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Create our future now

By Jack Latona
Posted May 19 2003

The pace of change in our lives sometimes seems overwhelming: new technologies, new drugs, new music, new people -- all happening like a kaleidoscope turning at high speed. We are being overwhelmed by change in our work, in our communities and in our personal lives.

Fortunately, there are many things we can do, not just to cope, but to turn these changes to our advantage. The future is knowable -- and with that knowledge we can begin to create our future now. Let me give you some examples of things we do or can know, no crystal-ball gazing required.

First, we know that computer and communication technology will continue to get smaller, cheaper and faster. You can now have a wireless telephone speaker, as well as receiver, in your ear. It can access, over short distances, a larger telephone and a computer, and from there, the world. The big step here is the connection to the computer. As this technology improves and expands its scope, we will, in effect, have a computer in our heads.

Are the people you work with -- clients, customers, colleagues -- planning for this, or do they even know about it? What? You haven't had time to read or think that far ahead because you're too busy with today's problems? Remember, today's short-term problems are usually yesterday's long-term problems we were too busy to deal with then.

Second, the population is growing and changing, whether you look at national, state, regional or local data. More people of different colors, speaking different languages, are already here and many more are on their way. We know this but are reluctant to deal with it, and would rather just hope they will go somewhere else.

Here's a surprise: In a few years more new residents will have been born here rather than have moved here. How do we make them go away? We will have to provide for their health,

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education, housing, jobs and more.

In our personal lives, change will also make big differences. We will have even more choices, meet more new people, have more new things to learn, and more opportunities for economic and personal growth. But we can't wait until tomorrow, Scarlett. Flexibility, tolerance and continuing education of all kinds will be essential.

You (not me, I'm 64) will also have many more years to keep doing these things. If you are 30 today, you could live to be 120 years old. I believe that the present and knowable changes coming in medical technology, drugs, health information, and genetic research will make this extreme prediction a reality.

These futures are all knowable now; in fact, they are known in various pieces and places now. There is no magic in this, just knowledge of what already exists or can exist with present knowledge. It does need to be more widely known.

Because I came to realize that we can know and create our future, two years ago I founded The Center for Creating the Future, Inc., a not-for-profit think tank in Fort Lauderdale.

We have already accomplished a number of successes. We have researched parking in Broward County; participated in the Downtown Regional Mobility Study; and begun the Fort Lauderdale Forum, an opportunity for people from various points of view to learn about and discuss issues concerning the knowable future of our city.

We hold monthly discussions of the more theoretical aspects of creating the future and in June will hold our first day-long workshop to teach people how to know and create the future for their businesses, their communities and their personal lives.

The future is knowable. We must fully understand that and, rather than wait, begin to create our future now.

Jack Latona is a former Fort Lauderdale city commissioner. The organization is found on the Web at <http://creatingthefuture.org>.

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NEWS COLUMNIST



Michael Mayo

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South Florida keeps growing, but will it grow up?

Published April 1, 2004

For as long as I've been in South Florida, coming up on 15 years, people have been complaining about growth. And no matter what's been said or done, the area just keeps on growing.

We've become the regional version of the old Yogi Berra restaurant joke: "Nobody goes there anymore -- it's too crowded."

In the end, it doesn't much matter who controls development -- cities or the county -- or who gets voted into or out of office because they are seen as pro- or anti-development.

Capital always finds a way to take root where there's opportunity.

The equation is pretty simple. South Florida's lifestyle still attracts more people than it repels. And until that is no longer the case, the area is going to need more of everything. Housing, schools, roads, modes of transportation.

No amount of righteous indignation or nostalgic wishful thinking can change that.

Sure, it's fun and easy to bash developers and politicians.

But maybe it's time to figure out more constructive ways to deal with the surge.

So it was in that spirit that I found myself in a downtown Fort Lauderdale conference room on Wednesday with a group of about 30 professionals -- lawyers, architects, contractors, business types.

The occasion was a monthly coffee klatch of the Center for

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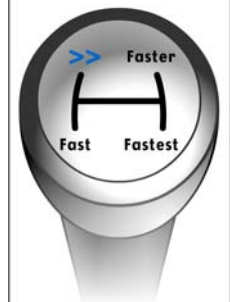
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Creating the Future, a think-tank founded by Jack Latona. Latona is a lawyer, lobbyist and former Fort Lauderdale city commissioner (1991-2000) who got swept from office in an anti-development backlash.

The setting couldn't have been more apt: the 12th floor of the BCC/FAU tower, a building that didn't exist a few years ago, with a nice view of the cranes and near-completed luxury condos straddling the New River.

Twenty years ago, when downtown was just a rumor, city leaders were desperate for growth of any kind.

They approved a development plan that didn't impose height restrictions or parking requirements in the downtown corridor. The strategy worked all too well. Now Fort Lauderdale is choking on growth.

The idea behind these gatherings isn't to push growth but to rationally deal with its impact. After all, even lawyers and developers hate getting stuck in traffic.

So it was heartening to see Fort Lauderdale planning and zoning manager Bruce Chatterton fending off questions about traffic flow and congestion during a slide presentation about the downtown master plan. There was lofty talk about light rail, feeder parking lots and better pedestrian crossings at downtown intersections.

One drawing showed a picturesque Broward Boulevard shrunk to two lanes in each direction, with a wide tree-lined median and landscaping. That didn't go over so well with those who crawl their way east from Interstate 95 every morning.

There was an artist's rendering of a bold rotary at the Searstown intersection of Federal Highway and Sunrise Boulevard. That drew some gasps of horror.

Chatterton, like all city planners in South Florida, has an especially tough job. Because of South Florida's shallow water table, there can be no underground parking garages or subway lines. There is nowhere to go but up. Or out.

And getting around is made more difficult because of all the maddening choke points -- drawbridges and railroad crossings.

You'd think by now, in the 21st century, the Henry Kinney Tunnel wouldn't be alone burrowing beneath the New River. It remains the only public tunnel in Florida.

You'd think by now, there would be plenty of spans in South Florida leading major roadways over -- and not through -- railroad tracks.

But that takes big money and long-term vision, something that's never been a specialty in a tax-averse state.

"We want to be a sophisticated city," Latona said. "We're growing up."



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But how serious can any city be when downtown traffic grinds to a halt every time some guy in a yacht -- or the Jungle Queen -- comes along?

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