

## “... to do something that matters”

### Meet Bridget O’Connor

By Devon Christianson, Envision board member

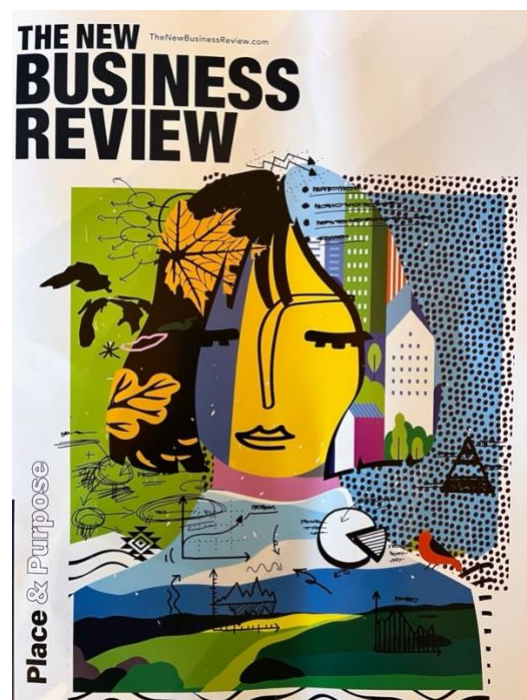
“Water drew me here,” explains Bridget O’Connor in her recent feature written for the *NEW Business Review*. Titled “Of Place and Purpose,” the article opens with the affirmation that it was the Fox River, seen from the St. Norbert College campus, that brought Bridget here from Minnesota as an undergrad. Today she is the president and CEO of the O’Connor Connective, a marketing and communications firm that seeks to “be the chosen partner for the advancement of our community.”

O’Connor’s recent contribution to the *NEW Business Review* is about “localitas,” a term she learned as an SNC undergrad. “It means to be committed to the place you call home,” she told me. So now, in the “home” she has adopted, Bridget committed to Strategic Foresight training with Envision. “It gave me a new mindset about my peers and other groups of executives,” she said. “It was like an in-depth focus group, learning about other’s vulnerabilities, sharing my own, and practicing future thinking.” She said the “four futures” tool has been one of the most helpful she’s brought back to her office. “It’s helped me test our theories of how we work, how this might resonate with leaders. It reinforces the direction of my company.”

Bridget explains in her feature article: “I’ve been thinking a lot about my purpose. What is the next thing that I should do with my gifts for the good of this *place*?” She explains that Wisconsin appears to be at a crossroads, along with the rest of the nation: Technology is advancing so rapidly it’s hard to get our bearings. Politics are volatile. Climate change is affecting our daily realities. And friends around me are still shaking off the post-Covid malaise.”

I asked her to expand on her mention of technology, specifically artificial intelligence or AI. She said the communications industry is an easy target for generative AI. “Think about it: We’re intrigued by beautiful graphics that take hours or days to create. We’re lulled by persuasive language that draws us in with emotional content. And we identify with our frailties and lack of talent to create complex but impressive images. Imagine using a tool to wow the world – that’s all it takes right?” she asks.

“When I attend presentations on all the powers of generative AI, it’s always a communications professional who asks ‘what about independent and creative thought? What about all the



nuances that a computer misses? Where are the guardrails?’ The audience is silently thinking, ‘Oh, yeah, another communications person worried about her job.’ But isn’t it more than that – for all of us?”

Bridget Krage O’Connor has been in the business for a long time, and she isn’t worried. As a matter of fact, she is leaning into the opportunity to use the tools that make the job less tedious, less burdensome, and pushing organizational leaders into the more important work of *thinking* with their humanness. “I’m in the business of humans,” she said, “and humans will always need core areas of expertise. If a leader’s strength is communication with stakeholders, that will always be important, and the need to strategically communicate *effectively* will remain. AI can’t read a room, build a relationship, or feel the emotions of the people around a table.” She explained that she and her team are less concerned about tactical implementation and more about strategy to implement success. “Trust is an organization’s greatest commodity.”

O’Connor explained that requests for communication assistance were always aimed at fixing low sales or poor community engagement and business needs, using a new website, social media post or billboard. Leveraging AI tools to work faster is a goal for most companies, and communication is no different. “How do you monetize decades of experience, community connections, and nuanced relationships that pay huge dividends? AI is certainly not there,” she offered. “Will it ever be?”

Bridget believes that, if she stays true to helping with communication strategy, she’ll be in the right spot. “The new tools coming from AI will help us do things more rapidly,” she concedes, “but the human element will remain: the emotion, the decision making, the relationships.” She



thinks we’ll get to conclusions faster, but “humans still need to make the call. Instinct is still important – information and instinct are both needed.”

In her *NEW Business Review* article, Bridget points to the power of looking into the future through signals of change, as she learned in Strategic Foresight training. She quotes Envision Greater Green Bay’s Executive Director, Alexa Naudziunas: “Our

challenge is to interpret trends and signals to empower our region to navigate change with insight, resilience and innovation.”

Bridget credits her time with Envision to shaping her thinking around business, her volunteer work, her commitment to the future of women as our future leaders in our Localitas. “I learned and was validated by our need to help women take risks, be seen and heard in places of power.”

Still, she says, you have to be comfortable with risk. “You must have your leadership team commit to the decisions. We are just starting to see this signal suggesting that investment in women, their innovation and their future business, will change the face of our community. The Schreiber Institute for Women’s Leadership is helping women improve their risk tolerance and inspire others to follow. Is this a signal that others might follow?”

For now, Bridget is using her super powers, her love of our localitas, to leverage leaders, AI, and our humanness to solve community problems. She is looking ahead, challenging us to think beyond ourselves and drive toward a desired future.