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Cass EDC speaker talks about a positive world

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If you've felt depressed reading world news lately, it's probably because you're skipping over the really positive news articles, said Jim Bensen, president emeritus of Bemidji State University.

Bensen was keynote speaker for the Cass County Economic Development Corporation annual dinner meeting Thursday, Oct. 30, at Chase Hotel in Walker.

"It's never been a better time to be alive in the world than today," Bensen said with animated enthusiasm.

"I've spent my whole life in the future," he said. Bensen has been a member of the World Future Society for 40 years.

There are 17 breakthroughs every minute in the world today, he said.

Bensen cited the nano-stethoscope, which can listen to a single cell; the creation of bio-steel, which is five times stronger than traditional steel; and a cancer assassin cell, which can be put into a person's bloodstream to track down and kill cancer anywhere in the person's body.

Today, things can move in a quintillionth of a second.

All it takes is being open to new ideas, he emphasized.

Bensen called this the Age of Abstraction. It is a time where people don't necessarily need to know how it works to use the innovations such as apps.

To be part of this age, all a person or business needs to do is to look toward the horizon. As you walk toward it, the horizon always keeps moving farther ahead. People need to keep moving to keep up, he said.

The rules keep changing, he said, so it takes imagination to reach toward new ideas. It also takes networking to mesh multiple people's ideas in new directions. It takes drawing ideas from the bottom up in organizations, which he termed "servant leadership."

To make the future your friend, Bensen said it first means a person or business must develop a mission, a reason to exist. Then, it takes setting a vision of how to reach into the future toward the ultimate goal. That goal will be ever changing, he added.

"Where there is no vision, people will perish," Bensen said.

Finally, there is the mystique, the perception, how others perceive you, he said. You want your ideas to set the standard for the best concept, the best quality product, the best innovation, the one that other people aspire to copy, the concept that no one else yet has thought about or mastered.

But, the innovator wants to be one step ahead in innovating in order to be the one everyone else continues to reach toward.

It is because there are people doing this today — at a rapid pace — that Bensen sees this as an exciting time to be alive.