

Notes from the Editor's Desk



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While “the architect” is a constant character in books, movies and television shows, some structural engineers bemoan the lack of recognition for their field. At last, though, there is a glimmer of light.

In one recent movie, “Boys and Girls,” the male lead (played by Freddie Prinze, Jr.) is a structural engineering student who’s career ambition is to build bridges. And according to MSC’s own movie reviewer, Elizabeth Phillips, it’s not a bad flick.

On a more serious note—though potentially no less entertaining—PBS plans on running in October a series titled “Building Big.” Hosted by David Macaulay, the acclaimed author and illustrator of “The Way Things Work,” the Building Big project focuses on five types of structures integral to modern life: bridges, tunnels, skyscrapers, domes, and dams. According to PBS’ promotional material: “Discover the stories behind these engineering marvels, and see how engineers today are building bigger than ever before. Simple, clear explanations of engineering principles show the power and excitement of science and math in the real world.”

PBS is currently creating a pretty nifty website (www.pbs.org/wgbh/building-big/) revolving around the program. Ultimately, the site will include:

• **Virtual Labs.** In these interactive workshops, visitors develop a “hands-on” understanding of the basic principles that underlie all built structures. Through creative Flash animations, these interactive simulations allow users to play with shapes, materials, forces, and loads to see how they affect large-scale structures.

• **Building Challenges.** You’re the engineer, solving problems and making structural choices as you build bridges, skyscrapers, dams, domes, and tunnels in these interactive stories. Your choices affect the story outcomes. Along the way,

you’ll learn why buildings, bridges, and other structures stand up—and why they sometimes fall down. With no plug-ins required, this feature is accessible to “high-end” and “low-tech” users alike.

• **Who Wants To Be an Engineer?** What do engineers do, anyway? Designed to build awareness of engineering as a career choice, this series of interviews introduces visitors to a diverse assortment of men and women from a variety of engineering disciplines.

• **Wonders of the World Databank.** This searchable database profiles the real-life structures featured throughout the Building Big Web site and television series, as well as other notable engineering milestones. This feature also provides guidelines for visitors who want to investigate big structures in their local communities and submit their findings to the Building Big Web site. Results will be published on the site as “Local Wonders” entries in the Databank.

• **Educators’ Guide to the Web Site.** This feature includes a multi-part “How-To” section with tips for educators and parents on how to use the Web site, as well as the educational videos that accompany the television series, to help students learn basic engineering and physics principles. This feature will also highlight a variety of Building Big outreach activities and materials.

PBS is offering via their website to provide educational material to teachers and others. If you’re interested, be sure to check out the site. And, of course, as they used to say: “*Be sure to check your local listings.*”