

Unafraid of the Future*By Stewart Truelsen*

In the 1986 horror movie, *The Fly*, a scientist played by Jeff Goldblum is experimenting with teleportation when things go awry. As Goldblum is transformed into a fly, he tries to reassure one of the other characters that everything is going to be all right. A reporter played by Geena Davis then utters the line used on the film's publicity posters, "No. Be afraid. Be very afraid."

"Be afraid, be very afraid," was what some were saying about the economy earlier in the year. The fear factor is a little less now, but the deep recession, job losses, H1N1 pandemic, climate change and global terrorism still set off alarms in the news and raise our anxiety levels.

"The future has probably never seemed more uncertain," said John Challenger, a leading expert on labor and employment, in addressing World Future 2009, an annual conference of futurists held in Chicago.

One would expect a lot of dire warnings to come out of the meeting, but that was not the case with the World Future Society, an educational and scientific organization that looks at the trends shaping the future. Challenger expected job growth in health care, energy and global businesses. In 20 years, he said, the corporate headquarters will be extinct and people will carry their offices on their backs, a mobile workforce.

Economic futurist Joan Foltz also was optimistic about a post-recession world. "The long-term trend is intact for the globalization of capitalism and that is bringing new areas of the world into development and the rise of the global middle class," she said. Foltz cited Africa as an emerging region with much potential to fuel the growth of companies that participate there.

British futurist Dr. Ian Pearson predicted that 20 years from now wristwatches will be smarter than we are. Even more startling was his confidence in forecasting that crude oil will sell for no more than \$30 a barrel in the year 2030. We might as well leave it in the ground, he said, because oil will largely be replaced by solar energy which will come down exponentially in price until it costs almost nothing.

Pearson also was optimistic that farmers can meet the demand for affordable food, which will have a longer shelf-life. Freshwater supplies will not run out because of desalination and better ways to capture rainfall. He professed not to be a "climate change denier" but was skeptical of climate change computer models and the desire of politicians to do something right now. He thinks they are jumping ahead of our knowledge and technology by five or ten years.

The last thing Pearson and other futurists desire is a return to the past in the name of sustainability or out of fear of the future. They have no desire to go backwards in time. Instead, they see new inventions and innovations and changes in people's values, attitudes and beliefs that can lead to a better world.