

## **Mr. Jack Corrigan**

Interview Conducted with Tye Libby on November 24, 2010

### **How have you seen the economic development profession evolve or change over the course of your career?**

I began in the 1960s, and there was no economic development profession. The economic development profession was in its infancy. Development around the country was led by utility companies and real estate professionals. There have been many changes over these last fifty years. Of course, one of the big changes was in our economy. It changed from an industrial economy to an information economy and then to a service economy. That had a large impact on the kind of economic development projects that were built.

In the 1960s most state governments were not highly active in economic development and neither were most cities. Since then, both state and local governments have become incredibly involved. The role of the public elected official has changed dramatically. Back in the 1960s, economic development was not at the forefront of the agendas of public officials. That has dramatically changed. The elected official has become the public entrepreneur now. That's a major change. There's hardly any elected official today that doesn't see economic development as a major part of his or her role. Those are some of the big changes I've seen over the years, and they have been all for the good.

### **As an economic developer, what was your interaction with the public officials you speak of?**

I was the Regional Director of EDA from 1972 to 1982. Then, I went to Washington from 1982 to 1985 to be in charge of the National Grant Program. I then went back to Philadelphia as Regional Director from 1985 to 1998. When I became Regional Director in 1972, there was a change in the legislation regarding the Economic Development Administration. The EDA received significant Congressional funding for grants to both states and cities for economic development planning purposes. And, practically overnight, every state government received a modest planning grant from the EDA. Almost every one of them set up an economic development office, and it was the first office for almost all of them. I believe the legislation was passed in 1974. Also, virtually every large city received a separate grant for setting up an economic development office. That piece of legislation was a great impetus to the development of the economic development profession.

CUED was beginning their training programs at that time. The programs were built on those grants and CUED was assisting with their implementation. They were a very close partner with the EDA.

### **What was your assigned EDA region?**

I was the Director of the Philadelphia Office, and I covered the area which was then Federal Regions One, Two, and Three. This included the thirteen states from Maine down to Virginia,

West Virginia, and then Washington, DC. However, it also included Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. It was the largest territory in terms of population. About thirty percent of the country's population was in one region.

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

It was an unusual path, to say the least. My undergraduate degree was in Latin and Greek, and my graduate degree was in philosophy and theology. I spent thirteen years as a Catholic priest. In 1969, I got my first job with the EDA as a Civil Rights Officer. I had been very active in the civil rights movement as a priest, so I was familiar with the legislative process. It was actually a fairly smooth transition. I was headquartered in Washington, DC, and that was a great experience in terms of getting to view the EDA closely. I wasn't immediately involved in economic development, because I was doing civil rights work. But at the same time, I was learning the agency programs and philosophy.

Within two years, I applied for the position of Deputy Regional Director in Philadelphia and was offered the job. Then, my boss retired about four or five months after I arrived. So I became Regional Director a little less than three years after I entered the agency. My background and training as a Catholic priest, though not in economic development, had involved me in leadership, organizing, planning, and motivating people to get things done. As a Catholic priest, you're in a volunteer organization where basically all the people doing the work are unpaid parishioners. You have to learn how to motivate them, because if you don't do it right, you're not going to get the job done. So, I think I received a wonderful training. Those were the skills that assisted me as an economic development professional.

**So interpersonal skills were particularly important to your work in the economic development field?**

Yes, exactly. But there were a lot of things I had to learn in the economic development field. Among them, the whole world of finance was something I really had to learn a lot about.

**What financing changes did you see in the economic development field throughout your career?**

There has been a great change in financing. When we began, all the financial tools that the profession had weren't being utilized. For example, the EDA had a direct loan program that they used to fund companies who would then create jobs. They would often be related to other EDA grants like locating a business in an EDA industrial park. But it puzzled me, because this was a program that was very little-used across the country. When our program in Philadelphia started, we found ourselves loaning around \$50 million of the national loan capacity. We wound up using probably sixty or eighty percent of the whole national budget in our office. This was because, in general, the economic development professionals were not as active in using this great program.

In the 1970s, we were very active in using our money to set up Revolving Loan Funds. We began setting up these programs in many cities and states during the early 1970s. At that time we had significant grant money.

I remember one particular anecdote. It was probably the early-1970s and the President and CFO of Allegheny Ludlum, a big steel company, came to my office in Philadelphia. They had two major facilities in New York State. They said they were going to close those facilities, and that there would be several hundred jobs lost. We were able to work with a consortium of employees of these two companies, and we made a \$10 million grant to the state of New York. In turn, the state loaned the \$10 million to this new company, ALTEC. Jobs were saved and added and that fund, which was started back in the 1970s with a \$10 million grant, is still run by the state. It probably has \$60 or \$70 million in it now, and it is functioning fine.

I think the Revolving Loan Funds were one of the great tools that we used. It was a learning process, and in the early days, most of my contemporaries were not as involved in the finance area as they should have been. Think of all the financing tools used today in public-private partnerships. They make such a difference in terms of getting projects done.

### **As Regional Director, did you ever have to go to Capitol Hill to fight for funding?**

Yes. Funding was always an enormous problem. I became Regional Director in 1972. In fourteen of the next eighteen years, our agency did not receive appropriations in the President's budget. There were fourteen years of Republican administration, and we were \$0 every year. It was an enormous battle.

I was a career Regional Director. During that time, Assistant Secretaries did not stay very long at EDA, because it wasn't a very popular program within the Republican Administration. Appointees did not see this as a place where they were going to make a big mark. So, when they arrived, they were already looking for their next job. As a result, the average tenure of a Regional Director was about a year and a half. We had new people coming in all the time. As political appointees, they were very skeptical of the agency.

I saw my role as accepting their agenda while trying to lead them to appreciate what EDA was doing. Over the years, I know that actually worked. But it was very difficult. The members of the House of Representatives were our biggest supporters, and even the Republicans on our committees. Since they were Congressmen, they were closer to the people and their problems. Invariably, even newly elected Republicans saw the value of promoting economic development. Ultimately Congress would fund us every single year, even though we were not funded in the President's budget. But it was always a struggle.

Our annual funding with EDA was roughly \$300 million per year. But during an eighteen month period in 1976 we received an appropriation of \$6 billion for what was called the Local Public Works Program. That was an anti-recessionary program. Along with standard economic development programs, it funded all sorts of public works projects—including public buildings, fire houses, and city halls—which EDA would not ordinarily have funded.

**So did most of your experience come from the Civil Rights movement, or did you gain experience on the job?**

It was developed on the job. And as I said, I think I was fortunate. Going back to my role as a priest, I was comfortable dealing at fairly high levels, and I found it interesting. I enjoyed that kind of work. That was a good experience, and I developed very good relationships with Congressional staff, both Republicans and Democrats. I was also fortunate that the Republicans in the Northeast tended to be more moderate than in the rest of the country.

**Did you have a particular congressman who was an important ally?**

Yes. Congressman Bud Shuster from Pennsylvania. He was head of the Public Works Committee for a number of years, and he was a very staunch Republican. But he had a high regard for EDA because his district was a fairly depressed area. As a result, he saw many wonderful EDA projects there, and he promoted EDA projects.

Another Congressman was Sherwood Boehlert. He was from the Mohawk Valley in New York State--a fairly depressed area. I was recently looking in the Congressional Record in 1994 and he spoke about EDA and me: "I cannot speak for the rest of the country, but I will tell you what. The Regional Administrator of EDA in Philadelphia, a fellow named Jack Corrigan— incidentally, I happen to be a Republican, and proud of it, and he happens to be a Democrat—I have a relationship with him. I almost say my daily prayers to him, because he is the guy who dedicates his role and his staff to communities to help communities pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. And that is critically important."

Well, as you can imagine, I had a very good working relationship with him. He represented an area that was highly depressed, and EDA made significant investments in his area, and they were successful.

**You spoke of your yearly funding battles, but what were some of the other challenges you had to overcome throughout your career?**

Well, as I said earlier, dealing with new administrations was difficult. When the Clinton Administration took office in 1990 I thought, "Now we're really going to get funding, and we're going to have a wonderful experience." But there was still a lot of skepticism of EDA. I remember being at a meeting in Washington, and all the regional directors of EDA were there. Around the table, the Democrat appointees were talking to us and treating us almost as adversaries. One of them said, "OK, now you guys have been giving money to your friends, and now we're going to give money to our friends." Of course, we spoke up and said, "Hey, we are career professionals. That's not what we do. We're not in the game of giving money to friends. We're in the business of creating jobs."

The political leadership of both parties was often skeptical of the agency, and that surprised me. I really thought, after all the years of having to do the best to persuade the Republican political

leadership, that it would be a much easier task once the Democrats took office. It didn't actually work out that way. They both needed to learn by experience.

One of my key roles was representing all the regional directors at meetings in DC because I was geographically closest. I tried to accept political leaders where they were, but I saw my role as trying to gradually bring them around. It was perhaps the biggest challenge that I had.

**Were there any other boarder challenges that you'd like to address?**

We were always trying to adapt our programs to meet those broader challenges. The day-to-day activities were dealing with local community issues like high unemployment rates. Ultimately, most of my time was occupied in trying to respond to the needs of the region that covered thirteen states and thousands of municipalities. There was a lot of work that we did at the local level, and that occupied most of our time.

**How maneuverable did you find such a large organization?**

Implementing new programs always required legislative actions and that happened fairly slowly. But our agency was very small. Our budget was only \$300 million, and we had a very small staff. The highest number of employees we had might have been over a thousand, but it has shrunk now to about 200.

Our agency was a very "flat" organization, and I thought that was very effective. As the Regional Director I reported to the Assistant Secretary. And I set up a system where the field staff, which was composed of economic development representatives, reported directly to me. We could get a decision made in a very short time, because it only took communication between the field staff, me, and the headquarters. Usually, the Assistant Secretary delegated the decision making to one of his senior deputies. One of the men that I dealt with for years was a wonderful leader in the field of economic development, George Karras. He ran EDA's Grant Program for many years. I was fortunate to take over that job for three years from 1982 to 1985. He is absolutely one of the pioneers. I look up to him as one of the great leaders.

**You were involved with CUED, correct?**

Yes, I was. Not as intimately as the staff, but I had established a very good relationship. I knew Ed DeLuca, back in the very early days, and then Ken Fry. One of the regional EDA directors, Jim Peterson, became the head of CUED. And Jim is also a first-rate, wonderful person. We used CUED, for example, to run our regional conferences. That was one of the many things that CUED did. They basically did all of the logistics and did a magnificent job. They also saw this as a way of broadening their membership base because of their close relationship. So yes, we worked very closely with them.

And when I was EDA in Washington from 1982 to 1985, I was the person that, as head of the Grant Program, was basically negotiating the annual CUED grants. So I worked very closely with CUED and even more closely than I did when I was Regional Director.

### **How did you see CUED evolve over the years?**

I'm sure the people that are closer to it than I can tell you better, but when CUED began, its members were almost exclusively public officials. One of the most important things was getting private sector members involved in CUED. I think that was absolutely the right move. CUED had a membership of a couple hundred people. And now IEDC has several thousand. It has enormously evolved. Under Jeff Finkle, an international aspect of economic development has been introduced.

Also, CUED's role of establishing formal training programs, and rigorous certificate programs, was a very important part of the evolution of CUED and IEDC.

### **What was your role in CUED?**

When I was in Washington from 1982 to 1985, I reviewed their grant applications and provided funds. When I was Regional Director, they worked closely with our office to help us with our regional conferences and activities like that. At the same time, I would be informally talking to the President of CUED about the organization's role in supporting legislative initiatives. Although their charter did not allow them to lobby, they did an awful lot of work that was close to that. They supported federal funding for economic development activities, and they worked with Congress. They did a lot of those things that were exceedingly important. They basically established a lot of those relationships.

Jim Peterson and I talked many times when he was Director of CUED. He spent a lot of time with the White House staff talking about CUED's priorities and trying to get support for legislation.

### **Were you a paid member of CUED?**

No, I was never a paid member of the organization. I was either the Regional Director for EDA or the Deputy Assistant Secretary in Washington. My recollection was that CUED gave the senior EDA staff the benefits of membership. We received all their publications, and that was done as a complementary thing.

### **What were some of the most pressing economic development issues throughout your career?**

Funding always seemed to be a very big issue, because as I said earlier, EDA often came close to losing its funding. EDA and CUED worked very closely on those issues with legislative leaders. CUED was a wonderful partner during all those days. It sounds very self-serving, but we were for many years, in a life or death struggle as to whether our organizations were going to continue. In the early days, CUED looked to EDA for funding, and without that funding they could not have survived. I remember Jim Peterson telling me that they were facing serious financial issues and [struggling to survive financially]. Obviously, those things may have been front-and-center over some of the broader programmatic things that CUED and EDA were both involved in.

**How did you present your case to Congress in order to receive funding for EDA? Were you able to show documentable success stories?**

We had research funding, and we actually commissioned studies to evaluate the effectiveness of EDA programs. We did that several times. It sounds self-serving to use your own funds to give a grant to someone to evaluate you. But we were very careful to choose organizations, like universities, that had independent respectability and were not simply going to give you an answer that you wanted to hear. And every single time the results were very positive about the effectiveness of the EDA program. I do think that helped a great deal. It certainly helped in terms of allowing Congress to continue its support of EDA over the years.

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

I was aware of that, but I was not involved in it.

**From talking to colleagues, do you know what brought about initial discussions of the merger?**

I wasn't close enough to really be able to comment on that.

**Were there any positives or negatives that you have noticed come out of the merger?**

In recent years, Jeff Finkle has been an outstanding leader in terms of handling the transition between CUED and IEDC. His clear awareness of promoting a much higher role for private sector members, and understanding the international aspect of it, has been exceedingly important.

**During your career, has there been anyone that inspired you?**

I would consider George Karras a mentor. We traveled together many times, and I learned a great deal from him. I think he was an outstanding leader. He personally had a great relationship with Congress. He was, of course, based in Washington all those years, and he knew all of the key congressional people and their staffs very well. That was one of his main roles...to work with them closely, to keep them well-informed, and to be on top of things. During many years, he was the person whom the Assistant Secretary would delegate, because he was in charge of the National Grant Program, to make decisions. I remember many times, when I had major projects, I would make a call to him and say, "This is what we'd like to do" and during the same conversation, he could give me a "green light." And that was extraordinary. In most federal bureaucracies you'd never be able to do that. But because we had a flat organization, we were able to get things done because of relationships like that.

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

Yes. One of the men that I hired back in 1975 as a research assistant was Neal Noyes. He worked in my office, and then he became the EDR in Virginia for many years. The State of Virginia has

a fund where the money from tobacco companies is used for economic development purposes. He left EDA, and he now runs that. I've stayed good friends with him over the years, and I think he would certainly say that he learned a lot from working with me over the years.

And there were others. When I came to Philadelphia in 1972, many members of the field staff that we had were older than I was. They were "old school" economic development professionals. They usually worked with a very small group of communities, and they tended to be fairly myopic in my view. And I considered my role to help them become more expansive and creative in the way in which they looked upon their role. I personally worked very closely with that group and I was successful in getting them to see their role more broadly than they had before. Even though they were a generation older than I was, I was indeed their mentor for a long time. And I know many of them would agree with that.

**From your perspective, where do you see IEDC now, and where do you see it going into the future?**

Clearly, IEDC is an important national leader in the whole economic development field. I believe that IEDC conferences and training programs are critical. They're critical things that the organization has done to develop leadership in the field. This also includes the magazine, because it serves as a repository of current economic development thinking. Both CUED and IEDC have had an incredibly important role in creating the whole economic development profession. The profession, as I said in the beginning, hardly existed back in the 1960s. I think that CUED and IEDC have basically created a whole profession. That may be one of the great achievements of IEDC today.

**How do you think the recession has impacted the economic development field in general?**

Of course, whenever there is a recession it just highlights the issues that are faced by communities all over the country. Although I do not deal with IEDC on a day-to-day basis, I'm still working as a consultant with many communities and helping to develop their projects. The need for an organization like IEDC is even greater today, because of the problems that communities are facing. Organizations such as IEDC have been extremely important.

I did work with IEDC for six months in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. They really have always been in the forefront of getting things done. I think their role, in terms of both being immediately involved in issues, and then in the broader role of their training and educational efforts, are outstanding.

**Are there any final stories or anecdotes from your career that you'd like to share?**

I'm just delighted that I've been able to work as closely with organizations like CUED and IEDC over the years. They were really great partners. In 1995, I was honored to receive the Ed DeLuca Lifetime Achievement Award from CUED. That was a great highlight in my life. I truly believe that it is a great privilege to be a professional in the economic development field. Your purpose is to help people create wealth in their own lives and in the lives of their community. You're

really helping people advance. I think there are very few other professions that offer the rewards of working to change people's lives.

One of the great things that we have seen over the years is that the communities that seem to work the best are ones where there is a culture of collaboration and a spirit of working together. I think that economic development professionals promote that kind of spirit and forward-thinking, and it's been a great privilege to have been a part of that.

**Speaking of collaboration, is there anything you want to add in regard to your efforts in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina?**

My work down there was focused on immediate problems and not long range solutions. In the Hurricane aftermath, we were trying to help people get housed. There is an enormous criticism on all sides for failures in Hurricane Katrina. There were two things I saw down there which were very encouraging. First, I worked very closely with the professionals from FEMA—the career FEMA employees—and I honestly never saw greater dedication. Ultimately, there were a lot of wrong decisions being made in Washington, but the day-to-day work of the FEMA staff was very impressive.

Second, the volunteer organizations—like the Salvation Army and the different church groups—made an enormously positive impact. In addition to FEMA, housing was largely provided by private sector organizations and church groups. They met the challenge of the time, and it was very inspirational to see that.

**Other than George Karras and Jim Peterson, is there anyone else you know of that I'd be interested in interviewing?**

The other person, I don't know if he's on your list or not, is Phil Singerman. He would be an interesting person to talk to. He was an excellent Assistant Secretary for EDA in the 1990s. Of course, he worked very closely with Jeff Finkle. I have seen him at different meetings in the last several years and I know that he's still active. He's an exceedingly intelligent professional and I know he would have some valuable insights. He's working in the technology field now, and I think you would benefit from talking with him.

Transcribed by Tye Libby on December 21, 2010

Rep. Boehlert's Speech on the House Floor commending Mr. Corrigan @ 1:02:29  
<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/videoLibrary/clip.php?appid=597411828>