Can you give an overview of how you have seen the economic development profession evolve over the course of your career?

There has indeed been a significant evolution—perhaps even a transformation—in the profession. My career began in the early-1970s during the “social justice era”. This was a time of great social upheaval in the U.S., characterized by the civil rights movement, affirmative action and a host of other Federal legislative initiatives. Many of America’s cities were experiencing great civil strife, which brought to the forefront the recognition of just how important America’s cities are to the nation’s economic and social well-being. I believe that was one of the defining factors of economic development in the 1970s and 1980s. Prior to that, economic development was pretty much the domain of southeastern states raiding industry from the Northeast.

Can you talk about the expanding role of women in the economic development field?

Like most other professions, it has been a predominantly male-dominated profession. When I began my career in economic development, there were very few women holding the top positions in our field. One of my first major achievements was the creation of the Greater Washington Business Resource Center – the nation’s first one-stop-shop for minority businesses and small businesses. While there were several leaders involved, I was the only woman. My next major post was as the inaugural director of Montgomery County, MD’s first economic development department. Again, I was one of very few women in the State of Maryland holding a cabinet post, and of course, I was very young at the same time. In addition to Montgomery County, Fairfax County’s economic development department was led by April Young, who later also was elected president of CUED. Two other counties in Northern Virginia – somewhat rural – had women in their top economic development posts. We were a rarity in the United States, perhaps because we were in the National Capital region which was at the vanguard of social change. For the most part, economic development was dominated by middle-aged, Caucasian men. But through the social justice era, more and more doors opened for the emergence of woman and minorities in the profession.

Were you treated like an equal?

In terms of my bosses, yes, most definitely, first because of the positions I held and as time progressed, because of my track record and standing in the communities I represented. In the beginning of my career, as a young woman, I understand why I may not have been treated as an “equal” by the CEO of a Fortune 500 firm. Being a diligent observer of this behavior helped me develop and hone my skills to effectively deal with Chief Elected Officials and Chief Executive Officers, who represented the types of individuals that I worked with on a regular basis. Over time, I was judged by my successes; in the final analysis, that is what mattered the most. Economic development then was about keeping a scorecard and with the help of my elected and
private sector leaders, we were able to achieve some impressive results. One of the greatest advantages for me was having many mentors – I was very young when my economic development career began and was fortunate to have had great mentors.

**Did you feel like you had to work harder to prove yourself?**

Of course, it was an era for women when we all had to work harder to prove ourselves.

**How has the development of technology changed the economic development field?**

The impact of technology on the economic development field has been immeasurable. First of all, it helped to advance the profession by providing tools to communicate and work on par with the private sector. Additionally, technology has helped to globalize economic development because it has broken down barriers and borders. Technology is a fundamental underpinning of effective economic development today. It is not only internal to an economic development organization, in terms of having the most advanced, sophisticated software and analytical abilities, but no one operates today without technology. Economic development started with a “filing cabinet system” of relatively small, personal networks. Obviously, the grasp and reach of economic development has expanded exponentially because of technology.

**Can you describe your personal career path? How did you become involved in economic development?**

My first job after college was helping to start a small minority business one-stop-shop in DC called the Greater Washington Business Resource Center. I really enjoyed it. I worked a lot with small businesses and large companies to help them with minority procurement and other related issues in the nation’s capital. I became the first Director of Economic Development for Montgomery County, Maryland. It was a big deal, as I was able to do some very innovative things, including helping to create the first research and development park in the U.S. devoted exclusively to biotechnology. This was in the late-1970s and early-1980s. During my tenure, we were able to land major firms and federal research labs and work to expand funding for the federal labs that already were there. A major goal was to shift some of Montgomery County’s tax base burden from residential to the commercial and industrial sectors, and we were able to achieve this in five short years. You had to be very enterprising in those days, and wear many hats.

From there, I was recruited to Phoenix in 1985 to start the first public-private partnership for the city of Phoenix, which evolved into the Greater Phoenix Economic Development Council. Then, I was recruited to Baltimore in 1997 to do the same thing. In the course of my work, I was very active nationally and internationally. I’ve had a great economic development career, even as a consultant. Today, I am working on cutting-edge economic development issues for both private and public sector clients and enjoying the flexibility and range of projects without the political constraints that come with serving in a top economic development post.

**Can you talk a little bit more about your international experience?**
My international experience has been extensive, and I am proud of the many foreign companies I worked with to help locate in the markets that I represented. Early on, it was a challenge to meet with the executives of foreign firms in Europe and Asia, as they were unaccustomed to dealing with women in positions such as mine. It was clear that unlike American business at that time, it would be important to develop relationships with these firms over the long term, and that became a major focus of my international business attraction practice. For example, with one Japanese firm, I visited them over the course of five years before they located the first Japanese pharmaceutical R&D lab in the U.S. When I first called on them, they said they had no plans to locate in the U.S. In addition, many regions from throughout Europe, Asia and North Africa were visiting the United States to learn more about economic development, and the organizations that I led were hosts to many of these delegations. They wanted to learn more about economic development and a particular area of interest was how we were able to bring diverse interests and groups together to focus on common goals. It is very important that we as economic developers share our knowledge, because it is to everyone’s benefit to have healthy economies throughout the world.

Who are you referring to when you say “they” are interested in learning about economic development?

They refer to the many individuals, local, provincial and national officials from nations throughout the world, including countries in Europe, Asia, North and South America.

And where are you now?

I’m based in Phoenix, Arizona. I have my own consulting practice.

What skills did you acquire over time? Did certain skills become more important as your career progressed?

“People skills” are number one. Everything in business and in life is all about relationships. I think understanding that early on was very critical.

Secondly, strategic thinking is absolutely critical. In economic development you are trying to identify the best opportunities and develop strategies to optimize those opportunities. Also, it is important to be analytical and have the ability to make decisions which are based on limited information.

As with most areas of business or any profession, the ability to be flexible and agile is paramount. Although we hear about the importance of these qualities in the private sector, nowhere are they more important than in economic development. As economic developers, we are constantly challenged with multiple, competing and often conflicting priorities. As leaders in this field, we need to make decisions fairly rapidly and assimilate change.

In addition, I believe that one of the most important skills for success in economic development is the commitment to help people and communities be the best that they can be. The economic
developer needs to work with people in other organizations—whether they are in government, business, cultural, or the nonprofit sector—as well as your own.

**How did you develop the people skills?**

I think skills develop over time, with a lot of on-the-job training. When we are young, we tend to just forge ahead and sometimes not recognize that we need to bring others along with us. No one has perfect people skills. The economic development executive is a change agent, and change often makes people very uncomfortable. So it’s critical to reach out, bring people together, and make sure that everyone is moving in general alignment. Over time I have developed people skills, specifically, how to foster cooperation and collaboration between and among individuals and groups. The Greater Phoenix Economic Council (GPEC) was one of the first organizations to really define that for the new wave of economic development in the 1990s. Economic development morphed from “smokestack chasing” to focusing more on issues like workforce development, competitiveness, and the linkage between higher education, economic development, and economic vitality. Bringing multiple actors together towards a common goal, and focusing on how those shared values bring people together in the first place, is very important.

**What did you study to acquire the technical and analytical skills?**

Everybody processes information in a different way. I went to school at American University and I have Bachelors in Political Science with a Minor in International Relations. I have a Masters of Public Administration from George Washington University, and I have a Ph.D. in Public Administration from Arizona State. While the technical skills are acquired over time, I am unsure as to how the analytical skills develop. I attribute mine to my education and work and life experience.

**What are some challenges that you have had to overcome throughout your career?**

When blazing new trails, there are always challenges to overcome. The most significant one is the natural tension that exists between the status quo and change. Economic development is about change – improvement over the long term – using different approaches and methods to create new and better opportunities for all. In many cases – certainly in my career – many of these new approaches were innovative in their time. Again, change can make others uncomfortable. In general, one of the biggest challenges for economic development executives and professionals is understanding that people are not always open to change…even if they say they are. It takes time to bring people together and forge a common vision and sense of purpose and direction. Patience is a very important virtue in economic development, because bringing people together means process can become as important as progress.

Another challenge is always budgeting. You never have the financial resources that you need, so making the most of what you have is critical. When I worked on the Shady Grove Life Sciences Center, it was a piece of county-owned land in the middle of nowhere. Today it is an incredibly
thriving area that has attracted some of the most incredible biotechnology and life sciences firms from around the world. I think having a bold vision is very important, and getting the buy-in among people takes time. When you have government involved, it takes maybe more time than one would want. Economic development means keeping lots of people happy most of the time. So that’s always a challenge for anybody, no matter what their walk of life is.

**How did you see CUED evolve throughout your participation?**

CUED was at the vanguard of urban economic and social issues, and helped to bring about Federal policy that supported the well-being of America’s cities. It was my good fortune to serve as Chairman from 1992 to 1994. CUED was always invited by the White House for policy papers. Every incoming administration wanted CUED to weigh-in on the major urban issues and help define them. CUED’s members enjoyed tremendous camaraderie – we were fighting the same battles, just from different places. Most people involved in CUED were urban-oriented and conferences and meetings were lively and informative. We always learned a lot. But like most other organizations, it ebbed and flowed in terms of its finances. When Jeff Finkle became president, CUED entered a new and important era. I think it’s incredible that Jeff has been at the helm and has led not only CUED, but also the merger of CUED and AEDC into what now is IEDC.

**Did you have any personal involvement with AEDC?**

No, I was not a member. When I was Chairman of CUED, I helped to initiate one of the early discussions with AEDC about the potential of merging.

**What was your role as Chair in CUED?**

Well, you don’t just become Chair overnight. First, I was head of Membership, [then] Marketing, [and then] the Conference Committee. One was required to work in different areas of CUED to understand the organization. If you were so fortunate to be picked by your peers to be Chairman, you worked just as hard. You conferred with the President of CUED, but also with Board members on various issues [like] conferences and the daily issues that come up for any organization. It is fairly hands-on.

**Throughout your time with CUED, what were the most pressing economic development issues?**

Economic recessions for sure. Workforce development was a huge issue, [as were] revitalization and brownfields. [It was] a lot of the same issues that we are focused on today, including: incentives and global competition. Globalization wasn’t as defined at that time, but we knew it would pose both opportunities and threats to the vitality of all American states and communities.

**Can you talk about the role of incentives in the field?**

The role of incentives in the field are important, as evidenced by the mega-incentive deals that are taking place throughout our country. I do not see the role of incentives diminishing as we
enter this post-crisis era, where costs reign supreme for companies. To reform the use of incentives, federal policy is needed, and I do not see Congress addressing economic development incentives in the foreseeable future. In years past, there were some compacts between states that lasted a while. New York and New Jersey at one time had an agreement to not use incentives to raid each other’s industry. That lasted as long as it took for one of the major financial institutions to move 3,000 jobs from New York to New Jersey.

Today, most governors are on the hunt for major private capital investments and job-producing projects, and many of them have expanded their economic development incentive toolkits during this recession. All things considered, incentives do play a role and incentives have gotten bigger and bolder in some states. If you look at some of the “mega deals” of the 1980s and 1990s, most of them had significant state and local incentives. This included not only tax credits and job training, but significant cash incentives or rebates.

To the extent that there is no national policy or regulations about incentives, we certainly will not see states voluntarily agreeing to not use incentives to foster economic development. The challenge is that states are competing with the national treasuries of foreign governments, many of which offer very significant incentives.

**What was the extent of your involvement with elected government officials?**

The economic development executive must work with the Chief Elected Officials of their communities and states. In my posts, I worked very closely with mayors, county executives, supervisors, governors and the Federal delegations of the states that I worked in. Elected officials are central to the success of economic development organizations. They are the elected “head of state” for a city, county, etc. Having positive and productive working relationships with elected government officials is imperative to the effectiveness of the economic developer. Some of my best mentors were chief elected officials. They also were my bosses, even when I reported to a private sector board. In all of my posts, I worked very closely with the elected government officials. They were vital to the success of the organizations that I led.

**Do you work with elected officials today at your private practice?**

Yes I do, especially in connection with economic development strategic planning and business location projects.

**Were you involved with the merger of CUED and AEDC?**

No, I was not. Jeff would reach out to me and keep me informed, but I was not at the table negotiating it.

**What brought about the initial merger discussions?**

We had two organizations, and a relatively small profession, [so we thought] it might make sense to create one organization. It ebbed and flowed. At some points AEDC reached out to us, and part of it was financially driven. Likewise, at some points, we reached out to AEDC and in part,
it was financially driven. We saw that, especially during recessions, governments typically cut their economic development and training. At that time, there were not as many private, or public-private, economic development organizations. So, we saw the handwriting on the wall. But, not everyone agreed that one, strong organization would be mutually beneficial. Yet, it ultimately that came about. Those kinds of things take time.

**What are some of the positives and negatives that came out of the merger?**

First of all, let’s start with the positives. To be honest, I really don’t know what the negatives are. We’re now into the tenth year of the organization, right?

One positive is that we have a very distinctive brand. There is one International Economic Development Council. In my view, and this is how I would define my view of the world, there is enormous strength in a group of many working together as one. Having a single economic development organization is extremely beneficial to the communities, states and countries that we represent. Having the combined resources and the power of a much larger membership—which means we have more people, more ideas, and more opportunities—is a huge strength.

In terms of the negative, I’m sure there was discomfort in the beginning, but I’m sure that is totally non-existent and has completely dissipated. Again, we’re going to mark our tenth year.

**Do you think the merger was inevitable?**

Yes. If you take a look at patterns of businesses, and even nonprofits, there is the tendency to concentrate a specific sector or “space” into fewer and fewer players. In the case of economic development, that space is pretty well-defined and it made sense to have one major player in this niche. It was only a matter of time.

**Was there anyone who served as a mentor or someone who inspired you?**

Well there are so many…where do I begin? One of my greatest mentors was my boss, Charles Gilchrist, who was the County Executive of Montgomery County. Another was John Dealy, who was CEO of Fairchild Industries. I could give you a list of a hundred.

Charlie Gilchrist, who is deceased, was the County Executive of Montgomery County, Maryland. He was one of the most phenomenal elected officials and human beings. He was wonderful, and we were able to do some incredible things together. We had some very innovative accomplishments. He was just a wonderful person. I’ve had many other elected officials as mentors, but I’m just going to name him because I don’t want anyone to be offended. I’ve had scores and scores of private sector executives who were my mentors.

**Did you mentor anyone in the field?**

Yes, many. I am very proud that many of the people I have worked with continue to stay in touch. Some of them are in economic development, and others are in different professions. I felt that one of my most important roles was to help with the professional and personal development
of the people that worked with me. They tell me that their economic development experience was one of the most rewarding experiences in their lives.

**Where do you see IEDC now, and where do you see it going in to the future? Do you have any predictions or see any emerging trends?**

IEDC is in an important place to provide information, ideas, exchanges, and professional training. I know that we offer technical assistance, and that we’re called upon to help in various cities. I think that role is going to continue to increase. Again, there is huge strength in a group of many working together as one. I see IEDC as a continued thought leader. Equally important, IEDC will help organizations or governments put those thoughts into actionable ideas. I firmly believe that IEDC will continue to flourish and will be called upon even more to help governments—and not just our own governments in the United States—make more intelligent and purposeful economic development decisions.

**How do you think globalization will affect the field?**

Globalization is irrevocably impacting all aspects of business and economic development is no exception. First, competition for a high standard of living, the best human capital, financial capital, innovation and new jobs has proliferated throughout the world. We all know this of course, but it cannot be overemphasized. More importantly, globalization has opened up entirely new vistas for us in terms of economic development ideas, strategies and programs. We certainly don’t have an exclusive lock on the best economic development approaches and ideas, and I think it’s very important for us to recognize that better solutions, greater innovations can be found on other continents, and not just in the United States. If we are in a local town of 50,000 people, there is another town of 50,000 on in another nation that is looking to create a stronger economy for themselves and they very well may have come up with an incredibly successful solution. For us who practice economic development in the U.S., we must focus on the basics and make sure that our communities and states are competitive and offer the attributes and amenities that are attractive for the best talent and high quality jobs.

Another important recognition is that in today’s globalized world, everyone wants their share of the pie. As more of the world’s population becomes “middle class,” with the attendant aspirations, we are compelled to work even harder to keep what we have and to maintain the standard of living and quality of life in our communities. We can’t take anything for granted anymore. At the same time, we can help educate and share information about the economic development profession and practice with communities around the world. In so doing, we can help define a greater good for everybody, because it’s in everybody’s best interest that we are all healthy from an economic standpoint. I see economic developers as global citizens who generously share ideas and know-how with one another – not just with fellow U.S. practitioners but also with economic development professionals throughout the world. Part of this is that we should be reaching out more aggressively to help train and develop the world’s economic development profession.
Where would you say the main competition is coming from in the next decade or two?

With the rate of acceleration of globalization and technology, we will see competition coming from unexpected places. The entire world is moving toward economic development and nation building. Five of the eleven fastest growing economies in 2011 are found in Sub-Saharan Africa. Of course, China will continue to strengthen its position as an economic superpower, but we also will see the ascension of other nations in Africa, Central and South America and Asia as well. Everybody around the world wants a better standard of living for themselves.

The United States needs to get its act together and work even harder to address the myriad social, economic and educational challenges that we are confronted with. While we still are considered the world’s most powerful nation and strongest economy, our position vis-à-vis the rest of the world is changing. We not only need to keep our competitive edge, but we have a special obligation to prepare economic development professionals globally…and not only the ones in the US. It is important that we share knowledge and know-how to help practitioners across the world to better understand not only the local implications of what they are doing, but also the global implications of their policies and programs.

How has the most recent economic recession challenged the economic development field?

The problem with recessions is that they tend to retract or completely obliterate the progress that is made in non-job-related economic development innovation and programs. Because of the Great Recession of 2007 and its continued lingering effects, every governor, every mayor, and every county administrator wants to focus on job creation – in many cases, without regard to cost. More than 3 million American jobs have been lost in the last couple of years, and based on all projections and forecasts, many of those jobs have vanished forever. The recession still exists in many communities across the United States, and the inclination is to go on the hunt for the big projects. The challenge for most of America’s communities is that other than renewable energy, defense and automotive related projects, the bulk of new jobs being created by American firms are located overseas. In recessionary periods, we’re forced to focus almost exclusively on short-term fixes instead of more rational, strategic and long-term solutions that will bring about the desired changes we need. Many people may deny this, but I have experienced it firsthand in every recession that has occurred during my career, and it is a definite reality.

So, in my view, recessions are always a backward wave for economic development. During the boom times, we made significant advances in demonstrating that there was more to economic development than job creation …it’s about workforce quality and an increased standard of living. All of that goes out the window when you have high unemployment. Politicians want to see jobs created. How are we going put people back to work? My response typically has been, this is economic development, not economic miracles. And in times of recessions, everyone wants the economic miracle. As we all know, there is no such thing.

Do you have any other stories or anecdotes you would like to share?

There are many stories I could share, but you don’t’ have time to hear them. Let’s just say that I have had such a blessed career, in good times and bad.
I think the big point in terms of all of our stories is that not only are we evolving in our own community and our own nation, but throughout the entire world as well. We have to find a way to work together. It’s the only way we’re going to ultimately have a world that flourishes and that provides an opportunity for everybody and where conflicts are minimized. We have to be global citizens. In my mind, the most effective way to resolve many of the issues confronting the world is through economic development. People want a better standard of living for themselves and their families. And I think economic development is the key to ultimately achieving world peace.