



**News Release – September 23, 2009**

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## **Jan Lawler Announces Retirement as President/CEO of the Economic Alliance Houston Port Region**

### **Chad Burke to Transition as Incoming President/CEO; Marie McDermott as Incoming COO**

HOUSTON PORT REGION, September 23, 2009 – The Economic Alliance Houston Port Region (Economic Alliance) President/CEO Jan Lawler announced her intention to bring to a close her approximately six-year tenure as the lead executive. Lawler will work closely with the Economic Alliance to ensure a seamless transition by year-end, providing expertise on special projects while making room for other personal and business commitments.



Lawler came to the organization in 2004 as the result of a national executive search. During this critical era the entity's board of directors committed to revitalize a twenty-year old organization previously known as the Southeast Harris County Economic Development Council or S.E.E.D. Lawler was hired to expand services and to further develop the economic influence of approximately 900,000 citizens who work and live in the port region.

As President/CEO, Lawler managed the organization as it rebranded into the Economic Alliance Houston Port Region and launched innovative economic development strategies customized for the region's unique sectors of maritime trade, energy and petrochemical manufacturing, and related service industries and small businesses. Other highlights include execution and management of contracts and agreements with 16 port region communities, 12 chambers of commerce, the Port of Houston Authority, Harris County and more than 100 private businesses. Expanded services have resulted in approximately \$320 million dollars of capital investment being recruited to the port region through Economic Alliance project work. An estimated \$25 million has been realized in the form of grants, assistance loans, studies and other economic service activities engaged by the organization on behalf of its stakeholders. Commitment of influential partners ranging from local to statewide groups was garnered in the last five years for unique long-term initiatives that evolved from Economic Alliance strategic goals and start-up facilitation. Examples include Project Stars™ (San Jacinto Texas Historic District), the Gulf Coast Petrochemical Information Network (GCPIN), and the formation of a recently publicized non-profit International Maritime and Energy Center.

Lawler, a CPA, credits the Economic Alliance board of directors, staff, business members and community leaders for being exceptional partners who helped with resources, hard work and influence specific to the port region. "Working in this capacity has been an honor for me and I am appreciative to so many, including those who came before me in this role. With this non-profit organization now revitalized and with enhanced economic development processes established

and now sustainable, I have a personal sense of goals being fulfilled," Lawler said. "Though the timing is right for my personal commitments and interests, I do want our members to know that I am committed to work closely in the future with the Economic Alliance because I strongly believe in its mission and value."

Economic Alliance Chairman of the Board Jim Gilbert spoke on behalf of the directors by saying, "Through dedication and perseverance, Jan has been the catalyst for the growth and development of the Economic Alliance. All of us who have been a part owe her a debt of gratitude. The Economic Alliance is now recognized locally and throughout the State of Texas for being instrumental in workforce development, promotion of the rich heritage tourism of the area, and working toward improving the quality of life for those who live and work within the service region of the organization. I believe that I represent many when I say that Jan has certainly made her mark and will be missed."

Incoming Board Chairman Dr. Charles Grant added, "Jan Lawler has been the driving force behind the Economic Alliance and a champion for economic development in the port area. I will miss her leadership at the Economic Alliance but feel sure we will continue to work together for the betterment of our region."

In response to Lawler's notification, the Board of Directors formally announced today that the leadership role vacated by Lawler will be filled internally through two promotions that have been unanimously approved for full implementation by year-end.



Chad Burke, current Project Director, who holds a B.S. Degree in Economics from Texas A & M University, will serve as the President/CEO. Burke came to the Economic Alliance in 2008 as Project Director - with a specific focus on the Project Stars master urban revitalization project. Previously Project Manager at the Technology & Economic Division of the Texas Engineering Extension Service in College Station, Burke's duties at the Extension Service focused on business development and project oversight for Texas communities. He worked with cities all over the state to provide technical assistance for strategic regional planning; with the goal of helping cities reach their economic development potential. In his role at the Texas Engineering Extension Service, Chad managed the TARGET program – Technical Assistance for Regional Growth in Economic Development. As director of a team of researchers, he worked with officials in numerous communities, including Bastrop, Brazoria County, Vernon and Canton. "I am grateful for the opportunity to work with the board of directors, staff, and our stakeholders to serve this region. I appreciate the Board's confidence in my ability to contribute to the ongoing success of this dynamic organization," said Burke.



A new role, COO (Chief Operating Officer), will be filled by Marie McDermott, current Business Development Director. Marie will continue to proactively recruit and manage business development and retention prospects while helping administer daily operations of the organization. In the new organizational structure, McDermott will be provided flexibility to continue her passion to lead business development for the port region commerce while the Economic Alliance is ensured of the ability to draw upon McDermott's rich experiences as President/CEO of economic development organizations and chambers of commerce around the state. McDermott came to the Economic Alliance with a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration from the University of Texas at Austin and as a graduate of the Economic Development Institute in Oklahoma with the Certified Economic Development distinction. Having filled presidential/CEO leadership roles in several organizations, McDermott is well known throughout the State of Texas and was selected as Chairman of the Texas Economic Development Council in 2005 after demonstrating skills on numerous leadership committees for that organization. She is a member of the International Economic Development Council.

"I am pleased with the Board's decision to promote from within the organization; a pivotal decision that will leverage knowledge and ensure stability. Recruitment of visionary, dedicated talent and colleagues to grow the Economic Alliance is something I am most proud," commented Lawler.

Economic Alliance Chairman Jim Gilbert expressed his appreciation to fellow board members for their assistance to approve the transition plan and noted, "I am enthusiastic about the next steps of the Economic Alliance. Our board will work closely with this talented staff to continue shaping the Economic Alliance to be an influential economic and public policy catalyst."

**The Houston Port Region**, consisting of sixteen communities in southeast Harris County, surrounds the 25-mile Houston Ship Channel and is home to one of the world's most influential energy corridor and trade ports. Businesses are attracted to the port region's advantageous tax structure; business-friendly legislative and regulatory climate; strong infrastructure; and vibrant assistance programs for incentives, financing, workforce development, and business site selection.

**The Economic Alliance** (Houston Port Region) provides economic development services and is funded by 12 chambers of commerce; Harris County; the Port of Houston Authority; private sector members; the cities of La Porte, Shoreacres, Morgan's Point, Pasadena, South Houston, Deer Park, Baytown, Seabrook, Pearland, Galena Park, Baytown and Jacinto City; as well as communities of Channelview, Sheldon, South Belt-Ellington and North Shore. Since early 2004 until the current time, the Economic Alliance has helped bring approximately 320 million dollars of capital investment to the area. Visit [www.allianceportregion.com](http://www.allianceportregion.com).

**Port Region Master Planning:** The Economic Alliance Houston Port Region is also known for development of a quality of life urban revitalization master plan, named Project Stars (visit [www.sjthd.org](http://www.sjthd.org)) that has been championed by Harris County Precinct 2 Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia and cities of the port region.

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