

# CLIMATECON! COLORADO

## The Story of the Start of ClimateCon!

By Michael Scanlon

February 2024

Dear ClimateCon! Community,

In March 2023, I vowed to start a high-level climate conference that celebrated innovation in the “climate tech” and “sustainability” fields.

I set out with an open mind, knowing that many others knew far more than I did. The goal was to create a fun conference that highlights and celebrates all the innovation and positive advances taking place in the fight against the climate crisis.

On April 11, 2023, I formally filed “ClimateCon!, LLC” at the Colorado Secretary of State’s office. ClimateCon! was born on Earth Month!

Almost immediately, we added “Colorado” to drive home the local factor. And so the ClimateCon! Colorado logo was born.

Early on, “and Inspiring Action” was added to the “Celebrating Innovation” tagline. I kept hearing, over and over, that other conferences were great and all, but everyone was leaving with a sense of disappointment, with a lack of fulfillment. “What was accomplished?”, I heard over and over from attendees of other conferences.

From the standpoint of a start-up Founder, you may not be surprised to hear me say there were some ups and downs along the journey. A key turning point was October 19th, when, broke and on the brink of homelessness, I started my W-2 job as a Preloader at UPS. Working 3AM to 9AM allows me to work on ClimateCon! from 10-5.

I’m thankful for the job. Steady income is a blessing when you’re working in conferences, a notoriously feast or famine industry. It’s an early morning workout program :) I’m proud to be a Teamster!

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There were certainly some momentous, key milestones along the way. George Sparks and [the Denver Museum of Nature & Science](#) took a chance on ClimateCon! in the early summer when the whole movement was little more than me and my big mouth. I will always be thankful to George. I encourage the DMN&S to keep taking risks on climate upstarts like they did on ClimateCon!. I encourage everyone to take risks on climate startups! So what if you “lose” everything, and get nothing in return. It’s still a win, fostering failure in the climate solutions industry. We need more failure!

[Denver Startup Week](#) was kind enough to connect us to [Halliburton Labs](#), and in September, during DSW, Halliburton Labs played our video, a [short one minute trailer](#) put together by one of our amazing volunteers, Sindbad with Adventure Story Media.

Our amazing volunteers turned out to be our greatest blessing of all. Yes, we had some incredible Session Leaders, and every one of them should be highlighted and praised. Yes, we had over 90 experts as panelists, and their credibility and wisdom lent ClimateCon! the gravitas it sought and achieved and promises to build on. Many thanks, and a huge kudos, to all who took the time to prepare for, and present at, ClimateCon!.

And yes, Governor Polis stopped by our nascent event, and I’m super thankful. A long-time champion of climate justice and limiting air pollution, Governor Jared Polis is also a long-time personal friend. Like everyone who played a role in this historic first ClimateCon!, I will forever be indebted to our Governor, who I sincerely hope will run for President one day. His mere presence brought everyone together for the only time that day (other than lunch!), and his inspiring remarks got us all riled up for the day ahead! Thank you Governor Polis.

All that said ... it was the volunteers baby!

At first, it was the three people coming forward on that fateful day in March. With no panelists, no venue, and no one behind the idea yet, I stood up at a One Million Cups meeting, and announced to the world - or the 15 or so entrepreneurs present anyway - that I was going to host a major climate conference in January 2024!

One of the three initial volunteers was an entrepreneur by the name of James Jackson. The Founder of [JCJack Identity](#), James does web sites - and much more. James has decades of business experience, and is really a business coach extraordinaire who just happens to guide people in getting their business out on the Interwebs. He never took a

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penny, although I offered to pay on numerous occasions. From a very early stage, ClimateCon! had a professional, first-rate website. Thank you James.

We held a test run event in May, where we [advocated for better cycling conditions](#) in Denver on [Bike To Work Day](#). This event highlighted our incredible volunteer base, hinting at the magic to come. Bike To Work Day is on May 17th in 2024. Plan accordingly!

Shortly after, we had another big win. But it required a deft shift.

From the beginning, I spoke of January 3-5, 2024 as the date for the inaugural ClimateCon! conference. Over the summer, I attended an event at the CSU Spur campus. I was blown away by the beauty of the venue, and they mentioned their sustainability features like drawing heat from the sewers. I set out to secure the venue, as people kept asking when we would have a venue. (An experience I'm reliving, and once again, it will work out. Trust me.)

I approached the CSU Spur campus, and they were very amenable to doing a deal. In fact, the entire team at the CSU Spur campus is incredible, they were tremendous partners, and in the end, it worked out great. There was just one hitch.

See, the CSU Spur is over by the Denver Coliseum, location of the annual National Western Stock Show every January. We could have the Hydro building in January, but only late January. To land this amazing venue, we had to pivot on the date. In making the pivot, someone adroitly pointed out that we were gonna get X number of people. While no one knew X, if we only had one day, all X would be there on that day. If we had 3 days, X would be spread out, and we'd likely not get all X in the room at once.

I condensed it to a one-day event on the spot. In hindsight, a one-day event works well. We attract busy professionals doing important work in the climate space. We don't want to take them away from their work for an entire week.

The summer was a slow period, as I anticipated it would be. This isn't uncommon when you're 6 months away from the event - it's just hard to generate excitement from that distance. (Notice we're turning around and doing our next major conference in less than 90 days? People are saying it can't be done. But back to my story.)

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A lot of people were saying this major climate conference in Denver couldn't be done. Some had the courage to address their concerns with me to my face, and I always respect and appreciate that forthrightness. It almost always comes from a place of love and a genuine effort to help, the same mindset I receive it in. Others were saying it couldn't be done when I wasn't around. I love it when people say it can't be done - it fuels my fire!

And certainly for us, the ClimateCon! community, we've got to be setting the pace and showing people that the old ways of doing things aren't the ONLY ways of doing things. We have to lean into action, we have to fail more. We have to do things people say can't be done.

Funny story, about this time, I strutted into the bar across the street from the CSU Spur campus. An old rodeo honkey tonk with a modern casual lunch twist, I was super confident I had a deal for them. I was sure their Tuesday night on January 23rd would be slow and they'd be open to a giant private party dropping in right after work.

I sidled up to the bar manager like I had the Deal of the Week for him. He asked me "Is this during the stock show?" "No," I coolly responded, "we deliberately made sure our event was after the stock show." "Are you the week after?" Yes, I indicated. "Too bad," he said. "We're closed the week after the stock show. We all work from 8AM-2AM every day of the stock show - we need that week off." So much for an obvious after party location!

As mentioned above, DSW in September was a key turning point. More volunteers turned up, offering us donations like free conference room space, while also lending their time and insight to advise and guide this budding concept. The process wasn't always pretty - OK, OK, it was NEVER pretty. Or even well organized. I own that. But it was pure, everyone was in it for the right reasons, and the volunteer hours slowly grew and grew.

There were two super volunteers who put in the bulk of the hours.

The first super volunteer to emerge was Andrew Warshauer. An engineer by training with his own successful startup installing cell phone capacity, Andrew was one of the early 1MC's devotees to dive in and help. As time wore on, he helped more and more, bringing structure to my madness and knocking off tasks like getting out marketing

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emails. Andrew became a trusted advisor I could turn to in times of doubt, or when facing a difficult decision. His steady hand and positive, can-do attitude are just the example ClimateCon! needs to set. Thank you Andrew.

The other super volunteer who came on a few months later, roughly 90 days out, and who really elevated the whole conference at least one notch, was Laura Walker. Laura is an industry veteran, and she persistently steered us toward the issues that matter. Things like science. Areas where the group hadn't been focused but should have been. She challenged us to be better, which in turn made ClimateCon! better. She took on numerous tasks, and delivered every time with flawless execution. Those clever mascots? Laura Walker. The elegantly laid out schedule? Laura Walker. The merch? The signage? Laura. Laura. Thank you Laura.

It was around this time, 90 to 60 days out, that I met with Victor Galvin. Victor was working with Conservation Colorado when we met. He wove together a history I largely knew - banking industry redlining and industrial zoning laws, to highlight two specific policies - to drive home the fact that institutional racism has caused higher rates of cancer, asthma and other ailments in minority communities. I could feel my eyes welling up with tears. And then a horrifying image entered my mind.

I envisioned ClimateCon! doing one session on environmental justice through a racial lens. And I could see one Black panelist, and one Hispanic panelist and one panelist of Asian descent. And I could see people viewing it as tokenism and being trite and I almost threw up. I decided then that we would have a Race and Climate series of events. And while an Asian American session never materialized, we celebrated our brothers and sisters of Hispanic and Black and Indigenous heritage, by giving them each their own session. We recorded them all, I hope you'll watch them all. Thank you Victor.

By the time we were 30 days out, the volunteer base was a good dozen strong, and we were getting something like 50-60 volunteer hours a week. Mind you, ClimateCon!, LLC is a for-profit. For-profits using volunteer labor is illegal, with some exemptions. To remain legit, we operate as a humanitarian for-profit, learn [more here](#). I was always grateful, I am tremendously grateful, I will always be indebted to all these volunteers!

The last 30 days are something of a blur. My most vivid memories are of December 30, when I took my two teenage children to Estes Park for one glorious overnight stay in the

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mountains. It was magical, and stepping away, I could see that the conference was really coming together. While not exactly the way I first pictured it (after all, it NEVER comes together the way you first envision it), it was coming together in a splendid way and I knew it would be a good showing.

The [Butterfly Pavilion](#) came on board as 2023 turned to 2024. Alongside the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, they were our other major sponsor, injecting much needed capital just as the bills were coming due. I encourage you to visit the Butterfly Pavilion in Westminster! Their venue is spectacular.

All our sponsors were huge. Xcel Energy brought gravitas. [CragLev](#) is a family owned startup making chalk by extracting carbon from the atmosphere. [GeoSolar Technologies](#) is planning to transform thousands of older commercial buildings into energy efficient buildings. [Clear Result](#) is preparing utilities for a clean energy future.

A huge THANK YOU to all our sponsors!

Always remember, the best way all of us can thank our sponsors is by patronizing their businesses!

On January 22nd, we held a volunteer training. I couldn't believe my eyes as one person after another strolled in. It was a diverse and passionate group, and you could feel them bonding together, an added bonus.

On January 23rd, we had over 20 volunteers show up to help create and execute the first-ever ClimateCon!. Part of me couldn't believe it, even though we had them all registered, with duties assigned and everything. The volunteers were self-organizing!

You want to meet an amazing, incredible person? Come to any ClimateCon!, and talk with any of the volunteers. They are selfless, confident, intelligent, humble and overwhelmingly positive and glowing people. Of all the stakeholders I feel the need to answer to - sponsors, ticket holders, panelists - the volunteers will always rank at the top. They see it all. They care as much as anyone. They only want what's best for the cause.

The actual conference is a blur of memories to me already. LeeAnn Kittle compared it to a wedding - "you talk to everyone and remember nothing." How I wish it wasn't true, and

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yet, I keep getting emails from people saying “remember how we spoke about this at the conference?” Yes! Yes, I definitely remember! It was a great day wasn’t it!

On a related note, if we spoke about collaborating in the future, I was very sincere when I said yes. And if you haven’t heard from me yet, well, I’d appreciate it if you’d shoot me an email.

**Community Insider Tip:** If you use [info@climatecon.world](mailto:info@climatecon.world), it forwards through to me and it will likely be seen by a volunteer also. And one day soon, a paid staff person.

In closing, I have to say it was a smashing success thanks to all of you. Thanks to the Session Leaders. Thanks to Governor Polis. Thanks to the 90+ experts who were panelists. And most of all, thanks to all the amazing volunteers who stepped forward! All of you made January 23rd an incredible, unforgettable experience!

We’re building a community together. [Open Social says there are six types](#) of communities, ours is clearly a Community of Action: “A **Community of Action** is all about mobilizing volunteers as a movement to jointly make a change in the world.”

Let’s collaborate and effect change as we build and grow our community of action!

With Tremendous Gratitude,

Michael Scanlon  
Founder  
ClimateCon!, LLC

P.S. The next ClimateCon!, in Boulder, Colorado, is only 61 days and 13 hours away.

You can [buy introductory price tickets here!](#)



Do you see the look on this young man's face?  
He just learned the long-term forecasts for the global climate!  
He was our youngest attendee.  
Thanks to Mom for allowing some selfie fun with her precious child.

**Let’s stay focused on what matters!**