



## **The John Williams CID Leadership Award**

### **By Tad Leithead**

In 1983, a group of Cobb County businessmen took a trip to Washington, D.C. to learn about how that city was managing their transportation challenges. The two leaders of the trip were Earl Smith, Chairman of the Cobb Commission, and John Williams, founder and president of Post Properties, and incoming Chairman of the Cobb Chamber. On that trip they got several ideas:

- SPLOST funding for County Transportation Projects
- Local Bus System
- The power of Community Improvement Districts (CID)

The County took the lead on SPLOST Funding and the Bus System. The Chamber took the lead on formation of a CID in Cobb, which would be the first in the state. John immediately discovered that there was no law allowing CIDs in Georgia. And, even worse, they were prohibited by the Georgia Constitution.

John approached State Representative Johnny Isakson and State Senator Roy Barnes for their help and, in November of 1984, a state-wide constitutional amendment to allow CIDs in Georgia appeared on the ballot and passed. Once CIDs were legal in Georgia, there needed to be enabling legislation to establish the rules for creating and operating a CID. So, John personally had the legislation drafted, and then went back to Johnny and Roy and asked them to sponsor the bill. In the 1985 session, Roy introduced the bill in the Senate, and Johnny introduced it in the House, and it passed and was signed by Governor Joe Frank Harris.

The law required a “local act” to be adopted by local government, in this case the Cobb County Commission. John had a local act drafted, and he asked Earl Smith to get it passed by the Commission, which Earl agreed to do, and it passed. The law also required a “cooperation agreement” between the County and the CID. John engaged lawyer, Sydney Parker, to draft a cooperation agreement, and it was adopted by the Commission.

Then, the boundaries of the CID were established, and the next step was to garner the support of businesses within the CID to join the self-taxing district by agreeing via “consent forms.” John committed over 50 of his employees at his company, Post Properties, to get the consent forms signed as required to create the CID. The consent forms were signed over a two-year period. They were then presented to the Cobb Commission, and the formation of Georgia’s first CID was approved.

On May 1, 1988, the Cobb Community Improvement District, (later Cumberland CID), was formed. The Board to govern the CID was elected by the membership. The Board’s first action was to set the millage rate at 5 mils. Their second action was to elect John Williams as Chairman.

John Williams’ vision and tenacity lead our business and elected leaders to understand the value of CIDs. His leadership fermented the creation of one of the most valued and dynamic economic generators we have witnessed in this state. The John Williams CID Leadership Award is not only a lasting tribute to John’s work and legacy, but also a way to recognize those who have followed in his footsteps.