

Tad Leithead: A Perspective on the Founding of CREW Atlanta and 41 Years of Change in CRE

Tad Leithead, President - [Leithead Consulting](#)

In observance of the transition from Women's History Month in March to Black Women's History Month and CREW Atlanta's founding in April, we asked past CREW Atlanta member Tad Leithead for a retrospective on the Atlanta CRE industry and CREW Atlanta's impact on its diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).

When I joined the Atlanta Commercial Real Estate business in July of 1983, Commercial Development and Leasing were totally male-dominated industries. I will go so far as to say that the prevailing wisdom was that women "could not be successful in such an extremely competitive environment."

A prime example of this way of thinking was a recurring networking event commonly referred to as "[NAIOP](#) Fight Night." Fight Night was a black tie, cigar-infested evening of prize fights with substantial consumption of alcohol served by scantily clad waitresses. Not surprisingly, very few, if any, professional women attended these events. Female professionals were not invited on more daytime-appropriate networking events, like golf outings, so "boys could be boys" while out on the golf course.

In the mid-'80s, a handful of professional women began breaking the mold by entering the world of commercial real estate. I was personally acquainted with a few of them, including previous CREW Atlanta presidents Char Fortune and Kay Younglove, and I was involved in the interviewing and hiring of Connie Engel, who came to work with me on the Atlanta Galleria leasing team after serving as a marketing manager at IBM for nine years.

These women immediately became successful in the leasing business. And, not surprisingly, they were not pleased with the sexist, "good ol' boy" environment the CRE industry fostered. They wanted to be invited to play golf. They had no interest in attending Fight Night but understandably objected to being excluded on principle. They wanted to be taken seriously by their male counterparts as Real Estate Professionals and objected to the overall attitude of their male colleagues. So, they decided to do something about it. The result was the formation of Career Real Estate Women, or CREW, which influences the success of the commercial real estate industry by advancing the achievements of women.

Today, the organization is part of CREW Network and is known as CREW (Commercial Real Estate for Women) Atlanta to eliminate confusion, but CREW Atlanta is older than CREW Network.

CREW Atlanta spoke out on the blatant sexism in CRE and pushed NAIOP to eliminate Fight Night and create professional networking functions open to all professionals regardless of gender. They also invited me to join CREW and to speak at one of their initial meetings. I agreed to do both.

Over the last 41 years, CREW has certainly made enormous progress on its initial objective of creating a more inclusive CRE environment for women. CREW Atlanta is now a vibrant and diverse organization serving the Atlanta CRE market and beyond. Today, CREW addresses all facets of equity, diversity and inclusion far beyond the original focus of gender discrimination in the industry. I would even say that issue no longer exists in our business, or at least, certainly not to the same extreme, due in large part to the efforts of CREW leadership so many years ago.

I am pleased to say that I still include my relationships with Char, Kay, and especially Connie among my most valued friendships. I remain honored that they chose to include me in their cause, and proud of what they, through CREW, have accomplished.

- Tad Leithead

CREW is dedicated to the continued advancement of DEI in our industry. In addition to our programs and initiatives focused on DEI education and awareness, CREW invites industry CEOs to commit to these goals by [signing an industry-wide pledge](#) to support the advancement of women and other individuals in underrepresented groups including but not limited to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, religion and age.

We encourage you to sign the pledge and do your part to support DEI in your companies and businesses.