

# TEDx Madison begins new era as 'a truly community event'

LAUREL WHITE | The Capital Times | lwhite@madison.com | @lkwhite Oct 11, 2015

About a hundred people gathered on Saturday to usher in a new era for TEDx Madison (<http://www.tedxmadison.com/>), a local event based on and inspired by the nationally renowned educational and motivational lecture series.

“This is a foundation year,” said Brandon Gries, a member of the organizational team that took up the mantle of TEDx Madison this year, following three years of changing leadership for the event.

Nine speakers, including Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, and Adrian Reif, co-founder of Yumbutter, a philanthropic artisan nut butter business, spoke at the event that took place at Edgewood College on Saturday.

“I’m here today to get inspired,” said attendee Sara Alvarado, who also attended last year’s TEDx Madison at the Bartell Theatre.

“It’s about gaining local knowledge — and learning how I might be able to help, how to give back in the community,” said Peggy Sundquist, another attendee.

Organizers agreed that inspiration was a key part of the event, but that idea-sharing and networking were the key elements necessary to ensuring the ideas shared at TEDx Madison would live on after the speakers go home and stage lights dim.

“It’s about fostering new links between attendees,” Gries said. “Today is just a checkpoint for these ideas.”

The hundred-or-so attendees at the event seemed to grasp that, too.

“It’s the community aspect,” said Ross Stainton, who drove down from Green Bay.

Attendee Laurie O'Donnell said "meeting new people" was one of her primary reasons for attending.

"I think people who are here probably have similar views about being active in the community," she said.

Attendees heard about widely varying subjects during the day-long event, from "The Power of Microfinance" to "Defending America's Parks Through Diversity."

The program's nine speakers were culled from an application pool of more than 100, Gries said, and went through a four-month boot camp that focused on perfecting their messages, making them "simple and focused."

Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, spoke about "the art of transformational and cheerful giving."

"In order to keep our most vulnerable from drowning we need our community to lift them up," Johnson said.

He also spoke about the \$100,000 scholarship ([http://host.madison.com/ct/ct/topics/race-in-madison/cristhabel-martinez-wins-boys-girls-club-scholarship-for-college/article\\_c3ed2c31-ca79-5962-bd9b-ff6dd99a653f.html](http://host.madison.com/ct/ct/topics/race-in-madison/cristhabel-martinez-wins-boys-girls-club-scholarship-for-college/article_c3ed2c31-ca79-5962-bd9b-ff6dd99a653f.html)) the Boys and Girls Club recently awarded to a Madison high school student.

James Edward Mills, an author and journalist, spoke about the importance of communities of color fostering a relationship with the outdoors.

"Spending time in nature is perhaps the last act of the civil rights struggle," he said.

Other speakers addressed the power of community in a rural African village, a microfinance initiative spearheaded by University of Wisconsin-Madison students and overcoming personal obstacles, from embracing a feminine identify in the male-oriented world of engineering and finding a personal voice as a transgender playwright and performer.

TED, the national organization that inspired TEDx Madison, is vigilant about how spin-off events are handled. They provide guidance and some support, but emphasize that spin-off events like Madison's are self-organized.

TED also imposes limitations on local events – attendance for TEDx Madison was capped at 100. That cap will continue until it can prove itself a sufficiently buzz-generating event, Gries said.

“We have to be interesting enough,” Gries joked.

He explained that viral sharing of TEDx Madison speaker videos, which will go online after the event on its website, would help convince TED that TEDx Madison deserves a larger audience and more recognition as part of the brand.

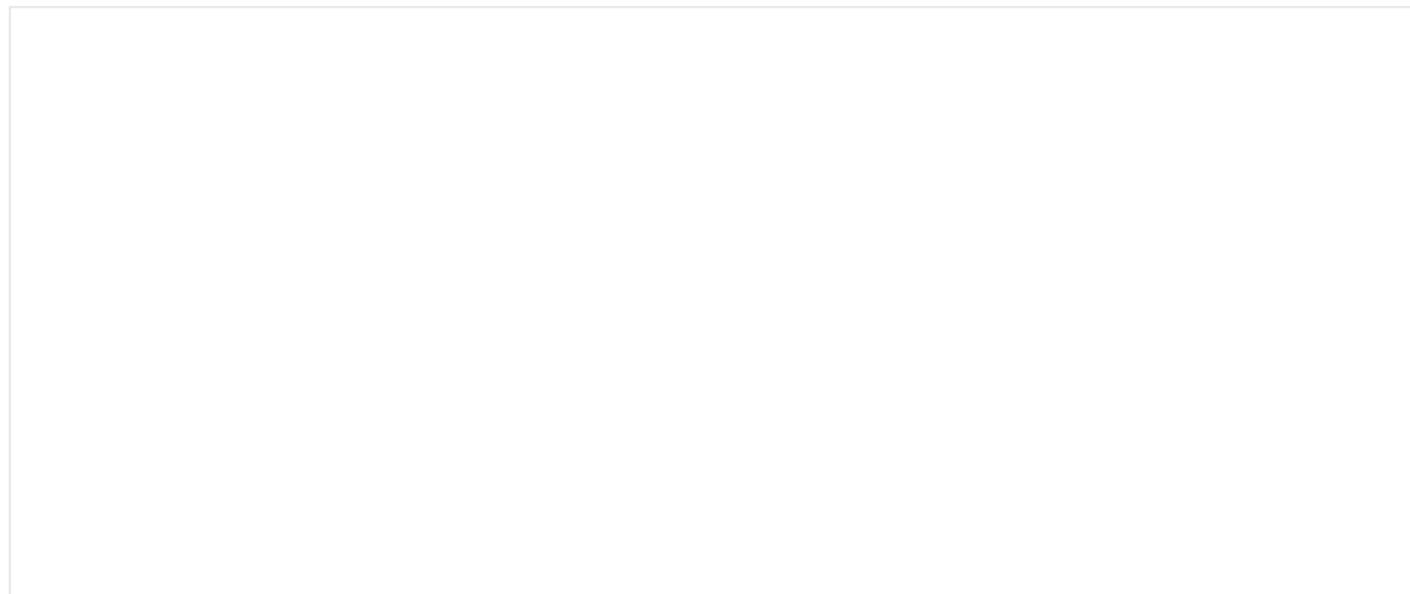
“The speakers are all from Madison. This is truly a community event, a Madison event,” Gries said.

## Laurel White

Laurel White covers technology and writes features on music, craft beer and culture for The Capital Times. She joined The Capital Times in 2014, having previously covered politics, agriculture and arts at Wisconsin Public Radio. She graduated with her master's in public affairs reporting from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism in 2014.

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