

GEDA Annual Meeting

The 38th annual conference of the Georgia Economic Developers Association was held in Savannah, Ga., from September 19 through 21. The focus of this year's conference—Economic Developers as Leaders: Taking Georgia to the Top—reflected the continued efforts of state, community, and business leaders to work together and foster growth for Georgia.

The conference presented the opportunity for attendees to explore issues and challenges that face economic developers, and workshops were offered on several of these topics.

“Incentives/Grants/Loans: State Resources and How to Access Them” provided an overview of state and federal programs that are available to assist communities for economic development projects. “Future Natural Resources and Environmental Issues” featured a presentation and discussion to formulate policies for state and local regulations that will affect air, water, or land development. Another offered discussion on sustainable economic development through tourism.

These discussions offered representatives from all areas of economic development the chance to learn more about immediate needs and issues across the state. Community development authorities, chambers of commerce, business developers, and state industry representatives came together to trade success stories and ideas and to discuss ways to improve the processes of economic and workforce development.

Several speakers at the conference stressed the increasing importance of workforce development and the success of Georgia's Quick Start program in providing that development. Dr. Doug Bachtel, professor in the Department of Housing and Consumer Economics at the University of Georgia, emphasized Quick Start's role in keeping Georgia's businesses competitive.

Georgia is the fourth fastest grow-



Jackie Rohosky, assistant commissioner, Economic Development Programs, DTAE, joins the discussion with keynote speaker (left), Dr. Jeffrey Rosensweig, associate dean for corporate relations at the Goizueta Business School of Emory University, and DTAE's Commissioner Ken Breeden at the GEDA meeting in Savannah.

ing state in the country by population, but it has 40 counties with fewer than 10,000 residents each, which creates labor shortages. With these counties losing population, there are critical job training needs that must be met to keep industry going and growing. In the current slowing economy, these counties will face even tougher problems. As Bachtel said, “When the United States catches a cold, these areas get pneumonia. We have to educate people, so they can get and keep jobs.”

R.K. Sehgal, commissioner of the Department of Industry, Trade & Tourism, cited the partnership between businesses, communities, and Quick Start as an essential part of the state's economic development efforts. “Before, we have mostly worked on bricks and mortar—buildings for companies and such. Now we are refocusing our efforts,” he said. New industries (such as freshwater shrimping) and new emphasis on existing industries will expand the need for training and continued education. Sehgal thinks the state is up to the challenge. “We have a new generation of teachers,” he said. “They are aware of



Dr. Jeffrey Rosensweig (left) and GDITT commissioner R.K. Sehgal at GEDA.

economic development and the importance of creating jobs.”

Dr. Ken Breeden, commissioner of the Department of Technical and Adult Education, thinks the need for workforce development will continue to increase and says Quick Start and the statewide technical college system will respond accordingly. “We had another great year, and our student growth curve accelerated dramatically,” he said. “We've increased by eight to 10 percent for the past 10 years. Last year, we increased by 17 percent, which is phenomenal. Businesses need a skilled workforce, and we're helping provide the employees they need.” **OS**