The Day

July 4, 2020

Workforce board president steps down

Beauregard's retirement now official; Courtney called him 'the prophet'

By ERICA MOSER
Day Staff Writer

John Beauregard's 30-year tenure as head of what is now called the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board started after the Cold War, with a nationwide recession and massive layoffs at Electric Boat, and it ended during another recession but with ramped-up hiring at EB.

"It was a wild ride, to say the least," Beauregard said this week.



Beauregard

But in those three decades, he received numerous accolades and became known not just regionally but nationally as someone who came out ahead of workforce trends, addressing labor needs through partnerships.

"I may sound completely over-the-top and unrestrained, but I've called him 'the prophet' in public settings numerous times," said Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, "because what he did in terms of the workforce board — really showing some imagination and vision about what's happening to the economy in the region going back to the early 2000s — is just really very special."

While Beauregard "retired" this week as president and CEO of EWIB, a decision announced more than

SEE BEAUREGARD PAGE C2

Beauregard received high praise in his career

FROM C1

13 months ago, he's not going anywhere: He's staying on as "special advisor to the president."

"I'm not surprised to hear he's going to stay in an advisory capacity, because he just burns with passion on this, and I think it would be hard for him to just go cold-turkey and walk away," Courtney said.

The new president and CEO is Mark Hill, who similarly said that Beauregard has "got too much wealth of knowledge and experience for us to let him go." Hill said he is not sure how long Beauregard will remain in this role.

Hill has been chief operating officer at EWIB for the past five years. A Montville High School alumnus and liberal arts graduate of Wesleyan University, Hill worked in finance and business leadership positions at EB, Pfizer and Aetna before landing at EWIB.

Partnerships put into action

Beauregard, who has lived in Norwich for the past 34 years, grew up in the Griswold area and went to college for business and industrial psychology. He interned with the Navy before working at Thames Valley Council for Community Action.

When he started at EWIB in 1990, it was known as the Private Industry Council. It then became known as the Southeastern Connecticut Workforce Development Board before merging with its Northeastern counterpart in 2003.

In Beauregard's first two or three years, EB eliminated more than 4,000 jobs due to reductions in defense spending, and the defense contractor in April 1992 saw its largest single layoff since 1977. Beauregard said at that point, the PIC and EB were actually bussing people to the Garde Arts Center to do "rapid response," such as helping people file for unemployment benefits.

He said this struggle meant working closely with different partners, which set the stage for the rest of his career.

The National Association of Counties in 1992 named the PIC a winner of the Job Training Partnership Act Award for Excellence, for helping with a program that used displaced workers from EB to build electric cars for public utilities in Groton, Norwich and Wallingford.

In the 2000s, Beauregard said the casino growth singlehandedly counterbalanced unemployment issues at the time. People thought displaced EB workers just rolled over to the casinos, but it wasn't that easy: He recalls using 450 employers to place 800 EB workers at one point.

> "It was a wild ride, to say the least."
> JOHN BEAUREGARD

In 2004, the U.S. Department of Labor gave EWIB its first Recognition of Excellence award, one of five presented nationally, for programming to boost employment in biosciences. Ten years later, Beauregard received both the Merit Award from Three Rivers Community College and a United Labor Agency Collaboration Champion Award.

When Beauregard talks about partnerships, it's not just some feel-good buzzword but something with tangible results: Through working with community colleges and employers, EWIB's Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative has provided free training that has landed more than 1,550 people jobs at local manufacturers, mostly at EB.

When the MPI was getting started in 2015, then-U.S. Labor Secretary Thomas Perez visited the region for a roundtable on labor force issues, and Courtney recalled this week that Perez whispered to him about Beauregard, "I wish I had a guy like this in every state."

On Monday, the 550-member National Association for Workforce Boards recognized EWIB with its Outstanding Achievement in Partnership Award, for the MPI.

Beauregard said this was one of his proudest moments in his three decades at EWIB, along with his work on youth employment; EWIB places at least 400 teens and young adults in summer jobs each year through the Summer Youth Employment Program.

EWIB has also done a youth spinoff of the MPI for high school students. In the intermediate and long-term, Hill said he's working on expanding the MPI model beyond manufacturing into health care and other sectors.

e.moser@theday.com