

personality profile •

Focusing on long-term

Warren Ribley

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By Eric Woods, Correspondent

Warren Ribley was born and raised in Olney, Ill. He attended Eastern Illinois University where he earned a bachelor's degree in political science. Ribley has two daughters, Kristin and Allison, and enjoys traveling, gardening, and other outdoor activities. He located to Springfield right out of college when he took an internship with the Illinois Senate and stayed on the Senate Democratic staff for the entire decade of the 80s. In 1990, when Pat Quinn became state treasurer, Ribley began working in the treasurer's office. That position lasted until 1995 when Ribley went on to the private sector in the mortgage banking industry. He stayed in that capacity for eight years before heading back to state government in 2003 with a position in the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO).

Nature of the business: Ribley has been with DCEO since 2003 and director since March of 2009. DCEO is the economic development agency for Illinois. Their primary mission is to create and maintain jobs. There are 12 programmatic offices in the state, and they have three cornerstones: business development, workforce development, and communication. "We are the office for state tourism, energy, film, international trade, small business, technology, and goal development," said Ribley.

How is business?: "This is a great job," said Ribley. "I really enjoy the position." Ribley became director during the worst recession that the state and country has seen in years, and he has seen signs that the state and country is coming out of that recession. "Playing a part in that is very rewarding for me." Ribley has found it very rewarding working for Pat Quinn and was very pleased with the opportunity, which has motivated him to work as hard as he can to provide terrific employment opportunities.

Trends: The primary change that Ribley has seen in recent years is that we are in a global economy now. "World economy is more competitive," he said. "Technology is changing everyone's lives all over the world." Ribley feels the competition in Illinois is no longer just the neighboring states, but the entire world.

Challenges: Getting people back to work is Ribley's primary focus. "Unemployment is still around 10 percent, which is down over the last eight months," he said. "It is still much higher than it needs to be." Ribley and his staff want to continue their efforts in creating new jobs for the 21st century economy.

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Of what accomplishments are you most proud?: Over the past year and a half, Ribley's office has been able to complete more than 95 business development packages and retained 20,000 jobs in Illinois. "We have leveraged \$2.3 billion in private investments in Illinois," he said. Ribley is also proud to implement President Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

What was your worst former job?: "I have been fortunate that every job I have had was better than the previous one," said Ribley. While in high school, he did work at a cemetery cutting grass and digging graves by hand, but he considered it a fun job since it was outdoors.

How does one succeed in this type of position?: Ribley believes that perseverance and persistence are two major keys to doing well in his position. "You have to keep focusing on the long term goals and understand that economic development does not happen overnight," he said. Developing trust and partnerships is also key to success. "You need to work through the issues with the communities and the private sector. It is very rewarding when it all comes together."

What's next for you?: "I hope to stay invested in economic development as it is a challenging but rewarding field," said Ribley. He would like to increase exports and trade with foreign countries. "We want to open doors for small and mid-sized companies to trade all over the world."