



TENacious

OCTOBER 8, 2026

TED^x StCloud

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x = independently organized TED event



WELCOME TO TEDxSTCLOUD 2026!

Tonight, we celebrate a decade of TEDxStCloud and the tenacity it takes to bring an idea to life.

Since our first event, TEDxStCloud has been built around a simple belief: Ideas Change Everything. An idea can challenge an assumption, open a conversation, change a mind, or send us in a direction we never expected.

That spirit inspired this year's theme: TENacious.

Ideas worth spreading rarely arrive fully formed. They require persistence, imagination, a willingness to challenge what we think we know, and the courage to step onto the red dot and share them.

Tonight, Nora, Sucharita, Njeri, Jill, John, and Esera do exactly that. Each has spent months preparing, with the support of volunteer speaker coaches and the TEDxStCloud team. We are grateful for the thought, courage, and trust they have brought to the process. Now, finally, their talks belong to you.

Our performers bring another kind of creativity and energy to the stage. Jason Schommer joins us with comedy, while The D2 Acoustic Duo, Paul and Joey Diethelm, bring music to the evening.

Tonight, TEDxStCloud turns ten. That milestone belongs to everyone who has helped make this possible. Speakers and performers have shared their ideas and artistry. Volunteers have given countless hours behind the scenes. Local businesses and organizations have stood with us as partners. And audiences have brought attention, encouragement, questions, laughter, applause, and conversation.

To everyone who has been part of this journey: thank you. TEDxStCloud exists because you showed up, contributed, listened, supported, and came back.

TEDx events are independently organized under license from TED, bringing people together to share ideas and spark conversation. We have been fortunate to do that here for a decade. TEDxStCloud is produced entirely by volunteers, with generous support from local businesses and organizations that help make this gathering possible.

Tonight, listen with an open mind. Be willing to be surprised. Notice the idea that makes you lean forward, or the one you find yourself thinking about tomorrow.

What might you reconsider? What conversation might you continue? What idea might you become tenacious about?

Stay curious. Stay open. Stay TENacious.

Brian Hart and the TEDxStCloud Team

2026 EVENT SCHEDULE

RECEPTION

The Regency

5:00 - 6:15

PROGRAM: PART ONE

Paramount Theatre

6:30 - 7:30

- Jason Schommer
- Nora Hertel
- Sucharita Mukherjee
- Njeri Clement

INTERMISSION

Paramount Lobby

7:30 - 8:00

PROGRAM: PART TWO

Paramount Theatre

8:00 - 9:00

- The D2 Acoustic Duo:
Paul & Joey Diethelm
- Jill Amsberry, DO
- John Larson
- Esera Tuaolo



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A colorful graphic for the City of St. Cloud, Minnesota. It features a stylized illustration of the city skyline with various buildings, including a clock tower and a lighthouse. The sky is dark blue with white stars and a large white starburst. The text "ST. CLOUD" is prominently displayed in white, with the tagline "Be Part of Something Greater" below it. At the bottom, there is a section for the City of St. Cloud, Minnesota, with a QR code and contact information for the Mayor's Office.

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THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

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TED^x StCloud



THANK YOU, COACHES.

Behind every TEDxStCloud talk is a coach who listens, questions, encourages and helps bring an idea more clearly to the stage.

We are deeply grateful to this year's volunteer speaker coaches, Annette Atkins, Sonja Gidlow and Jennifer Kramer, for the time, care and experience they have shared with our speakers.

Thank you for being such an important part of TEDxStCloud.



**Annette
Atkins**



**Sonja
Gidlow**



**Jennifer
Kramer**

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ANNUAL DATA POINTS FROM FISCAL YEAR 2026

MEET OUR **SPEAKERS**



ESERA TUAOLO

Esera Tuaolo, affectionately known as “Mr. Aloha,” is a former NFL player, singer, chef, author, entrepreneur, and nationally recognized advocate. He played nine seasons in the NFL, including with the Minnesota Vikings and Atlanta Falcons, and later shared his experience as a gay professional athlete in his book *Alone in the Trenches*. Esera is founder and Executive Director of *Hate Is Wrong*, a nonprofit dedicated to combating bullying and discrimination. A contestant on NBC’s *The Voice*, he continues to use his story and platform to bring people together through courage, authenticity, and Aloha.



JILL AMSBERRY

Dr. Jill Amsberry is a pediatrician and leader in medical education in Central Minnesota. She serves as Associate Dean of Undergraduate Medical Education at the University of Minnesota Medical School’s CentraCare Regional Campus in St. Cloud and as Director of Undergraduate Medical Education at CentraCare. A longtime CentraCare pediatrician and former medical director of pediatrics, she brings extensive clinical experience to her work preparing and supporting future physicians.

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JOHN LARSON

Dr. John Larson is Vice President of Plant Readiness and Startup at Niron Magnetics, where he is helping lead the development of the company's first full-scale Iron Nitride magnet production facility in Sartell, Minnesota.

An executive leader with 26 years of experience in semiconductor and magnetic materials technologies, he joined Niron as its second employee and has helped build its team, technology, culture, and operations. John previously spent 17 years in the semiconductor industry and holds a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Minnesota.



NJERI CLEMENT

Dr. Njeri Clement is Director of Cultural Fluency, Equity, and Inclusion at St. Cloud Technical & Community College, where she leads efforts to strengthen collaborative leadership and inclusive excellence across campus. She is a recipient of the Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Award and a Humphrey Policy Fellow. Njeri holds master's degrees in Public and Nonprofit Administration and Social Responsibility, as well as a Ph.D. in Leadership Studies.



NORA HERTEL

Nora Hertel is the founder and executive director of Project Optimist, a nonprofit news organization serving greater Minnesota with solution-focused journalism. An award-winning journalist with more than a decade of experience, she has worked as an investigative reporter,

political and public issues correspondent, and environmental journalist for organizations including The Associated Press, Wisconsin Watch, the St. Cloud Times, and USA TODAY Network-Wisconsin. Nora holds a master's degree in journalism from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and was a 2022-2023 Initiator Fellow.



SUCHARITA MUKHERJEE

Dr. Sucharita Sinha Mukherjee is a professor of Economics at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University, where she also teaches in the Honors, Data Analytics, and Gender Studies programs. Her research focuses on feminist economic development, comparative economic

development, gender inequality, and innovative approaches to teaching economics. Born and raised in India, she earned her Ph.D. in Economics from the University of California, Riverside. She is passionate about interdisciplinary learning, global perspectives, experiential education, and making economics accessible to students.

The background of the entire page is a dark blue gradient. At the bottom, there is a graphic of concentric ripples in water, suggesting a drop has been thrown. A horizontal light blue line is positioned below the company name.

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MEET OUR PERFORMERS

PAUL & JOEY DIETHELM



Paul "Stretch" Diethelm and his son Joey perform together as the D2 Acoustic Duo, combining accomplished musicianship with the natural chemistry of a father-and-son partnership. Paul is a guitarist and songwriter who toured nationally and internationally with Jonny Lang and is a founding member of The Fabulous Armadillos. He was inducted into the Minnesota Music Hall of Fame in 2022. Joey, a student at Concordia College, grew up surrounded by music and brings his own energy and perspective to their performances. Together, they offer an engaging acoustic mix of familiar songs, strong musicianship, and multigenerational connection.



JUSTIN SCHOMMERS

Jason Schommer is a stand-up comedian and storyteller who has performed across the U.S. and Canada and for U.S. military audiences overseas. He spent two years opening for comedy legend Louie Anderson in Las Vegas and toured with him regularly. A frequent performer with The Moth, Jason has won multiple Story Slam competitions and has been featured on The Moth Radio Hour. His comedy blends sharp wit, playful spontaneity, and stories that find humor in the absurdities of everyday life.

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