

Economic developer Tom Clark named Denver Post Business Person of Year

By Steve Raabe *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*
Posted:

DenverPost.com

Colorado's biggest economic development deals of the year carry a common, if not glaringly noticeable, element. They benefited from the Tom Clark touch. In recognition of his impact on business growth, Clark has been named The Denver Post's 2012 Business Person of the Year.

The major wins — a new U.S. Patent Office, direct flights to Tokyo, hundreds of new jobs from Hitachi Data Systems and Kaiser-Permanente, the relocation of several corporate headquarters — resulted from region-wide team efforts with a healthy dose of Clark in the mix.

He has been a key player in virtually every major business relocation and expansion along the Front Range since landing a job with the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce in 1985.

Clark, 63, serves simultaneously as chief executive of the Metro Denver Economic Development Corp. and executive vice president of the Denver chamber. The EDC is affiliate of the chamber.

He is nationally recognized for his advocacy of regional cooperation in economic development. The Greater Denver Corp., which Clark co-founded in 1987, was one of the first groups in the nation to bring together competing local governments and business groups in a collaborative framework. Its successor organization, the Metro Denver EDC, retains the same focus with 70 partner groups along the Front Range.

Clark is uncomfortable in being recognized for his achievements.

"I haven't done a single thing by myself," Clark maintains. "Everything I've accomplished has been part of a team effort."

The teamwork line might be considered standard fare from any executive with a modicum of modesty or a knack for talking a good game.

Except in Clark's case, collaboration is the real deal, the touchstone of his career in economic development.

"When he started out, he was a completely avant-garde figure," said Mark Muro, a public policy analyst at the Brookings Institution. "He may not be Edison inventing the light bulb, but he is one of the founding fathers of regional collaboration. All of this now seems like standard best practices, but he was way ahead of the curve."

Don Elliman, former director of the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, worked with Clark on numerous projects. In traditional economic development models, Elliman said, "everybody is fighting each other to land the deal.

"But Tom is so disarming in taking himself out of the picture and encouraging cooperation, that you just want to work with him," Elliman said.

A warning for staff

Clark is engaging, a jokester, a musician, an epic storyteller and unabashedly profane in most of his everyday conversations — a trait he attributes to a teenage summer job laying track for the Chicago Northwestern Railway.

"Their great gift to me is my unmanageable, prolific and inappropriate profanity," Clark says. "We warn all the new staff that if they are troubled with a boss who uses the f-bomb for a noun, adjective or adverb, or a boss who uses f-bombs when he's happy, when he's angry or when he's engaged in what appears to be, up to that moment, a civil conversation, they should turn down the job."

Clark is a recovering alcoholic, a condition of which he speaks openly. He's been sober for 29 years. The drinking

problem became apparent decades ago when he realized he was spending \$850 a month on alcohol. Not just his own personal consumption but in characteristic gregarious fashion, he was routinely buying rounds for the entire bar.

Stopping drinking and saving the money helped Clark and wife Donna Alengi buy a two-story Westminster home that abuts the 14th tee of The Ranch Country Club. Clark's garage houses his personal golf cart. A 13 handicapper, he plays about two rounds a month.

In the finished basement of the home are two of Clark's most cherished possessions — his collection of 22 guitars and bookshelves filled with rare editions of presidential biographies.

Getting his start

Clark worked in political and state government jobs in Illinois in the 1970s. In 1982 he joined the Fort Collins Chamber of Commerce as director of economic development. In 1985 he was hired by the Denver chamber, where he has served in multiple executive positions sandwiched around three-year stints as president of the Boulder Chamber of Commerce and Jefferson Economic Council.

When Joe Blake resigned as chief executive of the Denver chamber in 2009, Clark and Kelly Brough were the finalists to succeed him. Brough was selected, and speculation surfaced that Clark would leave the organization.

"Why would I leave when I love this work?" Clark said. "It's never been about the money, never been about the title. It's truly the most interesting job anybody could have."

Brough describes Clark as "a great colleague."

"He brings a passion and a light-heartedness to his work," she said. "He knows the importance of devoting time to building regional relationships and when necessary helping mend any to ensure the culture of a collaborative region remains strong."

Clark said that prior to the 1980s creation of the Greater Denver Corp., "the economic development model was fight like hell, and stab the other guy in the back."

Now, the organization's successor, the Metro Denver EDC, mandates an inviolate code of conduct: First get the business prospect committed to metro Denver, then, and only then, figure out which municipality is the best fit for the relocating or expanding company.

Closing deals

Disappointments can arise from the collaborative model.

Westminster had been a virtual lock last year for a \$300 million GE/PrimeStar solar panel manufacturing plant until GE suddenly switched gears and began looking at an Aurora site. Westminster officials might have been tempted to push hard and regain the upper hand, "but this is a major no-no under our code of ethics," Clark said.

Aurora landed the deal — although GE has since postponed development of the plant. However, both Aurora and Westminster were honored at the EDC's annual meeting for their commitment to regional collaboration.

Metro Denver's success rate for closing deals with prospects has risen from 30 percent in the 1980s to 62 percent in the 1990s, largely because of the cooperative approach, Clark said. In a classic example of being victimized by its own success, the region's victory rate now has declined to about 52 percent as Denver lost some of its cost-of-living advantages.

One of Colorado's biggest economic-development wins in years occurred in July when the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office announced that it will locate a satellite office in Denver.

The facility will employ about 130 workers initially, with employment projected to grow to as high as 595 after five

http://www.denverpost.com/business/ci_22243079/economic-developer-tom-clark-named-denver-post-business
years. Economists have estimated its total economic impact at \$439 million over five years.

Clark characteristically downplays his role in the deal. Others beg to differ.

Patent office

A consortium of Denver attorneys had tried during the Bush administration to land a Denver patent office, with no success.

"We were just some patent lawyers with big ideas, but we had no idea how to get from Point A to Point B," said John Posthumus, a Denver patent attorney with Sheridan Ross.

In 2009 the attorneys geared up for a second attempt. They set up a meeting with Clark and Elliman.

"Tom basically plotted out a game plan for us," Posthumus said. "We had the knowledge and enthusiasm, but we were kind of naive. Tom knew right from the beginning that we needed the (Colorado) congressional delegation's buy-in."

Clark also helped craft a detailed economic-impact analysis of bringing the patent office to Denver. As it turned out, metro Denver was the only region among several competitors nationally to provide the comprehensive analysis — a key factor, Posthumus said, in winning the office.

Another big win this year for Colorado was United Airlines' announcement that it will begin direct flights to Tokyo in 2013. Mayor Michael Hancock described it as "an economic-development victory of epic proportions."

Clark had been seeking the flights since 1986 and traveled to Japan with other officials as often as twice a year to cultivate contacts and build support.

"Tom is a gift to all of Colorado," said Brough of the Denver chamber. "He loves his work, he loves this place, and he loves the people. It is easy to see why he stands out among all the business partners in our region."

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The bio of Tom Clark

What he does: Chief executive of the Metro Denver Economic Corp. and executive vice president of the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce

Age: 63

Hometown: Canby in southwestern Minnesota

Education: Bachelor's from Minnesota State University; master's of public administration from University of Illinois

Background: Started career in state government positions in Illinois. Has been a fixture in Colorado economic development since 1985

Not-so-hidden talent: Has decent chops as a guitar player and singer. His specialty is taking well-known songs and customizing the lyrics to be played at special events such as awards or retirement ceremonies

What he's reading: "Prague Winter," by Madeline Albright

On his music player: A diverse mix with an emphasis on oldies and classic rock

The career of Tom Clark

Clark's résumé

1967-1971: Chicago Northwestern Railway, gandy dancer (laborer) and depot agent

1972-73: Speech therapist and audiologist

1974: Political organizer on streets of Chicago. Ran candidates who opposed Mayor Richard Daly's administration

1974-75: Illinois Department of Local Government Affairs, local government finance and land use advisor

1976-77: Illinois Governor's Office of Manpower Development, labor force planner

1977-79: Illinois Department of Local Government Affairs, Chicago regional administrator

1979: Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, special assistant to the secretary

1980-82: Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, director of commercial and industrial development

1982: Illinois Department of Revenue, special assistant to the director

1982-85: Fort Collins Chamber of Commerce, director of economic development

1985: Urban Data Sciences, partner

1985-87: Denver Chamber of Commerce, vice president of economic development

1987-1992: Greater Denver Corp., vice president

1992-94: Greater Denver Corp., president

1994-97: Boulder Chamber of Commerce, president

1997-98: Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, senior vice president

1999-2002: Jefferson Economic Council, president

2003-present: Metro Denver Economic Development Corp., CEO; and Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, executive vice president

Editors note: The Denver Post business-news staff considered 35 Colorado businessmen and -women for this year's Business Person of the Year award.

Candidates were nominated by members of the business-news department based on the impact the individuals had on the Colorado business landscape in 2012. We also invited readers to submit their own nominations via social media.

In the first round of voting, business editors and reporters selected their top five candidates, and the list was culled to the top vote-getters. The second round was a weighted vote, with staffers selecting their top five candidates in order of preference. Five points were awarded to each top pick down to one point awarded to the bottom pick.

The winner was the person with the most points.

The finalists

JOHN POSTHUMUS

Shareholder, Sheridan Ross law firm

Posthumus helped lead a drive to designate Denver as the site of a new satellite location of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

The office is expected to be a big economic engine, employing up to 600 and generating \$440 million in financial activity over five years. It will stimulate new waves of intellectual property development and research.

JOHN HICKENLOOPER

Colorado governor

Hickenlooper, a Democrat, has upended conventional political labeling by serving as a staunch business advocate.

His administration launched Blueprint Colorado, a bottom-up economic development strategy that includes provisions such as cutting red tape and making small-business loans easier to obtain.

MIKE LONG

Chief executive, Arrow Electronics

Long gave Colorado's economy a huge shot in the arm last year by relocating the headquarters of Arrow Electronics, a Fortune 200 company, from Melville, N.Y. to Arapahoe County. But his impact didn't stop with the relocation. Economic development officials say Long has helped attract other business, including Hitachi Data Systems bringing hundreds of new jobs to metro Denver.

BILL MOSHER

Senior managing director, Trammell Crow

Longtime Denver developer Mosher is helping spearhead the redevelopment of Union Station and the surrounding neighborhood.

The project, including a hotel, offices, restaurants and retail space, will become the key element of the Central Platte Valley's conversion to a multimodal transportation hub.