



Chicago Tribune

Please [register](#) or [log in](#)Subscribers:
[Get the Advantage](#)
[NEWS](#) [SPORTS](#) [ENTERTAINMENT](#) [BUSINESS](#) [HOMES](#) [JOBS](#) [CARS](#) [SHOPPING](#) [PLACE ADS](#) [NEWSPAPER SERVICES](#)

Presenting...

- [E-mail this story](#)
- [Printable format](#)
- [Search archives](#)

Search:

chicagotribune.com

Go

[chicagotribune.com](#) >> [Leisure](#)

Gadget adviser

**Most e-mailed
(last 24 hours)**

- [Family's dark humor revealed in death notice.](#)
- [Who won't let the dogs out?](#)
- [Cat hoarder called unfit owner](#)
- [White-collar jobless blues](#)
- [Feds charge 'massive fraud' in city hiring](#)

[More from today](#)
[Past week](#)
Recent columns
[ScanBuy aiming at camera phones](#)
 July 19, 2005

[Plextor spells DVR E-A-S-Y](#)
 July 12, 2005

[Web site casts spell on 'Potter' author](#)
 July 11, 2005

[Paranoid? Nosy? Try a spy shop](#)
 July 7, 2005

[Paranoid? Try a spy shop](#)
 July 7, 2005

[All recent columns](#)

Eric Gwinn

Future with robotic twist

Visitors to NextFest expo are automatically attracted to machines that do it all

Published June 25, 2005

NextFest, the technology expo this weekend at Navy Pier, could have been named Robot World.

Festival Hall A is filled with robots that spin and scratch records like twin deejays, lobster-like robots that look for sea mines, seal pup-like robots that give you goo-goo eyes when you pet them, robots that can vacuum the den, a robot that can balance gracefully on one leg, and another that strides without the jerky motions robots are known for.

But drawing the most attention was a Phillip K. Dick look-alike that quoted from the science-fiction author's books while fixing you with a gaze that moved seamlessly from placid to mildly annoyed.

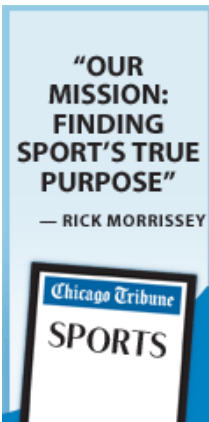
"Just like the real Phillip," says a joking Steve Prilliman, co-founder of Hanson Robotics. But more-human animatronics are good for more than just entertainment.

"As the population ages, these can be used as companions" for shut-ins, Prilliman continues, quite serious now.

"In Japan, there's a shortage of young people to [act as companions] for the elderly. This can provide that human touch." Prilliman says that five to seven years from now, he sees a market for life-like companion robots that use nearly 40 motors to change facial expressions in reaction to a human's voice.

Robots are not the only things among the 100-plus exhibits covering 40,000 square feet.

NASA offers a model of the Cassini spacecraft; the University of Illinois at Chicago shows a virtual reality wall that comes to life for those wearing the provided 3-D glasses.


[How to advertise](#)

NextFest doesn't belong just to readers of Scientific American, Discover, Popular Mechanics and Wired (the organizer of expo).

On Friday, thousands of schoolchildren and adults ogled and touched the exhibits. Joel Orgeta, a 15-year-old student and architect hopeful, says he found peace playing Brainball. Two players strap on sensors that measure brain activity. Sitting opposite each other, the players are separated by a small ball that moves toward the person with the most brain activity. Joel says he won his match by thinking about an ocean.

"It's cool. It's relaxing," said the fan of shoot-'em-up video games.

Asked if he would buy such a game, he replied, "I wouldn't even think about it. In a heartbeat."

Kids also enjoyed staring at GM's hydrogen-powered concept cars, the Motorola-equipped Cadillac that uses Bluetooth and voice-recognition technology to dial your cell phone via voice commands and let you converse hands-free while you drive.

Other down-to-earth technology included an interactive pillow that connects to the Web. Hug the pillow, and its companion pillow changes color wherever it is, so separated lovers can share a tactile experience, an experience even a robot could love.

NextFest, Saturday and Sunday at Navy Pier, 500 E. Grand Ave. \$10 online, \$15 at the door. Parking at the pier is \$22; www.nextfest.net.

You can search for more columns [in our archives](#).

Copyright © 2005, [Chicago Tribune](#)

[Home](#) | [Copyright and terms of service](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Archives](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Site tour](#)