

FUTUREtakes

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From the Desk of Tim Mack, President, World Future Society



At each year's conference, the World Future Society has worked to increase the participation of Young Futurists, as they represent the best hope the world has in building a positive future. This year's conference sets a new standard of commitment by the Society to the Next Generation of futurists worldwide. International groups such as the Global School Network, Future City and Future Problem Solvers will be bringing students to learn and teach us all about the promise of the future and their innovative approaches to realizing that promise. From creative education to new communications technologies, from blogging trends to the science of science fiction, the adults of tomorrow are going to be both participants and presenters in shaping their own futures.

By this I mean intense discussions of the future of the education system...by the students themselves, and how new technologies can help to transform it. The construction of a global virtual museum and collaboratory, the building of other types of synthetic worlds for modeling, socializing or saving the world, and in depth analysis on some of the less successful forecasts of the previous century are all part of this youth-relevant programming. Of course, I mean youth of all ages, and our discussions of disruptive technologies, anticipatory knowledge and continuous innovation will continue to go forward as well.

Finally, there will be a Young Futurists Center, where youth can connect with each other conference goers can listen to presentations or view projects, and the workings of other interactive projects like the Implications Wheel room can be examined and discussed and we are working to have wireless technology available there. In the spirit of this focus on youth and technology, I recently peeled back the years and launched the WFS President's Web Log, as part of the redesign of the WFS Web site. Of course, this being a blog means that I get to put my two cents in, but the real point is to get a dialog started with each other. Please feel free to engage me (www.wfs.org) in spirited debate concerning my wrong-head ideas or my failure to grasp the great trends of the new century. All's fair in futures!

One of our newest partners in the youth programs arena is the Future City program, which is a part of National Engineers Week in the United States (and as part of related activities in India and Japan). But the breadth of this undertaking is beyond mere civil or electrical or any other of the engineering sectors but encompasses the entire range of urban planning and modern governance.

Middle school students use the SimCity (Version 4.0) software to design a working city that addresses and solves energy, transportation, sanitation, housing, etc. challenges facing cities worldwide in the future. They then build models of their city, write essays about their design choices and explain/defend their creation in an oral presentation. What was most thrilling was the response of these young people to the idea that what had been for them a very engaging exercise of a few months' duration could in fact become a life-long way of thinking and problem solving.