



Walt Disney displays a model of Disney's 'It's a Small World' attraction from the 1964 New York World's Fair.

Visions of 1964 World's Fair Didn't All Come True

By Deepti Hajela

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Ryan Ritchey,
filmmaker

NEW YORK—Videophone calls? Yeah, we do that. Asking computers for information? Sure, several times a day. Colonies on the moon and jet packs as a mode of everyday transportation. OK, maybe not.

The New York World's Fair of 1964 introduced 51 million visitors to a range of technological innovations and predictions, some that turned out to be right on the money and others that, perhaps thankfully, were way off the mark.

At the Bell System pavilion, engineers touted a "picture-phone" that allowed callers to see who they were talking to, a concept that lives on in modern-day apps such as Skype and FaceTime.

At the time, though, picture phones didn't take off, said Lori Walters, history professor at the University of Central Florida. She attributed that to high setup costs that made them accessible to relatively few. And at a time when many men attended the fair in coat and tie and women in dresses, people weren't quite ready to be seen on the phone at any hour, in their pajamas or worse.

"We were still a little more of

a formal society," Walters said.

The fair also gave wide exposure to the power of computers, which at the time were seen as huge cabinets of blinking lights and electrodes operated by big corporations. At the IBM pavilion, visitors saw a computer system in which a machine took in a card with a date written on it and gave back another card with a news story from that date. At the NCR pavilion, a computer would answer scientific questions or give out recipes from a cookbook.

Hmm, asking a computer for information? Well, hello, Google. Hi there, Siri.

"I don't think it's a stretch to say in a lot of ways this fair was key to familiarizing people with and really normalizing the concept of working with computers," said Ryan Ritchey, a Philadelphia filmmaker who's making a documentary about the fair.

Another bit of technology (along with an annoying hard-to-forget song) was introduced by Walt Disney with the "It's a Small World" attraction: robotic animation.

That "animatronic" exhibit and three others, including one featuring a robotic President Abraham Lincoln, showed characters moving in lifelike ways, including smiling and blinking.

"This is the first time that mil-

lions of people had the opportunity to see something that could be described as robotic. The special effects you could see in the World's Fair blew away what you could see in the movies," said Joseph Tirella, author of a book about the fair.

Off the Mark

Of course, not everything presented as the way of the future came to pass, as seen in some of the views of the future in the Futurama 2 ride put together by General Motors. It included scenes of colonies on the moon as well as in Antarctica, huge underwater dwellings, and a machine that used a laser to cut through rainforests, leaving behind paved roads.

And don't forget the jet packs, demonstrated by men who wore them and zoomed around the grounds, but which remain a mode of transport found primarily in science fiction.

Regardless of whether such notions survived, observers said the fair offered a vision of the world's potential that made it seem like anything was possible.

"It really seems like 50 years ago, we had more exciting visions for 50 years in the future than we do now," Ritchey said.

From The Associated Press



Views of the future in the "Futurama 2" ride put together by General Motors. The millions of visitors who attended the New York World's Fair that opened in 1964 were introduced to a range of technological innovations and predictions.



This 1964 file photo from the World's Fair in Queens shows a views of a moon colony in the "Futurama 2" ride put together by General Motors.

After Wrongful Convictions, Legal Minds Seek to Learn From Mistakes

By Jennifer Peltz

NEW YORK—Hospitals have staff conferences to examine why patients died. Airline pilots have a system for voluntarily submitting information on safety concerns. Yet the life-and-death world of criminal justice often operates without a similar mechanism for probing its most feared failures: wrongful convictions.

Some legal thinkers said it's time for a criminal-justice version of quality control: frank scrutiny of cases gone wrong to identify potential weaknesses in the justice system and keep errors from happening again.

"Every time you've got a mistake, you've got all those phases in the system that failed to pick it up," said John Hollway, the executive director of the University of Pennsylvania Law School's Quattrone Center for the Fair Administration of Justice.

District attorneys, defense lawyers, police officials, and law

professors traded thoughts there last week with some uncommon counterparts: doctors, a National Transportation Safety Board member, a NASA official, and an expert on research-lab safety.

The gathering crystallized discussions that have percolated in recent years, as DNA has exonerated hundreds of people and raised broader concerns about false convictions—concerns echoed with this week's exoneration of a New York man imprisoned for nearly a quarter-century in a murder case. A few cities are testing out problem-solving reviews of cases gone wrong.

Admitting Mistakes

Backers of such reviews said they can only work if people feel free to speak up about mistakes with a goal of fixing problems, not assessing blame. But that may be difficult in the inherently adversarial realm of crime and punishment.

"There's a withholding of information and a defensive-

District attorneys' offices in a number of cities have launched conviction-review units meant as nonantagonistic venues for raising innocence claims.

ness that prevents us from getting to root causes of problems," said Jeffrey Deskovic, a reform advocate who has felt the toll of those problems firsthand.

He spent 16 years in prison in a suburban New York high school classmate's 1989 death. He lost appeals but was exonerated in 2006, after DNA linked the slaying to another man who had been convicted of killing

someone else in the meantime. Jurors had known that DNA evidence didn't point to Deskovic, but they were apparently convinced by a confession he said was coerced by seven and a half hours of interrogation when he was 16 years old.

Prosecutors, lawmakers, judicial commissions, and various other panels have sometimes analyzed the causes of wrongful convictions and other criminal justice problems. And the justice system has its own checks and balances, such as appeals courts, though their task is generally case-specific.

But in recent years, some prosecutors and public defenders including San Francisco's Jeff Adachi have taken a page from "The Checklist Manifesto," Dr. Atul Gawande's 2009 book arguing that humble lists prove to be powerful tools for combatting oversights in medicine, aviation, and beyond. District attorneys' offices in New York City, Dallas, and Santa Clara, Calif., among other places, have launched con-

viction-review units meant as nonantagonistic venues for raising innocence claims.

The units review cases defense lawyers present to them, reinvestigate new leads, and sometimes agree to ask a judge to throw out convictions. In a recent example, Brooklyn District Attorney Kenneth Thompson agreed last week to exonerate Jonathan Fleming of a 1989 Brooklyn killing that, prosecutors now agree, happened while he was vacationing at Disney World. A key eyewitness had recanted, newly found witnesses implicated someone else, and prosecutors' review of authorities' files turned up documents supporting Fleming's alibi. He had served 25 years in prison.

And the federal National Institute of Justice has cited medicine and aviation as inspirations for upcoming experiments with "all-stakeholder, non-blaming" reviews of criminal cases in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Milwaukee.

Milwaukee District Attorney John Chisholm is asking defense lawyers, judges, child welfare officials, and others connected to a prominent local case—a killing committed by a teen on juvenile-court probation for an armed robbery—to help

analyze what officialdom could have done differently.

Taking a Step Back

As prosecutors, "we should be open to examining the system in a collaborative way," Chisholm said.

But collaborating is not always easy when information is scattered across a criminal justice system made up of 3,000 county court systems and 18,000 police forces.

"It's like trying to reduce the numbers of deaths in the hospital when you only hear about 1 in every 100 deaths that occur," said Samuel Gross, a professor at the University of Michigan Law School, who maintains a list of nearly 1,350 exonerations but believes there are countless more.

And some caution that a non-fault-finding approach can go only so far.

"Creating a culture of blame and a punitive culture is counterproductive when you're trying to figure out what went wrong and how to fix it," said defense lawyer Barry Scheck, a founder of the Innocence Project, which works to clear wrongly convicted people. "But you have to, clearly, do something about those who are deliberate rule-breakers."

From The Associated Press