

Gel conference returns in Accord

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BSP Reporter

On Oct. 2-3, Accord’s beloved SkateTime will welcome the Gel (Good Experience Live) Conference. This will mark the return of Gel after a 10-year hiatus.

Mark Hurst, founder of Gel, and Stephanie Bauman, co-owner of BjornQorn and Skate Time, are old family friends and equally excited about the event’s revival.

“We have been looking and thinking about ways Skate Time can exist in the community outside of just being a roller rink. We are committed to being a roller rink, and it’s a very important aspect of what we do. But we also see it as a building that could really be more of a community hub, and so this opportunity came at a very good time for us...we’ve run the rink for three years now, and we’re sort of in a place where we want to grow it in some different ways. And we also at this time, really believe in community gathering and thoughtful conversation and intention around the choices we have as a business, and as an individual in the world,” Bauman said.

The first Gel conference took place in 2003, when the world looked a lot different than it does now.

“At the time, there were lots of really interesting projects as the internet and the web were first gaining popularity. And so I held the conference in New York City almost every year from ’03 through 2016, and we had projects like Jimmy Wales, [who] gave the very first talk about Wikipedia – the international debut of Wikipedia was on stage at the Gel Conference. And there were a number of other speakers along the way who presented projects or innovations or designs. We had quite a few performances on stage, but as of 2016, what I noticed was that the tech companies were really misbehaving. They were more concerned with growth at any cost than in creating really good experiences for the world,” Hurst explained.

It was during this time that Hurst launched his radio show, “Tecthonic” on WFMU, to caution listeners about the direction tech was heading.

“A few years ago, I noticed that there was some good news again that was worth telling people about. I like to call them these ‘little green shoots’ were pushing up through the earth – and they were projects like BjornQorn and Skate Time and Ravenwood. And I noticed a lot of them were in the Mid-Hudson Valley. There is so much creativity and inspirational work going on in that region that I thought maybe Gel could be a possibility,” Hurst



Mark Hurst holding BjornQorn at Gel 2015

continued.

The day-and-a-half event will feature eight speakers on the morning of Oct. 2. These include K. Greene, co-founder of Hudson Valley Seed Company, and Eric Gullickson, president of Mohonk Mountain House. After previously speaking at Gel in 2015, BjornQorn leaders Bjorn and Jamie will return to the stage, joined by Bauman this time around. Hurst will be presenting as well.

“Mark lined up a speaker, Jessica Elefante, who has parental guidance on advising families on how to make decisions about their kids and technology. Bjorn and I have two kids, and part of why we bought the roller rink was because there’s not a lot of places for kids to hang out where we live, and it’s an in-person experience – it’s a no private screen place. Phones are literally not allowed on the rink. I think parents, especially right now, are really struggling with how to make rules and decisions around technology and AI. So I’m personally really excited about that aspect of the conversation,” Bauman stated.

Following the speaker presentations, Upstate Curious is sponsoring a catered lunch. After lunch, attendees will embark on excursions. “One group is going to go on a mindfulness walk in nature at Mohonk, which is not far away. Another group is going to go up to Kingston and is going to have a session hosted by the Good Work Institute. Also in Kingston, we’ve got Light Brite Neon,” said

Hurst.

Dinner will not be provided. After dinner, attendees are welcome back for a skate party. A live band is slated to perform as well. Gel is expected to wrap up by midnight on Oct. 3, after attendees participate in a closing “community building session” facilitated by Micah of the Good Work Institute.

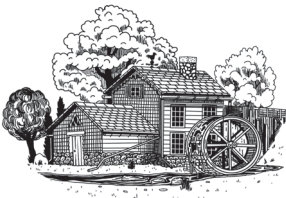
Tickets are currently on sale for \$275 through Sept. 2. After, the price to attend jumps to \$299.

“This is not going to be a money-making event. Some-day, I would love for Gel to be a money-making event... I’m working as a volunteer and just trying to cover rentals and T-shirts and posters and things like that... we’re only able to do it with the donation of the venue from Skate Time and the lunch from Upstate Curious, and the speakers also are foregoing any speaking fee. If you compare it to a movie or something, it would be high. But if you compare it to almost anything else you would do for a day and a half with catered food and scheduled excursions – it’s a deal,” Hurst said regarding the ticket price.

There are a limited number of scholarships and volunteer opportunities available for those who wish to attend, but the cost would be prohibitive.

“It’s about how we can live and work and be creative in this moment where we have so many challenges due to AI and other economic forces. So the people who have signed up are people who are interested in that. There’s an architect, and there are designers, and there are writers, and there are journalists, and there’s retirees, and I’m sure we’re going to get some students,” Hurst stated about the clientele.

Students and artists can purchase discounted tickets for \$75. For more information about Gel and to register, visit Gelconference.com [ESP](#)



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