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**SILICON VALLEY & TECHNOLOGY**

# Long Now Foundation Thinks 10,000 Years Ahead

March 30, 2017 6:45 PM Shelley Schlender

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA — In a cave in a mountain in western Texas, the Long Now Foundation is building a clock - a big clock, 150 meters tall. The clock will tick only once each year, go bong once a century, and once a millennium, it will send out a cuckoo. Its creators plan for it to last at least 10,000 years.

But they're not doing it just to build a better clock.

"The goal of the Long Now Foundation," explains its Executive Director Alexander Rose, "is fundamentally to foster long term responsibility and to think about the future in much deeper terms."

He calls the enormous, slow-ticking timepiece an icon of long-term thinking, one of many projects Long Now has launched on that scale.

"There's certain problems such as climate change, or education or things like that that can only be solved if you're thinking on a multi-generational or even longer time frame," he said.

Ferrets and mammoths

One of those long-term projects is an effort to save the black-footed ferret. This endangered, New World weasel is vulnerable to the old-world disease known as plague.

The Long Now's Revive and Restore project is exploring how to genetically modify the ferret's DNA to resist plague.

Rose says that Revive and Restore is also looking for ways to bring back the woolly

mammoth.

“We’re sitting on the cusp of one of the very first times in human history where we can do that. That project has been pulling together different scientists as well as ecologists to figure out not only what species we could do but what we should do to help the environment.”

Disappearing languages are another Long Now priority. This century, thousands of rare human languages may disappear. The Long Now is partnering with linguists and native speakers to preserve these languages on line. The foundation also has created language “decoder rings.” Each of these palm-sized disks, made from long-lasting nickel, holds miniaturized language pages for over 1,000 languages.

University of Colorado archives director Heather Ryan has assisted what's called the Rosetta Project. She says the Rosetta Disks are a great thought experiment for long-term thinking. And if we ever lose our on-line experts, she says, they may also be practical.

“Looking 10,000 years into the future, somebody could come across and . . . pick up the fact that there’s information etched on here. We can then find clues to all the languages of human civilization over time,” Ryan said.

In the here and now

To foster long-term responsibility, the Long Now Foundation sponsors talks and podcasts with visionaries, such as Dr. Larry Brilliant. The physician and epidemiologist is a former hippie and current philanthropist, who helped the World Health Organization eradicate smallpox.

Audience members say hearing these long-term thinkers gets them thinking about their future. One teenage boy announces, “Eventually, I want to make a difference in the world.” A man in the crowd observes, “We have to have a long-term view in order to have a long term life.”

As for pessimists who wonder, what’s the point of thinking 10,000 years ahead, when the world might not survive another 10 months, another member of the audience answers with a laugh, “Makes you wonder, but you’ve always got to keep

your eye on the future or else you'll be stuck. And you can't get anything done if you're stuck.”

By helping people care, dream and do, the Long Now Foundation plans to make the world a better place for a long time to come.

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