

## **HISTORY OF AEDC AND THE PROFESSION**

# **Introduction: Commemorating 75 Years of the American Economic Development Council**

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**ISSUE EDITOR**

Over the years, the field of economic development has experienced numerous changes in its progress toward becoming a true profession. The 2000 conference in Dallas, Texas launched a year of celebration commemorating 75 years of AEDC's history, because on June 1-2, 1926, what would become the American Economic Development Council held its first annual conference in Washington, D.C. At the close of these 75 years and the opening of a new century, it seems appropriate to chronicle the evolution our field has experienced. Thus, the purpose of this special commemorative issue of *Economic Development Review* is to honor 75 years of our profession's roots. We do so with a review of past milestones and an assessment of where the profession is today.

No profession advances without some pioneers and outstanding leaders, and economic development has its share. Many (though we surely have missed some) are recognized in this issue. Importantly, some of them have contributed articles to the issue, and we are honored to have this opportunity to

draw once again from their wisdom and insight.

The commemorative issue begins with a reprint of an article written by John F. Clark and originally published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1927 as the fledgling field of economic development was just beginning to organize. Inflate the dollars and broaden the perspective from manufacturing to all sectors of the economy, and the article holds up surprisingly well. Milestones in the history of the American Economic Development Council are chronicled in the next two articles. The history from 1926-1960 was edited by Michael Webb from an original report written by J. Huber Denn. Bill Shelton, Frank Birkhead, and Bob Seal contributed the update for 1960-2000, with a little help from Jerry Ruffin. We also honor leaders of the American Economic Development Council with an honor roll of Past AEDC Chairs and CEOs.

No effort to examine our profession would be complete without input from the King, Bob Cassell. We successfully cajoled him from the comfort of retirement to lead a series of articles on how the profession has changed. His perspective, ranging from the 1940s to the pre-

sent, is blended with contributions from Mark Waterhouse and David Kolzow. Beth Neu adds an interesting assessment of the changing role of women in the profession, and Harry Foden ushers us into the new century with a view of how professional ethics have evolved.

Two articles dealing with milestones in Texas and Mississippi round out our historical retrospective. While many states could have been included, these two have important precedents and are representative of state-level economic development efforts over the years. First, Bill Shelton outlines key economic development events for the Lone Star State, where many of the practices that make up our profession were conceived. Then, Tim Hudson and Judson Edwards review the history of the Magnolia State's "Balance Agriculture with Industry" program, which many contend marked the beginning of the incentives wars of recent years.

Two other articles examine the present and the future. First, Swager attempts to characterize contemporary economic development by revisiting its definition. In the other article, Bill Schweke provides a point of view that raises an intriguing question about the

future of our profession under the new realities of international trade.

Two special sections conclude the commemorative issue. First, given our historical theme, it seems appropriate to delve into the archives of past published work to reprise a classic article on economic development practice that continues to have lasting value. Thus, we went to the earliest issues of the *AIDC Journal*, the predecessor to the *Economic Development Review*, and selected Harry Clark's 1969 article on professionals and volunteers. Finally, the last section provides an index of articles from *EDR* for the past five years, compiled by Lisa Smith.

Upcoming issues of the *Economic Development Review* will further this commemorative emphasis. Of course, these issues will continue to provide timely articles dealing with contemporary professional practice, but they also will include articles that assess the current as well as the future state of the profession. In addition, the next several issues will continue the special sections launched here that revisit classic articles and indices of articles published in past issues.

In this issue we hear voices. Voices from the past that are now silent. Voices of senior members of a profession that they did much to shape. Voices of current and emerging leaders. New voices. Voices that give us a perspective of our roots, of our status, of our future. It is good to pause, to listen to these voices, to reflect.