Build, Secure, Scale — Together

Eleven years of community in the agentic era

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John Sturman
Co-leads, GDG Hudson Valley and Capital Region ·
~~with Wes Turner, PhD, RCOS~~

Yulia Ovchinnikova

Ph.D. Economics
MA Computer Science & Applied Mathematics



Single mom of two, started as a coder (C+, Pascal, Fortran, Basic), transitioned to journalism => early Web Dev => marketing => BizDev => publisher => influencer = > .RU => community manager => RuFOSS => US => reInvent myself as:

- Social Entrepreneur (WTM, HV **GDG**, HVTech, Startup HV, Coding & Web Development...)
- Strategist & Marketing Pro, Growth Hacker
- Tech Entrepreneur (Google Hackathon)
- Motivator / Speaker / Facilitator / Educator

OpenHub
Innovation | Collaboration | Education

TWELVE YEARS, ONE COMMUNITY

GDG Hudson Valley - 2014.
Helped to start GDG Capital Region - 2016.
Chapter went dark - 2019. The people stayed.
HVTechFest & HVTech community.
GDG Hudson - 2021. DevFest Troy - 2024

Since 2014, 430+ community tech events across the Hudson Valley

🏆 **2026**
GDG North America
Chapter Innovation Award

2015 · Study Jam, GDG co-organizer

2016 · Google Hackathon win

2017 · OpenHub founded

The chapter goes dark

HVTechFest keeps the room together

HVTech meetups: 3,000+ members

GDG Hudson Valley relaunched

2023 - John Sturman joins as co-lead

2024 · DevFest Troy with RPI

434 EVENTS IN 12 YEARS. THE ROOM NEVER CLOSED.

434

community tech events since June 2014

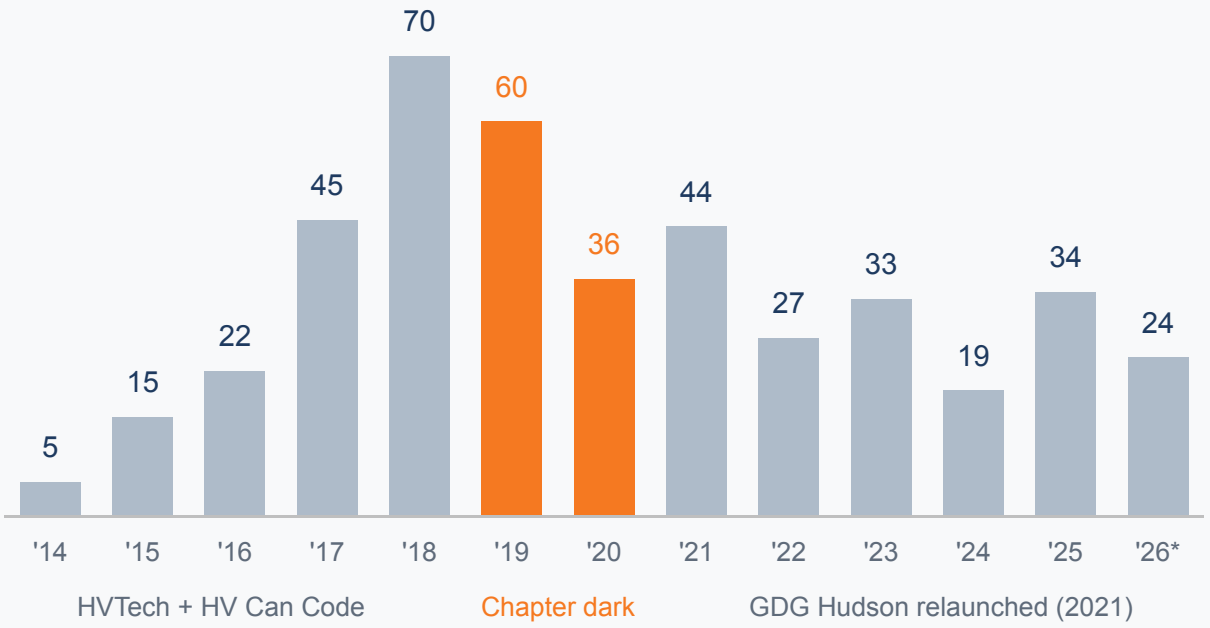
96

events in 2019–2020, while the GDG chapter was dark

4,900+

members across our three community groups

Community tech events per year



Unique events after removing cross-posts between Meetup (HVTech, Hudson Valley Can Code) and gdg.community.dev (GDG Hudson); includes 18 co-hosted with other GDG chapters. *2026 through Oct 23. Members overlap across groups.

RECOGNIZED: IT BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE WHO SHOWED UP

What this community earned:

1 · 2026 GDG Chapter Innovation Award
2 · Recognition from NYS senators and regional policymakers
3 · People who kept showing up



“Google didn't give this award to me. They gave it to the people who kept showing up.”

AI: THE BUILDER'S JOB IS MOVING

92M → 170M

Jobs displaced → new roles created by 2030 (WEF)

−19%

Relative drop in employment, ages 22–25, most AI-exposed jobs

SOURCES

WEF, Future of Jobs Report 2025
Stanford Digital Economy Lab, "Canaries in the Coal Mine?" 2025

The bottleneck is moving

HOW → WHAT → WHETHER

When we were busy with HOW, we had no time to ask WHAT made sense to build.

Today's agents:

Coding agents take a task, write the code, run the tests, security reviews, open a pull request.

→ **They don't ask if it was the right ticket.**

AI is NOT replacing:

- ✦ Defining the problem
- ✦ Clear communication
- ✦ Knowing WHAT to build
- ✦ Human judgment & empathy

"To thrive in the age of AI, improve your communication skills."

— ChatGPT Head of GTM

The skill that survives is human.

BUILD · SECURE · SCALE: THE HUMAN LAYER

Agents can build, test, and ship. What they can't do is vouch for you.

1 · BUILD

"Agents take the HOW"

People decide WHAT to build, and WHETHER it's right. You learn that from the people you build with.

2 · SECURE

"Trust is the scarce resource"

AI-written résumés. AI-run screening. A colleague who has worked with you can't be faked.

3 · SCALE

"One person inside"

One person who knows your work beats a hundred applications. Networks scale through people.

Community is the security layer of your career, and the fastest way to scale it.

"Recruiters run the process. Developers make the call."

−19% employment, ages 22–25, most AI-exposed jobs · Stanford, Aug 2026

The problem isn't no jobs. It's no on-ramp.
When the on-ramp disappears, people become the on-ramp.

THE T-SHAPE: WHERE THE CROSSBAR GETS BUILT

Depth in one domain PLUS range across others. In the agentic era, range is how you direct agents and catch what they miss.

Home domain

YOUR DEPTH

Built alone
at your keyboard
— code, data, your craft

Adjacent lenses

YOUR RANGE

Built in rooms like this one
next to a designer, a professor,
a student, a founder

The seam

YOUR EDGE

Where the problems live
that no single field can see
— or knows to build for

← You build the depth alone. You build the crossbar together. →

AGENTS ARE TAKING

- ✗ Boilerplate and syntax
- ✗ Writing code to a spec
- ✗ Running the tests

WHAT STAYS HUMAN

- ✦ Framing the right problem
- ✦ Catching what's wrong in context
- ✦ Knowing who the app leaves out

HVTech meetup → partner in crime → GDG co-lead → RPI professor

"I love working with high-energy, positive instigators."

WHERE WE MET

An HVTech meetup.
A conversation.
No job posting. No ATS.
I just knew.

WHAT IT BECAME

Five years as partners in crime.
Co-lead, GDG Hudson Valley.
Professor at RPI.
Our bridge to this campus.

That's developers hiring developers · Commitment is everything

"Someone brought me in. Now we bring the next ones in."

GDG ON CAMPUS RPI

Recently launched
by RPI students.
A new chapter of
this community.
Come on up!

RCOS × OPEN SOURCE

Open source is
community-built infrastructure,
including the agentic stack.

Up next: Wes Turner

Yulia brought John in. John helped students build their own chapter. That's how community scales.

The Power of Saying Yes!

How stepping into unexpected community opportunities shaped my career path.

DevFest Troy 2026 · Build, Secure, Scale: Developers and Builders in the Agentic Era

1 Simple Word

YES!

A deliberate practice of embracing unexpected invitations.

"Yes" unlocked unexpected leadership, teaching, and lifelong networks.

Pivotal Moments to say Yes

Computer Science Lecturer

Stepped in for manager to teach Software Design & Documentation, a pivotal RPI CS course.

Now working with small developer teams to build open source software in RCOS, a standa

GDG Co-Organizer

Joined Yulia and GDG Hudson to build community, expanding leadership scope outward.

Yulia brought John in. John helped students build their own chapter. That's how community scales.

Looking Forward, I Am Always Ready for the Next Yes

Community building starts with showing up when invited.

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EDGE: FOUR THINGS AI DOESN'T REPLACE

01 Framing the right problem

AI optimizes within a problem definition. It does not evaluate whether the definition is correct. That judgment requires domain knowledge the model doesn't have.

02 Evaluating output against reality

The test passed. The model is confident. The output is still wrong — because the domain context makes it wrong. Catching that gap is a human CDI move.

03 Directing AI toward what matters

Real prompt engineering is clear thinking translated into precise instruction. It compounds with domain knowledge — the deeper your domain, the better you direct the model.

04 Building at the seam

The highest-value solutions live at the boundary between a technical capability and a domain need. Getting there requires understanding both sides simultaneously.

Frame · Check · Direct · Connect — each one is built by crossing fields, not by going deeper in one.

Success Formula

1. hard **skills** - CS, AI, cloud, cybersec, etc
2. **industry** expertise / context
3. experience / projects: hands-on **problem solving**
4. connections

CLOSE: BUILD, SECURE, SCALE, TOGETHER

Not "Which agent should I learn next?" but "Who will vouch for my work, and whose work will I vouch for?"

01

This weekend:
Meet three people

Meet three people you didn't come with. One of them may bring you in, or be the one you bring in.

02

This quarter:
Join a mixed team

Join a hackathon or meetup team with someone from outside tech, and take a role that isn't "builder."

03

This year:
Vouch for someone

Bring someone in. Be the person inside who says: "I've worked with them."

Direction for ten years. Skills for two.

Welcome to DevFest Troy.