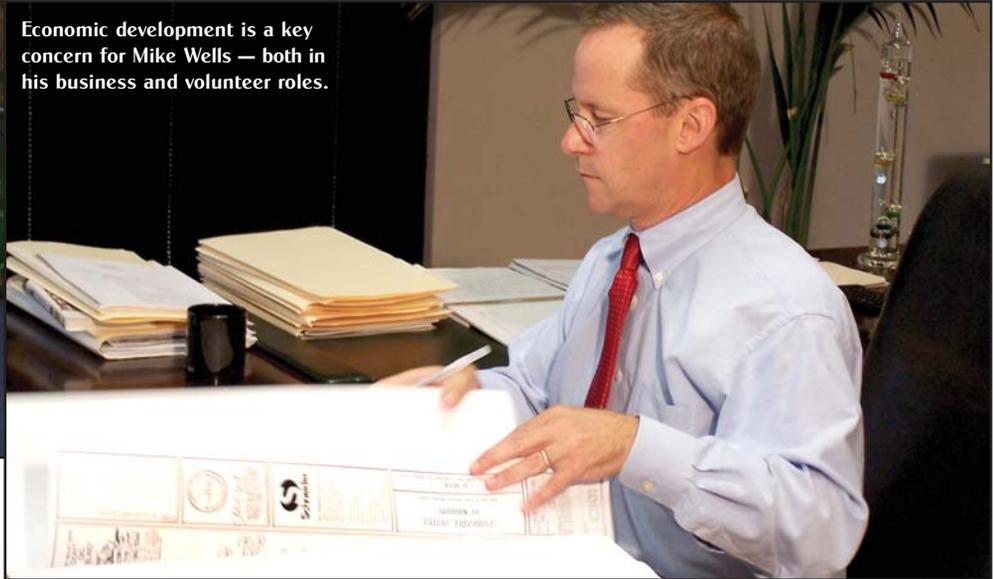




Economic development is a key concern for Mike Wells — both in his business and volunteer roles.



## 2006 Volunteer of the Year Mike Wells

As president of REI Investments, Mike Wells fully realizes the importance of a strong Indiana economy. He also knows that the political landscape goes a long way in determining that economic development climate.

Wells combines the two in his volunteer contributions for the Indiana Chamber, serving on various policy committees (economic development, taxation policy, business-higher education, and the technology and advanced manufacturing task force) through the years and as a member of the board of directors. He is a current member of the Indiana Business for Responsive Government (IBRG) political action group and one of the leaders of its fund-raising efforts, as well as serving on the Chamber's executive committee.

"I understand what it takes to create jobs. For our business, it's all about job creation," Wells contends. "If there aren't jobs, there isn't the need for office space. With IBRG, it's like being able to be involved in a number of different campaigns all at the same time."

Regarding local economic development, Wells has assisted with Indianapolis and Marion County efforts for many years. With that comes deep knowledge and valuable insights.

"Mike is very thorough and analytical in his approach," comments Mark Lawrance, Chamber vice president of corporate development. "His practical experience and strong political understanding lead to a very well-informed perspective. No matter the issue or topic, he is always there for the Chamber and the business community."

### Proactive efforts

Wells says it's too late for the business community to become involved after adverse legislation has passed.

"I know all people are limited in their time. That's the reason they should belong to the Chamber — you have people working for you every day," he reasons. "The Chamber does more for the business community and my business than any other organization I've been involved in. The lobbying efforts of the Chamber make a tremendous difference in the state of the economy in Indiana. It's time consuming yet very rewarding."

Jerry Semler, a former Chamber chairman and longtime leader of OneAmerica Financial Partners, helped bring Wells onto the Chamber board. Chris LaMothe, the Chamber president at the time, later asked Wells to serve on the executive committee.

"When I looked at the caliber of people, I said that's something I wanted to be involved in," Wells recounts. "That's an incredible collection of highly successful business people. When you put all those people in the same room and start looking at solutions, you're able to find ones pretty quickly."

### Business expansion

Wells has been finding his own solutions with REI since 1994. He worked as a real estate

By Tom Schuman

attorney before joining Browning Investments in the late 1980s. REI was formed as the real estate arm of that business, but since has expanded into five functional areas – investment, management, leasing, development and construction.

The 100-employee company owns 1.5 million square feet and manages 3.5 million square feet of office space in the Indianapolis area. Retail and hospitality projects have been added to the mix, along with geographic diversity in Kentucky, Florida, Texas and Arizona.

Wells says there is a lot of synergy between the various operations. “Typically, when we build something, we own it. If it’s in hospitality, we have a partner that manages that. We’re not a big volume developer. We’ve really developed the investments (part of the business), and that has become a major part of our company.”

Wells was involved in building the first of what became many office buildings on the downtown Indianapolis canal. The colorful Thomson Consumer Electronics headquarters is another memorable project, as is the downtown Marriott hotel, built at a time when the city was seeking the Republican National Convention.

That was a \$110 million project with a very challenging time schedule. The additional venue was also needed to serve convention center clients and Wells believes its focus on top-rate service helped improve the market’s overall offerings. It was REI’s first hotel project, but led to more work in that area. When the governor of Kentucky toured the facility prior to its opening, he asked what he needed to do to get a similar facility in Louisville. REI has since completed several projects in that city.

## Building a city

Former Indianapolis Mayor Stephen Goldsmith was working in the city attorney’s office when he met Wells, then a law student. He says neither had any political experience when Wells served as campaign manager for Goldsmith’s run for prosecutor in 1978. Wells has since been involved in numerous campaigns.

When he became mayor, Goldsmith relied on Wells and others to complement the work of his city staff.

“We were trying to do a number of fairly complicated financial transactions,” says Goldsmith, who is a school of government professor at Harvard University and was appointed by President Bush in 2005 as chairman of the Corporation for National and Community Service. “Nobody played a greater role in developing Indianapolis and the way downtown looks today

than Mike Wells. He must have volunteered 250 hours to make Circle Centre Mall a reality.”

Conscientious and hard-working are two of the attributes Goldsmith uses to describe his longtime friend. The two also collaborated when Goldsmith was trying to expand the local parks system and Wells was on the board of the YMCA, a position he has held for more than 20 years.

The Indianapolis Airport Authority has also benefited from Wells’ expertise since the early 1990s. Of the new \$1 billion midfield terminal project scheduled for completion in 2008, Wells claims, “People are going to be very impressed with how easy it is to use. It’s going to be a model for the rest of the country.”

For Indiana to be an overall business leader, Wells believes continued attention must be paid to education and workforce



Wells, with 2004 Volunteer of the Year winner Jean Northenor, is an active participant in the Indiana Business for Responsive Government’s political activities.

development. “You can’t snap your fingers and come up with a solution. Everything we do needs to focus on that. That will be the backbone for a successful Indiana economy.”

Wells, for one, will be there to do his part.

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