

Walking in the Agrihood, Where Apples Grow on Shoes...

We take a deep dive into the future

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Good news: You can now purchase Ralph Lauren fashions for your digital avatar and then exercise your soccer “muscles” in the Metaverse with your buddies -- and never even break a sweat. On a more practical level, you can buy a pair of actual, real-world sneakers and, when they get shabby, plant them in your backyard and anticipate their new growth as a pair of apple trees! Seriously.

What is the world coming to? That was pretty much the question on the table on March 1 as the Greater Green Bay area joined the global celebration of “World Futures Day” for the first time ever. Just over 100 local leaders, movers and shakers filled the Hendrickson Dining Hall at the St. Norbert College Bemis International Center for four solid hours of futuring, trend watching and wide-eyed exclaiming. “I couldn’t have been more pleased with the turnout, the enthusiasm, and the incisive conversation bubbling all around the crowded room,” said Envision’s new Executive Director, Steve McCarthy.



With financial support from some of the area’s most prestigious organizations -- Schneider, the Green Bay Packers, Green Bay Packaging, and St. Norbert College (SNC) -- World Futures Day demonstrated the potential of the sharp turn Envision took in 2017, committing to a focus on the discipline of Strategic Foresight. Immediate past president Dave Wegge, a retired SNC professor, pointed out that Green Bay seems to be on track to become the only U.S. city committed to using Strategic Foresight to shape a preferred future for the community.

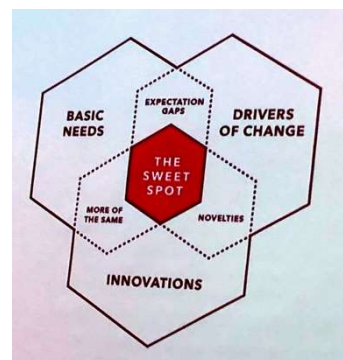
We’re Falling Behind

Phil Hauck, Envision’s current president, opened the program with the somber reflection that “we’re not as innovative here as we used to be.” He said the Green Bay area, which used to be two years *ahead* of the country in new ideas and creative applications, is now two years behind. On that note, he introduced Vicki Loomes, a dynamic “trend analyst” from London, England, to share insights gathered by TrendWatching, a global organization with 850 “spotters” around the world. They’ve been following signals and trends for 20 years.





Loomes introduced the group to four significant (and occasionally mind-blowing) megatrends, explaining that such trends arise when change bumps up against core human needs, creating tension. When needs, innovations and the drivers of change converge so that *all* are served, she explained, we reach the “sweet spot” that launches a recognizable trend toward the future.



One such trend, Loomes pointed out, is the recent shift in brand relevance from “me” to “we,” linking consumer choice to culture, purpose and society. Consumers now want their favorite brands to align with their values, she explained.

“**Unconsumed**” is the term Loomes assigns to current consumer focus on sustainability and mindfulness. “It’s not just ‘going green,’” she said. Examples include “circular solutions” and “eco-boosters.” The former is where that apple-tree-growing shoe came in, the innovation by a Canadian company to make a shoe both biodegradable and capable of *new* growth. Loomes also cited returnable containers for beauty products - to be sterilized, refilled and resold (not crushed and recycled) by the product manufacturers.

Eco-boosters support changing social values, which recognize a renewed interest in protecting the planet: a dog food that substitutes invasive carp for the precious salmon dogs love; fragrances made from carbon-captured ethanol; a VISA card that rewards its owner for climate-smart spending; a chocolate company in the Netherlands that’s pushing for a sugar tax! These are intervention seekers, Loomes said; they understand that 52% of consumers now think capitalism does more harm than good.



Goodbye to the Black Box

Acknowledging that smart phone adoption will have doubled in the decade from 2016 to 2026, Loomes explained the result of the transparency such a trend engenders. She called it the “Glass Box Brand” (as opposed to the black box brand), explaining that internal culture is fast becoming an important part of the external-facing brand. “Fifty-four percent of consumers from 175 countries now want to buy from companies that value diversity, sustainability, and other cultural values.”

Companies with “transparent brands” are now swapping marketing for metrics, listeners were told. Consider: shoes that now include sustainability facts on their product label; the Swedish



grocery store that prices food items based on their climate impact -- and then offers their loyal shoppers "climate credits" toward future products. "They oppose 'greenwashing,'" Loomes explained. Their pledge is for tangible progress toward climate consciousness.

This leads to "open-source solutions." For example, a gaming company now offers patents to competitors who design video games that are accessible to special-needs players. Some big banks now share customer deposit records of loan applicants who don't have credit records. A consortium of brands now works together to determine the carbon footprints of their products.

Another trend is toward a new version of **"insider trading."** This means treating staff better and improving the workplace culture. Early results include a decision by one company's employees to take a 6.5% cut in pay in order to enjoy a four-day work week and, for another, internships for individuals over 55, bringing new viewpoints into the workplace. Unilever has committed to raising living standards across its entire supply chain, and Deloitte now trains its full staff on climate change. Much of this might be in response to "the great resignation" -- the recent trend toward simply walking away from a job. As Loomes said, "every department is now the 'marketing department.'"

Learning from the Pandemic

Megatrend #3 offered the audience a glimpse into the "age of healing." Loomes said that global digital healthcare funding increased by 79% during the recent pandemic. Big players in the digital world are now getting involved in healthcare devices, and those devices are getting eerily sophisticated. (e.g. One records the tone of your voice throughout the day and reports back to you about your mood shifts.) Business has now become social, the group was told, with the focus on mental health now slightly edging out the importance of physical health.



Nike now offers a "Mindset" product that assesses the users' *mental* health status, and Bonanno Concepts has hired therapists to serve their wait staff! Jumbo, Netherlands grocery chain, offers "checkout chats" as an option for shoppers who want a little socialization as they pay, and Theraflu actively encourages consumers to take a sick day now and then.

The age of healing includes acknowledgement of the need to return to nature. Loomes discussed the "green gap" -- lack of accessibility to nature and the outdoors -- explaining that GDP is now sometimes measured as GEP: gross ecosystem product. She offered fascinating examples of urban restoration and a return to nature, including a Polish nasal spray company

that apparently cleans the air on playgrounds as children play. The concept of “agrihood” integrates suburban living with farming and incorporates fun and spontaneity into city life.

The Metaverse, You Say???

Finally, the trend analyst provided a look at the “metaverse” or digital self-expression. As Covid accelerated digitization of customer interactions, she said, people now tend to “forget ‘business as usual’ in favor of ‘business as social.’” Seventy-seven percent of people polled across 15 countries indicated their chief source for human interaction is now online. A slightly smaller percentage confessed to having been motivated by a social media platform to make a purchase. Loomes even showed the crowd images of a “shopping lens” that allows women to virtually try on makeup before purchasing it online.



Not only has shopping become communal and social through the online experience, but gaming -- the convergence of the digital world and the real world -- has taken on an entirely new purpose in our lives. “Gaming is now the third space,” Loomes explained, a place to hang out with friends -- virtually. And it’s gone way beyond playing games. What Loomes termed the “**virtual experience economy**” now offers:

- concert attendance within a video game
- actual sports *competition* in the digital world
- opportunities to learn financial literacy by playing Minecraft
- meta-campaigning by political figures
- clothing one’s avatar in designer attire, as mentioned above, making *virtual* belongings a new source of social status

Christies, the famed London auction house, recently sold a piece of virtual artwork -- that has no actual existence in the physical world -- for \$69 million in non-fungible tokens (NFTs). And, Loomes explained, it’s all because people are spending more and more time in digital space.

Our Community is Already on the Way

Breaking up that intense view of future trends was a mid-morning round-table discussion by three local organizations honored by Envision for their pioneering work in Strategic Foresight. The Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) of Brown County was cited for its commitment to forming “signals teams” and faithfully reporting signals and trends to its staff and board.



Nature's Way, a local manufacturer of personal wellness supplements, was honored for keeping its eye on "the third horizon" rather than focusing only on the present or the murky road ahead. And Bellin Health, which was actually ready to transition to digital healthcare just as Covid struck, was recognized for superior leadership that enabled a most timely organizational transformation.

Matt Schueller of Nature's Way explained that committing to Strategic Foresight really involves an investment more of time than of dollars. He said it was worth it, though, because companies in the Midwest really need to work hard to stay in the game. Devon Christianson, the Executive Director of ADRC, said that their return on investment has been simply in better service to people. "We don't compete for business," she explained. "We compete for the opportunity to engage with the people who can benefit from our services." Chris Elfner of Bellin Health said, "We're in a very competitive business. We see more disruptors every day." He explained that Bellin's return on investment in Strategic Foresight has been significant.

Asked what the challenges of implementation of Strategic Foresight have been, Christianson cited the need to convince people they don't have to be "experts" to participate. The whole staff can start learning how to use the tools without formal training, she explained. Schueller said the challenge at Nature's Way was to help the team see how they could weave the new approach to strategic planning into their current structure, and Elfner said the immediate challenge was simply helping untrained leaders adopt the *language* of Strategic Foresight.

The three panelists, all among the early graduates of Envision's Strategic Foresight program taught by [certified futurist Garry Golden](#), discussed the feasibility of implementing this



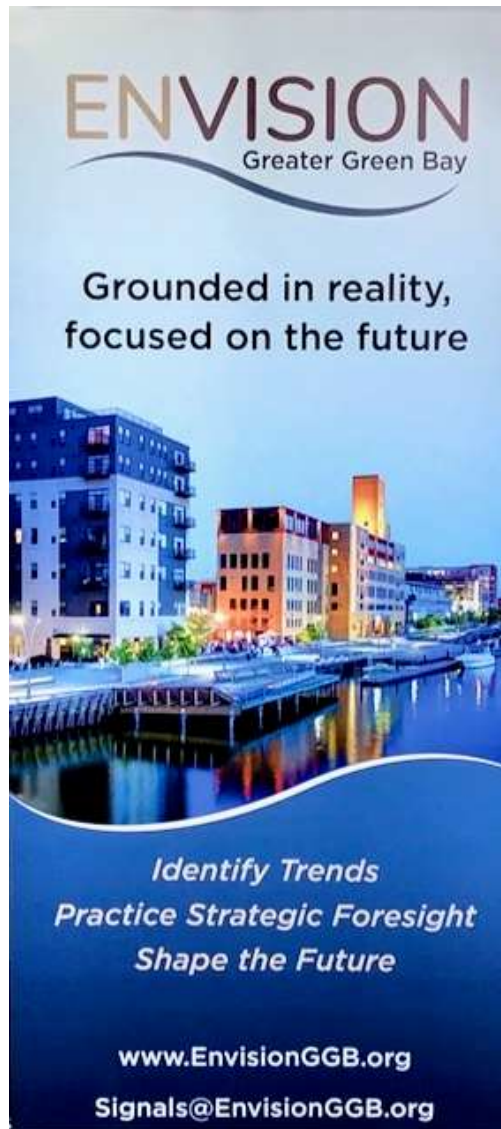
commitment to a preferred future, community wide. Elfner noted that the Green Bay area offers opportunities to align and collaborate without sacrificing organizational identity. Christianson pointed out that the Greater Green Bay area is actually small enough to work together but big enough to find the resources such a commitment demands. Schueller noted that Strategic Foresight training inherently builds relationships as the cohort

explores "really fun" challenges and learning experiences.

The program adjourned at noon with invitations to participants to sign up for [the next Strategic Foresight cohort](#), set to launch on September 9. (Another cohort is currently in training with

Golden.) According to board president Phil Hauck, “Attending the workshop is the spark that ignites the process that provides these benefits, including the change in how people think.”

“The event was part of a worldwide celebration,” said Dave Wegge. “Envision’s success with this first World Futures Day event in the Greater Green Bay area tells us that we can look forward to March 1, 2023 and hosting this celebration again.”



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