

Perspective

TUSCOLA REVIEW EDITORIAL BOARD:

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The last time I was in Italy

There I was in March, 1974, flying high, literally and figuratively. Literally because I was high above the Atlantic Ocean, flying to Italy, anxious and fully medicated. Figuratively because I'd been hand picked by the Chief Engineer of the Army Corps of Engineer's European Division to come help them unjam their Saudi Arabian construction logjam.

At that time there was an "oil crisis" in America, created largely by Saudi Arabia's boycott of nations that supported Israel in the Yom Kippur war. Crude oil had quadrupled from \$3 a barrel to \$12 a barrel and gas at the pump had doubled from 38 cents to 55 cents. There were gas shortages and violence at the pumps with wrap-around-the-block gas lines.

The world was poorer but Saudi Arabia was richer, newly awash in gushing gobs of oil money and dedicated to embarking upon a staggering ambitious building program. Lacking the necessary expertise to manage major construction projects, the Saudis retained the highly regarded Corps to manage much of their modernization effort.

But the Corps quickly ran into a problem which was "time," as in the Saudis wanted everything "now." But, the Corps explained to the Saudi's, to build the proposed King

Khalid Military City for 100,000 people, for example, out in the middle of a barren desert, you need to first construct temporary facilities for all the workers. For that you need road or rail systems to get materials to the site. For that you need a new deep water port to receive materials. etc. etc.

But the Saudis still wanted it "now."

Which led to our visitor from Europe coming to CERL, the Corps worldwide Construction and Engineering Research Lab. They looked to CERL for innovative solutions.

The Chief was eventually led down the hall to CERL's humble Industrialized Building Systems team to brainstorm this Saudi "time" problem. We had recently successfully executed a large scale construction project that came in under budget and in half the normal time.

At the end of our brainstorming session, everyone was shocked when the Chief said he wanted to borrow me for a week to come over to Italy to work with their legal team. Said he'd heard that had I'd developed a procurement process for construction that cut the entire building cycle in half.

My boss, Dr. Bagby, upon hearing this, looked incredulous—like he'd just been told

that the IRS had seized his wife as collateral for back taxes—and asked the European Chief "you want him?" pointing his bony finger at me.

Soon I was off to Italy, eventually making it to Tirrenia, where Camp Darby was located, on the Mediterranean—Camp Darby being the locus of Saudi operations.

Once at Camp Darby the following morning, I awaited a meeting with the head of the legal team for the European division, who had traveled in specifically to meet with me.

I was stunned when he finally waltzed into the room. He had a cape flowing from his shoulders to the floor, smoking a cigarette on a foot-long ebony holder, wearing a shiny suit the color of red wine, sporting a Van Dyke beard with his log mustache heavily waxed and curled at the ends, his long black hair flowing down to his shoulders.

My immediate reaction was that Salvador Dali had accidentally stumbled in, lost and disoriented, looking for the Fellini movie being shot in the area.

Introductions completed, this popinjay asked about my "so-called" innovative procurement model with a dismissive, regal air. While I explained it to him in detail, he kept tossing his head back, staring at the ceiling and blowing lazy circles

I'm just sayin'

By Mike Carroll

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of smoke skyward. It was off-putting—like I was explaining the Trinity to a bored Pope.

After some discussion, he said "I think I get it," quickly stood up, twirled his cape around his body, turned his back to me and strode proudly out the door, trailed by wisps of smoke. I guess we were done.

I suddenly felt small and silly: saw myself standing alone, back in a corn field in east central Illinois, Homer's little boy, insecure, wondering what in the world I was doing half way around the world... with a Salvador Dali clone.

That night, I found out why. The Chief had asked me over to his house for supper, during which he asked "Did you bring your sticks?" Dumbfounded, I blurted out "Bring my sticks?"

"Yes," he continued, "there's a member-guest tournament at Tirrenia's country club tomorrow. I've always wanted to win it, and you're my big ringer."

Surprised, I said "You didn't say anything about bringing my sticks," and then I remembered that during our get-together back at CERL, he and I had enjoyed small-talking about our golf game. Did he mention playing?

Panicked, I feared I was here more for my handicap than my handiwork—panicked, because I hadn't hit a ball in five months because of what we call in Illinois—but evidently not Tirrenia—bone cold winter.

Too late for excuses, I found myself the next day standing on the first tee of the Tirrenia country club, swinging old golf clubs the pro dug up that did not fit my height or swing, trying to dig in while wearing my street shoes—they couldn't find golf shoes in my size—all eyes on this "big stick ringer" the Chief flew over from the States. Fully pressurized, I took a mighty swing, my back foot slipping out from under me,

me almost doing the splits, and hooked a high drive over a grove of really nice Italian trees—Lombardy poplars, I think—over the out of bound fence and out of the park.

The assembled throng murmured, I winced, and the Chief seemed to be doubled up, retching—probably food poisoning from the previous night's supper.

Fortunately, during the round, I eventually settled down, taming my hook and replacing it with a banana ball slice.

It was a links disaster, followed by not getting invited for supper at the Chief's house again.

I finished the week working with architects and engineers on technical details, punctuated by animated debates about whether the head attorney looked more like Salvador Dali or Count Dracula. One architect argued he looked more like D'Artagnan, one of the three musketeers.

Then it was over—addio all'Italia—time to get medicated and fly home.

Once home, my fellow team members eagerly awaited my report, wondering: "did you do CERL's Industrialized Building Systems team proud?"

Smiling, I reported: "I knocked it out of the park."
mike carroll

Illinois doesn't know where it's going

By Jim Nowlan

I spoke recently to an audience of attorneys and financial planners about the future of Illinois. I asked for a show of hands as to who thought our state would reverse the almost 1 percent decline in population we experienced in the past decade. Only 1 of 30 thought it was likely.

Why, I asked: high taxes; climate; business climate; corruption, and lack of state pride were responses from this highly educated group.

Yes, I agreed, Illinois has obvious shortcomings, yet the state has incredible strengths as well, which would make Illinois an economic powerhouse otherwise. And the problems are fixable, though politically daunting.

Now let's look at the positive side of the ledger, which is strikingly bright, in ways I rarely hear trumpeted. Former state commerce director Jim Schultz of Effingham sums it up succinctly: In each of the five critical Rs—roads, rails,

runways, rivers and routers—Illinois is among the top three states in the nation. I called Jim and told him he should add a sixth R: research. A recent ranking of graduate research universities found the universities of Chicago, Northwestern and Illinois to be among the top 20 in the world—3 of 20, not just in the nation, but in the world.

I could go through each of the Rs in detail, but space limits me: Yet, look at a highway map of the U.S. See the density of interstate highways crisscrossing Illinois—thicker than for just about any state. We have more miles, 2,200, of interstate highways than any states in the nation other than California and Texas. And, our state is located smack dab in the middle of the world's largest market.

Our strengths would be the envy of most other states, if I weren't for our weaknesses. Yet, the weaknesses can be addressed. Other states have done so.

I contend the biggest problem for Illinois is that the state doesn't know where it is going. That is, there is no roadmap where we want the state to be in 10 years, and of what it would take to get us there.

I continue to be confounded that the state has never—never—done any long-term thinking. The closest we have is the 6,000 disparate bills introduced into the legislature every two years. Crazy.

The singular piece of forward thinking in Illinois history was the Burnham Plan for Chicago of the early 1900s, led by the architect Daniel Burnham and commissioned by the Commercial Club of Chicago. The effort followed on the heels of the stupendous Chicago World's Fair of 1893, visited by 27 million folks from around the world. So, the City of Big Shoulders, as Sandburg described the city, knew it could do big things.

After much work, the plan was presented to the City Council, which also labored

over the plan, ultimately adopting about half the recommendations. But what marvelous results: A magnificent lakefront reserved, not for private property owners, but for the public. Wide boulevards and a spectacular park system, and more. Chicagoans and visitors have benefited every day since its adoption in 1909.

Texas think big. Their business leadership has been developing a Texas 2036 plan, for where they want Texas to be on the 200th anniversary of their nationhood. They have a Can-Do attitude.

Illinoisans are so down in the mouth about our future that we have a Can't-Do frame of mind. There are, people think, too many political and interest group obstacles in our way. Elon Musk would be appalled at such thinking.

The business leadership of the 19th Century, such as Marshall Field, Potter Palmer, Bertha Honore Palmer, Julius Rosenwald (who built Sears), focused on the city they loved

and built. Chicago's big-time CEOs today at such behemoths as McDonald's, Boeing, CAT, United Airlines are up their eyeballs in alligators heading global companies; they don't have much time for Illinois, even though if it were a nation, the Illinois economy would be one of the top 20 in the world.

I have an idea of how to tap into an incredible underutilized resource. Former governor Jim Edgar's greatest legacy may prove to be his Edgar Fellows Program. Each summer for a decade now, Jim gathers 40 of the state's young leaders, including many lawmakers, from all walks of life, political persuasion and geography. For a week, the Fellows are sequestered at the University of Illinois in Urbana, where they learn about our state and its government from experts and national leaders. Over bourbon and branch water at night, they bond, and come to appreciate one another.

But then they leave town,

and fail to build on their relationships and any aspirations for a state they call home.

I propose that the 400 Edgar Fellows, rather than simply feel good about themselves, take on the task of creating a vision for Illinois, one they could then implement, as they are tomorrow's leaders. This could be done outside the hurly burly of politics, after which they would take their vision into that hurly arena, where it would have to be wrestled with, and just maybe, ultimately adopted. We need to know where we're going.

Why not, Elon Musk would say!

Nowlan is a former Illinois legislator, state agency director, aide to three unindicted Illinois governors, professor and author of a 2019 essay of the future of Illinois, done for the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University. Jim invites you to visit his new, interactive website at jimnowlan.net.

My kids never take my advice — thankfully

Some people are born with the gift of gab. But is it a gift, really? I mean, you can't un-wrap it. You can't return it. You can't set it on a shelf and look at it.

It can be a gift, I suppose, when it comes to persuasion. Salespeople need it. Lawyers need it. Comedians make their living with it. But I don't have it.

My kids have it. When my son calls, I can pretty well plan on being entertained for the next hour. He calls me for life advice, which is what dads are for, I suppose. I only hope that I'm not his only adviser because if I am, he has a tough row to hoe.

My role is mostly as a sounding board. My replies

Ramblin' Man

By David Porter
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consist mostly of "hmmm," "uh-huh" and "what do you think?" Sometimes, I borrow the Greg Hastings classic response: "Is that right?"

I don't know what else to tell him. But I'm glad he asks me. It's hard to feel relevant in this ever-changing world that

seems to be moving faster and faster. So it's nice that someone still wants to know what I think.

Let's not confuse knowing what I think with doing what I recommend. He and my daughter routinely do the opposite of what I suggest, and so

far, that's worked out pretty well for both of them.

My daughter is a talker, too. She doesn't ask for advice as much because she knows that's useless. Hers is more stress relief. It helps a person sort out their thoughts if they have a safe place to express them out loud.

I try to throw in reassuring comments like "hmmm," "uh-huh" and "that sounds good." I'll mix in phrases like "I think you're right," "oh my gosh," and "thank goodness." Mostly, I interject just to let them know I'm still on the line.

I have learned over the years — and it has taken a lot of years — what they don't want to hear. They don't want

to hear things like "you're wrong about that," "here's how to fix it" and "you're nuts."

Even under the guise of seeking advice, adult kids don't want Dad to fix anything, criticize their decisions or scold them. They just want to know that Dad is on their side. And Dad is.

It's not that I never throw them a curve ball. I'm still the dad, so I have a responsibility to point out a few things. I just try to do it in moderation.

But right or wrong, good or bad, their life decisions are theirs to make. Even if they choose a path that I tried to steer them away from, they do so with eyes wide open.

The good thing for me is

that they can't blame me if things go south on them. But that rarely happens, so the good thing for them is that they have all the credit for their own successes.

If they always took my advice and always relied on me for their choices, I would have failed them as a father.

It's a funny thing. I'm not a good conversationalist and I don't have masterful opinions. And that's what makes me a good dad. It's great that my kids still call and ask for my advice and even greater that they know better than to take it.

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