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Food

Sweet twists
on tradition for
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County schools
get \$250,000

Thursday, Sept. 17, 2009

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

TEDx event inspires with questions

Spinoff of national
conference has day
session in Atlanta.

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How do we synthesize
happiness?

How do we read one
another's minds?

How do we harness
wireless electricity?

Lecturers who appear at the TED (or Technology, Entertainment, Design) conferences held every January in Long Beach, Calif., chat about such "wow!" topics in highly compressed 18-minute presentations, available online at the TED Web site (www.ted.com).

The videos are addictive, said Joanna Durr, director of marketing at Newell Rubbermaid in Atlanta, who was excited to see a spinoff TED conference — called TEDx — come to Atlanta this week.

Durr was among 100 invited guests attending the one-day event Tuesday, at which atmospheric physicist Carl Hodges described growing crops with seawater and Georgia State University professor Gregory Jones outlined the mathematics of cooperation within complex systems, from slime molds to cities.

Sponsored by marketing firm Unboundary, the lectures took place at the Roundhouse, a retro-fitted railroad facility

in west Midtown. Participants snacked on peppermint patties and red wine, were treated to a "grits bar" prepared by chef Shane Touhy, and heard former Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra pianist Eric Lewis perform on a Yamaha parlor grand.

Among the influential products introduced at the first TED lecture in 1984 were the new Macintosh computer and Sony's compact disc.

The speakers then included Whole Earth founder Stewart Brand; mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot, father of fractal geometric; and artificial intelligence pioneer Marvin Minsky.

Since then, TED, run by the nonprofit Sapling Foundation, has found a wider audience with its online content and with such spinoff TED conferences.

There is a certain "save-the-world" quality to TED events. Global warming and greenhouse gases are topics visited repeatedly. A shudder went through the group when Ciannat Howett, director of sustainability initiatives at Emory University, pointed out that our grandchildren will find it hard to forgive us for using clean drinking water to flush our toilets.

Durr said she found the event inspiring but is still seeking answers to larger questions: "How do you generate cooperation? How do you stand for something greater?"