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A Place for Local Geeks To See and Be Seen, or Hired

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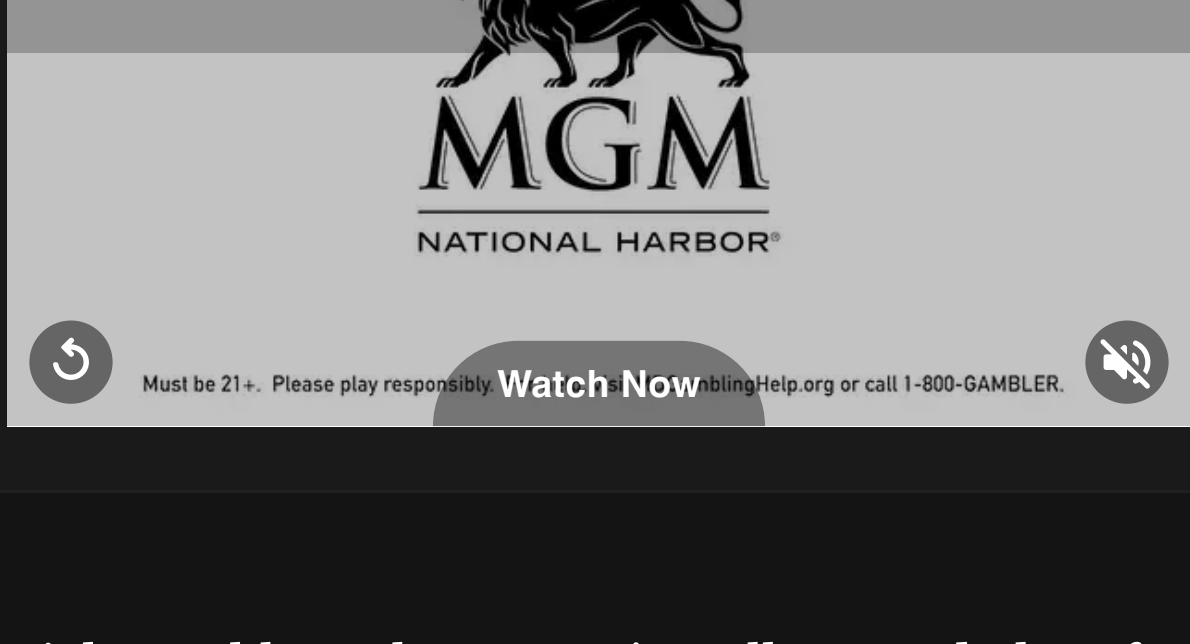
By Zachary A. Goldfarb

TechPost, which looks at people and ideas driving the local technology industry, runs Friday on the WashBiz Blog, at washingtonpost.com/washbizblog.

If you're a smart techie with Web talent, why come to Washington when you can go to Silicon Valley and snag a job with Google, Facebook or some up-and-coming start-up backed by millions of dollars in venture capital?

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Social Matchbox, a networking event once called "speed dating for geeks" that was held last night in McLean, is trying to show that there are plenty of opportunities here to work for cutting-edge Web companies.

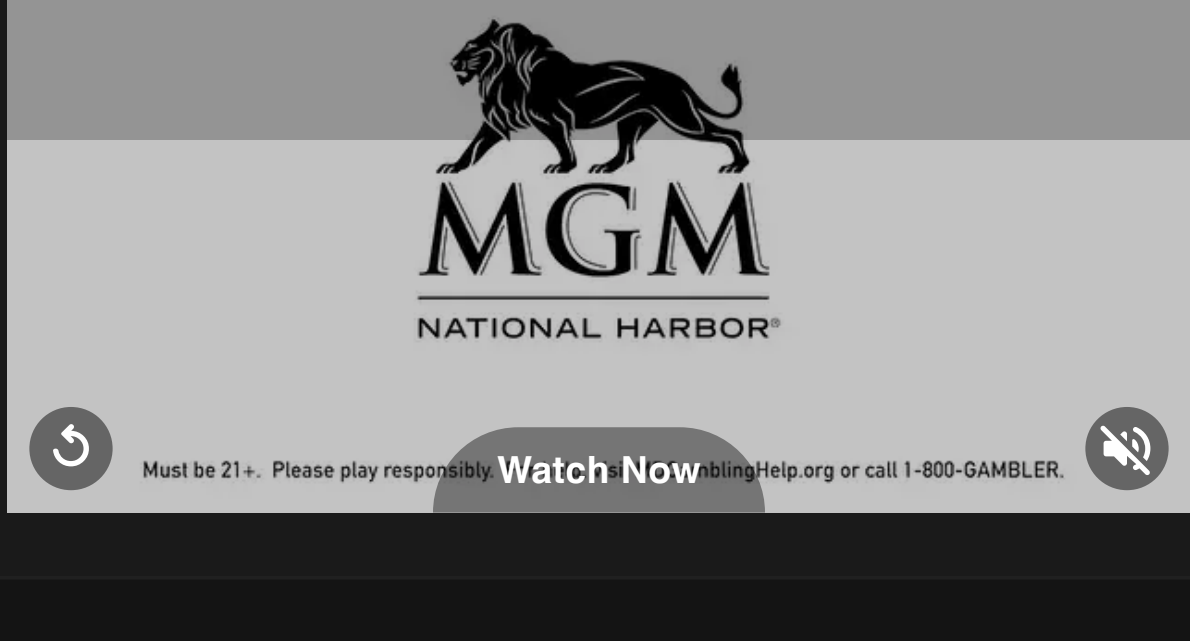


"Before Social Matchbox, there wasn't really a good place for start-ups to come together and announce to the community, 'Hi, we're here,' " said Robert Neelbauer, a local technology recruiter who hosts the event with his wife, Juliana. "One of the things the event accomplished is to bring the community closer and to give people an opportunity to talk to each other and help each other," he said.

This is the third time the group has met since forming this year, and Neelbauer said dozens of connections have been made at the events.

Unlike the standard chaotic networking event at a loud bar or a local firm, the first hour of Social Matchbox featured an open mic, at which 19 presenters -- mostly Web start-ups -- gave two- or three-minute spiels on their companies and ideas. Some just hoped to make the community aware of their existence. Some wanted advice or partnerships. Others wanted to hire programmers experienced in a particular kind of software or Web development. Still others wanted a chief executive or co-founder.

The roughly 100 attendees wore color-coded name tags: red for hiring, green for seeking a co-founder, blue for job-seeking, yellow for socializing. You could smell pizza everywhere and see people typing away on their iPhones. After the presentations, the crowd mingled as various Web products were demoed.



The event was held at Teqcorner, a building that provides space to many technology companies, and featured a few established tech firms, such as the Web hosting service Freewebs and the online brokerage FolioFN (featured in TechPost last week).

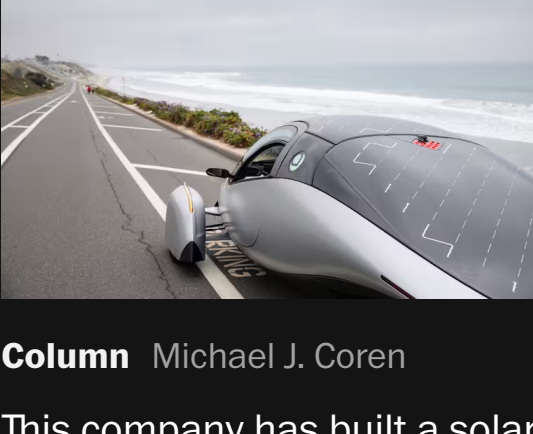
Neelbauer's day job is running Staffmagnet, a Dupont Circle-based consulting firm that helps technology companies find talent. So it's no coincidence that he has made Social Matchbox an extracurricular.

Companies searching for talent "could hire a staffing agency, and that staffing agency will search Monster.com," he said. "The kind of people who want to go work for Google don't need to put their résumé into a Monster. The companies need an organization like ours that already has community relationships built up."

Chris Heroit attended Social Matchbox's first event earlier this year. After that, he left a mid-size government contractor in Northern Virginia and moved to Positive Energy, a local Web start-up that helps people conserve power at home. He gave up a higher salary and may lose his coveted security clearance in a few years -- worth thousands of dollars. But his new job, as an engineer at Positive Energy, is more satisfying, he said, and he returned last night to talk about his experience.

"Whenever you're building something, you get invested [in] it emotionally, and you can't do that with contracting," he said. "It's too much beyond your control. People are very much short-sighted. They're worried about the next deadline, not what it's going to be like in three years."

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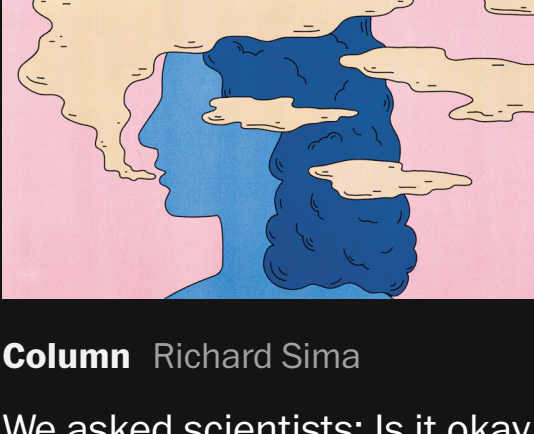


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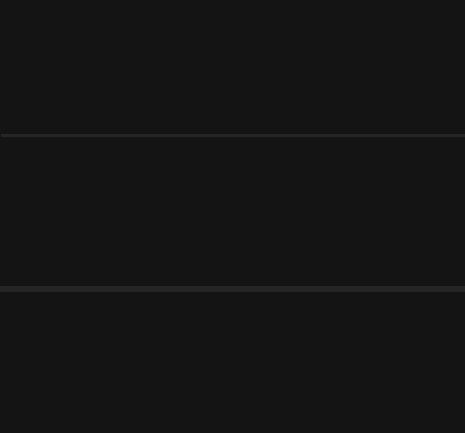
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