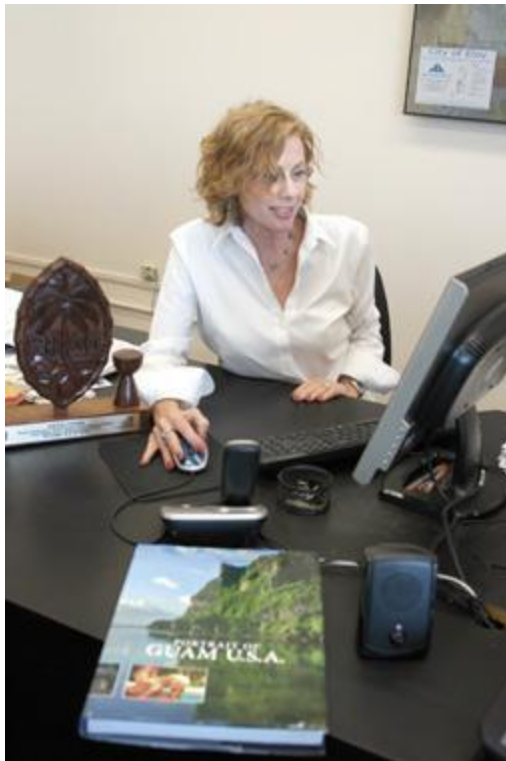


Guam welcomes Gayle Cooper

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Staff photo by Lindsey Gemme, Cooper works at her office next to the bank on Main Street in Eloy, surrounded by gifts she'd received last month for her time in speaking at an economic conference forum in Guam.



Director Gayle Cooper for the Economic Development Group of Eloy (EDGE) took time away late last month to travel halfway around the world to discuss the economy of Guam during a two-day conference at the University of Guam.

The annual conference was held Nov. 12-13, and Cooper was invited almost as a last minute switch when another speaker suddenly became unavailable. Flown first class and all expenses paid, she joined a panel of 60 guest panelists – and one of only three “off-island” speakers - who would discuss the potential effects a growing American military presence would have on its local economy.

With such a rich and tumultuous history, Cooper had to brush up on Guam culture. Being the very last to speak was a boon for her presentation, she said, for she got the chance to listen to everyone’s side and points brought up. In fact, she changed her presentation three times in order to accommodate what she had heard.

In Guam, 37 percent of the population are native Chamorros who have been there for 4,000 years, though history books tell of their “discovery” only 400 years.

“That doesn’t go over very well,” Cooper said.

When the Japanese invaded during World War II, the Chamorros’ main, ancient city was destroyed and leveled, and many were put in concentration camps until the end of the conflict. Since then, the historic city has been taken over and recreated as a U.S. army installation.

So Cooper’s positive message about how a military presence helps bolster any economy she knew would be a challenging job. “I never run away from a challenge,” she added.

For example, Cooper has been a public speaker nearly all of her life. She’s made presentations at conferences for California Local Economic Group, CorNet (corporate real estate network), IEDC, and spoke at an economic development administration telecast over the TV.

But of course, all of her audiences beforehand had been supportive, rather than arguing every point.

“The most dangerous assaults on economic development or any forward movement, is the insidious opposition that does not talk to you,” Cooper explained. “I’m fine with being challenged face-to-face so I can give them the answers.”

And specifically, she gave Guam residents tips on how to capitalize on the military buildup, and to view it as an advantage and good building block.

"As certified economic developers, we know how to make it happen. Our training is in knowing how to ignite a community and get them excited about economic development. It really does take your entire community to be successful.

"And I see that happening in Eloy."

Many visitors at Eloy's EDGE meetings, including Jim Rounds with Elliot D. Pollack and Company, are always so pleasantly surprised with turnout at meetings, which average about 40.

"People are supportive [for economic development in Eloy]. The problem is not everybody is aware. Everybody goes through their daily lives, and especially in this economy, people have basic needs to take care of. So, looking at the good of the entire community isn't exactly what's paramount on their minds."

Coming to Eloy in the current economic climate hasn't been easy in motivating, but the general feeling is a pro-economic development attitude among those who are familiar with efforts being made including from City Council members, and City Manager Joseph Blanton.

Besides being honored as a guest speaker halfway around the globe, Cooper has been recently honored at a much more local level.

For years, she has been very active with the Junior League organization in Phoenix. It was established by Eleanor Roosevelt, for 18-19 year old girls who didn't want to just marry leaders, but wanted to become leaders. Originally called the Junior League of the Settlement Movement, these young women helped immigrants settle in America after coming through Ellis Island.

Today, the organization is an international order, and the Phoenix chapter is turning 75-years-old this year. To celebrate, the League wanted to choose 75 outstanding women community leaders in Phoenix. Cooper is a former president of the League, and has served on many boards, and did many presentations and community oriented events while affiliated with the league. And just recently, she received a letter saying someone had nominated her, and she will be honored as one of Phoenix's 75 most outstanding community leaders.

"I don't know who nominated me, but someday I'd like to find out - because it was very nice of them to do so.

"It's just really cool, because I'm not exactly Sandra Day O'Connor," she chuckled.