

Competitive Edge

BY LORNA GENTRY

CEDT Connects Economic Developers to Businesses

To guarantee the high level of service provided by the VPs of economic development to Georgia's businesses, the DTAE in 1989 implemented the Certified Economic Developer Trainer (CEDT) program, a professional training program with high standards for certification.

"What we do is very dynamic," says Pete McDonald, a 1997 CEDT graduate and VP of economic development for Coosa Valley Technical College. "We have to change as the challenges change," he says, and it's through the CEDT program that economic developers are trained to respond to the ongoing needs of businesses.

"Through CEDT, both technical college and Quick Start staff members are better able to market Georgia communities as location sites for businesses and to excel at training the workforce for all kinds of manufacturing and service industries," says Sandra Morris, Quick Start's director of performance technology operations, who oversees the CEDT program.

"We accomplish this in three ways," Morris continues. "We continually update our training to match the evolving needs of businesses. We incorporate hands-on project assignments aligned with CEDT job duties. And, once certification is complete, we provide additional training during annual conferences."

The CEDT program consists of a rigorous, 18-month curriculum that covers a wide range of relevant economic development competencies, from effective community marketing, manufacturing and service industry operations, and assessing workforce training needs to the latest quality and productivity enhancement programs such as Lean Manufacturing. Program activities are diverse and include interactive workshops, self-study, operational tours and four individual projects. Project

assignments include a community assessment and an in-depth analysis of one manufacturing or service company.

"A great deal of complex content is covered," says Jan Melcher, VP of economic development for DeKalb Technical College. "Project assignments are very challenging. Participants learn the intricacies of how businesses are recruited and trained in Georgia. This knowledge, along with Quick Start and college resources, prepares them to function as a vital economic development partner within their community."

Since 1989, the DTAE's CEDT program has set the standard for excellence in the workforce development arena of economic development. Before CEDT, "there were pockets of excellence all over Georgia, but

no way to ensure that all businesses received the same high quality of workforce development services through our agency," explains Jackie Rohosky, DTAE assistant commissioner of economic development.

"At that time, local technical schools were transitioning to what is today the statewide technical college system," Rohosky continues. "As part of this change, the DTAE's Board of Directors and Commissioner Dr. Kenneth Breeden identified the need for training to meet the unique needs of the DTAE's economic developers. In partnership with Georgia State University, a DTAE team designed and launched the CEDT program to extend this excellence to all areas of Georgia. Today, we guarantee the quality of the program and partner with the Goizueta Business School at Emory University to ensure high-caliber and objective evaluation of projects."

To date there have been 10 CEDT classes and the Certified Economic Developer Trainer program is still keeping up with the frantic pace of economic development in Georgia.

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CEDT trainers at the 2003 CEDT Annual Conference

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“The overriding theme of the CEDT program is and has been focused commitment,” says Jan Melcher. “This includes a commitment to excellence in service, commitment to the businesses we serve and a commitment to excellence in government.”

Although the program demands a serious commitment, CEDT candidates don’t mind. “The rigors of the program, and subsequent rewards, create a sense of pride and foster continued commitment to high-quality standards,” says Melcher.

For CEDT student Nancy Coleman, Columbus Technical College VP of economic development, the advantages of CEDT are networking and making connections. “CEDT enables me to tap resources that help me do my job better,” she says, citing the recent successful location of a Heckler & Koch Inc. manufacturing facility in Columbus. When company executives contacted the Columbus Chamber of Commerce,



Coleman immediately used her CEDT network to start the process. “If I hadn’t known all the people involved with economic development, I wouldn’t have known how to tie it all together,” Coleman says. “We made a much better presentation because we are all linked.”

Steve Daniel, Flint River Technical College VP of economic development, who is in the current CEDT class, says the training has already helped him. Daniel’s first

project in the class was an independent study of his delivery area.

“We interviewed all the players to learn what their goals and strategies are, and pinpoint the strengths and selling points of the community,” Daniel says. Immediately the exercise paid off.

“Whenever I meet with new clients, I have that valuable information at hand,” he says. “I use it on a weekly basis.” **R**