Fairfax County’s boom was planned 50 years ago

On the surface, the differences between our two companies could not be more dramatic — like earth and sky, you could say. Founded in 1956, Dewberry is a family-owned architecture, engineering and consulting firm, and the company’s focus over the years has been on enhancing the built environment for its clients. Intelsat, on the other hand, is a multibillion-dollar publicly traded global provider of satellite services whose focus since 1964 has been skyward.

Despite this contrast, both of our companies are alike in one significant respect: We each made the strategic decision to locate in Fairfax County.

When Dewberry first opened its doors — well, door — more than a half century ago, Fairfax was a much different place. The county, which once produced more dairy products than any other bedrock issues that would lay the groundwork for its county’s growth. Business deals were forged with a handshake, and there were few regulations and requirements to decelerate our progress.

Even then, Fairfax County was an exciting place to do business, and it would soon become a boom town to which Dewberry happily hooked its wagon. Just a few years after the opening of Washington Dulles International Airport, the completion of the Capital Beltway would become our main street, giving structure to our growth and helping forge a forward-leaning identity. Soon major companies, particularly in the technology, information and defense sectors, would begin calling Fairfax home, and the county’s quality of life grew in turn with safe neighborhoods, excellent schools and outstanding cultural offerings. Meanwhile, George Mason University grew into its own, punctuating the county as a major research university and one of the largest in the commonwealth.

But make no mistake, this decades-long transformation of Fairfax County was no accident. It was part of a concert ed strategy to increase the commercial tax base, which in turn would provide the revenues with which growth could be supplied. The genesis of that wise strategy took place in 1964 with the creation of the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority, and 50 years later, we are now reaping the rewards of not only the birth of the EDA but of the county’s consistent fidelity to the EDA’s mission over the past five decades.

For Dewberry, we have kept our headquarters here because the opportunities we see have been great for growth and expansion. We have about 1,000 professionals nationwide. For Intelsat, the decision to relocate our headquarters and more than 400 staff this year to Tysons Corner was great for growth and expansion. We have about 1,000 professionals nationwide.

Here’s to the next 50.

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