

## **AAEA Fellow Nomination for Steven Deller**

Steven Deller, Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor and Community Development Extension Specialist, has made truly pioneering contributions to the development of community and rural economics as a subfield within the discipline of agricultural and applied economics. His research has profoundly changed the way regional and community economists approach local development. His extension programming has provided an internationally known model applying economic tools addressing community and regional development issues. And his coauthored book *Community Economics: Linking Theory and Practice*, remains the premier text in community and regional economics nationally. His scholarship has spanned topics relevant to local communities ranging from rural entrepreneurship, the role of amenities, the local economic effects of retirees and the local foods movement to tax and expenditure limits, local finance, and local budgets. His scholarship is truly interdisciplinary and has integrated tools and theories from applied economics, political science, sociology, and regional science. For example, his most recent co-authored book, *Understanding Municipal Fiscal Health: A Model for Local Governments in the U.S.A.* (2023), was described by Filip Hruža at Masaryk University, Czechia, writing in *International Journal of Public Administration*, as a "...honest and artisanal approach goes peel by peel from external factors to the heart of understanding the financial health of municipalities..." His use of spatial analysis has led to new understandings of the spatial issues related to microenterprises, economic growth, amenities, rural poverty, and rural crime.

**Research Scholarship** Dr. Deller has made extraordinary scholarly research contributions. The depth of his impact can be measured by the citations to his publications. According to Google Scholar, Deller's work has received 10,086 citations. His h-index (where h is the largest number of publications that have received at least h citations) is 51. His publications have appeared in

top journals in economics (e.g., *American Journal of Agricultural Economics (AJAE)* and *Review of Economics and Statistics*), regional economics (e.g., *Regional Science and Urban Economics*), and public finance (e.g., *Public Administration Review*). His most significant scholarly impact has been in articulating the importance of amenities to rural development. His most cited publication “The Role of Amenities and Quality of Life in Rural Economic Growth”, published in 2001 in the *AJAE*, has received 1,047 citations, making it the sixth most cited *AJAE* article overall and the third most cited in the 21st century according to the lead article published in *AJAE* in 2018 (*AJAE* 100(5):1253-1274). Mark Partridge, Professor and Swank Chair at The Ohio State U., explains: "This study altered the way that economists view rural development. It shows that amenities and quality of life are key features driving rural economic growth. Before this path- breaking work, rural economists had long dismissed natural resources and agriculture as the dominant features of most rural economies, but their understanding of how to promote rural growth in a more diverse economy was quite primitive." The high citation rate to this article testifies to its importance in identifying and assessing the role of quality-of-life and amenities in rural areas and in economic development around the world. Other highly cited papers by Deller include his 2000 paper in *Journal of Planning Literature* entitled "Quality of Life in the Planning literature" (406 citations) and his 1991 *AJAE* paper entitled “Measuring the Economic Efficiency of Producing Rural Road Service” provide examples of the breadth of his work on issues impacting rural America.

Deller has published 132 referred journal articles, which is impressive given that Deller has a 15% research appointment at the University of Wisconsin. It reflects that Deller's scholarly contributions are driven by grassroots issues and community problems that motivate his

scholarly inquiries and his outreach Extension activities. Besides his journal articles, Deller has also written or edited seven books and contributed 32 book chapters.

Dr. Deller is an outstanding scholar. In 2018, he received the *Walter Isard Award for Distinguished Scholarly Achievement in the Field of Regional Science* from the North American Regional Science Council. He received the *Rural Renewal Research Prize* from the Rural Renewal Initiative in 2020. And he is a Fellow of both the Southern Regional Science Association and the Midcontinent Regional Science Association. These Awards attest of the outstanding theoretical and methodological contributions made by Dr. Deller to the field of Regional Science. Stephan Goetz (Professor of Agricultural and Regional Economics and Director of the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development, Penn State U.) notes that "A remarkable aspect of Deller's scholarship is that he has been able to address emerging issues, such as the efficiency of providing roads, and yet been able to place this work in journals such as the *Review of Economics and Statistics*. In doing this he has set up entirely new areas of inquiry, such as the role of natural amenities in rural economic development. Dr. Deller is a true scholar in the best sense of the engaged land grant university scientist: he addresses new practical societal problems as they arise using state of the art economic theory and analysis, the results of which are then published in leading academic journals. His creativity over a long career is astonishing and continues unabated."

The breadth of research topics addressed by Deller is impressive. Judith Stallmann (Professor Emeritus of Agricultural and Applied Economics at the University of Missouri), in her nomination of Deller for the Isard Award for lifetime contributions to regional science, referred to Deller as a "renaissance man" reflecting the breadth and depth of his work on rural economic issues. His work establishes a cohesive body of literature, representing a systems approach to

thinking about communities. Dr. Daniel Bromley (AAEA Fellow and Professor at the University of Wisconsin) notes: "Deller's record of empirical research stands almost unprecedented in its theoretical foundations, its attention to specific detail, and its pertinence for public policy in relation to community and regional economies. Deller has set the standard for how to conduct policy-relevant research concerning local communities and the regional economies of which they are a central component."

**Extension Outreach and Teaching** In his Extension appointment (85%), Deller has made important contributions focusing on economic and policy concerns in Wisconsin, as well as nationally, supported by in-depth educational materials and policy analysis including over 200 bulletins, and Extension-related papers, as well as more than 100 conference papers and other publications. Jean-Paul Chavas (AAEA Fellow and Anderson-Bascom Professor, University of Wisconsin) explains that "these publications alone do not convey his important Extension impact. Dr. Deller has developed effective education programs that have helped many community leaders design and implement policies supporting economic growth. His contributions to community development in rural Wisconsin have been huge. And his programs have been seen as a model of economic development in rural areas throughout the world."

The relevance of his outreach contributions is highlighted by Deller being frequently quoted in the national media, including the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*. Deller is also a regular guest on *Wisconsin Public Radio*. Judith Stallmann remarks that "his service to rural Wisconsin is a high priority, and he applies rigorous scholarship to address issues of concern to rural people. He has applied his talents to a wide range of topics and made contributions to each. But in the end, he is always interested in how this sheds light on policy at the national, state or local level."

Nationally, Deller has made important Extension contributions. He received the 2017 *AAEA Group Extension Program Award* (Honorable Mention) for his contributions to the “Economic Impacts of Local Foods Toolkit”. This was part of a collaborative effort across seven universities and USDA. He has also been actively engaging with C-FARE to integrate a rural development lens into the organization's agricultural and natural resource focus. Mike Woods (Professor, Oklahoma State University) notes: "Dr. Deller has consistently been a strong voice influencing policy and the role of agricultural economists in building rural economies nation-wide. His leadership with C-FARE has enhanced our profession's effectiveness with policymakers and he has offered great insights into rural economic development policy."

At the University of Wisconsin, Deller holds affiliations with the Dept. of Urban and Regional Planning, the Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, the Energy Institute, and the Local Government Center (Extension) at the University of Wisconsin. These collaborations speak to the cross-cutting nature of his research and outreach. Deller was part of a team, which in 2017 brought a five-year (renewed for five additional years 2021) Economic Development Administration funded University Center to the University of Wisconsin. Deller was the interim director of the Center for Community and Economic Development that received this EDA UC award. To date, Dr. Deller has secured over \$4.5 million in external funding.

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Deller has no formal teaching appointment. Yet he has been teaching a graduate-level regional and community economics course. His *Community Economics: Linking Theory and Practice* (2004, with Ron Shaffer and David Marcouiller) provides a scholarly approach to the economics and policy of rural development and has contributed to improving the rigor with which academics and practitioners analyze topics in regional and community economics. The book has had a profound impact on economists and

policy makers, as reflected in the book's 332 citations (Google Scholar}. Published reviews of community/regional economics courses indicate that the text has been the single most used rural/regional/community economics text in the country and many course syllabi refer to at least one Deller article or paper.

Mark Partridge notes: "Steve's influence on real world communities extends beyond popular textbooks to his teaching in which a large share of community development specialists have either taken his courses or attended one of his Extension workshops. His commitment to teaching extends into the field with his innovative Extension program."

**Service Contributions** Through editorial positions, service to professional associations, and colleague mentoring, Deller has shaped and transformed community and regional economics within AAEA. He was the Associate Editor of the AJAE from 2004 to 2007 and edited the first *AJAE* virtual issue (on Domestic Rural Economic Development). He has served as Chair of the AAEA Extension Award Committee and as reviewer for the rural/community development paper selection committee numerous times and currently serves on the AAEA Government Relations Committee He was also an early Chair of the CRENET (Community and Regional Economics Network) section of the AAEA (with 237 AAEA members) and is one of the most active contributors to the AAEA-hosted CRENET listserv. Jane Kolodinsky (University of Vermont and past CRENET chair) says, "The CRENET section of AAEA is extremely supportive of Steve's nomination. His scholarly contributions revolutionized the way in which community development economists view economic development and he continues to produce high quality scholarship using cutting edge tools."

Deller has provided an important bridge between AAEA and regional science associations in the area of rural development. Ian Coxhead (Professor, University of Wisconsin)

notes that "Dr. Deller has served as President of the both the Southern and Mid-Continent Regional Science Association and served an amazing 14 years on the North American Regional Science Council including the NARSC President in 2021." Deller currently serves on the editorial board of eight journals including two premier regional economics journals, *Journal of Regional Science* and *Papers in Regional Science*. He was co-editor of the *Journal of Regional Analysis and Policy* (1999 to 2008) and has served as a reviewer for over 50 journals, including the journals of American, Canadian and U.S. regional agricultural economics associations. With his service to and integration of AAEA, CRENET, and the regional science associations. Deller has been instrumental at maintaining the integral and historic role of agricultural economics within regional science fields, helping ensure that regional scientists around the world have access to the knowledge base of applied regional economists.

Further, Deller is a recognized mentor to graduate students and young faculty. Brian Whitacre (Professor, Oklahoma State University) writes: "Steve has a genuine interest in bringing up the next generation of community development and regional economists. His passion for the subject - and respect for the community he helps to lead - is evident not only in his own work but in that of others he has helped along the way." His investment in young faculty is documented by research collaborations and co-authorships with early career scholars across the U.S.

**Conclusion** Steven Deller has had an extraordinary impact on the current approach to rural and regional development in research, extension and teaching and has served a key role in the development of regional and community economics in applied economics and regional science. Stephan Goetz writes "I cannot think of a scholar more deserving of this distinguished award in his academic specialty." Mark Partridge states that "Steve Deller is either the most or one of the

most influential economists in terms of how we view economic growth in rural communities in the last generation or two. His research changed the whole paradigm about rural development." Tom Johnson (Professor Emeritus of Agricultural Economics, U. of Missouri) writes: "Steve has demonstrated so well that research, teaching and Extension can be successfully integrated. He established a very high standard in all three of the Land Grant responsibilities."

AAEA Fellow and Professor Emeritus Bruce Weber, Oregon State U., provides a summary of Deller's contributions. "Among currently active applied economists, no one in the profession has had as profound or broad an impact on community and regional economics as Deller. Very few in our profession have succeeded in providing significant leadership in teaching, research and Extension, and no community and regional economist has been as successful in encouraging and mentoring young scholars and introducing innovations that build the AAEA's links to policymakers. With his pioneering achievements in teaching, research and Extension, Deller is the pre-eminent leader in community and regional economics for our profession, having fundamentally changed how this field is conceptualized, taught and practiced in agricultural and applied economics."

***Submitted by***

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