Just Peachy: Technology Celebration Demonstrates Georgia's Strengths

By John Yates, Special To LTW

Editor's note: John C. Yates is the Partner-In-Charge of the Technology Group of the Atlanta law firm of Morris, Manning & Martin, LLP and is a regular contributor to Local Tech Wire.

ATLANTA - I recently had the honor of Chairing the Georgia Technology Celebration 2003 in Atlanta. The event was historic for Georgia and the Southeast. Several new records were established:

• Attendance – We had more than 1,500 technology executives in attendance, the most in Georgia's history to attend a one-day technology event.

• Venture Capitalists – Over 140 venture capitalists attended the Celebration, and our Investor Showcase featured a dozen of Georgia's leading technology companies.

• Tech Associations – We had 50+ technology and business associations participate in the Celebration, the largest gathering of tech groups in the Southeast.

Other Highlights of the Celebration included an historic gathering of technology leaders from our region.

Modem Man – Dennis Hayes participated in the event and received an award for his role as the founder and CEO of Hayes Microcomputer Products. Dennis was the father of the modem and one of the most prominent worldwide leaders in technology for over a decade.

Internet Leader– The CEO of Earthlink, Garry Betty was a keynote speaker. Interestingly, Garry had previously been CEO at Hayes Microcomputer Products, working closely with Dennis Hayes during the early days of the PC revolution. Garry also announced the first profitable quarter for Earthlink – an historic announcement in itself.

Nanotechnology – Governor Sonny Perdue of Georgia was a keynote lunch speaker and announced the establishment of an $80 Million Center for Nanotechnology Research at Georgia Tech. The Center was made possible by an anonymous $36 million donation.

Software Icon – For almost two decades Peachtree Software was the leader in microcomputer accounting software systems. Ben Dyer and Bill Goodhew, two of the senior executives at Peachtree, reflected on the amazing leadership position that Georgia had in software technology for many years. They also highlighted the key role that Georgia Tech has played in the state's technology growth.

Computer Security – Many speakers at the Celebration emphasized the leadership role of Georgia entrepreneurs in computer security. Companies like Internet Security Systems have spawned dozens of software security startups in Georgia. These new security businesses have attracted venture capitalists to the state and established a reputation for Georgia as a leader in internet security.

Staying at Home – The Celebration highlighted several promising trends for Georgia:

(1) There are hundreds of Georgia technology entrepreneurs.

(2) Many of them are serial entrepreneurs and have started multiple companies in the state.

(3) Most of them have stayed in Georgia – and don't want to leave the state.

In addition, the next generation of Georgians are largely homegrown – their parents moved into the state as adults and have raised their families in the state. Georgia's challenge will be to make the quality of life conducive to keeping the next generation in the state and gainfully employed in the tech sector.

Biotech Beginnings – The Celebration magnified several challenges for Georgia's tech community. Biotech is an obvious shortcoming in Georgia. Our biotech community is very young and our sources of capital are limited. While there are several growing biotech, medical device and drug discovery companies in Georgia, they are first generation businesses. We've got a long way to go to catch up with other parts of the U.S.

Diversity – Similarly, many of the Celebration panelists noted the importance of fostering diversity in the Georgia technology community. If the first step is recognition of the challenge, then the Celebration was a step in the right direction toward increasing the diversity of leaders in our community.

I was honored to serve as Chair and organize the Georgia Technology Celebration. It was a record-setting event and the start of our state's business plan for making Georgia one of the top five technology states in the nation.

This column is presented for educational and information purposes and is not intended to constitute legal advice.

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