



Minnesota Journal

Inside This Issue

A publication of the Citizens League

Middle ground in urban growth debate. — Page 2.

Another view on adolescence. — Pages 2, 3.

Reality check on LRT. — Page 8.

Volume 16, Number 7
July 20, 1999

Technology reshaping rural communities

Having waited longer than their city cousins for electricity, phone service and decent roads, rural residents are now anxiously awaiting the full benefits of the latest revolution—advanced telecommunications and the information superhighway.

“I believe that [advanced telecommunications capacity] is as critical an infrastructure issue as highways and electricity,” says Bill Cobb, a former US West executive in Minnesota, and now CEO of Infinitec Communications, Inc. Based in Tulsa, Infinitec is helping small exchange carriers in North Dakota and Minnesota find economical

by Ron Wirtz

ways to deliver enhanced telecom services.

Minnesota state Sen. Steve Kelley (DFL-Hopkins) has been a leading advocate for expanding telecommunications capacity throughout the state. “Telecom is the only force I can see that has the potential of stabilizing or reversing the long-term trend of the depopulation of rural areas,” Kelley says, adding that use of advanced telecom “could happen faster in rural areas because there is such a strong desire to be fully engaged with the world (and) to overcome isolation.”

Much is already happening in rural areas. Four years ago, Blackfoot Telephone Cooperative in Missoula, Mont., began offering Internet service to its customers. They hoped to eventually convince 10 percent of their customers to go online, but already have over 15 percent of their customers on dial-up accounts and close to 50 percent of school clients on dedicated Internet lines.

Now the company is getting four or five calls a month for ISDN lines and other digital lines, according to Nina Duncan, member services representative for Blackfoot.

Continued on page 5

Districts must report income, expenses by school

by Ted Kolderie

Thanks to the '99 legislative session, parents, the press, policymakers and the public in Minnesota are all going to know a lot more about where the money goes in public education and about how money relates to performance.

Beginning this coming school year, districts will have to report the amount of revenue brought to each school by the students enrolled there. Everyone will now be able to see (a) where the revenue is, by school; (b) where the expenditures are, by school and (c) how students perform, by school.

The changes this year build on legislation in '97 and '98 that required “compensatory” revenue—the extra revenue originally voted in 1971 for low-income students—actually to be allocated to the schools those students attend. The Department of Children, Families and Learning is also beginning now to require the reporting of expenditures, including actual salary expenditures, by school.

Continued on page 5

Congestion, sprawl area's chief problem

Twin Citians view traffic congestion and urban sprawl as the chief problem facing the metropolitan area, surpassing crime for the first time since they've been asked over the past four years. There is widespread support for land-use policies to manage development in the metropolitan area, as well as for the use of “photocops” to monitor intersections and carpool lanes.

Those are three key findings of the 10th annual Metropolitan State University Civic Confidence Survey, which seeks opinions of residents of the seven-county metropolitan area on key regional and

by David O'Hara and Carol Bormann Young

local issues.

Traffic congestion was cited by 24 percent of area residents and the related problem of urban sprawl by nine percent. Crime, mentioned by 27 percent of Twin Citians, is still a widespread concern, but citizens view traffic congestion and urban sprawl together as the biggest challenge for policymakers.

In 1996, traffic congestion was mentioned by only eight percent of Twin City residents and urban

sprawl was rarely mentioned. By 1998, traffic congestion was mentioned by 10 percent of residents and urban sprawl by six percent. During this time, the percentage of respondents choosing crime as the chief problem has dropped from 71 percent in 1996 to 27 percent in 1999.

Lack of affordable housing is starting to become an issue. Only one percent named this problem in 1998; this year almost six percent mentioned this issue, indicating a growing problem, or, at least, a growing perception of the problem.

Continued on page 4

Finding the middle ground in the debate about sprawl

Urban sprawl is hot. Vice President Al Gore is making it a centerpiece of his presidential run and magazine stories have cast a spotlight on the way we are spreading out in this country. The Citizens League has long advocated careful urban growth management and in its 1997 report *It Takes A Region to Build Livable Neighborhoods* suggested a large menu of items for redirecting growth to the core and to more compact development in the newly developing areas.

With a newly appointed Metropolitan Council and chair, there are some new opportunities to move an urban agenda toward a more compact and efficient region. But there are dangers, too. If we are not careful, we can turn the urban sprawl debate into a polarizing dialogue of the deaf. Most Americans and by far most Twin Cities residents live in suburbs and do not see themselves as "the problem." They do not feel that they need "saving," and certainly not punishment, for expressing their housing preferences. With the fast-approaching redistricting in the Legislature following the 2000 Census, suburban ascendancy in the Legislature will likely accelerate. In sum, this is no time to launch a core cities versus suburbs war.

In its 1997 report on regional growth, the League said that articulating and sticking with a vision for our region's growth is paramount. But on the ground today, we simply do not have a unifying vision for how to grow, and in fact are pulling in many different directions at once. Clearly a priority task for the new chair and members of the Metropolitan Council is to build on earlier Council work and to seek support for such a regional vision

Another view: How can youth feel part of community?

Does "adolescence" need rethinking? Yes! (See "Does confining young people to 'adolescence' need rethinking?" in May 18 *Minnesota Journal*.)

I agree that the anger in youth is aggravated by the lack of "place" in society. How can one feel a connection to a larger, intergenerational community when you're not

wanted in it?

My grandson is 14. Skateboarding is his kinesthetic life; school is his intellectual life; home is the battlefield he stays away from; and community is the unknown alien force. He does well (pretty much straight "A"s) and is well-mannered, kind and respectful (most of the time, except at home).

He'll make it, but he has lots of privileges working for him—two concerned parents, home stability, supportive extended family, good friends and their families. Yet, there's a lot that could be better—work and higher education are both "unreal," outside of his daily experience. Community service, being wanted, knowing you are needed are not messages that he gets in his

pages of design specifications that few people understand—and more importantly, making some design elements, that have actually been outlawed by current codes, the desired form. Citizen involvement is the key to building consensus for more compact, efficient development. All the options—concentrated growth, nodes, etc., and all the implementation options, carrots or sticks—are not going to be as effective without a consensus on what things should actually look like. The VPS does that.

The League has initiated a series of conversations and is arranging a VPS demonstration for officials at the Metropolitan Council, Minnesota Planning, the Environmental Quality Board and the Office of Environmental Assistance in an effort to build support for a wide scale visual preference survey in the Twin Cities. We believe that the League can play an important part in facilitating a process where citizens have real choices and real options for the built environment.

Not everyone knows what terms like nodes, or mixed-use, or transit oriented mean. But everyone does have a direct connection to what their surroundings look like. If the whole "sprawl" debate continues to become polarized and politicized, it will become increasing irrelevant to regular citizens. People will tune out if they sense the debate is about political posturing. Building a consensus on a vision is an important first step in keeping citizens productively involved in the debate and to sustaining long-term support for an agreed-upon vision.

Lyle Wray is executive director of the Citizens League.

daily life. And he's one of the lucky ones. Lots of kids get much less.

When he first got his skateboard, he and his friends were stopped by the police and told to leave. They asked why, and he said they were told "Because adults are afraid of you." He was puzzled. He was the same kid as yesterday. What happened?

Continued on page 3

Viewpoint

by Lyle Wray

and how the pieces fit together to make it work.

We need to be mindful of a few principles:

- First, housing and development patterns are slow moving. It may

One exciting possibility is to consider growth options more fully by using tools such as the Visual Preference Survey (VPS). The VPS can be a key component in building public consensus and implementing any kind of growth strategies or other development criteria

"On the ground today, we simply do not have a unifying vision for how to grow, and in fact are pulling in many different directions at once."

take 30 to 50 years to turn around the patterns in the region, so we need to have strong commitment and continuity.

- Second, city form is largely shaped by the dominant transportation mode of the day. We are in a city with 98 percent of trips by car, with nothing in sight to move that but a fraction or so. How do we build a livable city around that reality?

- Third, quality of life and quality and price of public services and amenities are going to be a competitiveness issue in the United States and globally, as we compete to retain high-end jobs in the new economy. Businesses and citizens can vote with their feet rather quickly if we fall too far behind.

With these principles in mind, what are some concrete steps we can take?

such as those for the Metro Livable Communities Demonstrations account. The technique links regular citizens to the design process. It uses photography and computer enhancements to provide a common visual language for desired urban form. Too often land-use planning, even when well done is dominated by colored maps and insider language. The citizens are often left with a sense that their concerns are being trampled by the faceless, social-engineering bureaucrats. But people know instinctively what works and what they like. The VPS process creates a publicly accepted vision of urban form.

Over 400,000 people have completed these surveys across the country. The results can say much about design, zoning and transportation implications. In fact, some cities are actually now putting survey pictures directly into the zoning codes, sometimes replacing

Editors watch Jesse closely: travel, dolls, briefs, et al

On Balance

And sometimes the corn is as high as an elephant's eye.

12,000 pieces of underwear to the Governor, he was forced to donate all of them to charity.

West Central Tribune (Willmar) praised (June 16) Ventura for "putting priority on the needs of rural Minnesota" during a statewide forum on farm issues. "Getting a high-profile politician such as Ventura to focus on the ag plight can only help make more people aware of just how perilous those questions [facing rural Minnesota] may be."

Star Tribune said (June 14) the Reform Party in Minnesota deserves watching, since it shows momentum, resolve and a clear sense of what it must do to grow. The paper said (June 27) all three parties had elected chairs bringing strengths to their posts: Ron Eibenstein for the Republicans; Michael Erlandson for the DFL; and Rick McCluhan for the Reform Party. **Duluth News-Tribune** said (June 5) the Governor's "pig" veto stamp offends special interests but critics should "lighten up," because the stamp is effective in reminding the Legislature to avoid "pork" spending. The paper asked (July 3) whether the notion of President Ventura is out of the question given that "Bill Clinton, with all of his manifest personal flaws, won two terms in the White House" as "did

The Minnesota Journal

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The Minnesota Journal (ISSN 0741-9449) is a publication of the Citizens League, a nonprofit nonpartisan Twin Cities public affairs organization, 708 S. Third St., Suite 500, Minneapolis, MN 55415, George Latimer, president. Articles and commentary are drawn from a broad range of perspectives and do not necessarily reflect League positions on policy questions. The Journal is published once a month. Periodicals postage paid at Minneapolis, MN.

Annual subscription rate for nonmembers is \$40 issues. Orders may be placed at 612/338-3100 or by mail at the above address.

Postmaster: Send address changes to The Minnesota Journal, 708 S. Third St., Suite 500, Minneapolis, MN 55415

July 20, 1999

Ronald Reagan, with his obviously tenuous grip on reality."

Star Tribune endorsed (July 2) University of Minnesota President Mark Yudof's proposal to restore the NCAA rule that was canceled 27 years ago that freshmen be ineligible to play athletics. "It won't remove the distractions from study that college athletes face. But it would give athletes a chance to become college students first, before attempting to learn and play at the same time." **St. Cloud Times** agreed (June 15). "The NCAA has this bold, old solution in front of it. It's worth a try to reduce the exploitation of student-athletes and to restore some integrity to institutions of higher learning." **Republican Eagle** praised (June 15) Yudof's handling of the controversy over the men's basketball program.

Pioneer Press agreed (June 11) with Mayor Norm Coleman that the Twins should focus on one city in negotiating for a new stadium. It said (June 17) that, although the Metrodome could be converted to either a football or a baseball stadium, as part of a comprehensive facilities package, converting the dome for football "seems to make the most sense." **Star Tribune** called (July 2) it "disappointing but hardly surprising" that the Min-

nesota Vikings have rejected a \$160 million plan to renovate the Metrodome exclusively for football. The paper said with 81 home dates and ticket prices families can afford, baseball has a better claim on public money than football. It called (June 22) Gov. Ventura's suggestion that pro-stadium Minnesotans should donate their sales-tax rebates to a stadium fund a "loopy idea." "Government does not decide controversial questions by passing the hat."

Star Tribune said (July 7) fans of baseball and of city revival should cheer the agreement between Mayor Norm Coleman and the Twins to pursue a new ballpark in downtown St. Paul. "So far, it has been relatively easy for Coleman to outwit a clueless Minneapolis crowd that seems almost unaware of baseball's enormous potential to generate economic benefit and community spirit...But now his persuasive skills will be tested as never before. He must change the hearts and minds of a whole state." **St. Cloud Times** said (June 8) "Minnesotans want to see action on the part of major league baseball owners [to address economic inequities] before they consider putting up tax dollars for new facilities." **Mankato Free Press** said (June 16) if Minneapolis and St. Paul "want to battle for the opportunity to build a new stadium, let them have at it. Once the politicking ends, the plan that doesn't rely on state funding is sure to be the winner."

Another view

Continued from page 2

He couldn't understand what he had done wrong. That's a year ago. He still has no affirming reasons/experiences why he should like adults in power or adults that he doesn't know. That's not good news.

His experience is minor compared to lots of kids. Recently I went to the art show at the Soap Factory, sponsored by Walker Art Center. My granddaughter's artwork was in the show. She's a junior at the Minnesota Arts High School (and loves it—it's a wonderful place for her to be). As I watched the crowd, I thought, these are some of our best youth:

how are these young, almost-adults being transported to the day-to-day world of work, world of adults, world of contribution—community? And what about the other youth who didn't make it through the selection process, those who don't get to feel like "the winners"?

It seems to me the links are weak. Recently, I heard James Carbarino's presentation as the Knopka lecturer. He's powerful to hear. He talked about epidemics, how they begin, how they eventually take over an entire population, and why we are dealing with an epidemic of youth violence. Again, the missing connections, the wrong messages, availability of infected stuff that spreads the virus.

The end of April, I finished assisting with the AmeriCorps grant application for Minnesota. That job puts me in annual touch with some of the programs around the state—programs with tired, overworked, committed people who connect youth and community through being needed, through service. Occasionally, I see and hear some of those young persons. I feel the energy that shines through their eyes as they talk about working with elderly or young children or park restorations or houses they've built. They are needed; they are part of something bigger than themselves; they know it.

Joanne Englund, St. Paul

Poll

Continued from page 1

In a resounding show of support, over 72 percent of Twin Citians favor the imposition of local zoning and land-use policies to manage development in the metropolitan area. Another popular measure is the use of motion-activated cameras (sometimes called "photocops") to monitor intersections and carpool lanes. Sixty-five percent of Twin Cities residents support using these devices to ticket people for traffic violations.

When asked to identify the biggest transportation-related problem, 31 percent chose traffic congestion; 27 percent, traffic bottlenecks; 27 percent, the driving habits of others; nine percent, public transportation and six percent, road condition. These results differ from a 1996 Minnesota Department of Transportation survey. In that survey 42 percent chose traffic congestion; 17 percent, traffic bottlenecks; 19 percent, the driving habits of others; 17 percent, public transportation and 14 percent, road condition.

Education

Consistent with last year, most Twin Citians are happy with their local school districts and have a great deal of confidence in them,

1999 METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY CIVIC CONFIDENCE SURVEY*

What is the chief problem facing the Twin Cities Metropolitan area?

Crime	27%
Traffic congestion	24%
Urban sprawl	9%
Education	7%
Taxes	6%
Affordable housing	5%

Imposition of local zoning and land use policies to manage development

Strongly support	39%
Mildly support	34%
Mildly opposed	17%
Strongly opposed	11%

Use of "photocops" to monitor intersections and carpool lanes

Strongly support	36%
Mildly support	29%
Mildly opposed	15%
Strongly opposed	21%

*Results are based on a Metropolitan State College of Management telephone poll conducted May 1 to May 15, 1999, with 500 randomly selected adults in the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. The margin of error in the poll is 4.5 percent or less, for results based on all interviews in the poll. Margins of sampling error for smaller groups, such as Minneapolis or St. Paul residents, are larger.

although there is a significant difference between central city and suburban residents. Sixty-seven percent overall are either satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the quality of services provided, while 80 percent have either a lot or some confidence in their public school system.

These are high overall ratings, considering that education is the state's largest and most scrutinized expenditure. However, residents of Saint Paul and Minneapolis have a more negative view of their local districts—especially pronounced in St. Paul—than do suburban residents. Forty-one percent of St. Paul residents and 25 percent of Minneapolis residents have no confidence or not very much confidence in their local schools, while only 17 percent of suburban residents lack confidence in their schools.

In terms of satisfaction, 26 percent of core city residents are either dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with the quality of services provided by their local school district, while only 17 percent of suburban residents feel that way. Both of these numbers represent a significant improvement (i.e., decline in dissatisfaction) from 1998.

Trust in government

The perception of the honesty of elected officials seems to have rebounded from last year's decline, surpassing the 1997 level. In this year's poll 58 percent believed elected officials are as honest or more honest than average Minnesotans. In 1998, perhaps due to the Clinton sex scandal, 50 percent believed they were as honest or more honest than average Minnesotans. In 1997, 54 percent thought they were as honest.

The responsiveness of government officials has also improved, in people's estimation. In 1996, 54 percent believed that government officials were responsive to their concerns and needs. In 1999 this has improved to 61 percent. This improvement has been a steady trend that precedes the election of Jesse Ventura as Governor.



"...Crime, shmime!...we're always going to have that.... What we really need are Photocops to stop the loners on the carpool lanes!"

Satisfaction with performance

When asked about the quality of services provided by governments, 80 percent of metro area residents said they were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with city government, 81 percent with county government, 74 percent with state government and 63 percent with federal services. When asked which level of government Twin Citians trust to do what is right most often, almost 56 percent said local, 35 percent said state and 10 percent replied federal.

Twin Cities' public services continue to earn high marks. Services such as libraries, garbage/recycling, parks, 911 service, and snow plowing earned approval ratings of over 85 percent from local citizens.

The most noticeable change is the satisfaction with administration of welfare programs, which has improved each year since 1996. In 1996, 52 percent were either satisfied or somewhat satisfied, compared to 56 percent in 1997, 63 percent in 1998 and 69 percent in 1999.

Crime

The proportion of citizens fearful of crime has declined for the fourth consecutive year. When asked if there is an area within one mile of their home where they would be afraid to walk at night, 37 percent said yes, compared to 41 percent in 1998, 42 percent in 1997 and 52 percent in 1996.

Women are more concerned with crime than men. Twenty-nine percent of women said it was the region's biggest problem, compared to 24 percent of men. Even more significant is the fear of crime. Forty-nine percent of women say there are places within one mile of their home where they would be afraid to walk at night, compared to only 20 percent of men.

Despite their worries about crime, 89 percent of the area's citizens felt law enforcement agencies were doing a satisfactory or somewhat satisfactory job. They also believed local police were honest. Seven percent felt their local police would not lie or break the law in order to arrest somebody.

Significantly, residents of Minneapolis and St. Paul are less satisfied than residents of suburban communities with law enforcement. Eighty-three percent of Minneapolis and St. Paul residents felt their law enforcement personnel were doing a satisfactory or somewhat satisfactory job, compared to approximately 91 percent in the suburbs.

Minneapolis residents are less trusting of the honesty of their police, compared to residents of St. Paul and the suburbs. Sixty-one percent of Minneapolitans surveyed thought their police would not lie or break the law in order to arrest somebody (compared to over 76 percent in St. Paul and the suburbs). Likewise, fear of crime was greatest in Minneapolis, less so in Saint Paul and much less so in the suburbs.

Economy

People continue to feel confident about the metropolitan area's economy and the future. Fifty-six percent of Twin Citians said the region was headed in the right direction, compared with 52 percent last year and 47 percent two years ago.

Eighty-three percent say they are either satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their own financial situation, an increase from 78 percent in 1998. For the first time since the survey's inception, a majority of people have not reduced their day-to-day spending due to uncertainty or insecurity about their economic future.

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Education

Continued from page 1

Districts are not enthusiastic about doing this. Up front they like to say this reporting is too difficult, too complicated. It's a bit like the complaint of local units generally about the new rules of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board, that compliance would be "too costly".

What the reporting involves, in fact, is simply counting the students in the school and identifying each by the dollar-amounts s/he brings: so much for an elementary pupil, so much more for secondary, so much more if eligible for ESL (English as a Second Language), so much more if eligible for free/reduced lunch, etc. Add, multiply, then add again. District business officials would be embarrassed to say this is beyond their capacity.

Nothing in the new law restricts the board's authority to reallocate and to expend that revenue in whatever way and for whatever purpose it wishes: The law does not enact "line item management." A board, if it wishes, can simply pass a resolution transferring all the revenue from the school-by-school accounts to the district general fund and then proceed to appropriate, expend and run the district as it always has in the past.

Almost certainly the districts' real concern is that, with revenue initially allocated by school, board decisions—about how the money is used, about who gets how much and about how that relates to the improvement of student performance—will in the future have to be made in the open, where the tradeoffs are more explicit. Reallocations and expenditures will now

Technology

Continued from page 1

"Some of these customers are moving into Montana and are able to work out of their homes via a connection—primarily through the Internet—to remote networks. It's exciting to see."

have to be justified in a way they did not have to be before.

Boards got a taste of this while adopting preliminary budgets in June. Reporters began to ask how there could be "cuts" in program and teachers with so much new money coming in from the state.

Everywhere, says Sheree Speakman, the trend is toward the states arranging for money to move with the student and toward clearer reporting of actual expenditure by school. After some years with Coopers & Lybrand, one of the big accounting firms, she is now president of a consulting firm. The firm developed software to analyze expenditures by site, by program, by student. They use figures from the general ledger, the numbers districts report to their auditors—not the reports districts prepare for public consumption. Their "InSite" analysis was used in New York City and was recently adopted by the state department in South Carolina.

In Minnesota the law was also simplified in '99 to recognize revenue to the district where a student is served. Previously revenue was recognized where a student lived, so accounts had to be adjusted when a student chose to attend another district or a charter school. State aid now belongs to the organization where a student enrolls; it belongs to a district only when a student enrolls in that district.

Other developments

The reporting of revenue and expenditure is one of several areas of activity in '99, in K-12 education finance. In addition:

● This is a bargaining year; the first for "Education Minnesota," the name for the newly merged teachers' union. The question is how much of the additional rev-

Business demand

Rural businesses looking to improve their productivity and competitiveness are pushing much of the demand for advanced telecom. Rural branch offices are requesting digital links to the main office in urban areas, according to Duncan. Local companies are competing for contract jobs in far-removed places and increasing sales through the Web, she says. Even ranchers are turning high-tech

enue the Legislature voted will be taken up simply by increases in compensation, rather than used for reductions in class size, for professional development, for research, for evaluation, for technology, for new programs, etc.

The school boards association, as well as the teachers' union, fought hard during the session for all the new money to be "on the formula," which means, available for the salary settlement. So boards are now really on the spot.

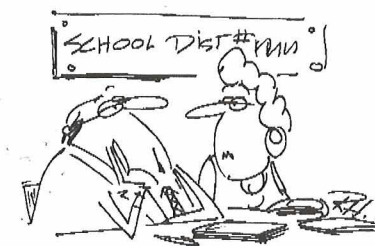
Legislators, like others, are watching closely. Early reports are that some inner-ring Minneapolis suburbs are agreeing to settlements running between 10 and 11 per cent for the new two-year contracts.

● The Legislative Auditor, if somewhat reluctantly, will be looking into the dispute between districts and legislators: Do districts (as they say) really have to "cut" because the Legislature doesn't give them enough? Or are the districts themselves responsible for the cuts/reallocations (as legislators tend to say) because they always overspend on compensation, whatever the Legislature gives them? A report is due by January.

● The Ventura administration will soon begin a set of policy studies. One will be on performance-based funding. The state will contract with Augenblick & Myers, Denver-based consultants, for this. There will be another, on "best practices" for learning. A third, on governance and accountability, may look especially at moving to county boundaries, or even to county government, for K-12 education outside the Twin Cities area. (Historically the "county superintendent of schools" was an officer of the county board.)

"and changing the way they do business."

Connie Sprynczynatyk, executive director of the North Dakota League of Cities, says, "We see many examples of ways that farmers, small and large communities, and businesses are taking full advantage of the technology to work smarter. Without the technological capability, I doubt the smaller communities would survive."



"...Sure it's nice to know we can spend our revenue any way we want to. It's having to blab it to the whole world that gets to me!!"

● Something has to be decided about the two big lawsuits; the one by the Saint Paul district for more money and the one by the NAACP in Minneapolis seeking, as is now clear, opportunity for low-income students to choose where they attend, in Minneapolis or in other districts. The suits must be tried, settled out of court or withdrawn.

The huge amount of new money voted this year by the state suggests the Saint Paul suit is unlikely to go to trial. And the state is bound to feel it has met its responsibility for adequately financing that district. The state can certainly argue, too, that with the changes in finance both in '97 and '98 and in '99 it has responded to the challenge from Gary Sudduth, the late president of the Minneapolis Urban League, to "Show us the money!" for low-income and low-performing students, even if it has not yet required all districts to be open to the enrollment of all kids.

The state really does mean to have more money spent on the low-income and low-performing students, not simply given to districts because districts have low-income students. The Legislature is now trying to say nicely to boards, as President Lincoln once wrote to Secretary Stanton: "Please do it."

Ted Kolderie is contributing editor of the Minnesota Journal.

Advanced telecom is also changing the way local communities think about economic development. Traditionally, rural communities have been content to attract heavy manufacturing or natural resource-based companies, but today are targeting high-tech businesses that are environmentally friendly to replace those declining natural resource industry jobs.

Continued on page 6

Technology

Continued from page 5

The Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation Board (IRRRB) recently unfurled a "do Information Technology!" (do I.T!) campaign to convince 25 of the nation's top 1,000 high-tech companies to set up a branch or production satellite office in the Iron Range of north-eastern Minnesota.

"If the program is successful, it will transform the entire economic culture of the Iron Range. We will enjoy a diversified economy that is less dependent on mining and logging," says Jim Gustafson, until recently commissioner with the IRRRB. While still in its infancy, the program already boasts a few success stories.

Underpinning the "do I.T!" effort are over 20 partnerships with private and public organizations. For example, MinnTelecom (a subsidiary of MinnPower) has invested \$2 million to wire the Iron Range with a high-speed fiber optic network, linking seven "hub" cities.

Quality of life

Along with a more diverse business sector, advanced telecom offers rural residents better access to such fundamental things as education and health care. Distance learning is now common at all levels of education. Virtually all higher education institutions offer on-line or video conference classes. Minnesota state Sen. Kelley noted that rural K-12 schools were among the first to embrace interactive TV to expand course opportunities for students.

But an effective distance-learning program is more than fancy technology, according to Paul Bowers, a distance-learning consultant. "Distance learning, when done well, is a balance between needs and costs," Bowers says. The hallmark of a good distance-learning program "is being able to reach students who could not otherwise be reached as well, as completely or even at all. That's need at work."

Along with educational needs, rural areas are particularly desperate for good health care. The Upper Peninsula of Michigan (U.P.) has

an average density of just 19 people per square mile and only 50 miles of interstate (all on the peninsula's eastern end). Long, severe winters greatly reduce people's mobility.

Per capita income in the U.P. is below average and the percentage of people over age 65 is high—both of which typically lead to higher health-care needs and usage. Nine of the 15 U.P. counties are federally designated as medically underserved and 12 counties officially have a shortage of health professionals.

But thanks to advanced telecommunications, the U.P. is seeing inroads to better health care for its residents. Telemedicine—health care provided via video and other "off-site" technology—is offering doctors the chance to give patients more specialized care without long treks to hospitals that might be many miles away.

The Upper Peninsula Telehealth Network (UPTN) is a network of 22 video conference sites and 10 teleradiology sites located throughout the U.P. The most obvious benefit of UPTN is that "patients are able to consult with health-care providers without leaving their home community," according to Sally Davis, UPTN program director.

But many obstacles prevent the widespread use of telemedicine, says Jill Zabel of the Minnesota Office of Rural Health and Primary Care. Rural care providers must first invest in upgrades to their telecommunications infrastructure, like an ISDN or T-1 line.

"Since the technology is rapidly changing, it is difficult to plan, pay for and install what's needed before it becomes outdated," Zabel says, adding that grants for such upgrades are available, but the application process "is often cumbersome and competitive."

Complicating matters is the fact that few insurers currently cover telemedicine services and the federal

Health Care Financing Administration has only recently started paying for teleconsultations on a limited basis. Until such cost coverage is expanded, "many providers cannot afford to offer services that will not be reimbursed," Zabel says.

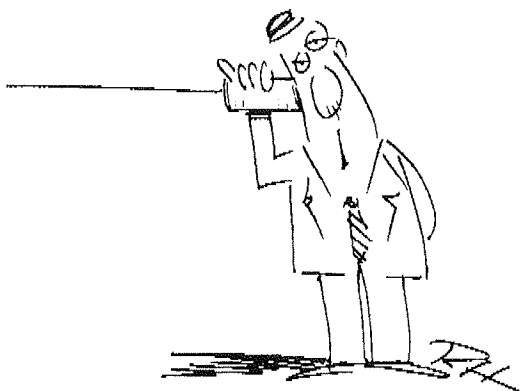
Call waiting

The obstacles facing telemedicine provide a salient message: Don't let the anecdotes fool you. In a market economy, where services are provided based on the number of willing buyers, it should not be surprising that rural communities have struggled to get on the information superhighway.

"At the moment, the biggest problem is rate of return," says Fritz Messere, a member of the National Experts Panel on Telecommunications for the Rural Policy Research Institute. "There has to be sufficient market to make a service profitable."

Rural counties cover 80 percent of the land in the United States, but hold only 20 percent of the nation's population. Such low density makes investment in rural telecom a tough sell—capital costs are high, rates of return are modest at best and subsidies for providing service to high-cost areas are being rethought as a result of the federal Telecommunications Act of 1996.

Most states have invested in fiber optic networks that connect regions and cities to one another. South Dakota is said to have more fiber optic cable than any other state in the country. Its Rural Development Telecommunications Network operates 16 fully interactive sites and 85 satellite receiver sites. In Minnesota, construction is under way of a 1,800-mile fiber optic net-



...Regarding telecommunications...you out there in the rural communities, simply put...you need a whole lot more soap on your strings, people!!"

work that is using the state's free-way rights-of-way as the network's backbone. The state complemented this with a \$15 million program called the Telecommunications Access Grant, which connected 470 schools, libraries, hospitals, nonprofit organizations to broadband services for free.

The illusive last mile

But even with fiber networks in place, the biggest obstacle facing rural communities is the so-called "last mile"—the connection of individual houses or businesses to the larger network. The existing infrastructure of phone wires is owned by local telephone companies and it can be cost-prohibitive for other telecom carriers to duplicate that infrastructure in hopes of competing in individual communities and regions.

Estimates put the cost of replicating the existing local phone network at \$3,000 to \$5,000 per household in urban areas. The federal Rural Utility Service estimated that a new rural line is three times more expensive to install than an urban line, mostly because of longer distances and lack of existing conduits like telephone poles or sewer systems, where wire networks are more easily installed.

Rates of return on capital investments can be anemic because revenue is based mostly on system use and not access. Telecom carriers earn money based on the number of times their lines are "rented" and low-density rural populations are rarely able to maximize a network's peak capacity.

Other critical factors influencing rural telecom are government subsidies and regulation. In 1934, revenue sharing between long-distance companies and local companies—dubbed "universal service"—was established to subsidize phone connections in high-cost areas. Fifty years later, a separate universal service fund based on carrier access charges replaced this system.

Telecom Act—for better or worse Significant changes were initiated with passage of the Telecom Act of 1996. The landmark law promises to introduce greater competition to the telecom industry, while calling

Continued on page 7

Technology

Continued from page 6

Additional universal funding for evolving" level of telecom service—goals that are seemingly at odds with each other and have created considerable controversy.

The law enacted a new universal service fee—called an "e-rate"—that is levied against long-distance carriers. These funds subsidize telecom projects for schools, libraries and hospitals in rural and inner-city areas. Last year, for example, about 30,000 schools and libraries applied for about \$2 billion in funding.

Already there has been a backlash. When the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) started collecting e-rate fees early last year, long-distance companies like MCI and AT&T passed that cost on to consumers, who balked at the new charges. Hearings were held on the matter, but Congress took no action.

The FCC is also leaning toward fees against all telecom carriers, based on their interstate revenue, which will be used to underwrite rural telecom service to high-cost areas and to low-income people. To complement federal fees, the FCC has encouraged states to create their own "explicit" funds from which carriers would draw direct reimbursements, rather than implicitly cross-subsidizing high-cost areas through such things as higher rates for urban areas and businesses.

Although a number of states have moved to explicit reimbursement for serving high-cost areas (including Wyoming and Colorado), Minnesota and the surrounding states have lagged behind, according to Diane Wells of the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission.

Universal service financing is complicated by different reimbursement rules for nonrural and rural carriers and changes in universal support for rural telecom companies will not be reviewed until at least 2001. Universal service support is also fairly closely to access charges, which the FCC has been changing.

All of these changes have created a moving budgetary target for rural carriers. "I can't even begin to esti-

mate any impacts" of recent and future changes, says Joan Mandeville, assistant manager with Blackfoot Telephone Cooperative in Montana. Such uncertainty can make companies skittish on new investments in rural areas. Most rural carriers are small companies that "cannot afford to make the wrong choices when they are selecting the appropriate technologies (and) services," according to Bill Coleman, manager of integrated community networks for MEANS Telecom, a consortium of independent telephone companies.

These scenarios run counter to the Telecom Act's intent of encouraging greater competition. But many believe that increased telecom competition is neither realistic nor good for rural areas.

"The FCC, in its wisdom, says competition is the answer," says Bernie Arcand, marketing representative for Northwest Communications Cooperative of Ray, N.D. "In rural North Dakota, there are just barely enough subscribers to keep one telephone company together. If competition came in and decided to 'cherry pick' the local hospitals, schools, businesses and gas plant, we as a telephone company could not survive, and neither could they."

Briana Gowing, media relations manager of GTE Service Corp., says their competitors "are going straight for the fat embedded in the system"—mainly urban markets. As a result, rural areas are seeing little competition, because there is no fat in these markets.

But Messere of the National Experts Panel says more time is needed to gauge the law's effectiveness. He noted there are indications that rural areas might yet be well-served by the law. "While some say consolidation in the industry is making a mockery of what the Telecom Act was supposed to accomplish, I think that the current consolidation was exactly what we should have expected," Messere says. "But, and this is a big one, getting services to the rural areas may become more enticing as the consolidation process makes it necessary to compete in the last mile."

Despite all of the potential disincentives, activity to overcome the "rural last mile" appears to be heat-

ing up. Much of this activity stems from bandwidth inadequacies of existing phone lines, which typically transmit 28,800 bits per second—significantly slower than the capacity needs of data-hogs like videoconferencing and high-speed Internet access.

New technology and competition

Competition is producing innovative technology—like digital subscriber lines—that expands the capacity of existing phone wires. But a diverse array of companies and technology is creating new entry points into homes and businesses, even in rural areas.

In Hibbing, Minn., Befera Interactive spent \$1.65 million on a "second last mile" of fiber to individual businesses and residents and another \$2 million on research and equipment purchases. The company has about 300 subscribers who receive cable access to the Internet, and video-on-demand services are expected to follow soon.

Industry experts believe cable companies are well-positioned to compete with phone companies for providing advanced telecom services. Like phone lines, existing cable networks must be upgraded, because they were not designed for two-way communication or for tracking phone calls. Costs for upgrading cable lines are lower than for phone lines and many rural towns offer an eager, if small, customer base.

Wireless technology also has made significant strides in the last decade, and offers significant service potential for rural areas, particularly for remote residences outside small towns. Such systems are competitive because they have relatively fixed capital costs and each new customer makes the system more cost-effective.

Difficulties remain with fixed wireless systems, however. Antennae demand clear sight lines to broadcast and government must regularly approve new radio signal frequencies, which are prone to interference and disruptions from rainfall and other radio frequencies. There are also frequent battles over antennae placements.

Utility companies offer intriguing possibilities. Nationwide, they have the third largest existing telecom

infrastructure behind phone and cable, with an estimated 40,000 miles of fiber. In some cases, power companies overbuilt distribution networks, because these costs could be recouped through higher rates, which are set by regulators according to a company's physical asset base.

Competing head-to-head with telephone companies is not very likely, due to the cost of wiring more homes with high-capacity fiber. But utilities have existing capacity, as well as "use-based" billing and service systems already in place. Most importantly, they have a huge customer base to which they already provide power services. It is estimated that about 100 electric utility companies are providing Internet services today.

Satellite services are also making inroads. Teledesic LLC, backed by such giants as Motorola and Boeing, is using a network of more than 200 satellites to build a global "Internet-in-the-sky." Other satellite-based carriers are available, but costs can be prohibitive—several hundred dollars each for equipment purchase and installation, with monthly bills well over \$100 for unlimited access.

But as with past innovations, rural areas might have to wait impatiently for the latest telecom technology to come to town. Consequently, it's hard to predict the full impact that advanced telecom will have on rural areas. Many believe it could bring a rural rebirth and repopulation.

"The urban areas are full of people who have moved into the city for economic opportunity and would like to return" to rural areas, says Bill Coleman of MEANS. "There are probably some urban residents who desire the rural lifestyle and would move to a smaller community if it were economically possible."

Ron Wirtz is district news editor for the fedgazette, published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. This article is adapted from an article that originally appeared in the April 1999 fedgazette, which can be found in its entirety at <http://minneapolis-fed.org/pubs/fedgaz/99-04/index.html>. The fedgazette's main website is <http://minneapolisfed.org/pubs/fedgaz/index.html>.

Are 7,000 LRT riders worth 100 times the bus bonus?

In 1997, the Legislature provided Metro Transit with a \$4.7 million bonus if it produced 125 million rides during the latest two-year cycle. Metro Transit actually exceeded the goal by an additional 6 million riders—a total of about 12 million more than the previous biennium. So the extra \$4.7 million helped increase ridership by an average of about 16,500 riders per day. That's a pretty good return on investment. On the other hand, the region is poised to spend 100 times as much to build a rail line that is forecast to provide 22,000 daily rides, only 7,000 new riders. One has to wonder if the support for LRT indicated in recent polling would remain if alternatives, and return on investment, were adequately presented.—*Phil Jenni.*

Busing, European style: In north-eastern Poland in the city of Olsztyn, a large fleet of minibuses charges the same fare as regular buses, but has a wider network of routes. These minibuses or jitneys also pick up excess passengers at regular-route bus stops during rush hours. In London, buses are quality certified for customer service and operations by the quality council. More one-step to board or “access friendly” buses are being put in place across London and the double-decked buses are becoming less common.—*Lyle Wray.*

Dan Wascoe's report in the *Star Tribune* June 21 about the people-movers at the airport reinforces the conviction that fixed-guideway transit is appearing in our region in the form of shuttles/circulators within the developed area, linking parts of a major activity-center with each other. The Hiawatha Ave. light rail will really function to link key elements of the convention/visitor business—the airport, the hotels, the convention center, the retailing—now divided between downtown Minneapolis and eastern Bloomington. (See June 15 *Minnesota Journal*, page 8.)

Construction has begun on the first shuttle, underground, between the south end of a new parking ramp and the main terminal. This could someday be extended to a “mirror-image” terminal proposed for the Mother Lake, northwest side of the airport. Later an above-ground shuttle will be built paralleling the

Take Note

“A Streetcar Named Desire.”—*T. Williams*

to-be-extended-yet-further Green Concourse. Total cost: over \$60 million.

An interesting question arises: If the transit at the airport can be charged (as it is) to the benefitting users and property owners, might the cost of the Hiawatha Ave. shuttle linking those benefitting hotels, stores, convention centers, etc., appropriately be charged to *them*?—*Ted Kolderie.*

Paying for congestion: The *Straits Times* newspaper reported that the Singapore government reduced electronic road-pricing tolls starting this June based on a successful program of 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. road pricing. The system has been credited with a major reduction in congestion on the roadways and higher average speeds. Each car using the system is equipped at public expense with a transponder to provide automatic access to freeways and a dash-mounted unit to accept credit or debit cards for payment. Multi-passenger vehicles receive a discount.—*L. W.*

It's reinventing government on a massive—and international—scale. At noon on Dec. 31, 1999, the United States will hand over the Panama Canal to the Republic of Panama, according to the terms of the 1977 treaty signed by President Jimmy Carter and Panama's General Omar Torrijos. The treaty set in motion a carefully orchestrated plan to ensure a smooth transition and permanent neutrality for one of world's most valuable transportation assets.

The U.S. government in 1996 converted the Panama Canal Commission—a federal government agency—to a wholly-owned U.S. corporation required to be financially self-supporting during the transition period. The Commission is now morphing into the Panama Canal Authority, an autonomous agency that will manage the Canal under Panamanian control after this year. Panama had earlier paved the way for the creation of the Authority with a 1994 constitutional amendment exempting the Author-

ity from the country's administrative and labor laws and allowing it to develop its own operating, procurement and employment rules. Think of it as a “charter canal.”

U.S. and Panamanian leaders are hoping the setup will allow the Canal Authority to focus on the competitive provision of maritime services. Already underway: a modernized vessel booking system, capital improvements to expand capacity, pricing changes, and increased emphasis on marketing and customer relations functions.

With 13,000 ships and \$600 million in tolls passing through the Canal annually, a lot is at stake in this reinvention project.—*Janet Dudrow.*

With 80 million Americans online and 130 million, or half our total population, expected to be by the year 2030, it is not news that the Internet is a profitable, growing enterprise. But just how profitable? America Online (AOL), one of the major players in the Internet industry, yielded an \$8 profit per customer last year. This year, they are expected to earn \$45 per customer.

Is that a lot? Well, compare it to the average of \$5 per subscriber earned by traditional media companies. At one point last month, the market value of AOL's stock was \$114 billion. That is more than the value of Time Warner, Inc., Times Mirror Corp, the New York Times Co. and the Washington Post Co. combined.—*Kris Lyndon.*

MASA, the state association of school administrators, now has an online jobsite listing openings in about a third of Minnesota school districts. It's available at no charge at <http://www.mnasa.org>. Some districts link to this so interested candidates can learn about the district on the same visit.—*T.K.*

Humphrey Institute Professor Samuel Meyers recently received a grant from the St. Paul Companies to evaluate initiatives to improve minority students' test scores. Meyers hopes to determine “what it is going to take to increase the academic performance of Minneapolis-St. Paul students of color.” The task is an important one and one over which researchers and city school districts cannot afford to dally.

In Minneapolis alone, 36 percent of the students in next year's graduating class—a large number of them students of color—still must pass one or both of the eighth grade Basic Standards tests in order to receive a diploma. Of the projected graduating class of 2,566 (from the city's seven public high schools and from alternative and charter schools), 569 students still must pass both tests and 357 must pass one test in order to graduate.—*Dana Schroeder.*

“Take Note” contributors this month include *Minnesota Journal* and *Citizens League* staff members and *Janet Dudrow*, policy analyst at *Dorsey and Whitney.*

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Citizens League Matters

July 20, 1999

News for Citizens League Members

Welcome

New and returning members

Ken Carlson
 Rich Carter
 Bev Driscoll
 Emma Foss
 Robert W. Geist
 James and Joy Gullikson
 O. Walter Johnson
 Kenneth H. Keller
 Dianna Kennedy
 Andy Martin
 Peter Meintsma
 Janice Myers
 Alan Naylor
 Erin O'Fallon
 Verlan Ott
 Jason Schroeder
 Liz Solem
 Jeffrey Taylor
 Marilyn and Herb Vogel
 Shelly Franz and Tom Waddell

Eight directors elected to League board

The Citizens League Election Committee tallied ballots at the League office on Wednesday, June 30. There were 540 qualified ballots counted (sixty less than last year). About 28.7 percent of the membership voted, down from last year and slightly below the five-year average of 30.1 percent.

The following were elected to three-year terms:

Andy Brown, partner, Dorsey & Whitney; **Cal Clark**, Economic Development Director, Utilicorp United in Minnesota; **Gary Cunningham**, Director of Planning and Development, Hennepin County; **Kent Eklund**, President, Cincinnatus, Inc.; **Richard Forschler**, partner,

Faegre and Benson; **Suzanne Fuller-Terrill**, Pinnacle Associates Group; **Matthew Ramadan**, Executive Director, Northside Residents Redevelopment Council; and **Kathleen Vellenga**, Executive Director, St. Paul/Ramsey County Children's Initiative.

Cal Clark, Suzanne Fuller-Terrill and Matthew Ramadan were elected to a second consecutive three-year term. Brown and Cunningham are currently finishing one-year appointments.

Past president Kent Eklund returns to the Board after an absence of several years. Richard Forschler and Kathleen Vellenga are newcomers to the League Board of Directors.

The newly elected members join returning Board members: **John S. Adams**, **Mike Christenson**, **Sally Evert**, **Lani Kawamura**, **Gene Merriam**, **Tony Morley**, **Emily Anne Tuttle** and **Jane Vanderpoel** whose terms expire in 2000. And the class of 2001: **Marcia Avner**, **Jean Harris**, **Susan Heegaard**, **Steve Keefe**, **George Latimer**, **David Olson**, **Robert Vanasek** and **Lee Pao Xiong**.

Citizens League bylaws stipulate that the 24 elected Board members may appoint up to 10 additional directors plus four officers.

The officers and additional directors for 1999-2000 will

(continued on other side)

CITIZENS LEAGUE

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The Citizens League promotes the public interest in Minnesota by involving citizens in identifying and framing critical public policy choices, forging recommendations and advocating their adoption.

The Citizens League is an open membership organization. Suggested dues for membership are \$50 for individuals and \$75 for families. Please call 612-338-0791 for more information about membership.



Andy Brown



Cal Clark



Gary Cunningham



Kent Eklund



Richard Forschler



Suzanne Fuller-Terrill



Matthew Ramadan



Kathleen Vellenga

Thanks to this year's Election and Nominating Committees

The Citizens League Board of Directors election couldn't happen without the work of two very important committees. The Nominating Committee is chaired by the immediate past president and is made up of two members of the board whose terms are not expiring and three people who are not members of the Board. The committee recommends and recruits candidates to run for the Board and ensures that ballots are mailed to all League members at least five weeks before the election.

Members of this year's Nominating Committee were: **Mary Anderson**, chair; **Kent Eklund**, **Steve Keefe**, **Marina Lyon**, **Rafael Ortega** and **Lee Pao Xiong**.

The Election Committee takes over after all the ballots have been received by the League office. In recent years, the League office has taken on a festive atmosphere on election day as a core group of regulars renew old friendships and catch up with the staff. Last year's veterans, **Ruth Hass**, **Larry Kelley**, **Jack Parsons**, **Bill Tarbell** and **Gertrude Ulrich** were joined by **Mary Ann McCoy**.

Thanks to all who participated in the 1999 Board election.

Board election *(continued)*

be appointed at the annual Transitional Board Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, August 31 at noon at Macalester College.

While the League welcomes new directors every year, we also regretfully say goodbye to others.

Members completing their three-year term are: **Mary Anderson**, **Pam Neary**, **Peter Gove**, **Marie Grimm** and **Christine Roberts**.

League bylaws limit Board terms to no more than six consecutive years. The members completing their

terms have all served multiple years and according to League bylaws are ineligible for re-election, although all but **Anderson** could be appointed for a one-year term.

Appointed members whose terms expire this year but are eligible for reappointment are: **Scott Brener**, **Bill Diaz**, **Linda Ewen**, **Laurel Feddema**, **Jim Dorsey**, **Bill Johnstone**, **Sean Kershaw**, **Barbara Lukermann** and **Orlan Thorbeck**. Like **Mary Anderson**, **Randy Peterson** has run up against the League's six-year term limit.

Don't forget to check out the League's web site to follow the work of the League study committees on seniors with disabilities and workforce training.

How I spent my summer vacation

by *Lyle Wray*

It's been a busy month for Executive Director Lyle Wray. He has spent the first part of his summer in Poland and Singapore spreading the gospel of performance measurement as a way of leveraging change in public sector systems. He spent two weeks in Olsztyn Poland where he taught public financial management in an executive masters program in business and public management that is affiliated with the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute.

The course examined government revenue and expenditure systems with a special emphasis on local government. The class also included a discussion of the emergence of the roles of citizens in performance measurement.

After a brief two-day visit to the League office, Wray was off to Singapore to participate in a worldwide conference on performance measures for government sponsored by IQPC Worldwide Pte Ltd. He chaired the second day of the conference, gave a paper and led a workshop. Presentations were given from around the globe, including speakers from the Britain's Royal Air Force; PricewaterhouseCoopers, Hong Kong; Queensland and Brisbane, Australia, and the United States.

IQPC provides executives with an opportunity to network and to share cutting-edge solutions. Senior Conference Producer Delphine Ang had this to say about Lyle's participation:

"Your participation had certainly contributed a meaningful exchange of knowledge and expertise. Based on the feedback gathered, we received very positive feedback for your sessions. In fact you were one of the highest rated speakers at the conference. The delegates found your presentations to be very interesting and insightful. Many delegates were impressed with your dynamism and enthusiasm in sharing your knowledge and experience with them. In addition, the delegates had highlighted that you did an excellent job in chairing the conference as you were able to draw the audience close to you."

Lyle also managed to squeeze in time for some personal travel. He unwound after his Polish excursion with a few days in London. And he spent the Fourth of July holiday in Bangkok on his way home from the conference in Singapore. Quite a summer vacation; most of us are content with a week at the lake.

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