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## The Mercury News

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### San Jose Mercury News (CA)

October 20, 2000

**Section:** Business

**Edition:** Morning Final

**Page:** 1C

## PHILANTHROPY'S A GAME TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY IN VALLEY

*DAN GILLMOR column*

**Bruce Largecap**, technology tycoon, has died and left \$500 million to a new foundation. You're the foundation's director, and your mission -- in a clever new CD-ROM simulation -- is to create an arts-led renaissance in a place where culture has been an afterthought.

You're in Silicon Valley, of course, where the arts languish amid unprecedented riches. Can you spend **Bruce Largecap's** fortune wisely? Can you help the valley become a place that transcends mere wealth?

Actually, according to the people behind the interactive computer game, which will be released next week, the arts are intimately related to the region's long-range health. Unless we pay more attention to culture, says San Jose-based Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley ([www.arts4sv.org](http://www.arts4sv.org)), we may be nothing more than a boomtown that someday goes bust.

"Do we want Silicon Valley to be a great place?" asks Harry Saal, an entrepreneur and philanthropist who is board president of the non-profit Cultural Initiatives organization. "It's not fated that this will be a great place."

The premise of Cultural Initiatives and its computer simulation strike me as unarguable. It takes more than money, ultimately, to attract and retain the kind of people who create greatness in a community. Today, this region falls short in so many ways, such as the incessant traffic and lack of affordable housing, both related to the boom in the tech economy and abysmally poor planning by governments.

Culture surely belongs on any list of qualities that matter. Yet here, in the richest place on the planet, there's not a single world-class arts institution. Money-starved public schools pay too little attention to the arts. Yes, some of the valley's wealth has gone into the arts, but not on a level that begins to resemble what public-spirited people do in real renaissance communities.

So Saal and his colleagues at Cultural Initiatives are trying to spark a conversation -- to persuade the valley's business community of the real value of arts in our lives. The CD-ROM is part of the campaign.

As in all simulations, decisions change the results. As foundation director, you begin with an endowment of \$500 million. You can spend money on education programs, marketing, projects that help arts organizations become more effective, cultural programming and facilities. You have to spend at least \$25 million a year -- effectively, the interest -- but can dip into the principal if you wish.

The way you spend the money over 40 years, realigning the investments every five years, influences such things as the overall community and business vitality and innovation. Complex mathematical models in the software do the calculation, which in turn feed a formula dubbed a "Great Cities Index."

You have to allocate your money wisely. In several attempts to turn Silicon Valley into a great place, for example, I found that it was unwise to put money into arts facilities before, say, arts education.

"Building a symphony hall before building an audience won't make much of a difference," notes Kate Cochran, Cultural Initiatives' deputy director.

Of course, the entire thing requires a leap of faith. You can look at the math behind the diagrams, which Saal says is based on well-studied models of civic engagement, participation in cultural activities and systems dynamics. You can even change the assumptions in the simulation if you wish.

But you have to fundamentally trust the models. If you're like me -- the last time I studied differential equations was in high school -- you'll tend to go along with the program's scenarios.

But to take it too literally would be to miss the point.

That's because the real purpose of the simulation isn't so much to prove how spending this much here and that much there will change things. It's to spark a long-needed conversation.

Saal hopes people will get together in small groups to play the game, then discuss the results to "begin to appreciate the complexities."  
One thing is surely not very difficult to grasp. A place without culture is ultimately barren of humanity. We have a choice to make here. Let's make it wisely.  
Sharing blame: Stock prices went up Thursday, but no one with any sense is ready to call this the beginning of a new bull market. The conditions are simply too unsettled.  
Barring a stunning -- and lasting -- new move skyward, the fear and loathing of the last few weeks seems destined to continue. So will recriminations, as we ask who was responsible for the Internet bubble in the first place.  
At a recent dinner with some top-notch financial journalists, the conversation came around to our profession's unseemly role in the bubble. Oh, sure, we usually included the "to be sure" disclaimers in our coverage, as in, "To be sure, these market conditions are unprecedented and may not last."  
But we also celebrated the suddenly wealthy founder of every two-bit start-up that had no serious business plan but incredible market capitalization. We may not have meant to do it, but we left the impression that anyone could make and keep such loot, and that it might go on and on and on.  
Perhaps, the next time we see such a bubble, journalists will remember history. But I doubt we will. I fear it's not in our nature.

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