

## PM WORLD TODAY - EDITORIAL – MONTH 2008

### Back to the Future - Project Earth Revisited!

*By: David L. Pells*

The Year 1990 was an important milestone in my professional career. In June 1990 I attended my first major international project management conference, the INTERNET'90 World Congress on Project Management in Vienna, Austria, where the themes were Management by Projects, Project-Oriented Business and Flat Project-based Organization Structures. That conference, so perfectly managed by Professor **Roland Gareis**, introduced me to INTERNET (now IPMA) and the fact that there were more than one project management society in the world (other than PMI, to which I had belonged for several years in the USA). I was also introduced to those themes that have permeated the business world ever since.

Then in October 1990, I attended the PMI'90 Seminars/Symposium (PMI's annual conference at that time) in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. The keynote speaker was Dr. Frank King, Chief Executive Officer of the Calgary Organizing Committee for the XV Olympic Winter Games in 1988, who electrified the plenary session with a fiery speech about the degradation of the Earth – the air, the ground, the water – being caused by our modern consumption-oriented society and petroleum-based industries. His speech was entitled "Project Earth"; by the time he had finished, he had excited and challenged the audience of project managers to "do something about it!" I was one of those who felt that call for action, subsequently leading a discussion group on the topic, then a "Project", and finally PMI's first chartered specific interest group, the Project Earth SIG.

What with all of the attention these days to Global Warming, Environmental Protection, alternative energy supplies and technologies, extreme weather, and human interaction with the planet, it was only a matter of time until this topic resurfaced. This month I want to take readers back 18 years to Dr. Frank King's keynote address at PMI'90 in Calgary, and to the initiative within PMI that followed called "Project Earth". For those new to PMI, or to the idea of "Green Project Management", perhaps this will be interesting and even enlightening information.

I will return to the INTERNET'90 World Congress in a future editorial, as that too had a lasting and profound impact on both my career and the world of professional project management. But now I want to return to Calgary, to the Autumn of 1990 and to the early 1990s to resurrect some important ideas and to recognize some of those who were involved.

It seems that Project Earth may be an idea whose time has come again!

## Frank King's Address at PMI '90

As the Calgary Olympic Development Association (CODA) chairman in 1978, Frank King became the bid chief of Calgary's successful pitch to host the 1988 Olympic Winter Games. He subsequently became the Chief Executive Officer of the Calgary Organizing Committee and Chairman of the 1988 Olympic Winter Games. Ultimately, he was the Program Director for those highly successful Winter Olympics.



(Presently a 2010 Games Ambassador for the upcoming 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, Dr. King has been named an Officer of the Order of Canada and is a recipient of the International Olympic Committee's Gold Olympic Order.)

His keynote address at the PMI'90 Seminars/Symposium, however, was not about the Olympic Games or about sports, but on the topic of the damages being done to the planet. Dr. King presented a series of slides that showed the impact of human populations and human activities on the Earth, dramatic displays of serious environmental damages and destruction. He presented trends and projections ranging from overpopulation and rampant diseases to catastrophic pollution in some countries, trends leading to many of the current conditions that we are now seeing – acid rain, erosion, ozone depletion, climate change, destruction of natural resources, and other problems. In other words, he painted a very dramatic and dark picture of the Earth if significant changes did not occur.

At the conclusion, he challenged us as individuals and as a project management organization to lead the way in addressing the global problems facing the human race. He called for a "Project Earth", a global project to save the planet, "to save Earth's citizens from themselves!"

## Project Earth discussions in Calgary

On leaving the auditorium, a few PMI members from various locations gathered to discuss the speech and whether there might be an opportunity to take some kind of action, to actually accept Frank King's challenge. One of those present was the late **Brian Fletcher**, former PMI President and Chair from Ontario and one of my mentors within PMI, who frequently urged me to "just do it!" In this case, he urged us to "form a team and go do something." Others who met in those hours after Frank King's speech in Calgary included **Helen Cooke** (Chicago), **Bruce Rodrigues** (Johannesburg), **Cathy Tonne** (San Francisco), **Paul Dinsmore** (Rio de Janeiro), and **David Mathie** (Turino).

We outlined and discussed a proposal to form some type of volunteer group of PMI members to launch a PMI-sponsored "Project Earth" initiative "of some kind to do something." We had some ideas, a lot of energy, and some heart-felt motivation.

But we really did not have good direction or focus. We even had an informal "Project Earth Meeting" at our dinner table at the Banff Hotel following the Calgary conference.

### **Project Earth meeting in Dallas in 1991**

In the months after the Calgary PMI conference, those of us with interest in the Project Earth initiative corresponded among ourselves, via letters, faxes and phone (this was before cell phones and email). Since the PMI'91 Seminars/Symposium was in Dallas in late September, however, it became clear that this would provide another opportunity to move the initiative forward. I happened to be the President of the Dallas/Ft. Worth PMI Chapter at that time so I had an opportunity to coordinate a meeting.

On Monday evening, September 30, 1991, about 12 people gathered at tables in the Tower lobby of the Loews Anatole Hotel. Participants included **Brian Fletcher** (Ontario, Canada), **David Cleland** (Pittsburgh, USA), **Russ Archibald** (Los Angeles, USA), **Fran Webster** (Cullowhee, NC, USA), **Cathy Tonne** (San Francisco, USA), **Bruce Rodrigues** (Johannesburg, South Africa), **David Mathie** (Turino, Italy), **Bob Curry** (Vancouver, BC, Canada), **Alan Stretton** (Sydney, Australia), **Chris Quaife** (Vancouver, Canada), **Bob Gillis** (Vancouver, Canada) and myself (Texas, USA).



We talked about what could be done and how to go about it. Again, a lot of emotional commitment to trying to do "something". This time, however, we agreed to start with our own organization, to raise some visibility, and take the initiative. We agreed to try to get a Project Earth track at upcoming PMI Seminar/Symposia and INTERNET congresses. We agreed to keep on meeting and talking. We disbanded and another year went by. (It is interesting to note how international this group was by this time.)

### **Project Earth SIG Initiative**

During the 1991-1992 timeframe, the concept of specific interest groups (SIGs) was introduced by PMI – this development emerged from several "Council of Chapter Presidents" meetings in Calgary and Dallas. In early 1992, I received some information from some other PMI leaders who were interested in launching SIGs related to various industries, and especially Information Systems. The idea struck me at that time: why not use the SIG structure as a vehicle for mobilizing interested PMI members to get involved in the Project Earth initiative.

I then sent off a letter to the PMI President and Executive Director requesting permission to establish a SIG for Project Earth. I started putting some information

together for PMI'92 in Pittsburgh, communicating with other "conspirators" in Canada and the USA, and began to prepare for a workshop on the topic.

The PMI Board of Directors actually approved a proposal on October 1, 1993, presented by Bill Derrick, PMI's Vice President of Public Relations, that approved the formation of SIG's, entered SIG's into the PMI Bylaws, allocated funds for support of PMI's SIGs and established a SIG/Board Interaction Committee. Subsequently, PMI established a SIG Council to consist of SIG Chairs, to meet at times along with the PMI Council of Chapter Presidents. The Project Earth SIG was one of 11 in formation stages at that time.



### **Project Earth Workshops at PMI'92 in Pittsburgh**

**Brian Fletcher** was able to get a "Project Earth" Panel included on the agenda for the PMI'92 Seminars/Symposium in Pittsburgh in October 1992. I agreed to co-chair the panel with **Bruce Rodrigues**, then to chair it when Bruce was unable to make it from South Africa. We had over 50 people attend, handed out Project Earth SIG

startup flyers and promoted the idea of a PMI Project Earth SIG. We started gathering names and contact information from interested people.

It was helpful in Pittsburgh to have an active supporter in **Fred Arnold**, Project Manager for the PMI'92 Seminar/Symposium that year. Another person who stepped up to get more involved was **Tom Vanderheiden** from Highlands Ranch, Colorado, who had extensive experience in the environmental engineering industry.

**Russ Archibald** was also able to coordinate a Project Earth track at the PROJEXPO conference in San Diego in November. By the end of 1992, we had an active team of about 20 people supporting the initiative, with another 100 or so interested parties, including organizations.

### **Project Earth at PMI'93 in San Diego**

We were able to organize a Project Earth track of papers and a workshop at the PMI'93 Seminars/Symposium in San Diego, where organization of a Project Earth SIG took more steps forward. The Project Earth track in San Diego featured the following outstanding paper presentations:

*"Cleaning up our Ports: Remediation Projects at the Port of Lost Angeles"*, by **Donald Rice**, Environmental Manager, Port of Los Angeles

*"Environmental Mega-Project Underway – Sludge Management in New York City"*, by Dr. **Itzhak Wirth**, Professor, St. Johns University, New York

*"Continuous Improvement through Lessons Learned in DOE's Office of Environmental Remediation and Waste Management"*, by **Suzanne Harter**, Project Manager, Project Performance Corp.

*"Benchmarking Environmental Project Management Performance"*, by **Jeff McCarthy**, Project Manager, Project Performance Corp.

In addition, the Project Earth Panel Discussion was held on the last day of the PMI'93 Seminars/Symposium in San Diego, featuring the following speakers from four countries:

- Mr. **Paul Dinsmore**, President, Dinsmore Associates, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Mr. **Brian Fletcher**, Manager of Project Management, Hoogevens Canada, Ontario, Canada and working in Monclova, Mexico
- Dr. **Vladimir Voropajev**, President of the Russian Project Management Association, Moscow, Russia
- Mr. **Chris Quaife**, Project Management Consultant, Vancouver, BC, Canada and co-Chair of the PMI'94 Seminars/Symposium the next years in Vancouver



I was the panel moderator. Following the panel discussion, an open meeting was held with the audience, many of whom were already members of the Project Earth SIG. As a result of the discussion, the following actions items were agreed leading up to the next year's meeting in Vancouver:

- ◆ Draft a Project Earth SIG Management Plan (David Pells)
- ◆ Draft a Project Earth SIG Education Plan for PMI (Tammo Wilkins)
- ◆ Identify Project Earth related Tools & Techniques in the PMBOK (Greg Githens)
- ◆ Draft a Project Earth Bibliography (Rob Wilson)
- ◆ Provide PMI'94 Project Earth Focal Points & Support the Project Earth Track Development (Tom Vanderheiden)
- ◆ Draft a List of Projects for Possible Project Earth Involvement or Support (Ed Mahler)

These projects represented the SIG's efforts to "get on with it" in terms of getting organized, producing some useful information, and being of service to the

profession. These initiatives represented a productive conclusion to the Project Earth Track and activities at PMI'93 in San Diego.

### Project Earth in Oslo

Project Earth was well represented and visible at the INTERNET'94 World Congress in Oslo, Norway in June 1994. **Cathy Tonne** and I presented a paper there entitled "Project Earth: Opportunity and Responsibility for Project Management Leadership in a Changing World", which was a session keynote paper and attended by around 75 people. In addition, Cathy and I were invited to lead an Environmental Project Management workshop, attended by approximately 15-20 conference participants from various European countries.

Interest grew, with more names and potential participants. Many PMI and INTERNET members were interested in this idea of a global initiative within the project management profession to raise awareness and to create positive change. The initiative seemed to be growing more international in scope and interest.

### Project Earth at PMI '94 in Vancouver, BC

PMI'94 in Vancouver was a real opportunity to showcase the potential for professional project management to help solve global and environmental problems. Project Earth SIG had major visibility and support, with one of our leaders, **Chris Quaife**, as Co-Chair of the conference. The themes for the PMI'94 Seminars/Symposium was Leadership and World of Change. Project Earth fit perfectly.



**Project Earth Panel** – On Monday, 17 October 1994, the Project Earth and Leadership Tracks of PMI'94 included a Keynote Panel on the subject of "Leadership for the Environment and the Economy." Panelists included the **Honorable Bill McKnight**, former Minister of energy and Mining and member of the Canadian NAFTA Commission; Mr. **David Runnalls**, Senior Advisor to the Canadian President's International Development Research Centre; and **Dr. David Marshall**, Manager of the Fraser Basin Management Program in British Columbia and Chair of the PMI'94 Program Advisory Board. U.S. panelists included Mr. **Randall Scott**, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Environmental Management's Office of Compliance and Program Coordination, US Department of Energy; and Mr. **Peter Devlin**, Manager of "re-engineering" of the DOE Project Control System Policy with the DOE's Office of Field Management in Washington, DC. The panel was moderated by Mr. **Kevin Evans** of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and was very interesting.

**Project Earth Track at PMI'94** – the conference included a full track of papers on the following general topics: Environmental Projects, including remediation, waste reduction and water related; Healthy Communities, including projects by regional and local communities; and Developing Sustainability, including urban revitalization and economic development projects.

**Dr. Frank King's return** – The PMI'94 Luncheon speaker was none other than Dr. Frank King, who had delivered the electrifying keynote speech four years earlier at PMI'90 in Calgary. On October 18, 1994, Dr. King delivered another high powered and motivational speech on the topic of "Leadership and Project Earth." I had an opportunity to meet Dr. King following his speech and to mention PMI's Project Earth initiative, which he fully endorsed on the spot.

**A Project Earth SIG "Business Meeting"** – held on October 18, 1994 and included the election of new SIG officers. Positions to be elected included Chair, First Vice Chair, and Chairs for Finance, Marketing, Records and Programs. As I had just been elected to the PMI Board of Directors, I stepped aside and **Tom Vanderheiden** was elected Chair. The SIG constitution and bylaws were ratified, and the SIG Management Plan approved. Another major development at that meeting was the formation of a Project Earth SIG Industry Advisory Council, with the following initial members:

- ❖ Mr. **Fred Arnold**, PMI Fellow, Vice President, SA Technologies, Pittsburgh, PA, USA
- ❖ Mr. **Timothy Basilone**, Manager, Environmental Affairs, Westinghouse Corp, Pittsburgh, PA, USA
- ❖ Mr. **William Colvin**, Vice President, ICF Kaiser Engineers, Oakland, CA, USA
- ❖ Mr. **Brian Fletcher**, PMI Fellow, President, ABRINN Project Management, Ontario, Canada
- ❖ Mr. **Hank Padgham**, PMI Fellow, Vice President, CH2M HILL, Tokyo, Japan
- ❖ Mr. **Lloyd Piper**, Manager of Projects, Chemical Waste Management, Houston, TX, USA
- ❖ Mr. **Leonard Stolba**, Vice President, PBQ&D, Sacramento, CA, USA
- ❖ Mr. **Charles Terhune**, Vice President, Saudi Arabian Parsons, Ltd., Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

This was a major development as it helped build momentum and establish some corporate support.

### **Project Earth SIG Chartered**

Guidelines and Procedures for formation of Specific Interest Groups (SIGs) was provided by PMI Headquarters to representatives of potential SIGs during 1994. I produced and mailed the official application for the SIG charter for the Project Earth SIG to PMI's Vice President of Public Relations, **Bill Derrick**, on 5 September 1994.

The application package included a proposed constitution and bylaws, SIG Management Plan, Summary of SIG History, copies of Project Earth Quarterly (published beginning in 1993), list of PMI members committed to the SIG, and a list of potential SIG members.

The Project Earth SIG received its charter from PMI in October 1994, making it the first SIG chartered by the Institute.

### **Project Earth Vision in 1993**

According to my article in the first issue of the Project Earth Quarterly in 1993, "Two years ago we envisioned really helping save the world. We were going to volunteer a group of project management 'experts' to the United Nations, World Bank, Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, or the International Red Cross. Project Management was the answer to the world's problems. All we had to do was do it."



"But time went by, we all had jobs, and not enough time to save the world. Last year we got more practical. We set goals for the PMI conferences and activities we had influence on. We set some communication and networking objectives. We started taking small steps. But we kept the vision alive."

"The vision is this: The project management profession really does have something to offer the world. How can many of the world's problems be solved? They can and will be addressed as projects! Who knows how to plan, organize and manage projects? We do! We don't have to decide which projects get started, but once objectives have been set, we can help accomplish those objectives better, faster, cheaper than just about anyone in the world. And if we don't know, we know someone who does, because we know how to identify and mobilize needed resources, including expertise. We do it every day in our profession. So the vision is to somehow "advocate" the better use of project management in the solution to global problems, to get our profession involved." [2]

### **Project Earth SIG Mission and Objectives**

According to the Constitution included in the application for SIG Charter from PMI, the mission and objectives for the Project Earth SIG were as follows in 1994:

**Mission** – To provide participants with information and opportunities to successfully plan, manage and participate in projects aimed at solving environmental problems.

**Objectives** – (1) to demonstrate and promote professional project management principles, as the most effective means for planning and managing environmental

projects; (2) to establish a network of project management experts and professionals interested in participating in solutions to environmental problems; (3) to provide information to project management experts, professionals and companies, which can enable participation in projects addressing global or regional environmental problems; (4) to identify opportunities for individuals and companies to participate in environmental projects, on a global, regional or local basis; and (5) to provide a resource for public and private organizations that are involved in initiating or managing environmental projects.

### **Transformation to EnviroSIG**

As can be seen from the stated mission and objectives above, the Project Earth SIG became almost fully oriented towards environmental projects, more or less dominated in the USA by environmental engineering and construction firms. Many of those organizations and projects were funded by governmental agencies or public utilities. A majority of the PMI Project Earth SIG members were from those sectors; sometime in the 1996 timeframe, SIG officers elected to change the name to the EnviroSIG. As PMI's membership base shifted towards information technologies, the EnviroSIG lost membership. It surrendered its charter approximately six years ago.

### **What happened to PMI's Project Earth Initiative?**

In the early 1990s, environmentalists had a very negative image among project managers and PM professionals, many of whom were from old line industries such as oil and gas, construction, engineering, petrochemicals, etc. So at the beginning, Project Earth was somewhat frowned on by many inside of PMI. At the same time, there was a growing awareness in North America of the significant environmental harm done by some industries, the need to remediate environmental damage at many industrial and governmental sites, and regulatory changes requiring plant modifications and re-engineering to meet EPA and other guidelines. As a result, the environmental engineering industry grew rapidly during that period.

So while environmentalists, the "greens", were frowned on, environmental projects were a growing field for engineering and construction project companies and managers. There was natural interest in the Project Earth SIG among environmental engineers and contractors, while there was a tendency not to appreciate the need for addressing global social problems with projects or PM. This led to the name change and re-orientation of the Project Earth SIG to EnviroSIG, in my opinion. The changing nature of PMI's members from engineering to information and communications technologies resulted in lost membership and interest, so the EnviroSIG lost momentum and eventually folded.

### **Project Earth today!**

Now we have come full circle to 1990 again. "Green" is good! "Green Project Management" and "Sustainable Project Management" are hot topics. Global environmental and social problems are more visible; projects funded by the UNDP, World Bank and a myriad of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are spreading like wildfire. More and better project management in the social services, for addressing AIDs and other diseases, hunger and education problems; for economic development; to fight global warming and climate change; for disaster response and recovery projects; for alternative energy development; for policing lawless regions and for addressing many of the problems that Frank King described in 1990 are now highly visible, badly needed, and more acceptable to everyone.

We all know that we are in this world and this life together now. We know that global problems must be addressed with international cooperation, with global solutions. As more of these issues become the subject of programs and project, and portfolios of projects, project management experts and expertise are needed to respond.

Project Earth may well rise again. Who knows? The time is right now!



Maybe

Good luck on your projects!

David L. Pells  
Managing Editor

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