

Feeding the poor, educating the millennials: 'Ideas worth spreading' at first TEDxMorristown

October 21, 2015 by [Kevin Coughlin](#)

Some revolutions start with guns. Others begin with zucchini.

Chip Paillex brought so many home-grown squashes to his office that co-workers finally suggested he deliver them to a food pantry. That delivery more than a decade ago led to creation of [America's Grow-a-Row](#), a nonprofit that provided 1.2 million pounds of fresh produce to needy New Jersey families last year.

"If you have some sort of passion—cooking, reading, hiking—you can take that and really help someone in need. Find that passion, and make a difference," Paillex told students and community members on Tuesday at the first [TEDxMorristown](#).



Katlyn Waldo and Louie Marin of Carolyn Dorfman Dance perform at TEDxMorristown 2015. Photo by Kevin Coughlin



Chip Paillex, founder of America's Grow-a-Row, addresses first TEDxMorristown. Photo by Kevin Coughlin

About 150 people watched five hours of presentations at Morristown High School intended to promote "ideas worth spreading."

"We hope to inspire you," event organizer [Michael DePalma](#) said to start the program.

Short for "Technology, Entertainment, Design," TED was founded by [Richard Saul Wurman](#), an architect and graphic designer, in 1984. Hundreds of global conferences are licensed by [TED Conferences LLC](#), which imposes strict rules.

Talks cannot be commercial or exceed 18 minutes. Audience sizes are limited and by application only, to ensure that "the people in the seats are as interesting as the people on the stage," said DePalma, a Morristown resident who runs an educational consulting firm, Pensare LLC.

TEDxMorristown sponsors included the [Morris Educational Foundation](#) and [Sustainable Morristown](#). The event was not a money-making venture, said Sustainable Morristown President Paul Miller.

Videos of the talks, recorded by students of Mike Butler's broadcasting classes, will be posted online in a few weeks.

HOMETOWN FAVORITE

Viewers are likely to draw inspiration from Paillex, a Presbyterian deacon who quit his corporate gig to devote himself to feeding the poor and educating youths about healthy eating. Tuesday's hometown favorite, however, was MHS senior Domenico Randazzo.

Randazzo, 17, outlined a strategy to **revamp education** and “destroy the millennial stereotype.” Too many students, he said, define themselves via Instagram likes, basement parties, and vodka smuggled into the gym.

He proposed breaking this dull, destructive cycle by transforming high schools into academies that nurture individual talents along five tracks: Biomedicine, Fine Arts, Humanities, Math and Vocations.

“I’m telling you right now,” declared Randazzo, a gifted musician, “my superintendent and my principal are in the auditorium right now. I’m pitching this to you. Let’s make this happen. These are good ideas!”

Choreographer Carolyn Dorfman served the day’s visual inspiration, with a primer on how to appreciate dance. Dorfman narrated lithe, lyrical performances of her works by Katlyn Waldo and Louis Marin from her dance company.



Domenico Randazzo, 17, speaks at TEDxMorristown. Photo by Kevin Coughlin



The first TEDxMorristown. Photo by Kevin Coughlin

“I make dances about the world as it is,” said Dorfman, the daughter of Holocaust survivors. “I make dances about the world as it could be.”

Choking back tears, author and film consultant Kerry Magro described his childhood struggles to overcome autism.

Entrepreneur Richie Etwaru shared a formula for controlling luck. Author Roya Hakakian, a former political refugee from Iran, and the sister of a **Morristown rug dealer**, spoke of a German terrorism trial that resulted in Iran’s ostracism by the West.



Audience takes group selfie at first TEDxMorristown. Photo by Kevin Coughlin

Troy Neuenberg related his cross-cultural experiences mentoring Eastern European exchange students working at a Martha’s Vineyard restaurant. “The more people we know, the smaller the world becomes,” Neuenberg said.

Dr. Michael Cantor, an osteopath, touted advances in regenerative medicine— specifically, the harvesting of one’s own platelets and stem cells to treat injuries.

DePalma said he’s already setting his sights on a bigger Morristown show next year.

Morris School District Superintendent Mackey Pendergrast, interviewed prior to Randazzo’s challenge to re-invent Morristown High School, said he hoped the personal stories of TEDxMorristown would inspire the 60 students in attendance to express themselves and “be open to whatever your story might be.”

Asked about Randazzo’s message, sophomore Amy Albin said students might agree with his call to tailor class instruction to their strengths. But as to his characterization of millennials’ shortcomings, “I’m not sure about that.”