

**FUTUREtakes**

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### **A Conference Snapshot**

## **World Future 2005 – Foresight, Innovation and Strategy**

*Jay Herson*

More than 1000 futurists representing more than 30 countries converged on Chicago July 29-31 for the World Future Society Annual Conference. This year's theme was "foresight, innovation and strategy." After the opening session Friday evening, Saturday and Sunday offerings included more than 100 sessions and two luncheons.



Two dynamic speakers opened the meeting at Friday evening's plenary session. The first speaker, Joel A. Barker, president of Infinity, Ltd, reviewed some basic principles of his book *Five Regions of the Future: A Revolutionary Roadmap to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* in order to answer what he considers the most important question of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—what the heck are we getting ourselves into? Barker's goal is to increase the number of people thinking about the future in order to take advantage of what James Surowiecki called *The Wisdom of Crowds*. He uses the conditions for crowd wisdom in Surowiecki's book and Barry Schwartz's (*The Paradox of Choice*) notion that people are faced with too many choices and cannot get enough information on each possibility to make the right choice to propose an involvement strategy. Foresight must reduce choices, create meaningful categories. Barker proposes getting diverse individuals together to categorize issues and to create implications wheels as described in his book in order to create a collective intelligence. He would like the WFS to continually poll its membership on issues and create implications wheels. This technique was illustrated at a special session on Saturday night with 200 volunteers.

The second keynote speaker was Ken Dychtwald, president of Age Wave and author of several books on longevity. He spoke on the broad topic of "The Longevity Revolution: The Future of the Marketplace, the Workplace and Our Lives." His opening remark was that two thirds of all of the people who have ever lived past age 65 are alive today. Life expectancy has progressed from 18 years 100,000 years ago to 25 years in 1000 AD, 35 years in 1500 AD and 76 years in 2000 AD. Current technology is adding 2 ½ years to life expectancy each decade and this may accelerate with better understanding of the genome, exercise, nutrition, alternative medicines, hormone therapy and therapeutic cloning. Some day we may be able to clone a new liver or pancreas when we are healthy and store it for use later on when we may need it. Stem cell technology is but one example of global development as the United States falls behind because of the current political climate.



As the US population ages and remains healthy more people are working longer. In the period 2000-2020 the number of people aged 55-64 will increase by 73% and those over 65 will increase by 54%. Most of these people expect to continue working past age 65. Poverty among US citizens aged 65 and older is steadily decreasing. Dychtwald emphasized the implications for marketing—design of furniture, houses, clothing, banking and finance, insurance, automobiles, entertainment media and content conform to the older person's lifestyle. He indicated that more people will begin second careers and possibly alternate careers and volunteer work well into their 80s. There are considerable implications here for educational institutions and large employers. He pointed out that women, who generally outlive their husbands, have even more opportunities for new relationships and lifestyle changes due to freedoms gained after their husbands die.

The Sunday closing address was given by Edie Wiener, president of Weiner, Edrich, Brown, Inc. Her topic was "Emergence of the Virtual Economy." She began her talk by indicating that she and her associates had accurately predicted the e-economy in 1998. She now was ready to predict the next economy. She contrasted past economies—hunter/gatherer, agricultural (4000 years), industrial (200 years), post-industrial (50 years) and information (25 years). The next economy will be called the virtual economy and it is already here. The industries comprising this economy will be:

*Innerspace*—electronic control of the mind, brain stimulation, drugs to prevent shyness, to get precisely number of hours of sleep desired. Virtual reality activities where the brain believes it is somewhere else—participating in sports event or beauty pageant.

*Microspace*—nanotechnology and quantum physics—changing properties of products. Applications in drug delivery, diagnosis of diseases, self cleaning windows, clothing alchemy.

*Cyberspace*—distance learning, digital music, virtual libraries. Hypernet will connect cars and home appliances to a network and to the internet.

*Outerspace*—hydrogen deposits on the moon becoming a source of energy on earth, Mars as a resource for agriculture, space as a place for pharmaceutical manufacturing, reflection of radiation away from earth.

*Timespace*—era of clairvoyance, telepathy, non-linear lifestyles (people can be retired and working at the same time, educating for next career while working in former career), TiVo programming in all aspects of life.

These spaces imply that family, community and privacy will change. There will be a new sense of self and a new definition of religion. Wealth will be based on the ability to control one's personal data and persona. We will be moving from mankind to mindkind and the latter will generate wealth and energy.

On the whole it was a very successful conference. The one disappointment was the number of cancelled sessions (10 out of 100). Perhaps this can be reduced at next year's conference WFS 2006—*Creating Global Strategies for Humanities Future*, Toronto, July 28-30, 2006.

**Washington Metropolitan Area Attendees at WFS 2005**

About 70 attendees were from the Washington DC area. The following attendees participated either as moderators, speakers or contributors to the conference volume—

District of Columbia—Kelly H. Carnes, Joseph F. Coates, Jerome C. Glenn, William E. Halal

Maryland—Ed Cornish, Ken Harris, Jay Herson, Ken Hunter, Luis A. Machado, Tim Mack, David Pearce Snyder

Virginia—William Sims Bainbridge, Raj Bawa, Clem Bezold, Harlan Cleveland, John Harvis, Carl Jensen, Daniel Knight, Gary Marx, John McDonald, William Rowley

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