewing parties available all around the state."

Garguilo said TEDx has been very successful with other colleges, such as campuses in Illinois and Michigan.

"TEDx is also a wonderful way to give back to the community," he said. "This is essentially what we are doing."

Poblete said volunteers are welcome to help by getting the word out about the conference and discuss their favorite TED talks and what they want to see at the Penn State conference.

"By getting the word out there, we are able to come into contact with different communities and engage with people," Poblete said.

Poblete was inspired by a video of a TED talk from author Malcolm Gladwell that he saw during a course his junior year. Gladwell spoke about the paradox of choice and how it can lead to happiness, Poblete said.

He said Gladwell's speech was unique because he compared the general idea of choice-making to making a decision on which spaghetti sauce to purchase.

"It was an out-of-the-box concept, and that's a perfect example of what we're looking for," Poblete said.

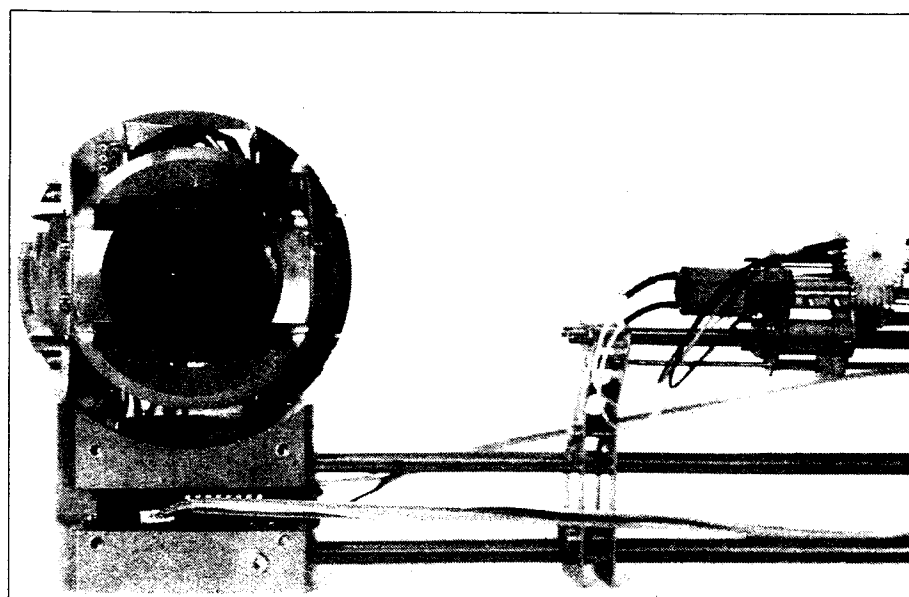
Though the event may tackle serious topics, entertainment is still a large part of the conference.

"We will most likely get local bands to perform among other entertainment," Poblete said.

"As of right now, we are not sure what entertainment will be there because we have to choose the speakers first and then build on from there."

Garguilo said the talks will primary be the main entertainment because they will enlighten the audience with fresh and new ideas.

TEDxPSU's website is tedxpsu.com.



The Tardigotchi connects a living mircoorganism to a vitruval avatar, cared for through Facebook. Courtesy of Matt Kenyon

Man creates avatar Professor wins award for virtual pet

By Kathleen Loughran
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Matt Kenyon has merged two pets into one design.

With his Tardigotchi artwork, the School of Visual Arts new media assistant professor has linked a microorganism to an "artificial life avatar," Kenyon said.

After submitting his artwork to a competition sponsored by Festival Internacional de Linguagem Eletronica (FILE), the project won first place in the Digital Language category of the international FILE Prix Lux competition.

Kenyon said the banquet for award winners, held in Brazil, felt like being at the Academy Awards.

Kenyon said he worked with Douglas Easterly and Tiago Rorke to develop the project.

He said Tardigotchi received its name from the Japanese "pocket pets," which were toys for children.

"It's similar to that except it's a brass sphere, and inside of this sphere there's a microorganism and there is also an artificial life avatar," Kenyon said. "The little creature that lives inside is a water bear... They look like little gummy bears that move around — they're really cute. One millimeter is as big as they get."

He said that the artwork was made using digital fabrication tools to connect the real life to the artificial life.

"A big part of the project is social networking. The Tardigotchi has a Facebook page, and you can friend him and keep up to date with what's going on in his life," Kenyon said. "You hit this button to play with it and feed it, and when you feed the

"You hit this button to play with it and feed it, and when you feed the artificial life, the real life gets fed."

Matt Kenyon
assistant professor of new media

artificial life, the real life gets fed."

Kenyon said the main reason the water bear was selected as the microorganism is because it hibernates for up to 100 years if it is not given food or water.

"We're not too worried if something bad happens," he said. "It might even outlast us."

But Facebook is not the only social networking device that can be used with the project, Kenyon said.

He said the artwork is also connected to mobile phones with Android technology. SharkArm Studios Programmer Curt Kling developed the Android applications for the Tardigotchi. "[There are] buttons that send information to a server telling it if a user can feed it at a certain point or play with it and that is interpreted by the physical part of the piece," Kling (junior-computer science) said.

Though Kling said he didn't have much influence on the development of the artwork, he said it "feels good" to be a part of a first place award-winning project.

"It's a really good project that shows how something digitally can also affect the real world, so I just thought it was cool to be a part of it," he said.

To e-mail reporter: krl5106@psu.edu

Muslim employees not allowed to wear scarves

By Maryclaire Dale
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

PHILADELPHIA — Prison officials can ban employees from wearing religious headscarves out of concerns they pose a safety risk, a U.S. appeals court in Philadelphia ruled Monday in a split 2-1 decision.

Prison officials have legitimate concerns the headscarves can hide drugs or other contraband, or be used by an inmate to strangle someone, the majority said.

The ruling dismisses a lawsuit filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on behalf of three Muslim women employed at the Delaware County Prison in suburban Thornton.

The EEOC had said they were being forced to compromise their religious beliefs to keep their jobs.

The suit was filed against the Geo Group, a Boca Raton, Fla.-based contractor that formerly operated the facility.

After the prison implemented a ban on hats and headscarves in 2005, nurse Carmen Sharpe-Allen was fired for refusing to remove her headscarf, or khimar, at work. Intake clerk Marquita King and correctional officer Rashemma Moss, after some deliberation, agreed to remove their headscarves on the job.

U.S. District Judge John P. Fullam had dismissed the EEOC lawsuit, and two of three judges on the appeals panel agreed with him.

They called it a close call, but said the prison's need for order trumped the women's right to wear the religious attire at work.

"...a prison is not a summer camp and prison officials have the unenviable task of preserving order in difficult circumstances."

Dolores K. Sloviter
U.S. circuit judge

"The EEOC has an enviable history of taking steps to enforce the prohibition against religious discrimination in many forms," U.S. Circuit Judge Dolores K. Sloviter wrote. "On the other hand, ... a prison is not a summer camp and prison officials have the unenviable task of preserving order in difficult circumstances."

An EEOC spokeswoman said the agency was disappointed by the decision and was reviewing its options.

Prison officials had argued that baseball hats, headscarves and other head coverings make it difficult to identify people and can be used to hide drugs and other contraband. Lawyer Walter F. Kawalec III, who argued the case for the Geo Group, did not immediately return a call for comment.

In his dissent, Justice A. Wallace Tashima, a senior judge the 9th U.S. Circuit, said the Geo Group had not been made to prove that the use of headscarves by employees posed an undue burden.

In a related case, the U.S. 3rd Circuit ruled last year that Philadelphia police could likewise bar a female officer from wearing a headscarf under her police hat.

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