

'Megatrends' author paints rosy picture

By Wayne Post
staff writer

Economic good times are here and they should continue to roll, according to the man who authored the best-selling economic forecast "Megatrends."

John Naisbitt painted a generally rosy economic picture for the nearly 1,000 tri-county business, government and educational leaders who heard him speak Wednesday at Rochester's Oakland University.

"What you keep reading in the media is that the recovery is slowing down. Then, two weeks later, you read that it's going strong," Naisbitt said. "The point is, it isn't a recovery. It's a powerful new economy coming into place."

The Naisbitt-described new economy is based on computerized information processing, not industrial manufacturing. It should feature abundant employment opportunities and greater respect for workers' individual dignity, according to the board, best-selling trend-watcher.

"There is already competition for workers," he said. "In the Boston area, companies are busing workers in."

Likewise rule-by-fear management, so prevalent in some corporations, should soon pass, Naisbitt said.

"We are seeing a shifting from the manager as order-giver to the manager as facilitator, as teacher and as developer of human potential."

Even the clouds seemed to part before Naisbitt's good news message. The drizzly day turned sunny just before he stepped to the podium.

NAISBITT PRAISED Michigan — picking up the governor's "comeback state" terminology — and indirectly praised local economic development.



John Naisbitt
author

"Michigan has a long-running history as a one-industry state — whether it be fur, lumber, copper or automotive — and that's changing," Naisbitt said. "Diversification is a very healthy part of this comeback."

Oakland Theological Park, developing just a stone's throw from where Naisbitt spoke, also drew praise for its proposed partnership of business and higher education.

"It looks similar to what we've seen in the Boston area and in the Carolinas," he said in an informal post-speech session with reporters.

Communities, like Rochester Hills and Troy, that attract new, small-scale companies, also gained Naisbitt's praise.

"It's an old industrial idea to go to a big company and ask them to come to put a plant in your backyard," he said. "Small, new, entrepreneurial

companies are where they jobs are coming from."

"Saturn is probably the last industrial plant," he added, referring to the Tennessee site for General Motors' newly-proposed automotive division. "The thought has crossed my mind that the Saturn plant may never come about, at least not as conceptualized."

The new economy apparently won't be without its growing pains.

Mid-level managers are becoming an endangered species, according to Naisbitt.

"Computers are increasingly doing the job of mid-level management," he said.

THAT MESSAGE holds no comfort for area automotive employees who are bracing for rumored layoffs.

"What we're finding is these people become entrepreneurs," Naisbitt said. "They frequently go into busi-

ness for themselves."

Unions stand to become obsolete, Naisbitt warned, unless they redefine employer/employee relations.

"We're moving toward union-free society," he said. "Unions must adapt and, to this point, they haven't shown the inclination."

Computerization helped prompt economic change, Naisbitt said.

Specialization, once a watchword among job-providers, is a much less marketable commodity today, he said.

"I told my children that unless they were going to be musicians or mathematicians they shouldn't decide what they were going to be until they were 35," the Washington-based forecaster said. "Maybe they took me a little too seriously."

A job-hunter's market should continue to the end of the century, Naisbitt said.

"There's terrific competition for personnel," he said. "From 1965 on

women began having fewer babies. And this these people — people from the so called baby bust — who'll be entering the market place from now until the end of the century."

Naisbitt elaborated: "In 1990 there will be 6 million fewer teenagers than there were in 1980. I have this vision of McDonald's being staffed by senior citizens. Imagine that, they'd be having employees who could add and subtract."

IF THERE is a dark cloud, Naisbitt said, it is the American educational system's inability to provide adequately-trained employees.

"I'm a strong advocate of the voucher system," Naisbitt said. "Then, schools could compete for students. One school could emphasize science, another the arts."

"I'm a product of the greatest voucher system we ever had — the GI Bill," he said.

Massive government debt, a red flag to other forecasters, doesn't bother Naisbitt terribly.

"I'm not saying something shouldn't be done, but Japan has a much higher debt per capita than we do," he said.

Chairman of the Naisbitt Group, a Washington, D.C.-based social forecasting agency, Naisbitt publishes a bi-weekly newsletter and monthly magazine tracking economic development in what the organization calls "bellefether states."

Naisbitt, who has also authored the book "Future Trends" and co-authored "Re-inventing the Corporation," spoke at Oakland University's inaugural Business Forum.

University officials hope to make the event an annual affair.

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Health program lauded

Oakwood Hospital's immunization program, recognized as a distinguished community health promotion program by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, has received the 1986 Secretary's Award for Excellence.

It was presented to Gerald Fitzgerald, president of Oakwood Health Services Corp., by Dr. James Harrison, deputy director for programs, Michigan Department of Public Health, at the hospital's third annual health promotion conference.

Joining Fitzgerald were Farmington Hills residents Dr. Max Lichter,

director of the Community Health and Health Education Department, and Margaret Kish, an Oakwood Hospital Guild volunteer who coordinated the program for four years.

The program, which began in 1981, is conducted by Oakwood Hospital Guild volunteers who visit new mothers in the obstetrics unit to explain the importance of childhood immunization.

As part of the program, the compliance rate of participating children at 4 months and 18 months of age is monitored. Thus far, the overall rate is estimated to be more than 95 percent.

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