

Laguna Woods History Center  
Community Oral History Project  
Transcript

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ABSTRACT: Born in Canton, Ohio in 1935, Morris explained his educational background at USC and move to California in 1953. He worked for the Leisure World, now Laguna Woods, management company Professional Community Management (PCM). Morris emphasized the logistics of this planned community. He moved to the community a year ago and shared about the amenities. He serves on the Laguna Woods History Center board of directors and is this community history project coordinator.

0:00:16 JK: We're here at the Laguna Woods History Center conducting an oral history project on the community. Morry Meadow here, it's May 2nd, 2016 and the first question we have prepared for you is when were you born?

0:00:17 M: January, 24th, 1935.

0:00:21 JK: And where were you born?

0:00:23 M: Canton, Ohio.

0:00:27 JK: Would you share about your upbringing?

0:00:30 M: Well, my parents were (uh) both immigrants from Europe (um). First few years of my life we traveled (uh) because my father was working for his brother-in-law who was in the scrap metal business (uh) during World War Two, that was a vital industry. And as the war wore down we returning to Ohio. My father established his business (uh) which was basically produce and I attended Lincoln High School, was on the school's honor society, not quite good enough to make National Honor Society. And I decided (uh) probably around my junior year in

high school that I thought dentistry would be a good career. And I had a half-brother living in Los Angeles and as he had a very fine dental school so that's what I aimed for and after a couple of years in pre-dent I decided I really wasn't a science person so I floundered around for about a year and then started taking some Poly-Sci courses and some public administration courses and I settled on Public Administration which led me into my first career with Los Angeles County government and personnel work. And I worked for L.A. County for twenty-eight years.

0:02:40 JK: What years did you establish this career?

0:02:44 M: '57 to '85.

0:02:48 JK: Okay. We're going to go back a little prior to those (um) just to learn a little bit more about your childhood. Did you have any favorite hobbies growing up that would lead to this career? Is there anything that signaled that prior?

0:03:04 M: Uh, I didn't have any particular hobbies. I...I made some model airplanes, you know the balsa stick and paper planes, played pick-up basketball on the local playground.

0:03:26 JK: And...

0:03:27 M: Spent quite a bit of time working in my dad's store.

0:03:34 JK: And who were your role models growing up?

0:03:38 M: My parents. I think I have a bit of O.C.D. in me from my mother and I think my personality is very much like my father's, pretty laid back.

0:04:00 JK: And were...did you have other siblings? Or was it just yourself?

0:04:03 M: I had a number of (uh) half-siblings. Both my parents had prior marriages. (Uh) My father had four children from his first marriage (uh) both considerably older than I was. So there really wasn't any relationship to speak of. And my mother had one child that (uh) was a toddler when she came from Europe. And he lived at home till he was eighteen and he was kind of a free spirit, there were the usual step-father, step-son clashes, so he left home about eighteen. But I looked up to him.

0:05:02 JK: And what country did your parents emigrate from?

0:05:05 M: They're both from what is now the Ukraine.

0:05:10 JK: And what were the conditions during that immigration, what years, what was the country like, was there...?

0:05:14 M: My dad arrived in this country as a... (uh) I guess around twelve years old, so that would be about '97, '98, 1897 or '98. My mother arrived, oh, probably around 1922 or '23 and she experienced the (uh) Russian revolution, times were

very hard there. And it was not a (uh) very pleasant place for (uh) people of the Jewish faith (uh) so she took my half-brother and her mother and they came to the U.S. both worked very hard. My mother was employed in a ladies garment industry and an early member of the union. And my grandmother, (uh) who was a fantastic cook, got a job as a chef and (uh) in Michigan for a resort, I believe.

0:06:52 JK: And that's where they initially immigrated to was Michigan?

0:06:55 M: No, Ohio. No, my mother immigrated to New York City.

0:07:00 JK: New York City. Okay.

0:07:01 M: My dad immigrated to Pittsburg and he moved around quite a bit, Baltimore and Omaha and settled in Akron, where my mother was then living and that's where they met.

0:07:22 JK: Akron. Okay. And how did this immigration experience shape your own upbringing?

0:07:31 M: Oh, I was very aware that growing up at the tail end of the (uh) Depression (uh) we were not impoverished, but (uh) in my...my parents always kept food on the table, we had a...a modest home in Canten. My dad's business occupied him very much (uh). A dollar really met something in those days and I guess that still carries over to me. If I see a penny on the ground, I will pick it up.

0:08:28 JK: And so eventually you journeyed to L.A. to where your half-brother was at this time to S.C.

0:08:35 M: Right.

0:08:36 JK: (Um) What was California like at this time? Was it your first visit here?

0:08:40 M: It was...well I had visited here (uh), let's see, I came out in 1953, I had visited briefly (uh) my mother and I came out to visit my half-brother in, I think it was 1948, '48, '49. And it seemed like a...a really nice place to live. And that helped me to decide to come to USC. I started school at SC, went back the first summer vacation, said I'm going back to California and I never returned to Ohio. Things were quite different then, (uh) population was one-third of what it is now. Traffic was not insurmountable and I enjoyed (uh) life in California.

0:09:55 JK: And your profession in L.A. County (uh) would you go into more detail about your role there?

0:10:33 M: Sure. (Um) My first position with (uh) L.A. County was in the personnel office of the county probation department. And I had responsibility for (uh) staffing. Well, actually, I started there as an intern in '57 and (uh) it was part-time, I think I...I remember my first assignment. In those days, all employees were given a civil defense assignment and keeping...keeping the records straight was Melon's particular interest. So they sat me down with his set of boxes with

cards, they said, 'Try to make some sense out of this.' So, that was my first assignment and then one day one of the (uh) personnel people came into my office and says to me, 'I'm going on vacation. You're going to take my place,' and I almost fell out of my chair because I was still wet behind the ears and I knew approximately what he did. And he said don't worry about it, there are other people in the office if you need help. So for two very long, stressful weeks, I was responsible for hiring the staffing for the juvenile facilities, probation camps, and the juvenile halls, and the school for girls. And I was delighted to see him return. I didn't make too many errors, but in those days, L.A. County had a very strict civil service system where if you wanted to hire somebody you had to choose from one of the three top people from the list. They've changed the rules since then so you couldn't make too many bad mistakes because there were other people in the department who were evaluating the applicants which resulted in a list of eligibles. So if I picked number three and I should have picked number one, it really wasn't that big of a deal. And (uh) then when I graduated, I went to work for the Los Angeles County Flood Control District in their personnel office. And that was a unique organization because of the management and executive staff were ex-military) court (13:22) engineers. And if you weren't an engineer, you really were not very significant in the organization. So I worked there for about nine months and then took a promotion to the L.A. County Engineers Department as the personnel officer. Actually, I don't even remember (13:53) my title was departmental personnel technician. And (uh) I was there about nine months and then I got a call from the probation department saying, 'would you like to come back? We have an opening. So I transferred back there and I...I worked there I just about eight or nine years. Then I took a promotion to a county personnel department and I spent two glorious, snoozing years developing several service tests (14:47) writing questions which were misleading, but accurate. And then one day, a number two man of the department came in to see me and said, 'I want to loan you out for a special study, the county board of supervisors has approved a pilot program for improving productivity. They even engaged the services of the Arthur Young company, a management company and (uh) this was going to be a new experience and I certainly looked forward to it. And I went through their eighty hour training program studying films, listening to lectures, learning how to do time study, and then we were turned loose on the world and I spent about eight months conducting studies in the county recorders department. And it was very interesting and if I degress please steer me back (uh). If you haven't thought about it, it's easy to walk into an office and say, 'Oh, everybody's working, productivity must be good. But if you sit and watch people and what they're doing, and how they are doing it, and how much time they spend not doing it, you see that productivity really isn't as great as you thought it was and the...and the recorders department was considered one of the ace department heads. And we conducted studies in a couple of divisions and we produced our findings which showed that they were overstaffed by like twenty-five percent.

0:17:25 JK: Wow.

0:17:26 M: And it wasn't because people weren't working. It was because they weren't spending enough time working.

0:17:36 JK: So this all leads into your career with PCM being the productivity coordinator and...

0:17:43 M: Not yet.

0:17:43 JK: Not yet, but it will lead into it.

0:17:45 M: It will. It will.

0:17:46 JK: These essentials skill sets, so we really want to highlight...

0:17: 52 M: Okay.

0:17:52 JK: That core training in your early career was essential for your role in this community in forming this cooperate entity that manages...

0:18:04 M: Sure.

0:18:05 JK: This experience in Leisure World. So (um) when you are ready to transition there, we want to learn about the first time you heard of this Leisure World being created and just your development into this career as well.

0:18:20 M: Well, I was aware of Leisure World, seeing commercials on tv back in the 60s, but I had no intention of coming to work at the time. But after I took an early retirement from L.A. County, my new wife and I moved back to Pennsylvania, she had accepted a position with Bryn Mawr College teaching a school of social work. And after a year, a couple of years there, (uh) we decided that life in California was really better. So we came back here and came back in 1985 and I was casting around for a new career and I joined an organization called Forty Plus, which helps you prepare for mid-life career changes and was very helpful. They taught me how to network, which leads me into coming to PCM (um) in the course of networking I met with the general manager of the (uh) south coast water district. And as it turned out, he worked for the flood control district at the same time I did. Although we never had any (uh) opportunity to connect. And I had asked him, I told him I was looking for a new career, and he said my background was quite good. He didn't have anything suitable, but he gave me some names. Then he called his executive assistant in and she gave me some names. One of whom was a person in the personnel office here. And (uh) I called and made an appointment and we talked for like two hours and she said we don't have anything available right now (uh) for a person with your experience level, but we're definitely interested and we will keep your file right here. So (uh) a couple of weeks went by and I called to let her know I'm still interested and she said well there is one job and (uh) it's...it's an entry level administrative assistant to the

maintenance director and I said I'm not doing anything can I interview. So she said I'll set you up for an interview. I'll let you know. We were living in Westwood at the time so it was quite a drive down, even in 1985, and (uh) she called me back, she said we've set up an interview for you, bring some examples of your work. So I kept some copies of studies and projects and I bundled them up put them under my arm and came to see the maintenance director del Mar (22:13) and in the course of talking with him it turns out that his wife was a social worker, as mine was.

0:22:24 JK: Diane.

0:22:26 M: Although my wife (uh) was teaching at the time at SC. And (uh) he thanked me for coming in and said he would let me know. He was impressed with my background and by the time I got home there was a call from personnel, now known as human resources, saying that Mr. Maure would like to offer you the position of administrative assistant and here's the salary. I said, well that's kind of low. I'd like to see it higher. So she said I'll let you know. So she called back, she said, 'Okay, we can bump it up. When can you start?' And I said, 'Is Monday too soon?' So, that Monday I came down, just a couple of days after my birthday as a matter of fact. And the secretary said, 'You can have a day off.' At that time, you got your birthday off. And I said, I don't want it off now I'm just starting. So...so I became the administrative assistant and I did things like preparing (um) items for the board's agendas and I got acquainted with (uh) the different (uh) departments and sections within PCM. And one day I went into Del (24:12) and I said, 'You know, I see things here that are reminiscent of what I saw in my studies with L.A. County and I'd like to develop a Productivity Improvement Program. So he said, 'Well layout the plan and we'll talk about it and I talked to the IT people and I said in order for me to develop this program I'll need your support and it seems that there was a tremendous amount of data available, but it wasn't being used for anything other than budgeting. And budgeting in those days went this way: How much money do you need to run the operation and there'd be some haggling with the boards and well that's too much so they'd arrive at a budget and they evaluated their success based upon how much money they spent. And I said there's some problems there. So basically what I did was I developed a program where each unit in the maintenance division would report on the number of units of work they accomplished: (uh) Plumbers, how many main drains did you clean? How many (uh) running toilets did you fix? (uh) This sort of thing. And the day that the IT people had, it already developed some average times for each activity, which had a code. So I said well it's really very simple, you put the two together and it says based upon historical data, here's how much time was spent in changing a toilet in a manner and you look at all the different activities that a unit, plumbing unit (uh) carried out, apply the average times and you compare that with the actual time worked and all of a sudden you have a comparison. Crude, but better than before. An interesting phenomenon happened I

started getting reports showing units of work completed and the time should have taken based upon historical data. Comparing it to the actual time and you develop a percentage which I called the productivity rate. And it showed productivity, at that time, in some units were as low as seventy, seventy-five percent. And so I started creating weekly reports, giving them to management and the foreman. And the foreman would look at it and say, 'We're only at seventy-five percent. So he would counsel his workers and little by little the line started going up and the program was of great interest to (uh) the mutual boards, but mostly to the GRF because they're the ones that pay the bills to PCM. And I had some other ideas which didn't catch fire and if I have the opportunity I'm going to talk with the new CEO, give him my suggestion (uh) I observed early on and I keep coming back to the plumbers because that's a very significant part of the maintenance division (uh) that the plumbers would line up every morning at the warehouse with their shopping list of parts materials that they needed for their trucks. And the shopping list was based upon what they had used the previous day. And I said, the plumbers are standing there in line for upwards of a half hour waiting for the warehouse staff to pick the parts off the shelves, put them in a bag, and give them to the plumber. And I said, Wouldn't it be much more efficient if the plumbers turned in their parts list at the end of the previous day so that the warehouse could have the bags ready when they walked in, instead of thirty minutes, five minutes. Well, for whatever reason it didn't go over big. The warehouse didn't like it because they would have to work a little longer in the evening, late afternoon and the plumbers didn't like it because they had to work for it (30:27) and I don't want to denigrate the plumbers or the warehouse, they both work hard. But, I think one of my criticisms of the organization was that too much of the work and I'm talking now as a...an industrial engineer, too much of what was going on was for the convenience of staff, not the residents. And I think the new CEO is turning that around just based upon a couple of things that I've seen.

0:31:14 JK: Let's return to this planned community as early as you can recall it (um) with your possible encounters with the founder himself, with Ross and the Rossmoor Corporation. Is there any kind of dialogue you have between the early founders of this community (um) with those early visits or at any time did you have that opportunity?

0:31:39 M: I...I never met Ross Cortesse. I saw him from a distance once (um) I think I talked to his daughter, Heidi, on one occasion. That was later when I had become the business manager, which was an interesting part of my career here (um).

0:32:07 JK: What year did you start that?

0:32:09 M: Oh, I say I worked in the maintenance division about three, between three and four years, I believe. When Mr. Cortez first envisioned Leisure World in this area, he was able to obtain FHA financing to build the co-ops and it was his intention, I believe, to build out 12,000 plus co-op manners. But about halfway through, FHA

money dried up and so he embarked on building condominiums. So thirty mutual condominium and mutual fifty towers condominiums together arm (are? 33:22) a little bit more than half of the total community.

0:33:29 JK: What year did the funding run out...run out approximately and the shift take place like...

0:33:37 M: Probably...

0:33:37 JK: Just like an estimate.

0:33:40 M: Probably (uh) fifteen...fifteenth year of the community.

0:33:43 JK: Fifteenth year. Okay.

0:33:45 M: That's just a wild guess. I really don't know. I don't remember. Another one of my failings.

0:33:51 JK: No, no. Fairly early into its development that this shift takes place, that vision.

0:33:58 M: Yeah. It's probably closer to twenty years.

0:34:01 JK: Okay. And how do you think that affected the community with (um) the shift from manners into condos?

0:34:08 M: Well, when...when he started building co-ops it was almost an unknown thing in Southern California. Co-ops were around for many many years in the east, but relatively unknown here. But it...with FHA financing he was able to build modest homes and people didn't need a lot of money to buy and live here. And one of the aspects of co-op ownership is that you don't own the real estate. You have a real estate interest in the form of a lease which is called an occupancy agreement. And as the prices of manners when up with resales, it was affecting the resale market because people could not get second mortgages. The FHA loan was the first mortgage and paying off that mortgage was part of the monthly assessment. They were thirty year mortgages so we implored the then congressman, who was representing this district, and we asked him, I and my superiors, asked him to engage with FHA to permit (36:17) second mortgages, which they finally agreed to. And we were able to convince several banks to right (write?) second mortgages for the co-ops. I think that was one of my more significant contributions to the community.

0:36:43 JK: And do you think quality of living changed because of this?

0:36:48 M: No, but it certainly improved the resale market and of course when they resend the realty market goes into a slump outside the gates, the same happens inside. People who want to buy here can't sell their homes on the outside. People who want to sell here can't find a buyer, especially if they couldn't get a second

mortgage. So that turned things around a bit. But I think resales are...are holding fairly level now after the recession that we experienced.

0:37:51 JK: How did the community deal with the recession?

0:37:56 M: I really don't know 'cause I wasn't part of it. But I'm sure it affected the resales. It's not easy to buy into (uh) the village. The financial requirements are...are...are not onerous, but they're significant. You have to have proof of sufficient income and proof of sufficient assets.

0:38:33 JK: And this was similar to the vision established or different?

0:38:37 M: Right from day one. The only change has been that those numbers have been increased.

0:38:43 JK: Okay.

0:38:44 M: You need more assets and more income now.

0:38:46 JK: Okay.

0:38:48 M: (Uh) One other change that appears to have taken place, it's my understanding that either one or both of the mutuals, United and Third, are limiting the number of manners that people can own. I think that's primarily Third. United's always had a rule that you could only own one co-op, that was an FHA rule. But, there was one exception. If you owned one and you wanted to buy the one adjacent and open them up that was okay. But you had to pay two monthly fees, which was quite a bit of money. But, I think of one case where (uh) the owner of the co-op was an artist and he turned the other unit into his studio.

0:40:06 JK: We'd like to return our conversation back to the beginning of this community, as far back as your connection starts to its founders and its development. So, would you please share with us?

0:40:17 M: Well, I came in (uh) twenty years after the community had started. And it was totally built out so the things that happened during my career are basically the establishment of a new Maintenance Center administration building which now houses Broadband, I believe. (Uh) There...there really wasn't much development other than that, (uh) just maintenance, (uh) but I spent a number of years in the business office as a business manager and a couple of things that I initiated we're really very (uh) significant. One was the establishment in house of the automatic payment of monthly assessments, just called easy pay. (Uh) Another one that (uh) I think was very helpful for the community, I started a new residents orientation program, which was about two hours twice a month, once for United and once for Third. And it (uh) exposed new residents to life in a homeowner's association and many of them have never been owners in an association. And they really weren't...they weren't educated in how it works. (Uh) You know, we hand them a

pile of paper nobody reads it, very few people read it, maybe a couple of lawyers. (Uh) But it's important for them to know that you don't paint your door red just because you like red and you don't hang your laundry out the window, it's these kinds of things. (Uh) Just getting them educated in life in an association and being able to answer questions. (um)

0:43:11 JK: And you taught these orientations yourself?

0:43:14 M: Yes.

0:43:14 JK: Okay.

0:43:15 M: And I developed a...a curriculum if you want to call it that.

0:43:19 JK: Okay.

0:43:20 M: (Uh) And I presented...

0:43:23 JK: And it was something people can (uh) upon moving here they...they would have to go through or it was just an option just to get educated.

0:43:29 M: No, it was...it was voluntary.

0:43:31 JK: Voluntary. Okay.

0:43:33 M: They were encouraged to attend and probably half of the new residents.

0:43:41 JK: Wow. That's significant.

0:43:43 M: Yeah, it was and I think everybody agreed that it made a difference. (Um) The residents felt much more self-assured. Staff saw a decline in certain kinds of problems that occurred. (Uh) One of the problems, and I hope this won't be taken the wrong way, but (uh) a number of (uh) Asians were starting to move in the community. Parents who had (uh) very little command of English and it was hard to get across to them that they can't do some of the things that they were doing. And we would have to contact (uh) their kids who bought it for them and try to get them to explain to their parents. And eventually things got smoothed out, but (uh) that was a little...little (uh) pothole in the road. (Uh) This was a very large community, 18,000 people, almost 13,000 homes. (Uh) I think the boards starting a newsletter, they...The Village Breeze, was a significant improvement recently. (Uh) I and other execs and PCM tried to convince the boards to start a newsletter years and years ago and they just didn't want to spend the money. I think it's well spent, anything you can do to communicate with the residents is a plus. (Uh)

0:45:43 JK: And does The History Center provide that newsletter. Is it an outlet? Do they archive some of these materials?

0:45:51 M: Well, The History Center does its own newsletter.

0:45:55 JK: Right.

0:45:55 M: The Village Breeze is produced by (uh) the mutuals and GRF.

0:46:02 JK: Okay.

0:46:03 M: And it's online.

0:46:05 JK: Great.

0:46:06 M: And it's very informative. Unfortunately it's, I think bi...bi-weekly.

0:46:17 JK: Wow.

0:46:18 M: And (uh) some of it should be (uh) some information should be given to the residents more frequently. But, there's Channel 6 and there is The Globe and there are always people who just don't pay attention, so...

0:46:48 JK: So, your journey to this community is later. So you moved here more recently, so...

0:46:54 M: Right. Just a year ago.

0:46:56 JK: Just a year ago. So (uh) what is your perceptions of the community before moving and now after moving?

0:47:03 M: Well, when...when I was the business manager and once in a while a potential buyer would come in and see me to find out about how the community operates and the pluses and the minuses. And if they were from out of the area, mid-west or east, which many of them were, I would caution them to try it before you buy it. Coming to a strange place (uh) can be difficult and if you haven't lived in an HOA before, it can be doubly difficult. And I'd even invite them to come to the new residents orientation if they were so inclined to get more information. (Uh) The realtors do a good job of selling, but they don't always tell both sides of the story. Their job is to sell and the community's job is not to sell, but to take care of the property and insure that the property's value is maintained. So, there's a bit of a conflict. And realtors don't always want us...us, I'm putting myself back in PCM, don't want (uh) community management to say too much, because it can fall up (49:00) a deal. And that's just a reality of the business. And most realtors were very cooperative when we tried to cooperate with them. And I think over the years, let's see if I can recall, there are about a hundred resales a month. I don't have the actual figures for recent years, but when I was still employed here, it was about a hundred a month, twelve hundred a year, it's ten percent.

0:49:50 JK: Fascinating.

0:49:51 M: And there are a lot of third generation people living here.

0:49:55 JK: Would you share a bit about that? So...

0:49:58 M: Well, people bought when the community was brand new in the 60s. And as they died or moved on, their kids took the manner and now it's repeating itself for a third generation. This is a...a great community to live in for a variety of reasons. (Uh) It was intended for active adults, active seniors and initially it was almost like public housing. Everything looked the same (uh) and then over the years the (uh) mutual boards have recognized that younger people want to come here and they want to not move into old folks housing so they are upgrading their manners spending considerable money with granite counters and they're pushing out walls and taking down walls. And (uh) it's quite a bit different than it was in the 60s. And (uh) we moved here...I'll give you a little anecdote. I guess two years ago my wife and I were sitting, talking and she said one day her (er 51:48) once during this conversation (uh) if you, meaning me, should die before she does, she would sell our house in Dana Point and move here. (Uh) This is a...a great community where you're surrounded by people of the same age with similar interests. And I said, gee if you should die before I do, I would do the same thing. So she said, well then why don't we do it while we're still able to move. And so (uh) she looked around and she found some places that interested her and I came and I looked and I said that's fine. And then we sold our house in Dana Point and we put a considerable amount of money into the house here. But, there...there's really one major reason for living here and that is, (uh) in my mind, the activities and the facilities. Some people move here especially single women because they feel safe and secure. (Uh) The monthly assessment fees are high in the order of \$650 a month and the financial requirements that you have to present your ability to pay are significant. (Um) But when you consider what you're getting for your monthly fee in terms of recreation (53:55), socialization, security, (uh) it's ideal for most people as they become more mature.

0:54:09 JK: And what's your favorite community amenity that you...

0:54:12 M: (Uh) I think the club houses. We're not swimmers. We certainly use the...the par 3 golf course. And it's (uh) it's nice to know that if you want to go away for a few days, my house is pretty secure. There is no perfect place, but this is better than...than most.

0:54:43 JK: And what community clubs and organizations did you join and what years?

0:54:49 M: Well, (uh) we've taken a number of classes. (Uh) My wife has taken photography. (Uh) We've both taken (uh) Introduction to Digital Slideshow Production, which I've repeated a number of times. And that's not just classwork, but the instructor who's been teaching the class for years, she leads field trips (uh) generally into L.A. And? (55:27) We ride the Metrolink which is a new

experience for many people. And she finds places to visit (uh) on the field trips that we had no idea existed so that's...that's a really (uh) educational experience. The Saddleback classes and we joined the movie club and some of our friends who are both on both ends of the political spectrum have introduced us to clubs that they like. (Uh) We haven't joined, but we've attended a couple of meetings and we've made some friends here so that we socialize, which is really important for (uh) seniors. (Uh) In my early experience I saw a lot of people that were just warehoused here by their kids, that was unfortunate. (Uh) And they became recluses (56:44) and over the top hoarders (uh) and there are (there's 56:55) some people here who live on the poverty level. They've been here a very long time. And fortunately the Laguna Woods Village Foundation is able to provide some assistance (uh) helping them pay a utility bill or (uh) some other thing, pay car insurance maybe. But, there is so much to be said about this community that is positive. (Uh) You can live a fairly full life here without owning a car. Certainly the bus system is not as convenient as owning a car, but it'll take you throughout the community seven days a week and take you to the mall. It'll take (57:52) you to nearby doctor's offices. So there's a lot to be said for it. I think as you get older you want to be near medical facilities. And certainly Saddleback Hospital Medical Center has grown up with the community as have a number of (uh) assisted living facilities outside our walls. (Uh) I think when Mr. Cortez broke ground here there wasn't much around except sheep, sheep and cattle. And so (uh) the village has really become the nucleus for two cities, three cities if you count Lake Forest formerly known as El Toro. So it's a significant (uh) entity (58:55) and a political power house. (Uh) It was very much in the forefront of changing El Toro Marine Air Base and to the Great Park, not so much creating the park but stopping (uh) the air base from becoming a public airport. (Uh) I don't know if you're aware of it, but early on (uh) in the early years, a marine jet crashed inside of (uh) this community. I don't recollect whether anybody was killed.

0:59:49 JK: We have the date, January 22nd, 1967. So...

0:59:53 M: Well, it's early on.

0:59:55 JK: So, (um) this...at this point your reading about it, correct?

0:59:58 M: Right.

0:59:59 JK: Okay, so...and then (um) how do you think this event shaped the community as your alluding to here.

1:00:06 M: Well, I...you know, until it became a city, (uh) anything this community wanted depended on the whims of the County Board of Supervisors, it was unincorporated territory. (Um) Gate 6 (uh) wanted a traffic signal and the county would not put one in. I think the community finally agreed to pay half of the cost. I wasn't directly involved in that, but it's kind of hearsay for me. But (uh) they did

have some clout simply because of the numbers of people who lived here. And (uh) on certain issues that's a big block of voters.

- 1:01:08 JK: Speaking of incorporation, in '99 (um) it's added into Laguna Woods. So, what, what do you think Leisure...Leisure World's legacy was at that point in this transition into a new identity? What was the meaning for you?
- 1:01:23 M: Well, I think one of the driving forces in their few members of the boards with Bob Raiden and Bird Hatch (um) they...they were (uh) out in front stopping (uh) an airport marine core base. And also an incorporation because the community didn't always have control over its own destiny and by incorporating, they could call the shots. And since this community represents 98% of the voting population of this city, (uh) and I don't know about the present board, but the original (uh) county council, city council I mean, (uh) they were all Leisure World residents. And they understood the needs of the community and certainly they didn't ignore the...the few other facilities outside (uh) the gates. But I think (uh) Leisure World and now The Village have certainly benefited from incorporation.
- 1:03:10 JK: And the community recently celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 2014. So, were you a part of those events or...
- 1:03:17 M: No.
- 1:03:18 JK: Okay.
- 1:03:20 M: Nope (uh) my predecessor was. I followed her as (uh) business manager. And she...she played a...a major role in...in that celebration.
- 1:03:41 JK: Who...and her name?
- 1:03:43 M: Tanea Mackeheny. She's now selling real estate, but she was a long-time employee.
- 1:04:00 JK: Would you live anywhere else?
- 1:04:04 M: Well, I wouldn't live anywhere outside of Southern California. And I haven't found any place that I think is better than this community, with its...you know, with its drawbacks. (Uh) The pluses far outweigh the minuses in my mind. As a matter of fact, before we decided to buy here, I did a cost comparison of what it cost us to live in Dana Point versus what it would cost us to live here. And we reduced our expenses by over a hundred dollars a month. We ended up with a larger home and all the activities here. (Uh) Even though the assessments here are much higher than they were in Dana Point, I didn't have to have a gardener and I didn't have to have a pool man. The insurance rates were lower here. (Uh) Car insurance was lower, house insurance was lower. So there were (uh)...I don't have to pay a gas bill. The electric bill is much lower. So, financially (uh) this was

a gem. And at one time we were...we had a motto of Best Kept Secret in Orange County. And I think that this community is superior to the other Leisure Worlds. Did you hear the story about how it dropped the name Leisure World?

1:06:03 JK: No, let's go ahead and capture that.

1:06:06 M: Okay, this is a significant milestone for this community. (Uh) From day one it was known as Leisure World and there were a number of other Leisure Worlds built by Cortesse across the country, Florida, Pennsylvania...no New Jersey (uh) Arizona, somewhere in the mid-west. They didn't all go by the name Leisure World, some did. Well, Mr. Cortesse's estate passed to his daughter, Heidi, whom I met just once. And (uh) a few years ago she was developing another Leisure World, I think in Maryland. And she felt that the keeping the name Leisure World here would somehow detract, it's my understanding, would detract from the sales of the Maryland property. So she proposed to this community that they pay an annual licensing fee to retain the name Leisure World which was copied (uh) trademarked. (Uh) But all the stationary, the buses, the trucks, everything said Leisure World. Well it was a significance sum that she was asking for and the community felt that this was extortion, these are my words. And so they decided will give up the name Leisure World at some expense 'cause you have to change everything and they had a contest and the name Laguna Woods Village came into being.

1:08:42 JK: And it finalized in 2005 is what I understand.

1:08:46 M: I'll take your word for it. (Uh) Let's see, that was after I had retired.

1:08:59 JK: Okay.

1:09:03 M: And (uh) other than the name change, it's the same community. The people that like it here, love it here, there are always a few that find that this isn't their cup of tea for a variety of reasons. But, that's the world in general.

1:09:31 JK: And we want to also speak about your involvement here with The History Center. It's relatively new, but just your (um) history of getting connected, who brought you here, and your role. So, if you would share with us.

1:09:47 M: I'm here under duress. No, Bob Rain is a long-time friend. I've known him since he served on Third Mutual Board and GRF Board, and...and city council. And (uh) I don't know, I bummed into him a few months ago and he invited my wife and myself over to dinner. And we were just talking and he asked me if I was familiar with The Historical Society and I said, 'Well, I'm aware of it. But I have no involvement and no connection.' So he said, 'Well we're thinking about starting a...an oral history. Would you be interested in being involved, maybe coordinating the interviewees? And my wife said, 'Do it. Do it.' She's always after me to be involved in things. And I'm not a joiner as such, but it sounded like

it might be interesting and fun. So I said sure. So, the next thing I know is I'm invited to a History Center board meeting and (uh) you know the rest. That's why I'm here. (Uh) From what I've seen it's a remarkable organization. Trying to capture fifty plus years of history. A lot of water has gone under the bridge. And there are a few original owners here. Gosh, in fifty years they...they're centenarians now. And certainly (uh) their kids who've moved here know a lot of the history. And I'll be trying to round some of them up to participate in this oral history project.

1:12:23 JK: What do you hope The History Center preserves for the future?

1:12:28 M: Well, I would hope that the...the history that you're capturing will be made known to the...the general public of this community and outside also. (Uh) You know it's funny, my wife and I have traveled to a number of foreign countries. And (uh) generally on tours, and you strike up conversations. And almost without exception, you met somebody on a tour who says, 'I have an aunt who lived there or my grandmother lived there or my next-door neighbor's mother lived there. It's...I don't think it's on everybody's lips throughout the world, but certainly it is known far and wide. And (uh) a special place to live.

1:13:40 JK: What would you like the community to accomplish in the future?

1:13:44 M: The community? Well, going back to my...my working life here. (Uh) The original houses, fifty years ago, they were not class A structures. They were intended to be housing for moderate income people. And they really need to be re-built. And this was one of Bob Rein's, what's the French expression, *rensen entrée*. He really was promoting a program of revitalizing the oldest homes, tearing them down and rebuilding them to modern standards. The plumbing is...the infrastructure is weak to say the least. The community spends...well, United Mutual, the co-op (uh) mutual, they spend an awful lot of money maintaining crumbling structures and infrastructure. And he was talking to developers about how they would do it and it would mean displacing people temporarily into available housing in the community while this rebuilding is going on. But he could generate enough interest. It's, I think it's common for seniors, as they become more senior, to resist change. I see it in myself. My wife sees it in herself. We like things the way they were because it's comfortable and when I go to Costco and they moved something I get upset because it isn't where I intended to find it and I have to find somebody to tell me where to go to get it. So that was...that was one major point of resistance, I think. But the community is going to have to do something in the future. What's another great thing about this community is the boards have always, not individual members, but as groups, board members (uh) they have been willing to take the position that assessments have to go up. If the cost of paint goes up, if the cost of new lawn mowers goes up, replacement trucks, costs go up. You cannot keep assessments from going up. And one of the problems that most HOAs in this area outside the gates, one of the problems that they deal with is raising fees. And it's not unusual for an HOA to

have special assessments because they have not put money into reserves. And they haven't put money into reserves because it meant raising the fees. And no board member anywhere has to face his neighbor and say, "The rates are going up. It's going to cost an extra ten dollars," (er) whatever next year. So they say, "Oh, we're going to keep the fees the same way they were. And I'm going to be off the board in two years and I may move somewhere else. And that's just part of the psychology of HOAs, I think. But this community as far as I know has never in fifty-two years had a special assessment.

- 1:19:10 JK: Is there anything else that this community is unique in its own way?  
1:19:21 M: I think that some of the problems this community faces are similar to any HOA. (Uh) Where we moved from in Dana Point (uh) some of the younger residents wanted to improve things, make things better. And the older residents, just like the older residents here say, "It was this way when I moved in, it's good enough. We don't need to make changes. We don't need to improve the entry monuments at the front gate. (Uh) We don't need a new Administration Building because all it needs is some paint." And that isn't so. I...but I think that's...that's typical of seniors of (uh) HOAs with a large number of seniors. Where I lived, people would buy a home for a lot of money and then they would dump a whole lot more money into it. (Uh) The original residents like things just the way they were. So I think the community (uh) and interestingly enough the average age in The Village has not changed substantially in fifty-two years.
- 1:21:04 JK: Fascinating.
- 1:21:05 M: Well, certainly in my experience since '86 it has stayed right around seventy-eight, give or take a year. Even with an influx of younger people the older ones are living longer. So it balances it out to about the same average.
- 1:21:38 JK: Anything else you'd like to share with future listeners?
- 1:21:41 M: Yeah, (uh) because this is an age-restricted community, (uh) maintaining the age limits is a continuing problem. People want to have their out-of-work, underage people live with them. And so they developed this pre-text of, "Oh, my son is my care provider." Well, gee Mrs. Smith you seem to be pretty active. You belong to a number of clubs and you even go horseback riding once in a while. And it's hard to imagine that you need a care provider living with you, especially one that's underage. So...
- 1:22:54 JK: And this isn't been dealt with yet? Is this something...
- 1:22:56 M: I had to deal with this regularly.
- 1:22:59 JK: Okay.

1:23:01 M: And I'd have to bring them before the mutual board. And I remember one lady saying, "He's my only child. He just got out of prison. He doesn't have a job. I can't turn him out." And the board has to make a decision. Are they going to ignore the law and the rules or are they going to let this lady keep her son living with her. (Uh) I didn't have to make those decisions. I merely had to recognize the problem and present it. Underage people living here is not a huge problem, but it is a problem. I even had a board member once say to me after a meeting, "Oh, my neighbor's had her teenager living there for six months." And I said, "Well, you know it's against the rules, your rules. She said, "Yeah, but she's such a nice lady." So, those are the kinds of things that crop up.

1:24:35 JK: Anything else you'd like to share with us?

1:24:39 M: I think you've covered my...my bio pretty well.

1:24:43 JK: Wonderful. Well, thank you for participating in this inaugural interview of this community project. We appreciate your time and your history that you've shared with us.

1:24:55 M: It was almost a pleasure. No, it was a nice experience and I was glad to participate.

1:25:03 JK: Well, thank you. And we will...that concludes this interview.