

# An Interview with Microsoft's Brad Smith

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By Gary T. Smith

This week's program was so action-packed it had to start 10 minutes early.

**Todd Summerfelt** opened with the invocation, reflecting on Spring as a season of the new emerging from the old. In noting the recent passing of Herb Bridge, Reverend Sam McKinney, and Barbara Bush, he observed that the same cycle happens within families, communities, and this Rotary Club. Reflecting on the contributions of those passed, he said "let us also celebrate a new generation of leaders that spring, fresh and vigorous, from the roots and stocks of those that came before."

**Trish Bostrom** led the club in an enthusiastic rendition of *This Land is Your Land*.

See the stories in the Totem email for the memorial for **Herb Bridge** and a special recognition for **Corinne Cavanaugh**.



## New Nordic Museum – Wedged Between History and Hipster

Eric Nelson, CEO of Seattle's Nordic Museum, described the evolution of the museum and the grand opening of its new 57,000 square foot facility on May 5.

Founded in 1980 in Ballard in loaned space at the old Daniel Webster Elementary School, the Nordic Museum now hosts 65,000 visitors a year and has a staff of 30. Beginning in 2003, the Museum began buying property on Market Street and now owns two blocks near the Locks, on which it built its new home. The museum is "wedged between history and hipster," Nelson said.



Designed by Seattle architecture firm Mithun in collaboration with Nordic design expert Juhani Pallasmaa, the building of clean Scandinavian lines, built to Smithsonian museum standards, will be able to host world-class traveling exhibits on contemporary Nordic culture alongside permanent exhibits on the history of Seattle's Nordic immigrants and a genealogy research library.

Nelson said the Museum reinvented itself. They asked, what is the most relevant story we could tell? They recognized that the Northwest and Scandinavia share core values, including innovation, social justice, openness, and a connection to nature. The museum will reflect these themes and will look forward as

well as back.

The Nordic Museum kicks off a month of festivities in May, with a Nordic Innovation Conference presented by Ericsson on May 3, followed by the grand opening on May 5. To borrow a term from modern music, the experience will be something of a mashup – think Stan Boreson embraces Danish Punk. Learn more at <http://nordicmuseum.org/>.

## Brad Smith, Rapid-fire Interview

For the main program, member **Beth Knox** introduced Brad Smith, Microsoft's President and Chief Legal Officer. Smith oversees more than 1,400 employees and leads the company on cybersecurity, digital privacy, public policy, intellectual property, accessibility, philanthropy, and environmental sustainability. Smith is also the enthusiastic Honorary Board Chair of the 2018 Special Olympics USA Games, which Knox runs.

**President Mark** conducted a rapid-fire interview of Smith.

### How Safe is Your Cyberspace?

Microsoft and other tech companies are realizing they can and should be part of the solution to combat cyberattacks, Smith said. He noted a new accord among 34 companies committing to building stronger cyber defenses.



“We’re seeing more cyberattacks launched by nation-states,” he said, and “companies have the capacity to find out who did them.” (Giving this topic further context, a news story this week stated that South Korean officials estimate their country alone is now targeted by an estimated 1.5 million North Korean hacking attempts daily, or 17 every second.)

Smith said that last year when the WannaCry ransomware attack started to spread around the world, “within a few days we had connected that attack to a group in North Korea.” Microsoft and two other companies acted simultaneously to dismantle the organization’s malware capabilities, and Microsoft quickly launched patches that addressed the vulnerabilities, and cleaned PCs around the world. “We can’t dent this cybersecurity threat if we (companies) don’t have the courage to address these attacks,” he said.

### Philanthropy

Wright asked about Microsoft’s good reputation for philanthropy, which Smith said started with Bill Gates’s mother. She advised her son to start a United Way campaign in his young company. The company match is now up to \$15,000 a year. Last year Microsoft and its employees raised \$156 million for United Way, of which about half was given locally.

## Enabling the Disabled

“One of every seven people on the planet has some kind of disability – it may be permanent, it may be temporary, it may be physical, cognitive, or intellectual,” Smith noted. “Our CEO, Satya Nadella, has made this a cause for the company and directed more attention to creating products for individuals with disabilities. This also has the ability to be a movement that unifies our employees.”

Smith said “There is no area of our work as a tech company that has more potential to do good or bad for people. If we create a new version of Windows and we suddenly render a screen reader that a person with blindness can’t read, we not only risk making that person unemployed, we risk making that person unemployable.



“At the same time, there is probably no area where technology can do more to improve people’s lives than helping people with various disabilities. One example is a product we released last June called Seeing AI,” Smith said. It allows a person with blindness to wear an earbud and hold a phone, which is connected to the cloud, and the phone’s camera, coupled with AI, can tell the person in some detail what they are “seeing.”

“This focus has spilled over to our hiring. We’re very focused on what we’re calling Inclusive Hiring. One of our best programs is our Autism Hiring Project. We’ve hired 56 people with autism. We are hiring some amazing people. They have special skills that are contributing to our work in really incredible ways. We see that we all have an opportunity to connect with people in the world, bring them into our workplaces, change their lives, but change our lives as well.”

## Special Olympics in Seattle July 1-6

“This is the biggest sporting event in Seattle since the Goodwill Games a quarter century ago,” Smith said. “There will be 3,000 athletes, a thousand coaches, and their families.

“We’re going to be on the nation’s stage. But while this is a special moment for our city and our region, this is not just about the Special Olympics USA Games,” Smith said. “This is about Seattle, a city of inclusion.”

## A New Seattle Legacy

“For over a century, every Olympics or World’s Fair has left its host city a lasting legacy. Almost no place has created an icon that has matched what the Space Needle has meant. This summer we have an opportunity to create something that is every bit as important. We are creating a Job Fair so that employers can come together and get



involved, volunteer, and learn about inclusive hiring.

“But the single most important thing we can do – the gift that will give a decade from now – is to bring some of these inclusive hiring practices to more employers across Seattle to add to the culture and create an environment where people appreciate what they can gain when they open their doors to people with these kinds of intellectual disabilities, how they will enrich their own lives if they do so.

“If we can create that, we won’t see it on the skyline, but it will have an impact that will build on the legacy of the Space Needle. That’s what we should do.”