



Building a Legacy

Michael Durden

Prominent American business magnate John Moody once said that “the United States as we know it today is largely the result of mechanical inventions, and in particular of agricultural machinery and the railroad.”

My father was a railroad man.

In 1980, Earl Durden founded two railroad companies—Rail Management Corp. and Rail Switching Services, Inc. Those

companies created a legacy that has lived on going on a dozen years since his passing. He was an icon in the railroad industry not only because he operated efficient and safely run railroads, but because of his commitment to and love for this country. That dedication was borne out in many of his civic and community activities. In addition to serving as long-time chair of the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association, he was

as a member of the Florida Base Relocation Appointment Committee, served on the Bay County Economic Development Alliance, chaired the K-12 grade Sub-Committee of the Florida State University-Panama City Presidential Blue Ribbon Committee, was on the board of the Florida Council of 100, as well as director and past chairman of the Florida Justice Reform Institute. Each of those roles allowed my dad to express his overwhelming gratitude for all the success and prosperity that he had been blessed with.

In addition to his many philanthropic efforts, he served on the Board of Directors at The James Madison Institute. He joined the JMI board in 2003 and it proved to be one of the most valuable organizational relationships he had. Over time, he was able to marry his commitments to his family and businesses with his beliefs in the wisdom of freedom, capitalism, and liberty—and JMI was the vehicle for that. He saw a very different Florida emerge over the more than two decades he spent in the Panama City area. He cherished the ability to work with principled conservatives to guide the state to be a beacon for economic liberty and opportunity.

Since his passing, I have had the distinct honor and privilege of carrying on his legacy. That legacy has lived on through the Durden Foundation—we have supported cancer research, veteran programs, education, the special Olympics, among many other worthy endeavors.

I count The James Madison Institute among those worthy endeavors. JMI's work in promoting the principles that my father, I, and my family hold dear—and their

ability to objectively position the Sunshine State as the north star of prosperity for the rest of the country has led me to the conclusion that Florida's story is of vital importance to the nation in the years to come. The Sunshine State's path should be two-fold—continue to protect our state from unwise policy, and export our success across the country. As conservatives and believers in federalism, we should be seeking a 50-state ground game to win hearts and minds over to the wisdom of free market capitalism, limited government, and economic liberty.

This is why my family's foundation, through a multi-year commitment, is launching the Durden Center for the Advancement of Liberty at JMI. This anchor gift will, we hope, serve as a catalyst for Florida to extend its reach to the other 49 states, while at the same time ensuring that future leaders in Washington understand that the founders' wisdom was one in which the states serve as laboratories of democracy and policy solutions emerge from the bottom up—not the top down.

The Durden Family Foundation has planted our flag on the beach of freedom in Florida with JMI—we now want to advance it forward and I look forward to bringing along many on the journey in the years ahead.

Michael E. Durden is the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Kedrick Cerry, Inc., a private investment firm based in Panama City, FL. He is also the Chairman of The Durden Foundation, a private charitable organization based in Panama City.