

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

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mvrpc.org



MIAMI VALLEY

Regional Planning Commission

Shaping Our Region's Future Together

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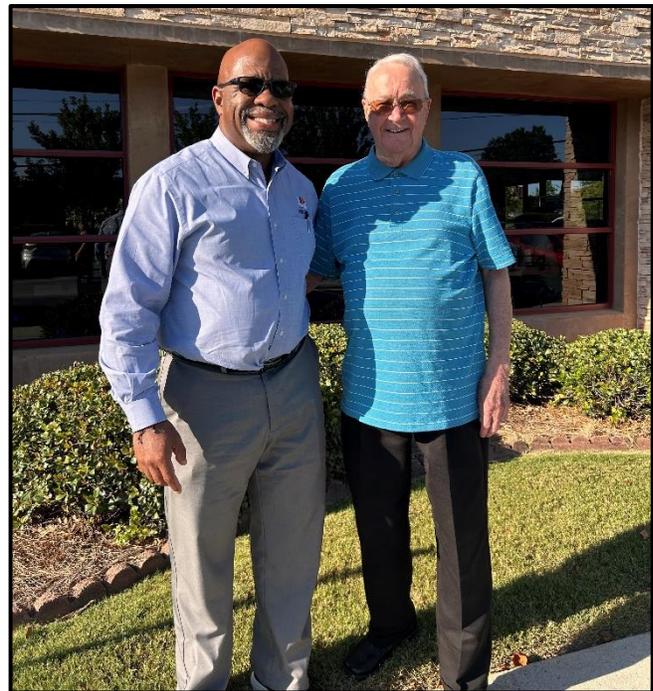
Legacy of Leadership: Reflecting on MVRPC's Journey with Dale Bertsch

On June 26, 2024, I had the honor of meeting Dale Bertsch, the first Executive Director of the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission (MVRPC). This historic encounter allowed me to reflect on our agency's rich history and legacy while sharing personal stories and insights.

A Glimpse into Dale's Life

Dale Bertsch, a 92-year-old resident of an assisted living facility in Atlanta, has lived a remarkable life marked by resilience, advocacy, and dedication. Living in a detached bungalow with a one-car garage, Dale remains active despite dealing with tendonitis and partial blindness in his right eye. He even drove us to dinner at J. Alexanders, showcasing his enduring independence.

Dale's journey to Atlanta began several years ago when his wife Ann's health was declining. The couple moved to be closer to two of their three daughters who reside in the area. Sadly, Ann passed away last year, but Dale continues to find joy and companionship with his lady friend, Bobbi.



MVRPC's Growth Under Dale's Leadership

Dale's employment with the agency started in 1964 at a salary of \$13,500, Dale negotiated with the Board of Directors a salary increase to \$15,000 to include his moving expenses to the Dayton market. The initial agency budget was \$37,000 and it grew to \$3.5 million by the time Mr. Bertsch left in 1979. The agency's number of employees grew from three to nearly 100 when he resigned in 1979.

One of Dale's significant contributions was his role in the development of the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission (MVRPC). Initially, the Transportation Coordinating Committee (TCC) served Greene and Montgomery Counties. Dale lobbied the Governor to designate MVRPC as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), despite resistance from city managers who preferred the TCC's engineer-led approach.

Dale's vision for MVRPC included a strong partnership with local businesses and a commitment to diversity. He resisted pressure to locate MVRPC's offices to the Wright State University campus, insisting the agency remain downtown. This decision placed the agency at the heart of the community it served.

A History of Advocacy

Dale's advocacy for African Americans and diversity in the workforce predated many formal civil rights movements. Dale's training is in landscape architecture from Michigan State. He and his wife grew up in Sandusky, Ohio. Dale was married when he was drafted in to the U.S. Army in 1953. He served for 2 years. I told him that he appears to have been an advocate for African Americans in the workforce and he was ahead of Dr. King in his advocacy for us. He advocated for the track and field AA athletes. The Knights of Columbus sponsored their traveling track team. Even in northern cities in the early 1950's (Detroit, Chicago, New York) the African American athletes could not stay at common hotels. Dale said when traveling with teammates, he also stayed where the African American athletes could stay.



As he was drafted into the Army, Dale was a project lead for a unit that included more than 200 soldiers but all were African American except for three. At the time, soldiers could reenlist into the Army only if they had their high school degree or GED. Facing the end of their army career, Dale and the soldiers that had their degrees taught classes and tutored the soldiers. Dale taught math. He noted that all who participated received their GEDs and were able to reenlist.

Dale also noted two run-ins with local bars/restaurants around Ft. Campbell (Clarksville, TN) and a town in Alabama North of Birmingham. He was thrown in jail because the African American servicemen could not be served at those restaurants. Dale shuddered to think what would happen if they weren't wearing their uniforms. Military Police worked with the local police to retrieve the servicemen from jail.

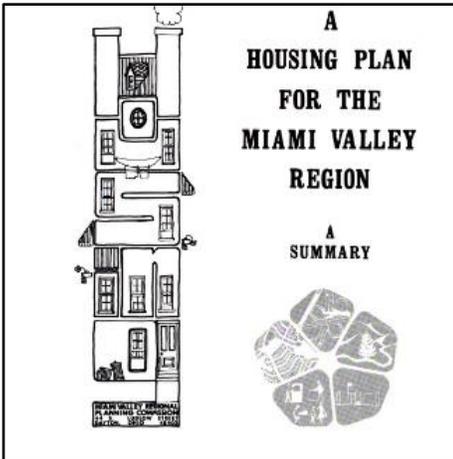
These experiences, army and track, were the basis for Dale being an advocate for African Americans and treating people fairly. He felt people are just people and he raised his kids that way. He noted that Gwinnett County is the most diverse county in the Atlanta region and that is why he now lives in that county.

Dale explained that as he was staffing up, two of his first employees were African American women. One young lady returned to Third National Bank because the work at MVRPC wasn't busy enough for her. He noted that his first draftsman employee gave him an ultimatum. He didn't work with African Americans: either you fire her or I will quit. Dale fired the draftsman immediately.

In addition to Ann Shafor and Roberta Longfellow, legends in the local and statewide planning, Dale also hired Minnie Johnson. Up until our discussion, I was unaware that she had worked at MVRPC. Sadly, all five of his deputy directors passed away last year. He noted that Ms. Johnson and her granddaughter spent the night with Dale and his wife Ann about 3 years ago as they travelled to Florida. Minnie has 2 daughters that live in Atlanta. Ms. Johnson worked for MVRPC for around 10 years. Before hiring her for MVRPC, Dale noted that he met Minnie and her husband after they staged a sit in at a lunch counter at a local business. Dale referred her to positions with Montgomery County, State of Ohio, and ultimately GDRTA as CEO. Dale was also active with National Association of Regional Councils (NARC).

Fair Housing and Departure from MVRPC

Under Dale's leadership, MVRPC adopted a fair housing plan, becoming a model for regional housing strategy. Dale noted the MVRPC board unanimously adopted the fair housing plan. He lived in Centerville while he lived here. He lobbied Centerville to be an early supporter/adopter of the idea of decentralized affordable housing.



Because the agency was a model for regional housing strategy, Dale worked for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in Washington for 2 days each week. That resulted in MVRPC receiving \$2M annually from HUD for their affordable housing work. Other grants from HUD helped MVRPC to pay for the local plans and zoning ordinances that the agency worked on for our members during his time.

In 1979, Dale felt that it was time to leave mostly due to the Regan administration's proposals to cut federal budgets. There was some pressure to leave due to the Fair Housing Plan but he felt he had the board's support of this. These proposed cuts meant that MVRPC and many regional councils lost grant funds from HUD, Department of

Justice, and others.

Dale was pursued by HUD, Ohio State University, Los Angeles, Little Rock, and Atlanta Regional Commission for significant positions due to his successes with the Fair Housing Plan. He had the option and flexibility to wait on the offer of his choosing.

Dale chose the Department Chair position in Architecture and Planning at OSU. He lived in Columbus for approximately 15 years. He also was a partner in a small consulting firm. He noted that they owned the Score Board bar near Westerville. His firm worked on numerous small-town plans across Ohio. While at MVRPC and in consulting, Dale's plan funding strategy included leveraging area employers in the funding of downtown and jurisdictional plans.

Reflections on Successor EDs

Dale shared his thoughts on his successors, noting the challenges and contributions of each. Dale noted that Mr. Vining came from Atlanta (ARC). He wasn't a good fit for the staff and several left. He was with MVRPC for only 2 years. Dale said he went to work at Huffy when he left the agency.

Dale mentioned that Nora's power base was small cities and townships. She advocated for the smaller communities in MVRPC. Since she became board chairperson and then MVRPC's longest serving ED, she leveraged this base very well.

Dale mentioned that Art Haddad (Miami Co.) was a supporter and advocate for MVRPC. Another fun tidbit was that Mr. Art Haddad, Miami County, was on Dale's search committee and he was on my search committee almost 50 years apart! What an indelible mark that Mr. Haddad has had on MVRPC!

In Conclusion

It was an honor and pleasure to visit with Mr. Dale Bertsch. The visit was very warm and cordial. After a

couple of hours, I felt I had known Dale all my life. We shared stories about fatherhood, widowhood, and finding love again. After dinner, we took photos and planned future visits, cherishing the bond we formed. Afterwards, we said our Good-Bye's and exchanged a hug.

Dale's legacy is a testament to the power of advocacy, leadership, and the enduring impact one person can have on their community and beyond. His story is an inspiration to all who strive to make a difference for their Regions and communities.

Further Reading on Dale Bertsch's Legacy

For those interested in learning more about Dale Bertsch's incredible journey and contributions, we've compiled a selection of news articles that delve deeper into his impactful career and advocacy. You can read more about Dale's work with the MVRPC, his efforts in promoting fair housing, and his lifelong commitment to diversity and inclusion through these articles:

- Explore Dale's role in regional planning and fair housing initiatives in the [Housing Plan for the Miami Valley Region](#).
- Gain insights from a detailed article in the [Dayton Daily News](#) highlighting his local impact.
- Read about how Dale's work helped Ohio suburbs embrace inclusive housing in this [New York Times article](#).
- Discover personal reflections with interviews by [Dale](#) and [Ann Shafor](#) with Antioch College.