

# The Olympic Legacy: Building on What Was Achieved

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**"Economic Development: Seeking Common Ground"** by Richard W. Padgett (principal, Richard Padgett & Associates) and James R. Oxendine (consultant on community economic development). This article focuses on finding a way to work together in applying "metrowide" solutions to "metrowide" problems. Future economic development plans must use the same cooperation employed to accomplish the successful Olympic Games celebration.

**"Community Development: Building On a New Foundation"** by Larry Keating (professor of city planning, Georgia Institute of Technology), Max Creighton (executive director, Community Design Center of Atlanta, Inc.), and Jon Abercrombie (director, Common Focus). Cosmetic improvements were made to certain downtown areas and other extensive improvements were made to upgrade substandard conditions in the downtown Atlanta area. Community development corporations were established as well as legal and institutional frameworks to foster further permanent redevelopment.

**"Downtown: The Heart and Soul of Atlanta"** by Carl V. Patton (president, Georgia State University). The Olympic games were an impetus to improve and appreciate the Atlanta downtown area, and to create a downtown where people are safe and have interesting things to do. This article discusses three topics: the Olympic impact, a vision for post-Olym-

pic downtown, and the challenges faced by bringing about that vision.

**"The Arts: Atlanta's Missing Olympic Legacy"** by Michael L. Lomax (president, National Faculty). According to the author, the arts held an inconsistent and often minor role in the Olympic games and Olympic related events. This disappointment stems from the unrealistic expectations and lack of cooperation within the arts community.

**"The Olympic Games: 17 Days of Sports or More?"** by Stan Kasten (president, Atlanta Hawks and Atlanta Braves), Robert Dale Morgan (vice president/Sports, Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce), and Janet Marie Smith (vice president, Sports Facilities, Turner Properties). Three long-term sports-related impacts of the Olympics are discussed in this article: what Atlanta gained from the Olympics, including new and remodeled stadia, the proof of the ability to host sports events, and the city's association with sports; what the opportunities are for the future; and implementing a plan for the future.

**"Leadership: Where Does Atlanta Go From Here?"** by Harry West (executive director, Atlanta Regional Commission). In the wake of the Olympic bombing, local leaders were instrumental in regaining a positive attitude and allowing the games to proceed. The role of leadership and the sharing of responsibility are key in understanding the destiny of Atlanta.

growth opportunities or a small family looking for a memorable vacation. As a city, Atlanta has always suspected that it would come up short once an outsider got a good look at it. After all, the first wave of "visitors" to Atlanta went so far as to burn the city down. The six-year anticipation of "the world" coming to visit was at least as privately unnerving as it was publicly exciting. Atlanta prepared for this second great wave of visitation with one question in mind: "How will we be judged?"

Such a question was basically healthy for Atlanta, as is the collective experience of anxiety about being judged. And because of its massive scale and the six long years to deal with it, the Olympic Games may yet prove to have been the best thing Atlanta could have experienced—not because of how the world saw Atlanta, but because of how Atlanta saw itself, warts and all.

### **Building an Infrastructure for Community Development**

Perhaps more fundamental to community development efforts than the new housing were the establishment of community development corporations (CDCs) in several poor neighborhoods and the installation of legal and institutional infrastructure necessary to foster development in areas beyond the reach of the private sector (Keating, Creighton, and Abercrombie, 1996).

Prior to the Olympic effort, community development efforts in Atlanta were minute. For example, in 1988 in a national study the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Ford Foundation researchers used Atlanta as an example of a major city which had not developed a substantial nonprofit/community development corporation sector. The few existing nonprofit housing suppliers were new, quite small, and largely unproductive. No equity investment fund existed which could take advantage of the profitable returns available through the federal Low In-

come Housing Tax Credits or provide essential portions of the multilayered financing required to rehabilitate or construct housing for poor people. Although a State Housing Trust Fund had been approved by the state's voters, funding had not been appropriated. Moreover, legal mechanisms to redevelop abandoned and seriously tax delinquent properties were either cumbersome or nonexistent.

The advent of the Olympic bid acceptance, however, energized the tenuous position of community-based groups. The credibility of the five existing community-based nonprofit corporations functioning within the Olympic venue neighborhoods was immediately enhanced through formal acceptance of their institutional presence and by recognition of their respective turfs.

In several neighborhoods the presence of a common threat and of a common opportunity united people who might have otherwise remained apart. In conjunction with, and partly a result of the impending Olympics, the city and its neighborhoods constructed the essential elements of the institutional infrastructure necessary to support community-based development.

- Three years of staunch advocacy helped establish and staff the Atlanta Fulton County Land Bank Authority. Changes to the laws governing the disposition of tax delinquent property have helped craft the authority into an effective ingredient for community redevelopment.
- The State of Georgia has annually appropriated money to the Housing Trust Fund.
- The Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership (ANDP) was formed to act as an intermediary between community based nonprofits and businesses and foundations.
- The business community suspended its skepticism and mistrust of community development initiatives, and community

groups set aside their reciprocal apprehension, yielding new development in poor neighborhoods.

- Five city- or metrowide nonprofits developed the capability to augment indigenous redevelopment of poor neighborhoods.

Although production by community-based nonprofits has matured slowly, several neighborhoods have experienced significant expansions of capacity. Equally important, each neighborhood has at least one functioning CDC, residents have generated redevelopment plans, and there is generally agreement on how redevelopment ought to proceed. In each case, the institutions required to sustain the momentum the Olympics catalyzed have been constructed.

While Atlanta has made progress on redeveloping some of its poorest communities, we would be remiss not to note that the extensive redevelopment generated by the Olympics also damaged several communities. The absence of planning and development requirements common in much of the rest of the country meant that the construction of the Olympic stadium, Centennial Olympic Park, and Coca-Cola's Olympic City shifted the burden of many off-site impacts onto surrounding communities.

### **Art and Culture**

While many of the Cultural Olympiad's programs and activities were sparsely attended and left little lasting impression, there were some notable exceptions (Lomax, 1996). Celebrate Africa!, staged collaboratively with the National Black Arts Festival (NBAF) in 1994, was heavily attended, and represented a major first for both the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) and the NBAF. The partnership enabled the Olympics to give substantial focus for the first time to the arts and culture of the African continent, thus establishing a model for future host cities. Moreover, the collabora-

tion allowed the NBAF to present more African artists than ever before. Because of the Olympics, the NBAF was able to establish itself firmly as an international festival, celebrating the heritage of Africa and the African Diaspora at a scale it could not otherwise have underwritten. The project is thus potentially a watershed for both partners.

Of all the pre-Olympic projects, the Cultural Olympiad's 1995 gathering of living Nobel Laureates in literature was best received nationally. Not only did its regional audience respond enthusiastically, but the national news media gave the project attention as well. Like so many of the Cultural Olympiad programs, however, it left no legacy. Once the evening was over, nothing beyond the printed program remained as even a reminder that it had ever been held.

Most of the programs and activities, however, were not well attended. The High Museum's exhibition, *Rings: Five Passions in World Art*, was an exception. This blockbuster display of 100 masterpieces of world art, each reflecting one of five Olympic ideals, drew attention, controversy, and sustained public interest from the moment it was announced. After a slow start, attendance was uniformly at or near the High's ambitious goals.

If the museum was the flagship, it was by no means the only strong performer at the Woodruff Arts Center. The Alliance Theatre ambitiously produced new works by two contemporary American playwrights. Alfred Uhry's *The Last Night at Ballyhoo* sold out well in advance. Pearl Cleage's *Blues for an Alabama Sky* played to near sold-out audiences. Atlanta Symphony Orchestra audiences were equally strong. The High's *Rings* was a powerful magnet, giving the Woodruff Arts Center almost 24-hour-a-day drawing power throughout the Olympics.

Among Atlanta arts institutions, the High appears to have been one of the most intentional and strategic in exploiting its

collaboration with ACOG. In addition to being the museum's centerpiece during the games, Rings inaugurated a series of major exhibitions at the High. The museum's next two shows, mounted in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art, are designed to expand the High's role as a major national museum that draws audiences locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally by targeting the tourist and convention market with greater focus and sophistication. These ambitious shows, to be followed by others not yet announced, are framed within the High's larger intention to build upon its Olympic opportunity with a series of blockbuster exhibitions that will consolidate its identity as the Southeast's leading museum.

### **Lessons Learned**

A different type of legacy evolved from what was learned from the multiple tasks associated with preparing for and staging the Olympics. While we refer to these as lessons learned, perhaps it would be preferred to use the phrase "lessons taught," since it is not yet clear that the lessons have actually been learned. We address three lessons: the value of cooperation, the importance of vision and leadership, and the need to address racial division. In some sense they are nothing new, but the Olympics brought them once again to the fore in Atlanta.

### **Strength of Cooperation**

One of the principal lessons taught by the Olympics was the importance of cooperation, whether it is regional cooperations among governments, public-private cooperation, business-community cooperation, or cooperation among nonprofits with similar missions (West, 1996). Several examples illustrate this lesson.

The Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) controlled the event planning, but sought countless community part-

ners to successfully stage the Games. The distinct definition of mission and goals helped focus on strategic action steps. The roles of community partners and organizations were well defined. ACOG used the term "inside the fence" to describe items that were in their realm of responsibility—like construction of the venues and security for athletes. Other organizations were created to conduct business "outside the fence." The Corporation for Olympic Games Development in Atlanta (CODA), a public/private effort, was formed to achieve civic improvements. The Metropolitan Atlanta Olympic Games Authority (MAOGA), operating as the "holding company" for the Atlanta Olympic Games, was able to clear the way for developers interested in creating affordable housing in conjunction with Olympic capital improvements. The lesson is that a shared vision can be achieved by having roles clearly defined and action steps delineated among partners to achieve an efficiency of purpose.

The business community and the venue neighborhoods overcame their mutual distrust to make substantial improvements in the community, as was described above (Keating, Creighton, and Abercrombie, 1996). But we also know how fragile these relationships can be. Activists, angry at the insensitive power of the Olympics, talk about how neighborhoods were abused. Impatient business leaders, frustrated by the difficulties of neighborhood redevelopment, talk about how neighborhood leaders would not listen and squandered their golden opportunity. Both make one assumption: efforts to rebuild venue neighborhoods over the last five years have failed, that the Olympics did not live up to the early expectation to rebuild neighborhoods. But community redevelopment is both a lengthy and continuous process. The standard against which to measure progress is not whether specific communities have been completely

transformed in five years, but rather the time (usually decades) it has required for similar efforts to bear fruit. The greatest present risk is that this assumption of failure will become the prevailing conventional wisdom, obliterate the hard-won beginnings which have been established, and undergird a reversion to the suspicion, hostility and mistrust which were widespread before the Olympics imposed the necessity of collaboration and a rigid timetable on disparate groups.

The arts community is a dramatic example of what results, or doesn't result, from fragmented and unfocused effort (Lomax, 1996). Because the arts community was not organized, did not set collective goals, and did not advocate for them in a unified manner, the arts did not benefit as tangibly as they might have from the Games. Art groups, which are notoriously fragmented and without a tradition of cooperation, collaboration, or collective action separately pursued individual interests.

The need for cooperation is also evident in the efforts to revitalize downtown, in economic development activities, and in the issues that the Atlanta region faces (Patton, 1996). We know that the major problems affecting both the city of Atlanta and Metro Atlanta—poverty, education, crime, natural resources, pollution, transportation—cannot be addressed by individual cities or counties. However, the challenges to cooperative action are many.

Leaders must find ways to heal the urban-suburban rivalries in our region, and form productive partnerships for competing effectively in the world marketplace. Neal Peirce (1993) writes about the emerging importance of regional cooperation as we approach the next millennium. According to Peirce, metropolitan regions are where the action will be in the future, especially in the U.S. as we see devolution taking place at the federal level. But, perhaps more impor-

tantly, the Atlanta region must compete cohesively in the future or it won't compete at all in the global marketplace.

Achieving regional synergy does not mean consolidating the 74 local governments. It may mean consolidating some governments and services. It means increased cooperation, and perhaps agreeing to shift some decision-making to a regional level. It also means that organizations within the Atlanta region—whether public, private, or civic—must find new ways of working together to leverage the resources and strengthen the whole.

David Rusk (1993) argues that any attack on urban social and economic problems must treat suburb and city as indivisible parts of a whole. Today's urban crises require exchanging the old politics of exclusion for a new politics of inclusion. And, these challenges will test whether or not Atlanta can develop a new spirit of community. The ability of Atlanta's leadership to grasp and implement these concepts will be crucial.

The lack of shared vision concerning the Atlanta region's economic growth and development among its various governmental units is an example of the difficulty of adopting a regional approach (Padgett and Oxendine, 1996). The political in-fighting over the region's water and waste water treatment, the mass transit versus highway debates, and the urban versus suburban growth generally are all pointed examples of how not to accomplish things well. In spite of the Atlanta Regional Commission's legislatively-mandated authority and its proactive stance, no game plan for a cooperative regional development strategy has been successful to date. The lack of public sector leadership represents a significant barrier that must be overcome in order to take advantage of the opportunities that should occur in the Atlanta region's post-Olympic development.

There are several specific economic development steps that can be taken, all geared either toward metrowide action to promote metrowide economic development or toward more effective community redevelopment strategies. The barriers to achieving metrowide cooperation and coordination with respect to long-term economic development are relatively easy to identify. Not surprisingly, they are terribly difficult to overcome.

### **The Importance of Vision and Leadership**

Atlanta saw that vision and passion are necessary to take a dream to reality. Many thought Billy Payne was "tripping the light fantastic" when he first envisioned hosting the Centennial Olympic Games in Atlanta. It is difficult to step out front on an issue that may not be immediately and universally embraced. The lesson here is to believe in the power of one's vision and dreams. And while it may be necessary to get help from others to reach the goal, it is possible to be the "champion" to spark something great (West, 1996).

If Atlantans learned nothing else from the Olympics, they should have learned that we have the capacity to set high, seemingly impossible, goals and achieve them—much to the surprise of everyone. Atlantans' positive attitudes are real and the community can excel and achieve great things when everyone works together. This capacity, coupled with Atlanta's history of successes, should give heart to the community and challenge it to be bold, deliberate, and intentional. The games created awareness and expectation. After 16 days of constant global attention, the world now knows where Atlanta, Georgia is. After acquitting itself well in the presentation of the games, nagging journalists' criticism notwithstanding, there is justified expectation that the city is capable of competing on a broader stage in

many arenas. If the community will learn from the example of Billy Payne and Andrew Young that, with a vision and persistent hard work, seemingly impossible dreams are achievable, then community organizations may be inspired to dream and work hard to fulfill their dreams. In the end, such an effort might prove to be the most tangible and enduring Olympic legacy of all (Lomax).

### **Diversity and Race Relations**

During our long road to the Olympics and the world, we uncovered several hard truths about Atlanta's relative strengths and weaknesses (Padgett and Oxendine, 1996). And, while never far from the surface, one of the most important things we learned is that Atlanta is still a largely divided, if not formally segregated, people, and race still drives it apart. During the Olympics, Atlantans reveled in the many different colors, cheers, and styles of its Olympic visitors—we were fascinatingly different, but the same in our love of coming together to celebrate the best of humanity. The Olympics drove home the point that in the future the community must not only be comfortable with diversity, but should look for ways to celebrate the richness that it brings to our daily lives.

The legacy of racial intolerance affects almost all facets of community rebuilding. Regardless of its guise or manifestation, however, the fundamental reason the Atlanta region continues to resist metrowide approaches to metrowide problems is race. No suburban city, town, or county sees benefit in merging its problems, its resources, or its efforts with those of the city of Atlanta. Nor does the city of Atlanta government seek any metrowide cooperation which will in any way diminish the political or economic power of city government—never mind that the economic base which the city of Atlanta political leadership controls is itself being diminished by the lack of metrowide coop-

eration and, in some instances, consolidation.

The substantial growth of Atlanta's African-American middle class—the great success story of the past two decades—has been almost completely overwhelmed in the public's perception by the great failure of the past two decades: our inability to resolve the very real economic, social and racial inequities which make metro Atlanta's urban core one of America's most desperately poor. Unfortunately, the tendency, both inside and outside the city of Atlanta, is to engage in divisive rhetoric which builds on, and in turn strengthens, the racial hostility and distrust which makes any real progress nearly impossible.

So as Atlanta moves into a period of building on the legacy of the Olympics, the greatest question for leaders, however, may be, "How do we learn to live peacefully together?" There have been increasing calls since the Olympics for the Atlanta Region to talk openly again about race relations. During the 1960s, through visionary leaders like Martin Luther King and Ivan Allen, Atlanta served as a model for the rest of the country on how to approach desegregation peacefully. Some leaders have urged Atlanta to take the lead again to continue to break down the sometimes invisible walls we have built between us.

As one individual pointed out, "Success in the global economy will come to those regions that can transcend cultural, racial, and ethnic differences to enable all residents to work together toward common goals." ■

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