

Stories of Origin

By Tony Pichler

There he was—trapped! Dave Wegge was driving down to Brookfield in his SUV to join Devon Christianson and Randy Lawton in providing a workshop at the Wisconsin Non-profit Conference. Little did he know that I had an ulterior motive, not to mention a notebook and pen in hand. What was I seeking as the new Executive Director of Envision Greater Green Bay? The story of how Envision moved from the Bay Area Community Council and its focus on producing community studies on various issues to the current focus of futuring and strategic foresight analysis. I was not disappointed. Dave provided the tale of transition.

In Dave's words: *"Devon Christenson was the President in 2016. We had one year Board Presidents back then and, of course, the organization was completely board led. Devon held a strategic planning session led by Lee Bouche at the KI Center. Four people who had been around since the beginning of the Bay Area Community Council were invited to participate."*

Over time, memory sometimes fades. For Dave, who has been involved in so many community initiatives, as well as his work at St. Norbert College, there has been a lot of water under the bridge of life. So, the names of those who participated in that initial session were a little foggy. However, Judy Crain, Dennis Rader and Dave himself definitely came to mind. The group was charged with visioning a future direction for the BACC.

Dave continued: *"I was part of the World Futures Society and had delivered a paper a couple years prior to this strategic planning session at the KI. I wrote that the work of the BACC as good with quality-of-life studies and digging into community issues. However, it was not planned. It was driven by the personal interests of board members. We were just looking at the present, but things were changing so fast that we needed to look into the future."*

A task force was created to build upon Dave's paper as well as the work of the KI conversation. A task force was developed to adopt a futuring approach. Dr. Mike Lukens from SNC served as chairperson of the committee with Nan Nelson, Phil Hauck, Lee Bouche and Dave filling out the task force membership. The group planned to put on a conference and have the focus center on the future of Green Bay in 2017. Lukens contacted the University of Houston and explained the objective of the task force and the conference. Houston suggested Garry Golden who had Wisconsin connections, having graduated with an undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He was invited to become the keynote presenter for the first conference.

According to Dave, the group was just getting started. *“In talking with Garry we decided to try a training session with Garry himself as the facilitator. This would be a pilot program. We had eleven community leaders who took part in the training for free and held at St. Norbert College. Following the training the evaluations were so positive that we decided to push into the future with this new direction. We contracted with Garry for one workshop per year. While we tried to expand to twice a year nearly immediately, we didn’t have the market for this expansion. It wasn’t until a few years later that we were able to successfully expand to a second workshop.”*

When asked what the benefit the direction of providing workshops in Strategic Foresight Analysis has been to community organizations, Dave had this to say: *“The benefit to organizations has really varied but overall it has been extremely positive. For the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Brown County, the impact has been significant. Same goes for Bellin and Nature’s Way. For Bellin, the strategic foresight analysis process totally changed their strategic planning process. They now focused on telemedicine and technology which made them ahead of the game when the COVID pandemic hit. Matt Schueller at Nature’s Way was looking at the future of supplemental healthcare. If you track the trends of supplements, at first people went to a health food store. Then the big box stores became involved. Matt felt the next iteration could be direct sales to consumers. With the training in strategic foresight analysis, Matt scanned the signals of change, made a presentation to their board which included headlines, and pushed the board to look at the Third Horizon to determine a direction for the company. The rest, as they say, is history as Nature’s Way changed the way that supplements are consumed.*

Dave and I were approaching Milwaukee, and it was time for him to more fully concentrate on the road. But a few final words of wisdom were in the offing as we wrapped up the conversation: *“There is a growing market for strategic foresight analysis. There is a huge disruptor with the cutbacks of the federal government that creates an environment that needs the tools that Envision can provide. Non-profits have not been thinking of the future as much as they should. Now they need to do so. Envision can help them find a path through these disruptors.”*

Like a ride at Bay Beach, the journey came to an end. This new Executive Director had a better sense of the rich history of this organization. A key player in that history had shared his wisdom and memories. Oh, what a journey it has been!