



Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author and do not reflect positions of organizations with which he is affiliated.

Herbster, WI, April 11<sup>th</sup> – Volume 4: Number 15 [Back Issues](#)

*“If you chase two rabbits, both will escape.”*

-Chinese proverb-

**MEETINGS and EVENTS:**

Links will provide additional information. Dates for recent additions are in **bold**.

<i>What</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Where</i>
<a href="#">Herbster Smelt Fry</a>	April 12 <sup>th</sup>	3:00 – 7:00*	Herbster's Historic Gymnasium
<a href="#">BCEDC</a> Board Meeting	April 14 <sup>th</sup>	10:00 – noon	Washburn Library
<a href="#">Biofuels Conference</a>	April 16 & 17	All Day	UW – Stevens Point
<a href="#">Sustainable Business Conference</a>	April 24-25	All Day	Ashland
<a href="#">Business Development Conference</a>	May 7 & 8	All Day	Cable, Lakewoods
<a href="#">Digital Healthcare Conference</a>	May 7 & 8	All Day	Madison
<a href="#">BCEDC</a> Annual Meeting	May 12 <sup>th</sup>	10:00 – noon	TBA
<a href="#">Manufacturing Advantage 2008</a>	May 21	All Day	UW-Stout
<a href="#">Green By Design Conference</a>	June 12-13	All Day	Washington DC area
<a href="#">Northern Aquaculture Demonstration Facility</a> Field Days	June 12–13	All Day	Red Cliff / Bayfield
<a href="#">Northwest Wisconsin Lakes Conference</a>	June 19 & 20	All Day	Cable, Telemark

\* Get to the Smelt Fry early! *The Herbster Community Club has been known to run out of Smelt before quitting time.*

## Cities, Stories and the Politics of Progress

TGIF has been criticized for using the words “eco” and “sustainability” too often. Too bad! It just turns out that sustainability is simply and unequivocally important. It is what we also call

survival. Sustainability is about making good decisions today that preserve choices for future generations. Eco means home; that is where we live! Live in a pit or live in a palace, survival is paramount. Foul the nest through neglect or nonperformance and nasty things begin to happen. Empty rhetoric, artless verbal bullying is one way to foul the nest we live in – our cities and communities – and limit progress toward worthwhile ideals.

Stories about survival – escape from a close call – and anti-survival – death real and death virtual, the rise to prominence and the fall from grace – dominate our news stories daily. Journalism has been characterized as the first draft of history, the first telling of the stories that will be repeated, edited, examined and retold in future books of history. We ask our journalists to be accurate and fair. We should demand as much of ourselves when we tell our stories. Abstractions, models of ideals or lists of best practices don't take us very far toward social equity, environmental values or economic development. Schools are powerful social tools and stepping stones for individuals as they seek these worthwhile ideals. But clearly one size doesn't fit or work for everyone. Phrases like “a world-class system” or “finest public school system” demand a dialog that begins with a suspension of assumptions and commitment to collegial relations.

Relationships are at the core of our survival, sustainability is about relationships; maybe it is only about relationships. Stories may solidify relationships or stories may separate us. Stories deal with beginnings and endings. They may tell us about the past or project a future. The words we use to tell our stories make a difference. Use the wrong word and you can lose a reader or a listener. Use just the right word and you may get attention and retain an audience.

Apparently opinion leaders and voters in the City of Washburn decided they had heard the word, sustainability and “eco” too often. They wanted, it appears, quick evidence of progress. “Build it and they will come” seemed to be the theme *du jour*. Voices from in and around the City of Bayfield are filled with “eco-this” and “sustainability-that” with a contrapuntal “grow-is-that” and “progress-is-this.” As voices get louder, logic gets lost. Democracy declines. Mayors get mauled.

A small but influential band in Bayfield represented by two outspoken individuals has apparently resurrected a shibboleth that the Mayor of Bayfield is “anti-economic development.” Partisan party politics aside(which, of course, it never is), it just may be that the Mayor, with a business degree, owner of multiple business and, longer than his critics, a resident of Bayfield, has a penetrating understanding of the community he leads and what has made it the tourism success that it is. That is Bayfield's economic development. And, a state-of-the-art sewerage treatment facility makes more economic development possible. Interestingly one voice scolds the schools and another celebrates school success. Both tell stories about Bayfield to assure followers and satisfy skeptics. Stories told are filled with mustard or jelly and a frosting of confidence and self-assurance. A vision is articulated but details and definitions be damned. One critic asks, “Who are the leaders?” and “Are they willing to lead?” A curious pairing of questions. Leadership probably begins with sense-making.

Unfortunately the loud and vocal get attention at meetings and in spaces of the local newspaper while contributing little to a spirit of working together to make anything important any different.

Perhaps it is time to demand some definitions. These critics could profitably begin by asking; "What does it mean to lead?"

Tip O'Neal, the late Speaker of the US House of Representatives, is frequently quoted; "*all politics is local.*" Less frequently, we are reminded that he said; "*I have been in politics all my life. I am proud to be a politician. No other career affords as much opportunity to help people. Let us not concern ourselves with what we have tried and failed, but with what it is still possible to do. Let us spare no energy that the nation and the world may be better for our efforts.*"

Yup! In politics some good people get beat and some just get beaten up. But progress means that our cities and communities maintain spaces for new ideas, tell the stories of successes and keep sight of our progress toward worthwhile ideals. We should really hope that those who get beat or get beaten up don't pack up and go away.

The chart for the future is not about contest it is about collaboration. Leveraging our connections in a global community will help us save our rhetoric for a reality that really matters.

"Best schools in the nation" is empty without definitions and details. Getting to the future starts with building a common vision and then demands that we ask, "What is the next step?"

## **LIGHTER SIDE:**

As with most jokes the original author is unknown. Whoever you are; "Thanks!" Names, when added, are intended to tease the innocent.

### **A HISTORY LESSON.**

Railroad tracks.

The US standard railroad gauge (distance between the rails) is 4 feet, 8.5 inches. That's an exceedingly odd number.

Why was that gauge used? Because that's the way they built them in England, and English expatriates built the US railroads.

Why did the English build them like that? Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways, and that's the gauge they used.

Why did 'they' use that gauge then? Because the people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they used for building wagons, which used that wheel spacing.

Why did the wagons have that particular odd wheel spacing? Well, if they tried to use any other spacing, the wagon wheels would break on some of the old, long distance roads in England, because that's the spacing of the wheel ruts.

So who built those old rutted roads? Imperial Rome built the first long distance roads in Europe (and England) for their legions. The roads have been used ever since. And the ruts in the roads? Roman war chariots formed the initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagon wheels. Since the chariots were made for Imperial Rome, they were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing. Therefore the United States standard railroad gauge of 4 feet, 8.5 inches is derived from the original specifications for an Imperial Roman war chariot. Bureaucracies live forever.

So the next time you are handed a Specification/Procedure/Process and wonder 'What horse's ass came up with it?' you may be exactly right. Imperial Roman army chariots were made just wide enough to accommodate the rear ends of two war horses. (Two horses' asses.) Now, the twist to the story: When you see a Space Shuttle sitting on its launch pad, there are two big booster rockets attached to the sides

of the main fuel tank. These are solid rocket boosters, or SRB's. The SRB's are made by Thiokol at their factory in Utah. The engineers who designed the SRB's would have preferred to make them a bit fatter, but the SRB's had to be shipped by train from the factory to the launch site. The railroad line from the factory happens to run through a tunnel in the mountains, and the SRB's had to fit through that tunnel. The tunnel is slightly wider than the railroad track, and the railroad track, as you now know, is about as wide as two horses' behinds.

So, a major Space Shuttle design feature of what is arguably the world's most advanced transportation system was determined over two thousand years ago by the width of a horse's ass. And you thought being a horse's ass wasn't important? Ancient horse's asses control almost everything...

and **CURRENT Horses Asses are controlling everything else.**

Take care and enjoy a great weekend!

/BRUCE

© Bruce Lindgren 2008.

*TGIF is distributed as both HTML and TEXT versions. The HTML version has graphics, formatted text and clickable hyperlinks. To receive the HTML version, your e-mail client must be set to accept HTML. [PDF versions are now available.](#)*

*TGIF is distributed each Friday. Subscriptions for TGIF are free and may be obtained by contacting Bruce Lindgren at [bflind@cheqnet.net](mailto:bflind@cheqnet.net). You may UNSUBSCRIBE by sending an email to [bflind@cheqnet.net](mailto:bflind@cheqnet.net) with "UNSUBSCRIBE" in the subject line.*

*IF you have not subscribed and YOU ARE RECEIVING TGIF FOR THE **FIRST TIME**, your address has been placed in a temporary distribution list to receive a few issues without subscription.*

*Bruce Lindgren is Principal of [B.Lindgren CONSULTING](#). The consulting practice serves small business, local government, school districts and non-profits providing support for research, grant development, technical writing, marketing support and project management. Bruce brings his background in biological sciences, education, small business and media technology to generate and implement ideas contributing solutions to mission critical challenges.*

*In addition Bruce maintains the following affiliations:*

[Bayfield County Economic Development Corporation](#), (BCEDC) Director

[Inland Sea Society](#), (ISS) Director

[Lake Superior Binational Forum](#), (LSBF) US Co-Chair

[Bayfield CountyLakes Forum](#), Board Secretary

[Raindrop Garden Gallery](#), (RGG) Co-owner

[IDEA Consortium LLC](#), Owner

[Chequamegon Institute, Inc.](#) Initial Registered Agent

[Coalition for Eco-Industrial Development](#), (CEID) *Acting President & CEO*

[Northwest Wisconsin Workforce Investment Board](#), (WIB) *Member*

*The encircled fractal triangle represents an integrated cluster of seven ideas – economics, ecology, equity, ethics, experience, education and energy – that may be considered a core for sustainability studies. Bruce is available to present illustrated lectures and facilitate discussions about role of education in Industrial Ecology, Sustainable Development and the Sustainability Revolution.*