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AIDC Chair, 1979-1980

IEDC Interview Conducted with Nancy Moorman

How have you seen the economic development profession evolve over the course of your career?

My first job in economic development was in the Industrial Economic Research Division at Texas A&M University. This was 1955 so the focus was totally on manufacturing...recruiting manufacturing, growing manufacturing, and retaining manufacturing. It was a very myopic view of what development was.

My next position was Assistant Director of the State of Texas Industrial Commission. And again, it wasn't economic development in any form or fashion. It was pure industrial and manufacturing attraction.

Next, I went to another pure industrial recruiting position in Wichita Falls, Texas, and [then] finally to Fort Worth, Texas.

It was not until I got into the chairs of AEDC, that I began to personally take a broader view of development. I had come to the realization that there were economic activities outside of manufacturing that impacted a community's economic wellbeing and quality of life.

So, I started seeking economic activities outside of traditional manufacturing while I was with the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce. I worked on bringing in hospitals and related healthcare providers and retail. It was the beginning of developing a broader perspective on just what economic development could be and [what] benefits [it could provide] to the community. Also, these other activities made the community more attractive to the manufacturing sector.

Many economic developers have come around to the fact that we are really in the community development business. We call it economic development, but the better practitioners today are looking at the broader view. You have to look particularly at the community's needs and the desires of the citizens. A local economic developer has to continuously ask, "What is missing from the private sector? What is missing from the public sector?" It can be retail, which I am involved with now. The emphasis of the company I'm with now is bringing retail into communities. But I believe that any economic activity should be considered. Any activity that is missing and needed [should be considered].

What economic development tools do you use for such projects?

For me, the primary job of economic development is marketing. I think you have to look at all the marketing tools that are available. Now, because of advances in computers, data storage, and geographic information systems, we now have more and better tools than we used to. There really is no excuse for a community—regardless of size or funding—not to have first-rate marketing materials.

How have financing tools changed throughout your career?

We also have many more financial tools now. When I started work in Texas, it was against the state's constitution to use any type of public financing for private ventures. That had to change. But it didn't change until 1979 when the constitution was amended, and the state allowed the use of incentives and financial tools such as tax increment financing and abatement. We were able to use community and public resources to attract industry, manufacturing, and whatever else we targeted. So, there has been a great deal of growth in the scope and types of tools that are available. I think that is across the board [and] not just in Texas. We work throughout the United States, and every state has an arsenal of financial tools.

Can you further describe your personal career path and how it evolved as economic development profession evolved?

As I said, I went to work for Texas A&M, and I worked there seven years. There was no one on the staff who had actual experience working in communities. All their backgrounds were academic. I decided that I wanted a career path that would give me some economic development exposure at both the state level and the local level. Then I hoped return to A&M with that experience under my belt. I was very fortunate, because I worked two years with the state of Texas and then two years at Wichita Falls, which was a city [with a] population of 115,000. The business community had raised \$3,000,000 for a privately funded industrial development program.

Then, I went back to Texas A&M. I was at A&M less than ninety days, when Sprague Electric Company—an electronics company out of North Adams, Massachusetts—located a plant in Wichita Falls. Sprague made me an offer I couldn't refuse and they hired me. For two years I did their location analysis for new plants. I did searches in France, Puerto Rico, Mexico, on Native American Reservations, and in the United States. I got exposure to that side of the business...looking for plant sites.

Then, I had the opportunity to come to Fort Worth. I took the economic development job here. I really didn't look at that as a real change in direction, but I ended up staying twenty years at the Fort Worth Chamber. [I spent] four [years] in economic development and sixteen [years] as manager.

When I left the chamber [of commerce], I started a consultant firm with the former mayor of Fort Worth. [I] eventually ended up with Buxton, which is the company I'm with now. We are very large for a research organization. We have over one hundred employees, and we have several product lines in location and customer research. I work with communities throughout the country on a product called Community ID. It is a retail recruiting tool for communities. We help them develop a marketing strategy, implement it, and attract retail. I've been doing this since 2000. Some of my longtime friends in economic development think that I have sold out and have gone over to "the dark side."

What skills did you acquire over the course of your career?

For many years I had an assistant or a secretary that did most of the clerical work. Now, with the way we've evolved, I've had to learn computer skills. I've adapted to them and function at an acceptable level. I also had to learn about Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and how to utilize those.

What challenges have you had to overcome throughout your career?

Let me be very specific in one of them. I was President of AIDC in 1979 and 1980. I became convinced—as I went from secretary to treasurer to first vice president and then president—that the bylaws were antiquated. They had originally been formed in 1926 when AIDC was a committee of the US Chamber of Commerce. They had been amended over the years. I proposed to the executive committee that we rewrite the bylaws. I wanted to completely rewrite the bylaws, and I lost that battle on a vote of eight-to-seven. The executive committee wanted to keep the current bylaws and just make changes. Then, we drafted the changes. We had 117 changes to the bylaws, if you can imagine that. We took them to the annual convention in Atlanta, because the membership had to vote on the bylaw changes. The most contentious proposal was changing the name from American Industrial Development Council to American Economic Development Council. That concerned a lot of our old members who did not share the philosophy that economic development was broader and did include industrial development or manufacturing development. In fact, I had a petition from forty members in California that said they would resign if that new name change went through. It was a very contentious time and there were very deep-seated emotions. We went to the convention in Atlanta, and I knew it was going to be a hard fight. We engaged a professional parliamentarian to help guide the meeting. We did it in an orderly and professional manner.

The first change on the agenda was the name change. It was a lengthy meeting, and people were speaking both for and against it, but it passed. When it passed, we were able to vote on the other 116 changes. Only one failed, so 116 of the 117 were passed. The basic structure and the nature of the organization were changed and I believe improved. I was the last volunteer AIDC President. To that point, the volunteer leader had been called “president.” We changed that to “chairman” and made the top staff position the president. We had one proposed bylaw change that failed. It was to give more discretionary powers to the paid executive. The members obviously didn't want it, so it failed by a wide margin.

AIDC/AEDC was a volunteer-run organization with staff support. I view IEDC as a staff-run organization with volunteer support. So, it was a change in the nature of the organization. AEDC was way less involved with government lobbying and legislative efforts. We were private-sector oriented. In fact, if you looked at some of those early materials, AIDC had a maximum membership of 125, and you had to be a department head in a business. They considered chambers of commerce to be in the private sector.

Most economic developers who work in the community are always challenged by volunteer leadership. [The leaders] very seldom have the necessary understanding to make decisions about economic development. Getting volunteers educated enough to make wise decisions about economic development for their communities is a tough challenge.

Can you give more detail about your role in AIDC/AEDC? How did your involvement in the organization affect your own career development?

When I was working at Texas A&M, AIDC had their annual meeting in Dallas. I requested to attend the meeting, but my request was turned down. So, I went on my own, paid my own way, and attend my first AIDC meeting. That was probably 1957 or 1958. I knew very few attendees but decided that I was going to get actively involved in AIDC primarily for the networking opportunities.

I joined and then started to participate in their activities. The first chance I really had to make an impact was when Fort Worth submitted bid and was selected to host the 1976 annual meeting. I was the chairman of the local organizing committee. At that time, AIDC had financial stress, and fortunately we had a very successful conference and put money into the bank for AIDC. Therefore, I got the attention of the leaders. In the old days, before the bylaw changes I described, the past five presidents served as the nominating committee for AIDC officers. Of those five, I knew three of them well. After we made money for AIDC, they asked me if I wanted to go into the chairs, so I did. I started as treasurer, then [went] to secretary, [and] then up the chairs. That's the way I got involved. When I was president, we made those changes. After I was president, I again had the opportunity to chair another local organizing committee and hold another conference for them. So I was actively involved in two annual conferences.

How did becoming involved affect your own career?

I've always thought that economic development is a networking business. I got to know a lot of economic developers from the United States and Canada by virtue of my involvement. I probably wouldn't have made these connections had I not been involved. Networking has been a primary value for my career.

How did you see AIDC/AEDC evolve, and why did it evolve the way that it did?

I think you have probably heard this if you've talked to a lot of the old AEDC people. We always looked at CUED as being the government branch or public section of economic development and AEDC being the private sector. To a great extent, that has been the case. IEDC has made strides to merge both the government and the private sector. If there has been a loser, I think it's the private sector because there is not nearly the emphasis placed on it in IEDC that we had in AEDC. We were big proponents of the role of private sector businesses in economic development, and I think that is not quite as strong of an agenda for IEDC. Perhaps it's a good thing to get both the public and the private sector together.

Were you involved with the merger at all?

I was indirectly [involved]. I taught thirty-seven sessions of the Basic Course at Texas A&M. We were the first Basic Course in the country. Georgia followed right after us. I was dean of the basic course for six sessions. I was also involved with some sixteen sessions of the Economic Development Institute in Oklahoma. There was concern [during] the merger how the roles of

those institutions were going to be treated in the new organization. So to that extent, I was involved in it...but not directly in a policy role.

What were the reasons for the merger?

There were several things. AEDC made some bad choices on staff. When you have a volunteer-run organization, you need good staff support. Some of the staff that we ended up with didn't have the depth of knowledge to be running that type of organization. They didn't have the experience level. I think that the organization itself got into trouble. The volunteer leadership didn't take command and make appropriate changes. AEDC was descending in influence at a time when CUED was ascending. For those directly involved, it seemed logical to combine them into one organization. There was a great deal of bitterness with some of the longtime AEDC members who felt that CUED got the better hand.

Did you see any positives or negatives coming out of the merger?

The people involved with AEDC were a pretty close-knit group, particularly after going through the chairs, so there was a lot of camaraderie. In fact, this past week I received emails from a half-dozen former chairs of AEDC. That has been lost and diminished a great deal.

I was also on the AIDC Board when we set up the certification program. The board had long discussions on what the certification was all about. After the board passed it, the President at that time was Bob Cassell from Georgia. He said that all of the board members could be grandfathered and would be certified without taking the exam. However, he challenged us not to grandfather ourselves in, but to take the exam instead. The first test was given in Denver in 1972 at the annual meeting on a Sunday morning. There were no certified economic developers before that, so they took individuals from the academic community to judge and certify the first CIDs. There were three of us on the board that were dumb enough to take the exam. The others were grandfathered. That was kind of an interesting experience.

When the merger happened CUED didn't have a certification program, so many of their elected volunteers had never been certified. Most of us from AEDC were CID/CEDs and there an annual meeting of certified economic developers. But that went by the wayside with the merger because it would have been just former AEDC members in attendance. Now it is called the Leadership Conference—not a CEcD conference—so that they could involve those that came out of CUED.

What has happened with IEDC since the merger?

I think it's strengthened. It's a better organization because of the merger. I think the staff leadership is definitely stronger and has brought a lot to the table. Sometimes I feel that IEDC is too close to doing government work and trying to get grants, but that is just because of my background. It is a far stronger organization now.

What are the current trends in economic development? Will they carry into the future?

The first Basic Course that we held had no females. I think it was all males for the first six or seven courses. The first lady to attend the Texas Basic Course was in about 1960. In the last session that I taught, which was in 2003, 63% of the class was female. That has been a very dramatic change in the nature of the business.

Do you see any emerging trends in economic development?

I think there will continue to be more emphasis on total community development, whether that means healthcare, retail, manufacturing, or transportation. It will be much broader in scope than just the old narrow and myopic industrial development.

How do you see the IEDC organization changing in the future?

We have regional economic development organizations, like the Southern Economic Development Council (SEDC) that are very parochial in their attitude. I don't know if it will ever happen, but it would be better if IEDC had a more prominent role in the regional organizations. But, that may have to evolve over a period of time. I think it would strengthen IEDC to have that type of role.

IEDC is doing a better job providing educational needs for the practitioner and of being more concerned with the daily needs of members. It's often said that if you go to Billings, Wyoming, there will be an association of pastors and preachers, because they have enough of them in the community to have an organization. But, there will probably only be one economic developer. That individual is out there fighting a daily battle alone, and they have to be equipped with a lot of tools. I think it is, and will continue to be, a mission for IEDC to provide those tools. You don't have an internal support network when you are out there by yourself.

Do you have any other anecdotes from your career that you'd like to share?

No. The role of the economic developer will continue evolving and changing, and I think it's up to IEDC to be cognizant and aware of it.

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