



## PRESS-REGISTER

### **Economic development group's leader hopes to get closer to state recruiters**

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**By JEFF AMY**

**Business Reporter**

ORANGE BEACH — The Economic Development Partnership of Alabama will seek tighter ties with state government and work to guard against duplication in economic recruitment and job training, said Bill Taylor, who will take the reins of the private group July 1.

"We will be more closely tied together to ADO and the governor's office than we ever have before," he said Monday. "We have to be if we're going to see what they see. We must, if we're going to be a catalyst."

Taylor, the outgoing chief executive of Mercedes Benz U.S. International, the auto assembly plant near Tuscaloosa, spoke to attendees at the Economic Development Association of Alabama's summer meeting, which continues through Wednesday at the Perdido Beach Resort.

EDPA was created in 1990 by some of Alabama's largest companies, most importantly Alabama Power Co., as a private industrial recruiting group. A key player in Alabama's early courtship of automakers, it receded in importance when the Alabama Development Office, an arm of state government, took a more assertive role in industrial recruitment.

One primary role of the group in recent years has been to provide data.

Though he's been on the EDPA board since 2000, Taylor acknowledged that his new job is something of a switch.

"Why would a car guy be interested in working at EDPA?" he asked at one point. "Has that question crossed your mind? It's crossed mine."

Taylor said he has more recruitment experience than some would realize, as companies that followed Mercedes to Alabama all wanted to sound out the German carmaker on its experience.

"We've recruited for you," Taylor said. "You know that we've been a magnet."

The new president said he wants EDPA to prod state agencies, colleges and private groups find ways to reduce duplication and fill in gaps in economic and workforce development.

"We're going to find there are a lot of redundancies. You know there are," he said. "Streamlining what we do is absolutely critical if we're going to serve existing industry and business."

Serving current industries has become a watchword in economic development circles as the recession has deepened, as new project activity has dried up and communities try to hold on to the jobs they have.

"We need to do more to help existing businesses survive, because that's what it 's all about right now, is survival," Taylor said. "And after survival, we need to help them be very, very prosperous."

In his own auto industry, Taylor told attendees that he believed parts suppliers would have to consolidate plants to deal with reduced volume. He told recruiters that he believed there would opportunities for communities to win plant relocations or expansions as that consolidation process occurs.

"I hope I can be part of the solution and bring something to these communities to help them prosper," Taylor said.

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