

## Working with John DeGrove

By James Nicholas

We have all lost a friend and colleague. Andy, Jim, and Kim, you have lost a Dad, and before than a Mom. You have my most heartfelt sympathy and condolences.

In early 1969 John DeGrove, as Dean of the College of Social Sciences, hired me as an assistance professor at Florida Atlantic University, fresh from graduate school. This began a glorious adventure that has continued to this day, and it's not over yet. With the founding of the Joint Center for Environmental and Urban Problems, John appointed me first as assistance and then associate director. I was privileged to serve as the acting director of the Joint Center, while John was at the Department of Community Affairs. And I want to say that without the able assistance of Lance DeHaven-Smith I don't think that I would have survived. While I was sitting in John's chair, I was frequently told that I had big shoes to fill. This was true in more ways than one; did you ever look at the size of his feet?

I had no idea what I was getting into or what a fantastic man had chosen me as a colleague, although I felt more like a student. At that time Florida was changing; it was starting to recognize itself as an important player on the national and international stages. Florida's natural beauty has always been there, but it took World War Two, flood control, affordable air transportation, mosquito control, and air conditioning to make it desirable to the millions of people and businesses that poured into the state. Florida was open for business, but Florida didn't have the institutional ability to cope with that business. The result was a mess; much of the natural resources were being destroyed, and the state's natural beauty was befouled with poorly designed and underserved developments. Many of the bays, estuaries, and rivers were choked with undertreated or even totally untreated sewage. This mess was topped off by the Everglades burning. The sad fact was that too many saw Florida as something to be sold rather than something to be treasured. Someone had to do something.

There was this tall country boy from Palm Valley, and he was ready, willing, and able to take on the tasks of protecting the land that he loved. Florida was blessed with insightful leadership in Governors Askew, Graham, and McKay who saw Florida's problems and the man that could address those problems. John was the intellectual source, Governor Askew got it through the legislature, and Allen Millage rammed it through the ELMS Committee. This was the beginning of John's long association with Florida's growth management. I, and I'm sure all of us, shudder to think of what Florida would be like today without John DeGrove and the programs he championed. John set out to design and then implement a system that would preserve what is special about Florida, while providing economic opportunity for Floridians. He recognized that if what made Florida attractive was sold off or destroyed, that there would not be the beauty of natural Florida for us to enjoy nor economic opportunity for Floridians. John understood that thoughtful management of Florida's natural resources was good economic policy.

Florida was not the only beneficiary of John's wisdom. States from Maine to Hawaii consulted with "the Master," and you can see the results in the planning and managing of their growth. Many foreign nations also drank at his font of knowledge. John covered the world, "preachin" the gospel of growth management.

Sadly, today Florida is backing off from its commitment to growth management on the theory that growth management is bad for or destructive to economic growth and prosperity. Yet in 1972, when Florida's first growth management laws were passed,

- the State had a population of 7.5 million, as contrasted with 19 million today. That's growth of 150% under growth management; that doesn't sound like anti-growth to me.
- Today there are about 7.5 million people employed in Florida, as contrasted with 2.3 million in 1972, an increase of 190%. That sounds like economic development to me.
- During this same period Floridian's personal income grew by almost 300%, after adjustment for inflation. That sounds like increasing prosperity to me.
- During the period of growth management:

- Population grew by 150%
  - Employment grew by 190%
  - Personal incomes grew by 300% (after adjustment for inflation)
  - Per Capita incomes grew by 57%, again after adjustment for inflation.
- By any measure, this is outstanding economic performance, and much of this is because of and not in spite of growth management.

When Florida rethinks its lack of commitment to managing growth, we will find a treasure trove in the writings of John DeGrove. Let me say something on that subject. The DeGrove family donated John's papers and they have been put into a special collection as the John M DeGrove Collection at the University of Florida's library. For those of you with papers, correspondence, and other materials relating to John, please consider donating them to this collection. Florida will need all of these when it turns again to John DeGrove for guidance.

He will be missed.

James Nicholas was raised in what is now Miami-Dade County. He was professor of economics and assistant, associate, and acting director of the Joint Center for Environmental and Urban Problems at Florida Atlantic University. Since 1985 he was professor of urban & regional planning and affiliate professor of law at the University of Florida. In 2006 he became emeritus professor of urban & regional planning and of law. He is a member of and serves on the board of 1000 Friends of Florida.