



## The Fourth Annual Young Leaders Forum: What's Next?

By Roslyn Brock

*The National Committee launched the Young Leaders Forum (YLF) in 2002 as a way of building personal and professional bridges between the next generation of leaders from the United States and China. The venue for the annual 4-day Forum alternates between the United States and China, and membership lasts for a minimum of 2 years, allowing each YLFer to attend a conference in each country. At the fourth annual Forum in October, 2005, Fellows from the classes of 2003 through 2005 (along with a few alumni from 2002) met together in Chengdu and Jiuzhaigou, Sichuan. In this piece, Roslyn Brock, a three-year veteran of YLF (who is also the director of System Fund Development at Bon Secours Health System, as well as the youngest person and first woman to serve as vice chair of the NAACP Board of Directors), shares her observations and insights on the Forum.*

The October 24, 2005 cover of Time magazine shows Apple CEO Steve Jobs proudly holding his company's latest technological breakthrough, the new video iPod, in visual response to the bold, block-lettered question-posed-as-a-statement displayed on the giant iMac screen hovering below him: "What's Next." The entire edition was devoted to exploring new developments from technology to biology and beyond.

Coincidentally, that same basic question, framed as "The Next Big Thing," was the theme for the fourth annual Young Leaders Forum (YLF), held October 21-25, 2005, in Chengdu and Jiuzhaigou in Sichuan Province. Similar to Time magazine, the Young Leaders Forum assembled a group of leaders who explored important trends and ideas of the future via panel discussions and personal exchanges. We probed, discussed, and critiqued each other's presentations in an interactive cross-cultural laboratory that enhanced our understanding of the "The Next Big Thing" from a comparative and global perspective.

The Young Leaders Forum brings together exceptional American and Chinese leaders, age 40 and under, to stimulate dialogue, improve communication, and develop lasting friendships. The annual program is held alternatively in China and the United States. This unique social experiment, begun in 2002, continues to reap a bountiful harvest for its participants and sponsors. In 2005, the latter included The Thornton Foundation, Time Warner, Inc., Shaklee Corporation and UPS.

I was tapped as a new YLFer in 2003 and, in October of that year, made my first trip to China. I'll never forget the early morning hike up Huang Shan or the breathtaking view from the banks of Hangzhou's West Lake. Looking back on the '03 trip and its theme – "Balancing Change and Tradition" – I realized that I gained a new appreciation for the challenges associated with change in a growing social and political economy. My recollection of China was a country full of activity and promise. Cars, bicycles and people walking crowded busy narrow streets in the business districts. In rural communities, new structures sprang from the earth symbolizing prosperity and hope. On this return trip to China in 2005, I noticed many new developments in the country, as well as a sense of pride in the air that Beijing would be hosting the 2008 Summer Olympics.

For "The Next Big Thing," Fellows were asked to share their thoughts on future innovations and trends based upon their professional or personal expertise in one of six areas: Health, Medicine & Science; Technology; Art & Design; Business & Finance; Government; and Civil Society. Following our first breakfast in Chengdu, we got right down to substance. I was selected to be the team leader for the Health, Medicine and Science Panel that included Martha Aronson, vice president of Medtronic Europe; Roger Barnett, chairman and CEO of the Shaklee Corporation; Hu Kanping, editor of Green China Times; and Dr. Adam Kaplin, assistant professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University. Together, we undertook the difficult task of trying to engage a diverse group of leaders in a discussion of



where healthcare, mental health, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, even folk remedies, are heading next. Based on the lively discussion that ensued, even from the jet-lagged Americans, the 2005YLF was off to a good start.

The remaining four panel groups led discussions over the next two days that were equally interesting, informative and often quite spirited. A few highlights: As part of the What's Next in Technology discussion, Mark Lundstrom, a technology entrepreneur and CEO at BioScale, Inc., gave a riveting presentation on how his company has used nanotechnology to develop the world's most sensitive scales, capable of measuring cells, proteins, and other molecules. Tang Haisong, founder and CEO of eTang.com, followed with a discussion of what's next on the Web, quickly getting less Web-savvy YLFers up-to-date on Google maps, Flickr.com, blogging tools, and their Chinese online equivalents.

The Civil Society panel, headlined by 2005 Fellows Zhu Yongzhong, founder and director of the Sichuan Development Association in Qinghai, and Dacia Toll, president of Achievement First, shared lessons learned in addressing the range of educational needs of children from impoverished communities. Later in the day, Vishaan Chakrabarti, vice president of The Related Companies, and Will Wechsler, vice president at Greenwich Associates, engaged in an interesting cross-panel political debate about the implications of space and density in large-scale urban development projects.

An important element of YLF is the opportunity to experience indigenous culture and natural environments in the host country. Our time in Sichuan Province was peppered with activities that enhanced our understanding of China's natural and historical resources as well as its economic growth. One was the breeding farm of Ren Xuping, a peasant entrepreneur known as the Rabbit King, whose hard work and assistance from Heifer International, an NGO that helps families achieve sustainable livelihood and provides training and economic assistance to communities, has made him a multi-millionaire. Another was the incredible beauty of the Jiuzhaigou Nature Reserve, one of China's most impressive national parks, where we enjoyed not only pristine natural settings, but performances from residents of one of the nine Tibetan villages in the valley.

There are so many terrific memories that I could describe. One of the most memorable was the farewell dinner. After the formal entertainment of Tibetan songs and dances ended (and a bit of "social lubricant" had been applied), I was particularly struck by how the entire group continued to bond together through music and singing. It was amazing to witness how the Americans and Chinese separated into their respective corners and huddled together to ask each other, "What's Next? What will we sing?" in a sort of "American Idol"-type frenzy. 2003 Fellow Fuyang Vice Mayor Du Changping led the Chinese delegation in singing Chinese revolutionary songs. Although I could not understand the words she sang, I felt the energy and passion that gave rise to each song. Her rhythmic voice told the story of struggle and progress for the citizens of her country. In contrast, Americans sang "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," chock full with dramatizations and emphasis on 'swing low.' "What's Next?" The Chinese delegation sang "Do-Re-Mi" from the Sound of Music in perfect harmony. The Americans applauded wildly and joined in the singing. And to our delight, the Tibetan performers returned (after duties to the other patrons were fulfilled) to join in the fun. Finally, after two hours of songs that spanned every genre of Chinese and American music, we all stood together, locked arm-in-arm and raised our collective voice to sing "Auld Lang Syne." What a powerful testament to share with the world about strengthening alliances and enhancing communication in our global village. Our time together was enhanced by our ability to put aside differences and seek a common understanding around issues that were important to us. Despite language barriers, as well as cultural traditions and political ideologies, a relative group of strangers became true friends in the course of only a handful of days.



For me, the most memorable experience of my three years as a YLFer took place during this year's extension trip. Civil Rights icon Rosa Parks had died the day before and her picture was on the front page of the China Daily. On the walk up the mountain to view the immense Leshan Buddha, Mayor Du took me by the arm and said, "So Roslyn, tell me about this woman you call Rosa Parks." For her to ask me that question, and for me to be able to share something so meaningful to me, was an intense, affirming and gratifying moment that captures the essence of the Young Leaders Forum and the bridges that it can build.

The memory of this final gathering will linger in the minds of all who participated in this year's YLF as they contemplate "What's Next" for 2006.

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