

Graduates Anticipate their Future

Fall 2023 Strategic Foresight class presents final reports



What if the signals told you that you've been pitching the wrong product – to the wrong audience? Or imagine the signals told you that artificial intelligence (AI), rather than a *danger* to your primary audience, is actually the *key* to enhancing the services they need? On the other hand, what if the signals indicated that AI will only stoke the fires of the very threat you're trying to eliminate?



Those were some of the gripping scenarios presented on November 17 at the Green Bay Botanical Garden as our fall graduating class shared the results of their foresight journey and laid out plans for shaping the future. The organizations represented in the class – several of which had already sent members through previous Strategic Foresight training – included:

Green Bay Botanical Garden
Jane Benson, Political Activist
Bay Towel
Schneider

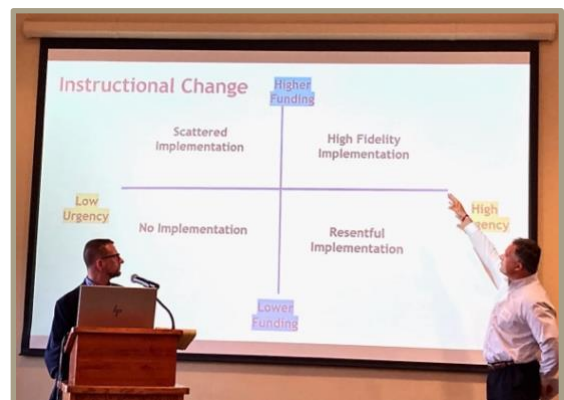
Salvation Army
Unified School District of De Pere
Schreiber Foods
Dudley Birder Chorale



The Schreiber Foods team enthralled the audience

with the possibility – including a photo – of a cooking robot that might one day work in a family's kitchen! That was just a small part of a transformed future that suggests these changes for the food production company: AI used in formula development to save time, automated production lines, reusable packaging, and wearable technology to help people plan their meals.

Chris Thompson, Superintendent of De Pere Unified Schools, said his study of Strategic Foresight changed his entire perspective. And his story was all about – you guessed it: AI. He spoke of how AI can extend a teacher's reach, take over some of the basic lesson planning processes, and even lead small-group work while the teacher stays front and center with the main class. He told us about earbuds with artificial intelligence that can instantly translate speech to another language, and asked whether AI translation reading glasses could be far behind. "We must embrace it," he told the group.





The team from Green Bay's Salvation Army, who had followed signals related to mental health, AI, social work, and changing local expectations, acknowledged that their organization is currently in a "constrained" era. "We have to go back to the basics," they said: Soup, Soap, and Salvation. But the focus now will be on *civic* nourishment, a "clean slate" from which to view the landscape, and sharing their signals with the community. The group wowed the audience with two videos they'd made using artificial intelligence: one to replicate the past (1855) and the other to simulate the future.

"How can I do something wildly different?" asked one of the speakers from the Schneider team. This hometown business, started 88 years ago in Green Bay, and now serving 8,300 customers through the work of 17,000 associates that haul \$3 billion worth of freight each year, is focused on the most fundamental improvement for their future: how to make diesel mechanics safer. As they work to develop their own new technology, they acknowledge the need for 700 diesel mechanics. The Schneider presentation demonstrated how AI might revolutionize the work and the life of a diesel mechanic, actually moving the job from "blue collar" to "white collar."



The Schneider team used AI to create "newspapers of the future." They handed them out to listeners during their presentation.



Bay Towel is also a local company grown beyond anyone’s wildest dreams, having started in 1929 by asking Curly Lambeau if they might launder the uniforms of the Green Bay Packers! Today they wash 21 million pounds of laundry each year and process 20,000 garments daily. And 95% of the uniforms, table covers, and linens they rent are inventory the company actually owns. Their focus has been on labor scarcity and automation. The team shared concerns about a coming shortfall of 6-7 million workers – and likely millions more

benefitting from the “greatest transfer of wealth in history” who might ask, “Do I even *need* to work?” They admitted that “our industry is still very old school,” valuing the handshake, relationships and service. But they envision a transformative future, with: ID chips in rental materials to accurately track them; motorized carts for route reps; ergonomic rising truck floors; and automated systems in delivery trucks to improve both safety and efficiency.

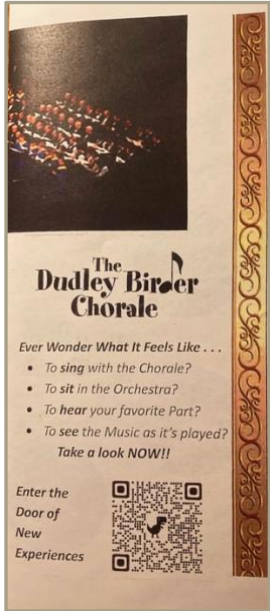
Jane Benson represented no one but herself in her Strategic Foresight journey, admitting that she is a political activist focused on short-circuiting the potential harm of disinformation. She stated that such disinformation is not a mistake – it is intended to cause harm by asserting power over reality, inspire fear of the person spreading the lies, and overwhelm both the press and the public. Jane walked us through the foresight tradition of STEEP, citing increasing addiction to social media, decreased oversight of online digital technology, the threats of a \$600 billion digital ad industry, an environment conducive to all of the above, and the political paralysis in Washington. Her vision of a positive transformation included “boringly safe election results,” a global digital ethics law, AI oversight to identify social media disinformation, and state-mandated media literacy instruction in public schools.



It was the Dudley Birder Chorale that admitted their organization is “in the midst of a midlife crisis,” as is classical music in general. With diminishing attendance in the face of an exploding home entertainment industry, they have been focusing on the hard questions: *Who is our primary customer? What is our primary product?* The signals indicated a shift “from themes to experiences, from larger affiliations to *authentic* affinity connections.” Accepting that work-life balance is now highly valued and that *belonging* is important, the group recognized that

the audience is *not* their primary customer – “it’s us, the singers!” The valued product is “the value of the transformed *member*.” The chorale proceeded to lay out their vision for that new horizon where they are no longer selling the performing arts, but promoting the value of *performing* the arts! A revelation!

The team from the Dudley Birder Chorale created a sample brochure to demonstrate tangibly how they might implement an entirely new approach to marketing their “product.”



Finally the host organization, Green Bay Botanical Garden, with 6000 members and 200,000 visitors each year, presented “a future beyond our borders.” Following an extended consulting experience with Envision leaders, the group has accepted that AI is here to stay, and knowledge is doubling about 15 times faster than it did 60 years ago. They see a transformed future that is “proactive, a new era” that will require significant adjustments. Thus they have launched the Green Bay Pollinator Corridor Project, anticipating that, by 2030, robots will be helping to maintain the corridors – weeding and seeding. By 2035, they suggested, the Garden might even be using drones to analyze soil conditions and deliver optimal plant species. “We must be forever scanning for signals,” they said. “We must learn the capabilities of artificial intelligence to help *bring our world into the community* instead of merely trying to *bring the community into our garden*.”

