

Personal Musings on the 21st Century Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

Are you still a bit stuck in thinking that we live in the 20th Century? Is it still hard to think of being a 21st Century person? And do you realize, we've already used up over 11.5 % of the new 21st Century as of July 1?

Well, it is true. Go back in time: the First Century (100 years) ended at midnight on Dec. 31, of the year 99. In the same manner, the 10th Century was completed on Dec. 31, year 999. In still the same manner, the 20th Century was completed at midnight on Dec. 31, 1999. Thus we began the 21st century on Jan. 1, 2000.

Now add them up: 2000 through 2009 is ten years of the new 21st Century. We recently finished another year, 2010, so that makes 11 years (11%), of the 21st Century that have been completed---and what do we have to show for it?

On the National Scene

Jim Teodtman, in a recent AARP Bulletin, called the past decade (plus one year) a "dreadful decade". Others might say it was a decade from hell. And he was just talking about jobs! And remember 9-11-2001? That is in the 21st Century. Although most of the decade, into late 2007, was one of seeming prosperity, its vulnerability was exposed by the great crash of the stock market and the collapse of some great financial institutions.

There is no question that the collapse of the job market which followed has been disastrous for many. The Bush tax cuts, slight if any for the average man's budget but grossly over-generous for the rich man and his net worth, were supposed to stimulate the economy. The theory was that the rich, with even more disposable wealth, would build more factories, create more jobs, and thus boost jobs and the economy.

Trickle down to the masses, it is sometimes called. The rich men's tax cuts that were espoused by Reagan in 1980, and cut even more deeply by Bush II, led into the great 1982 and 2007 market crashes. Under Reagan, unemployment reached 10.8%, Some Trickle! Yet retaining the tax cuts is proposed again today by some as a way to heal the economy! Wall Street had to be bailed out after the last tax cut!

The 21st Century had started out with hope, President Clinton coming the closest of any President to broker a peace between Israel and the Muslim world. But Muslim anger at the west brought on the World Trade center catastrophe on 9/11 of the year 2001.

The anniversary of 9/11 will be this coming September. Our subsequent mistaken assault on Iraq acted as a great recruitment incentive for young Muslim men, resulting in the longest war in our history, not yet over. Few if any statesmen are to be found in the halls of Congress, nor in the States, especially including Wisconsin.

Sauk County and Baraboo

On the local level, the 21st Century is also affected by national events. Each of us owns a part of the national and state debts--Clinton was the only President in decades years to actually start paying down the national debt. The continual warfare brought on by a mistaken invasion of Iraq helped the national debt to skyrocket

In our area, Sauk County's moderately liberal voice in state affairs was effectively blunted by splitting Sauk County's representation in the Assembly. In the state Senate the political dirty trick known as Gerrymandering blunted local influence in that body--look at the shape of our state Senatorial district some time. Note what the party in power did this month in redistricting.

Baraboo will soon suffer its third historical highway bypass and the loss of perhaps hundreds acres of farm land when the current project is completed. Its construction is designed to speed tourists past Baraboo to Dells-Delton, where they are then funneled through three miles of slow traffic crying for a bypass. The new road will, however, supply locals with a faster access to Madison and the job market there.

Even before the market crash, Sauk County suffered along with the Nation in the loss of factories and jobs to countries with a low wage level work force. Several local industries left us. Despite this, census figures are expected to show a rise in both the City and the County (they did--- we now number over 12,048 and growing in Baraboo).

There are good signs for the 21st Century however. Our county remains a prime area in which to live. Devils Lake will celebrate its 100th Anniversary as a Park this summer. Expansion of the Riverwalk, including the gazebo, enhanced the downtown area, along with the new Broadway Bridge. The new city services building, sometimes called the Taj Mahal, provides superior facilities for street and other departments.

A ten year street program has worked out well, although this writer was astonished when the newly rebuilt (2009) and quite wide Fifth Avenue-Street still has parallel parking! It was a perfect but missed opportunity to change Fifth Avenue and Street to diagonal parking for downtown shoppers, especially helping the theatre.

We were even more dismayed to learn that South Boulevard, critically in need of rebuilding, is again being delayed. Even stranger, there is no parking for the full length of the Effinger Drive so one can use the Riverwalk.

Near Future Projects

Renewed energy and programs show great promise for Circus World, as well as the new Historical Society building, where completion is within reach. The Al. Ringling theatre continues to amaze, as careful restoration reveals its beauty. Significant donations are needed for this internationally recognized jewel.

So here we are, well into the 21st Century. Surely, as the decades go by, we will see more progressive transformation of Baraboo and the county. More than eleven percent of this 21st Century may be used up, but the First Quarter isn't even over in this game. Go Baraboo...Go Sauk County! Think Big for the 21st Century!