

Laguna Woods History Center  
Community Oral History Project  
Transcript

NARRATOR: Bob Ring  
INTERVIEWER: Jennifer Keil  
VIDEOGRAPHER: Cindy Keil  
DATE: September 25, 2016  
LENGTH: 01:10:32  
LOCATION: Thousand Oaks via Skype Video  
PROJECT: Laguna Woods History Center  
VIDEO: <https://youtu.be/VHRnHIMAN5E>

ABSTRACT: An oral history with the past president of Leisure World Historical Society which is now Laguna Woods History Center. Bob Ring served on the GRF and Third Mutual boards. He was a past mayor of Leisure World and was an essential community leader to the cityhood campaign.

*Please be advised that the following interview was conducted via Skype which caused some audio and video limitations. We recommend that you utilize the provided transcript for further clarification.*

00:00:00 JK: We're here with Bob Ring to share his memory starting many projects for the community. What was the first time you learned about Leisure World?

BR: Well, my kids actually on their way through high school worked at The Towers and the dining room. So, it was started by my daughter Lori. She worked all through high school and my son, Dave, tried for a little while and decided that wasn't his cup of tea. Then my youngest son, Bob, did it for a couple of years. But that's how we learned about Leisure World. And then in 1988, I actually moved into Leisure World from Laguna Hills where we lived.

00:01:00 JK: Can you share about that?

BR: I moved to Leisure World late 1988 and I was still working at the company called Unitech Equipment. That originally was an independent company then it got bought by Bristol-Myers and by Three M. And then we purchased Unitech equipment in 1988 and then after that in 1993 we sold it to the Japanese company and I essentially retired. So, from 1988 through '93 I was still working. After that, I worked for free.

JK: Right.

**Starting the Leisure World Experience in 1993**

00:01:42 I started my Leisure World experience in 1993 when I was elected to two terms on the board of Third Laguna Mutual and was its president during the last two years of my four and a half years of service. So, I needed something to do. I'd been working sixty hours a week and got on the boards and worked for free for sixty hours a week.

**The Differences in the GRF Board**

00:02:07 BR: Very different than it is today. Although, it appears as though it may be going back to what it was. In those days, the boards were really friendly with each other. The three boards worked with each other and the people on the boards, we liked each other even though we didn't often didn't agree with each other. What we did was work with each other, we went out to lunch together, we gave each other awards...and it was really friendly. It was...before what I call the rebels without cause. So, what was it Jimmy Dean who made the movie *Rebels Without Cause*. Well, the next generation coming through really wanted more independence, me to myself. And I got on my first airplane when I was nineteen years old. My daughter got on her first airplane when she was two years old. So, maybe that's how things progressed and that's how people progressed. I'm not saying that generations that followed us were bad or good, it's just say we're different and wanted different things. And in the later years what happened is more and more controversy, more and more independence, more and more we do ourselves.

JK: Sure.

**Founders of the Community**

00:03:36 BR: Contacts I had started with Russ Disbro who got involved with Leisure World in the 1970s and he was our general manager. And he and I got to be good friends and we're still good friends today. Although, I'm too far away now to have lunch with him, you know, every quarter or so. But Russ really grew up with the community and he was the general manager while the community really got modernized. The early people in Leisure World really tried to make it a better place. There were a lot of retired school teachers, there were a lot of business executives and all sorts of people. And they all contributed their knowledge as the community was being built. All sorts of projects came along that they could contribute to.

**Most Striking Aspect of Early Leadership**

00:04:36 BR: Probably the...they went through a lot of general managers, I think it was "a lot" meaning about four. And it always came back to Russ Disbro and he was a stabilizing influence in the community. Russ was a financial guy, but former baseball player and he had the ability to negotiate with the boards. If they would need something, and I'm talking a period before say 1989/1988, in other words the first twenty-five years. If they needed something he would figure out a way to do it. Likewise, if boards were not behaving themselves, he would come down on them and really get them to do what was best for the community.

**Starting a Political Career in Leisure World and Cityhood**

0:05:36 BR: I got on the Third Mutual board. I spent a couple of years there and then in 1997, as president of Third Mutual, we took our first serious look at making a city. Marian Bergeson who was on the...supervisor came down. And we had a luncheon meeting with current and former board members and she...it was sort of like a light went out, turned

off the lights, no...the county's gone bankrupt there's really no point...communities like yours, they wanted to be independent cities and you people are a donor community, in other words, all of your taxes are going somewhere else, very few of them stay in your community. You ought to become a city. Then the tax revenue that you pay, a lot of it will come back to your city. So, PCM went out and hired Leslie Keane. Leslie Keane really specialized in doing the things that we had to do to become a city. And one of the first thing was that we had to petition the local agency formation commission to consider us as a city. So, I became one of the three chief petitioners, myself, Matt Magidson, who was a president of GRF.

00:07:40

I was a president of Third and then we got Cynthia Chyba from the United boards...so with three of us. And our job was to go out and get signatures of about forty-two hundred people so that we would qualify. And in order to speed up the process, what we did is we had El Toro Water District petition LAFCO. And they were able to do it just with the vote of their membership. And then as soon as we got enough signatures then they pulled out of it and it became our show. We got our signatures, together with the help of *Leisure World News* and six weeks set a record for how long it took to get the signatures.

JK: You have a startling percentage.

BR: Yeah, the signature collection went easy. What was difficult is...the vote was going to be...take place in 1999. I think we actually voted. I think we went to the polls in March. If we look at December, previous December and we look at the...what the sentiment was it was 60-40 against cityhood at least. So, what happened was Bert Hack got involved and Bert suggested we make the whole cityhood issue an airport issue, nobody wanted planes coming over our community. What the plan was...was to convert the Marine base to a commercial airport. It only meant that there'd be one 747 every three minutes going over our community 24 hours a day/seven days a week. So, once we made it into an airport fight and then the other thing we had to get across is places like Leisure World, part of the unincorporated county, had no voice. That cities had a huge voice...the airport fight, so. That was our theme for the three months and 10,000 people voted and we won by four hundred and thirty votes, I believe.

#### **“Key to Cityhood” as an Airport Issue**

0:09:30

The key to cityhood was definitely the airport issue. We had over 95% of the people that lived in Leisure World were anti-airport. The newspapers showed the airplanes going over about two miles or three miles south of the city between the city and Laguna Beach, no. The airplanes would come right over the...what is now the community center, and touch down and...the turning point really came when we did some noise testing. We raised enough can with Bert Hack. So, we got everybody to agree that they would do a noise test. I would be flying commercial jets and landing them at El Toro. So, we gathered at Clubhouse 2 which planes would be coming right across and did the test. We're standing there and I was one of the people standing there and said, “Oh, man that isn't very much noise at all. I really don't know how we're gonna sell this thing.” Well, what really happened was a noise reflected. Where we were standing right under, it was really quiet. A half a mile away near Clubhouse 4 they could really hear the planes. But more important, while these planes were getting ready to do the test, they were circling over Laguna Beach and Laguna Niguel. And those people were up in arms. “You mean if

there's an airport at El Toro the landing pattern is there...gonna circle over our community? No way!" So, that got them on board and an airport fight not long really helped our community, but it got the other communities really excited about the noise and the problems with airplanes landing.

### **Becoming a City Council Member – Joined in 2002**

00:11:41

I was not on the original city council. So as part of the election for the city, 19 people running. Some of the people who were running were opposed to cityhood. It's unbelievable to me how could you run for the city council after you had spent a whole campaign against forming a city. But there were several people who ran for the city council who were anti-cityhood. Fortunately, none of them got elected that first election. So, we elected 5 people and one of them was Jim Thorpe. Jim got most votes because he had been a city councilman...in San Juan Capistrano, I believe. And, so he was a leading book, Bert Hack. I don't have the names right here, my fingers...fingertips. There were 5 city members of the original city council and I stayed behind because I was president of GRF and we needed somebody on that side who understood what the city was all about. And I, as chief petitioner, and Matt Magidson had moved to Florida and Cynthia really...we needed a woman since women are 60% of Leisure World. So, basically I had been through a lot of work with Leslie Keane. So, having stayed behind and stayed on the city around the board side of things really helped...that made a good communication interface between Golden Rain and the city. We were really fortunate with Leslie, she had been a city manager before and most important, she knew lots of contacts...she did all sorts of neat things. She got us our first funding from the state within six weeks. Unbelievable, nobody has hit that record before or since. So, this city was often running and set up things. After I was finished...my term on GRF, I applied for and was appointed to the Orange County grand jury that was in 2001. Oh, about two months later Jim Thorpe resigned from the board. Ed Snyder who was one of the cantankerous board...she was all over his case all the time and he just finally got tired of it and he resigned. And I was appointed to take his place and the following November I had to run for election and I was elected...was either elected or appointed because nobody would run against me all the way through retirement, which I retired from the board in 2014.

### **Retired from GRF Board in 2014**

00:14:55

So, it would be the 2010 election would have been the last time I was elected. So, that's how I got involved and it was really a lot of fun building a city. By 2014, frankly I had enough...I just plain couldn't get excited about what was traffic going to be like in 2032. I mean, by that time I'd be looking at the grass from the bottom side up. And the real fun of it from my personal point of view was building a city, and by 2012, we had gotten most of the hard work done. We had sign orders, we had programs for businesses, we had all sorts of things. We had a couple of experts build in, Bert Hack was really...was still on the council, was a well-known person. All of the county affairs...very, very active in county committees. Brenda Ross, who was another one of our original council people, Brenda was known throughout the country as a specialist on senior issues. She was on the President's Council for Seniors also the State Council for Seniors. So, she was well-known and she did an incredibly great job of first getting senior issues out on the table. So, here's this little, tiny city with virtually no money and a limited 18,000 people and we had two people who made the city very, very well-known. My focus during that period was...I really focused on the city itself. In other words, what were our policies with respect to signage. What was our policy with respected zoning and that sort of thing. So, I

really focused on that and even though I got involved in county committees, not nearly to the extent that Bert did. And even though I was involved so much in senior issues, not nearly like Brenda was.

### **Getting Involved with the Historical Society**

00:17:44

BR: I went to the Methodist church and I was one of the ushers at the 9 o'clock service. Another one of the ushers was a gentleman by the name of John Fuller, who at that time was president of this society. And as I once stated, John was a really neat guy. He was president of the United board. He was president of the History Historical Society. But, John was just a nice guy and as she said he...his management was really passive. So, on Sunday mornings, we were not joking around in church and we did...he's very passive so I just couldn't resist being aggressive. So, we ushered in church like I...people would come in and they wouldn't look too happy and I would whisper and say, "Want to tell you this is National Grouch Week and the pastors requested that you please don't smile during the service this morning." We served communion, once in a while I'd ask them what kind of crackers they would like, Swiss cheese or American cheese on their cracker. So, we would do all sorts of things. What it was really all about was having fun. For some people on Sunday morning this was the first time they talked to anybody all week or had...the object was to get them to smile and sort of light up and figured that I was crazy. I have this warped sense of humor. But anyway, John was complaining about the History Center. "Aww, man! I need people..." I said, "John! How tough could a History Center be?" I said, "Or a Historical Society be? It just can't be that difficult." So, finally after, you know, a couple of months of conversation I said, "Look, [if] you need help this badly I'll come down and I'll help you." So, [in] 2004, I got appointed to the board and before I knew it, two years later I'm the president. When I got involved in 2004, the society had a business manager. We had a resident who worked part-time and she got paid and she really did the day-to-day operations, our \_\_\_ came along and that sort of thing. So, that didn't work out, so we actually went outside and we hired a business manager who would work part-time. Well, that didn't really work long-term, either. The beginning it worked really, really well. But what happened was first the cost. Second, this young lady was a...had two kids and as the kids got older, they took more and more of her time. So, we were always competing with the kids and her husband on the occasion, so her important thing would come up, activity would come up that we were sponsoring and she couldn't be...she couldn't be involved because her husband was going on vacation or the kids were doing something. And more important, most important we had a treasurer who had dementia. Now I don't know if you know how dementia works, but people with dementia, in particular in the early stages are experts at hiding it. Did we know that he wasn't paying the taxes...the social security taxes of all this stuff for about two years? Well, finally we find this stuff in a drawer. Oh, boy. Well, it took us two years to straighten it all out, but the result of this we said no more employees because with volunteer treasurers, and that kind of thing, you have no real control and it wasn't...it's a charity and not a regular business. So, we just said no more employees if we have people they work for free and then we don't have all these tax problems. At that time, as Evelyn told you, the society really had a different look. They had a newsletter. I think it came out quarterly. They had all sorts of trips, like I think about every quarter, they would have a trip to a museum or something that had to do with history. So, there was a chair who figured out where the trips would be and they got people and they took the money for the trip and that sort of thing. They had an...they also had an annual dinner where they had a bunch of officers and presented what came to be known as a Strevey Award to some

important people. It was always a formal dinner. Well, with the dinners, the problems that we had, at least when I got involved, was nobody wanted to pay more than \$25 for dinner, but they also wanted dance music. So, you had to hire an orchestra, you had to get enough people to cover all that. You had to pay for the clubhouse and that kind of thing. And we didn't make money on any of these things. And it just took a lot of people and a lot of effort to get them done. So, when I took over, there was a really dramatic change. First, whenever I deal with OPM, that's other people's money. I get sense of this as a member of the city council you're always dealing with other people's money and they want to know what you're doing with it and where it went. We couldn't compete with other clubs. A lot of the clubs have trips, we couldn't compete with that. We couldn't compete with dinners. What we could compete with is really protecting...getting the information about the community and protecting that information. So, we set some goals - first to preserve the history of Laguna Woods, to make our collections accessible to the public and to treat them in a way that they would still be there. Almost instantly we got in trouble, the Historical Society was started in 1977 as original bylaws and they had been revisited in 1992 said that the quorum of the members, that's anybody who paid dues was a member, was 15% of the membership. So, in order to have your annual meeting which is state required you needed to have 15% of the members available. Well, they started out with about 900 members, but when I got involved we're down at 300 to 400, I think it was about 400 members. 15% - that's a lot of people...

JK: Right.

00:29:14

BR: ...and trying to get them at a meeting and explain what on earth we needed to get through to them was not an easy job. So, what we did...what I did was we re-stated our articles of incorporation and we got a quorum there and we got them to vote that they were no longer members. Members of the corporation, the voting members of the corporation was its board of directors. And you're allowed to do this under the California non-profit benefit corporations code. So, this meant that the board of directors really could make the decisions, they were financially responsible for them, but it was the directors. Now, we still called the people who paid dues and were members, members, but they were...they did not control the corporation. That allowed us to make decisions that the board of directors had to make on a timely basis and also meant that these things like we start our time on the corporation as opposed to trips and this sort of thing. We really got lucky. In about 2007, we had a city of Laguna Woods had been formed. When they...we started the city, or they started the city, the first thing that happened...other cities came to us and said, "If you guys are smart, you'll save all your memorabilia. By law you have to save all your documentation and all this...all the business part of the city you have to save those in city hall. Well, what most of the cities had done was thrown out their memorabilia. You get all these things, you have a parade, you have this, you have that, you have pictures pretty soon they're all gone. For example, ten years ago when I was writing or...when I was writing the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary book, I'm searching for a city...for a picture of the original city hall. No picture exists, except there was a really bad photograph in the newspaper. So, I took the photograph and basically went down to the...took an up-to-date picture of where it was and put the names on the window and all that. I'm using Photoshop and that's where the only good picture, city hall, came from. Well, Leslie was aware of this, a sleek key in the city manager. So, we actually entered into a partnership in February 2007 where the city said they would provide staff support, supplies, sorts of things. And in exchange for this, we would basically be the home for

the city's memorabilia. All the newspaper clippings about the city, anything that wasn't required by law to be at the city. So, we have shelves of documents for the city and memorabilia. In June of that year, the city hired Chris Macon to be a special project manager. One of those projects luckily for us was to be the curator of the city...of the History Historical Society. So, Chris was spending about a third of his time in the beginning of the History Center. So, he got involved...he...what a superstar. And the first thing he did was he used the city's tech...computer tech and we put in a network. We used, they had some computers...we bought a couple of new ones. We had some hand-me-downs, but we got a computer network together. I think, as Evelyn told you, everything was Apple, now we switched to PCs because that was just easier to use. Then he went...you've heard about the Veterans History Project.

JK: Right.

BR: Chris called Washington and said, "We're involved with the Veterans History Project. We don't see anything on the computers about our thing. Where do we stand?" Well, the lady said, "Well, we have 700 application[s] or information things that you've sent us." Then he said, "Yes." They said, "But, we haven't used one. Why? Because you didn't use our forms. You used your own forms and we have a typing staff here and they use one form, our form and that's all they know. So, they're nicely here in boxes." So, he got them to send the boxes back to us and we went through it, each of those forms and transformed them using their forms, sent them back to us and they registered those people.

### **Veterans History Project**

00:31:22

BR: With the Veterans History Project, you had the option of not only the written forms, but you could make a video. In the early days, we worked with the Video Club and their approach to the videos was they had somebody like yourself, however that person was in the video. So, it was like a live interview on TV. The problem was in many cases, the interviewer was the star of the show, not the veteran. And before you knew it, there's all this stuff going on. This was fine and this worked and the people in Washington would accept those videos. Then they came along and changed the rules and said, "No, we want head and shoulders and we want basically the veteran is there. There is no interviewer, even though in the background, you can have questions. But, basically it's to be an oral history. So, we went back to the Video Club and remember what I said about treasurers and volunteers. They were having a terrible time scheduling people to take these interviews. They did...their rules were a little different than ours. They would take anybody, we would only take members who...residents of the community. But in 2011, things had just slowed down. They only had one interviewer. There were health problems, there were timing problems, all sorts of thing[s]. And while I was in the hospital, in 2011 one of the veterans who wanted to be interviewed had been on record as requesting an interview for more than three months. He died without an interview and the board, the History...Historical Society board got upset and they broke the relationship with the Video Club. And a little while after that we got with Media Arts in San Diego and they took that over. They were very careful like yourselves to do the oral history exactly like the veterans, Washington wanted. Until about 2013 when Washington people who run the Veterans History Project changed their approach. Now they want instead of

head and shoulders they wanted all sorts of background documents that they could show with these oral histories. That wasn't too bad except they insisted that they had to have the original document. There are not many veterans who are willing to give up their original documents. So, that essentially killed the program. So, that's how we got from here to there on the Veterans History Project, though it really is not an active program. It's been replaced by oral histories like the ones you're working on with us. So, now you would like to know about some of the other programs?

### **Historical Society Programs**

00:35:24

BR: Let me tell you some of the programs that we have. First, we worked with the state library system and we did...we participated in their Californians of the Past Program. Between 2008-2009 we did ten videos. These were short videos which captured early Californians' experiences through the eyes of the people who did it. So, we had at least one who was a prisoner of war, an American citizen who they...put in a camp because we were fighting the Japanese. A library person lost ten different people and we can...I can get you that list of people but, they were little videos. And DD Arts in San Diego was working with the library system, that's we got to know them and that's how we got them involved in the Veterans History Project. Another one of our programs was the Over 90 Program. Leisure World itself, the Golden Rain Foundation, every year would have a luncheon for anybody who was 90 or over. So, Joan Long, who was one of our board members and one of our volunteers, volunteered to work with GRF and we would send birthday cards out for all these people who were over 90. We would also provide their names to GRF so that when this annual dinner came along, they would get a special invitation instead of reading it in the newspaper and sending their name in. And then in addition to that, I volunteered to be the after dinners or after lunch speaker at those things. So, it was all tied in. We were working with staff on this program. And it's a fun program because people were always surprised when they get a birthday card in the mail.

JK: Right.

BR: The next big project is probably what's called *The Historian*.

JK: Yes.

### ***The Historian* – Historical Society Journal**

00:37:53

BR: So, how did it start? I no sooner got involved in the Historical Society and Evelyn Shopp was writing the newsletter at that time. Now you're too young to really understand what it was like in those days, but to make a newsletter you typed up the copy, you cut it out, you paste it. Cut and paste, right?

JK: Literally.

BR: Well, exactly. I mean if the paste slipped a little bit the article was crooked, particularly the pages fall. Good old Publisher came out at that time on the IBM PCs and I was a ones and zeros guy. And...so I got involved, so one of our issues I said, "We're going to digitize this thing. It's just way too hard." So, I worked with her on one of her issues. I actually did it on a computer and we...using Publisher and did it that way. It didn't take much longer than that. I basically took over the newsletter...renamed it *The Historian*. What we did was it was still somewhat of a newsletter. The inside, this front



page, there was as they had in their newsletter a...or the old one...a memo from the president and I put in anything that would be of interest. There were also couples, especially projects that they had in there, like they would look at the...what happened ten years ago, twenty-five years ago and put those in there as they a lady who's name I don't remember who did that. And there were...and they would talk about some historical events. What I did was I left the second page...was there for anything that was really newsletter kind of thing and turned the rest of it into, really a history document. So, I started with the clubhouses and then after that I decided that I would review each year starting in 1964. We'd do one year at a time and then intersperse there some other interesting kinds of things like one of the articles was Leisure...the first five years of the churches in Leisure World. Cortese gave the church, if a new church wanted to start up around the community, he gave them the land. That was the good news, bad news is they got it for free if they had their church started in two years. So, that's why you see all the churches around Leisure World. So, I did the history of that...we featured some people like Florence Curtis Graybill whose father was a famous photographer and portrayed the traditional customs and lifestyle of the Indian tribes. All that stuff is in the Leisure World library so did one on that. And then another one we featured was George Rowley who lived around...Rowley, "R-O-W-L-E-Y", who lived around the corner from me. And he was a humorist cartoonist for *The Register* for more than a decade and some of his cartoon[s] were just unbelievable and pointed right at our community. Did things on trees, we did the first written article on...written by Dave Logan - *Birth of the City*, on El Toro Water District's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We worked with them and got the history...their history. So, it was all sorts of things like that all interspersed with things that happened from year to year like the air crashes and that kind of thing.

#### **2011 Realization of 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2014**

00:42:17

Now that went on until about 2012. In 2011, staff woke up and we woke up that there was a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary that was going to...of the community that was going to take place in 2014. And we got lucky, an associate who had bought PCM offered to give us \$10,000 if we would write a coffee table book on the 50th anniversary. And we agreed...so we went out and Myra Neben, who was the editor of the *Leisure Word News* and then the *Leisure World Globe*, we got with Myra and we paid her a small fee and said, "Would you write the book?" And she agreed to do that and Chris Macon went out and got an East Coast publisher who agreed for \$5,000 to publish the book, to edit and publish it. That was 2011. By Memorial Day in 2012, we did not have but about half a dozen paragraphs. Why? Well, you're now an expert on why. (laughter) When you do these things like a coffee table book, it's essentially a picture book. You can't write them unless you know what pictures you have. So, Myra knew all the history of Leisure World, had no idea of what pictures we had. So, there's some 820 pictures in the book, there's 39,000 words. But, it's a picture book so what happened was I...it didn't take long for me to figure out if it was gonna get written, Myra would have to do it because I was the only person who knew what we had in the archives...and the way the pictures...and what the pictures were. So, I went together and once again used Publisher and started publishing a book. You know, chapter by chapter and I used Myra to help arrange the book.

#### **Arranging the Book with Photographer Pat Wilkinson**

0:44:52

BR: Pat Wilkinson helped on all the photographs. She's a really great photographer so any pictures we didn't have, she went out and took them for us. So, we worked our way through so now I've got a book. We're now about 2013 and it's time to get it published

and our publisher is up in arms. We have this battle going on, “We’re supposed to write on your book. And you’ve done it and our feelings are hurt.” I’m saying, “You couldn’t write it. There’s no way you can do it.” Well, our feelings are hurt, so we finally terminated the contract, left them with their \$5,000...went to Saddleback Printing who then published the book for us. And they...there was a lot of, as you know, ground work involved. And they were willing to do that and the fact that we’re, you know, ten minutes away from each other we could go over and work with them and they could work with us. And it really worked out...it’s...just wasn’t the kind of book that you could do long distance. And you’ve seen the book with all the pictures. There’s no way you can do it without starting with the pictures and then building the story. So, that’s how the book came to being. Now, where did the money come from? In 2011 or 2012 we had a golf tournament and these were 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary golf tournaments and we basically made a lot...enough money to pay for the book. The book actually cost to print it the unbelievable sum of about \$60,000. Why? We only made a 1,000 copies...it was color, it was perfect bound. I think that’s what you call perfect binding,<sup>1</sup> and that sort of thing. And it’s just expensive to print a book in small quantities. So, the total cost was about \$60,000 and that was paid for really from the proceeds that we got from the golf tournament. So, that’s how the book came to being. What is it? Well, for practical purposes as you mentioned already, it’s being used as basically a history book. The city went back and they were...needed the history of one of the parks, they picked it up from there. The dog park, so the dog park history is in the book. And they went back and used that as their...in order to get this stuff for their agenda with some changes they wanted to make. So, it is valuable...people will...there will not be another book for at least 25 years and maybe another 50 years. So, that really covers what the book was all about.

### **Preserving Newspaper History**

00:48:05

One of the other projects we had was we said that one of our goals was to preserve the history. Well, as you’ve already found out one of the thing...the most valuable history thing is the newspapers. We have probably about 90% of the newspapers that were saved. However, as you can imagine, the newspapers, the first editions back in 1964, depended on how much they spent for paper. Some years the paper...you can see the crumbles in the boxes. It’s started to deteriorate and it’s gonna...they’re gonna fall apart in another decade. So, what we did was we decided we would scan the newspapers. Well, we couldn’t scan them for free. We have a copy machine, but for each issue it’s only about 8 hours work to do it on a regular copy machine because the copy machines only take a half a page and then you gotta cut the newspaper apart and put it back together. Well, we found a scanner made in Germany that cost \$9,000 that would do it automatically. You can scan the newspaper in less than 15 minutes and then everything else is automated. Well, it’s a really small project as you can imagine. Let’s see there...in 2006 *The Register* started to post their newspapers on the internet. So, their 42 years from 1964 to 2006, there’s 52 issues per year which makes 2,184 issues. And they average it a little more than between 15 and 60 pages so you have 120,000 pages of newspaper copy to scan and to digitize and make searchable. This machine has allowed us to do, I think, we’re about 18 months into the project and we’re about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way done. Just unbelievable we have volunteers come in and you saw a picture of the...of...the scanning machine. And they put it on and I still haven’t figured it out how it figures the pages, but

---

<sup>1</sup> Smyth Sewn Binding

it puts it back in order and it works fine. And this will preserve that history. So, it's a huge project.

### **Dean Dixon and the Community Oral History Project**

00:50:47 When the Veterans History Project really came to an end, Dean Dixon, the current president of the History Center, started an oral history project which is focused on the history of Laguna Woods Village. The other things that happened along the way was...in 2014, we remodeled the History Center...really brought it up-to-date.

### **Remodel and Renaming to the Laguna Woods History Center**

00:51:23 We changed the name from The Historical Society to The Laguna Woods History Center and we really started on a new direction. And my time was up, we moved here to Thousand Oaks and...so much to my delight Dean Dixon has taken over and got the center started on that approach.

### **Preserving the Archives**

00:51:56 BR: We still have a lot of work to do on preserving the archives. If they're able to pick up this oral history like if they can get the Russ Disbro who's been there...or was there from 70 to about 10 years ago, Russ can give them a whole lot of history so there are many, many people we've...Morry Meadow who's now involved with the society who...business...the business area of staff for a long time. There are a lot of these people who are still alive who can give us an awful lot of history and an awful lot of information. So, if they can figure out how to collect that information and get it done that will really be a big achievement. That, plus clean up the archives. We got all the photos scanned cleaned up and rearranged things in the archives area. Now the problem with archives is if you have a fire, it's gone. If you put it in water or sprinklers if they come on, it wipes out everything anyway. So, in case anything would happen to that all those originals are gone so it's really important that we have computer backup which we do have and that we scan everything and digitize it so that the information's searchable, you can find the information. It's a huge project, we have some money that we've raised to help that, but there going out getting contributions to help fund those programs. It's our heyday we...we're spending like \$32,000 a year. Just the expenses to do those kinds of projects with the volunteers that money is...got significantly reduced. One of the other projects that had that we picked up early from the Evelyn's time was that clubs, in order to make it attractive for clubs to participate, we charged them \$50 a year. Some of them paid us \$100, some of them paid us \$300 a year. They could store their documents at the History Center now. Now why is that attractive? Let's assume that I'm a...for example I am the secretary of the Garden Club. I was never secretary, but that works. So, at home I have the minutes. I have all this other stuff. All of a sudden I get sick and I move. What do you think my family does with all those documents? It's been wasted, it all disappears. So, nobody wants to really stock this stuff in their homes even though most are forced to do it. So, what the History Center does is, they say you can store your minutes and basically you've got three inches a year. You can store pictures, you can store your history...don't store your financial because anything you give us is open to the public. But anything that's not confidential you can put it in here and it will be here and if you go out of business in exchange for the donations you've made while you were in business, we will stock and protect your stuff forever. So, another one of the scanning jobs we have to do is go through all those club folders and they're about 60 of them and scan those so

that fire or anything like that, any kind of catastrophe that those are all preserved. So, that's another project that's...that looks...that we will be looking ahead at.

00:56:13 JK: Would you have lived anywhere else?

BR: Well, they made a lot of changes in the last year as you are well aware. They terminated PCM, they've gone to what mimics city management even though it's not a city. It's really self-management...there are some improvements, there is some good news, some bad news. The biggest thing is they really have to allow staff to do their job. The problem is with the number of boards we have and the number of people involved in those boards, staff would go crazy trying to do everything that each individual wants. So, the boards have to work together and it's gotten a lot better, I mean, we passed the bottom of the trough. So, hopefully that will continue to improve...it's a great community. It is known throughout the world, it does a super job. It's a great place to live. We lived there...we moved in 1988 and it was by far the best move we could have made. There's no place you can live less expensively. There are lots of things to do as I friend. Now for women who are 2/3 of the community they go out, go for coffee, they go shopping together. But men sort of don't do that...when I have some of my old work people come visit me I said, "So, when's the last time you went to lunch with one of the guys and it wasn't golf or something like that, where it's just lunch with one of the guys?" Well, those are few and far in between. And so for us men there's really nothing to do. I mean I had friends who lived in Irvine and they'd go for two hour walks every day, that was their entertainment. I worked...I had politics as one kind of thing I worked at the...in the...I was in the garden center so I had a garden. That was another kind of thing, I'd get involved in the History Center. We went to exercise classes. Bette was busy all the time so it really gives you something to do. If you want to be a couch potato, that's fine and you know you can come at night lay on the couch you have your wife put butter and sour cream on your tummy and a little salt and pepper and you're an official couch potato. You can be as active as you want, but it gives you the opportunity to meet people. There's over 200 clubs, there's Saddleback classes, and you just got to keep busy. If you want to stay healthy, you have to keep busy. You have to keep your mind functioning every time you start to sit there with nothing to do and feel sorry for yourself you suddenly get sicker, so.

00:59:35 JK: Did you have a favorite community amenity?

BR: No, not really. As a volunteer, and I think you already know this, you only do those kinds of things that are fun. So, what you get now is not that they're always fun or that there isn't enough to do. There are a lot of hard work, there's a lot of tears and that sort of thing. But, you generally do not get involved in things you're not interested in and that you're not getting some kind of enjoyment out of it. So, the things that I was involved with...I loved those things and I wouldn't give up any of them.

01:00:11 JK: Have you seen any noticeable changes from moving from Leisure World to Thousand Oaks?

BR: Well, I think we covered the one in Leisure World really from the squeeze of people on the boards and the community that worked together to me, to myself and rebels without cause.

01:00:28

### **2013 Last Honoree of the Month Program**

There is one illustration I can use. You're familiar with The Honorees of the Month Program. You asked me about mine. In 2013 we held the last Honoree of the Month Program. Now why? One day I was riding home with Gloria Moldow. Gloria had written an article with the society. She'd gone through her friend's history project, interviewed and did an article on women in WWII. She picked out the women and wrote this up and then we published it. As I believe the *Leisure World News* also published the article. It's a really great story and riding home with her one day we were talking about The Honoree of the Month Program. And she said, "You know we had the same thing in the college I went to." I said, "Oh, how did it work out?" She said, "The same as yours." She said, "The college was small and building and growing. We had all sorts of people who did honorable things. But after we had reached some point, the people changed and the test changed and you were no longer able to pick out people who were specialists." And the same thing happened to us. In the beginning, what they used was people who had done things outside, but contributed to the newspaper or whatever then it focused on people who helped the community grow. And then what happened there were fewer and fewer people because there was no more growth, we were fully built out. Things were very organized and...so that was the biggest change. The My Hero Awards as you would say...my hero, look what you did for the community. There were just fewer and fewer people. Or those people who did things at the time maybe in the future looking back had greatness, but at the time they were viewed as doing more harm than good. Now that may well change as we look back 10 years from now and look and say, "No, they really did a great job." That's not unusual...so you're not gonna honor those people you think that are not doing good stuff even though they're doing all sorts of things. So, that's the change there, change from...going from the village to University Village here has been huge. You have to understand that University Village, Leisure World's 60% women University Village is at least 2/3 women. You young ladies live a lot longer than us old men. So, Bette integrated into this community within 45 days...wasn't a week 'til she was on their chorus group and this and that and that sort of thing. For us men, there's not that many things to do. So, I played 2,000 games of FreeCell. Gradually, no, I'm getting involved so it's more different, but I had all sorts of things. Was the move a mistake? No, we're closer to our daughter, we have guaranteed healthcare and those are the reasons you make a move. And it was time for me to get out of Leisure World or...Laguna Woods Village. I still call it Leisure World because things have changed and it was a new philosophy not that it's wrong or right, but I wasn't very comfortable with it. So, I got a lot of that...like *Leisure World News*...Do I read it every week? No, I haven't even downloaded it, I think, about two months. I had for the society...I need to download it and I haven't done that yet. So, my interest and focus has changed. But...uh...

1:05:07

### **Honoree/Leisure Worlder of the Month Program**

BR: Honoree/ The Leisure Worlder of the Month Program is to...started out as several different things. It started in the early days. They actually picked people who did things outside of Leisure World. They also picked people on staff who did important things. But pretty soon, by 1989, it really settled down and people who were Leisure Worlder of the Month it was because you were resident of more than five years and you had made a definite contributions to the community. You could not be elected until you at least finished one term on the boards or that kind of thing. I was rejected, I think, about three or four times just...I was known as a lightning rod...some good, some bad. But finally

the powers to be first they wanted to appoint both Bette and I Honorees of the Month. Sometimes they had husband and wife and I turned that down because it wouldn't have been fair to Bette or to myself. We just had too many things and very, very different things that we did. Bette was an Aquadette and involved in all sorts of things that the...Harmonaires and clubs and exercise class. I was involved in politics and the garden club a little bit and that sort of thing, but mostly in politics. Finally they agreed that they'd appoint me independently and so it's a huge honor. Let's see, let me put it this way, you know, at my age I go to a lot of funerals and eulogy. It is fun to have somebody go through your life while you're still alive and you hear all these neat things about yourself and you get up to...you can respond to them. So, that's really what it's all about. It's quite an honor now, they do a video and they do a write up...write you a scene. Have I ever watched a video? No. But to much of my surprise my relatives have watched it, lots of other people have watched it, but I have never gone back and watched it.

01:07:51

JK: Do you have any final thoughts about Leisure World?

BR: Leisure World is going to be there for a long, long time. It's just way too big to kill. There's no way that it's going to go away. 12,736 units on incredibly valuable property, priced very, very attractively. Nobody in these types of communities can get the land and the activities that it has to offer. It is the star. Heaven on earth is what they call it.

JK: So, thank you for participating in this community project. We're delighted to conduct this interview with you and appreciate your time and generosity for producing this series.

BR: Well, you're quite welcome. It's been my pleasure to do this with you and hopefully it's helpful.

JK: Thank you so much and that concludes the interview.